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Growing Souls
by Corvus_Aconitum

Summary

“I have come, Captain, to inform you of a case of pregnancy. My own... pregnancy.”
Where Nick's words have been formal and without emotion at first, his voice cracks at the last. Renard's forehead creases. He leans forward in the armchair he has folded himself into. “Care to repeat that?”
When Nick meets his eyes now Sean perceives the full scale of his trauma.
“I am pregnant. Adalind did not steal my powers. She knocked me up with a child.... Three months... I am three months along.”

When Adalind tried to steal his Grimm powers, things didn't go according to plan. Nick keeps his powers but gains a whole lot of other problems. Good then, that he has awesome friends and a supportive Captain. A relationship breaks, issues need to be worked through, new love blossoms.
Now rated EXPLICIT. If you want to read the story without the explicit part, don't read the part of chapter 8 that's encased in:
!!!>>>!!!
text
!!!>>>!!!
I've always wanted to write a Mpreg story and finally I've done it... or at least half of it. ;)
What can you expect?
Nick through the emotional wringer, Nick with awesome friends and a caring Renard (deeply in love and totally oblivious to the fact)....
Adalind and Juliette wracking havoc each in their own way...
and, of course, Nick Burkhardt with the most amazing baby bumb there is!

This is gifted to the three above for the most amazing Mpreg baby fluff... seriously check out their works!!
Enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Growing Souls:

The spell Adalind has used before getting into bed with Nick has had many repercussions. Only the intended one – to steal his Grimm powers – it hasn't had.

Nick isn't aware. Neither of what has been her goal nor of the other little tidbits life holds in store for him.

Juliette is angry and bitter. She cannot understand how Nick couldn't have known! He should have known! He has cheated on her! Nick tries to explain, haltingly and despite every fiber of his body shying away from what has happened that night. He bares his innermost feelings to her, barely gets the sentence out. He tells her he feels raped; Juliette laughs in his face!

“Really? You feel raped? Sorry, if I cannot see how having sex with a woman can be so bad! You didn't complain before you knew it wasn't me.”

Nick doesn't want to have this conversation. It's hours after everything has gone to hell, early morning of the next day in fact. It is about Adalind in their home, in their inner sanctum, the wedding gone wrong, the Captain shot and still not out of danger. They are in a Police provided motel room, while their home is declared off limits, leaving Nick with nowhere to hide and gather himself. He's reeling from shock and desperately waiting for news about the Captain.

Her words, considering all this, feel like a knife to the gut. But he loves her, doesn't he? So he tries
to make her see.

“Juliette, that... that is the problem. I *didn't* know it was her!! I... I... There's a reason why sex is considered intimate. I laid myself completely bare before her. She has seen me at my most vulnerable... she has touched me in places.... To think that it has been *her* the whole time....”

He cannot go on. The thought alone makes him shudder and his breath hitch. Unconsciously he backs away until he bumps into the lone chair in the room.

Seeing Nick shaken like this and hearing the words seems to have taken some of Juliette's anger. She approaches him slowly, reaches out a hand. He doesn't flinch when she touches him but it is only by great force of will. It twists his guts and makes his throat close up with shame. He shouldn't react like this. Not when she tries to comfort him.

“Hey, Nick.” Her words are soft, a drastic contrast to her earlier bitter screech. He looks up into her eyes with difficulty. He's coiled tight as a spring, ready to bolt. Something is off about her expression. He cannot place what. It's not like she looks angry anymore. Her next words drive it home, though. With the force of a pole-axe:

“Hey, it's okay. I mean, it's not as if she took you by force.”

At this point his throat turns dry as dust.

“No, she didn't. She took me by deceit.”

It is a fierce if barely there whisper. Her narrowing eyes and her closed off expression shows her thoughts on the matter. She doesn't understand. Not one bit. He wants to scream, to cry and make her see.... But can he blame her? She hasn't experienced it. Had it been the other way 'round, had it been her and a man in zaubertrank disguise, matters would have been clear. The way things are, they are not.

Nick rises from the chair before he can say something he regrets. In his mind he tells himself that he is not hurt by this. That it isn't her fault. He has to scream it at himself – in the darkest corner of his mind – like a mantra to make it true.

“I need to go to hospital to check on Renard. I still don't know, if he will survive. I need to know!”

The way his voice nearly breaks at the end reveals a depth of emotion... of fear for his Captain, that he hasn't expected. But then again, Renard has been shot today because he has wanted to help. Nick has been meant to get a zaubertrank. Hank has said that earlier, after he has appeared at Monroe's and Rosalee's wedding place. Nick still doesn't know what that's been about, only that Renard desperately wanted him to get it and got shot for his trouble.

“What? Now?”

Juliette's disbelieving hiss pulls him out of his thoughts. He looks back at her with a confused frown, at which her own expression darkens considerably.
“Don’t you think you should be here? With me? It was a difficult day for me and you just think about Renard?”

Nick could have laughed at the travesty that are her words. He doesn't.

“I need to know. He might die because he's tried to help us!”

“I for my part don’t see how he has helped us any! In case you forget, you still slept with that hexenbitch.”

Another verbal blow, another attack that tears at Nick's slowly crumbling defenses. He reigns himself in, anyway. Hides hurt and shock and just looks at her imploringly. “Please, I'll be back as soon as I can but I need to know.”

And I cannot bear to be near you right now... but that is my problem not yours....

“Oh, well. Do what you think you need to do. If you want to be with me, after all, I'll be here. Big surprise.”

She turns without sparing him another glance and flounces into the bathroom.

“Juliette....”

The door is slammed, making Nick flinch badly.

>>> When Nick arrives at hospital Hank is there to greet him. Before he can even think to ask about their Captain, Hank wraps him in an untypically tight bear hug. Nick’s a bit lost at what to do but in the end he returns it with true appreciation. Despite both being guys, at times Hank has a sixth sense for when his partner desperately needs a manly hug.

“Hey, man. How are you doing? Monroe and Rosalee told me what happened before the Captain and I got to your house. How are you and Juliette? Cannot be easy having your house turned into a crime scene again... not to mention all the other shit.”

Nick only nods, shutters falling to hide deeper emotions. He cannot bear to think about all that now.

“It's... going to take time. How is Renard?”

Hank heaves a sigh.

“He's been out of surgery since sometime around midnight but hasn't woken yet. At one point it
was a real touch and go, but they managed to get him back and his... well you know... good constitution makes him heal fast. At least that's what Rosalee and Monroe told me.”

“Okay. That's not as bad as it could be. It's good, actually. He's out of immediate danger, right?”

Nick lets out an explosive breath, pushing fingers through his hair and making it stick up even more. He looks harried and lost. No wonder, really. Hank cannot blame him after all that's happened in the last hours.

“Yeah. That's a good thing.” He says with a tired smile.

“Come on. One of us can go in at a time. Go and wait for him to wake up. It's okay. I'm taking care of the rest.”

Hank pats his shoulder as he gently manhandles him toward Renard's hospital room.

>>> 

Nick takes up the lone chair by the man's bed. Renard looks terrible. Pale, hooked to a whole army of different tubes and machines. Three bullet wounds, the medical report at the end of his bed says. He cannot take his eyes off the prone form of his Captain. The picture burns itself into his retina, wedging itself into a place deep inside his heart and refusing to leave.

Seeing Renard like this is worse than what happened with Adalind – at least he denies that what's happened there still shakes him to the core.

Right now this is the place where he needs to be. He remembers Juliette's accusations, her hurt expression – hurt for reasons he tries to understand but feels betrayed for, anyway.

He needs Renard to wake up and get well again and he needs answers to what has been going on and why.

*What has Adalind been trying to accomplish? Why did the Captain want me to take that zaubertrank?*

Hank has been the one to deliver it on the Captain’s orders but Renard couldn't tell him what it should have done before he lost consciousness after being shot.

When the zauberbiest twitches for the first time after nearly two hours of listless waiting, Nick takes his hand before he realizes what he's doing. It is a reflex. It is an urge to soothe and protect.

Renard lets out a low moan. His eyes move frantically beneath still closed eyelids. Patrician, always controlled features scrunch up in undisguised pain. He must be hurting like hell despite pain medication.

Tired eyes are forced open. Nick perceives confusion there. Confusion and fear. He also detects
Renard's decision to move before the man himself does.

Carefully he places a hand on the zauberbiest's shoulder to keep him down.

“Easy. Take it easy, Captain. You are safe.”

He tries to sit up, anyway, but is hindered by hands he is no match for. Definitely hurting like hell. It's in green eyes, liquid with unshed tears, and in a stiffening of his huge, magnificent body.

Sean's world is a hazy, nightmarish one. His last memory is being shot. He needs to move out of danger! He tries to do just that.

Pain, so much fucking pain!

Arrgh! He woges briefly. He cannot stop his 'biest from roaring forth to brave this agony. A gasp from beside him. Someone is with him in the room. An enemy? A friend?

Those hands on his body move. They do not hurt him... they stroke and soothe and anchor him.

A familiar voice, that his inner 'biest recognizes while his human mind still remains in the dark. It helps to calm him down, and that turns agony from roaring to manageable. Slowly he grows more aware of his surroundings.

Nick. Nick is there with him.

“Nii...” He coughs dryly as his throat is parched and, oh hell, it sets off a series of terrible spikes of pain.


A glass with a straw is placed at his lips. He sips slowly. It's just plain water but it feels heavenly on his throat.

The Grimm's concerned face swims into view. Sean focuses all of his attention on that face... on the man with him. It helps.

With awareness comes fear. Memories and worries nearly overwhelm him. Nick. Is he still a Grimm? Does he know about Adalind's plan?

“Nick... Grimm... still a Grimm?’”

“What? What do you mean?”

Nick has never seen Renard like this. He looks up at him with eyes filled with panic and terror. The injured zauberbiest moves. The pain must be excruciating! He half turns toward him, shaking hands gripping the lapels of his jacket. It is so much like after he's lost the coins and simultaneously nothing like that time at all. There's desperation, fear and powerlessness but these feelings are not born of greed or allusions of greatness.
It is fear for him... and for his Grimm, whatever that means.

Nick takes those shaking hands into his own, pries them away gently and guides the powerful, battered 'biest to lie back on the bed. Renard must be completely out of it, if he's showing his emotions this openly. It disconcerts and worries him.

“Easy. Don't move around. You'll make your injuries worse.”

Renard does not let go of his hands. His face is marred by pain but his lips are moving, trying to tell him something:

“Nick! Adalind... wanted... steal Grimm p'wers. Did... did... the trank?”

The air in Nick's lungs turns to molasses while his blood runs cold.

“No. I... I didn't. It smashed on the ground before Hank could give it to me. Why? I mean... how can I not be a Grimm anymore?”

“Adalind. Spell. Verfl... Zwillings... schwester. Did she...?”

Nick feels the urge to throw up. He answers anyway. In a hoarse whisper.

“Yes. She did. She... looked exactly like Juliette.”

Never before has he seen such devastation on the Captain's face. The edges of Nick's vision blur while small details like droplets of cold sweat on Renard's brow stand out. Blood rushes in his ears. He cannot comprehend how this could happen.

I should have known!

That single thought, which has been hurled at him in angry accusation hours ago, makes his insides turn.

What an irony. What a fucking irony.

I should have known....

He's gripping at straws now.

“But... but I saw you woge!”

Renard's eyes widen.

“You... when?!”

Nick's bewilderment grows but he's always been empathetic. Maybe Renard is embarrassed by this.

“When you woke up. You were in great pain. It's okay. Pain and meds made your control slip... that's... that's okay.... Nobody else saw it.”

Sean thinks his heart may stop or burst.

“You saw me... woge....” He lets his head fall back onto the pillows, relief flooding him. He turns
his head to the side until he can see Nick again. Suddenly all strength is sapped from his body, leaving him barely conscious and at the end of his mental rope.

He cannot help the shadow of a smile tipping up the corners of his mouth. Only briefly. Only a short glimpse yet speaking volumes.

Hiding his emotions is damn difficult in his state. He needs to draw back. But he's so relieved that it hasn't been in vain.

“You... still... Grimm.”

Nick's eyes grow impossibly large.

“So you mean... it didn't work? Adalind's... Adalind's whatever didn't work?!”

“You saw me woge.”

Those words are a mere whisper but sound like an absolution.

Now that Sean's greatest fear has been assuaged, consciousness slips away faster than he can fathom. The last thing he knows is Nick's head coming to rest on his shoulder in a barely there touch and the sound of a hitched breath. Before he can make anything of it he slips into blackness.

>>> 

After leaving Renard to recuperate and calling Hank to plan their next steps he drives to Monroe and Rosalee’s house. He needs a moment to gather himself before he can get out of the car. He needs to regain control. Adalind's curse – Verfluchte Zwillingsswester Renard has called it – may hasn't worked but that does not make it any more bearable... not by far at least.

Okay, small steps. Just rebuild what's been broken. Just...Oh, fuck, who am I kidding? Still. I need to start somewhere.

He exits his car and rings the doorbell with the firm intention of apologizing for ruining the wedding of his two best friends. He gets enveloped in a two-people hug instead.

„Hey, Nick. We've heard from Hank what has happened... all of it. How are you holding up? And how is the Captain... if you already have news, anyway?“

„Err... Renard is on the mend. I talked to him shortly before I came here. But honestly, I’m not sure you should be asking me how I'm faring. After all I ruined your wedding! If Adalind… if she hadn’t tried to get revenge, you would never have come into this situation. It was my Grimm powers she was after, although for some reason stealing them didn't work. Anyway, that’s not important now. What I want to say is, I’m sorry! How are you? How are you holding up?“
He cannot meet their eyes, afraid that they are disappointed in him and that the paper thin grip on his emotions will slip any moment now. When a large hand settles on his shoulder and a smaller one on his cheek his head whips up in surprise. His wide eyed gaze is met by Rosalee’s warm, sympathetic and Monroe’s fondly exasperated one. He backs away instinctively but halts the movement once he realizes what he’s doing. Monroe and Rosalee shoot him concerned glances but leave his actions uncommented.

„Come on, dude. Adalind wrecking havoc again is hardly your fault. It's good to hear that her plan didn't work out, though. And hey, we are married now!“

At the end Monroe's tone turns smug and it elicits a tiny smile from Nick.

„How are you and Juliette doing?“

This is Rosalee and Nick can read the question not asked: Are you and Juliette okay?

„We’re fine. It’s fine…. No, it’s not.“

He hangs his head, pacing the room. It's all eating him up. But surely he’s making a fuss about nothing… like Juliette said. He should man up and not burden his friends with his trivial problems! When he tells himself that, it all sounds reasonable, it sounds easy.

He just cannot see it that way, no matter how often he tells himself. He feels so near to breaking that it truly frightens him. A lump the size of a football forms in his throat and for the life of him he cannot look at them. He is too afraid about what he may see... and what he may reveal to them.

„Okay, okay, mate. This is a conversation for tea. Definitely a tea conversation, isn’t it, Rosie?“

The freshly married couple ushers him into the kitchen and into a chair while he still fights for control. He hasn't slept since yesterday and does not think that he would be able to even if he tried now. He wants to be alone while at the same time he wants comfort and company. It's a constant battle fought within him.

No matter what his mind decides in the end, they won’t let him off the hook before he spills the beans, anyway. He takes a deep breath. Telling them while keeping it together is so much more difficult than just pushing it to the deepest recesses of his mind and to top it off, there’s a niggle of constant fear, that they won’t understand....

„Nick. No stalling. You’re going to have tea with us, you’re going to like whatever I set before you and you’ll tell us what’s on your mind.“

Suiting actions to words a mug is placed in front of him. He can feel Monroe's stare boring into him. He does not have to look to imagine how the blutbad looks right now: His bushy browed scowl never strays away from him, not for a single moment. Nick finally crumbles. He cradles the big mug in his hands just to give them something to do.

„It’s difficult. Juliette is still at that motel room. She is angry… understandably…. I should have known. I have been the... active part.... I shouldn't feel....“

„Nick, stop right there!“
It’s Rosalee and her tone is fiercer than he has heard in a long time.

„If you’re going to finish that sentence, I’ll strangle you! Only because you are a man and Adalind is a woman doesn't make her actions right! Or easier to deal with. Adalind did something incredibly deceitful, that you had no way of anticipating. I am aware that this is difficult for Juliette but she should not forget that being intimate with a woman you hate has been forced upon you. She has to see that you did not want this.“

She takes his hand, squeezing it gently. Nick heaves a sigh. If it were only this simple.

„I know that. And I think Juliette also does. I mean, I just have to give her time. As you've said, it's been difficult for her, too. And… we both need time… but we’ll manage. It’s going to be fine.”

He makes a real effort to smile encouragingly. He even manages to hide a grimace at tasting what Monroe passes off as herbal tea.

“Now you two need to pack and enjoy your honeymoon and I don’t want to hear anything that’s not holiday stories or a postcard greetings from wherever you are going to go.“

“You are just trying to get out of tasting my wonderful herbal tea, Mister.”

“I did taste it... tiny sip... see? And I would never even dream of hurrying you along to get out of finishing it. I love your tea... but now I need to be going.”

“You are a bad liar.”

“That's why you like me.”

They let Nick steer them away from heavier topics for now. They will need to talk about this sometime in the future but they also respect Nick's choice of when that will happen.

>>>  

In the weeks to come things between him and Juliette are tense. He tries to make it right, anyhow. Despite knowing – in the deepest recesses of his mind – that he shouldn’t need to do so, that she should be there for him like he would be for her, he does his best to make it right.

Another problem arises, though. When they have grown close enough again, that Juliette initiates contact of her own, he finds that he cannot bear it. At first he hides his adverse reaction. She is only meaning well. He should like that she seeks cuddling and touching like in the past. Thing is, he doesn't. Every time she touches him, no matter how hard he tries, there is a point when he grows panicky with fear that it might not be Juliette touching him but Adalind!

The more he tries to let her in, the worse it gets. He doesn't know what to do! He knows that she
wouldn't understand. One evening it escalates.

She has caught him by surprise. He has been poring over some case files when she places a hand on the back of his neck. Before he can reign in his instincts he's half out of the chair and backing further away. When she asks what the hell is wrong with him he tells her. She is his girlfriend. He should be honest with her.

It results in her slapping him across the face and demanding to know, how he could even for one moment think she is Adalind. He tries to explain that this is just what makes it so bad... that he cannot differentiate, but she sees no reason.

After that he sleeps on the couch, barely sleeping at all and feeling more vulnerable and alone than ever.


Sean has been back on active duty for a while now. His wounds have healed well – as attested by his mother, who has payed her son a surprise visit as soon as she has heard of the attack... and bought him a new, safer home while she's been at it. It is nice to know her in the vicinity for once.

In the background he's pulling strings to get those responsible for his near death. Openly sending an assassin now? Really, if it hadn't almost killed him it would have been laughable. Thinking about it, maybe he should take the time and breath to thank Griffin for shooting the man before he could put a fourth bullet into him.

All in all things have calmed down satisfactorily. Apart from one matter that still occupies his thoughts: Nick Burkhardt.

When Nick appears at work that day, Sean notices a few things: There is a vivid bruise on his left cheek and he looks like he hasn't slept properly in days. It begins to worry him. His Detective has been withdrawn ever since the day of Monroe's and Rosalee's wedding but this is something else entirely. He wonders where he's gotten that bruise. It could have been Grimm work but somehow Sean doubts that.

It's a good thing then, that he has a question to ask Nick, anyway. It will be a good opportunity to check on him.

As of late he has felt a strong protective streak toward the Grimm. He may not be known for bearing his emotions on his sleeve (or anywhere other than deep inside) but after what has happened to Nick even he can sympathize.

In fact, private and proud man that he is, he may be better able to relate what damage such a breech into your inner sanctum – both bodily and emotionally – can do to you.
Sean has the distinct feeling that Nick is not getting the support at home that he should and a
cautious voice tells him that the red hand print on his cheek is related to that. Unexpected is the
rather fierce stance his inner 'biest takes on this. He has to exert all of that iron control he is famous
for to keep his wesen side from rearing up in a protective rage.

It is most disconcerting, really. Miss Silverton has done nothing to him. He does not even have
evidence that she is anything but a loving partner to Nick. He is going by instinct alone, but still do
his jaw muscles tense and his nostrils flare at the very thought of her.

The question he still needs to ask is a mundane one. He could have done it all day and been done in
2 minutes straight. Something keeps him from doing it, anyway. A hunch, an instinct. He isn't sure.
He only knows that, when the Grimm drops off his report late that evening while everyone else has
already left, the time has come.

“Nick, one last thing before you leave: There is that award ceremony we are all required to attend
next week. Shall I book one or two seats for you? Hank will come alone, too, so that would be fine,
but in case you want me to set Miss Silverton on the list....”

“No!”

Nick blushes deep crimson. Renard raises an eyebrow. That has been unexpected. He pins his
Detective with a narrow eyed stare, waiting for an explanation.

“I mean, no need to. Just one seat is fine.”

“If you are sure. But it would be no problem at all to have her attend.”

“No, I would rather not... that she accompanied me.”

Sean does not believe his ears. Neither the content of his words nor that down trodden tone seem to
fit the man he has come to know. He cannot even seem to meet his gaze. Sean clears his throat to
prompt him into looking up and is perturbed to find himself faced with haunted gray eyes. It is a
short glimpse only but it has all of Sean's alarm bells ringing. He has seen too many relationships
going from defunct to violent to leave this unattended.

He comes around his desk with slow, measured steps, leaning back against it and looking down on
his Detective with as much open concern as he can bring himself to reveal. This is not easy for him.
Showing that you care means handing out potential weapons to your enemies. Not that Nick
belongs to that group.

“Nick, I have the feeling that you are not coping well at the moment.”

The Grimm glares halfheartedly at that. It seems more a defense mechanism than any real anger.
Even the way he crosses his arms in front of his chest looks more lost than aggressive.
“Well. A lot has happened lately. I'm doing the best I can. Sorry, if I'm not all chipper.”

Sean raises an eyebrow and glares back until his Detective loses his attitude.

“Nick, I know that you are trying and I know you cannot talk about it to someone with professional training given that it's all wesen related but I am willing to listen.”

Nick scoffs at that, pulls up defensive walls around him faster than one can blink. He opens his mouth – no doubt to give another off handed comment to distract him – but Sean holds up a hand to stall him.

“Let me rephrase this: I have the feeling that Miss Silverton makes this more difficult on you than she has any right to.”

Nick's eyes stray to the side for an instant before his brows furrow and he meets his Captain's gaze squarely. Seeing determination and not a small amount of reproach there, one would think to have imagined his moment of insecurity. Sean knows it hasn't been imagination. On the contrary, it seems he has hit the nail on the head.

“It's not her fault. I should have known. She feels betrayed and I cannot fault her for that.”

He sounds steady enough. Just like the decent man he is, staying strong, taking the blame and the brunt. But Sean knows him well by now. He is aware of how his character traits may trip him up, no matter how well Burkhardt deceives himself.

“You gave me a reason, Nick. You did not deny my statement, however.”

The zauberbiest captures his Detective's eyes with an intense gaze, that Nick cannot escape. Sean sees the inner struggle. Already his Detective's lips are parting to deny his words and yet he cannot seem to get anything out. Only a tiny push is needed to make him open up. Nick has doubts in his own reasoning, that much is clear. He needs to see. If he is correct in his assumption on what has happened at his home, then the Grimm needs to tell him.

It's all there is his expressive face. A battle within, fought silently. Guilt and shame against hurt and righteous anger.

Sean finds that he really wants to help, so he decides to push:

“It may not be my place to be asking, but as I said I am willing to listen. Let's face it. You did not get that hand shaped bruise from nowhere. What has happened? Be honest with me. You are obviously struggling and I want to help.”

His Detective pulls back even further into himself. Of course, he does not want to talk about this... cannot do so, maybe. Still he remains frozen to the spot, fighting that inner battle. Sean is patient and his offer is genuine. He remembers well waking up at hospital, confused and riddled by pain. Nick has been there for him despite all that had to be weighing on his mind at the time.

On a hunch he decides openness may be his best shot:

“When I woke up after being shot, you were there. And when I asked you, when you had seen me woge, your first thought was to spare me embarrassment even though it should have been whether you had lost your powers or not. I want to return the favor... to be there and listen.”
Nick can barely believe his ears. Ever since that night with Adalind he's felt like drifting in the open sea, barely staying afloat and with no hope of being saved. It is like Renard is throwing him a life line....

And yet he is this close to taking a proverbial knife to cut that line.

*Juliette does not deserve my scorn. It is my fault that I am being an idiot about that whole touch thing. She is only meaning well....*

“Nick... what has happened? I do not intent to bring anyone behind bars but I need to know if you are in this deeper than you can work out of.”

'I can take care of myself!' is already on his tongue, but hearing Renard's voice so very near has him rearing back in shock. Seeing his Captain directly in front of him, however, does not bear the same horror as having Juliette touching him. That fact catches him off guard. He focuses half on the best flight path and half on Renard's face. For once there is no calculation, there is concern and empathy. It is such a stark contrast to the hooded, cool expression he normally sports, that it breaks him out of his first impulse to flee. He looks at his Captain... really looks for once.

And that's when he perceives his hand hovering just above his shoulder and yet not moving an inch farther. The message is clear:

The mighty Royal, the zauberbiest Prince and, of course, his superior is asking permission, if he may touch him. If he may do something as simple as placing a hand on his shoulder in comfort.

Seeing that really drives it home. He remembers that Juliette did not do so even once ever since the night with Adalind. She, who should have been most perceptive of his fear, has never paused to think about it. Even last night, after he has explained everything and she has slapped him, she has touched him again. Placed her hand on his cheek, above the fiery print, and now that he realizes that, he also remembers her expression when she's done it.

It has been pure spite.

The lump in his throat, which has been growing ever since Renard first hinted at his defunct home situation, becomes impossibly large. As a cop he knows all there is to know about domestic abuse and so on. This isn't about that.

*Juliette has been angry, that is all.... She has felt spiteful because I have hurt her.*
If he knows all this, why does he need to close his eyes, to squeeze them shut tightly to push out that damn ache in his chest?

Without a conscious thought he moves forward a tiny step so that Renard's hand lands on his shoulder, after all.

At first there's tension, then acceptance and warmth seeping through his thin henley shirt at the ongoing contact. That hand squeezes his shoulder gently. A thumb rubs small patterns. Nick lets out a breath he has been unaware of holding.

“Come on. Sit down and then let's talk about this.”

And surprisingly it does not seem such an impossible task anymore. Renard is neutral ground. He is not as close as his friends but he knows enough, is close enough to tell him. With his friends there is always that subconscious fear that they will find him unworthy of their friendship when he tells them more. Shame burns deep in his gut. It is of no consequence that realistically they would never think of him like that.... The fear of losing them, shame in front of them is too great to confide in them.

He grows aware of being pushed into a chair and that another one is pulled up. He sets his attention back on the other man even while an inner voice whispers to him that it is easier to keep looking at the ground. Anything is better than seeing the same lack of understanding that he has found on Juliette's face at his revelation.

But Renard isn't like that. He sits with his elbows resting on his thighs, leaning forward slightly, and patiently waits for his Detective to explain himself.

“I am not comfortable with Juliette accompanying me because lately things have been difficult between us.”

“Hmm.”

“It's... it's....” Nick breaks off, looking at him like he wants him to be a mind reader so that he does not have to spell it out. Sean can certainly understand the sentiment. The only thing he can offer, though, is patience. The Grimm buries his fingers in his hair, gripping strands of it tightly before letting go and simply pushing unruly bangs out of his eyes.

“Ever since Adalind changed into Juliette and... we had sex... I... I cannot bear her touch anymore. Juliette's touch I mean. What really gets to me is the fact that there was not a single difference between the two! Juliette keeps insisting that I should have known... or that it cannot have been all that bad, if there was seemingly no difference between Adalind and her....”

He huffs a bitter laugh and both know that he's on the verge of cracking. If not his laugh then maybe the violent shudder is a dead give away.
“... but there was no way how I could have known.... And that's really messing with my head! No matter how hard I try there's always a point when I fear that it might be Adalind, after all. ... That she has slipped into my home again to wreck havoc and hurt people. I know it's stupid. I should be over it already, damn it!! But I just cannot do it. I'm too weak or whatever. Maybe I'm becoming paranoid. I don't know! Anyway, last night Juliette caught me by surprise. She touched my neck. I nearly overthrew a table in my haste to get away from her. Needless to say, she was not amused... and even less amused when I explained matters.”

By the time he has ended he is sitting in a position similar to the zauberbiest's, arms propped up on his thighs, kneading his hands and staring somewhere at the ground.

Renard is silent for a long time but when he speaks Nick finds himself drawn in. He looks up despite his fear that he'll find disgust and mockery on the other man's face.

There is none. Just grave seriousness and a deeper understanding of matters than Nick would have expected.

“So she has slapped you.”

“Hmm.”

“Have you thought about ending your relationship with Juliette?”

“No! It's not....”

“Not her fault?”

Nick gives a terse, mute nod.

“I agree that Adalind's actions are not her fault... but they aren't yours either. I know the dynamics of Verfluchte Zwillingsschwester. There is no way to distinguish the two individuals going by appearance. Someone who knows that the zaubertrank is used might be able to pick up differences in behavior but you couldn't have known because you were not expecting such a thing to happen. That, and Adalind is a masterful actress. You could not have known!”

Nick looks away frowning and Sean knows why. Telling himself that he could have prevented this is easier than admitting that his fiance's behavior has been wrong.

“I will even give it to Juliette that she has felt slighted in the beginning but as soon as she had seen your struggle and especially your reaction yesterday she should have seen sense. I know that you have always worked hard to make this relationship work, even at the time when she had lost her memories of you. Maybe now is the time to give yourself some space.”
“I just need to work harder!”

This is not the level-headed Detective Sean knows. This is a desperate and hurting man who grasps at straws to keep from breaking down.

“No, Nick, you do not. For once it is Juliette who needs to work harder. She needs to give you space and time, just like you have done when she's needed it, and if she does not understand that, maybe then she is not the right person to be with. I am not telling you to break things off with her but you should contemplate, if what she brings into your relationship is really good for both of you.”

Nick doesn't answer but he can see that he is thinking about his words. That's something. Both take a moment to gather themselves, to find back to their usual roles and onto comfortable ground.

“And now you should try to get some sleep. It's up to you, if you call Monroe or Hank, or even if you sleep on my couch. Of course you can go home as well. You are a grown man I won't make that decision for you. Just know that my place is available should you decide you need it.”

He looks deeply into Nick's eyes, locking gazes and not letting go until his Detective gives another nod.

“Thanks. I mean it. I did not expect to be bothering you with my worries tonight... but talking about it helped, anyway. Thank you.”

“You're welcome. I will see you tomorrow then.”

“Yeah. See you tomorrow.”

They leave it at that. Nick opts for the trailer instead of bothering him even longer but talking to the zauberbiest has shifted some things into perspective.

>>>{}

When he is tired all the time and gets frequent headaches, he chalks it up to stress. When he starts feeling nauseous in the morning, throwing up more often than not, he thinks the whole situation with Juliette is finally getting to him.

When all this doesn’t stop and an appointment with his doctor does not yield any results, he begins to have a terrible suspicion. But that cannot be. He is a man… but he is also a Grimm, so who knows what else his ancestors have in store for him.

As he's sleeping either on the couch or in the trailer, anyway, it is a convenient opportunity to check what his Grimm books have to say on the matter. He finds it shortly before dawn. It is only a tiny side reference. It is a foot note that makes life as he knows it crumble around him!

>>>{}}
His cell phone feels like lead in his hand as he takes it up and pushes speed dial for Rosalee. He cannot tell her but she might still know someone he can go to. He just has to play this right.

Even as he contemplates that he feels bad for hiding things from her. His left hand slips to his stomach while he unconsciously hunches in on himself. He needs help. He needs someone to talk to about all this yet there is nobody. There’s simply nobody who he can burden with this knowledge.

And frankly, he is deadly afraid that they will think less of him… that they will hate him… and the child he may bear.

He tries to take a deep breath but half way through it hitches in the beginnings of a sob.

_Don’t loose your head! You need to be strong! You cannot…!_

„Hey, Nick? What can I do for my favorite Grimm today?“

„Oh God, Rosalee!“

Hearing her warm voice nearly tears Nick in half. He needs her help so badly but fear that she will find out and be disgusted has him in a choke hold.

„Everything okay? You sound… odd. Do you need help with a case… or anything else?“

He clears his throat in an attempt to get out any words.

_How is it possible that I am so emotional these days? I cannot seem to hold it together! Come on, Nick, gather your wits and keep a cool head!_

„Yes… a case. You see, I have this case and I want to help a woman. If a wesen were to look for a doctor to do a pregnancy test, where would she need to go?“

„Um, let me think…. Dr. Cransbury would be a good choice. He is a kehrseite schlich kennen with vast knowledge about all things wesen and he has his office here in Portland. I’ll send you his contact details.“

„Thanks. That's great but is he…?“

„Understanding, tolerant and discreet?“

He can hear her warm amusement.

„Yes.” Nick closes his eyes in desperation. Surely his perceptive friend can spot his anxiety a mile away.

„Nick, he is one of the most open, good hearted persons I know... and he's impartial because of his
kehrseite status. The woman, is it someone I know? I mean, this seems to be very important to you. Can I help in any way?

„No…. No, it’s not someone you know. And I have it under control.“

Saying this almost causes him physical pain. He hates lying to her and above all he wants someone to talk to about this. It's difficult to admit but he needs comfort and advice what the hell he is supposed to do now! His throat closes up but he swallows around it.

„Rosie… just know that you’re helping already. I need to be off now. Thank you again.“

„Okay. Just call if you need anything else.“

>>> 

He has just returned from his appointment with Dr. Cransbury. Rosalee has been right about him. He’s been great and has not even batted a lash when he has told him about his heritage. He has largely omitted the circumstances of how he came to be impregnated, only that it has to do with a hexenbiest, but their conversation has cleared up some matters nonetheless. Furthermore he feels comfortable with the doctor. Something in his down to earth, warm demeanor assauges his initial misgivings. That’s something, isn’t it?

Pressure builds behind his eyes, tears threatening to leak out. They have performed the test.

He, Nicholas Burkhardt, is pregnant and approximately three months along.

How this is possible?

Some weird shit about Grimms being so near to being extinct that evolution has thought up this neat little trick.

How he of all people came to get knocked up?

A rare chain of events that shouldn’t have come to pass. A once in a century thing, according to his doctor.

It has happened anyway.

A sob tears through the Grimm. In the solitude of his own home he stumbles into the bathroom to throw up violently. For once it isn’t morning sickness. It is gut wrenching fear.

Juliette is away on a three day vet congress. It is his only saving grace.

She cannot see me like this. She cannot know. It isn’t her fault. She wouldn’t understand... would
hate me.

In his grief he ignores these thoughts completely, or maybe he simply pushes them away as too hurtful on top of it all.

He slides down along the tiled wall, letting sobs overtake him. One hand comes to rest on his mostly flat belly in a protective gesture. It's instinct. He doesn't understand it.

Help. I need help.

He’s screwed. He feels so utterly alone yet doesn’t know where to go.

Because he’s ashamed… and frightened out of his mind! He bears the child of a person who he hates, who has all but raped him and who has made all their lives living hell. Harsh breaths echo through the bathroom. Another wave of fear, of nausea, another gut wrenching sob. Throwing up again. Being overwhelmed by the enormity of it all.

I am pregnant. The child is Adalind's. How... how can I keep it? How can I not hate it?!

And in this moment a whole new horror assaults him:

It is bearing an innocent child, a tiny living being that may be hated despite having no part in its parents’ crimes. What Adalind did to him has been terrible but so much worse is the thought that he might hurt that child within him because he is not strong enough to rise above his hate for its mother!

His arms come around his belly, now truly enveloping his midsection... and his baby. He curls up on the floor. He wants to keep the little one... he needs to keep and protect it.

He knows what to do. There's no way around it. It hurts him. It tears him up until he's all raw inside.

It is not its fault. It's not the baby's fault!!!

And this time he means it. It is no denial or deluding himself, no protecting the wrong person, no betraying himself.

He does not sleep that night. He doesn't feel good even now that he knows what to do, because a thousand fears ghost through his mind.

How can I protect my unborn child through Grimm and Police work? How can I be there for it despite my job? How can I bear looking at it when I know who is its mother? Oh, God! How do we get through the next months without Juliette finding out? How...?
It's too much. Emotions are going crazy on him, leaving him ragged and vulnerable. At some point he simply shuts down.

Only at the crack of dawn he resurfaces from what he realizes now has been a major anxiety attack. Slowly he gets up from the ground, walks into the kitchen, makes coffee, throws it away – because he is pregnant and coffee is a no go. He makes plans. Cautious, half baked plans that all involve one thing:

He needs to tell the Captain. He needs to inform his superior so that they may make contingency plans and think up safety measures.

He needs Renard because he is the only one he can go to with this....

And weirdly because he feels safe with him.

It is half past four in the morning. He gets into his car and drives off.

Nick turns up on Renard's doorstep 20 minutes later. He shivers in the cool morning air.

*God, I haven't felt cold in like forever! Not since being zombified anyway.*

Another violent shiver. He's in shock. On some level he realizes that.

A heavy drizzle has set in. He must have stood there for quite some time just spacing out. He's drenched.

He rings the doorbell. Once, twice. Ears straining he hears Renard getting up, checking for intruders, looking at his door monitor, finally turning the door knob.

He still startles badly when the door opens and the zauberbiest appears in front of him. Damn it. He's really out of it. He knows this and cannot do a fucking thing about it.

The perceptive 'biest takes up every tidbit. From his haggard appearance to shivers to that utterly lost look in stormy eyes.
“You look like shit. Come in.”

This may sound harsh but the hands taking him by the arms and pulling him inside are not.

>>> 

Sean leads his Grimm into the living room and pushes him down to sit on the sofa without uttering so much as a word. His actions show a certain hurry, because, honestly, he fears Nick might fall if he doesn't get him to sit down quickly. The last time he has looked this bad has been when he's been freshly out of zombieland. What has happened to shake up the imperturbable Detective so much?

He ponders if this is a time for whiskey or blankets and sweet tea but on a hunch decides on the second.

>>> 

Nick notices that he has been staring into space when his hands are wrapped around a steaming mug and a thick blanket is dropped around his shoulders.

“Nick.” The tone of Renard's voice – somewhere between concern and exasperation – tells him that the Prince hasn't called him for the first time. He makes sure to actually focus on the man this time.

“Ah, you are finally with me. I was already contemplating slapping you to get you out of subspace.”

Nick is sure that this is partially true. Renard is like that.

“Nick, what has happened.”

Some measure of clear-headedness returns to him. He focuses, truly focuses now.

This is the point of no return.

“I have come, Captain, to inform you of a case of pregnancy. My own... pregnancy.”

Where Nick's words have been formal and without emotion at first, his voice cracks at the last. Renard's forehead creases. He leans forward in the armchair he has folded himself into.

“Care to repeat that?”

When Nick meets his eyes now Sean perceives the full scale of his trauma.

“I am pregnant. Adalind did not steal my powers. She knocked me up with a child.... Three months... I am three months along.”

Nick pales so drastically that Sean thinks he will faint. He doesn't but he does not seem to get
enough air into his lungs either!

First things first: He takes the mug out of the Grimm’s hands and places it onto the coffee table.

„Nick. Nick! Come on, focus on me!“

His Detective is staring ahead, mouth open and sucking in harsh, utterly ineffective breaths.

„Detective, head between your knees and then deep and slow breaths.“

The Captain suits actions to words, clamps his hand down on Nick’s neck and pushes his head down until it is resting between his knees.

„One breath at a time. Hold it. Good. Now let it out…. And again.“

This is Renard’s business voice. As a cop Nick has been trained to obey his superior. The Captain knows this and uses it to their advantage.

„Deep breaths. Keep it up.“

When he is halfway himself again Nick makes to raise his head but Renard is having none of it.

„No. You are not yet through. Keep your head down and concentrate on breathing.“

In accordance to his command that large hand stays on his neck. Nick would have expected to feel the same terror as when Juliette has touched him but apart from slight annoyance at being manhandled like this he only feels calmed by it. Curious.

„Are you with me again?“

„Hmm.“

„Verbal answer, Detective.“

An exasperated sigh, which Sean takes as a good sign.

„I am still totally fucked up, but I’m feeling less like my lungs are a foreign object implanted into my chest for decorative purposes.“

„That has to suffice for now.“

The pressure on his neck lets up, prompting Nick to rise from his position. If he thinks that Renard will let him be now he’s wrong. He’s taken by the shoulders and pushed backward until he’s actually resting against the back of the sofa.

*God, how embarrassing!*

„It’s okay. I’m okay now.“

„Have you seen yourself in the mirror? I am taking no chances. If you want to convince me that you are better, drink your tea.“

They remain like this for a while. Nick doing as he’s been told and Renard watching him like a hawk. When the Bastard Prince leans forward, loosely entwining long fingers and pinning him
with a piercing gaze, Nick knows it is time for their talk.

„So, let me get this straight: When Adalind used Verfluchte Zwillingsschwester to turn into Juliette and have sex with you, she did not steal your powers like would have been normal, but somehow impregnated you.“

„Yes.“

„I have to ask this: How do you know you are pregnant?“

„I did the test. I went to a doctor.“

„You went to a doctor?!“ It is clear that Renard is not comfortable with the thought.

„Yes, I did. Rosalee recommended him. And I did a background check, of course.“

„Hmm. So Rosalee knows.“

„No, she doesn’t.“

There it is again: His gaze straying to the ground, shame flickering across expressive features.

„I asked her where a wesen woman would need to go to perform a pregnancy test in a safe environment.“ The words spill out on a soft exhale. Like an admittance of guilt, which for Nick it surely is. Sean can imagine quite well what goes on in his Detective’s head. He’s not only overwhelmed by the situation, he is also beating himself up over hiding this from his friends... and a whole lot of other things as well most likely. They will need to address that but not now.

"Where does Juliette stand in all this?"

"She doesn't know either. She is on a three day vet congress. I wouldn't know how to tell her, anyway."

There’s less guilt this time and more wariness. Renard decides to let the matter slide for now. There are more practical things to discuss.

„There are spells and zaubertraenke to disguise your pregnancy. There are even ways to protect the child while still in the womb. But those are technicalities. There is only one important question: Nick, do you want this child?“

Sean captures the Grimm’s gaze. He draws him in with those jade green eyes and does not give him a chance to look away.

He sees it all in his face. He is uncomfortable, he is torn and ashamed.

„Yes. Yes… I do want it… but…“

There is so much hurt, something so haunted in Nick's expression and posture. Something in Sean cracks at seeing this. He would never have thought to be in this position... to be a confidant to Nick Burkhardt, lost and almost broken Grimm. But he is....

And he intents to see this through. Nick has come to him with something that cannot be easy for
him in any way. He did it, anyway. No matter how shrewd and calculating the zauberbiest can be, this time his agenda is an altruistic one: It is to help this man.

„But what?“ It is a soft query, a gentle prompt to open up to him. Nick opens and closes his mouth a few times without getting anything out. He's breathing faster again. The enormity of it all seems to swallow him whole. This is no trivial matter. This is about a child. A living being.

„I… I do want it… I want to protect and nurture it and take care… but… but I am so damn afraid that I will hate it because of who is its mother!!“

Nick voice cracks at the end. He hunches in on himself, one hand going to his belly, one hand burying in his hair. Nick is shaking violently. Sean follows his instincts for once and places a hand on his shoulder - slowly, carefully and only after the distraught Grimm has had time to draw away should he desire to do so.

„You won’t hate your child. The moment you see the miracle that is a new living being you will love it no matter what the circumstances of its conception. Believe me, I speak from experience. I do have a child with Adalind.“

„But what if I neglect it… or mistreat it… or…?! I cannot… I cannot…. It isn’t the child’s fault!! It isn’t its fault!!“

Nick works himself up into a state faster than he can fathom! Tears and ragged gasps. He cannot stop it. He does not understand why this is happening so damn fast!

“Nick?… Nick! May I draw you into my arms? You are sliding into another panic attack and I think that you need my help.”

Renard's voice, deep and soothing. The question perfunctory and still it mends a deep wound that has not closed ever since Juliette threw his own fear in his face. The strong zauberbiest could overpower him in the blink of an eye, especially now, but he does not.

Nick cannot answer. Renard seems to understand, anyway, for he is drawn into strong arms. One hand settles on the back of his neck, the other holds him tight. His cheek touches the smooth fabric of the Captain's shirt. His shivers and half-sobs are absorbed by his strong, heavy built body.

“Okay, okay. Now just try to draw a full breath. Come on, you can do this.”

Nick doesn’t notice his own tears. Not before he wants to speak and finds his throat constricted.

He gasps for air, squeezes his eyes shut. His worst fear is mistreating that innocent little bundle of life. He’s never been as afraid as right now. Like before in his bathroom all gets too much. He must have made a sound.

„Shhh. You won’t do any of those things. You will love your child. You will give it everything you can and once it is born, it will make things right in ways you cannot even fathom right now. It will be okay. You will be alright and so will be your child. It’s okay…. And now calm down. We will find a way. You have all our support. You may haven't told them yet, but your friends will be there for you as well. It will be okay.“
They remain like this for an indeterminable space of time. Renard holding him while Nick tries to get his head around it all. There's nothing sappy about it. Just now Sean Renard, zauberbiest and Bastard Prince, is the one person keeping the Grimm from going crazy.

>>> 

“Sorry, Sir. Damn. We need to get to precinct. I have wasted all this time just freaking out and bothering you. ’m sorry.”

Renard shakes his head. They are sitting on the thick, expensive rug in front of the Prince's sofa, no longer huddled together, just facing each other.

“No need to be sorry. And you will not go to precinct today. You are in no state to work.”

The tall 'biest stands and, extending a hand, pulls Nick up with him.

“I have a guestroom. I will show you to it, you will get into bed and sleep.”

Nick makes to protest but Sean stalls him with one level gaze.

“No arguments. Going by what you've told me you haven't slept in at least 20 hours and you've had more than one anxiety attack. Your first step to treating your child well is taking care of yourself and thereby of it. Understood?”

His tone leaves no room for arguments but his gaze is amicable enough.

“Yes, Sir. I doubt I'll be able to sleep but I will try.”

“Good. There is food and drink in the fridge. If you desire to do so, you can take a shower later. For now just try to rest. Tonight when I return from work we will start making plans. I meant what I said earlier, we will see you through this.”

“Thank you. I mean it. What will you tell Hank about today?”

“That you called in sick and I gave you leave.”

Renard leads the way upstairs to a simple but tastefully furnished room with a single bed. He leaves shortly only to return with a shirt and sweat pants.

“Your clothes are still damp. Change into these. There is no sense in courting a cold by staying in your clothes.”

Nick knows he should feel annoyed at Renard's bossy behavior but somehow it is a relief to have decisions taken out of his hands for a while.

Once Renard has left the room Nick changes and gets under the covers although he doubts he’ll be able to get a single wink of sleep.
At least he's not feeling as lost now as he has been hours ago. To be honest, just now is the first
time his impending pregnancy does not seem like a one way road to disaster.

I can do this. Renard knows now and he is a strategic master mind. We will make plans... and
make my baby safe.

That last thought is equally as hurtful as it begins to acquire a very special place in his heart. After
telling Renard reality of bearing a child has slowly sunk in and with it an urge to protect and love
that little being growing in his womb.

He isn't sure as of yet how he will manage or how his future will look but he knows without a
doubt that the child within him has done nothing wrong and that he will do everything in his power
to give it a good life!

He has been wrong about not getting any sleep. Almost as soon as his head hits the pillow he is out
cold. It seems Renard's presence and promised help is more reassuring than he could have anticipated.

Sean readies himself for the day after he has left Nick in the relative privacy of his guest room,
already making plans for what needs to be done to keep Nick and his baby safe.

Nick and his baby. What a weird thought. A feeling arises in his chest, that at first he cannot
identify. Is it possessiveness? The need to know where Nick is and what he does? No, apparently
not.

As he puts down his briefcase to wander back upstairs and check in on his Grimm one last time
suddenly he is aware of what is driving him:

It is fierce protectiveness! It has been there in a weaker variant ever since he has learned of
Adalind's plans to take his powers, but now it rears its head with a hitherto unprecedented ferocity.

This time said protectiveness has no reason to come up because Nick is fast asleep. In any other
situation he would have smirked at finding the man like this after his vehement assertions on the
contrary, but right now there is only profound relief coursing through him.

Nick Looks truly exhausted and despite his athletic built lost and vulnerable among the covers. A
shiver runs down the zauberbiest’s spine in memory of the past two hours.
What is this man doing to me? In the past his problems wouldn't have shaken me quite so badly.

The level of Nick’s distress has been worrying and implications about his home life are deeply disturbing.

Suffice to say, the pregnant Grimm needs all the sleep he can get and he will need all his strength to face what lies ahead. He closes the door quietly behind himself and makes his way to precinct.

There’s nothing for it. If he wants to help Nick through this, his best shot is finding solutions to the various problems that may arise.

He can help Nick protect his child and ensure that his friends have his back no matter what. He has enough power to keep Adalind and Kronenberg from finding out and yet he fears being unable to protect him from the one person that could be Nick's downfall: Juliette Silverton.

He has never been given to self-deception and furthermore has experienced first hand what venom and ill will can be dropped on an innocent child, that's been unlucky enough to be born as the bastard of another woman. Of course, he could be wrong but he rather suspects that the redhead will hurt Nick deeply once she learns about his state.

Somewhere deep down even the Grimm seems to know. He wouldn't have held off telling her otherwise. Right now, though, Nick is still hoping for a future with her and Sean cannot do a thing about that.

>>> 

At precinct's main office he pens a note for Hank, telling him that Nick is on sick leave for a day and he should take Wu along to his investigations, before moving on to his office, shutting blinds and door behind him.

Once alone Sean takes out his burner phone, calls his mother and asks for a meeting as soon as possible. When she tells him she is free today around midday and if they shall meet for lunch Sean agrees with an uncharacteristically open show of gratitude and relief.

He picks out a secluded, largely unknown restaurant for their meeting and quietly asks his mother to work her hexenbiest magic to ensure their privacy. She raises an eyebrow at his request but complies at once, after they have ordered and been brought their respective drinks and meals.

„So tell me, son, what brings us together on this fine day?“
There’s a spark of mischief in her eyes but also of knowing. Oh no, his mother is not deceived for one moment that this is a meeting purely for social reasons.

„I have disconcerting news and frankly I am in need of your expertise once again.“

She raises her eyebrow in a perfect mirror image of her son.

„Apropos my expertise. You told me on our last meeting that Adalind’s ploy to steal the Grimm's powers has been unsuccessful. Are you any wiser as to why that is?“

Sean’s expression of carefully veiled concern has her on high alert. She is able to read her son in practically any situation even when nobody else is able to detect a shred of emotion on him, so showing his feelings on the matter almost openly is in her book a reason to worry. He sighs and takes a small sip of his water.

„The reason for one matter leads us directly to the other one I need to discuss with you. Nick is pregnant… with Adalind’s child. He is about three months along and needs your help in disguising pregnancy and protecting the child.“

Elizabeth Lascelles prides herself on being a tough, practically unshakable woman, who does not wear her emotions on her sleeve, but at this revelation her eyes widen and her lips part in shock.

„Well, that is an unexpected bit of news. So you mean… instead of stealing his powers she gave him part of her life essence and made him conceive a child? I must admit, I have heard about such phenomena but have always thought it to be rumors only.“

„Apparently those rumors bear more truth than anyone has realized so far. Of course, it is in our interest to keep it at rumors and legends. It would put Nick in even greater danger if anyone were to know about this.“

He proceeds to tell her everything from the circumstances of the child’s conception to Nick’s problems and fears. It isn’t his intention to disclose things the Grimm has told him in private but he knows, if his mother is to brew that zaubertrank successfully, she needs to take everything into account. Be that the particulars of Nick’s night with Adalind or his emotional state. Magic is particular that way.

„He has come to me early this morning to make his… confession, if you want. He is currently sleeping in my guest room. At least I hope he is. He looked about to collapse when he arrived and the following hours did not do him any good either.“

Elizabeth places her hands on his larger ones.
„Oh, Sean. You seem, indeed, deeply worried about Nicholas."

There’s no mocking in her voice, only empathy and a bit of surprise. Sean still finds the need to explain himself:

„You should have seen him, mother! I've already been surprised when he has opened up to me about his difficulties with Miss Silverton last month. To find him on my doorstep at five in the morning looking on the verge of losing it has been… disturbing."

He frowns, lost in memories of the last few hours. Elizabeth squeezes his hand gently, knowing that her son is not finished with what he wants to tell her. Sure enough those watchful green eyes focus back on her own an instant later.

„Do you know what was the reason for his second break down? It was fear that he will treat the child badly because of hating its mother! After all that has happened to him he would have all the reason to be angry and hurt but his sole concern is the well being of a child, that has been forced upon him! He does not deserve to be broken by this... not when his concern is for a yet unborn bastard child. I need to help them. Call me a fool but I feel a truly disconcerting urge to protect both of them."

Elizabeth has her own theory on what is the driving force behind her son's actions but telling him would only make things more difficult and push him to distance himself from his feelings, so she takes their initial line of conversation back up.

„After what you've told me about your stay in the hospital and about this morning I find myself reaffirmed in thinking that your Detective is a decent man. It speaks for him that he puts his unborn before himself despite in what way it has been conceived. Of course, I will help you. I guess you are asking for a shadowing trank and something to protect the child while still in the womb?"

„Yes, I am. And know that I am deeply grateful for your assistance, mother."

„Helping you out is no hardship at all, especially seeing that I am absent from your life often enough as it is. Now let us discuss the particulars so that we may be able to help your Grimm as soon as possible."

„He is not my Grimm, mother. Far from it, actually. I have never seen a Grimm more independent and unheeding of any tradition or obligation to the royal houses. At times it is most frustrating."

_You may deceive yourself into thinking that, dear son, but in reality you love him for it._

His tone shows dissatisfaction but, deeply hidden within, the wise hexenbiest detects a fondness that she has never found in him so far. It is with a secret little smile that she goes into details about zaubertraenke and workings of magic.

>>>
Nick sleeps until late afternoon. He is surprised that it has been this long but has to admit that he feels better than before. Upon getting up he finds his clothes lying on one of the sideboards freshly laundered and folded. He remembers now: Renard has a housekeeper and said housekeeper must have taken it upon herself to wash his clothes. He wonders briefly, if she has simply dusted him over as part of the guest room fixtures while he's slept, and for the life of him he cannot decide if that thought is bad humor or marks him as slowly going crazy.

Whatever it is, he takes his clothes to the bathroom and takes up the Captain's offer on a shower. After that and a meal also left out by the industrious housekeeper he feels a lot better and calmer, more ready for what the world has in store for him.

>>> 

They are sitting at the kitchen table together, both nursing a big mug of hot beverage, and making plans for the future. Had anyone asked Nick a few weeks ago how high was the possibility of him and his Captain doing this, he would have said zero.

But here they are and, frankly, it is the first time in weeks that the Grimm feels anything but tense and restless.

“Your growing belly is going to be a problem in the months to come. We cannot simply take you out of work, so we need to hide evidence of your pregnancy.”

“Hah, good luck with that. I'm beginning to grow bigger even now and I really don't want to know how I'll look in a month or two.”

Renard smirks at the image and even the dirty look Nick throws him is no deterrence.

“Good to know that at least you are having fun, your Highness.”

At the sarcastic dig at his heritage Sean levels his own glare but it lacks heat and, honestly, after last night none of them is too averse to engaging in a bit of harmless teasing.

“There are zaubertraenke to accomplish that.”

“Hmm. I must admit I'm a bit wary in regard to them. More often than not those things rebound back to bite you.”

“That is because until now you have never come into contact with a trank designed especially for you and your needs. You are correct in assuming that many a trank takes as much from you as it offers you but that does not apply to every single one.”
Thinking this through Nick pushes up the sleeves of his gray long sleeve shirt, revealing strong, sinewy forearms. For a moment Sean feels himself drawn to the sight of them. He shakes himself out of it when the pregnant Grimm starts talking again.

“If I were to take such a trank, what would be required for it to take effect? I mean, is some ritual involved or some gruesome ingredient? And could Rosalee brew it?”

The Captain huffs an unexpected laugh.

“No and no. Neither ritual nor obscure ingredients are needed but Rosalee cannot brew it for you. And even if she could, as of yet you haven't told her about your pregnancy so the point is mute.”

Nick rolls his eyes in exasperation.

“I have told you only hours ago. Tell me how I should have found the time to tell Rosalee and Monroe. In case you forgot, you ordered me to get some sleep.”

“Which you did and it did wonders to your well being and mental stability. Point taken, though. Anyway, telling Monroe, Rosalee and Hank will be imperative and should not be postponed for much longer.”

Nick heaves a put upon sigh but his gaze straying to the side tells Sean that he is aware of the importance of that.

“Yeah, I know. I'll do it soon. But now back to matters at hand: Why can Rosie not brew the trank for me?”

Renard's raised eyebrow shows exactly what he thinks about Nick's attempt at stalling but he answers his question anyway.

“Only a hexenbiest can successfully brew it.”

Nick pushes himself away from the table in agitation. He paces the room, suddenly coiled tightly again. Sean does not know, if he is aware, but his hand has gone to his belly at once in face of the news.

“Why are you suggesting this zaubertrank, if it is impossible for me to find someone to make it?! I mean, tell me how should find, let alone trust a hexenbiest to do this for me?”

His brow furrows and he all but hunches in on himself while pacing the length of the kitchen.

Renard remains calm in face of his anguish. He steeples his fingertips as he tracks Nick's progress through the room.

“My mother. She is a powerful hexenbiest (Nick cannot help flinching at that.) and has worked all her life as midwife and healer. Despite your understandable misgivings you have nothing to fear from her. Furthermore she would be willing to brew the zaubertrank as well as perform the ritual necessary to protect your child.”

“You told her?!”
Nick whirls around, features now set in true anger and marred by a trace of betrayal that hurts more than Sean would ever admit.

“I have not told her about you in particular. I have only asked in a general way. She already helped me out with the trank that should have prevented you from losing your Grimm powers and she would be more than willing to help out a second time.”

That may be a lie but a necessary one. He knows one thing for sure: His mother would never hurt the Grimm, not if he forbade her to and most likely not even if he didn't. She may be a powerful hexenbiest and knows how to take care of herself but the boundless vindictiveness that drives other ‘biests is only a slight shadow in her otherwise genuine personality.

He wants to help Nick and if it takes hiding preparations already enacted to make him agree then so be it.

Nick looks slightly mollified and when Sean motions for him to come over to the table again he actually complies. Slipping back into his chair he rubs a hand over his face. The Grimm looks tired again and Sean finds himself wanting to comfort him.

*What is happening to me? Never before have I felt this urge. It is most bothersome.*

Nevertheless he searches his mind for something to say... something to take his fear away.

“This would be one problem solved and it would enable you to continue Police and Grimm work with little risk to you or your child. You would still need to be careful, of course. No running heedlessly into danger and no going alone. As I said, you need to tell Monroe, Rosalee and Hank because you will need their support and protection in the time to come.”

The zauberbiest Prince levels him a piercing stare, daring him to say otherwise. Nick does not contest the general sentiment but feeling the girl in the situation scratches at his pride.

He grounds out: “You are aware, Sir, that as a Grimm and experienced cop I can take care of myself?”

His tone has clearly deepened in anger, steel underlying his words.

Sean knows, one is well advised never to underestimate the Grimm, no matter how peace loving he is. He is facing a predator, who apparently does not take well to being made out as in need of protection (and is under influence of a healthy dose of pregnancy hormones).

“Believe me, I am. But even you will admit that pregnancy makes you more vulnerable and that the life and well being of your baby is more important than hurt pride.”
The Captain's stare is punishing, not letting him off the hook. Nick feels shame rise within him.

*Damn it! What am I thinking? Of course my stupid pride is less important than my... my child!*

He heaves another sigh that quite suddenly threatens to become a strangled sob.

*What the fuck are these hormones doing to me?!*

He scrubs at his face, unable to look into Renard's eyes. There is a sigh from across the table.

“Nick, I know this situation is difficult for you, which is the reason why you need to tell the others.”

“With the others you mean my friends, not Juliette, don't you?”

At Nick's accusing tone the zauberbiest only tilts his head and raises an eyebrow. There's a challenge in that sharp gaze mixed with reproach. The Captain is not necessarily a fan of sass.

“If I remember correctly, you were the one telling me on more than one occasion that you are uncomfortable with telling her. But if you want me to be honest, then, yes, I would advice you not to tell her until you can do so with no doubts about her reaction.”

Nick purses his lips but more in painful acceptance of the truth than in anger. Sean is sure none of them will forget the Grimm's despair anytime soon and it makes him take action rather than sit back and let Nick's own inhibitions stop him.

“Anyway, we have much to discuss but first you will call over Monroe and Rosalee and tell them.”

Not even giving him a chance protest he takes up his Detective's phone, flips through contacts until he finds the number and presses call button. Holding the cell phone out for the Grimm to take he looks at him with an air of expectancy.

Seeing the name displayed on screen Nick opens and closes his mouth in flustered disbelief, before he snatches the phone out of Renard's hand with an angry swipe.

*What the fuck?! What is that man thinking?*

He feels conflicted between throwing the phone against the next wall, right at the Captain's face or actually putting it to his ear. In the end he decides on the last, though not without glaring a hole into the zauberbiest across the table.
First half done.
If I said the angsty part is over I would be lying but there will be much fluff and a happy ending, too. :D
Chapter 2

On to the second round. Chapter two already has pregnancy weeks added. Chapter one will get that, too, but only after I've gotten a wink of sleep. :) Beware of emotional angst at the end of the chapter and of the non-con touching part. I am not sure, if I should be issuing trigger warnings here. Anyway, the chap is long and there will be fun as well, so that leaves me to say: Enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter 2:

“How do you know that I even want to tell them?”

Nick asks in a harsh whisper, heart beating quickly as he waits for Monroe to take up.

“I know you. Not telling them nearly kills you but you are too afraid of their reaction to go through with it. A fact that strikes me as stupid given that we are talking about two wesen that call a Grimm their best friend.”

Nick makes to snap out a reply but in that instant Monroe takes up.

“Hey, Nick. What’s the matter? New case? Pizza and movie evening? Saving the world from evil?”

“Hey, Monroe. Errr... Are you and Rosalee free to come over to the Captain's house... about right now?”

“I admit, that’s one I haven’t anticipated. Why Renard's house? What’s the matter? Did he get injured again? Wait, I'll put you on speaker. Rosie is with me right now.”

Sean has heard the blutbad’s last words. Nick looks even more nervous now that Rosalee listens in as well.

“Umm... it's not a case and Renard isn’t hurt, but it would be good, if you could come over. Is that okay?”

He really doesn't know what he would do, if one of them said no. Right now his nerves are as taut as wire rope and as frail as a spider's web.

“Sure we'll come over. Just send us the address and we'll be there.”

This is Rosalee simultaneously saving him and digging his grave.
“Thanks. Until later then.”

He ends the call and glares at his zauberbiest Captain with all he's got. That glare clearly says: 'Thanks for putting me through this. It's going to be great.'

Renard is unfazed.

“You realize, Nick, that it is going to be okay?”

Sometimes the Royal's calm countenance is unsettling, sometimes it is the only thing that can reassure Nick. This time he cannot for the life of him tell what it is. Or maybe he can, but that would mean admitting to other things he would rather not touch upon right now.

>>> 

They are all sitting in the living room, Monroe and Rosalee on one couch, Nick on the other and Renard in the single armchair not far away from Nick. True to their word the couple has made its way over to the house as soon as possible.

Nick is nervous as hell. Even Renard's calming presence or Rosie's gentle smile, that tells him she is already aware of something tormenting him, cannot keep him from wringing his hands. He sits hunched over, gaze switching between his friends, the Captain and the floor, never staying in one place for too long. This is not like him. He knows it, he hates it, he cannot to a thing about it.

“Nick, something is bothering you and I have the feeling that this is not simply a Grimm matter. So what is it?”

The fuchsbau looks at him with empathy. She tries smiling encouragingly but it cannot break the tense atmosphere. Nick makes to speak only to break off before a single word has left his mouth. By now both Monroe and Rosalee look openly worried. Great.

“Just get over with it.”

It is Renard. His words sound callous, but going by the long glance they've exchanged and the visible straightening of Nick's shoulders, there has to be another layer of meaning. He closes his eyes briefly and takes a deep breath. The dead serious expression arresting his features does not want to fit his otherwise lively persona.

“Okay.... I'm pregnant.”

While Rosalee is shocked into silence, Monroe acquits that joke with the comment it deserves.

“Sure you should procreate? I mean, more Grimms and all, you know?”

He could have anticipated Rosie's elbow to his ribs. Renard's death glare comes as something as a nasty surprise. Totally unexpected however is Nick's face clouding over with so much more than bemusement. The blutbad is assaulted by a myriad of different scents, fairly oozing off his friend all of a sudden:
Hurt. Uncertainty. Fear?

What the heck?

“Nick, everything okay, buddy? I mean... what was I gonna say to a joke like that?”

The twin glares of his wife and the Captain clearly say 'Not that!'.

Something is utterly wrong here!

Monroe approaches his friend, dropping to his haunches in front of him to catch his gaze, current audience be damned.

This is weird and highly disconcerting. Nick makes flippant remarks or rolls his eyes as if I were especially dumb. He does not go all creepily still and remains silent!

Right now he's just sitting there, staring at his lap, where his hands rest balled to white knuckled fists. This really gets to the blutbad. He's truly worried now.

Really, this is not like Nick at all. But can that mean...?

“Sooo... you weren't joking?....”

He is aware of how incredulous he sounds. Still no answer. Just the slightest tremor shaking the Grimm's frame. Then suddenly an explosion of movement! Nick looks up, glare punishing, grabs the front of his sweater and pulls him just a bit nearer. If he could have, Monroe would have backed off with his proverbial tail between his legs. Gone is the man, who looks lost and vulnerable, to be replaced by one hurt and angry Grimm!

“To answer your earlier question, Monroe: No, I was not yet sure, if I wanted to procreate. But sadly I had no say in the matter!!”

He looks moments away from either punching him or breaking down. Like a storm appearing out of nowhere.

“Nick.” It is a single quietly spoken word. Renard. Nick lets go of his front as if burned, shooting up from the sofa and slipping past the dumbfounded blutbad. Dropping from his haunches to his behind he risks a quick glance at the Captain.

Uh, oh, unholy fury concentrated in a single stare. Focused on me! What's going on here?
If his nose doesn't deceive him (and it never does) that is protective rage a mile against the wind. Renard might have saved him from Nick's wrath but talk about hopping out of the pot right into a frying pan! As if no longer seeing it will make the danger go away, he quickly turns to follow his friend's movements instead of being killed by a glare. Nick paces the room clearly agitated. Monroe has never seen him like this, no matter what has happened. Really, a Loewen in a cage is nothing against that!

“Adalind did not get my powers... I got a child! Yes, I am pregnant! Not Adalind, not Juliette. By some fucking rare chain of events I became pregnant... from a woman I hate, who slept with me in guise of the woman I love and can now not even bear the touch of! You are right, Monroe. This shit looks like one big joke to me but sadly it is reality! This is my fucked up life!!”

Throughout his tirade he has steadily grown louder and suddenly all that anger is just a touch away from bone deep despair. It disturbs Monroe more than even the Grimm's wrath could. There's a gasp from Rosalee. Renard remains completely silent, which with the Royal could mean anything. Before he can say anything, Nick continues, confirming his thoughts:

“Now you can hate me all you like... or tell me to never come bother you again. Just go ahead. We've already had a warming up round, didn't we?”

His tone is sharp, cutting, aiming to hide how afraid he is of their reaction. Rosalee can still only stare in silence, hands clasped before her mouth. Renard seems arrested in a state between keeping out of this and getting up to... comfort Nick?

Who would have thought that it would be Monroe himself who made it right again?

He rises from where he's come to sit on the floor and approaches his friend slowly.

“So that dastardly woman knocked you up with a child and now you think we'll hate you because of that?”

Nick does not laugh or play down his doubts. His fear is all too apparent. In his posture, his scent – and what really drives it home – in his left hand twitching minutely as if he yearns to place it over his still flat belly. He stands half turned toward floor length windows, face partly in shadows.

“Okay, listen up, dude: Whatever you come home with, we're gonna accept you! So you're a man and pregnant? Well, that's really weird crap and we're going to talk about that later. But if you think we'll push you away... or your... child... man, that is weird, … anyway, then think again! I mean, come on, you are a Grimm and I didn't kick you out of my home.”

Is it only his imagination or has Renard just looked smug for a tiny instant? Oh well, there are more important things right now. Like talking to a very pregnant, very unsettled Grimm:

“Okay, I did pounce on you in the garden that day we first met and I could have torn you to shreds... you were a baby Grimm at that time compared to now... but you were a Grimm and I still let you come back.... And gave you coffee... and let you ask all your questions... Oh, I'm rambling. Sooo... whatever you're gonna do, we're 100% with you! Aren't we, Hon?”
He looks to his wife for help as much as for confirmation. His beloved fuchsbau nods slowly, not because her support is half-hearted but because it's quite a bit to stomach. She walks over to Nick (not without giving Monroe that smile) and takes his hands in hers. At first he seems reluctant to let her take them away from where they have now firmly settled over his stomach, but after a moment or two his shoulders sag in relief. Rosalee has good instincts. She recognizes the very instant when her friend needs (and accepts) a hug. She envelopes him tightly in her arms, going on her tiptoes to do so. It would be adorable, really, if it weren't so sad at the same time.

“Oh, Nick. Monroe is right. Whatever happens you can count on us.”

Nick wants to thank her but now that his anger has evaporated his emotions are in turmoil again, leaving him with a lump in his throat that he cannot talk around.

“So I take it you already met Dr. Cransbury?”

She whispers softly in his ear while they hug. He can only nod but that's okay. He does not need to explain himself or justify his actions. Feeling Rosalee's warm hand rub over his back, hugging him just a bit tighter in response to his nod, tells him that everything is okay.

“And you want to keep it?”

No judgment, no accusation. Another nod, empathetic this time.

“Then we'll all make sure that the two of you stay hale and healthy. Now come on, let's sit back down and then you can tell us everything from the beginning. Maybe Sean has a stash of tea hidden somewhere. Oh and maybe this time we can do this without ripping my socially awkward husband's head off, hmm?”

When Nick tilts his head now in embarrassed acknowledgment it is with the smallest of smiles. It is a relief to see it there.

>>> He has told them everything. Armed with mugs of hot tea they are discussing the zaubertrank and ritual to protect himself and his baby.

“I understand that I cannot be the one to brew the trank, but if your mother needs any ingredients, be sure to tell her she can come to me. I already met her briefly before. In retrospect it must have been when she bought ingredients for the trank to stop Adalind's spell. Anyway, she has told me at the time that she is your mother and she seemed genuinely friendly. So if you say she means well and won't hurt Nick, then I trust your judgment. But Sean, if she does hurt him, you'll face Monroe's and my wrath.”

Her tone is playful, but her gaze shows a hint of steel. The zauberbiest inclines his head to say 'warning duly noted' and does not even bat a lash at the use of his first name. Rosalee is the only
one in the group to do so, but curiously that’s okay. He likes the good-natured, witty fuchsbau woman.

“Then you have less doubts than Nick.”

“That may be, but let’s not forget that Nick has a bit more of a history with hexenbiester than I have. Anyway, let’s not get into that now. I’m sure once he has met your mother he will have a less misgivings. Now about that trank....”

Sean leans forward, elbows resting on his thighs, going into Captain mode. Nick has seen this often enough at the station. It is a calming sight. This means Renard will put all of his considerable intellect up to making him and his baby safe.

As Rosalee and the Captain lose themselves in details, that are well above Monroe's and Nick's knowledge level, both friends turn to other matters and let the experts talk among themselves.

“So... are we okay again?”

The blutbad asks hesitantly, having forgotten neither Nick's hurt expression nor his angry tirade. He rarely feels bad for being a klutz, especially when it comes to Nick, who equals out his quirks with his own penchant for teasing and turning up with questions and a flippant remark at ungodly hours. This time is different. It's not been his intention to hurt him.

Sitting beside him on the couch Nick just looks ahead but this time his posture and scent show no distress.

“You know, when you talked about coming home to you, you sounded like a father having one of those creepy father-daughter conversations about going out with guys. That was weird.”

It gets him a friendly punch to the side.

“And, man, you won't believe how much I feel like a freakin' father sometimes. I mean, every time you go out, there's another one trying to get one over you.”

“Don't worry. Most of the guys end up either dead or in prison.”

“Ha! Say that again when one of those guys puts you in hospital next time around. Now I finally understand why the average daddy does seem a bit mental now and then when it's about their daughter.”

Nick cannot help chuckling at that. Yes, everything is back to normal, indeed.

“Now, Mr. Grimm, tell me, what can we do help you out that is not about creepy zaubertraenke or rituals?”

“Umm. You could, of course, become uncle Monroe and if it's a girl you can chase off every single guy that looks at her the wrong way once she is in her teens and getting ideas.”

“Errr, Nick. Not that I'm not honored but why do you think does that hypothetical girl have a Grimm for a father?”
“For the killing part... in case chasing them off is not enough.”

That completely deadpan response is not creepy at all.

“Ah, sorry, I forgot. Decapitare is a nice nickname for a daddy, don't you think? Oh well, maybe it's going to be a boy.”

Another quiet chuckle, another step to being okay.

>>> Sean is torn from his conversation with Rosalee when he hears Nick laugh quietly. It is a good sound. One that he wants to hear again, although he can barely believe being able to engage such a thought let alone such level of sentimentalism. To keep damn butterflies from roaming his stomach when the Grimm does laugh a second time around, he employs another tactic.

Looking from Monroe and Nick back to the fuchsbau he sneers:

“How is this possible? How can they go from what we saw not 15 minutes ago to squabbling like that?”

The woman across from him smirks knowingly.

“I don't know. They are a dynamic duo?”

Renard grimaces when Monroe says:

“Just so you know, Nick, if you had been joking earlier, my comment would have been a damn good one.”

The Grimm shakes his head but cannot keep a grin off his face.

“Yes, if it hadn't been so spectacularly misplaced, it would have been a good one.”

The blutbad has the gall to look smug. Sean is torn between being reluctantly amused and wanting to rip Monroe a new one for hurting... oh, better not go there.

Impossible, those two!

The zauberbiest Prince turns back to Rosalee.

“Dynamic? Don't you mean 'demonic’?”

Her smirk widens.

“Do you want to know the truth? Sometimes I am not sure.”

Her eyes gleam with warm humor and knowledge of things that her all too perceptive gaze has caught from the man in front of her. Sean is not sure, if he is comfortable with that, but he decides that not thinking about it is a good course of action.
The next day sees Nick back at work and brings about another inevitable conversation. He sits in his truck together with Hank, unsure of how he shall proceed. His partner takes the decision out of his hands:

“So, why did we go out to get coffee, if we are now sitting in your car not drinking it?”

“I have to tell you something."

“You are ending things with Juliette?”

“What? Err... no. Why would you assume such a thing?”

Nick seems distracted, and not in a good way either. Hank shrugs.

“Just a feeling. Okay, what is it then?”

“Hank, I am pregnant.”

Wow. Talk about the top ten of unexpected things your friend and work partner can tell you.

“Okay. Ummm, don't you mean, Juliette is pregnant?”

“No, I mean I am pregnant... and Juliette doesn't know.”

The last comes out in a rush. Nick’s gaze strays to his lap and won't rise again.

“I have seen and heard some weird shit since learning about wesen and all.... This is weirder. How did that happen?”

Nick huffs a bitter laugh and looks at his partner in disbelief.

“You take that better than expected. And you are already asking about the how?”

“Yeah well, you heard my introductory sentence, didn't you? Sooo, back to my question: How the hell?!”

By now Hank's expression matches his rattled exclamation. Nick's face falls.

“Adalind. She didn't steal my Grimm powers... she knocked me up.”

“Fuck.”

Another bitter laugh, that would have been a sob, if he hadn't been through that already.

“That sums it up quite nicely, doesn't it?”

“Nick, I didn't mean...!”

“I know. Don't worry.”

“How did you find out?”

Nick heaves an explosive sigh and fiddles with the hem of his shirt.
“I’ve been tired all the time, I had morning sickness. After some time I overcame denial, connected the dots and checked the books. Then I had Rosalee recommend a doctor to whom I could go... without telling her it was me who wanted to check about pregnancy. He knows I’m a Grimm, he did the test. He confirmed it. Since yesterday evening Monroe and Rosalee know as well. Sorry about that whole being sick crap.”

“The Captain?”

Nick ducks his head.

“He knows as well. Actually... he was the first to hear about it. I found out the evening before yesterday. I... was completely out of it. After I came to myself my first instinct was to tell my superior about my pregnancy. Police regulations, you know? Laughable. I was in shock. Renard... was real help. I think he kept me from going crazy right then and there.”

“Renard's idea to have you stay home?”

“Hmm.”

Hank looks at him steadily.

“Then I’m sure you were in no shape to work. The Captain does not do things like that out of nowhere.”

Hank is silent after that, taking some time to digest it all. When he stops staring at nothing and seeks out his partner's gaze, Nick sees a myriad of emotions there.

Revolusion or mocking is not among them, quite the opposite in fact. It takes a weight off Nick's shoulders he hasn't realized has been pushing him down.

“Considering how you looked earlier when you told me Juliette doesn't know, I take it you wan to keep it that way, right?”

“Yes. For now at least. I just don't think she would understand.”

“Because she did not understand what that time with Adalind did to you, either?”

“Yes.”

It hurts Hank to see his friend like this. He puts a hesitant hand on Nick's shoulder. At first the Grimm tenses up but after a moment or two he relaxes under the steady touch.

“I don't want to, but I see where you are coming from. Juliette aside, are you okay with having this baby?”

“If you are asking me, if I want to get rid of it? No, I do not. If you are asking, if I am fucking afraid of what might happen? Yes, I am! I mean, Hank, what if I conceive a baby and then treat it badly because... because I cannot forget who is its mother?!?”

Nick goes from controlled to looking like he's close to losing it in the space of a moment.

“Frankly, I can imagine a lot of bad things, but you, Nick Burkhardt, treating any child badly is simply not among them. Really, have no worries there. And if you need anything, man, I mean anything – apart from relationship advice, obviously – just ask. I'm here to help.”
Nick actually feels better. He even manages a small teasing smirk as he answers:

“Hank, you may be a dunce at marriages but you are a great friend. Thank you.”

If his partner's voice grows a bit hoarse at the end, Hank doesn't mention it. He just grins broadly and proceeds to tease him with a thousand fake reasons, why he might want to avoid being at precinct under guise of getting coffee.

“Okay, okay.” Nick says smiling broadly now. “We'll go back right away. Just don't complain to me when that unfinished report I took you away from has not miraculously written itself upon our return.”

>>> 

When Juliette comes home from the congress Nick decides to cook. If this is to work... if at some point he wants to tell his love about his baby, then he has to try harder. He has the best intentions. Renard's advice to take some space is all good and well but it won't salvage his relationship.

There are still the same problems as before but with a stubbornness typical for him he pushes them to the deepest recesses of his mind and starts preparing Juliette's favorite food.

When jingling keys herald the opening of the front door he makes an effort to relax muscles that have unconsciously tensed up.

*Oh, God. How can I hide my pregnancy? How can she not know what is going on? Nick, get a grip! There's no reason at all for her to notice. What happened to you is not normal. It is not what anyone in their right mind would ever take into consideration. Calm down.*

He concentrates on what he hears:

Juliette takes off her coat, breathes in deeply and makes an adorable little noise showing her appreciation for what she smells. Nick smiles. He likes it when she makes that sound. He tells himself he can do this.

This time he doesn't need to scream it in his thoughts to make it true, he just has to whisper it... as many times as it takes to stick.

*I love her, right? If I do, I should be able to do this!*

“Ohmm. Nick, do I smell my favorite food there?”

“I think you do. Of course, I could have been sneaky and made some other food smell like it but at the moment I'm fairly sure it's asparagus potato casserole in the oven.”

She laughs. It is a good sound. She comes over to where he is standing at the kitchen counter, hugging him from behind. He has expected this. He makes sure to stay relaxed and to smile when
she turns him around in her arms.

“I have missed you.” She whispers. He repeats his mantra, he hugs her back.

*I can do this. She has missed me. Of course, she wants contact. She is not Adalind.*

They kiss, soft and slow. The tension of the past weeks has all but evaporated.

*This is not Adalind!*

“How was the congress? Any gruesome stories to tell?”

“For the most part it was rather boring but there was one case about a cat who managed to eat 7 socks before anyone was the wiser. It was fascinating, really....”

She tells him more about her days while he sets the table. The relieved breath he takes when she steps away from him to sit at the table is disguised as inhaling the wonderful aroma of their meal. He tells himself it doesn't matter.

*Everything is okay. It's my problem, not hers. It's not as if she should be forced to take my stupid problems into consideration. It's my fault, not hers.*

They eat, they talk and slowly they find back to their old ease. Nick tells her of an uneventful few days, about meeting up with Monroe and Rosalee and doing boring paperwork with Hank. Nothing heavy gets mentioned.

*It's better that way. We need to find back together before I tell her.*

… She wouldn't understand!

That last one is an unwelcome whisper at the back of his mind and he pushes it from his thoughts with an angry shove.

Later they sit on the sofa and watch TV. Juliette is cuddled up to him, lying half on top of him, encircled by his arms. She is content, strain of the past weeks forgotten.

Nick can take it all of ten minutes before his heart starts beating faster.

*Come on, get a grip. This is beginning to get ridiculous! You should be over this already!*

His heart won't slow down. He breathes just a little faster than before.

*This is Juliette. My beloved Juliette.*

“Wow, babe. Missed me so much? Seeing how quickly your heart beats and how your breathing goes one has to wonder. Getting all hot and heavy there, are you?”
Mischief colors her voice and a playful gleam makes her eyes sparkle. Nick has closed his own. He's concentrating so hard on keeping any negative reactions to her contact buried inside that he has barely heard her.

“Nick?”

His eyes snap open. There's concern in her tone but also an edge clearly showing her displeasure. He needs to do something.

“Juliette, could you... could you give...?”

She catches on quickly and moves away all right. Glowering at him with fiery eyes she snaps:

“Oh, come on! Don't tell me you're still not over this crap! It was only sex!”

He wants to assure her, to tell her to cuddle back up to him but he cannot bring the words over his lips. He looks at her helplessly, gut churning, trying not to feel hurt at her words and praying that she will understand.

She doesn't.

“Brilliant, Nick Burkhardt. You needed all of one evening to spoil everything again! Thank you very much! I'm going to bed... and no, you do not need to come!!”

Juliette shoots up from the couch and upstairs before Nick can even try to respond. He is left alone with a vague feeling of nausea and angry at himself. Needless to say, he does not sleep much or at all that night.

*Why do you always have to bugger things?!*

He curls up on the couch without even noticing that his arms wrap around his middle in an effort to comfort and protect.

>>>>

The next evening Nick drives to Monroe's and Rosalee's house with the vague plan to have them stash away the sonogram picture that Dr. Cransbury has made of his baby. Ever since his appointment it has sat in his jacket pocket denied and forgotten. He cannot keep it at home or at the trailer because Juliette could find it there. It has his name and the date on it, which would make it hard to explain things away.

*As if things aren't complicated enough already.*

He sighs and makes his way up to the front door.

Feelings of sadness and loneliness settle in his stomach like lead. He may want to ask them about...
the picture and tell them what information Renard has given him about zaubertrank and protection ritual but just as much – only on a subconscious level – does he seek camaraderie and comfort.

Monroe seems to understand that something is amiss the instant he lays eyes on him. They do not exchange any words, just look at each other for a long moment, before the blutbad takes his friend by the arm and pulls him inside.

It's right over to the couch, where he is nudged to sit in the middle between Monroe and Rosalee.

A long time passes before Nick grows aware, that they have purposely wedged him in a cuddle between them. He is shoulder to shoulder with both of them. Warm and comforted. This is better than any reassuring words could be. He is surprised, when he looks down, to find a mug of tea resting in his hands.

*When has that gotten there? Oh, who cares.*

He takes a sip.

*Hmmm. Something fruity this time.*

Rosalee leans her head on his shoulder at some point. He is surprisingly okay with that. It is calming and the urge to put his cheek to the top of her head is nearly overwhelming. He looks over to Monroe as if to ask permission for what he not yet dares to do. His gaze clearly says 'Do it, man. I wonder why you haven't already'.

With a small sigh he leans into the contact. They stay that way, the couple lending a level of support, that their friend never knew he craved... until this day.

“Would you put away my first sonogram picture for safe keeping? I... I don’t want Juliette to find it.”

“Sure. Things with Juliette still being difficult?”

This is Monroe, taking it all in stride as if they had done this for years. Nick gives a mute nod.

“Will you show it to us?” Rosalee's quiet words are colored with careful excitement, as if she isn't sure yet, if excitement about his pregnancy is appropriate or not.

“I can... if you would like to.”

They move apart a little bit so that they can see each other better. To her endless relief Rosalee finds a bit of her own excitement mirrored in Nick's eyes.

“I'm off preparing tea.... Real tea this time.”

The blutbad ambles into the kitchen while Nick takes out the picture and hands it over to Rosalee, who cannot keep in a little awed noise at the sight of it. The form depicted on the black-white print is tiny but already child like in a curious way. There's not much in the way of limbs but there definitely is a head and torso.

“Oh, Nick. I know the circumstances have been as far from ideal as can be but... oh, this is amazing!”

Her eyes fairly gleam with adoration and her smile is warm and gentle. In face of her obvious
excitement – for the first time maybe – the ongoing father takes time to look at his baby with anything other than dread.

“It is?” He whispers.

And then after a pause he returns her smile and says: “Yes. It is, isn't it? This really is a baby. It's tiny at the moment but... it's a baby.”

Monroe returns with tea and moves behind the couch to look over their shoulders.

“Hey, this is the most nicely shaped tortoise I've ever seen!”

Is his dry comment, positive emotions carefully veiled and yet clearly apparent to the others.

Nick cannot help it. Maybe should be indignant, maybe he should punch the blutbad but he bursts out laughing. When he has calmed down he throws a narrow eyed stare over his shoulder. Monroe is less impressed than he should be.

“Careful, Monroe. This is my baby we are talking about.... But it does look a little like a tortoise, doesn't it?”

“We could call it Toisie while still... in your womb.”

Rosalee pauses, fearing she may has said too much, but Nick simply smiles and nods.

“It's okay, you know? What will happen from now on still frightens the hell out of me, and let's not even start about how... Toisie came to be, but having it is actually okay now.”

“That's good. Nick that's really good. We will be there for you and your baby.”

Rosie wraps him in a careful hug, that is more motherly than anything he's had in a long while.

„Yes. We will protect the Grimmlet brat and his little tortoise baby.“

This time Nick deals Monroe a playful punch. He is amazed how these two always manage to lift his mood in no time at all.

„Thanks, guys. And I’ll pretend I haven’t heard the bit about the Grimmlet brat… and the tortoise baby.“

They spend the rest of the evening talking. He does not elaborate on what has happened with Juliette but he tells them about what Renard has relayed to him this morning about how to step up his baby protection.

„I do not know specifics but I recognize both the zaubertrank and the ritual she has chosen to protect Toisie while still in your womb. I will look it up in the books first thing tomorrow, of course. Her offer seems genuine. I did not have all that much contact with her but she gave the impression of being one of the few good hexenbiester out there. That and considering Sean’s
actions of the last days, I doubt he would do anything to endanger you or your child. So if he weren’t sure of his mother’s intentions toward you he wouldn’t have suggested this.

„Not that I want to saw doubt where none is due but how can you be so sure about Renard? I mean, he might be a better Royal than the rest of them taken together but he has also tricked us in the past.“

Rosalee counters her husband’s reservations with a secretive little smile.

„Oh Hon, I think you would be the one best equipped to answer that question. After all, you saw and most likely smelt the barely contained protective rage he flew into after you thought it prudent to make callous comments to Nick’s revelation.“

Monroe shudders, both at the memory of the zauberbiest’s death glare (and vibes of pure evil) as well as the dressing down his gentle-natured fuchsbau wife has given him once they’ve had returned home that night.

„Oh he certainly did."

„He did?! Why didn’t I notice any of that?“ This is Nick, frowning at them with a mix of confusion and consternation. Rosalee pats his shoulder.

„Nick, don’t worry. You simply weren’t in any state to perceive those undercurrents at that time."

„Yep. Stuck somewhere in the land of anger and dread."

This time both Rosalee and Nick glare at him, which pushes him to move hurriedly into the kitchen to prepare a late dinner.

„Hey, hey, just saying. No need to rip my head off.‘‘ They hear him mutter on the way.

„So back to my question: He did?!“

„Yes, of course. After what you told us about when you went to tell him after your appointment with Dr. Cransbury that shouldn’t surprise you all that much. To be frank, I am not sure if there are many things the Captain cares about, but he does care about you. I think in this you can trust him…and I further think that you already do. You wouldn’t have told him about Toisie otherwise. I know you, Nick. You protect what you love, and if that would have meant telling nobody at all and going through all that alone, then you would have done it without a second thought. You didn’t, though, and that means you must trust your Captain on a pretty deep level. Oh, and just so you know: I am glad you told us. It is what friends are for… helping out and sometimes lending a shoulder to lean on."

„Yes, I have noticed. And in regard to Renard: I’m not sure, if I should call him bossy or concerned, but he was rather adamant about me getting enough sleep and all after I turned up on his doorstep in the middle of the night. I mean, he practically put me to bed that morning.‘‘
“And knowing him, when you complained about it later, he rubbed in how much good it did you.”

“How did you know? Rosie, you are creepy but I like you.”

“Did you just call my wife creepy?!”

That's Monroe's indignant squawk from the kitchen.

“I admit I did but I also told her I like her. Does that count in my favor?”

“If that was a 'buddy-buddy-I-like-you', then yes. If not, start running!”

“I opt for waiting until after dinner to do that.”

“Needy Grimmlet brat. That adorable tortoise baby is your only saving grace, just so you know.”


Police work continues as normal. Nick, Hank and Renard agree that magical protection should be established rather sooner than later because between Cop and Grimm duties almost anything can happen, but apart from that nothing has changed. Nick schedules a meeting with the Captain and his mother for Thursday evening. He dreads and yearns for the ritual to commence. The thought of coming into contact with Elizabeth Lascelles makes him deeply uncomfortable but he needs to protect his little one. There's no way around it. Just this morning when they've arrested a suspect he nearly got kicked into the stomach. This cannot go on, so he needs to see this through no matter what.


Before driving to the Captain's home he's send Juliette a message that he has to work late today. Not that she cares all that much but he feels like he should at least give an explanation, even if it is a false one.

*This is not good. All that secrecy has been what has strained my relationship with her in the first place. It's the very reason she has felt unable to accept my marriage proposal.*

Despite knowing all this and feeling bad for it, he cannot risk telling her yet... or at any point.

That last thought makes his gut churn even more – with guilt, disappointment and dread. There is a voice deep inside himself telling him that protecting his baby must be his first priority and that same voice tells him he might never be able to make things work out with the love of his life. It hurts. It hurts like few things in his life ever have.

But to be honest, losing little Toisie – no matter how it's come to be – would not only hurt but kill
Elizabeth Lascelles appears to be a woman in her fourties – beautiful, intelligent and self-confident in a way that speaks not of overconfidence but of being settled in life and well aware of her own skills. It's only that she cannot be as young as she looks, for she could be Renard's sister but is his mother, and that brings Nick right back to the reason why he regards her warily instead of greeting friendly as is his usual way.

She is a hexenbiest, he needs to put himself at her mercy, if he wants to protect his child and, no matter what Rosalee said about Renard protecting him, he's damn afraid and in full defense mode. The fact that the woman regards him with a small knowing smile and a gaze just as piercing as her son's does not make him feel any better.

This Grimm is a strong one. Elizabeth knows this as soon as she meets him face to face. She feels his very aura, lashing out and pulsing against her own powerful one as he seeks to learn if she is a danger to him and his unborn child. For a moment yet she lets the pressure build – gets a feel for him and his innate power – then she pulls her own aura back into herself and lets him off the hook. She must say, she is impressed. He's held himself well despite his young age and lack of experience compared to hers.

“You must be Nicholas. I am Elizabeth, Sean's mother. But before we continue this, let me make a proposition: I do not intent to harm you and I dearly hope you don't either, so why don't I keep my 'biest in check and you do so with yours?’”

Her tone is light and nonthreatening. The Detective's shoulders relax a tiny bit. He's neither a fool nor is he brash in nature. His eyes tell her that he sees the merit of her words even though he is still regarding her with a silent frown.

When he finally gives himself a push toward making this work, not only his own frame loses a good bit of tension but also her son seems to relax.

Nick releases a breath he hasn't been aware of holding. He steps up to the women and extends his hand in a careful gesture of peace.

He's not normally this distrusted of people only because of their wesen heritage. It is Toisie making his Grimm rear up to protect.

“I am, indeed, Nicholas Burkhardt... but Nick is fine. And yes, keeping our hidden sides in check seems like a good plan.”
Much tension is lifted after that and Sean – ever the diplomat – motions them over to the kitchen table for hot beverages and making plans.

Like so many times before Nick nurse a big mug of tea in his hands. He swears he's had more of the stuff – and different kinds of it no less – than he's had ever before in his life. That's maybe the reason why he shoots Renard a bit of an evil glare when he gets tea while the other two get heavenly smelling, strong coffee.

“I miss coffee already. How am I going to survive the next months?”

He has muttered that under his breath but Elizabeth must have heard it because she emit a soft chuckle.

“I admit that was one of the few drawbacks of being pregnant with Sean. Abstaining from coffee was hard. So if anyone tells you there are beverages equal to coffee, don't believe them. There are none. But keep off it, anyway. It's good for your child.”

Nick shows the trace of a rueful smile but all too soon the genial young man grows serious again. He has a good head on his shoulders, and although it would make things easier for them, Elizabeth is glad that he is not easily lulled in.

Sean is content to let his mother and his Detective talk things out on their own. They are both grown individuals and, frankly, coming in between a powerful hexenbiest and a Grimm in full protection mode is not on his top ten to do list. It seems, though, as if they are working this out all on their own.

Knowing both of them quite well by now he has hope, that they will get along, given time and a little less explosive circumstances for a meeting.

Why he is even thinking about how these two will get along given a longer space of time is beyond him. Most likely they won't even meet after today or maybe after Nick has taken the first dose of zaubertrank. The tiny voice suggesting, that with him having a closer relationship to his Grimm his mother someday might have one, too, is silenced quickly.

Nick speaking pulls him away from this peculiar contemplation.

“I do not want to insult you, but I have to ask: What is your gain in doing this? I mean, I would like to believe that you are doing this from the goodness of your heart but even all other things aside, at least the ingredients must take money to procure.”

Elizabeth notices with a bit of amusement that, after uttering his doubts, the Grimm looks over to
her son with an almost apologetic gaze. As if doubting her motives may also hurt Sean. It confirms
what she thinks about the man sitting across from her... and about her son and his Grimm together.

“To be honest, there is more than one reason, Nicholas.”

Nobody has called me Nicholas for years.

It makes him feel simultaneously like an errant school boy and – curiously – safe and cared for. He
shakes off both feelings with years of practice.

“First of all, to this day I work as a healer and midwife and as such I am sympathetic to your case.
Secondly – and I am sure Sean will not want to hear that – you are good for my son, so keeping
you happy and healthy indirectly helps him.”

“Mother, please.” It is a quiet, dryly posed assertion. No whine can be heard, nothing boyish is
there to spot and still Nick perceives a note of embarrassment that only mothers can elicit in sons.
A pang of loss and longing mixes with secret amusement at Renard's reaction. Anyway, back to
matters at hand.

“I am good for your son, how? I mean, other than enabling him to tell others he has a non-
murdering Grimm in his canton, who more or less follows his command, what could I give a man
like him?”

The experienced hexenbiest regards him with a knowing gaze that Nick has to wonder about.

“For a first you bring out his good sides....”

“Mother, could we please move on to the particulars of ritual and trank now? Nick, just accept that
she does not intent to harm you or your child and confer with her later about payment for
ingredients and such. I can assure you they do not cost a fortune, so I am sure the two of you will
reach an agreement together with Rosalee at some later point.”

By now it is all too apparent that the powerful zauberbiest is fed up with being talked about as if he
either weren't there or a small, recalcitrant boy.

Both agree to let matters rest for now, Nick with an embarrassed flush and his mother with a
satisfied smirk.

“As you wish, on to the zaubertrank. Nicholas, how do you feel about your unborn child?”

The change of topic is sudden and, going by his stormy expression, a 'that's none of your business'
is already on his tongue. She holds up a hand, pinning him with a meaningful stare, that only
mothers and apparently Sean Renard can pull off.

“I need to know in order to brew the shadowing trank successfully. The need to disguise a
pregnancy from all too curious eyes is as old as time but just as old is the wide range of emotions
going with such need to hide it. The zaubertrank acts on your emotions as well as the combination
of ingredients. This brings us a) to the reason why I need to know how you feel about all this and
b) to the keying part.”

Nick's gaze strays over to Sean, making Elizabeth think that maybe the Detective is uncomfortable
with his Captain's presence for this.
“I am sure Sean would be willing to leave the room, if you are more comfortable with talking about this in private.”

Nicholas scoffs at that.

“There is nothing he does not already know. And better than anyone else most likely. He was the first I went to with this. He's been privy to just about any emotion I could have had to this, including two panic attacks and at least one breakdown. So yes, he can stay.”

Elizabeth is truly surprised at his words. It is one thing for her son to tell her about that night but it is quite another for the Grimm to admit to it. It makes her hopeful for the child's future. Nick is willing to go to great lengths to protect it, even if that means revealing something so personal to a woman he barely knows.

“Thank you, Nicholas.”

Nick looks up startled. He has not expected this. Neither her thanks nor her genuine sympathy. His embarrassment is clearly visible as he rubs the back of his neck while searching for what to say.

“Umm... thanks. So what do you already know?”

“Nothing that you do not tell me about.”

Sean watches the two interact with interest. His mother is good but Nick is no fool. He has recognized her answer for the sneaky evasion it is and yet he cannot tell if or what she knows exactly. Going by his expression he makes the conscious decision to let it slide for now and concentrate on her question. With that returns a Nick, that is haunted by memories and weighed down by a responsibility he hasn't been prepared to take on. Sean would give much, if not all to make that side disappear forever. What that in turn says about his own state of mind he avoids thinking about.

He comes back to the conversation. Nick has just told his mother about the night with Adalind and it's repercussions. Haltingly now he bares his feelings to her. The dread, the worry about not being good enough to love that child no matter the circumstances of its conception. Even the anger and first blossoming of positive feelings.

His mother is visibly moved. She is as good as hiding her thoughts and emotions as he himself, but just like Nick reveals his inner world, so does she. They begin – carefully and without even noticing – to establish a connection.

He couldn't be more surprised when he realizes that just as unconsciously his hand has moved to rest on Nick's wrist at some point during his tale. Even the Grimm seems to grow aware of it only now. Their eyes meet, both expect tension and embarrassment. There is none. Not in either of them. Sean gives an almost imperceptible nod to prompt Nick back into conversing with his mother. The Grimm follows this gentle command, going on as if the whole exchange hadn't happened and not moving his wrist out of Sean's grasp.
She has explained the specifics to him. In order to key the zaubertrank to him and his baby she will need to establish a magical connection. Depending on what she perceives, the two most important ingredients will vary. In order to do so she will need to place her hands on his bare belly while he lies back... and that's where Nick's current nervousness is stemming from. To say he is uncomfortable with the thought of a hexenbiest doing that would be a gross understatement. Right at this moment Nick is doing all he can to keep himself from simply leaving.

To make matters worse, he needs to relax while she does it, otherwise a connection cannot be forged.

So he is sitting on the bed in Renard's guest room, eyeing every move the woman takes with deep suspicion and knowing that not even Sean's presence can make it any better this time. Elizabeth seems to know that as well for she quietly asks the powerful zauberbiest to leave. He throws a long inquiring look at his Grimm, who gives a tiny nod after what seems like an eternity.

"Are you ready for me to place my hands on your stomach?"

Although his eyes say no, he nods bravely. Fear goes out from him in waves and after hearing what happened to him she can understand his misgivings. She waits until he has fully lain down and bared his stomach for her to see. There is a tiny bulge already, unnoticeable for a stranger yet clearly visible to the trained eye.

"It's going to be fine. We will make your baby safe."

Her voice is not as deep as the Captain's but still it calms him down somewhat.

Still, this is everything he has come to dread ever since that fateful night but he needs to see it through. He watches her hands as they move toward his body. A slight tremor goes through him. Before he has made a conscious decision his hand shoots forward, catching her wrist in a bruising grip, before her fingers can so much as touch him. He even must have growled but his brain has gone into survival mode and all he can do is not actively pushing her away. He does not let her out of his sight, eyes wide and ink black, chest heaving with sudden harsh breaths. She does not flinch away, just looks back steadily.

"Nicholas, I am not going to hurt you."

She is an epitome of calm. Seeing that he is the one restraining her, those words may seem ironic
but they have hit the nail on the head. Nick lets go of her wrist as if burned.

“Oh, God, I am sorry. I....”

“It's okay. I know, had that been any more than an instinctual reaction you would have done a lot worse than just grabbing me.”

She means it. She rubs at her wrist absentmindedly and already Nick sees a bruise forming.

“Sorry. I'm pretty messed up these days.” He hangs his head. Lately he cannot seem to get a grip on his emotions, especially when he feels threatened.

“Don't worry about it. If I felt the need to defend myself, I would be well able to do so. Come on, let's try another approach.”

He looks up with careful interest. She takes it as a good sign.

“Take my hands and place them on your stomach. Once you are comfortable with that we can see about lying back and the keying part. How does that sound, hmm?”

He follows her suggestion, gently this time and as hesitant as a shy teenager. He moves them until they come into contact with his belly, slowly and not at all sure that this is what he should be doing. Her hands are warm. They just rest there, not harming him in any way.

“Very good. Try to relax. It's going to be okay.”

Both are aware that she talks to him almost like to a frightened animal but both also know that it helps a tiny bit. Once Nick has sunk back into the pillows and makes no move to push her hands away she begins sending out her magic to get a feeling for that small bundle of life inside. There is a barrier, and a formidable one at that. She recognizes it for what it is.

“I can feel your inner Grimm. It is a strong presence, roaring to protect your child. This is good. A father should protect his young one. But in order to key the trank to your baby I need you to open up to me. I am not going to hurt you or your child. Just relax. Deep breaths... that's good. You're doing well.”

Slowly but surely Nick unwinds. Her voice has an effect on him similar to the Captain's. It is good. He likes hearing it. Keeping half an eye on her he concentrates on that voice in order to allow her magic inside.

She closes her eyes, probing not with her hands but her mind and innate powers. She frowns in concentration, staying completely still for a long time, before quite suddenly a delighted smile comes to her lips and her shoulders visibly relax.

“Oh, what a strong and healthy baby boy!” She exclaims softly when finally Nick has relaxed enough to lower his barriers.

“He is?”

“And wait,... he is a he? I always thought a baby's gender couldn't be determined before the beginning of the sixth month.”

For the first time that day Nick speaks with wonder in his voice.
“Let's say I have my ways. It is similar to a premonition, a hunch, but pretty accurate. I hope I didn't spoil the surprise. And he is, indeed, a healthy little lion.”

Nick gazes down on his barely swollen belly in wonder, also for the first time, it seems to the wise hexenbiest. When he looks back up there's no longer wariness but hope and tentative excitement.

“No, it's okay. I'm happy to know Toisie's gender.”

The corners of his mouth turn up in a mischievous grin. It is a good look on him. She begins to understand, why Sean is quite taken with this young Grimm... although her oh so shrewd son is oblivious to the fact.

“Toisie?” Nick chuckles, warm and just a bit self-depreciating.

“On that first sonogram picture the shape of my baby looked like a tortoise, at least according to my friend Monroe. It kind of stuck, so while still in the womb we've christened it Toisie. I know it's silly.”

Elizabeth smiles and is as taken with this genial, kind-hearted man as her dear son.

“Oh, I like it. Sean was not a friend of sonograms either while I was pregnant with him. If it hadn't been for our 'biestly connection I think I would never have learned his gender before birth. I swear, no matter how often we did a sonogram, my son always managed to turn his... important bits away. Must have been intent on upholding his dignity even then.”

When Nick chuckles his eyes fairly spark with warm humor.

“I wonder why I can imagine that so well.” He quips dryly.

As if on cue there is a knock on the door and the aforementioned, always dignified Prince enters the room at their call. Finding himself faced with twin expressions of barely veiled amusement he throws them a suspicious glare.

“I see the two of you have overcome your initial difficulties. Mother, I dearly hope you haven't told my Detective anything foolish pertaining my childhood. I would be most displeased to hear that.”

Standing there with his arms crossed in front of his chest, drawn up to his full height and staring down on them, Renard poses quite a sight.

“Your mother did nothing of the sort. But she told me I am expecting a healthy baby. And, oh, it is a boy!”

While the zauberbiest's features soften unexpectedly at the news, Elizabeth mentally applauds the Grimm.

Not bad. Not only did he manage to lie without my son detecting it, he also employed clever deception. To tell him about the baby's gender surely did the trick.

“Suffice to say, I have established a connection and will now be able to key the zaubertrank to Nicholas and his child. I think the ingredients will be Lionshood for the brave and Edelweiss for the innocent and resilient ones.”
His mother seems satisfied with the outcome and Nick remarkably more at ease, so he lets the matter of their unholy glee slide for now.

“That is certainly good to hear.”

Of course, he has also spotted the dark bruise on his mother’s wrist, but knowing she would have acted accordingly if this had gone beyond her control for even one moment he keeps quiet about that as well.

>>> 

While they have been working on the keying Sean has seen about dinner. When they eat there's notably less tension. Elizabeth explains about the ritual. So far everything is well. Only when she proposes for Sean to be the one to perform it, do both men look at her with adorably dumbfounded expressions.

Nicholas forgets his forkful of rice halfway to his mouth. It's cute, really.

Sean isn't far behind either, his uncomprehending frown almost comical.

“I do not profess to that very often, but I am afraid I cannot follow you, mother.”

“It's easy. The ritual – just as the zaubertrank – thrives on emotions and I dare say that you have a closer relationship with Nicholas than I do. Furthermore you are enough of a zauberbiest to act as anchor and caster for this. So what do you think, boys? Nicholas, would you be more comfortable with Sean doing it?”

The Grimm swallows visibly, his reply just a touch breathless.

“That depends entirely on what that would entail.”

Oh, yes. There is definitely hope for those two and if half of what I suspect about the Grimm’s current relationship is true, then this might be for the better, anyway.

The hexenbiest smirks much to both man's consternation. Sean spots his mother's meddling a mile away and he would have liked to refuse just to spite her but there's still the matter of protecting Nick's baby.

“And what would that ritual entail, mother?”

Nick cannot help thinking, if Renard had addressed him in that tone he would have started running already. This is a show of cold reproach taken to perfection. Or in other words: It is the exact tone Renard uses with them, if they have really mucked things up.

Elizabeth remains totally unaffected, which is a little bit unfair but then again she is his mother and most likely has been privy to this in his teenage years when he has just started trying it out.
“You will draw specific symbols on his naked chest and stomach while chanting spells. I have brought everything we need. You can do it tonight.”

“Okay. If Renard is okay with it, he may do it.”

Nick's quick consent surprises all of them, even the Grimm himself.

“Sean?”

When the powerful Royal inclines his head Elizabeth looks like a cat who got the cream. Nick and Sean exchange a glance, both certain that they have just been played and yet unable to tell how she did it.

>>> They are in the kitchen, Elizabeth mixing the ritualistic ink and her son familiarizing himself with the spell's wording. He looks doubtful for once, not at all confident in his ability to do this.

“Sean, when you recite the lines I want you to concentrate all your thoughts on how much you want to protect Nicholas and his child. You do not need to woge or do active magic but focusing on this is vital for the spell to settle.”

“And you are sure I should be the one to perform it? This is important, mother. I won't take chances just to indulge your meddling nature.”

“And with these words, my dear son, you have answered your own question. Of course you will do well. You won't take any chances because this is more important to you than even you may realize.”

“What are you saying?”

“Oh, the ink has just the right consistence. Hurry now before it is wasted.”

Renard shoots her black glare for all too obvious evasion techniques but moves over to the living room where Nick already sits on the thick rug in front of the sofa. For the ritual they need to kneel facing each other and Elizabeth has deemed the place just right. It is comfortable and as the very place where Sean has held his Grimm through his breakdown it bears enough significance to them to be suited for this.

The hexenbiest explains one last time what they need to do before she retreats to a chair at the breakfast bar. From there she is able to watch over them without invading their privacy.

>>>
Nick follows the Captain's every move as he kneels in front of him and carefully sets the bowl down on the floor between them. He would have expected to feel uncomfortable but this time his close inspection of the person across from him has nothing to do with wariness but everything with a level of fascination he does not yet understand.

“Nick, you need to take off your shirt. I can turn around if that makes you feel better but in a few moments I am going to see you half-naked, anyway.”

“Oh, yeah sorry. I was distracted for a moment. And no, you do not need to turn around.”

He slips out of his Henley shirt, not sure what Renard's close scrutiny means.

“Are you already planning where to place your doodles? If I catch you drawing stick men and flowers I'll be out of here before you can blink.”

Renard has the gall to smirk.

“You'll have to wait and see, won't you? I cannot say I possess your gift for drawing but I am confident it extends to drawing a few runes and lines... or stick men. And now we should begin before that ink truly goes to waste.”

“Okay. Umm... just go ahead.”

Their eyes stay connected for a moment longer, then Sean dips his right index finger into the bowl.

“May I touch you now?”

Nick licks his lips and nods wordlessly. He cannot put into words how much the Captain's consideration means to him. Every time he comes close to touching him he asks permission first, and not once since this crazy ordeal has begun Renard has mocked or belittled him. Well, not about the important bits, anyway.

When the cool wet ink comes into contact with his skin he emits a small gasp. This time there is no wild urge to defend himself, there is just surprise at the novelty of sensation.

Green eyes search out gray ones and hold their gaze.

“Mirror. A mirror. A mirror to my soul.”

The words roll off Sean's tongue like water down a gently flowing stream. He really has a gift for languages... or maybe a gift for talking in general. That deep, velvety drawl mesmerizes him as much as the long finger drawing a first symbol right in the middle of his chest does. He follows the path of ink, unable to look away.

“Gate. A gate. A gate to what I give.”

Another symbol is drawn beneath the first, the zauberbiest's face set in concentration.

“To connect and protect.”

Another dip into the dark purple paint and both runes are connected by a straight downward line. By now the liquid doesn't feel cold anymore but very warm.

“Ill will and harm done, protection be granted.”

Sean's and Nick's eyes meet for an instant before yet another part is done. Two symbols this time,
high on his belly where a few weeks ago well defined abs have been and now the beginnings of a baby bump resides.

“With my soul, my thoughts, my innate 'biest, reaching out to protect you.”

The two runes are connected by a horizontal line drawn with utmost care. Renard has a far away look about him now, as if he is lost in memories. Nick cannot know how close he is to the truth.

Sean loses himself in the ritual. The drawing of runes, the rhythmic chant, those stormy gray eyes, that fair skin and well formed body.

Maybe it isn't only the ritual... maybe it is the Grimm, whom he loses himself in.

He remembers pain and vulnerability.

In his mind he still hears tentative excitement when Nick has talked to his mother after the keying. He has actually heard that part of their conversation while he walked by the door on his way to his study. A smile wants to come to his lips at the memory of the baby's naming but is held at bay.

When he recites the final line and draws a last symbol all his thoughts are with the man across from him and the tiny living being inside. His 'biest waits just under the surface, ready to protect or – if necessary – to tear apart anyone posing a danger to Nick and his baby boy.

“The child, the father, the unity. As a mirror of my soul, protection be granted.”

Nick's breath catches when suddenly waves upon waves of positive, warm, wholly embracing energy flow through his very veins. He moves forward without a conscious thought, forehead coming into contact with Renard's broad chest. It is instinct. It is feeling safe and understood and protected. He hasn't felt like this ever since that one night, which has put his life to shambles.

Sean has never known such feeling of accomplishment until he feels what a strong protection his thoughts and innate power weave around the Grimm and his young one. When Nick moves toward him, cradling him is the most natural thing in the world. They stay like this, heartbeats in sync, minds afloat until slowly those overwhelming sensations ebb away.

Slowly the embrace is loosened. They look at Nick’s stomach to find that the symbols have vanished just as the last remains of ink on Sean’s finger have done. Their gazes lock and both smile, reservation, control and dignity be damned for one precious moment. Afterwards both distance themselves, finding back to normalcy while never forgetting that wholesome feeling from before. They have done it! Both feel the protective magic like a living, pulsing thing.

At the other end of the room a certain powerful hexenbiest and mother smiles as well, shown in the crinkles around her eyes and the satisfied gleam within. She knows for certain, that only love can forge such a strong protection. There is hope.

For Nicholas' happiness as well as for Sean's. Curiously, although her son is the most important thing in her life, she wants them both to be happy. Preferably together.
The zaubertrank works well. When ingested a peculiar feeling overcomes him, like a soft shiver running over skin and body. Elizabeth has explained that he and he alone will always be able to see himself for what he is. Others will see him like he has been at the beginning of his pregnancy. Even his clothes will appear to lie flat over skin as will his hands when he places them on his stomach. Hearing that, Nick perceives the true strength of the trank for the first time.

Until the child is born the content of one small vial has to be taken each week. Every Friday evening he will wait for one dose to lose effect and then take another one.

19th - 21st week:

It's nine in the evening. Hank takes his jacket and waits for Nick to come as well. Okay, he might have waited for a wall to move and gotten the same response. The only thing still unclear is if his partner is sleeping or just continuing to work. Lately Nick has been dead tired more often than not, which is equally amusing as it is exasperating at times.

“Come on, Princess, you need your beauty sleep.”

Nick glares, an effect destroyed entirely by rubbing at his eyes sleepily.

“This Princess is going to kick your ass as soon as she is awake enough to do so.”

“Yeah, yeah. We'll cross that bridge when we come to it. Now call it a night.”

“Relax, Hank. I just want to go (this is interrupted by a jaw cracking yawn) over these statements again, then I'll head home as well.”

Hank glares back but it has little to no effect on the Grimm. Maybe because he's nearly asleep and does not even notice it.

“If I were not expected at a bar by a beautiful woman in 20 minutes I would frog march you home. Honestly, you make baby sitting you more difficult than it should be with a grown man.”

“Yes, Tracy. Whatever you say.”

Nick has already gone back to reading statements... or maybe to fake doing so while sleeping.

“Tracy?!?”

“Errr... top three of female babysitter names?”

Nick looks up from his papers, eyebrow raised as if that should have been obvious.

“Okay, man, I'm off. But if I do not get a message later that you're home and well on your way to sleep, I'm going to come back and you're not going to like what happens when you are still here then.”
Nick looks a cross between amused, exasperated and immensely grateful.

“Boy, that's one weird mix of emotions on your pretty face.”

Hank grins, Nick grimaces and mouths 'pretty face' with disbelief before he replies to the initial comment:

“Yeah, well. Joys of... you know what. I don't know half the time how it is possible to feel the way I feel.”

>>> 

Sean locks his office to turn in for the night. It's gotten quite late but between conferring with his various international contacts and reviewing reports he has simply lost track of time.

Much to his surprise a single desk lamp is still on in main office and a single person still in attendance. Then again, maybe not so much of a surprise after all. It is Nick and he has fallen asleep with his cheek plastered to the very papers he's been going through. He shakes his head as he approaches and a tiny smile comes to his lips. Shortly he contemplates shaking him awake but reconsiders quickly. Given how Nick reacts to unexpected touch nowadays he values his health too much to have a startled Grimm break his hand upon finding it on his shoulder when he wakes.

“Nick. Wake up. That desk is for working not sleeping.”

Nick comes awake, blinks owlishly, looks around and even wipes his mouth with the back of his hand to get rid of the odd bit of drool....

All before he even notices Renard standing a small distance away.

“Captain! Sorry, didn't see you there.”

His face takes on a lovely shade of pink. Sean smirks at his Detective's embarrassment.

“I wager, being asleep and all, no, you did not. What are you still doing here? It's half past 11pm.”

“Errr... same question there?”

“Back talk is rarely appreciated, Detective. Now would you answer my question?”

Uuuh, that kind of tone. Nick makes an effort to become more alert and reactivate his mind to mouth filter.

“Sorry, Sir. I was reading through statements to glean information that might help us solve our case but halfway through I must have fallen asleep.”

“Why don't you call it a night? I was on the way to the parking garage myself. We have the same way.”

It's clear that this hasn't been a suggestion but his tone is much softer than before.

“Okay. Why not?”
He rubs his hands over his face in an effort to clear his vision. He's less successful than he would have liked. He rises from his seat, then just standing still and waiting for the world to right itself.

*A bit more tired than I though, huh?*

By the time he grows aware of the hand holding onto his arm to support him a full minute must have passed. He blushes again.

“Errr, thanks... I guess.”

“One thing is sure. You will not be the one driving tonight. Come now. The sooner we get away from here the less is the likelihood of you falling asleep while standing upright.”

Renard does what Hank has not had the time to and all but frog marches him to the elevators. One would think that in a situation like this Nick would be able to stay awake but even on the short ride down to the parking lot his chin sags onto his chest and he takes a short nap.

The zauberbiest keeps a watchful eye on his pregnant charge. It is amusing to say the least to see Nick fighting sleep and hopelessly losing. He finds himself reminded of that video, shared by Wu, of a puppy dog who could not stay awake no matter how hard he tried and who's small furry head repeatedly flopped down before he snapped awake again.

Only that Nick's head stays firmly down on his chest as he naps in what cops have perfected as a safe stance for sleeping on your feet. When the elevator doors open Sean makes an impromptu decision and hoists the Grimm up into his arms bridal style before he can think too closely about his motives for doing so. He carries him the rest of the way to the car, surprised when Nick speaks up sleepily.

“So you responsible for transporting cargo nowadays?”

Renard looks down. There's no distress in his expression or bite in his words. Either he is too far out of it to truly notice what happens or – what would be much more interesting – he is okay with being carried by him. Best not tip him off on that and simply go along with his question.

“If you want to call yourself that, then, yes, I am in charge of transporting important cargo tonight.”

Nick smiles sleepily.

“You called me important.”

He waits for his Grimm to become awake enough to set him down, opens the car door and maneuvers him into the seat, fastening the belt around the docile man.

“It seems I did. Don't let it get to your head, hmm?”

Maybe it's his tired mind playing tricks on him but Renard's expression has softened to something that he has never seen on the stoic man before.

*Must be my mind playing tricks on me.*

“Would never even dream of doing that.”
Renard gets into the driver's seat and starts the car.

“Don’t make promises you cannot keep. Seeing the way you are, dreams cannot be that far off. Come on. Let’s get you home.”

From one moment to the other the atmosphere changes from light to tense. Renard throws a glance to the side not sure how this could happen so fast.

“I would rather... if you let me out at the trailer.”

They are pulling onto the street, Nick gazing out of the window at the darkness beyond. He looks small all of a sudden.

“You're not going to sleep in the trailer.”

Renard's word is final, leaving no room for arguments, so Nick curls as far into the seat as he can, brings his arms around his belly and closes his eyes to await the inevitable.

>>> 

He wakes to Renard's soft call and curiously not in front of his own home.

“What, why?”

The Captain manhandles his befuddled Grimm into his house, saying quietly:

“I said that you're not going to sleep in the trailer. I did not say I would force you to go home if you do not want to.”

“You're a great superior. Did I ever tell you? Oh, and a great Prince as well. You've got the stature and aristocratic looks.”

Most interesting. Apparently feeling safe makes this Grimm sink faster into a dopey half-awake state than I could ever have fathomed.

Back to the well known guest room it is, this time actually helping Nick change into night clothes as the oh so dangerous Grimm is utterly unable to do so on his own. He already has him under covers and is ready to call it a night himself when Nick sits up once more. He fumbles for his cell phone lying on the nightstand, equally successful at operating it as at changing out of his attire.

“What are you doing now?”

“Have to... m'ssage Hank... or he'll come by an' be evil.”

“What?”

Even as the question leaves his mouth he is unsure, if he wants to know the answer.

“Hank said to tell... when I am in bed.... Beauty sleep for Princess he said. Hank's evil. Not a Princess. Tell him... when you next see him.”
Shaking his head the powerful zauberbiest takes the cell phone out of unresisting fingers and sends Griffin a text that the Grimm has actually managed to find a bed for himself. That done he puts it back onto the nightstand and gives Nick a gentle push in direction of the pillows. He's asleep even before he's fully down.

*Oh well, at least that went according to plan. This Grimm will someday be my death.*

The fondly amused smirk belies that last thought as he leaves the room quietly.

>>> 

At about five months of pregnancy Nick is more than glad for the shadowing trank. By now his baby belly is of a decent size - one that he would never be able to hide if it weren’t for that clever bit of magic. With Monroe and Rosalee it has become a well loved habit to wait together for the effect to wear off and watch pregnancy’s progress before Nick ingests another dose.

Firmly he pushes away the thought, that of all his friends and loved ones the most important person, Juliette, does not yet know about his state. He wants to convince himself that she would be good with it, if he told her, but always when he is about to do so some inner sense of foreboding keeps him from spilling the beans.

He sighs and, rubbing his hand across his face, puts away the book he’s been reading. It is difficult. It is also a fact that ever since his latest freak out at her touch their relationship has become cool and strained. Neither says anything but both know that this might be something they will not overcome.

And it is not that Nick doesn’t try! On the rare occasion that she touches him now he hides his discomfort, bearing the contact because that’s what is expected of him, isn’t it? He wants their relationship to work out and if that means suffering on his part then maybe he deserves just that. Why would Juliette show such lack of understanding if it weren’t for valid reasons?

*After all, he should have known.*

Still there are doubts. He experiences these little twinges when Monroe, Rosalee, Hank and Renard give him all the support he could wish for. Ruefully he thinks back to that one evening last month when Renard has driven him home after finding him asleep at his desk in precinct office.

Renard. A twinge of something entirely different goes through him. The Captain has been great about all this from the very beginning. His consideration and help has gone far beyond what is expected of a superior officer or a ruler of a canton for that matter.
He understands.

The thought comes unbidden and yet it is undeniably true. Even though he’s had no reason to take any of Nick’s fears into consideration, he has done so from the very first moment.

It has been unexpected, appreciated, it has been something Juliette hasn’t done even once.

Well, Juliette is out with friends tonight, so he has a relatively relaxed evening. It hurts him to even think that but it is what he feels. At least he seems to be over morning sickness now but constantly hiding and tiptoeing around each other takes his toll. For the last few days (or rather weeks, if he is honest with himself) he has felt spread too thin to hold it together. That heavy tiredness, that had him fall asleep at work, stays with him almost constantly now.

At least Toisie is well. He’s had another medical exam a few days ago and his doc has attested his little boy with a clean bill of health. He is growing as he should and on his last sonogram picture he’s looked like a real baby, indeed. Complete with little feet and hands he has well outgrown his tortoise look from the beginning.

Normally his monthly appointment would have been a few days later but seeing that his doctor has gone on vacation for a week they have prescheduled it. Dr. Cransbury has given him a number for emergency calls, ruefully saying that if anything was the matter he could at least give telephone advice, even if he couldn’t be there in person.

Nick isn’t overly worried, though. He will be back by tomorrow around noon and he should be settled until then.

They have talked for a long time. When Nick has asked the doc why he is so supportive of him, although his view of Grimms cannot be all that positive given his acquaintance with various wesen, he has laughed and shaken his head. In the end he has explained it like this:

As a doctor of many a wesen mother he hears much about their concerns, too. In the past many women have told him, that they fear for their children’s future and hope that no evil wesen or Grimm will ever cross paths of their family. Lately those horror tales about meeting Grimms have decreased in number and - curious of nature as he is - he has asked those many mothers and fathers why that is.

With some of them it’s just been coincidence but a great many of them have told him that now Portland has a Grimm who asks first and kills only as a last resort. A Grimm who hunts the bad ones and defends innocents no matter what their heritage may be.

Nick remembers the fond expression when Cransbury has looked at him as if he were the conclusion to his tale. His following words have stayed with him as well:
"Nick, you are a kind man and embrace what life has thrown in your face with an endurance that I admire. If I can help you and your child in any way, I will do so. And if you pass only half of what I hear are your values on to your son then there will be a next generation of Grimms that you can be proud of."

He has busied himself with putting away his instruments while Nick has discreetly wiped away one or the other tear.

"Did I mention that I hate pregnancy hormones?" He has muttered when the other man had retaken his seat. The doc has smirked and said:

"There simply are a few things women are better suited to endure than we are. Raging hormones is one of these things. Oh, that brings me to another reason why seeing you through this safely is very important to me."

Mischief gleams in Cransbury’s brown eyes when Nick raises an eyebrow in silent question.

"I admit to a certain professional interest in having the first and most likely only pregnant male in my office."

Nick snorts at that.

"I bet you do, Doctor. I won’t appear in some obscure science journal, though, will I?"

The other man looks rueful.

"No, I am afraid that wouldn’t be in your best interest, would it? Oh well, the greatest of discoveries have been made in secrecy. Apropos interest and secrecy: I would be most interested to meet that Captain, you have told me so much about…."

The sound of a key being turned in the keyhole pulls him from his musings. He tenses up without meaning to. It seems Juliette is home. While he sits up straighter he hears her taking off her coat.

"I’m home, babe." She says, sticking her head in through the door, before putting down her handbag and ambling into the kitchen. To anyone else it would seem like everything is normal but years of being a cop and knowing Juliette tell him that she is slightly tipsy. Apparently the evening out with the girls has been good, whereas he ’hasn’t been much fun’ he believes her words have been.

Seeing that she calls him babe after weeks of nothing but cool indifference confirm his theory. There’s the sound of a bottle and a glass being taken out of a cupboard, then the redhead herself appears in the living room. True enough she holds a wineglass and a bottle of red, which she puts down on the side table before perching on the armrest of the sofa.

He greets her with a quiet „Hey.“ and scoots over a bit to make room for her. No need not to be friendly. She hasn’t done anything to him. She follows his silent invitation and sits down properly.

„Thanks, babe. Do you want one as well? I didn’t bring another glass but…."

„It’s okay. Thank you. I don’t want any."

„Oh, why don’t you?“ She pouts, Nick tries staying patient. He’s been short tempered all of today, so much so that Renard has send him home early with instructions to take a bit of much needed
rest. Slightly tipsy Juliette is not increasing his patience level by any means.

„I am just not in the mood to drink wine right now.“

He is proud that his tone does not project any of his inner turmoil.

„Before that night you haven’t been such a bore, you know?“

Of course he knows exactly which night she talks about. Inwardly he seethes. It’s one thing that she is discontent with their relationship but it’s quite another to mock him for it. Just right now it’s all becoming too much real fast.

„Really, you have to try out the wine. It is the tasty one we bought together before… you know?“

„Juliette, leave it, will you?“

He grates out between clenched teeth. He’s barely keeping his temper in check. She might be slightly drunk but she is hurting him on purpose. He knows her. Her mind works just fine even though her inhibitions might be lowered. It is something he has always loved about her. It hasn’t mattered if they have emptied a bottle of wine together or two. They have both been able to hold an intelligent conversation even after that. The memory brings back longing for what they’ve had and softer feelings.

„Come on! You have to….“

But enough is enough:

„No! I cannot and I do not want to!!“

He shoots up from the couch, needing the space and realizing what he’s said. He turns around to her, praying that she hasn’t attached too much meaning to his words.

No such luck. He finds himself faced with an inquisitive gaze that shows just enough suspicion to hurt.

Fuck!!!

Rising from her seat as well she tilts her head just so.

„Why do you say that you cannot? Are you ill? Have you gone among anonymous alcoholics? What is it?! Another thing you cannot do anymore since you bedded that bitch…?!“

It seems all her bottled up anger unloads itself this evening. He isn’t far behind, however. He is deeply hurt by her words, he’s just had enough of hiding, tiptoeing and always being considerate and he shouts at the top of his lungs:

„I cannot drink alcohol because I am pregnant!“

Silence ensues and it is not a good one.

„What?“ A harsh whisper that expresses confusion and betrayal. Seeing her like this makes all of his anger evaporate at once.

*How have we come this far? This is the woman I love. Why couldn’t we simply work through this*
together?

Because you were too weak....

That last thought comes unbidden yet refuses to leave. It is embodiment of every doubt he’s ever had about his fears and inhibitions being justified.

Come on, Nick! You just have to try harder! What do you have, if you lose her? You love her!

„Juliette....“

„No! I mean, you push me away for months, wallowing in self-pity over an event you should be ashamed of and that is your excuse!?“

Pain spreads through his chest and makes his throat constrict. Whatever hopes and delusions he’s still had pop now like a bubble.

She will never understand or take my problems seriously. She will never help raising Toisie. I...have to protect him!

He takes a step backwards, the back of his legs just shy of touching the coffee table. With this realization familiar feelings of insecurity and helplessness return. He swallows.

You have to explain it. Tell her so that she either leaves or understands. Just end this fucking uncertainty!

He’s acutely aware of her closeness. It’s not a good feeling.

„This may sound like complete bullshit but what I said is true. It’s another fucking Grimm thing and I am sure you can imagine very well when it has happened.“

He sounds much calmer than he feels. There the slightest edge to his words, showing the Grimm ready to protect his child no matter what, even while his eyes plead with her to understand and take him at face value.

„You are delusional!!“ She snaps, eyes narrowing, expression going stormy.

He is prepared for her anger. It tears him apart just a bit wider, makes his defenses crumble just a little bit more, but he has expected it. What he hasn’t foreseen is her bitter vindictiveness. The very moment when she decides to hurt him for destroying her happily ever after.

„It seems you really have gone ’round the bend now, but if that is what you need....“

She steps up to him until they are only inches apart, bringing back all his fears with a vengeance. Up until now he has been focused on anger and even on his last remaining feelings for her, now all that slides into the background. She smiles at him, but it’s cold and brittle. He knows her well. She
is hurt and wants for him to hurt just as much. She will say something cruel. He knows it and yet would never have expected it to be this:

“Shall I touch you like Adalind did? Yes? Do you want that? After all, if you dream up a love-child for the two of you now, you must have enjoyed yourself when you had sex with her! So you say she knocked you up with a child? Honestly? Let's see.”

“No!”

Her fingers are nimble and quick, slipping under his shirt, ghosting over his chest, his nipples. Pushing up fabric to reveal a stomach unchanged to her zaubertrank deceived eyes and heavily swollen to Nick’s.

“Juliette! Leave it!”

Suddenly it’s all back. His fears, her touch, concern for his baby boy, all adding to a true wave of panic! Nick is coiled tight, tensing up, feeling violated at her touch.

“Oh, I forgot. You hate it when I touch you.”

Her voice is sickly sweet, eyes blazing with anger. She does not end the contact. Her fingers burn on his skin like fire. His breath catches. He takes a step back.

“Juliette, I don't... I can't.... Please!”

His Grimm is so near to the surface, so near to lashing out that he does not dare move a single muscle for fear of hurting her. Even after all this.

It nearly kills him to stay in her vicinity, to face her cruelty but he doesn't push her away. She knows that. She knows him so well and abuses that knowledge when she crowds him up until the back of his legs bump into the glass coffee table.

“Juliette, step back!” His voice is hoarse but gains a measure of strength. It is a last stand, a paper thin facade to hide his terror.

“I know this is all difficult and hard to believe, but, please, give me some space and let's talk civilly about this.”

He tries to project calm. He tries for normalcy to hide what having the former love of his life so near is doing to him. To imagine Adalind, the hexenbiest breaking forth, seeing him come undone under her touch. Seeing him at his most vulnerable. He draws in a deep breath but there doesn’t seem to be enough air in the room.

“Giving you space? Talk civilly? Last time I checked I was your fiancé. I have every right to touch you when I want to.”

“No, you have not. I am still my own person and I have told you repeatedly to let me go!”

Uttering these words is difficult as hell. A very small part of him still thinks that it isn't her fault and that she is not truly as cruel as right now. Surely she doesn’t mean it like that....
Juliette ignores him. She tilts her head coely, looking at him through her lashes in a cruel imitation of the hexenbiest. She makes all his terrors come to the fore. The very reason why he cannot bear her touch. More than ever panic grips him as she slides her hands up and down his chest, grazing skin and nipples with her nails.

He is pale, sweating, on the edge of a panic attack that he would never have experienced in this scale if it hadn't been for raging hormones of his pregnancy.

He twists his body away, fabric tears. Finally he manages to dislodge her touch. His hands come around his belly in a protective gesture that's purely instinctual. He isn't even aware of doing it, only of the need to protect his child... to protect himself as well.

“Oh you really think you're pregnant! How sweet!”

She coes mockingly, eyes going wide and hands coming up to her mouth in fake surprise.

“Honestly, Nick, that's sick!! Whatever your mind has thought up to justify bedding that bitch, this is sick! So you hate my touch? You are the victim? Let's see if we cannot convince you otherwise! Maybe you can imagine I am Adalind, can't you!?”

She knows exactly what her last words do to him! She sees the panic, the utter fear and disturbance in his eyes. She revels in it as she takes his face into her hands, ignores his frightened gasp and presses her lips against his in a searing kiss!

Nick screams inside!

No! Nooo! Help! Sean, help me! Let me go! I can't...!!

He freezes completely, petrified with terror. His moan is a travesty of a lover's sound, filled with powerlessness and emotional pain. He cannot breathe. His hands go out now, trying to push her away, but he is too weak and held back by the last remaining feelings for her!

I mustn't hurt her! But I cannot bear her touch! Let me go!!

Horror and shock have taken his breath and sapped his strength. She feels his impotent touch against her front, laughs into the kiss and finally pushes him back with the fury of a slighted, angry woman!

He falls backwards, crashes into the coffee table. The sound of breaking glass is tuned out by blood rushing in his ears. He does not feel shards cutting into skin and embedding themselves. He only feels the burning ghost of her touch on his lips, his skin, in every place where Adalind has touched him that night. It's all back, and with it comes the same nauseating revulsion as when he has realized that it hadn't been his beloved girlfriend.

Juliette...

… who is now standing over him, glaring down with a mix of bitterness and cruel satisfaction.
He cannot move. But he hears her next words. They will imprint themselves into his memory:

“Nick, we are done! You have destroyed everything! With your damn Grimm bullshit and by bearing or may not bearing the bastard child of that hexenbiest! You could have just manned up, gotten over it and saved our relationship but you didn't! You are pathetic! I hope you'll be happy with your little bastard or whatever else your sick mind will conjure up! I am through with you!”

At this point his own ragged breathing tunes out her words. He cannot take any more. She tears open every emotional wound there is. He shakes like a leaf, caught up in a nightmare of past and present.

As she storms out of their home and out of his life without another backward glance he curls up amid broken glass and splintered wood. More cuts, blood trickling down in thin rivulets. A deep ache settles within him, growing in intensity.

Tears run down his pale face while his mind tries wrapping around the horrors of his imagination... desperately telling himself that this cruel person hasn't been the hexenbiest or his beloved vivacious Juliette and failing.

After some time the focus of his thoughts begins to shift:

His baby! He needs to protect him.

*Oh my God. My baby! Help!*

Enduring that all-encompassing ache and the inability to draw a single breath make him believe that surely it must be originated in his belly and with that his panic reaches new heights!

*My baby! My baby might be hurt!!*

Looking down on himself, blinking away bright spots and blurred images of past events he notices for the first time that he is smeared with blood. He jumps to conclusions faster than an eagle dives down for the kill.

*NO! Noo! I killed it! I couldn't protect it!!*

His hands, arms, even his stomach, all covered in blood. He cannot connect the dots from crashing into glass to seeing that. All he can think is that surely he has killed his baby boy! A low moan comes over his lips.

*No! No! Noo! Noo!! Help! We... help!!*

His movements are abrupt and uncoordinated when he searches for his phone among glass shards and splintered wood. It has sat on top of the table before all went to shambles. At last he finds it and takes it up only to have it slip from his blood wet grip again.

He curses, a hoarse and wheezing string of words.

Finally! His phone held in a white knuckled, shaking grip. He pushes speed dial.

Renard.
The man takes up at second ring.

„Nick, what is the matter? Didn’t I…?“

„Help! Sean, help!! Baby…. I killed my… baby!!“

„Nick?! What…? Where are you? What happened?“

But Nick doesn’t hear him or his own broken sobs and disconnected words. There is only the sound of blood rushing in his ears….

Blood like the crimson substance clinging to his skin…. Everywhere…. He hurts so much…. The phone slips from his grasp as darkness and despair descend on him.

Sean’s alarmed shouts and pleads to stay with him go unheard.

Chapter End Notes

I really hope Nick isn't coming across as too emotional. I'm basing his state of mind on the fact, that he isn't used to that hormone cocktail currently in his blood and going through a lot of stress and trauma. On the cliffhanger/ angst front bear with me and the boys. I promise there will be lighter stuff and fluff ahead in the next chapter... along with some more angst. And a happy ending. :)
Chapter 3

Chapter Notes

Remember how I wrote 'First half done' when posting the first chapter? Scratch that, this has been growing like a monster... or maybe a baby Grimm in the making. Sooo, Nick whump and lots of after care. Enjoy.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter 3:

20. PW:

„Nick, what is the matter? Didn’t I…?“

„Help! Sean, help!! Baby… I killed my… baby!!“

The words freeze Sean’s insides. For an instant he fears his phone may slip from suddenly numb fingers.

„Nick?! What…?“

It takes a vexing moment for Police training to kick back in.

„Where are you? What happened?“

But there’s no answer, just those absolutely terrifying sobs and frantic murmurs.

„Nick! Stay with me! Tell me, where you are! Nick!!!“

Still no answer. His mouth goes dry with fear for his Grimm. There’s a clatter and after that more sobs and murmurs, only from a greater distance. Nick has in all likelihood dropped his phone.

„Damn it!!“

He cannot hold in the curse. A few times the Captain tries calling out to Nick but to no avail. Keeping his cellphone pressed to one ear he takes up his stationary phone and punches speed dial for Sgt. Wu. As soon as the Asian takes up he bellows a command.

„Wu, locate Burkhardt’s current whereabouts through the tracking device implanted in every Detective’s phone!“

„Captain…?“

„Do it now! Send the coordinates to my cell.“

„Yes, Sir. Is backup needed?“

„No. But keep Griffin on standby and tell him to await my orders. I will inform him of any further
Sean is already grabbing his coat, storming out of precinct and into parking lot with long strides. By the time he has reached his car there’s a message from Wu. He frowns.

_Nick’s home address. What the hell has happened?!

„Nick, I am on my way to you. Just hold on! I am coming.“

He says in hopes that the Grimm somehow hears him. He keeps up the line, turning his phone on speaker and placing it on the passenger’s seat in case the Grimm takes up his own, after all.

>>>  

No signs of a break in. The front door is closed and there are no traces of anyone manipulating the lock. He knocks loudly, shouting for Nick to open up.

No answer. His ’biest is urging to break through his human facade as his concern for the pregnant Grimm increases.

„Nick!! Can you hear me?“

Hearing no sound and getting no response in any form he doesn’t hesitate any longer and wrenches the door open with a single snap. In the long run it might have been more prudent not to damage the door but his primal zauberbiest side, which has slipped into protective mode yet again, has other ideas.

Gun drawn he slips inside and takes in the scene in one sweeping glance:

Almost no signs of a struggle, no overturned furniture, no cupboards emptied out in a haste. That means no break in most likely. But there in the living room: Nick sprawled amid a thousand bits of broken glass and splintered wood! His ’biest howls within but he keeps a cool head, even as Nick's low moans and whimpers want to tear him apart. Watchful eyes scan for possible danger, take in the damage to man and furniture. It reminds him of nearly three years ago when Olec Stark has invaded the Grimm's home and brutally attacked him. But there’s a vital difference between the two incidents: there is no crying, concerned Juliette and yet there on a side table is a bottle of red and a wine glass with lipstick on it.

His scrutiny of the room has only taken a few seconds but to the alarmed Captain it still feels like an eternity before he can be sure that there is no immediate danger. A particularly loud sob from Nick pushes him into action. He's at his side in only a moment, taking in the horrifying sight of cut skin along with wood and glass embedded in it. Nick does not even notice him but neither does he seem to be aware of lying in a heap of potentially harmful debris.
“Nick!” His voice is hoarse with emotion. The Grimm doesn't react. There's only the sound of ragged harsh breathing, then the jarring noise of glass against glass. Nick is moving without taking heed of where he is. More cuts, more blood. He curls up, arms wrapping themselves more tightly around his belly, whimpers wrought with deep emotional pain.

“Nick! Can you hear me? Stop moving!”

The tiniest sign of a reaction. His Detective twitching, whimpering, whispering his name in recognition and desperate plea.

“Sean.... My... ba...by!” It ends in a near silent sob. Hearing his utter devastation makes another of Sean's walls crumble.

“I'm here. I've got you now. I'll make sure your baby is safe. Shhh. I am here now.”

Making a quick decision he slips his arms around Nick's back and under his knees. The Grimm flinches and sucks in such a big gulp of air that it has to hurt. Carefully he scoops him up into his arms and lifts him out of the mess before setting him down on the ground a little ways off and leaning him up against his chest without so much as a second thought. He keeps up a gentle murmur of reassuring words but feels impotent all the same. Nick is ghostly pale, dark hair matted to his scalp by sweat and shaking like a leaf. With a feeling of urgency he gives him a quick once over. There are various cuts, most of them still bleeding sluggishly. His hands, arms, back and shoulders, all cut up more or less severely.

He examines the stomach: Only a few superficial cuts there. Most of the blood must be from his arms when he has wound them around his midsection.

Sean heaves a relieved sigh but Nick must have misinterpreted that as a shocked gasp. His impossibly wide eyed gaze goes from unseeing to focused solely on him. Looking down into those pools of gray wrenches something deep inside him. He has never thought he would be able to feel something as strong as this.

„Sean. Help…. I killed him…. Blood, there’s so much blood! My baby!! I hurt him….“

It’s a high pitched barely there whisper. Seeing him like this is pure torture.

„Shhh. Nick, I’m here now. Let me see. I’m here to help now. Shh. Let me take a look.“

Carefully he takes both wrists and lifts them away from his stomach for another, closer look. Still the same, thank God. He keeps them held gently to the side, though. There are glass shards stuck in his forearms from where he must have caught his fall. It wouldn’t do to risk an injury to the stomach now.

„Nick, your baby is safe. The blood is mostly from the cuts on your arms. You didn’t hurt him. You did not kill him. He is safe. Safe.“

He repeats this over and over again until understanding trickles into Nick’s gaze. A jerky nod yet he isn’t calming down at all. Whatever has happened, his Grimm seems way beyond consolable. He can feel Nick’s heart beating in a wild staccato even though he is leaning against him only sideways. His breaths come quick and sallow, not getting enough air into his lungs by far. It worries him deeply and again he silently asks the question:

What the hell has happened here?!
„Nick. Shhh. It’s okay. I’m going to make it okay. You are safe. Your baby is safe."

Sean cradles him closer to his chest, trying to comfort him with his body, too. He knows Nick is trying. He sees his desperate attempt all too clearly. His pregnant Grimm is murmuring in distress and hell, they are getting nowhere. They need help. With one hand he fumbles for his phone, while the other still holds the Grimm pressed to his front.

Hospital is out of question, but he can call Dr. Cransbury. Some time ago he asked Nick for his office number and now he is glad to have it on hand. He puts the cell to his ear, waiting for someone to take up. A beep, then a female voice starts speaking:

„We are currently on vacation. Our office is closed. In case of an emergency, please, contact your nearest hospital or try reaching us on Monday the ….“

He ends the call.

„Damn it!!“

His Grimm starts at his outburst. Sean puts his cheek to the top of his head in an effort to soothe.

„Sorry. It’s okay. I’m getting help. Everything is going to be okay."

*What to do now? Who to call? Rosalee! She is the next best choice.*

Nick throws his head back then, face scrunching up in pain. A small whimper escapes him, making Sean’s heart sink into his stomach with dread.

„Nick. What is the matter? Where do you hurt?“

He cannot answer as his features contort again. His arms want to curve back around his midsection but Sean keeps them away. Instead Nick tries curling up more tightly.

„No, no, no, NO! Now I've done it...Toisie...!“

Another heart wrenching sob. Another episode of pain. Nick is caught up in a spiral of hurt and mounting panic. He isn't breathing right and deep inside he still believes to have hurt his baby boy.

*Oh, God! ...sooo... so much pain!*

“Help.” It is a shaky wheeze. Sean needs to act right now, but he is still puzzling out what the hell is happening to his Grimm.

*Pain at intervals. Coming from his midsection…. Experienced under great duress.*

A terrible suspicion sneaks up on the zauberbiest. Another pained and utterly terrified whimper from Nick.

*Don’t let it be premature labor pains! It’s too early… way too early!*

With a feeling of cold dread Sean hoists his Grimm up higher, cradles him tighter and puts one hand to his cheek to turn his face toward him and catch his attention. The skin is pale and slick with sweat. Damn it!
Nick. Your baby is safe, but I need you to calm down now! Please, everything is going to be okay. But you need to calm down for your child. Come on. Deep breaths. Concentrate only on that. You can do this. I’ve got you!”

Nick tries. He tries so damn hard but seeing that he isn’t getting anywhere and that the ache in his midsection is only increasing makes calming down impossible. He looks up at his Captain, desperate, panting, tears of pure anguish running down his cheeks.

*I cannot do it! I am too weak. Help! I’m losing Toisie!*

Another frantic gulp of air. He squeezes his eyes shut as another wave of pain hits.

Just when Sean wants to howl in frustration at his own powerlessness, some deep, archaic instinct tells him to place his hand on Nick’s stomach. He does not hesitate. Nick flinches violently at the unexpected touch but for once the zauberbiest takes no heed. He knows, in the deepest recesses of his mind, that they will truly lose the little one, if he takes his hand away now.

Nick’s shakes increase. He emits a drawn out sound of distress.

Sean is right, though, because a moment later pulses of warm, protective energy flow from his fingers directly into the skin beneath. He feels muscles tensing under his touch, contractions still coming. Nick moans in pain, but with each passing moment do the cramps lessen.

In his ears, suddenly reverberating through Renard's very being, are three heartbeats. One slower and two fast beating ones.

With a jolt he realizes that he is feeling his own, Nick’s and the baby’s heartbeat. Instinct has him tucking the terrified Grimm closer to his own body. He might worsen a few injuries but it is either this or losing Toisie. His hand never leaves its place on Nick’s stomach.

Those heartbeats, that are not his own, do slow down. They begin matching his own to some extent.

Without a conscious thought he begins rocking them gently and murmurs inconsequential things. Protective magic works itself deeply into Nick's being. It heals, it wraps the Grimm and his baby up in a warm, protective fold. It soothes and reassures. Nick moves slowly now. He turns, buries his face into Sean's shirt.

“That's right, Nick. That's right. I've got you. Calm down. Match me in breathing. In... and out. Just follow my lead. Your baby boy is safe. You making sure of that by calming down and lowering your stress level.”

Nick listens to these words, soaking them up along with Sean's protective magic. He curls into the
tight embrace. This feels right. It takes the edge off his panic. Every time his mind jumps back to fretting, the deep voice of his Captain pulls him back onto safe ground. This isn't Renard's business voice, though. It isn't as controlled. It is rough with emotion, a bit scruffy... just like his cheek is when he leans it against the top of his head now.

He is still not alright but he isn't falling into abyss either. Renard is protecting them and slowly, very slowly contractions die down to nothing, counteracted every time by Renard's magic.

While they sit huddled together and the powerful 'biest coaches him through breathing exercises, exhaustion and events catch up with the pregnant man. He hurts everywhere, feels weak, crappy and still disturbed on such a deep level that violent shivers run down his spine time and time again. He doesn't stop sweating either. If he has been tired as hell and generally overworked in the past days, he is even worse now.

When blind panic gives way to that, Nick slumps against his Captain with a barely audible groan. Sean takes note at once.

He looks down on his Grimm with deep worry. Nick is more than just unwell. He is sick... bodily from being pushed well past his limit and emotionally from whatever has transpired earlier and it nearly drives him crazy that he doesn't know what that has been! How can he effectively protect him, if he cannot make out the foe?

Well, at least both their heartbeats have slowed down to what Sean thinks is normal, the baby’s being a bit faster but that is normal as well. He still feels them beside his own... courtesy of the protection ritual most likely. He has no time to ponder the matter, though. He needs to concentrate on what to do next and lets his gaze sweep over the room in search of supplies, coming to a decision.

“Nick. I am going to take you away from here now. I'm taking you to my home, where you are safe and will be cared for.”

He whispers all this in his Grimm's ear. He is in no state for anything else anymore.

“Nick, one last thing before we go: Do I need to contact Juliette? Why isn't she home?”

The reaction is dulled because of exhaustion but no less drastic. A low moan, another violent shudder wracking his frame. He buries his face even deeper into the fabric of Sean's shirt, heartbeat picking up at once.

“Okay, okay. I think I understand. Shhh. You are safe. No one is going to hurt you or your baby.”

Only decades of exerting absolute control over his body and mind enable Sean to keep his 'biest inside and voice steady when blind rages boils up within him.

“You have told her, haven't you?” A soft spoken, unusually emotional assertion for the Prince.

He doesn't expect an answer but the hitch of breath he feels gushing against his front is enough of an acknowledgment.
He has placed one of the flat decorative pillows on Nick’s stomach before carefully folding his arms to rest on it. That way he can bundle him up in a blanket (the one, which by all appearances, Nick has used before) without risking further injury to his midsection. Having done so he scoops him up into his arms. His zauberbiest is so near to the surface – lending strength and a sense of purpose – that he has no difficulties at all to lift the grown man. He leaves this hellhole of a place without another glance.

Sean wastes no time to maneuver his Grimm into the passenger seat, buckle him in and get behind the wheel himself to pull up on the street in direction of his home. On the way he calls back up.

Monroe and Rosalee are first. He informs them about the situation and instructs them to drive to his home with supplies for treating various cuts and something that won't harm the child but will help Nick to calm down and sleep. In all this he leaves no doubt that his orders are to be fulfilled without arguments or deviations from what he has told them to do.

When Monroe asks, if it wouldn't be easier and faster to bring him to the Spice Shop, Renard coldly snarls:

“No. I won't let him out of my sight and I won't leave him unprotected! Not if I don't know exactly how he came to be injured in the first place and who might be willing to do him harm!”

“He wouldn't be un...!”

Rosalee interjects gently:

“We will be there. Don't worry, we will have everything ready and help you take care of him. Just... just make sure he stays alright until then.”

Finding the fuchsbau's voice thick with worry temps his own protective urges down to a manageable level.

“I will do so. Hurry but drive safe.”

Hank is next: He explains the little he knows to the Afro-American before giving him his very own set of instructions. Hank might be deeply worried and quite angry on behalf of his friend but he keeps a cool head as is his habit.

“How can I help. Just tell me what and I'll do it.”

“You will chose someone trustworthy, drive to Nick's place and have the door repaired and every lock on every door exchanged.”

“I'm all with you there, but are we allowed to do that? Even if it was really Juliette doing that, it is partly her house too. I don't want to get Nick into trouble with the law.”
“I am almost certain, that she is responsible for what has happened to Nick. We will do what is the recommended course of action for abusive partners….”

Hank sighs audibly before finishing Renard’s sentence:

“...Exchange the locks and don't let anyone in. Understood, Captain. I'll get to it at once. You make sure that Nick is alright.”

“I will, trust me.”

By that time they have nearly reached his home. He takes a final turn, then they pull up on his drive. Rosalee and Monroe are already there and the fuchsbau carries a large bag, most likely filled with her supplies. They need to hurry. Nick needs medical treatment and the three of them are the only ones available to help him now. The only consolation in all this is that he still perceives two steady heartbeats beside his own.

>>> 

They have stopped. Nick isn't aware of much but he does notice on some level that the door opens and he is shifted. It hurts like hell and he cannot help anxiety bubbling up again. Images of his last moments with Juliette come unbidden to haunt him. He must have made a sound for there is a murmur of quiet words, that he doesn't get the meaning of but soothes him all the same.

He knows the scent of the person moving him. He has come to associate it with safety and with a single person: Sean Renard.

He shivers despite being wrapped up in something. His head comes to rest against something warm and firm, though, and it makes him feel a tiny bit better. His arms curl around his stomach more tightly. This hurts but it also reassures him that his baby is still there with him....

*No wait, feeling its heartbeat is doing that.... How is this possible?*

He slips back into blackness even before Sean has lowered him onto the bed in the guest room.

>>> 

Sean tries ignoring Monroe and Rosalee for the time being as he carefully peels away blanket and pillow from his mostly unresponsive Grimm. From behind he hears the couple gasp in shock at the sight revealed.

He cannot fault them while at the same time he wants to strangle them for startling Nick yet again. He may be barely conscious and in a very bad way but deep down all his Grimm instincts are focused on protecting his young one. Those two making startling noises isn't helping any.

Still, it is true. He looks terrible! Cut in so many places that he doesn't even begin to count and unsettled to an extent that he may slip back into a panic at the slightest provocation.
Rosalee clamps her hands over her mouth as she leans into her husband for support. Monroe's arms come around her instinctively even as he asks:

“What has happened to him? And... (an audible gulp) is the little one okay?”

Everyone knows what the real question is: Has he lost it?”

The Captain turns around to them with a grim expression.

“I don't know what's happened exactly but I have my suspicions. And yes, his baby is okay as far as I can tell. I cannot reach his doctor so we need to help Nick and quickly at that.”

Both nod with determination, moving together like a well oiled machine now that they have a new purpose.

>>> 

Once Rosalee has finished unpacking her supplies Sean takes her aside for a moment and forces himself to let Nick out of his sight.

*He is safe with the blutbad.*

Monroe might be wieder but right now he looks like he would tear out the throat of anyone looking at his sick friend the wrong way.

*He is safe.*

“Sean, what is bothering you?” She whispers.

“Have you brought something to calm him down?”

“Yes, I have and I see why he would have use for it but you seem to have more reason for it than just precaution. Is... is something the matter with Nick's child that you did not tell us before?”

Her eyes have narrowed, telling the zauberbiest clearly that she wouldn't take kindly to that. He looks back steadily, entirely unaware of concern breaking through his mask of tightly controlled emotions.

“I have valid reason to believe that Nick has come very close to losing his child tonight. He was in panic because blood from his various wounds ended up on his belly and lead him to believe he had hurt his baby.... It was why he called me in the first place. He was having contractions already but then protective magic of the ritual reacted and put them back to rest. Anyway, I fear he is not out of danger yet, so it is imperative for us to lower his stress levels.”

He speaks in an urgent whisper, knowing that every moment they waste talking is a moment his injuries remain untreated. In his hurry he fails hiding his emotions for once, allowing her to see the true extent of his anxiety. She takes his hand quite unexpectedly and squeezes it gently.

“Don't worry. Your actions haven't been in vain. We'll make sure that Nick and his baby get well again. And, Sean, thank you!”
She returns back to the Grimm's side before the zauberbiest can do more than frown.

*How could she have known? I didn't even tell her it has been my direct intervention saving his child.*

>>> 

Monroe watches over his fallen friend with open concern.

*What has happened... or rather who has happened to bring him into such a state? I swear, if I get my hands on that someone I will....*

When a growl starts up in the back of his throat he reigns his beast in with conscious effort. Instead of letting his anger frighten Nick, who is moving restlessly, he crouches down next to the bed and takes a careful sniff of the Grimm.

This time he cannot keep in a low growl. Nick twitches in the temped down version of a flinch and Monroe hurries to reassure him even while his insides burn in anger. His friend settles again at his soft tutting noises and even blinks his eyes a few times before they slide close again in exhaustion.

Monroe balls his fists in his lap. He should have known. Along with the sharp smells of sweat, blood, pain and fear there is Juliette's scent clear as day! It clings to his body, to his front and his face. Along with that there is anger and the jarring tang of bitter spite. He does not need to know what has happened for suddenly a rather vivid picture asserts itself.

>>> 

Slowly Nick resurfaces from the subspace to where he has gone. He still hurts, is still frightened but the smells and sounds around him are more familiar and much more reassuring. He knows those around him. He hears Monroe's gruff tone and Rosalee's gentle one. Along with that is the Captain. He cannot only hear but practically feel his presence nearby.

He is lying on a bed, half on his side. Someone moves near once they see he is awake.

“Hey, Nick. You are back with us. That's good.”

Rosalee's gentle murmur. A hand on his shoulder. He flinches violently despite himself, rears back sharply and has risen halfway from the bed before knows what he's doing! It jars aches in so many places – even in his baby bump – that he slumps back down with a pained groan. His heart has gone right back to beating in his throat, every flight reflex pushed to the max from one moment to the other!
On the edge of his awareness he perceives a small, tear wet “Oh, Nick.” then there is Renard's deep voice in the mix and his hands carefully, slowly rubbing over some uninjured part of his shoulders. He doesn't flinch now. This is safe ground.

“Easy, this is just Rosalee. She wants to help. She would never harm you. You know that. You know her. Just settle down and look at her. It is your friend Rosalee.”

Those words get through to him only slowly. He blinks, looks, sees her warm, concerned gaze, liquid with unshed tears of sympathy and worry. He relaxes a fraction, mouths ‘Sorry.’ He is so fucking tired and aching from head to toe.

She shakes her head with a tear wet smile, telling him without words that he has no reason to be sorry, then stretches out her hand minutely and only when he gives some sort of silent assent grabs onto his own hand. It is a light touch, steady and yet mindful of the various cuts there. He squeezes back after some moments, wincing as it hurts to do so.

“Nick, we are going to take care of you both now. I have something for you to drink. It will help you settle down. Sean has told me some of what has happened and if you and your little one need one thing now, it is rest and calming down. Is it okay, if I help you drink it? …Along with the antidote to the shadowing trank so that we may actually see that beautiful baby bump of yours?”

„My… baby….“ He whispers and looks down on his bloodied belly. He swallows thickly, fears returning with a vengeance. Renard’s large hand, which has never left his shoulder in all that time, moves to his back to provide a steady source of comfort.

The ongoing touch clears his head enough to contemplate the question.

He remembers what his panic earlier has nearly done to Toisie… what Juliette has said about his baby boy and done to them. His expression darkens, he tenses up and low in his throat he even emits a rumbling growl.

„Protect…. Protect him from Ju….“ He trails off, squeezing his eyes shut against emotional pain that threatens to overwhelm him again.

„Nick.“ A soft, prompting whisper. „That’s right. We will protect him. You need rest. You need to calm down and sleep. This will help.“

The fuchsbau smiles through her sadness and holds up a liquid filled glass for him to see. He nods slowly, eyes already sliding shut.

Everything hurts. He wants to sleep like she said but he fears the nightmares waiting for him in the darkness.

Just before he closes his eyes completely he perceives the tips of her fingers hovering near him. He knows what she is asking and in response moves his head just a tiny bit towards her.

When her warm hand gently strokes over his forehead and through his hair now, it makes him settle further instead of frightening him. Monroe crouches next to his wife, taking vial and glass as she comforts their friend.
“Sean, why don't you help Nick sit up a bit and keep holding him? That way I can treat his injuries much better.”

Her pointed gaze says what she doesn’t want to put into words: Nick feels safe with you and it will reassure your own primal side that he is as well protected as he can be.

Even the blutbad seems to see the benefit of this for he gives a tiny prompting nod when Sean takes a moment to answer.

“Okay.”

Calling Nick quietly before shifting his hand from his back to his torso, he lifts him up easily to slip in behind and settle him against his chest. It is visible to all what this is doing to their pregnant Grimm. He slumps against him, eyes remaining closed, as if for the first time tonight he does not have to keep up his guard. None of them are forgetting his injuries, of course, but they cannot treat him before he hasn’t let his guard down.

The antidote goes first. He swallows that without question when the rim of the vial is set to his lips.

He's so tired... and hurting terribly... but above all it is little Toisie his thoughts are with.

*Hold on, my baby boy. Papa will protect you.*

“Next is the calming potion. Just take slow sips. Good. You're doing well.”

He swallows the rest of it, concentrating on Rosie's soothing murmur. One deep breath, another one....

Calm washes over him and would have pulled him right under, if it hadn’t been for his Grimm rearing up again!

He frowns, suddenly afraid that he won’t be able to protect his baby, if he were to slip off right now.

*NO! I made... a mistake! I...cannot... sleep now!!*

He shakes his head to clear it but it is a losing battle. He makes a plaintive sound, begins to trash weakly in Sean’s hold.

*No, no, no! I need to protect...!*

„Nick, Shhh. Don’t fight it. You need to sleep now. We will watch over you and guard you and your boy. Just breathe.... This is good. You are safe. Just let the potion work.“

Renard’s velvet rumble is so near, so soothing.

*Safe.*
„That’s it. Take just a few moments to rest your eyes. You are exhausted. Sleep, my Grimm. We will protect your child until you can do so on your own again.“

Renard appeals to that primal creature within, addresses him specifically as he knows what a strong drive your innermost instincts can be. Nick responds. He ceases his trashing and slumps back against him, head half turned into the smooth fabric of his shirt.

„That’s it. Just let go. Just breathe.“

And when that large, calloused hand starts stroking through his sweaty bangs - a repetitive caress aimed to comfort and soothe - he slowly succumbs to the potion’s effect. The last thing he perceives is the man’s murmur in his ear and touch on his skin.

Even when Nick's head slumps completely against Sean's chest as he slips off, the zauberbiest continues to hold him. Neither blutbad nor fuchsbau show any opposition, but then again, his zauberbiest would have sooner raged to life than let them take him from his protective embrace.

>>>  

They work methodically on Nick's injuries now: After cutting away the remains of his shirt Rosalee treats each wound while directing the men around her as she sees fit. They follow her orders willingly, bowing their heads to her expertise.

First are the deepest ones and those with glass or wood stuck in them. Bits are carefully extracted, wounds are cleaned and disinfected thoroughly, wiped free of blood and then smeared with a dark green ointment, that seals each cut immediately and starts the healing process.

Monroe is send to fetch things and to hold the bowl, into which she discards shards of glass and splinters of wood. He helps her apply bandages and sterile gauze pads where needed, all the while keeping his blutbad in check, even in face of all that blood. For Nick, he knows without a doubt, he would bath in blood without taking a single lick.

The Captain is instructed to hold and shift their friend as necessary. He concentrates fully on him, always aware of his reassuring touch being needed while a particularly large object is pulled out or a deep wound cleaned. Nick still feels pain on some level, that much is obvious to all of them, but with every new cut treated, he settles a little more easily.

Rosalee has just finished wiping his large baby belly with a damp cloth to clean away last remains of blood when Sean speaks quietly.

“Monroe, do me a favor. Go to my bedroom – it is the room opposite of this one and there is a cabinet of drawers in there – and fetch one the button down pajamas.”
The clock maker nods slowly, very well aware what a concession to his privacy the zauberbiest has just made.

“I'll be back quickly.”

>>> 

When Monroe returns Rosalee and the Captain have taken the sullied throw blanket away and stripped him down to his boxers. He sees the necessity of that but will be glad all the same when he is clad in the pjs he's just brought. With Nick being as vulnerable as he is now it just sits better with him to have him wrapped in warm, comfortable clothes than seeing him lying there almost naked and with all those bandages on display.

All three heave a unanimous sigh of relief when Nick is finally settled under thick, clean covers and sleeping deeply. The calming draught would have made him sleepy, anyway, but with how weakened he has been, it has put him to sleep as soon as pain has decreased to a manageable level.

>>> 

They have left the door ajar and are gathered in Sean's living room for a much needed break. The sky outside is already showing first streaks of color but none of them thinks about making up for lost sleep.

"Sooo, anyone else got the urge to tear Juliette's throat out?"

The blutbad asks casually but with an underlying growl, eyes tinged red. Rosie gives a huff of hearty assent.

"I'm not usually like this, but, yes quite."

Renard remains silent but he tilts his head just so, making him look a wee bit deranged. The way he has folded his long, muscular body into the armchair - grip on his snifter of Whiskey tightening just a fraction - makes for a powerful and truly frightening picture.

“"I see, we are all in the same page then.” This is Monroe's dry, almost cheery assertion. There's no humor in his eyes, though. There is concern and the clear message that he will protect pack, which of course includes their resident Grimm.

“Whatever Juliette did, it was a whole lot more than pushing Nick into his coffee table... maybe he should think about buying a wooden one... sturdy oak maybe.... would have been loads more convenient to crash into that. Ah, I'm rambling, sorry. Anyway, she was pretty close to Nick not very long ago and not in a friendly way either. Welcome touch smells differently from what I have gotten off Nick. Whatever has made him as skittish as a maushertz, she was directly involved.”
Renard's expression darkens considerably at having his suspicions confirmed. Even just sitting there un-woged, face half in shadows against the lightening sky, he looks like the zauberbiest of all their nightmares.

When he gets like this, one should think twice about messing with him or with the very few people in the world he cares about. Suffice to say, Juliette hasn't done so and she might as well come to regret that.

But even the more mild mannered couple sports twin expressions of fierce anger. Their agreement to protect their pregnant Grimm may be silent but that makes it no less binding. There is no doubt at all, that any of those present would go to hell for him and back.

21. PW:

Monroe and Rosalee leave at five in the morning, reluctant yet sure that the reclusive man won't leave Nick's side if he can help it. The empathetic fuchsbau sees his urge to return to Nick's side even now, when it is hidden behind a near emotionless mask.

She promises to bring by herbs for a strengthening tea later today and Monroe quietly cautions him to give them a call, no matter what, if he needs their help. Renard gives a quiet assent to both and sees them out before taking a chair and sitting down to watch over his sleeping Grimm like he said he would.

Hank comes by around six. He has fulfilled his task and is anxious to know how his friend is faring and how he's come to be like this. Renard takes him to the guest room briefly, standing back to give Hank a moment of relative privacy.

The broad shouldered man crouches down – not making a sound despite his sturdy frame – and places one of his own large hands over Nick's bandaged one as it lays on the pillow.

“Hey, partner. We've bugged up protecting you but from now on we'll make sure you an' your little tyke stay safe and sound.” His promise is a delivered in a deep rumbling murmur, intended not to wake his friend but not lacking fierceness either.

Beside that Hank brings with him an item and an information that makes Sean inwardly sag with relief while his outward bearing doesn't show a stretch of weakness:

He has found Nick's phone among the remains of the table and has remembered his partner telling him about an emergency number being passed to him by his doctor. Mentioning this to his Captain brings about an unexpected explosion of sharply posed questions and ultimately of action. The doctor gets called and this time Sean can ask him to come over and check on Nick. Cransbury promises that, though not in Portland yet, he will come by as soon as he has gotten off the plane from Boston, which will be around noon.
At last Hank puts down a large sports bag by the end of the bed.

“A few things and clothes for Nick. He's staying with you for the time being, isn't he?”

“Yes.” Renard stands taller under Griffin's scrutiny as if daring him to argue with that. Hank doesn't. He slumps in relief, surprising the Royal.

“That's what I had hoped, thanks Captain. He feels safe with you. Being with you is the best thing for him at the moment.”

>>> 

At seven Renard calls Wu in precinct to tell him that they have everything under control and that Nick is on sick leave for the time being.

No, it is nothing overly serious, he assures, but requires some time nonetheless. He also tells him to cancel all his appointments for the day as he and Hank will be occupied with the aftermath of what has happened. When the Asian asks, if he can help in any way, the Royal says – wry amusement clearly detectable over the line – that he can try and keep things at the station from descending into total chaos.

>>> 

Nick wakes up feeling achy and exhausted. Pain on the surface is what he has expected, his very joints and bones aching is not. He's groggy, slow to regain full consciousness and even then his perception of things stays fairly fuzzy.

What he feels as clear as day is something cool moving over his forehead. Fear trickles into his being, but before it can fully come to life, instinct tells him that there is no source of danger. He recognizes the person with him.

The Captain.

He turns his head to the side slowly, vision swimming before sharpening again. Renard sits at the edge of the bed, dabbing at his face with a damp wash cloth and frowning.

“Capt'n... what...?”

He not sure which question to ask: 'What happened?' or 'What are you doing?'.

At seeing him flounder his expression softens fractionally.

“Nick. Good to see you awake. Don't worry. You are in my house and you are safe.”

Renard murmurs quietly and when even that reverberates painfully in his skull, he knows why the man is doing it.

Why am I feeling so awful? The last time I was awake I wasn't.... last time.... Oh my God, what
“Sir..., my baby... is he alright? Did he...?”

He needs to know! Damn! Who gives a fuck about feeling like shit, what is the matter with his child?!

He sits up abruptly.

Nausea, dizziness, pain hammering into his skull!

His arms won't hold him for even a moment but Renard is there at once, catching and supporting him before he can crash back down.

“Whazzit? Please!”

The dizziness just won't stop. He closes his eyes tightly, is guided to lay back and steadily held down when he makes to rise again in his anxiety.

“Your child is alright. Dr. Cransbury has been here not long ago and checked you over. He is alright. Now stay down. You are in no state to sit up.”

A clear command. Nick swallows against a wave of nausea, panting to stave it off.

“What's happened? Why am I...? You said Toisie... is okay!”

“And he is. You, however, are not. You are running a low but persistent fever and your circulatory system is out of balance, which is why you are experiencing dizziness, nausea and weakness among other things. This, Nick, is your body telling you that it has been pushed far beyond its limit.”

“My baby?”

Nick is pale, his skin clammy with cold sweat. Renard has already told him but he needs reassurance that Toisie really is okay and will stay that way no matter what is happening to his own body right now. Sean's hand on his chest goes from restraining to comforting in a single motion, thumb rubbing over his sternum lightly.

“Your boy is going to be okay as long as you take it easy. Your doctor has ordered bed rest, hearty, healthy meals, as much sleep as you can get and no. stress. at. all.”

Even in face of the zauberbiest's admonishment Nick emits a small groan. He feels like total crap, tired to his very bones and dizzy even when he only lets his gaze dart around and still he could cry from relief, because at least his baby isn't hurt.

“Your injuries are healing well. There's something to be said for a Grimm's regeneration abilities. Now, Rosalee has brought by a tea to help alleviate your symptoms. I will brew a cup for you and then it is something to eat.”

“'m not sure tha's good. Not hungry, an'way.”
Renard pins him with a stern look.

“The matter of food is not up for negotiation. If I remember correctly, we have established that taking care of your unborn means taking care of yourself.”

>>> 

By the time Sean returns with the mug Nick is almost asleep again and he cannot fault him. He calls out to him, anyway, knowing that it is necessary for him to eat.

“Come on, Nick, wake up. You and your baby need nourishment now.”

Nick blinks his eyes open, taking inordinately long to regain full consciousness. The half-zauberbiest watches it with concern but also with resolve strengthening in regard to what he has vowed to himself when sitting by the Grimm's bedside.

While watching over him like he has promised, Sean has decided that he won't let Nick hide his problems anymore. To become as sick as he is now, he must have been severely stressed and tired out for months. He hasn't told them, not the worst stuff, anyway. Of course, there have been snippets of evidence: Their conversation in his office months back, falling asleep at work, being quieter and more restless. Definitely this hasn't been a one time occurrence. His fallout with Juliette may have been the last stroke but this has been going on for much longer. If the zauberbiest were to take an educated guess, he would say ever since his night with Adalind....

But that's for later. He has a pregnant Grimm to feed.

He can see Nick is trying to stay awake now and be it only for the sake of his child.

“Yes, that's good. Stay with me. After food and drink you can go back to sleep.”

He helps him sit up with gentle efficiency.

This is not good! Oh, fuck.... Everything hurts and....

Nick gasps when nausea rolls over him. He makes a strangled sound and before he knows it he is heaving into a bucket, supported by Renard. His vision white-washes at some point throughout. He loses track of time, coming back up drenched in sweat and slumped against his Captain like a puppet with its strings cut. At least the cool cloth reappears, pressed to his forehead as he is held. Violent shivers wrack his body. Nausea has not yet subsided but there is simply nothing left to come up.

“Easy. It is going to pass. Here is a bit of water. Just rinse your mouth for now.”

Only when he hears those words does he realize that he must have made a sound. He has no time to
feel embarrassed, though, as a glass is held to his lips and cool liquid trickles into his mouth. He leans to the side to spit it back out, trusting Renard to have the bucket ready. After that he is guided back to rest against that solid, warm chest.


They stay like this until Nick is feeling less like he is going to pass out.

“A bit better now?”

“Hmm.” He knows that nodding would be a very bad idea.

“Good. Then let's see how tea agrees with you. It is going to help.”

Nick is a bit wary but takes a small sip. Both hold their breath but thankfully it stays down. Emptying the whole mug is a slow process which the Captain sees through with the boundless patience of a true chess player.

“Thanks.” Nick mumbles, actually feeling a tiny bit better, and slipping off to sleep even before Sean can answer.

It seems food will have to wait, after all.

He lowers him back to lie down on his side, deep worry creasing his features. The doctor has said this is normal in the beginning. Strain of the pregnancy in itself, months of unnecessary stress and, of course, the latest trauma have pushed his circulatory and nervous system out of the loop, resulting in this. It unsettles and angers the zauberbiest.

He would like nothing more than to have a few moments alone with Juliette Silverton, showing her just what he thinks about her mistreatment of his Grimm, but he has more important things to take care of....

Like the pregnant man lying in this bed.

>>> 

The next time Nick drifts up he manages to drink a small bowl of thick broth and another mug of tea. He isn't feeling much better but at least he is more clear-headed. Renard has been there from the very beginning helping him... or maybe he has never left. Upon waking the Grimm has found him standing by the window, watching over him like a silent sentinel. The tall, imposing zauberbiest has been gazing out of the window, expression somewhere between contemplative and troubled as if a thousand thoughts chased one another in that brilliant mind.

It should have been unsettling... the thought that the Royal has been there the entire time. It isn't. Nick remembers bits and pieces of the night before – hazy snippets in a thick fog, yet edged into his memory. Stuck there along with demons conjured back up all too easily. Thinking about those hurts deeply; remembering Renard's words does not. They have been soothing, calming... have enabled him to let his guard down for a bit.
He has promised to protect them as long as Nick is unable to do so on his own and, inexplicably, he believes him. Renard has meant what he has said. He has realized that deep within his Grimm had been screaming and going up the walls to protect his unborn child. He has made it better.

Nick isn't sure how to tell the man how much that means to him but he resolves to try as soon as he isn't feeling like he's been recently chewed out by an ogre.

With one memory comes another one, though.

Remembering Juliette, remembering what she has done and what would have happened had it not been for that usually distanced, often uncaring half-zauberbiest, who has done everything to help them.

Sean's hand on his naked stomach, slipped underneath the remains of his torn shirt. Warm, protective energy countering pain and contractions. Being held, rocked in his arms even.

All that blood, stemming – as he knows now – from multiple cuts and wounds.

He looks down on his bandaged hands and arms, curling himself around his large baby belly and hugging it, shuddering violently as he realizes how damn close he has come to losing his child.

Sean perceives a change of atmosphere at once. Nick has been resting after his meal, nestled under thick blankets and almost dozing off again. Then something has happened. He has looked up at him once with such warmth in his gaze, that it had secretly taken his breath away. He has hidden his reaction, ignored it even, yet he cannot keep his heartbeat from quickening to almost match that of Nick's baby. Traitorous body. For a few moments the Prince has allowed himself to entertain lighter thoughts, that may or may not have revolved around a growing infatuation with the genuine man across from him, but then everything has changed:

Nick has closed his eyes, expression flickering in pain, and then he has curled up on his side into a tight ball around his baby bump. The zauberbiest has instantly been alarmed, thoughts going back to that night in Nick's home when he has been gripped by contractions all of a sudden.

"Nick. What is the matter?!"

Hearing not his usual smooth tone but a question rough with emotion, has Nick snap his eyes back open to look up into the very concerned face of his Captain. It takes him a moment to place what's going on, then he uncurls slightly, going so far as to place a hand on Sean's where it is resting on the bedspread.

"Sorry. I didn't want to scare you, Sir. It's nothing... I mean... I was just remembering things from last night and realizing... what would have happened, if you hadn't been there."
Sean's expression softens like Nick has seen only once before. The hand under his own shifts, grips his in return and squeezes gently.

“It... (a deep breath, wholly unusual for the always composed man)... it hasn't happened. Your child is unharmed and you are on your way of getting there as well. You are both here and safe now. That is what matters.”

Nick nods with a small, tired smile.

“Thanks. Really... I cannot say how much.... Just thank you.”

“It's okay. No thanks needed. I'm glad you two are okay. Why don't you rest for a bit, hmm? God knows you need it. You are still feverish and looking far too peaky.”

“Yes, Sir. Whatever you say, Sir, although I'll have you know that I am not peaky but rather nobly pale. As a Prince you should know the difference.”

Sean's amused smirk shows his appreciation for Nick's attempt at humor more clearly than any words can.

With a final nod he gets up to leave Nick to reacquainting himself with his baby boy. Turning by the door to look back he catches a glimpse of him sliding his hands gently over his belly, murmurung soft things to his unborn child and shedding a few silent tears for what they have gone through.

He retreats to the living room then, to give his Grimm the rest and privacy that he needs, and is able to truly relax for the first time since taking Nick from that hellhole of a place.

When he looks in on him late that same evening, he finds him lying on his side, whole body curled protectively around his large womb, and deeply asleep.

He steps over now, leans down to adjust blankets, feels his forehead and dabs his face and neck with a damp cloth again. All this comes natural to him and is done without a conscious thought. Trivial matters like pride, distance or the nature of their relationship have slid into the background the moment Nick has called him to his home that night, frantic and injured.

No, that is not true. It has become unimportant the moment the Grimm has appeared on his doorstep telling him about his pregnancy.

Chapter End Notes

Cannot believe that this spanned only one night and one day! Oh well, they had much to work through.
Chapter 4

Chapter Notes

Let me tell you: This chapter fought being written harder than a cat about to be put in a transport box... and if you are now imagining a wildly trashing, yowling cat you have it exactly right!! Whew!
Anyway, this is a chapter of hugs, realizations and mutual pining.
Much less angsty than the others.
Here you go!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter 4:

Nick's recovery is slow but steady. He sleeps almost all the time – and one should think that would improve his condition pretty fast. Well, it doesn't. Not by far, anyway. Nick tries to be patient but all too soon he is thoroughly fed up with getting dizzy and feeling crappy every time he sits up. Worse still, is needing someone to help him with the most basic things like making his way to the loo or dressing. A pretty big part of that is owed to his many smaller and larger injuries but it is also that bone deep exhaustion and completely crazy way, in which his body is acting up.

Now it's early morning of his fourth day in Renard's house, it is the first time he has managed to make his way into the kitchen without aid and he's just had a breakfast of such epic proportions, that it would have been fit to feed a whole army with. He hasn't managed everything, not even after he has persuaded the zauberbiest to eat one or the other bit, but at least he has tried.

That Renard has taken the day off just to drive him to an appointment with his doctor isn't sitting any better with him than Rosalee or Monroe giving up their days to stay with him in case he needs help. It has been like that for the last two days. First Rosie has been there and then Monroe, now it is Renard again, who is making time for him in his no doubt busy schedule.

Really, he doesn't want to be a bother. He could just have taken a taxi and be done with it. Every time he touches on the matter, though, the zauberbiest silences him with a reproachful stare and so Nick gives in despite his guilty conscience.

>>>>

“Really, this is getting ridiculous”, Nick complains as he is guided to the car by Sean.
It seems that leaving bed, washing himself, eating and walking the nearly non-existent distances between rooms has sapped his strength so far that he is almost ready to collapse again. His frustration knows no bounds but as always Renard isn't daunted by it. He just pins him with a hard stare and snaps out:

“No, ridiculous is when a grown woman keeps up your stress levels over the course of months, injures you out of spite and pushes you into a severe collapse by acting like a total bitch!”

Nick stops short and can only stare dumbfounded. Neither has he heard the man ever call anyone a bitch, no matter the situation, nor has he expected this level of anger simmering in the always controlled 'biest. Renard just glares back, daring him to deny it or defend Juliette. Nick doesn't answer but he also doesn't find a single shred in himself, that wants to jump to his former fiance's defense. The Prince acquits his silence with a curt nod.

Clearly this is all he has to say on the matter.

>>> 

City life is busy today, many people are out and about. They have to walk some distance because there hasn't been a single empty parking space near Cransbury's practice. The walk is a struggle for Nick, but he won't stand for Sean helping him and this time the zauberbiest respects his wishes. He knows his bit about pride and about keeping up appearances in public and will interfere only if the Grimm asks him to. Still he keeps close watch. Nick is already tired and not getting any better the farther they go. He hides it well, Police training enables him to, but his increasing pallor is a dead give away all on its own.

He manages to plow on until they reach their destination – an act of strong will rather than actually possessing the strength to do so, Sean knows – but as soon as the door closes behind them and he finds his immediate vicinity devoid of onlookers, he all but collapses. Sean is there in an instant, catching him around the waist and keeping him upright.

Nick is breathing heavily, brow dotted with perspiration and unnatural heat is coming off him, no doubt from the fever he is still running. Sean's inner 'biest goes up the walls in anxiety, is barely kept in check under a calm facade.

This level of concern is irrational! Get a grip! You are a Prince, the ruler of a canton and you have killed men without a second thought. You should be able to view this with an ounce of detachment!

The receptionist doesn't miss a beat and motions them right through to a room with a bed, where Sean guides his Grimm to lay down. Nick is uncomfortable and embarrassed but he cannot deny
that he needs it.

“Sorry.” A low mumble.

“Don't be. Just rest for a bit.”

He nods and closes his eyes with a sigh even while Renard helps him out of jacket and trainers. Nick could kick himself for being unable to do it himself but there isn't any strength left. It is as simple and frustrating as that.

Sean is aware that he feels guilty about taking up their time, but he vows to nib that in the butt, should it ever threaten to hinder his recuperation.

For now he takes a seat in a chair next to the bed to watch over his pregnant Grimm. He is pale and sickly looking again. This isn't good. The longer he watches the more he has to fight for control over his primal side.

*Damn it! Since when do I have problems mastering my wesen side? This is ridiculous!*

His zauberbiest is out for blood, gnashing its teeth, yearning to main those responsible. And doesn't he know all too well, who that is? One is the mother of his own child, which makes tearing her to shreds something of an impossibility. Miss Silverton however.... No difficulties there, at least where the 'biest is concerned and the Police Captain silenced.

He pushes all those thoughts back into the deepest recesses of his mind, aiming for calm and keeping a cool head.

*Easier said than done. This impossible man drives me to distraction.*

His gaze strays back to his Detective, fitfully dozing, tense and far from healed even after four days. He cannot help lingering, keeping watch. It is like that first night all over again. Guarding his Grimm and his sleep is the only thing that keeps him from going crazy. The door opens, Sean perceives this even without looking. He has risen to his feet and moved in front of his Grimm before the other person has fully entered, his mere stance warning anyone to lay a hand on him. Nick is instantly awake as well, alert despite crushing tiredness and prepared to protect what's his.

It is Dr. Cransbury and the Welsh man regards them with a quiet, knowing smile that makes the sensible part of Renard reel back to reestablish a calm facade least his feelings be exposed and used against him.
So much for control. Damn it, Sean. What is the matter with you? Oh well, you know it, don’t you? You are a possessive bastard and in the books of a zauberbiest possessing means protecting at all costs. Not that it would ever be possession. Not with independent, strong willed Nick Burkhardt.

...As if you would ever want to possess him.... It would mean destroying what you love most about him. Love...? Like... definitely like....

Focus, Sean!

Taking a deep breath that not even the perceptive doctor can spot, the Captain inclines his head in greeting and retreats to the background to let him do his work.

>>> 

Owen Cransbury has never been a complicated man. He has a wife and children, that he dearly loves, and he finds great joy in his work and patients.

And the Grimm? Oh, it's safe to say that he's held great fondness for the genuine young man from the very beginning.

Seeing him here together with the imposing Captain and noticing a few things those two are unaware of, makes him a very happy man, indeed. All is going to be well, given a bit of time and maybe some life changing insights.

>>> 

Sean watches from the sidelines as Nick and the doctor interact. It is amusing to watch how easily Cransbury handles him, reassuring where needed and gently shushing him, when Nick is unduly straining himself. During it all the doctor takes his pulse, feels his forehead and studies him closely without interrupting their conversation even once.

When he proposes that Nick should sleep for a bit while he takes an appointment with another waiting couple, the ruler of Portland holds his breath.

He expects protest but it seems even his stubborn Grimm has to concede that he won't make it through his examination without falling asleep. With a fond expression the doc helps Nick settle down further before coming over to him and inquiring about the last few days. Sean answers his questions honestly and for once without reserve.
“Seeing that this may take a while, shall we call you when it is time to fetch Nicholas or do you want to wait up?”

Sean briefly considers the question.

In all honesty, even if he had pressing matters to attend, his 'biest would never let him leave the Grimm's side right now. He has long since stopped questioning his fierce protectiveness, at least not since the night he has found Nick, traumatized and with his life in shambles.

“Thank you, Doctor, but I will simply wa....”

“No need to. We can do the examination now! Really, it's okay.”

Neither of them has expected Nick to be awake and least of all to attempt sitting up in his state. Nonetheless both has happened. He is even paler than before and visibly shaking, yet there is iron determination gleaming in his eyes. Apparently making his superior wait just because he isn't strong enough to go through his appointment now, is where his tolerance ends. It goes in line with each and any of his guilty thoughts and, frankly, he is quite through with being a bother! Also he is a Grimm, for God's sake, and not about to let an episode of weakness defeat him.

Well, Nick hasn't reckoned with Renard's opinion on the matter.

Seeing his Grimm like this – weakened and still stupidly insisting on acting strong – makes the last of his control snap! He is not sure, what he has just revealed to the doctor, but he knows, that he makes it to Nick's bedside in less than three strides and has him pressed back to the bed and pinned with an unholy glare, before anyone can even twitch.

Over the course of the last days he has found this man in a heap on the floor, injured and emotionally shattered, he has saved his unborn child through ancient magic, held him while countless glass shards have been pulled out of his body and sat by his bedside when finally fitful sleep has claimed him!! He has seen day by day what results the Grimm's penchant for suffering silently has born. The sickness, the pure emotional hurt. He might not know what has transpired between Nick and Juliette but he knows damn well, that he will no longer stand for Nick putting others' needs above his own!

“Listen to me, Nick. You will do nothing of the sort! You will rest now and quit kicking up a fuss. In case you have forgotten, it hasn't even been a week since you've nearly lost your unborn child and I will be damned, if I let you undo it all now, because of some misplaced guilt on your part! Is that understood?!”

His Detective looks as if Sean has just punched him in the gut – and a distant part of the Prince's brain recognizes that – but the need to instill some sense into him outweighs everything else right now.

Nick cannot answer, words stuck in his throat. Renard looks positively livid! He won't let him off the hook, gaze smoldering and obviously waiting for something. His heavy, large hand hasn't left his shoulder or stopped pinning him to the mattress either. Nick expects, considering all else, to
feel threatened. He doesn't. It isn't what pushes him to the brink of tears.

*I am such a bloody fool! Of course he is right. I have endangered my child yet again just because of my stupid stubbornness. I have vowed to protect my little one and still I am failing him over and over.*

“Nick.” His tone is cold and clipped in a way Nick has not heard in a long time. It makes it all so much worse. Knowing that the Captain won't let this go before he's gotten a verbal answer, he swallows thickly and whispers: “Yes, Sir.”

“Good. Now rest. You need it.”

Nick curls up on his side without meeting anyone's gaze. He is too ashamed to do so. He has mucked things up yet again. It's testament to his overall exhaustion that sleep claims him, anyway.

Once he is sure that Nick will do as he is told and he has collected himself again, the Prince turns back to the doctor. He expects to find those keen, brown eyes regarding him with reproach but there is none. Only a kind of understanding that – for Sean's liking – goes far too deep.

“Why don't we leave Nicholas to rest and move to the adjoining room for a moment?”

Sean gives a tight nod and follows the older man, but only after glancing over at his Grimm's prone form one last time. Cransbury is friendly enough when he gestures him into a seat opposite of his own, nonetheless Sean feels the need to apologize. Normally such blatant loss of control is well beneath him, but he cannot help it when he feels Nick is threatened.

“I apologize, Doctor. It wasn't my intention to snap. I merely wanted to ensure that Nick's undue feelings of guilt are not causing a setback in his recuperation.”

Small crinkles appear around his eyes as the Welsh man studies him with fondness, that Sean cannot find a single reason for. Cransbury seems to be well aware of his consternation as his eyes are truly alight with mirth now. The half-zauberbiest cloaks himself in impassiveness and waits for the other man to go on.

“No harm done. It is good to know that he has someone to look out for him. Just keep in mind, that all this isn't easy for him either. From what I have learned of him so far, he would sooner cut off a proverbial limb than burdening others with what he perceives are his problems and his alone.”

The good doctor has hit the nail on the head.

“No matter that his attitude may worry those around him, it cannot be easier for him to accept help than it is for a proud, independent man like you, Captain.”
He might have a point there and he might have a deeper knowledge of my character than I would like.

He considers how that makes him feel and what it might mean for him and finds to his great surprise, that tolerates the man. He might even go so far as to say he likes and trusts him to some extent. He has to, doesn't he? Otherwise he would never leave him in charge of Nick and his child. Shying away from what that says about him and his feelings for the Grimm, he finally answers and be it only to distract himself:

“I am aware that this isn't easy for him, far from it actually, but I have been with him when he nearly suffered miscarriage, and I had to make him see that his guilty conscience about taking up our time is unfounded. I did not in any way want to imply the he is a bad father. He may be stubborn and infuriating at times but he does care about his child deeply.”

“Oh I know that. Just make sure that Nicholas does, too, will you? Now, I have to go and see my other patients while we give Nicholas a chance to regain some of his boundless energy.”

“He is quite energetic, isn't he?” Sean murmurs mostly to himself just as Cransbury leaves the room.

>>> 

Silently he returns to Nick’s bedside, sinking into the chair and staring at the pregnant man for a long time. After a fierce inner debate he finally gives in and places his own hand over Nick’s, where it is resting on the bed in a loosely curled fist.

He looks more vulnerable than Sean would ever want to see him – not because he perceives it as weakness, but because he cannot bear to see him suffer any more after all he has been through.

Oh well, there is nothing for it. Finally admit it, you fool: You have hopelessly fallen... in love with him.

Once thought he can no longer deny it. This is more than just an interest in Nick's well being, this desire to protect, to nurture... and to be near him. These are urges wholly new to the reserved zauberbiest yet he cannot shake them off. Nick has well and truly gone under his skin. He sighs heavily and only permits himself to do so in the knowledge that nobody is privy to his moment of weakness.

Be that as it may, there is no chance that what you desire will ever come to pass. He is straight, he has just been deeply hurt by the woman he loved and, honestly, considering that you are the same wesen as the one, who has brought on this whole disaster, how could he ever love you?
Well, how could he, indeed? It's hopeless.

With difficulty he detaches himself from all those foreign feelings crowding his chest, ignoring memories of Nick looking up at him as if he were a life line or of relaxing in his arms after hours of emotional wreckage.

I really need to get a grip! I am not helping Nick to woe him over, I am doing this because I care about him as a fair Grimm and as a good Detective! It is as simply as that. No need to get sentimental.

It is what Sean desperately tries telling himself, but this time not even his iron control can lock away his feelings.

>>> 

Upon waking up Nick needs a moment to gather his bearings. He frowns even before he’s fully there. His hand has been warm but now there is a rush of cool air, a feeling of loss. He cannot explain it, shrugs it away.

When he’s alert enough to remember what’s happened before, he turns his flaming face into the pillow to hide from the world - even if it is only for a moment. There isn’t much chance to hide, though, is there? He’s instantly aware that Renard is with him in the room. It isn’t his scent or even a sound he makes… he is aware of his very presence.

Nick expects awkwardness... reproach maybe. Renard is well able to hold a grudge and let you know it with one cold gaze. And considering how bad he’s mucked up things earlier, it doesn’t take a genius know the man’s mind.

„Feeling better now, hmm?“

The question is posed in such a soft tone that Nick’s head snaps up from his hiding place despite his best intentions. He must look really stupid but he cannot help staring wide eyed, especially as there are small crinkles of a barely hidden smile around the Royal’s eyes.

„Done hiding?“

„I… umm…“

He looks back down, hoping for earth to swallow him whole.

„Will you answer my initial question now? Against popular belief I didn’t ask only to hear myself speak.“

That may be a Captain typical reprimand but his tone is still nowhere near the business like one he uses at work… or when pissed with someone. In the end it encourages him to face the man sitting at his bedside.
„Yes…. I’m feeling… much more like myself.“

This is accompanied by ducking his head for what feels like the thousandth time since waking up. He sits up and draws his knees toward himself as much as his enlarged belly allows. On the edge of his vision he perceives Renard leaning back in the chair, crossing his arms and content to wait.

„You know, I am not going to rip off your head.“

There’s amusement in his tone and, upon looking, even a tiny bit in his face, so Nick lets his shoulders slump and replies:

„After earlier I wasn’t so sure.“ Even while saying this he feels heat creep back into his neck.

Renard sighs, leans forward and then there is a large hand resting on his neck. It actually feels cool in comparison to his flaming skin. None of them takes note any more, that Renard has waited, if Nick would draw away, before placing his hand there. Of course the Grimm has been aware, has had enough time to do so, yet he hasn’t moved a muscle.

„Nick. My words may have been harsh but what I wanted to impress upon you is, that none of us minds helping you or spending time to be there for you. None of us is thinking you weak or presumptuous, you know?“

„I know that. I… I just didn’t want to be a bother and then… I botched things again.“

There’s a humming noise from the zauberbiest, touch never wavering, soothing him.

„To be honest….“ Nick tenses under his hand in anticipation of what is to come. Another sigh from the always controlled Royal.

„To be honest, every one of us is relieved beyond measure that you are slowly getting better. I know what your intentions are and that you fear taking up too much of our time, but how about you simply let us fuss over you and your boy for a bit… just to reassures ourselves that you are truly going to be okay despite recent events?“

Nick couldn’t have been more surprised.

*The Captain worried? Okay. The Captain feeling the need to fuss over me? To reassure himself of my continued health?*

When Nick looks up, his eyes are swimming with tears.

*Stupid hormones!*

He forces himself to look into the man’s eyes, anyway. Renard deserves as much and seeing those aristocratic features for once stripped of their barriers makes it a little bit easier.
Okay. I’ll try to… let you fuss. (A weak smile, shadow of his normal mischievous one.) Thank you, you know. For helping and… caring and all that you’ve all done ever since all that crap has started."

His voice is rough with emotion and reveals entirely too much but suddenly that’s not important anymore. Renard has made it better just by being there as he has done for a long time now. Nick realizes that and it makes his heart thunder in his chest and his stomach flutter.

"It was no…."

Before he can finish that sentence, there is a knock on the door and Dr. Cransbury quietly enters the room. Renard’s hand slips away from his neck and Nick feels its loss all too clearly.

"Nicholas, I see you are already up and about. Feeling better?"

"Yes, I am. Thank you for making the time for me so that I could rest."

This time there is only a light flush coloring the Grimm’s cheeks.

"No problem at all. What you think, shall we see how your little one is doing now?"

A small smile plays around the doctor’s features as he stands by his bedside, hands stuffed comfortably in his lab coat pockets and studying his patient with a keen gaze.

"Yes, please. I’ll sleep much better once I know that he really didn’t take any damage from… what has happened."

>>> An hour later Owen has done a full check up of man and baby and can attest at least Toisie with a clean bill of health.

"I will not keep the fact from you that latest events have done quite a number on your body. You will fully recover but you need to give yourself time and rest. You shouldn't return to work until Monday at the earliest and even then I would like you to come in for a last check up beforehand to make sure you are fully recuperated."

"Okay. No problem, I'll come by on Monday. As long as my baby is okay I am willing to do a lot of things."

"Good. I will see you on Monday morning then. If anything is the matter before then, don't hesitate to call or come by.”

Nick nods but with a distracted air, letting the Welsh man know there's still a matter on his mind. He waits patiently for the Grimm to say what's bothering him.

"I have a question pertaining my pregnancy that recent events - namely my near miscarriage - have raised. When the time for birth has come, how do you wager my child will get out? I mean it's not like I have… a hole like women do, you know?"

He trails off, facial color that of a ripe tomato.
,,Hmm, frankly I have wondered about that as well. There is always the possibility of doing a cesarean but some of your male ancestors have born children long before such methods have ever come into play, so there has to be a natural way. What that might be, sadly I know as little about as you do."

,,Hmm. Yeah, I feared that. Not that it is your fault. It isn’t every day you have a pregnant male Grimm in your practice....."

Nick frowns in thought, trained mind already going over possibilities.

,,Do you maybe have a relative, who you can ask? I take it, this isn’t common knowledge even among your kind but maybe someone knows something."

,,There aren’t many of us left but I will try and find out."

,,See that you do that while I will look into the matter myself and search for anything useful."

>>> 

They bid farewell to each other not long after that. The Grimm and his Captain take their leave, Nick deep in thought and Sean content to let him be. Knowing that child and father are as well as can be expected, is enough to appease both Sean's sentient and his primal side for now.

>>> 

Nick has much time on his hands and still needs it to recover. No matter how tedious that may be, it also gives him time to concentrate on his little baby boy. Dr. Cransbury has told him that by now the little one can differentiate sounds, taste whatever Nick has eaten (And isn't that a mind boggling thought?) and has a well developed tactile sense, which he uses for touching and playing with about any part of his own little body that he can get his hands on. It has thoroughly amused Nick when he has been told and it occupies his waking moments now, when he places his hands on his large belly and talks softly to that tiny living being within.

One time he has done so, only to hear the Captain chuckling, leaning against the door frame and watching him. At being caught staring the man has tried to appear all dignified and not amused but even sleepy Nick can read him very well by now.

When he has told Renard that he feels twitches in his belly every time Toisie has the hiccups from drinking his fill on amniotic fluid, he has even smiled a little bit.
Hank has fetched him extra early and is relieved when Nick comes out of Cransbury's office saying that they can drive right on to precinct. Nonetheless Hank keeps throwing him worried glances, that he thinks Nick doesn't see. Well, he does and not a week earlier he would have snapped at his partner to quit being a mother hen. He keeps quiet this time, because no matter how much Hank's behavior exasperates him, the Captain's words won't leave him.

*How about you let us fuss over you and your boy for a bit?*

Renard has been worried and openly admitted to it. It's something Nick would never have expected from a reclusive, often suspicious man like him, who has grown up in the knowledge that showing feelings unerringly leads to being exploited. Knowing this makes him cherish the Captain's actions even more. Curious warmth spreads through his chest and without his notice a soft smile steals onto his lips.

“Hey, Mr. Dreamy. You gonna continue day dreaming with that besotted smile on your face or are you going to answer my question?”

“Err, sorry. Which question? I was busy being besotted.” Nick snipes right back, to which Hank heaves a theatrical sigh.

“Do you wanna snatch breakfast on the way or make do with what we have at the station?”

“Are you thinking about the bakery where that cute brunette works, which you've been pining over for the last weeks?”

Hank goes for looking nonchalant… and fails.

“Have you finally asked her out? You've had a whole week without me there to steal your show. Have you used it well?”

Normally Hank would have scowled at that, but it is so good to see Nick well again – and with that teasing smile no less – that he let's the comment slide.

“Just so you know, I haven't been pining and I could have asked her any time, no matter if my boy wonder partner had been with me or not.”

“So you haven't yet?”

Now the Afro-American scowls for true, grumbling:

“You are paying for coffee.”

“Hey, I don't even drink coffee anymore.”

“That's your business, partner. You're still paying for coffee and for whatever it is you drink these days.”
They are driving to a crime scene when Nick's phone rings. Fishing it out of his jeans pocket – a feat made rather difficult by an ever growing baby bump – he takes it up without looking at the caller id.

“Burkhardt?”

“Locking me out of my own house? Are you out of your mind?!”

Every muscle in his body tenses at hearing her angry shout.

“Juliette.” Her name feels like dust on his tongue. Beside him Hank's grip on the steering wheel tightens.

“Who do you think it would be? In case you have forgotten, my things are in that house! You cannot keep me away from that. Destroying everything we had wasn't enough, was it? Now you...!”

“Juliette, are you sure you want to go there? If I were you, I would tread carefully. Anyway, I cannot deal with you right now, I am working a case. I will text you time and place. Be there or not, I don't care. And do not call again.”

Nick hangs up before she can reply. Hank throws him another worried sideways glance. To be honest, he is mightily proud of his partner for holding it together and taking the wind out of her sails like that. Despite emotional trauma he has acted like the trained professional he is.

Oh, revulsion and fear are there alright, but right now it's all kept under lock and key. In his partner's book there are more important matters than being drowned by negative emotions.

Hank knows that brooding expression. It's the one they only ever get to see, if Nick is truly pissed at someone for laying hand on those he cares for. Hank can certainly identify with that. He pulls up on the curb to hold the upcoming conversation without needing to focus on the road. Nick rubs his hands over his face tiredly.

“You okay, man?”

“Hmm. Not really. Honestly, I know that legally I have no right to keep her from entering the house as long as I cannot file an official complaint, which is impossible because of the whole wesen aspect, but I really don't know what I would do, if I met her now. It wouldn't involve cowering away in fear, that's for sure.”

Steel underlines his words while in an unconscious gesture his hands curve around his invisible baby belly.

Oh yes. Nick might be disturbed by what has happened with Juliette but by hurting his unborn child
she's gone one step too far. It has taken some time to register but now that she's provoked this Grimm's protective side, she had better watch it.

“Want me to do it?”

Despite the situation Nick finds reluctant humor within himself.

“Putting it like that you sound like we're planning murder.”

“Well, she hasn't endeared herself to me, that's for sure. But no, I'll just be keeping watch. And you have to admit, I am more than qualified for the job. I have experiences with three ex-wives to draw back on.”

It is a true testament to how shaken his friend really is, when there's no protest at all.

“Would you really do that?”

“Sure, I would. Any thoughts on the when?”

Nick is visibly struggling with himself.

“Would it be egoistic to say, today after our shift has ended?”

“Not at all. Would want to be done with it soon as possible as well. Nothing wrong with that.”

“Thank you, Hank. Honestly. Just... thank you.”

“No problem. Now what do you think: Crime scene then lunch?”

Nick's sardonic grin is nearly as bright as usual.

“Sounds spectacular. Oh how glad I am to be past 'morning' or rather 'any time of the day' sickness. Makes being homicide Detective so much easier.”

>>>

Nick is sitting in his truck, staring broodily through the windshield at aunt Marie’s trailer. Rage boils beneath a paper thin layer of forced control. It has been simmering all day, ever since Juliette’s phone call in the morning. Even after a week to distance himself it has taken only a one phone call for it all to come back. His mind is going in circles: Her hurtful words. All that she’s done. To think that he has loved her all this time and just like that she has exploited all his weaknesses to hurt him as deeply as possible.

At the thought of what could have happened to his beloved baby control gives way to an overwhelming urge to wreck damage! He needs an outlet or he may well end up hurting someone. Worst thing is: Every single time he looks down on his well rounded belly - instead of growing calmer like he normally does - that simmering rage swells to something fierce and primal, that is entirely fueled by the urge to protect and avenge his baby.
Hank is meeting Juliette just now and Nick has told him, he would drive to the trailer to look for information and that they should regroup tomorrow morning at work, so there is time….

… Time to find an outlet for his pent up frustration!

He exits his car, stomps over to the trailer and fetches a big ax. It is either this or screaming or possibly hurting someone. Rushing back outside, weapon hefted in his right hand, he looks around in search of something....

There! The huge carcass of a dead tree, felled by some storm most likely, and perfect for his purpose. He steps up to it, rolls his shoulders and raises the ax. A roar, a mighty downward strike, a deep cleave chopped into the tree trunk before him. He rips it back out, repeats the process, lets out another angry roar.

Damage dealt, pent up frustration beginning to break loose.

Nick does this over and over again! Movements become natural, advance in intricacy. One should think navigating a heavy weapon around a 5 1/2 months baby bump is difficult but a Grimm is born to fight. He compensates.

He begins to sweat in earnest now, sheds his jacket, keeps hacking away at the dead wood. One thought chases another. Memory after memory. Yes, this is bringing out his frustration, his bottled up emotions, but it also re-opens each and every emotional wound.

>>>  

Hank leans against the wall outside of Nick's front door waiting for Juliette. He doesn't have to wait long. She gets out of her car, spots him, freezes and scowls. All this happens in the blink of an eye, a simile to her relationship with Nick, really: Steadily going downhill, faster than anyone could have fathomed.

*Going philosophical now? Better get this over with.*

Hank sighs inaudibly.

*It's still a shame.*

She stalks up to him, appraising him with her head tilted to the side just so. Just like when everything has still been okay... when she's still been their friend.

“Hank. Has Nick not even had the guts to face me? That's pathetic, especially considering that he’s exchanged the damn locks.”

The broad-shouldered Detective just crosses his arms in front of his chest.
He's had three ex-wives, he should have expected this yet it shocks him how little he has known her. This isn't the vivacious, bright person that has been Nick's fiancé. This is a bitter woman who has hurt his friend.

He pulls up to his full height, grimly satisfied when her superior air dims.

“Shall I tell you the truth, Juliette? It has been *I* who has exchanged the locks. Think! In case you've spared him even a single glance after pushing him into that glass table, he's been covered by cuts all over. Bit difficult to go about home improvement when you're down injured and sick, don't you think?”

For a tiny moment there's a spark of regret but all to soon it is squashed down by anger and bitterness. He sees her slipping over the edge as he has with hundreds of criminals. No regret, no sense of what is right and wrong. He's saddened by it. How could they have come so far?

She opens her mouth and he knows, this is the point of no return. Instead of watching her face morph into that ugly expression of a self-absorbed person feeling unjustly slighted, he turns to unlock the door, suddenly desperate to get this over with.

“Pah! I should have known you would only see his side! Nick this, Nick that, as if he's been the victim here! No one's ever bothered to listen to my side of the story!”

He turns back to her very slowly, gaze smoldering with fury barely kept at bay.

This is rich coming from her....

Well, he's done with her spouting crap and insulting Nick.

“We would have listened to your side, you know? And we would have been glad to help, but you've lost that privilege the moment you decided to treat our friend like a piece of shit. Now, Juliette, get to it before I think too closely about what exactly you did to my partner.”

Her eyes narrow, she plays for superiority. He doesn’t give an inch and soon her act crumbles and she quickly brushes past him to enter the house. Hank's cool facade never wavers, not this time, but deep down he is angry beyond measure. She would have deserved worse than just words but he is a cop through and through and physically harming her would have gone against his morals no matter that she doesn’t seem to possess any.

>>>}

After finishing with the redhead, Hank makes a last stop at precinct to drop off a few things. Nick isn't there but that doesn't have to mean anything. After all, their shift has officially ended. His meeting with Juliette still occupies his thoughts and makes for a grim expression. People give him
Hank tells him about recent developments on the case and after a moment’s hesitation also about what’s happened with Juliette. The frown, that’s been ever present since he has strode over to him, only deepens.

„Where is Nick now?“

Renard’s tone doesn’t sit well with him. The man is not easily shaken yet he looks unsettled somehow.

„He said he would go to the trailer. Why?“

Renard's features slip into impassiveness. Hank knows that expression. The Captain is considering and planning for each possibility like the true chess master he is.

"It might not be anything out of the ordinary... just a hunch, really, but I'm going to drive out there to see, if he needs any help."

„I could accompany you, Sir.“

Renard shows the trace of a smile, appreciating the sentiment and for once showing it.

„No need to. If anything important comes up, I’ll be sure to contact you."

"I would appreciate that, Captain. And take good care of him, will you? He feels comfortable around you and no matter what he tells himself, today has shaken him."

Sean inclines his head and they exit the station together.

>>> 

On the way over forest tracks and poorly maintained roads that feeling of foreboding morphs into one of defuse dread. He cannot explain it but he needs to be near his Grimm. There’s virtually nothing pointing to anything being out of order but he knows Nick by now. He is almost sure that this time it won't be panic and helplessness, it will be anger, that has been long overdue.

>>> 

He doesn't need to search long before he spots his pregnant Detective. Oh and what a sight that is! If it had been training, if Nick weren't carrying a child, the zauberbiest would have stood mesmerized and looked his fill. Gorgeous. Skilled. Deadly.

If it hadn't been anger... no fury... poisoning Nick's thoughts and taking reason from his actions, he would have let him go on.
Sean understands him all too well, no stranger to impotent anger himself, but this isn’t good. There is no measure, no end or relief in sight. Nick Burkhardt is dealing with grief and guilt by unleashing a side of himself, that has been out for blood ever since his child has been endangered.

The only question is: How much of this can his body handle before collapsing again?

He decides to step in.

"Detective, just what do you think you are doing?"

The zauberbiest makes sure to put a good measure of authority into his demeanor and tone. As a cop Nick has been trained to obey. A certain inflection of his voice is bound to push through the chaos of his emotions.

The Grimm whirls around, staggering away from the tree trunk, eyes narrowed to mere slits and a breath away from throwing that imposing weapon right at his Captain. But Sean's estimation holds true. As soon as he perceives his stance, his unperturbed, steady gaze, that never strays from Nick's, he lowers his axe abruptly.

"Nick, what are you doing?"

His voice going softer, only by a shred.

Nick's chest rises and falls with heavy breaths, his free hand wipes over his forehead, where sweat is running down in small trails.

"Taking care to keep from hurting anyone."

Apparently he thinks this is an adequate explanation for he turns on the spot and chugs his weapon at the tree with such force that its blade embeds itself deeply into the wood. Unfazed by Sean's presence he stalks over there and wrenches it back out again, muscles rippling under his shirt as he does so.

Lips compressing into a firm line, Renard strides over to his Grimm and catches the ax by the staff before Nick's newest downward strike can gather too much speed.

They stand arrested in a silent battle, Sean's stare as unmoving as his hold on the weapon whereas Nick's sparks with anger.

"You've just been confined to bed for a week. Don't you think this is enough? I know you are angry and cannot punish the one responsible but all you are going to achieve is running yourself ragged and hurting your child."

Nick's gaze is wild when he rips his weapon out of Sean's grasp in a show of true Grimm strength.

“I don't fuckin' care!!”

He stomps away from the Prince, over to the other end of the tree, as if putting distance between
them could make his words less true.

When he wields the weapon once more, Sean allows himself a tiny moment of watching the play of muscles underneath the Grimm's thin shirt but then gets back to the matter at hand. Once again he steps in, stopping the ax in the middle of another powerful strike. This time, though, there is higher momentum behind the attack and he feels the impact all the way down to his shoulder when his hand closes around the wooden staff and arrests the blow.

Once again they freeze, Nick way beyond angry, Renard controlled. Green eyes drill into livid gray ones without so much as a twitch.

"Yes, you do."

"No I...!" Nick falters at repeating that degradation of his baby boy.

“I...”Finally he stops trying to push or wrench the weapon away, slumping a bit and letting Sean take it from him.

“I am just so fuckin' angry!”

“And I understand that but hurting yourself or worsening your state again won't make it better in the long run. It will only crank up your guilt levels should anything happen your child after all.”

Nick lets his head sink in defeat.

“Hell, I just don't know how to get rid of that bloody tight feeling in my chest. Damn it, I loved her! I tried! And... do you know what she said?”

They have never really talked about what's happened... until now. Sean remains silent, prompting him to continue with a minute nudge of his chin.

“She said, I am crazy... sick... She accused me of mugging things up between us by being a Grimm and bearing my child. She... she called my baby boy a little bastard child!!”

His tone has steadily grown more menacing, an unholy gleam coming to his eyes, hands balling up into tight fists at his sides.

“She has insulted my child!!” An angry hiss, muscles tensing, expression darkening further. Nick spins on his heel; starts pacing the clearing like a caged animal.

“She may say I messed up and be right, I don't know, but nobody... nobody...nobody calls my child a little bastard!!”

He snarls, turning back to the tree trunk, and his fist barrels forward in a powerful right hook. Renard sees where this is going: If Nick hits that tree there will be drastic damage to both man and wood. His own rage at Juliette pushes zauberbiest strength into the open and allows him to do, what is necessary:

He steps into his Grimm's path for a third time, swerves to the side minutely to avoid the flying fist and uses his momentum to clamp strong arms around his torso and spin him around. They end up in a tangle, the zauberbiest pressing the panting, roaring man to his chest and this time Sean is forced to throw all this strength into the mix to restrain his pregnant Grimm.

"Nick, let it go! I know she deserves punishment but your child does not! And that's what it will come to, if you don't stop now!!"
At hearing that, all fight leaves him and he slumps against his powerful biest with a sound, half roar half sob.

Sean holds him tight... holds him up.

"Shhh. I know she has hurt you. I know it, Nick."

His words are a whisper, anguish and grief a mirror image of his beloved Grimm’s.

"I tried... I didn’t know how to make it work and the thought that my... baby could be hurt in all this... but I tried...!"

"Shhh. I know. I know you did. Shhh."

At some point Sean has begun to card his fingers through his hair, unheeding of sweat and grime, focused solely on comforting his pregnant Grimm.

"She touched my stomach... to spite me... after I told her... although she knew... I was frozen to the spot... couldn't stop her. Her hands were everywhere... on my chest and... It was all back... I couldn't move... I couldn't hurt her. She knew that. She did it on pur... pose. Her expression... was just like Adalind's...."

He cannot go on, helplessly gasping for breath.

"That damn, trice cursed woman...!" He stops himself with difficulty. “I've got you now. No one is going to hurt you or your baby again. I will sooner kill them than let that happen. You are safe now."

Nick buries his face in his Captain's chest, needing and soaking up his unique scent like a drowning man needs air.

The zauberbiest for his part puts up thick walls to keep his creature in check. Deep within his mind he imagines causing bloodshed and unspeakable pain to a certain redhead, while outwardly every ounce of his sentient, feeling mind is there with his Grimm. Nick doesn't need visions of revenge right now, he needs comfort and understanding.

And there is even more: Sean hasn't known that he's needed to hear that, but Nick defending his child despite its bastard origin mends more festering wounds inside the zauberbiest than he could ever put into words. His love for this man swells to something warm and living.

>>> 

Renard takes him to his house after that. They haven't had a chance to talk about where Nick intents to stay in the future but after this the question is postponed for the time being. There is no way Sean is letting Nick return to the house where it all happened anytime soon.

Instead of putting him to bed in the guest room, he settles down with him on the sofa. Nick doesn't even protest when Renard pulls him in close and starts rubbing soothing circles on his back. On the contrary, he snuggles into his side and soaks up any comfort his biest is willing to offer.
Sean makes it better. He is his anchor when the shit in his life threatens to fling him out into rough sea.

This is safety. This is all he needs right now and Renard seems to know that.

>>> 

Things slowly get better after this. Nick goes back to work the next day and in the evening he decides to visit Monroe and Rosalee. He really needs to give Renard some space after taking up so much of his time lately. Now Rosalee and he are sitting at the kitchen table preparing ingredients while Monroe does what he likes best: cooking and throwing in snarky comments.

“How did your appointment go?”

“Cransbury was satisfied with Toisie's condition and less so with mine.” His smile is clearly on the rueful side.

“And apart from the fact that Renard went practically apoplectic on me when I didn't want to rest before my appointment, all went well. The Doctor told me a few interesting facts about my baby and we did another sonogram. I'll show you the picture later.”

Monroe represses a heartfelt 'Awww.' only barely. It wouldn't do for a self-respecting blutbad to do that.

“That's good to hear, dude, but let me tell you: I know you are trying to distract us from the 'apoplectic Captain' part. Let me guess, that one was more a case of you being a stubborn idiot and he the voice of reason?”

“Hey, I'm not always stubborn and doing idiotic things!”

Rosie chuckles. “And nobody said that. You only do that from time to time. So, why didn't you want to rest like a good boy?”

Nick takes her teasing with much more grace than he has Monroe's.

“I didn't see sense in keeping Renard waiting for me to finish napping and being examined, only because I've been a mite bit tired. Anyway, he put me back on track... in a rather spectacular fashion."

He shudders at the thought of that tongue lashing, adding under his breath:

“And I might have deserved getting my head washed.”

“Poor boy.” Rosalee coos: “But if it helps you any, he most likely overreacted because he was worried about you and your baby.”

Nick sighs.

“He kind of said that too.”

A smirk steals onto his handsome features.
“And he kind of admitted that he wanted to fuss over me... that all of you did want to, in fact.”

Now he's looking somewhere between pleased and embarrassed. The fuchsbau places her hand on his and there is love and warmth in her voice when she speaks up:

“He's been right about that, Nick. You had us all worried and taking care of you was our way of reassuring ourselves that you and your little boy would get well again.”

The Grimm blushes, at which it's Monroe's turn to smirk. He might be facing away from them but he can smell almost as much as others can see and what he smells on his friend is most intriguing, indeed. Not that he will divulge any of his insights right now. No need to scare the horses so to speak.

“Umm, apropos taking care: Renard put up with me all of last week, could I... I mean, could I sleep here tonight? I cannot bother him endlessly, you know?”

“You can't? What did you do the last three years then, when you turned up on my doorstep at ungodly hours time and time again?”

“What I did? Owing you favors, apparently, as you've repeatedly reminded me, Mr. Smartass!”

Nick shoots his friend an evil glare with no real heat behind it. Rosie shakes her head, as always quite entertained by their antics.

“Quit squabbling, boys. Now to answer your question, yes, of course, we would love to have you over. And regarding overstaying your welcome with Sean: You may not remember it but that night when you were injured, he held you cradled in his arms the entire time while we treated your wounds, so I cannot imagine it to be such a hardship for him to have you over.”

“Do you think so?”

Nick looks unsure of himself all of a sudden. She would dearly like to tell him about how much love she's seen in his eyes that night but that is something those two need to realize on their own, so she goes for casual reassurance:

“Yes. Why don't you ask him, when you next see him?”

Nick nods and resolves to talk to Renard tomorrow at work and have a nice evening with two of his best friends tonight. Nonetheless he texts the man about his whereabouts, knowing that it might not be required of him to do so, but not wanting to worry him needlessly either.

>>> 

The next day – before Nick can even decide on the when and where – the zauberbiest takes initiative of his own:

“Nick, a word, please?”

“Of course, Sir.” He follows the man into his office, wondering what he could want to discuss in private and, frankly, dreading that conversation quite a bit.
“In case you were wondering, Nick, you may stay at my house for as long as you wish.”

Nick rubs the back of his head, gaze slipping to the ground before he can stop himself.

“Uuh, yeah. I've meant to talk to you about that. Thank you for everything you have done, but I really should return to my house. I mean, I cannot bother you all the time. That just wouldn't be fair to you.”

Sean can hear that Nick’s heart isn’t in it and that makes a carefully hidden part of him rejoice. He steps up to his Detective, who won't look up at him now no matter what, and lifts the smaller man's chin with his index finger.

“I am aware that you think your continued presence would bother me. That isn't the case and I do not offer things, that I do not mean. It is no trouble for me to have you stay in my home. You are a grown man, I won't push you in one direction or the other. Just consider it as an option available to you. If you want to stay, come home to me tonight, if you want to return to your own house, do that. No matter what your decision will be, if ever anything is amiss, do not hesitate to call. Do you understand?”

“Yes, Sir, and thanks for the offer.”

Warmth and appreciation chases away embarrassment and unease. Sean answers with a small smile of his own, before nodding curtly and dismissing him to return to work.

>>> 

That evening Nick returns to his house, standing in the living room for some time just pondering what to do. This has been his home for almost five years now. It looks bereft with Juliette's things missing yet it is with relief that he perceives evidence of her disappearance. He is torn, doesn't feel comfortable here anymore and has known that even before returning. So many bad things have happened here. Goods things, too, of course, but almost all of them are tinged with painful memories now. In the end he packs a few things, exits his house, locks the door behind him and drives back to the Captain's.

Renard welcomes him with a smile, that is in his eyes instead of his lips, and an inviting gesture, commenting quietly that now he really ought to put up a sign on the door to the guestroom, reading 'Nick's room'.

The Grimm huffs a laugh and works hard to keep his eyes from misting over.

Stupid pregnancy hormones, has he mentioned that?

23.PW:

It's taken Hank and Nick a little over a week to get their facts together and develop a solid working
theory about how their latest murder has been committed and by whom. They are sitting in the quiet corner of a diner, going through what they know over a slightly healthier than normal breakfast.

“Okay. So we have John Patterson, who's died in his own garden shed after sustaining multiple slash wounds of unknown origin, the last of which has torn his throat, right?”

Nick looks over to his partner, who nods before adding his own part.

“What we know about him is the following: He is 6'3”, heavy built, most likely an alcoholic and has tuned violent against his wife and son on more than one occasion according to witness statements.”

“Myra and Neil Patterson (wife and son of the victim) are wesen called 'grazile Katze' or 'graceful cat', lynx like creatures, who have razor sharp claws but are of slight built. None of them could have overpowered the victim under normal circumstances.”

“So normally we would exclude them from our suspect list because of the difference in power, right?”

“Jep, normally we would, but of course there's nothing impossible where wesen are concerned.”

And true enough, after a few more sessions in the trailer – this time together and actually doing any research – they have found a foot note about female grazile Katzen being able to produce a longish stinger laced with narcotic poison from the middle of their hand, if caught up in a situation of great distress.

Together with Dr. Harper's comment about a small puncture wound on the side of the victim's neck and a substance of unknown organic origin in his bloodstream, it puts them on the right track.

They know almost certainly that Myra Patterson has killed her husband, but cannot prove it for obvious reasons, which leaves either letting a murderer escape or get her to confess to it on her own.

“So we have Myra, who wants to protect her 16 year old son. She kills her husband by knocking him out with poison and then slitting his throat....”

“...And now we have her son Neil admitting to murder, that he couldn't have committed without a fat load of luck, most likely to keep his mother from being prosecuted for protecting him from his asshole of a father.”

“What a mess”, Nick concludes with a sigh.

They both know Neil's confession has been an act of desperation. He has panicked when they have taken his mother in for questioning, knowing how she did it but not grasping, that legally they
cannot proof his mother's guilt because of the wesen aspect in all this. They have neither a murder weapon (as that has been her claws) nor bloodied clothes or anything similar to connect her to it. Neil doesn't know that, though, and to protect her he has fabricated a vague story about killing his father with a small garden rake, which he has thrown into Columbia River afterwards to hide his crimes.

His story is incomplete at best, but it is an official confession, so the question is: Will Myra Patterson admit to murdering her husband once she hears about her son's confession or will she let him go to jail for it?

There's only one way to find out:

They drive back to precinct and with Renard watching from behind the two way mirror they interview her once again.

Hank shuffles a sheaf of papers while Nick sits opposite of the woman regarding her steadily and without saying a word. Silence stretches on, broken only when she shows the first signs of fidgeting in agitation.

“Mrs. Patterson, we apologize for keeping you here this long. You can leave after formalities have been taken care of.”

Nick's tone is friendly enough even though his eyes tell a different story. They show her the Grimm, make her woge briefly and let her know that he is aware of so much more than your average Detective would be. She sucks in a frightened, startled breath.

“You are...!”

“Yes.” This is Hank, confirming her suspicion before she can put it into words. On the recording tape it will sound like they've merely talked about releasing her from custody. They let her stew for a bit before going on:

“You see, Ma'am, we are here to inform you, that your son, Neil, has confessed to killing his father just minutes ago and that you are, as such, no longer a suspect in this case.”

“He did what?! That cannot be true!”

“We think it is. He gave us a plausible story: He hid in the garden shed and waited for his father to come in, then he caught him by surprise and thus managed to mortally wound him with a small garden rake. Threw the tool into Columbia afterwards to hide it, he said.”

She stares at them angrily, lynx like features flickering in and out of existence, mentally cursing them for knowing about wesen and still taking that crap about a garden rake at face value.

“You know that this is not true!” She spats, keeping the growl out of her voice only by a hair's width.

“Oh, do we? What other explanation do you have and why should he admit to something he didn't do?”

Hank leans back in his seat, an epitome of calm while Nick leans forward slightly, firing up his
Grimm aura to prickle over her skin. She visibly struggles with herself.

Their message is clear: We know about you and how you did it, but we have to take your son’s confession seriously, if you don't give us reason to believe otherwise.

In the end she caves in.

“Okay, okay! Don't bring Neil into this, he hasn't killed John. It's been me!”

Nick cannot help it, he openly gasps. Even his hand twitches as if to make a movement, only to be aborted halfway through. Mrs. Patterson for her part narrows her eyes, looking at him strangely and snapping:

“What?! That's what you wanted to hear, isn't it? No need to act all surprised now! Well, anyway. It's been me. The part about the garden rake... is right. I killed him with it, not Neil. He has been to that poetry club he thought I didn't know he attended. First I wounded John with that rake a few times, on the shoulder, then his arms and then I took a last lick at the bastard's throat. He might have been an idiot with a barrel chest, arms like a gorilla and meaty fists but he's also been a fuckin', bumblin' drunk. Didn't take much to kill him in the end.”

There's no falseness in her tone now despite taking that bit about the garden rake as means to explain a crime she shouldn't have been able to commit. There is enough truth, enough hate and desperation to make it believable even by kehrseite standards.

“Well, if that is the case, you will have to tell us exactly how it all happened.”

>>> 

After finishing with her and having her led back into custody, they step into the room behind the two way mirror to discuss things with Renard.

Their Captain doesn't look entirely pleased and Nick knows exactly why that is. The raised eyebrow makes an appearance along with that piercing stare that makes you feel like a specimen under a microscope.

“Well, you got your confession but next time, Detective, cut down on the drama. You nearly blew it in there.”

Nick blushes fiercely, rubbing the back of his head and withering under Renard's unforgiving stare, before admitting:

“I know. I'm sorry. Err... actually... err... that hasn't been an act.”

The zauberbiest's eyebrow almost vanishes into his hair line, and his gaze clearly says: Do go on, this had better be good.

Nick swallows thickly before finally spilling the beans.

“I was surprised because... well, you see, Toisie just kicked for the first time ever.”

Despite Renard's frown Nick cannot keep a small, excited grin from stealing onto his face or his hand from rubbing small circles on his invisible baby bump. Renard lets his Grimm stew in
suspense for a while – fair is fair after all – before allowing his own expression to clear and even showing a shred of amusement.

“Well, congratulations to that then. Just make sure to keep it out of Police proceedings in the future. Is that clear, Detective?”

“Yes, Sir.”

As Renard steps out of the observation room both Detectives share a small grin. He stops just inside the door, however, making them freeze with a tiny bit of terror, and throws over his shoulder:

“Apart from that, good work both of you.”

When he is out of earshot both heave sighs of mighty relief and while shaking his head Hank finally comments:

“Your antics have been worthy of a true drama queen, that's for sure! Really. The way you gasped.... Only thing missing was you saying something like 'No! Really?!’.”

“Very funny, Hank. I wanna see you keep quiet when that happens for the first time ever.”

After a moment he starts chuckling himself.

“Honestly, no matter how well I know the Captain by now, being put under that stare is still creepy as shit.”

“Glad to know that even with your very charming self you don't have him wrapped around your little finger then.”

“Hey! I am... the 'p' thing. I have any right to be granted a few liberties.”

He snipes back in a low whisper, spark in his eyes belying his snappy tone.

“Whatever makes you happy, Sweetie.”

“Sweetie is going to kick your ass real fast, if you don't stop calling me that. And don't think I cannot do that despite... circumstances.”

Together they exit observation room and Hank promises treating him to his favorite brand of donuts as peace offering. Nick pretends to think about it for all of two seconds before agreeing with a large grin. Hank has the feeling that he has just been masterfully played.

24.PW:

It is another zaubertrank night. Nick is standing in front of Sean's floor length living room
windows, gazing out at distant city lights and contemplating, if he should go to the guest room while the trank wears off or if...

*No surely he wouldn't want to. It is just my baby belly. He is a man, who has fought battles since nearly before I've been born, why should he be interested in seeing how far my baby bump has grown?*

“A penny for your thoughts. Isn't that what they say?”

Nick whirls around to find the tall zauberbiest standing a few paces behind him, pose relaxed and teasing smirk softening his features.

“Errr. Oh, nothing important. Sorry. I didn't hear you come up.”

The smirk widens.

“So I have noticed. Which is why I am intrigued about what is occupying your thoughts enough for your exceptional hearing to be out of game.”

Renard tilts his head to the side just so, focusing all of his attention on Nick. Finding himself thus pinned by captivating green eyes the Grimm experiences a weird fluttery feeling in his stomach, that he cannot explain. His hand comes up to scratch the back of his head.

“It's silly. Really, nothing important.”

“Why don't you try and we see how silly or unimportant it really is?”

Nick perceives the change at once. There's still a teasing note but underlying that is strong concern. He knows the cause for that. Although he is hiding it exceptionally well, Renard is afraid that Nick is facing a serious problem again and not telling anyone. They've had a rather fierce conversation about that approximately two weeks ago.

Nick decides to spill the beans, after all. Only to reassure the Captain... not because he likes what might happen, should Sean actually say yes....

“Umm, okay. But I have warned you.”

He flounders for a few moments, mentally scolds himself and finally blurts out:

“Do you want to see? I mean, the shadowing trank is about to wear off and maybe....”

He trails off, half expecting Renard to scoff and leave the room himself in lieu of outright telling him to go elsewhere.

The man's actual response therefore surprises and secretly delights him.
“Yes, why not. Let's see what you have amounted to.”

“Hey, a lesser man might have taken that as an insult.”

There's a mischievous spark lighting up gray eyes as Nick mock glares at him.

“Show me another pregnant man and I'll gladly test the theory.”

While hiding behind nonchalant cool and teasing his Detective, Sean is secretly pleased and humbled to be allowed to bear witness to this very intimate event. He tells himself, he is only glad that Nick is working through his issues but reality is a different matter.

“Hah, you can easily say.... Oh.”

The Grimm grows silent and, smiling, looks down onto his enormous womb, which has just become visible again. No matter how often it has already happened, the change always kind of surprises and amazes him.

Sean has been about to comment but at the sight of this well rounded belly he cannot help being enchanted.

Nick goes from watching his baby bump to throwing a quick glance up at the Royal. He needn't have feared to be caught staring for Sean seems to be completely captivated by what he sees. A true smile has come to his lips, which together with tiny crinkles around his eyes is a very good look on him. If he had been with Rosie and Monroe he would have commented on how amazing this all is, but with Renard he just silently awaits his verdict. After what feels like an eternity the taller man pulls his gaze away from Nick's middle and captures his gaze.

“Given my mother's line of work, I have seen women in all stages of pregnancy. I must say, no matter if man or woman, it never looses any of its beauty.”

Nick blushes and makes to say something, but his mouth goes o-shaped instead and he looks down on his womb with a quiet smile and barely contained excitement.

“Toisie just kicked! Do you want to...?”

He breaks off, shaking his head and raising a hand in apology.

“Sorry. I forgot myself for a moment. Surely you wouldn't want to. Sorry.”

Seeing the way one of his hands rests on his belly, it is clear what Nick has been about to ask.

Sean actually does want to, but shall he give in to temptation? If he remained silent now, the offer would be forgotten and done with... easy....

Maybe it's the way Nick is holding himself, as unsure and new to this as he is, or maybe it's that curious warm feeling, that has been at home in his stomach for quite a while now....
He cannot define his reasons yet his decision is already made. He chances a glance at Nick. The Grimm isn't demanding anything of him. Refusing would be easy and the sensible thing to do.

“It is something I never had the chance to experience with Diana, so, yes, I would like to... if your offer is still on.”

“Really? You're not just saying this to...?”

Renard crosses his arms in front of his chest and raises the infamous eyebrow, that has reduced weathered politicians to stuttering fools.

“Nick, have I ever been known for saying things to indulge people? Oh, and you might as well call me Sean when we are not at work. I think what we've been through certainly warrants being on first name basis.”

A touch of positive surprise, a brilliant grin, that's almost cheeky. The Detective he knows is restored.

“Well, if you put it like that... Sean... so here you go.”

Nick steps up to him bravely, pushes up his shirt and, with a last glance at him to ask permission, he takes Sean's large hands and places them where his belly just begins to curve downward.

Both men wait with bated breath and when the little one finally kicks, they jolt simultaneously and look at each other with twin smiles of a secret shared.

This is amazing! Staying close together... feeling Toisie move.... Why do I like it so much? It feels... absolutely right.

Nick blushes heavily as his eyes mist over. Renard takes note at once. Of course he does. There is not much getting past him. A frown chases away the soft expression from before. Nick feels saddened by it, tears threatening to actually spill over.

“Nick, are you okay?”

Sean makes to take his hands away, thinking that maybe it has been too much, after all, but Nick keeps his own hands pressed firmly on top of his. Without a conscious thought the zauberbiest takes a step closer. Nick shakes his head as if frustrated with himself.

“Pregnancy hormones. I hate them! I don't know how women do it!”

Relief washing through him, so strong that he thinks his knees will buckle; emotional turmoil hidden behind calm countenance.

Thank God. If it is only that....

“Hmm.”

And while one hand stays on the well rounded belly, the other goes to Nick's neck to draw him in and have his head come to rest against Renard's broad chest. Surprisingly there is no awkwardness. Just two people standing close together, offering and seeking comfort.
“Your boy certainly has inherited the strong kick of his father. I would know, I have been accosted by it before.”

Nick doesn't miss a beat.

“Hah, I could say the same, couldn't I?... Oh, damn! Now the little fiend kicks at my bladder. Excuse me for a moment.”

With an adorable, apologetic smile he slips out of their embrace and dashes over to the bathroom. Renard gazes after him, shaking his head with fond exasperation.

25. PW:

Nick has noticed that his friends have begun to take care of him in small ways and that he - as embarrassing as that is - practically soaks up their affection. It is one or the other hug from Rosie, general fussing from Monroe... and that memorable evening when he somehow started stroking his hair (Both have come to a silent agreement never to mention it again.).

Then there is Sean making sure he actually gets into bed when PGSAs (pregnant Grimm sleep attacks) strike unexpectedly and, of course, that soothing effect only the zauberbiest has on him these days when things get real bad.

With Hank it is little things like giving him a hot pack for his aching back one time. He thinks back to that one with a fond smile:

Nick presses his hand into the small of his back for the umpteenth time to relieve the persistent ache there. Hank throws him a worried look, rummages through a drawer and disappears from main office with whatever he has fished out.

"Here. That's gonna help."

Nick starts at hearing his partner's voice so near by. He has been absorbed in proof reading his final report while absentmindedly rubbing his lower back. He eyes the thing in Hank's hand with not a small amount of skepticism.

"Errr. What exactly is that?"

It certainly looks like black mud preserved in plastic foil, Nick thinks to himself.

"Just take it, man. You'll like it."

The Grimm looks like he isn't so sure about that but takes it, anyway. His face clears as soon as his fingers touch the thing.
"Oooh, a hot pack! For my back?"

Hank wags his eyebrows, secretly pleased at Nick's delight.

"Well. You can put it anywhere you like, buddy. Just don't give it back to me, if you do put it elsewhere, okay?"

With a grin Nick slips the hot pack beneath his shirt and scoots back against his chair's backrest to keep it pressed there. His expression morphs into one of utter enjoyment at once and Hank nobly refrains from commenting that it does look like Nick has applied it elsewhere.

>>> 

"Sooo, nowadays you're keeping hot packs around just in case your old ass partner has a bad back?", Nick asks innocently some time later. The Afro-American shrugs unconcernedly.

"You see, when my sister was pregnant she almost always had a bad back. Having hot packs on hand just about everywhere has been an instrument of survival. I just never stopped stashing them and seeing that now you've pulled a muscle when fighting a perp, I see I've been right in never stopping."

Hank looks rather smug, both at his successful hot pack rescue mission and at mentioning their cover story for Nick's latest bout of pregnancy back pain.

"Are the two of you aware, that you are behaving like an old married couple sometimes?"

This is Sergeant Wu, of course it is.

"And are you aware, that you are a nosy prat sometimes?", Nick asks succinctly.

"Yes, well. Everyone does what he's best at."

That is wonderful about Wu: he is never perturbed or offended by snarky comments... most likely because he likes quipping them himself so much.

"Okay, what did you come here for, Wu, before you and Nick decided to go all snippy?", Hank throws in before they can go on.

"New case, Detective Boys. Hit and run in Washington Park."

Hank frowns.

"You mean, hit and run as in 'happening on an actual lawn of that park'?"

"Jep. Looks like weird shit. That's why I called the Ghost Busters... and in case you cannot follow me, that's the two of you."

>>>
Hank is out fetching lunch while Nick goes through evidence they have gathered for their case. He's bent over a load of pictures spread out on his desk.

„Detective Burkhardt, how good to see you again.“

That succinct tone, that artificial smile in her voice. Nick doesn’t need to see her to know who is standing behind him… in a room full of people. A lump of cold dread gathers in his stomach. The urge to break his pen or better yet ram it right into her chest is almost overwhelming but he has too much control to do so.

He turns around slowly, letting picture and pen, that he’s had in hand, slip back onto the table.

Adalind Shade wears a perfectly tailored black skirt along with a white designer blouse and high heels that bring out the beauty of her long legs.

„Miss Shade.“

Politely inclining his head and appearing the epitome of calm is the hardest thing to do. Her bright smile and sparkling eyes are enough to make him want to vomit.

*Don’t let her get to you. See what she wants, twist it to your advantage. Most likely she’s come to gloat. Let her see the Grimm in all his glory.*

He doesn’t make it easy for her. He just waits and regards her with that steady, unnerving gaze that criminals fear when facing the good natured Detective. She doesn't miss a beat, or is damn good at appearing that way.

„Well, you see, it’s been such a long time since you’ve saved me from that crazy woman that I wanted to see how you are faring.“

Adalind is good. Outwardly she is the guileless, concerned lawyer, while inside her eyes malicious glee shines bright.

„Oh, I cannot complain. Why don’t we go somewhere less noisy?“

He guides her out of the room with a hand on the small of her back, leaving her no choice but to accompany him or make a scene. It is an act of will to do so. His hand, where it touches her blouse, seems to be burning, the urge to draw it away is almost unbearable in its intensity.

>>> They are in a side corridor rarely used. Alone for all intents and purposes. No matter how good the hexenbiest is at deception, Nick can tell she is uncomfortable. They both know that he cannot do anything to her but it is still satisfying to see her repress a shiver when he steps closer.
„Now, Adalind. I’m curious. Still licking boots of the Royals? I mean, are they at least paying well for your… services?“

Her eyes narrow in anger before she locks it away behind a pleasant smile. It is her voice, though, that betrays her true feelings:

„Well, I am not lacking in anything! You however…“ She trails off, looking him up and down with an air of disdain. He knows what she is on about. His Grimm powers, of course. Boldly she steps up to him, woging as she does and succinctly asking:

„Is it just my imagination, Detective, or are you lacking in skills?“

Every fiber of his body fights her closeness yet he doesn’t move a muscle, locks away feelings of anger, fear and revulsion – even that tendril of upcoming panic – and looks her straight in the eye.

„Just your imagination, I assure you. Maybe you should get yourself some help. Being delusional can be dangerous at times.“

His Grimm surges forth, eyes becoming as deadly his tone, liquid black orbs, that show her the entirety of her rancid soul. She rears back with a small screech, unable to re-assume her human facade in face of his undiluted Grimm power. He takes this game just a little bit farther, steps into her personal space and pins her with a truly frightening stare.

„Tell me, Adalind, was offering yourself up like a slut worth not stealing my powers?“

It is the barest of whispers yet that only heightens the effect. She cannot put her anger and frustration into words, is petrified by his very presence. When he takes a step back, folding his arms across his chest and regarding her coolly, she cannot hide her relief.

„Now, why don’t you tuck your ’biest away? No offense, but it is a bit repulsive to look at.“

She’s only able to pull it off when Nick deliberately looks away from her for a short moment. They both know it and it nearly kills Adalind to be played by him like this. She flounces off without another word, so occupied with asking herself, why the hell her plan hasn’t worked, that she doesn’t even notice Captain Renard looking after her, first with surprise and then with barely disguised blood lust.

Oh how I yearn to shed her blood and maim her pretty little face! What did she want? Did she meet Nick? He doesn’t need that shit right now. Not after everything has just calmed down again.

He keeps an eye out but doesn’t see his Detective in the immediate vicinity. It leaves him unsettled, gut churning with worry.

>>> 

Once Adalind has vanished through the elevator doors Nick takes two steps to the nearest wall, turns and slumps with his back against it before his legs can give way. His heart thuds in his chest
and, no matter how well he has played the woman, bile really threatens to rise in his throat now. He balls his hands into fists to keep them from trembling. Every bit of fear is back, every feeling of revulsion and vulnerability. He feels dirty, raped all over again. It takes a long time and resolute breathing exercises for panic to subside.

Left behind is anger. Burning, poisonous, fierce anger, that won’t leave him no matter how much he controls his breathing or thinks about how good it's felt to rub in her failure.

You need to let go! You are upsetting Toisie with how wildly your heart beats. He’s already moving much more than normal. Calm your heartbeat down and let it go. You've given her a dose of her own medicine, be satisfied with that.

It isn’t working, not in the anger department, anyway. He needs help and, as improbable as it seems, he knows exactly where to go.

>>> Sean hasn’t returned to his office for long when there’s a knock on the door and his Grimm steps inside.

Nick is trembling. With anger or maybe fear? He isn't saying a word, not looking at him. The perceptive zauberbiest draws his own conclusions and has stepped around his desk before he gives it a conscious thought.

“You have met Adalind.” A quiet assertion, not a question. Pregnancy hormones or no, there aren't many things that upset Nick like this.

His gaze remains steadily on his Grimm, watching for anything that might give him a clue to what Nick needs or wants him to do. His chest is heaving, eyes blazing with pent up emotions. Jaw muscles are tense and working, his shoulders hunched, muscles clenched. In short, anger and agitation are rolling off of him in waves. He has come to him, though. Without a word, without an explanation, hoping Sean will understand and make it better.

He thinks he does. He murmurs something about how Nick should show him the murder weapon of their current case – words meant to keep up appearances – and leads him away from prying eyes. Nick is good. The moment they step out of his office a neutral expression slips onto his face like a mask hiding the turmoil within. They aren't stopped on their way, leaving Sean to push his Detective into one of the mostly unused rooms without anyone the wiser. Only after he has closed and locked the door, does Sean lightly grab his shoulders to reach through the haze of automatic responses Nick has cloaked himself in.

He flinches and already makes to draw away before he catches up and realizes that it is only Renard touching him.
Safe ground.

“Nick, what's happened with Adalind?” The Captain's tone is serious, concern shining through. Nick won't get away without answering. He meets his eyes reluctantly.

“She came to rub in the loss of my powers. I showed her the Grimm and asked her, if acting like a slut was worth it... and if the Royals had paid her well. She fled after that.”

If it hadn't been for his monotone way of speech, allowing him insight into the depth of what the encounter has done to him, Sean might have smirked. As it is, there's only one course of action: Without a word he steps up to his pregnant Detective and draws him against his chest. Nick doesn't flinch this time, he melts against his bigger frame. Sean winds his arms around him, rests his hand on the nape of his neck and tucks his head under his chin as he has done often before.

Routine.

Neither does it require conscious thought nor do they think about it. Not anymore. As he holds him close something in the Prince settles. At first he cannot place it but soon it becomes clear: He has a purpose and a good one at that. This is what he is meant to do. This feels right... even when he busily denies that fact.

At first he just wraps Nick in a tight embrace, listens to his thundering heart, his angry hitches of breath. Nick allows his head to settle against his broad chest, takes up any comfort Renard offers. He closes his eyes and let’s go of it all when finally the man’s soothing whisper reaches his ear:

„I am proud of you, you know? You hit Adalind with the only thing that gets to her and you never lost your countenance. You did well. Don't think anything else."

Slowly he calms down, tensions bleeding from his shoulders. With every intake of breath he inhales the zauberbiest's scent.

Oh, God! Sean's scent is like a soothing balm!

It is so familiar, so good... it's like nothing he's felt in a long time. Strong, spicy, yet soft like barely a wisp of captivating odor. It is happiness, a soothing presence to feel safe around.... It has been his anchor for a long, long time now and Nick has never realized.

He does now and with it comes a whole new level of ease.

He grows very still, just breathing, just being....

Held by a man who has moved out of his own comfort zone time and time again just to help him. This whole time it has been there: Closeness, trust, being himself without being judged. Being comforted and supported despite what the man’s instincts must have told him about emotionally investing himself in a Grimm... despite what he has learned all his life about showing feelings... showing weakness.
With sudden clarity Nick realizes that he has well and truly fallen in love with Sean Renard. This is what he wants to wake up to for the rest of his life. This Man. This everything. For a moment he floats, leaves the horror of his encounter with Adalind behind.

Until another realization hits him:

He cannot act on his feelings, will never be able to do so. There is no ground to assume, that Renard has feelings for him, not of the romantic kind, anyway. He has done enough for him... is doing it even now. Nick cannot bear putting him up to even more of the crap in his life or threatening the relationship they currently have. It makes the soft smile that has stolen onto his lips become bittersweet. He won't derail how far they have come, but realizing something so mind-blowing only to have it snatched away fills him with bone crushing sadness.

The half-zauberbiest notices the subtle change of atmosphere at once. He always does.

“Nick, are you okay? A moment before you seemed to be getting better. What has changed?”

He doesn't push his Grimm away, not even when he would like nothing more than to see his face. Nick for his part vows to keep his inappropriate feelings to himself and locks them away deeply inside. When he takes a step back and meets Sean's concerned gaze he even manages a credible smile.

“I am getting better. Just hormones wrecking havoc again. Thanks for helping.”

With a last deep breath, that's meant to calm him and not at all to get a last whiff of Sean's alluring scent, he moves over to the door. He throws a last glance over his shoulder, saying:

“And by the way, it has felt unbelievably good to say those things to Adalind.”

Sean knows that there is a myriad of things that the Grimm is omitting but he let's it slide for now. He lets a devious smirk chase away the last traces of open concern to enable them both to find back to their usual roles.

“I bet it did. Like I said, I am proud of you for playing her without losing your cool or revealing your secrets to her. Don't you dare feel guilty for how much you've enjoyed that, Detective.”

“Yes, Sir.”

This time Nick doesn't need to act for a smile to appear.

No matter, if I will ever be able to pursue my.... Oh, God, what a thought.... My feelings for him, this is good all on its own. What we have.... how far we've made it.

>>>
It's on Thursday evening, when Nick and Sean are doing something as mundane as washing and drying the dishes after dinner. After what seems like an eternity to the Grimm he manages to gather his courage and ask the zauberbiest about an event he has planned with Monroe, Rosalee and Hank:

“Um, Sean? We're having 'pizza and movies' evening tomorrow at Monroe's and Rosalee's. Would you... like to come as well?”

Sean for his part is secretly amused by how prettily his always laid back and sovereign Detective can blush and he would have actually said yes, if it hadn't been for other obligations that evening.

Taking his silence for refusal Nick starts fiddling with his already bone dry plate and towel and mentally smacks himself for even asking.

“If you don't want to, that's okay. I just thought... there's pizza... well... and movies... and I think I should stop talking before I make even more of a fool of myself.”

The last comes out is a rapid rush and goes along with turning an even darker shade of red. Shaking his head mildly Sean steps up to him and takes plate and towel out of his hands to put them down on the counter.

“In all honesty I would have liked to come and... (here he cannot help smirking) have pizza and movies with you and the others, but sadly I have a meeting with the Chief of Police tomorrow evening.”

The small flicker of hope and delight, that's appeared before Nick could school his expression back to neutrality, is most intriguing, indeed.

“If that's the case and if you don't insist on getting pizza, you could always join us later for a second movie.... And now I need my towel back, otherwise these dishes will never get dried.”

The zauberbiest marvels at how quickly this man regains his equilibrium but then again, he is one of his best Detectives and a formidable Grimm at that.

“I might just do that.”

Sean pretends very hard that Nick's answering grin does not make his stomach flutter and his heart beat faster.

*Stupid bodily reactions. Who has ever needed them?*

>>>  

“So, guys, out with your orders”, Hank says looking at his friends inquiringly. Nick waits for Monroe and Rosalee to place their orders before listing his own:
“Okay, ready Hank?”

“Yeees.” The Afro-American draws out the word like he thinks Nick is a bit slow and makes a show of keeping his pen poised above the paper. Nick is unperturbed.

“I would like triple cheese pizza with anchovies, bananas, a dash of sweet and sour sauce, broccoli.... Are you even writing that down?”

Despite his best efforts Hank looks a bit green, scrunching up his nose in distaste.

“Yeees.” Another drawn out syllable to show his skepticism.

“Oh, wait. I'm not finished.... Make that one half with anchovies and the other with jelly beans... if they have those... if not I'll take mushrooms.”

Nick couldn't look happier – contentedly rubbing his baby belly – while Hank looks like he's about to dash off to the loo any moment now. Even the fuchsbau, indulgent to each and any of his rare pregnancy quirks looks a mite bit queasy and Monroe just a step away from launching into a hearty tirade about the importance of a healthy diet during pregnancy. The Grimm ignores their varying expressions of horror... and then bursts out laughing!

“Did you really think I would order that? That's just eww! It's not like I suddenly have weird food cravings just because I'm pregnant. I'll take that basil, tomato, mozzarella pizza and a large ice tea.”

Hank glares at him the whole time while placing their order but has to admit defeat at some point because seeing his friend as carefree as this is just too good.

When they discover that the guys from 'Georgio's' have forgotten to put pepperonis on Hank's pizza, the blutbad fetches some from the kitchen and decides to bring out a few other goodies just for the fun of it. Spreading ingredients, pizzas and beverages on the low coffee table they all settle in front of the television and start in on a lazy evening of good company, movies and food.

>>>  

Hank and Monroe cannot help snickering as their resident pregnant Grimm munches happily on his pizza, one hand always resting on his big, for once visible baby bump. If they are to believe his account, Toisie shows great enthusiasm at his choice of food by raising a true kicking and somersaulting ruckus within.

'No weird food cravings at all.' Hank mouths to Monroe as they observe Nick frequently adding weird ingredients like popcorn or pickles onto his slices of pizza before taking another bite. He doesn't even notice doing it – is completely caught up in the movie plot – which makes it all the more amusing to see. Rosalee for her part just smiles quietly and hands Nick another pickle when he gestures first in the general direction of the food and then at his belly as if to say: 'big baby
womb says no to leaning forward'.

>>> 

After the first movie it becomes apparent that pregnant Grimms have earlier bedtimes than non pregnant ones. Every few minutes Nick's head would sink onto his chest only to be jerked up with an adorable shake and owlish blinking.

Monroe sighs. He sits between Rosalee and his friend on the huge sofa.

"Men with cricks in their necks from falling asleep sitting upright on the sofa are cranky men in the morning. Just move over already."

Nick looks to Rosalee. She understands at once.

"Don't worry. I have my husband's whole big, snugly side to myself. Your head can have his lap."

Hank snickers at the double meaning.

She throws a pillow at him without batting a lash, hitting him squarely in the face. Nick settles down on his side with a very big grin. There's some awkward shuffling before everyone is comfortable but then they are ready for the cozy part of the evening.

"Monroe, in case I didn't mention it, your wife is badass and brilliant."

"I know!" The note of smug pride in his voice makes Rosalee fairly glow and in face of this not even Hank can stay grumbly, although he makes quite a show of rubbing his nose.

>>> 

An hour later the doorbell rings. Rosie gives her husband, who is more often rubbing his eyes now than reading, a quick peck on the cheek before getting up to open the door.

It's Sean.

She hugs him and is glad when he reciprocates the gesture with a little squeeze of his own.

"So, what movie is on?"

"None at all," she stage whispers, leading him into the living room and pointing at Nick. "Because this one is doing a veritable impression of a bear in hibernation."

She looks over at Hank, fast asleep as well.

"And that one does, too. And my husband... well, he seems to have decided to lay down among the bears."

"So it would seem." The zauberbiest's smirk promises much subtle, captainy teasing in the future.
"You should call them the 'bear-squad'."

"Maybe I should do that. And maybe I should take the sleeping Grimm home now, hmm?"

"You could do that... or you could have a nice, big mug of tea with me in the kitchen. In contrast to my dear husband I even ask my guests which blend of tea they would like instead of just putting something in front of them."

"I find myself unable to decline such a tempting offer. Oh, and do you think we should tell Monroe that he keeps petting Nick's head even while they both sleep?"

Rosalee's eyes dance with mirth.

"Naah. We'll just show him tomorrow. Hank already snapped a picture when he did so earlier."

The fuchsbau finds she likes Sean's quiet but genuine kind of humor and his softer demeanor very much. She leads him into the kitchen for tea and a chat while the rest of her unusual pack sleeps on unabashed.

26.PW:

Lately Nick has developed a disconcerting habit of falling asleep in any available and unavailable place. Sean knows that with work and pregnancy's progression he is more prone to tiredness but this...? In the privacy of his own thoughts he allows amusement to come through.

Once Sean has even heard Wu tease the Grimm about the reason for his tiredness, hinting that certain enjoyable activities may be keeping him awake at night.

*If it only were that simple.*

The zauberbiest heaves a sigh that he barely keeps from becoming a growl.

*Tame yourself. He isn't yours – well he isn't anyone's right now – and you shouldn't even think of such matters.*

With sizable effort he focuses back on his initial track of thought. He remembers well coming home late one evening last week to find the Grimm on his couch, still sitting up and sleeping like the dead. The memory plays out before his inner eye:

He gazes down upon him, contemplating what to do.
He should wake him.

*His back won't thank him for sleeping on the couch, which means grumpy Grimm in the morning and that in turn means complaints from Griffin about said Grimm's bad temper at work.*

There's really nothing for it.

“Nick.” No reaction.

“Nick!” Still nothing, only open mouthed, slightly droolly sleepiness. He gives him a firm nudge to the shoulder. After things have ended with Juliette Nick's touch issues have slowly gotten better. These days Sean is fairly sure that his hand won't face dismemberment at doing so.

Oh well, he could have poked a wall and gotten the same response.

Only that he would never have prodded a wall - that being much too undignified for a Prince - and that the wall wouldn't have smacked its lips, snorted and slept on... like the impossible pregnant man in front of him does just now.

*Oh yes. Open mouthed, snoring Grimm. Sexual appeal in its purest form.*

He could act ignorant and ponder, why he is considering Nick's sex appeal, but lying to oneself only goes so far and plotting how to best move him is more important. Putting him over his shoulder fire fighter style would have been his method of choice before a certain Detective has gotten himself knocked up with a child, right now... Toisie wouldn't thank him one bit for doing that.

Bridal style it is then. Really, this is becoming a particularly bad habit of his. With a silent sigh and too much fondness by far he picks him up and carries him over to the guest room. Honestly, the idea about a sign on the door, reading 'Nick's room' in bold letters, becomes ever more appealing.

Before he can think too closely about relieving Nick of the greater part of his clothes and carefully arranging him to lie on the bed, he pushes his mind to another incident:

It has been four days ago when Hank has entered his office and reported a curious occurrence:

“Captain, we got the perp. I just came to inform you that we've booked him into holding cell No.3.”

“Very well. Any problems with apprehending him?”

“No, none at all. Nick laid into him pretty good. The guy stood no chance.”

“Good work, both of you. By the way, where is Nick?”
“Sleeping.” There is no embarrassment whatsoever.

“Sleeping?” Well, there's certainly a lot of reproach in his own voice to make up for Griffin's appalling lack of contrition.

“Yes. You see, one moment he fights that guy with all he's got – and, hell, what an impressive fight that has been, Sir – and not 15 minutes later when we're back in the car, he simply falls asleep. Haven't been able to wake him ever since.”

Sean can certainly identify with that sentiment. He pinches the bridge of his nose and glares at his Detective for good measure, but his initial displeasure has been assuaged.

“And where is he now?”

“I left him in the car.”

“You left him in the car?!?”

He knows Hank to be a tough, level headed guy, but when he slowly rises from behind his desk and steps up to him, he seems a mite bit afraid.

“Errr, don't worry. I left the window open a bit and I really couldn't wake him.”

“Hmm.” Sean has been very close to picking his Detective apart bit by bit, though at hearing this, he cannot help experiencing a certain level of amusement.

_Might as well let Griffin off the hook before he faints.... And good to know that I haven't lost my touch._

“You are aware, Detective, that Nick would have your head, if he were to know that you talk about him like he is a dog left in your car?”

He leans back against the front of his desk, giving Hank some space and is satisfied to see him relax only now.

“Jep. Anyway, we have another witness statement to collect, so I'll return to him in a moment and see, if he's more approachable to waking once we have arrived there.”

“Good strategy. Will you tell him that he missed one stop on the way while taking a lengthy nap?”

“Not if my life depended on it.”

“Wise man. Send me a message once you've safely dropped him off at home, will you?”

He is very sure that no emotion leaks through his mask, so seeing that damn knowing twinkle in Hank's eyes is most dissatisfying.

“No offense, Sir, but you can go see for yourself when you come home. I do intent to drop him off
at your place.”

The broad shouldered Detective leaves his office with a smug grin.

That has been the latest incident and now...?

Oh, well.

He stares down at a text message from the blutbad:

> Your Grimm has fallen asleep in the trailer and sleeps like the dead. Come fetch him.<

Sean shakes his head while sending his reply.

> Why do you assume he is my Grimm?<

> Don't know. He is a near permanent fixture in your home? And I have heard rumors that your housekeeper just dusts him over along with the rest of stuff in your house while he's sleeping.<

The Prince paces while reading, torn between extreme amusement and exasperation. He doesn't even take heed of where his steps take him.

> That was a one time occurrence and I am not at all sure, that his statement bears any truth.<

Huffing the zauberbiest sends another message right after the first one. There is a question that needs to be addressed after all:

> Why did you let him stay up that long in the first place?<

> First, I am not his mother... although he acts like an unruly teenager too damn often. Second, he's the most stubborn being in existence! You have met him. You should know.<

Monroe has a point there. He looks up from his cell, only to find out where his pacing has taken him. He's wandered right toward the coat rack... ready to grab his jacket, ready to fetch his Grimm and make sure he is safe and with a warm place to sleep for the night... preferably where he can see, protect and generally be near him.

I'm so screwed. These flights of fancy have never afflicted me... not until now.

He tugs on his jacket, gets into his shoes and grabs his keys. While on the porch he texts back:

> I see your point. Coming.<

> I've already bundled him up in a blanket for easy transport.<
>How very thoughtful of you.<

Getting behind the wheel he shakes his head at the whole situation.

*Honesty, when have I become responsible for moving around heavily pregnant, sleeping Grimms?*

... 

*Important cargo.*

His own words have come back to him just like Nick's do now:

’*You called me important.’*

Yes. He realizes. *This is exactly the point. Nick has become important to me... more than important, if I deign to stop lying to myself. It is of no consequence that I cannot have him and of no use to keep denying it. This man, quirks and all, has become the most important thing in my life. I hear his heartbeat and that of his unborn child every time I am near him, damn it!*

*Still I must get these notions out of my head. I have no right to claim him and I shouldn't endanger the progress he's made after that shit with... that woman... by revealing my feelings to him.*

He takes his coat and drives out to the trailer. He has known that he would do so the moment he has read Monroe's first message.

>>> 

Upon catching sight of Nick in the trailer it becomes apparent that Monroe hasn't been lying: Despite falling asleep sitting hunched over with his head resting on one of the open Grimm journals the blutbad has managed to wrap him up securely in one of aunt Marie's many afghans.

He hides the smile threatening to appear but he's also aware that the inevitable softening of his gaze has given him away to the perceptive clock maker. Sean doesn't try waking Nick, knowing that Monroe probably has tried everything there is before texting him.

“Time to see him safely home.” The zauberbiest murmurs half to himself and half to Monroe, scooping Nick up into his arms with a small grunt and the flicker of a woge.

“*He's getting heavier nowadays, isn't he?”*
This is Monroe, commenting in a stage whisper while watching from the sidelines. Sean throws a short gaze downward to see if Nick is still sleeping before he dares to answer. Better be safe than sorry, they say.

“Yes...” A bit of adjustment. “...He is. But don't let him hear it ever. He might be the only one able to see his growing belly on regular basis but that doesn't mean it isn't a sore spot to be reminded of his current... proportions.”

“Hah, I'm not suicidal enough to do so. No desire to see a Grimm like in our childhood stories unleashed.”

Monroe visibly shudders and shifts from foot to foot, obviously wondering, if he should open the trailer door for the Prince or simply keep out of the way.

“Oh, he wouldn't do that. Most likely. And now do you think, you could open that door or do you need to continue wearing a hole in the carpet?”

Sean's impatiently raised eyebrow seems to raise the wieder blutbad's hackles but obviously he hasn't lied about possessing a measure of self preservation. He might scowl fiercely and grumble unintelligible things under his breath, but he does open the door in the end.

>>> 

When Nick rolls onto his side after Sean has carefully set him down on the bed, the zauberbiest's heart melts all over again. He has always thought himself above responding to such simple stimulants but at the sight of his deeply sleeping Grimm wrapping his arms around a belly, that he knows has become rather round at this point, his breath catches in his throat. He yearns to reach out and smooth dark bangs away from Nick's face – to caress and soothe – but never gets farther than reaching out half way, before self-control kicks back in.

With an exhale, that reveals so much more than he ever would have wanted, he turns away and leaves the room.

He never notices Nick's open eyes or his wildly beating heart, which he has kept beating at a steady pace for as long as his Captain has been near.

Inside of him, though, nothing is calm.

Can it be? Is it possible that Sean has feelings for me?

This time there is no bone crushing sadness. There is a tiny shred of hope beginning to blossom while he rubs slow circles on his big baby bump and finally returns to sleep.
Chapter End Notes

Longest chapter yet... but I had to cover some ground, didn't I?
Hope it wasn't boring, I just really wanted to show the whole crew taking care of their favorite pregnant Grimm. ;)

First of all, sorry for the long wait. Muse took its time but when it came, it did with a vengeance! :D
That said, thanks to all of you for waiting patiently and being awesome with encouragement!! You guys are all great!
By the way, I have given up on predicting this story's length.... Maybe we'll get to 7 or 8 chapters total... maybe. ;)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter 5:

PW27:

“Hey Monroe, what are you doing right now?”

Well, Nick for his part is assembling his lunch one handed while juggling his cellphone with the other and he's fretting just a tiny bit, or more than a tiny bit, and....

“If this is going to be some wesen related case question, I'm out. I'm sorting through Rosie's and my Christmas stuff preparatory to putting it all up for the season and I don't want to be disturbed.”

“It's so nice to know that you care, really. But don't worry, I'm on my 48 hours off, actually, sooo... need some help?”

“You want to help me sorting through old stuff? Who are you and what have you done to Nick Burkhardt?! And don't even think about lying, I know at least three different wesen able impersonate someone.”

“Monroe, don't be silly. It's really me. I just... well, one year from now there will be Toisie expecting to be dazzled by Christmas cheer and I know next to nothing about these things, so maybe helping you will get me inspired what to put up when time has come and so on.”

Nick could swear that Monroe has just made an 'aww' sound on his end of the line but then again, that would be all kinds of mushy, so maybe he has just stubbed his toe or something. He plows on before his friend can say something mocking, hands fidgeting with his sandwich crust out of nervousness that's got nothing to do with their current conversation and everything with whom he is meeting in the evening.

“I mean, even aunt Marie tried to spread the cheer for me. It was all pretty spartan but for her standards it was practically going overboard.”

“What did she put up then? Chopped off ogre heads decorated with tinsel?”
“No, not that. I wasn't supposed to know about the whole Grimm stuff back then, remember?”

“So it was chopped off reindeer heads with tinsel after all.”

Nick grins at Monroe's smug tone.

“Something like that.”

“Hah, and knowing you, you probably tried to sneak in as much additional decoration as you could get away with, didn't you?”

Entirely too much smugness now in a certain blutbad's tone.

“Damn it, how did you know?”

“Three years, that's all I say, Mr. Grimm. You are an open book to me.”

“In your dreams. But I really did that once. Nearly drove aunt Marie crazy because every time she rose in the morning there was another item about.”

Nick snickers at the thought, unknowing how much his non sentimental friend likes to hear that carefree sound.

“In retrospect, for being a Grimm and all, it took her ridiculously long to find out it was me.”

“I'm sure she was ecstatic when she found out.”

“Jup. Apropos ecstatic, where's your wife while you are sorting through stuff?”

“She pleaded off, saying she still has work to do in the Spice Shop.”

From the amount of grumbling he does, Nick deduces that he doesn't believe a word of her excuse. He cannot help chuckling at the thought.

“Not funny. Oh, and while we're at it: This isn't just a ploy to get me to let you in and then ask some wesen related question, anyway?”

Now Nick outright laughs.

“Do you ask, because you know that you couldn't resist, anyway, if I were to ask such a question?”

Monroe growls, which only serves to heighten Nick's amusement.

“I refuse to answer that.”

“It is certainly within your rights to refuse making a statement, Mr. Monroe.”

The Grimm's tone has pitched from amused to mock stern in the space of a second. Monroe wonders, if strangling someone through the phone might be possible.

“Argh, Nick! Don't go all cop on me and come on over already!”

“Okay. I'll just finish lunch... which has taken on rather larger proportions than expected... oh well, Toisie is hungry... err, where was I? Oh yes! I'll be over soon.”

Nick hangs up to something that sounds suspiciously like Monroe face palming in exasperation.
Nick is sitting cross legged on the floor of his best friend's attic, which is thankfully clean thanks to a certain someone's liking for organizing and dusting, surrounded by a whole load of cardboard boxes.

“So, what's the matter, dude? I mean, other than practicing to dazzle the munchkin with Christmas cheer.”

The Grimm chances a short glance upward where Monroe is sitting on an ancient wooden folding chair with a clipboard resting in his lap. Going by Nick's expression and actions he has hit the nail on the head. Something is bothering the ongoing father. He heaves a tiny sigh before fully meeting Monroe's gaze.

“I'm meeting up with mum tonight. To tell her about my pregnancy and ask her about what might happen later on... When my little boy wants to come out and so on.”

“Ah. And now you're worried that momma Grimm will be less than amused. Need me to come with you?”

“Yes, that's kinda the problem and... no, but thanks. Sean asked the same thing, by the way, but while I appreciate both your offers, I think the less wesen involved in this talk the better.”

Despite his assurances it's clear that he's deeply worried and gearing up to protect his little one at any cost, be that against outside danger or his very own mother. It's there in the way he rubs over his belly, or plays with the hem of his shirt instead, whenever he's aware enough of himself to recognize the telltale action as something to give his secret away to others. He can smell it on him, too. Nick's in full nurturing mode. It's been bound to crop up at some point.

Seeing this, receiving evidence every time he takes a breath makes Monroe's pack instincts flare up somewhat fiercely. Nick might be better off meeting his mother alone, but if she dares to lay a single finger on him or his child, she will face Monroe's wrath, deadly momma Grimm or no!

To steer Nick's thoughts away from all that he gets them back on track with what they've come up here to do:

“Okay, now to taking inventory. It will be like this: I will name an item from the list, you will repeat it back, if you spot a box with that name on it. Got it?”

Monroe does an extra show of bushy brows and is secretly happy to note Nick's more mischievous side reappearing. The impertinent Grimm takes in all the boxes with a teenager worthy eye roll and mutters:

“Well, seeing that every single box is labeled. It cannot be that difficult, can it?”

“Hey, you wanted to learn, now do as you're told.”

“Yes, Master.” This is said with a crooked grin and mock deference that simultaneously raises Monroe's hackles and amuses him.

“Right. Now here comes the first: Blue Christmas tree ornaments with snow trees?”
“Jep.”

Monroe clears his throat, Nick sighs.

“Blue Christmas tree ornaments with snow trees.” The Detective repeats dutifully, which the clock maker acquits with ticking the item off the list.

“Wichtelmann figurines from Niederbayern?”

“Wichtel... mann figurines from Nie... derbayern.” It sounds too funny when Nick tries to say it. Snickering, Monroe ticks it off the list.

“Schwarzwälder Holzschnitzereien?” Nick looks around, face set in concentration.

“Ah, there. Schwarzwae... honestly, Monroe! Who can even pronounce that!!”

“Quit whining and practice your German.”

He repeats the phrase with exaggerated slowness, that has Nick scowling. Nearly having Nick knotting his tongue upon trying to repeat it back is just as amusing as watching his frustrated frown. In the end he gives up, jabs his finger in direction of a small box and snaps:

“That one over there. Suit yourself, if that isn't specific enough.”

They continue in that vein for a while, making good headway. Finally there are only a few items left on the list:

“Train-set from 1963?”

“Train-set from 1963.”

“Railroad station with figurines?”

“I think I’ve fallen in love with Sean.”

“Hmm, curious.” Monroe peruses the list, scratches behind his left ear with his pencil.

“Really, Nick. I am quite sure I didn't ask for ’I have fallen in lo'... wait, what?!”

Brown eyes swivel from paper over to a certain Grimm but it's to no avail. There's only a mob of dark brown hair to see as Nick is busily staring into his lap.

“Umm, not to say there's anything wrong with my ears but care to repeat that?”

“I said, I think I have fallen in love with Sean. That is to say... I know I've done so, I just don't know if I should act upon it. At first I was all 'No, definitely not!' but then something happened that led me to believe, that maybe... he has some feelings, too, and it would be stupid not to do it, if we both.... You know?”

Rambling Grimm is adorable, Monroe has to admit. And it gives him time to wrap his own mind around stuff. He chooses his words carefully, or not so carefully, but then again, sometimes blunt just does the trick:

“Well, it's about time you noticed, dude.”

Nick's dumbfounded look is priceless. Not often that he catches his Grimm friend unaware like
“What do you mean? You saw that earlier?”

The blutbad shrugs. “It's been kind of obvious, don't you think? I mean, he was like sparking with protective 'biest fury every time something happened to you or someone so much as looked at you the wrong way and he did that totally emotion dependent protection ritual for you and your unborn baby.... Need I say more?”

That's one fierce blush coloring a certain Detective's cheeks.

“If you put it like that. But do you think he would even want.... I'm going to have a baby... and even now I'm a nuisance because I live with him despite owning a house... and I cannot imagine that he would want to....”

“Hey, Nick. Calm down, will you? Why not just ask him? Renard strikes me as a guy, who can make his preferences quite clear, so.. yeah, why not?”

Nick looks for all the world like he fears exactly that: Renard telling him all too clearly that he doesn't want him. It wakes the need to reassure his friend, so Monroe does what he rarely ever does:

He places a gentle hand on Nick's shoulder, focusing all his senses on the man in front of him to gauge, if he's okay with being touched at all. He is, apparently. He doesn't smell distress or fear. Instead Nick looks up at him, gaze for once wrought with uncertainty rather than determination or inquisitiveness.

“Don't be such a worrywart. In all honesty, Renard seemed to be more taken with you and your little one than with anything else I have seen. And the fact that I've been able to spot anything at all from the master of poker faces speaks for itself, don't you think?”

Nick mulls that over.

“So you think I should try?”

“I certainly think it's worth a shot... but maybe you should ask Rosie. In regard to relationships she is the only one of your friends with any kind of a positive record. Not that competition is all that fierce, given your choice is between an antisocial wieder blutbad, a cop with three divorces under his belt and, well, her.”

That has Nick grinning full out but Monroe isn't finished yet:

“Oh, and just so you know: You are not the only blind fool in love. For all his being a sneaky, strategic master mind kind of guy Renard's been remarkably slow on the uptake as well.”

“Monroe, you really know how to flatter a man.”

>>>
with his Captain. He doesn't know what the future will bring. If he'll find the courage to confess his feelings to the zauberbiest or if very soon he'll need to look for a different place, estranged from the man he loves because his feelings are not returned or if maybe he will....

He enters the living room where not long ago his little boy has nearly died. Another place thick with bad memories. He lost so deeply in reminiscence and contemplation that he doesn't perceive the figure stepping out of the shadows until it's too late. He slips into defense mode at once but had the woman wanted him harm, he would have been dead before he's had a chance to twitch!

“Mum!”

“Nicky. I must say, the last time I did this you've been more alert. I could have done God knows what!”

Nick frowns in frustration, not least because she is right.

“You cannot fault me for not being on my guard when I expected you not until half an hour later and, more importantly, ringing the doorbell instead of lurking about in the living room.”

The older Grimm has the grace to look abashed, which simply means she looks less fierce and likely to bite his head off for letting down his guard.

“I was only worried. I arrived early, so I watched the house. Finding no signs of recent habitation, naturally, I went to investigate.”

Nick can very well imagine what 'arriving early' means in his mother's language. Coming here hours in advance and scouting out the whole area most likely. It is so typical for her that he smiles despite himself and finally steps over to wrap her in a hug. The soft press of her returning the embrace wakes long forgotten memories in him and for a moment he fears that he'll burst into tears right then and there. His mother's visits have always been wrought with conflicted emotions but this time considering what he will tell her and what's happened right here.... It' an explosive mix. Stupid hormones!

“Nicky?” There's just a bit of warmth in her voice, reassuring him it's concern making her ask not revulsion at his touch.

He pulls himself together, thankfully able to use his cop training to bury it all deep inside, and steps away from her.

“What can I say? Just glad to see you. It's rare enough, isn't it?” His lopsided grin may not fool her entirely but it distracts her enough not question him further.

“Wanna have coffee or something?”

“No thanks, but I would like to know why Juliette doesn't live here anymore?... Or you for that matter, given what I have seen of the living room and kitchen.”

Nick just raises an eyebrow in exasperation.

“Honestly, mum?” A defeated sigh.

“Juliette and I broke up not that long ago. I all but moved out. I'll explain later.”

From his tone it's clear that the matter is closed, or at least he hopes so.
“I'm sorry to hear that. Well then, what did you want to ask me in the first place.”

She pats the space beside herself on the sofa, having taken a seat herself only moments ago. He complies with a mild head shake and an expression somewhere between frustration and amusement.

“You really know how to do your connectives, don't you?”

She smiles just a bit and even that transforms her sharp features from cold Grimm to loving mum.

>>> 

Kelly Burkhardt knows that showing her feelings isn't her fort. Too much has happened in her life to harden her ways and bury anything resembling levity deep within the walls around her heart. Seeing her son like this – all grown up, weary and on guard in one instant but amused and lively in the next – coaxes her lighter side out like few things could. Okay, maybe the little girl she is guarding and raising does, too, but Diana isn't here now and she has other matters to consider, anyway. Like the hunch that her son is bearing worries and burdens on his shoulders far greater than what he can carry. It is in his eyes, so much like his father's, and in the minute tension of his frame. Something is off and she will find out what that is.

>>> 

“Mum, what do you know about pregnant Grimms?”

The question smuggles the shadow of a wry smile onto her lips. It's not what he has intended but it loosens the knots in his stomach somewhat.

“Quite a lot, apparently, seeing that I was pregnant with you once upon a time.”

He rolls his eyes.

“Really, mum.” Deadpan. Just a hint of teenage exasperation. It is a ruse. A shell he's scarily well trained in applying to hide all that's within. His mother waits for his next step.

Now how to go about this? First, hide your emotions.

And he does, going from son to cop in the space of a second. It is clear that the older Grimm perceives the change. Her expression show inquisitiveness along with... pride... and a note of wistfulness that leaves him puzzled. Her eyes, though, are all too knowing.

How can that be? I've meant to hide my feelings, not give myself away!

“Nicky, what's the matter?”

Again a small measure of warmth bleeds into her tone as she asks. God, it's such a long time since he's last heard it....
His eyes flicker with emotional pain and surprise, overlapped by the very real question of why she can read him so damn well, although they have barely seen each other during his adult life?

Unaware of the deeper layers of what is vexing him, she takes pity on him at least in one respect:

“Don't worry, son. Whatever is occupying your mind, you are doing exceptionally well at hiding it. It's just that....”

She falters, untypical for her.

“It's just that you look exactly like your father when doing it. He was very good at keeping his worries hidden – and there's been a lot to worry about with a Grimm for a wife as you can imagine – but over the years I have learned to interpret a lack of emotions on his face. You see, normally your dad has worn his feelings on his sleeve so when they disappeared all of a sudden, I knew what to expect. You.... Sometimes it is like watching a mirror image of him.”

He stares at her sideways, taken aback. It chokes him right up and he can only utter a tiny: “Oh.”

It's all back. He's a teenager again, remembering the very few occasions aunt Marie has commented on a resemblance between him and his father. It's never left him unaffected. Not back then and certainly not now with pregnancy hormones in full swing. His eyes fill up before he is even fully aware of it.

“Oh, Nicky.” Her voice filled with a touch of grief, of regret. A hand on his shoulder. He doesn't flinch back although he has half expected that he would. His mother is different. No matter how much he worries about their upcoming conversation or how close to strangers they sometimes are, his mum is safe ground. Looking into her eyes – so similar to his own, only more jaded and wiser to a brutal world – he manages to regain his composure. He has come here for a reason. Time to get his act together and get done with it.

“Mum, what do you know about pregnant Grimms... evolution wise?”

Her eyes narrow a fraction, features becoming guarded. She tries working out what exactly he's asking but she knows what he is on about.

“I know that we are only a distinct few and that we've always been in danger of extinction. And I know there are twists of nature to... change the odds”, she asserts carefully, to which he nods.

So she knows at least something about the matter. I'll do the 'what' first and see how she'll react. If it's a positive reaction I can tell her about the how. If not...?

>>> 

Kelly watches her son with apprehension. He rises from the couch and takes a few steps back.

What is the matter? Why would he do that? And why that question?

Nick takes something out of his jeans pocket (a small stoppered glass vial) and uncorking it, he downs the contents before she can do anything. She holds her breath just like her son does by all appearances. Regarding him closely, a suspicion forms in her mind.
But evidence is there, quite suddenly it's there. In the bulge of her only son's very swollen belly, in his stormy gray eyes that speak the same language as her own have done so long ago: Protecting the life of a little one, protecting it at all costs!

>>> 

Nick doesn't let his mum out of his sight as the zaubertrank takes effect. A tiny shiver, then another more violent one. The first because of the trank, the second in fearful anticipation of her reaction. She stares at his middle, transfixed, comprehension dawning. Her hand twitches. His own hands do, too, coming around his womb in a guarding embrace. His mum, reaching for a weapon? No. Something else. He believes to know what it is.

Another woman would have lifted her hand to her mouth in shock. Kelly Burkhardt is too well trained for that. The only indication to a world of warring emotions? Her lips compressing into a thin line and a hint of feeling shining through. At long last she gives in to the impulse, fingertips coming to her lips as she takes it all in.

She drags her eyes away from his middle to meet his gaze squarely.

"Son, what has happened?!"

She rises as well, makes to reach out for him but together with her sharp tone, it's just the wrong thing to do. All of his protective instincts slam in full force! He knocks her hand away, keeping his own raised, half stalling her, half warding her off and backs away.

"No, mum! Keep... keep away!!"

Their gazes are locked, Grimm auras clashing, and Kelly looks, really looks at her son's expression and posture for the first time since he's swallowed the contents of that vial:

His gaze is wild and there's a tension, that encompasses every muscle of his body. Ready to bolt, ready to fight. His eyes are swirling with black, the Grimm fired up. He is prepared to protect his baby... her grandchild... from any danger that may befall them.

Even a possibly disapproving, trained to kill mother, that he doesn't know all that well because she has decided to be dead rather than continuing to be his mother. For the first time in decades her eyes fill with tears. The implications, Nick's fears, it all hits her hard.

"Nick. Son...."

Not a shred of her usual confidence, a rough sound.

"It's okay. I'm not going to harm your... child. Ever. No matter what has happened or how you came to be with it."

Wetness spills over onto her cheeks. She doesn't move, Nick doesn't either. It takes him much longer to reach a decision than it's taken her to make up her mind. When finally he unfurls and
practically collapses into her embrace, she holds him tight like she should have done a long time ago. She rocks him gently, let's his near silent sobs wash over her, taking them inside of her and vowing to remember them every damn time she is wont to justify leaving her family for a higher purpose.

>>> 

They are sitting on the couch again. Nick is drying his eyes with his sleeve, frustrated at himself. Kelly takes his arm and pulls it away, her own thumb rubbing away moisture from his cheeks as she regards him with interest and a small smile.

It makes a tiny one of his own appear in return. He huffs in exasperation, then says the most adorable thing:

“Pregnancy hormones! Honestly, who has ever needed them? Did you have problems with that when you were pregnant?”

She laughs outright. A sound he hasn't heard in a long time either. It's a good one.

“Let's just say it is a good thing your father has been such a peace loving man or he would have banged my head against a wall before the first three months had been over. Pregnancy hormones could make me a little... I think the word he used was... cantankerous.”

“So did he bang his head against a wall, then?”

If his mother had been any less proficient at hiding her reactions, he knows she would be blushing now.

“Once... or twice maybe. I admit I could be difficult to be with. So, who have you to help you through this? There is someone, I hope?”

Nick gets the impression of a protective lioness when she utters these last words.

“Yes, there are. Monroe and Rosalee and Hank.”

Her eyes narrow, unable to repress her instinctive reaction this time.

“Your wesen friends? And your partner from work?”

“Yes, the very ones. Without them I would have been lost. They have been great help.... As has been Sean.”

He waits for her reaction, crossing his arms in front of his chest in a clear sign that he will brook no bullshit from her about this. She seems to accept it until....

“Wait! Sean as in Sean Renard, Bastard Royal and Prince of Portland?!”

“Yes. Actually he was the first to know and he has helped me from the very beginning. His mother has brewed the very zaubertrank that keeps me and my baby protected and anyone from seeing evidence of my pregnancy.”

“I won't deny that they seem genuine but how can you be so sure....?”
"I am no easily gullible child, mum! Sean saved my baby and me when I nearly suffered miscarriage, in this very room and because of what Juliette, the one person I should have been able to trust, has done!!!"

Well, that's shut her up. For once she looks like a dear caught in the headlights.

“What?”

And with that he lounges right into telling her everything, starting with that first, misbegotten night. He leaves nothing out. Partly to make her damn well see and partly because he needs to get it out of his system. He even tells her what he fears almost as much as informing her of his pregnancy:

"So, if you want to visit me in the foreseeable future, you will have to knock on Sean Renard's door. I've been living with him ever since the night when Juliette walked out on us."

She takes a moment to digest that but in the end she nods. And with a wry smile she adds:

"What can I say, my parents' view on your father differed a little from mine as well but they have accepted my decision, so how could I deny the same to you?"

"Thanks, mum. That's all I ask."

Nick isn't sure, if she thinks that they are romantically involved or not but he doesn't dissuade her either way.

>>> 

“You were reluctant to tell me about that little hexenbiest's involvement for fear that I would punish her daughter for it, weren't you? A small child, if I may remind you.”

Nick only shrugs, mostly unaffected by her reproach.

“The possibility has crossed my mind, yes. I'm a homicide Detective, at this point there's not much I can safely rule out. And Grimms are not really known for their forgiveness, either.”

His mother huffs, unconsciously mirroring of his own huff from earlier.

“Hmpf. Well, I won't. I wish you hadn't forbidden me to lay hand of either of these two vindictive... women, but I will not treat Diana any differently from before. At the very least I will take care to instill some sense of right and wrong into her to keep her from repeating her mother's mistakes.”

“Thanks. I'm not sure I want to think too closely about whose child I've been defending, but thanks all the same.”

After that Nick finally gets to ask the question he has come here for.

Kelly needs to think about it for a while, racking her memory for facts long pushed away as insignificant to her daily life. She remembers at last, giving him the condensed version of what a male Grimm can expect of the last stages of carriage, in particular the shaping of a birth channel for
the baby.

To sum it up:

It will be as far from pleasant as one can get and it will happen around the 32nd week of pregnancy, which is to say 30th week in Nick's own calculation.

Normally count of pregnancy weeks starts at the beginning of a mother's last monthly bleeding but seeing that Nick doesn't have that, his doctor and he have decided to count from the moment of conception onward, which lands them at a total of 38 weeks instead of 40.

Oh, and because the concept of his bowels rearranging and a new hole tearing itself isn't scary enough, his mum has also told him, that he will be bleeding like a pig. Frankly, there's nothing more reassuring than a momma Grimm's bluntness.

Only when he has gone an alarming shade of white at her announcement, has she seen fit to enlighten him, that the bleeding won't be enough to worry about, but definitely enough to make it... ewww. At her advice of a day of bed rest afterward he could only nod weakly.

All in all, though, she's made it up to him, because afterward she's let him ask all those questions you can only ask someone, who's been carrying a child of their own.

>>> 

It's quite some time before Nick returns to his real home, the one he shares with Renard and where he feels safe and welcome. He finds the zauberbiest standing in front of the floor length windows deep in thought. Lights are dimmed, so silhouetted against a backdrop of twinkling city lights and with a snifter of some drink weighted loosely in his hand Sean looks truly magnificent. He has not yet noted his entry, sign of how far his mind has drifted, and Nick takes a long moment to look his fill while he still can. Excitement curls low in his belly, accompanied by a spike of activity from his little one. Seems he isn't the only one appreciating the view.

Taking off his tie has been Sean's only concession to a more casual attire but it isn't a well tailored suit which has Nick's knees turn to jelly. It's his face cast in shadows, set in thoughtfulness, an air of dignity that doesn't come with expensive clothes or royal blood but with natural grace.

"Hey, I'm home." He says it softly so as not to startle the zauberbiest. Turning away from the window and raking inquisitive eyes over him, it becomes clear with whom his thoughts have lain. A warm feeling spreads through Nick's chest and reassures him that coming to live with this man has been the right decision.

"Nick, how did it go?"

The Grimm smiles, relieved, genuine, carefree.

"It went well. A bit of an emotional roller coaster ride throughout but it's all good now."
Nick has the feeling that Sean only takes a sip of his barely touched drink to hide evidence of his profound relief behind it.

"That's good to hear. Did she enlighten you about what to expect?"

"She did, indeed.... In her very own totally reassuring way." Sarcasm is thick in his tone.

"I'll tell you the gruesome details over breakfast tomorrow and when I'm not this close to falling asleep in my feet. Oh by the way, did you wait up for me?"

"What makes you say that?"

The Royal tilts his head to the side, smirk evident and eyes sparking with playfulness. Nick is all too happy to continue their banter. Stepping up to the taller man with a teasing smirk of his own he looks up into green eyes and murmurs:

"Let me think: Standing in a dark room, still in your work clothes at 10pm and carrying a drink you are not drinking...? I really don't know what led me to believe you've waited up for me."

"Hmm, you might have me there."

Nick positively beams and on an impulse he closes the distance between them and bumps his nose against Sean's cheek in an affectionate nuzzle.

"Thank you, Sean", he whispers and has vanished to his room before Renard can even react.

The Prince remains behind in the darkened living room, still feeling the ghost of a touch, where Nick's nose has been and where the gush of his breath has warmed his cheek with softly whispered words. He doesn't move, ignores the glass in his hand... thinks that if he stands completely still then maybe that feeling will linger.

>>> 

Nearly a week has passed since meeting his mum and Nick is hopeful in a way he hasn't allowed himself to be so far. Talking first to Monroe and then to her has shifted some things into perspective and cleared away some niggling doubts.

Work, too, is going well and his pregnancy progresses as it should. Toisie is a healthy baby boy and not even recent bouts of back pain can dim the Grimm's good mood. Of course, it's not all sunshine and roses and never will be, but it's more than he has ever hoped for and he believes, that he might just find happiness along the way like he's always wanted.

Having his mum's support is a relief beyond measure. Having her promise that she won't treat little Diana differently for what Adalind has done to him is something he avoids thinking about but is secretly glad for.

Now that only leaves sorting things out with Sean. Not that there's anything wrong on a general scale. It's just that after admitting his feelings to himself and making up his mind about asking him out, his stomach is constantly in knots. His little boy seems to agree, never having been more
active than these past days and kicking every time his innards flutter with excitement over something the alluring zauberbiest has said.

Which is something else he is noticing more: Sean Renard is gorgeous! The way he moves, talks, holds himself. His face, all angles, strong lines, softer ones coming to the fore on the rare occasion he smiles. He could go on for quite some time. It makes him blush and has Toisie moving as if he were attempting a happy gurgle inside of him. The Grimm smiles tenderly down at his big bump and shakes his head at their thoughts. Yes, at their thoughts, for by all appearances his baby is in full agreement with his opinion on the Captain.

The object of their excitement enters the living room just now and asks, if he wants to join him in preparing dinner.

"Yeah, sure. Coming right through as soon as the munchkin stops practicing kung fu moves in my womb. Maybe I shouldn't have watched the whole Karate Kid trilogy with Hank but he insisted and what's a guy to do when his partner plays the 'buddy evening' card?"

Smirking Sean ambles over to the kitchen and starts rummaging around in cupboards. Once he is out of sight Nick attempts to get out of the armchair he's been sitting on with one of his Grimm books on his lap (or rather propped up on his belly). He grimaces upon rising, biting back a sound with great force of will. In all honesty his back has been giving him constant trouble these past days, but after making it through a day of Police work successfully, catching an early night thanks to Hank and knowing that Sean would be home early as well, he'll be damned if he pleads off helping now that the Captain has asked.

"Did you learn something useful?"

Nick swivels around with another heavy wince but thankfully the zauberbiest is still occupied with searching the cupboard. It takes a moment for him to catch up to what he is asking.

"Err, yes, actually I did: Never get in a fight with old men you don't know for they might kick your ass and aunt Marie's load of household chores heaped upon me might have had a higher purpose, after all."

"You mean other than keeping your teenage self out of trouble?"

"Of course. I was an example of good behavior back then."

Renard's chuckle, as quiet as it is, is music to his ears. He makes his way over to the kitchen grinning. When upon his entry Sean turns toward him with a few bowls in his hands, he silently thanks God that even pregnant Grimms aren't prone to waddling. On the contrary, for being almost seven months gone he's still quite agile.

>>> They have finished preparing and eating dinner and for Nick it has been... a sight to behold. He works hard to keep a blush from showing at the very thought. The way the muscles in Renard's
back move subtly when he's standing at the workbench and chopping vegetables, the way his controlled features come to life when he talks about something he likes, that strong column of his neck in motion when he takes a sip. Yes, it's safe to say that ever since his talk to Monroe a few days back, Nick's subconsciousness has finally allowed him to appreciate the entirety of what sums up this man.

Nick has never been the 100% straight guy but to feel drawn to a male this intensely is new even for him. It should frighten him but, in all honesty, out of all that's happened these past months this is what frightens him the least.

Dinner has been great. And not only by his estimation, going by Sean's relaxed, sometimes even playful manner. It is like the reserved Royal has shed another layer of his armor, allowing Nick to see what only few have ever perceived. He is still the same man, razor sharp intellect and an equally sharp tongue when he aims to cut or is venting about some stuck up politicians who think they know all about the intricacies of leading a precinct when in reality they don't, but in Nick's presence those edges seem to mellow and from time to time be interspersed by quick episodes of unrepentant teasing.

He likes spending quality time with Renard. Growing feelings aside it is a chance of getting to know him a lot better. Sean has a wicked sense of humor (which has come up at work occasionally in form of dry wit and sarcastic remarks), he has a true passion for toffee fudge and likes Classic Rock just as much as classical music.

Yes, they have both enjoyed themselves tonight but where is light there's also darkness:

Shadowing the thrill and excitement of all this, are insecurities and doubts that admitting his feelings to Sean will destroy everything and push him back into the black abyss, that his last weeks with Juliette have been. The thought alone makes him shudder but he is determined to try, anyway. It is like Renard has said all those weeks ago in Cransbury's office:

Nick has spent enough time putting others' needs before his own. It's time he seeks happiness for himself and his beloved little boy.

And if this means ignoring a dull, constant ache in his back and concentrating on Sean, then so be it. He is a Grimm, he has been through worse and he has never been feeling safer than now ever since his life has been turned upside down by his pregnancy.

>>> 

“Shall I take a cup of that... interesting tea over to the living room for you?”

"Yeah, that would be great."

Nick knows his tone is a curious mix eagerness and... not so eager, but the latter is to be chalked up to the mentioned beverage instead of the man inquiring and watching him with mirth lurking deep inside his jade green eyes.

“I'll just finish drying and putting away the dishes, then I'll be along.”

Sean has done all washing up so in Nick's opinion it's only fair that he does his part as well.
“Oh, and could you take over the honey as well? Without anything to sweeten it, that stuff is practically undrinkable.”

Nick has the feeling that his all too obvious shudder secretly amuses Renard.

Sean takes a jug of already prepared tea out of the fridge. His very pregnant Grimm insists that drinking it cold somehow makes it taste better, he for his part thinks that absolutely nothing could make that tea taste better.

He remembers well the very first time Nick has ingested the herbal brew. After his collapse and subsequent recovery Rosalee has put together an assortment of tea herbs to give him a supplement push in concerns of vitamins and energy. Nick has been grateful to his friend but his expression on that first evening has been hilarious:

Back then their relationship has not as easy going as it is now, so while watching his Grimm work hard not to spew the whole brew over the length of his coffee table, Sean has done his own bit of hard work and kept his expression completely blank.

Nick, being the observant man he is, must have seen his amusement, anyway, for he has snapped at him to taste the stuff rather than enjoy seeing him suffer. In the end – and Sean still doesn't know how Nick has managed to – he's been persuaded to at least smell the tea... and he has vowed, if that brew should ever find it's way into his fridge or storage cupboard, it would be topped with a very tight lid!

Thinking about this brings him right back to his Grimm, who is standing by the sink, drying the last of their washed dishes and looking beautiful. Sean tries to reign in these thoughts but it's of no use at all. And Nick does look amazing tonight.

Watching him, casual clothes, baby bump and all, is a sight that leaves him enchanted. Nick hasn't gained much weight around the hips or his face. It's just his shapely, rather rotund baby belly that stands out... like apart from that he has only mellowed a little bit around the edges.

And Sean himself has mellowed as well, hasn't he? At least if his general behavior tonight is any indication. Even if he would have wanted to change that, which curiously he doesn't, he wouldn't have been able to in all likelihood. That, at least, he has known for some time now. Nick just has this effect on him that no one else has ever had.

Absentmindedly he pours the tea from hell into a sports bottle – thankfully complete with screw cap and inbuilt straw – and places it onto the side table next to the armchair Nick has occupied before dinner. He throws a quick glance back into the open kitchen area. Nick is just about to put the last plates away.

*This is good. A relaxed evening with my very pregnant Grimm is something I look forward to more than I am ever likely to admit. I may not be able to pursue my feelings for him but this I can have.*
Speaking of relaxed: Occasionally now Nick takes the antidote to the shadowing trank in the evenings and leaves his baby bump in clear view. His mother has assured them in the very beginning that it wouldn't do any harm to his child and that there is enough of zaubertrank and antidote to frequently do so, but seeing Nick comfortable enough to show his womb, is still a deeply humbling concept to him. Watching all those small gestures like a belly rub here or a tender whisper to the unborn child there is a delight he wouldn't want to miss out on.

The zauberbiest shakes his head to free himself of those all too mushy thoughts.

_Apropos small gestures, how about you actually put any honey inside the tea like Nick asked you to?_

With the intention to complete his deed firmly in mind he turns around to find Nick stretching to reach the topmost cupboard only to abort the movement suddenly with a heavy wince and a barely contained groan.

_Back pain again. I should have known, yet haven't spotted a single thing all evening. Some cop I am. Nick has gotten disconcertingly good at hiding any discomfort, that much is clear._

A few weeks ago Sean would have been angry about this kind of deception, but he has learned his piece about respecting Nick's decisions in regard to pregnancy's various drawbacks. Of course the Grimm wouldn't wish to place focus on it every time his back gave him trouble, which happens a lot, and let it impact his daily life. Being the proud zauberbiest he is, Sean certainly knows all about that one.

That's no reason, anyway, for not helping now that he knows.

>>>  

“Back pain again?”

Nick starts at the sudden question. Before he can do more, plates are taken out of his hands and put away with minimal fuss.

“Hmm”, he says. No sense in denying it now. He would have expected admonishment but thankfully has found himself faced only with acceptance of his own decisions. And really, he's pregnant, not sick. It's an opinion Nick firmly holds onto and so far it hasn't led him astray.... That crazy bout of sickness after his fallout with Juliette aside.

There are better days and worse but in the end for all the trouble he'll have his beloved baby to raise, so what's a bit of discomfort compared to that?

Thumbs press into his back, digging into tightly knotted muscles on both sides of his spine. He cannot help a small moan of pleasure from slipping out.

“Oh God, this is good.”
No matter that he doesn't want to kick up a fuss every time his back gives him trouble, *this* is heaven! He hasn't known how damn tense he has been all day, hell, *all week*, before Renard has begun working wonders with those capable hands of his. Bit by bit knots and kinks are massaged away and Nick drifts onto a soft cloud of relief and pleasure.

Without thinking he leans back into Sean's broad chest, head falling back and turning to the side. His lips inadvertently come into contact with soft skin on the side of his Captain's neck.

“Hmm.” Another subconscious expression of his feelings. Those kneading fingers pause for an instant before taking up their work again. Nick takes a moment to register all that. When he does....

“Damn! I'm... I'm sorry! I didn't mean to force myself upon you in that way! Sorry!”

He's out of the zauberbiest's vicinity faster than Sean can answer and it's all too obvious that Nick awaits a cool reprimand for overstepping lines.

Sean steps up to him, shaking his head.

“It's okay. Come here, you foolish man.”

It is a gentle command, posed to give Nick time to make up his mind.

Do I want contact? Do I want distance? Sean leaves the decision to me. Damn it, I know what I want but is that what I should be doing or will it send him running for good? I don't fucking know!

Nick cannot answer, his tongue tied by worries so much more complicated than a simple rebuke. Like before he fears demanding too much. Sean understands what's left unspoken, having learned from past experiences.

He pulls him against his warm body, turning him around effortlessly, back to chest, arms coming around to encircle him along with his large baby bump.

Tension, wariness, finally acceptance of what Sean is offering. The pregnant Grimm sags against him nearly boneless. An aquiline nose nuzzles gently in his hair, then a feather light kiss. Soft touch, vulnerable gesture. Barely there and yet revealing a world of feelings. It makes Nick's whole body tingle. It's now or never. He swallows thickly, takes a deep, fortifying breath and inhales that alluring scent of his zauberbiest one last time before speaking:

“Sean? I think I have fallen in love with you.”

His voice is hoarse with emotion.

A content humming noise from above, embrace tightening. It is anti-climatic, really. A kiss to his temple, Sean's whisper mirroring his own:

“And I think I may return those feelings.”

Nick closes his eyes, soaking up acceptance and affection from the taller man while enormous relief makes him weak in the knees. He is held safely, no chance to fall. Warm, large hands are splayed across his over sized belly, rubbing and caressing instinctively. He experiences no fear or
revulsion at the touch. It feels right. It's where he has always belonged. These strong arms, this feeling of safety, of being protected... simply of love. He turns around in the embrace – standing a little sideways to give his womb some room – and brings his own arms up to wind tightly around his big man's torso. Looking up he sees more emotion on Sean's face than there's ever been before! It's still a far cry from what other people would call absolute joy and contentment but Nick has learned to read his Prince well and this is telling him all he needs to know. He angles his face up, heart pounding and expecting to feel the girl in the situation. He does not, but he does want to kiss this man more than he's ever wanted to kiss anyone else in his life!

Sean meets his gaze squarely, eyes gleaming with what he normally keeps hidden. There is a tiny smile playing on his lips when he obliges.

The sensations when their lips finally meet are different from what Nick knows but, oh, this is good! Those lips on his are soft and supple despite the man be all aristocratic angles. There is a hint of beard scratch where their skin touches. The Grimm doesn't mind and obviously the zauberbiest doesn't either for he tightens their embrace and their kiss alike. Tongues touch, tentative, likewise inexperienced with kissing another man, getting bolder by the second.

Nick closes his eyes. This could go on forever. A quiet chuckle, breathed into their kiss. They draw apart at long last and there's a spark of mischief in Sean's eyes that he likes very much. The man tilts his head to the side just so and the source of his amusement becomes clear:

"Is it possible that your baby just kicked my hip?"

A quiet laugh from Nick as he presses his face against Sean's broad chest to hide the gleeful expression to go with it.

"Yes, he is especially good at that. And at sitting on my bladder. Which reminds me...."

He slips out of their embrace with a rueful smile and great reluctance to dash off to the bathroom and take care of important business. Sean shakes his head, great fondness making him do so instead of exasperation.

If someone had told him 6 months ago that he would be in love with a pregnant Grimm, who happens to be one of his best Detectives, he would not have believed them. But here he is. Surprised but very happy at the outcome.

>>> Sean has settled on the couch when he hears the bathroom door opening and closing. He waits with carefully veiled eagerness for his new found love to appear, only that that never happens. No footsteps, no sounds other than Nick's breathing, his quick heartbeat echoing through Sean's being along with that of the little one. Definitely nervous excitement.

*What is he doing?... Ah, of course. My very brave Grimm has suddenly turned shy. It's one thing to*
He bites back a chuckle in case it insults him and leisurely calls out:

"Nick, whatever keeps you from coming over to the couch and letting me explore a few more inches of you, in any case, your tea gets warmer by the minute and I think that's something neither of us wants."

This time the chuckle just wills out at the sight of Nick Burkhardt, seven months baby bump and all, dashing over to his tea, sucking it down in record time, dashing back to the kitchen for something to wash away the horrible taste and then return to the sofa trying to look like he hasn't just done all those things. The fierce blush kind of gives him away but Sean is thinking that a task well executed deserves reward:

"That's my good Grimm", he murmurs, snags his wrist and gives it a little tug to show his intention.

It's not like Sean isn't new to this either but Nick's nervousness gives him a chance to find his own confidence. He treads carefully, though. This beautiful man may have confessed his love to him and kissed him eagerly but there are still issues about touching that Sean is not about to disregard. Now it's Nick's turn to take the next step.

The Grimm looks down on him with deep emotion simmering in his gray eyes. Despite the adorable display from moments ago, Nick knows exactly what he's doing.

He regards his zauberbiest, their joined hands.... He considers implications and angles like the good Detective he is.

In the end that searching gaze lands back on him and a beaming smile breaks through. He slips onto the couch next to him with an agility that he hasn't expected but is very much delighted by. Sean doesn't move, is content to look his fill and let Nick take the lead. The possessive 'biest may want him badly but above all he wants him to be comfortable with everything that's happening.

"It's okay, Sean. I want this."

At this he snakes his arms around his beloved Grimm, drawing him nearer. Another intense muster, that makes even the ever composed Captain blush, then Nick leans over to initiate a shy kiss.

As their lips meet and tongues twine with growing fervor the Bastard Prince of Portland finds, that doing another person's bidding can be quite enjoyable.

"Hmm, you mentioned something about exploring?"

Nick's voice is deliciously deep and husky.

"Maybe I did. Do you want me to, Mr. Burkhardt?"

"Why don't you try and we'll see where that gets us?"

"A working hypothesis I can live with."
And he slips his hands underneath Nick's shirt and up over the expanse of his back. Amazingly warm and supple skin meets his questing fingertips. Hmmm.

He'll keep it tame tonight. They are both new to this and none of them is prepared to take sudden leaps but a bit of exploring...? Oh that's certainly within their limits.

Nick seems to like what he's doing and his knowing look tells Sean, that he is confident that his 'biest won't ever do anything to make him uncomfortable or feel pressured.

It turns out to be a very relaxing evening for both of them, that ends with Nick falling asleep curled up against his side with one arm resting over his baby bump and the other slung around his big man's middle. Looking down on his sleeping Grimm a feeling of peace settles over him, that he hasn't experienced ever before.

>>> 

The next day finds Nick visiting the Spice Shop after work. Although it's really a wesen related question leading him here, there's a bit of good news he wants to share with a no doubt happy Rosalee and exasperated Monroe.

Apropos his blutbad friend: Nick counts firmly on Monroe to broach that particular subject in his own unique way and entirely without meaning to. He's good at such things.

Rosalee is just sorting a new delivery of goods while her husband puts items into shelves and cupboards.

Nick thinks he's doing rather well at hiding occasional twinges of back pain while moving but of course the fuchsbau takes up on it.

"Hey, Honey. Back giving you trouble again?"

"Yeah, but that's okay."

Monroe snorts in confusion. Oh, and has Nick mentioned that his friend is good at asking about things he really doesn't want to know?

"Nick, dude. Not that I profess to understand a pregnant man, but how exactly is that okay?"

When the impossible Grimm just smiles goofily, Monroe wants to bang his head on the wall for being stupid enough to ask.

Oh, here it comes. Armageddon. Nick starts talking and Rosie is giggling.

"Actually my bad back helped me get together with Sean."

His wife beams and Monroe's all very happy as well but....
"He massaged my back and then I went all stupid and moany, but Sean was great about it and called me a foolish man when I freaked out and then I gathered my wits and asked him and.... It was really all very tame but, oh, it was so good! We kissed and...."

"And I think we really don't need all the details of what your evening of canoodling entailed", the blutbad interrupts before he becomes privy to things he'll never be able to unhear.

Rosalee looks like she would have liked the details and Nick, grinning like a sappy lunatic, waits until Monroe has vanished into the kitchenette for an obligatory cup of tea before he whispers: "Canoodling? Really? And you'll get details later."

>>> 

They take it slow. They cuddle, they kiss, they talk until they are hoarse and get to know each other. Nick soaks up his zauberbiest's care and affection and Sean revels in the knowledge that for once there is someone who appreciates him for himself instead of his money, prestige or power. Nick is genuine, he is his equal, he is showing him day in and day out that Sean is worthy of his love.

Nonetheless there are doubts niggling at the back of the proud Prince's mind. Not doubts about wanting Nick or even about the child he is carrying. No, this goes far deeper. How could Nick ever love his zauberbiest side? Not only is it ugly to look at – the root of vindictiveness like some say – but it also is embodiment of Adalind's wesen side.

Sean isn't given to self-doubt nor is he used to such insecurities yet his worries remain firmly lodged inside of his being. It is only a matter of time until his perceptive Grimm catches on to it, so it doesn't come as a great surprise when Nick addresses his behavior.

PW28:

Things are great but Nick cannot help noticing that his 'biest is growing increasingly restless. Sean is never restless. Not as Captain Renard or the Prince of Portland and not as his mate. He's an epitome of calm and composure, so when he behaves like this, it gives Nick cause to worry. At first he keeps his observations to himself, scolding himself for projecting his own insecurities onto his lover.

When one evening Sean throws him frequent glances, that he thinks go unnoticed and that show a trace of wistfulness that makes a lump form in his throat, Nick decides to ask him about it.

He walks over to the armchair his mate is occupying, takes papers out of barely resisting hands and watches him closely as he poses his question:

"Sean, what is the matter?"
Shutters falling. No chance to read his expression now.

"Are you... (a fortifying breath) having second thoughts about our relationship?"

Sean looks up shocked.

"No, never that!"

Nick believes him.

"What then?"

"It's nothing. I am just tired...."

"Stop. I am not stupid and I've had enough underlying tension with Juliette to last me a lifetime. I'll listen to anything you have to say, just...."

It is a new experience for the independent Captain to have his jaw taken in a firm yet non forceful grip. To have it tipped up to be seen and to be shown his lover's feelings and doubts in return.

"... Just talk to me, please."

Oh how could I refuse such a request? How could I close myself off in face of those stormy gray eyes, that show me and only me a world of emotion? I may be a possessive, distanced bastard but I love this man and his unborn child more than I can say. At least that much is clear to me.

"I...." His voice fails him, his jaw muscles work in frustration over his own weakness. Fingers raking through his hair, redirecting his gaze where it has wavered in shame.

There's no judgment in Nick's gaze, only an endless pool of patience.

"It is... my zauberbiest side I have misgivings about."

Finality colors his voice, like that's an admission of guilt all by itself. Nick is experienced enough in wesen ways and life to know that there might be dangers he hasn't yet come across. He doesn't dismiss his concerns and doesn't back off. He investigates as is his way.

"Why are you concerned about that?"

Sean rises from his seat, the urge to pace unquenchable for once. Pulling away from Nick's hand on his face but slowly, like he is loathe to do so.

"You seem to be sure of your feelings now but how could you...? (a frustrated sound produced low in his throat, nearly a growl) How could you accept that side of me, if it's the same kind of wesen, that has hurt you so much?!!"

Nick keeps his distance, somehow knowing that Sean wouldn't want to be touched as long as his doubts haven't been assuaged. He contemplates how to answer. He knows his own feelings on the
matter but how to tell Sean?

"Tell me, what did you do when I first came into my Grimm powers?"

Renard frowns in confusion. Nick is serious about this. He wants an answer and honesty he'll get:

"At first I was wary. I kept an eye on you, watched what you did. How you settled conflicts and handled violent wesen that the law could not get to. You did not disappoint. Far from it."

A flicker of a smile.

"Exactly. You judged me according to my actions. And that, Sean Renard, is what I did and will do in the future. Don't get me wrong, you have done things back then that I will never fully condone and there are matters we will need to talk about. I love you, anyway, not despite your zauberbiest side but all of you including that. Frankly, that side of you has been vital to helping me all these past months."

He steps up to his 'biest now, for once being the one to observe his mate for signs of distress over being touched. There are none and it makes Nick happy.

He slips his arms around his powerful mate, drawing him near.

"You and your 'biest have helped me more than I can ever thank you for."

He kisses a cheek, kisses his lips.

"The ritual to protect my baby, impossible without your wesen half. Saving Toisie after... after what happened with Juliette."

Remembered pain becomes a beautiful, teasing smile along with his next words, melting the Prince on the spot.

"Even all the growling, possessive- and protectiveness. All the man as much as the zauberbiest. We cannot separate wesen from human any more than we can separate my Grimm side from the same. I love all of you, never doubt that... my foolish man."

Now it is Sean's turn to show his feelings freely. Small crinkles around his eyes as he smiles. Relief, gratitude, love and quite suddenly Nick finds himself wrapped in a fierce hug and his foolish 'biest buries his face in the crook of his neck.

To soak up his scent, to express himself where his usual eloquence fails him and to regain his composure.

Nick kisses the top of his head, cradles him just as close as his mate has done when he's needed it most and waits until Sean is ready to resurface.
It's safe to say that Nick's book and Sean's paper are paid no more attention that evening as they seek to stay as close together as possible.

And when after both have gone to their respective beds Nick cannot sleep, he gathers his courage, pads over to the master bedroom and opens the door.

Watchful eyes, green color dimmed to black in the darkness, follow his approach to the bed and one hand pats the space beside him invitingly while the other pulls back the covers.

He slips into bed beside Sean, wriggles in place with a shyness that's adorable and is securely enfolded and pulled back into a loving embrace. They are asleep within moments.

This is right. This is what they want to wake up to for the foreseeable future.

Chapter End Notes

Fluff to the max! What do you think? Too much? Not enough?
Chapter 6

Chapter Notes

Another chapter. There will be more fluff, a talk with Sean's mum, talks with friends... and trouble. Enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter 6:

Sean wakes slowly, drifting through that fuzzy world that's neither sleep nor waking. This is unusual for him and nice in an entirely incomprehensible way. He shouldn't be happy about this major breach in his defenses! Conditioned by many years on the run normally he goes from asleep to alert in the space of a moment. Not so today. Something is different. Or someone.

Nick. Heavily pregnant, warm and pliant while asleep right beside him. He's never thought he would get a chance like this. That the Grimm would be his. He's hoped and he's even let that possessive, primal side of him entertain fantasies which his controlled human mind wouldn't dare touching upon. But Nick is here, safely ensconced in his arms.

Hmm.

It's been about a week now that they've admitted their feelings for each other and it's still kind of surreal. Not because they are two men or because of Nick's pregnancy, but because Sean Renard, half-zauberbiest and Bastard Prince, never is this lucky. Up until now he's had to fight with claws and teeth to get whatever he may have desired. It's made him patient, moving his players across the board in the great scheme of things, and occasionally it's made him ruthless.

Not his weapons of choice this time. Not a fight or a competition and definitely nothing to win his Detective over with....

His Grimm has come to him willingly, has chosen to trust him like few have ever done. You cannot tame a Grimm. You either break them... or you are chosen by one and found worthy of their trust. Sean shows a small smile and a rare set of emotions now. Tenderness, love, wonder that this is really happening to him. A counterpoint to his usual countenance.

To be here in bed with Nick, to have him in his arms without having to hold back. Being the cynical man he is, he isn't all that sure that there's an afterlife... heaven... but this comes pretty close anyway.
Sean tightens his hold reflexively. His boy shows no signs of waking, just snuffles adorably and wriggles a little so that their bodies are flush against each other. Some time ago the Grimm might have been a light sleeper but now almost nothing can disturb his death like slumber, come hell or high water.

Chuckling the half-zauberbiest presses his nose into the soft spot of his Grimm's neck. Untypically for him he indulges himself. He nuzzles silky skin, takes advantage, takes pleasure from this simple act. Because Nick cuddles back even while asleep, an unconscious action telling Sean that there are no contact issues to be braved this time.

The soft, downy hairs at the nape of his neck, lovely. A scent that is purely Nick, intoxicating and addictive.

As his arms come around his partner’s globe shaped midsection in smug possessiveness, Sean takes a moment to simply look his fill. His mate is wearing a baggy shirt, worn soft from years of use, and boxers – all tame yet strangely intimate considering that they have just spent their first night together. His brow is smooth – no worry lines for once – and his lips slightly parted. He is feeling completely safe in his 'biest's arms. It's written in lax features and the way he has melted against Sean's bigger body.

This man is trusting me to protect him and his unborn child and what's more, his beast – the one similar to my own and yet its total counterpoint – is, too.

Sean buries his face in Nick's soft, dark locks, closes his eyes and just feels and breathes. There's a depth to his boy's scent, that is compelling: Liveliness, power, a nuance speaking of home and belonging. In short, a familiarity that he has never consciously perceived until now. He can even detect Toisie in it. Not per se, mind you, but in the general scent of someone, Nick, nurturing and loving a young one.

How he knows this? He cannot say. Another facet of the ritual? Maybe. His sense of smell isn't normally this good, not in anything other than magical ingredients, anyway, and that is a 'biest thing. Does he care? No. Nick, scent and body and soul, is giving him a feeling of peace hitherto unknown to him. He wants to gather his Grimm even closer and never let go, no matter how much of a sentimental fool that makes him.

His hands follow the line of the warm and bulging belly. They caress and stroke and map out every single inch. His eyes are still closed. He wants to commit his boy’s lovely baby bump to memory. There’s a content hum from Nick, no more awake than before no doubt. Sean smiles softly like he doesn’t allow himself very often. Well, no one is watching. He revels in this feeling of total contentment, belonging and acceptance.

Nick has come twice to him now, first gifting him with trust and then with love. Even back then he has come to him. When he hasn’t known where to turn and needed to hide his secret to protect his
little baby boy….

The zauberbiest stops short at the thought. The need to hide…. His hands ghost over the large, amazingly soft skinned womb again.

... A womb that he shouldn’t be able to see or feel because of the shadowing trank.

*I can feel it. Can I see it?*

He lifts the blanket slightly.

*Yes, definitely able to see it.*

Sean is reasonably sure that yesterday evening, when Nick has sought his bed and his proximity, there’s hasn’t been an enormous and beautifully rounded belly in sight. He would have noticed. He always notices when it's on display.

A sliver of dread crawls up.

*What is happening?*

It is exactly this feeling of dread, this minute tension entering his frame that wakes Nick more surely than anything else could. Grimm instincts are a force to be reckoned with. Nick doesn’t wake with a violent start but he grows alert more quickly than he has ever done since entering second pregnancy trimester. Sean watches his beloved come to and wills himself not to panic. There's still time until they need to rise, it is their first time waking up together and he will be damned, if he starts it with frightening Nick right out of his mind.

His gaze mellows with the decision, putting a rare, tender expression there. At first he's a tiny bit shocked at his own sentimentality... then his Grimm rubs at his eyes without any coordination to speak of and before he's even fully awake, at which point such inconsequential concerns like preserving his dignity fly right out of the window.

>>> 

Nick comes awake to a peculiar feeling of unrest, that vanishes as soon as he realizes who he's curled up against. Turning slightly he looks up at Sean, who is awake and watching him.

*Waking up in Sean Renard’s arms. If that isn't a novel concept.*
Seeing an expression on the Prince's face, that can only be described as the Sean-muted version of 'completely endorsed', he knows it will be okay as he cuddles up to his 'biest with a content sigh. Sean hums like a giant, decidedly smug cat and immediately gathers him closer, which Nick could get used to as far as morning wake ups are concerned. Toisie must have similar thoughts because he's doing a set of lazy kicks like he's a little lion cub stretching after a nap in the sun. Nick chuckles and rubs his womb to settle the little one inside.

"Good morning." Sean's voice is rumbly and warm. Nick beams at hearing it.

"Hey. Slept well despite Toisie an' me taking up lots of space in your bed?"

"Hmm, very well. Having you beside me just trumps having more space in bed. And waking up to find you peacefully sleeping in my arms didn't hurt either."

Nick snakes his arms around him and catches his lips in a lazy, sleepy kiss. He cannot help smiling against those delectable lips when he remembers his 'biest's scrutiny upon waking. It hasn't been intense per se, more like enamored and tender. In short, things he wouldn't have associated with Sean Renard until a few days ago.

"Oh yeah, what was that with watching your favorite pregnant Grimm sleep, anyway? Anything I should know?"

He says it with a smile, voice still rough from sleep. Sean contemplates his reply carefully. He prides himself on hiding his thoughts and feelings well but apparently this does no longer apply to his Grimm. Nick may be teasing but he's taken up on that shred of tension, that he's been unable to shake off. He must broach the subject carefully, though, no sense in rushing into it.

"So I am not allowed to watch you sleep?"

He raises an eyebrow and awaits Nick's reply.

"That depends. In case you cannot get enough of me, feel free to look your fill, my Captain. If you watch me with concern, however, because something is bothering you, I want to know what it is. As of yet I'm undecided which one it is or if maybe it's both, but I'm sure you'll enlighten me soon enough."

"You know me disconcertingly well, Detective. So, just in case this needs clarifying, I have no objections whatsoever to you in my life and in my bed. Far from it, actually." There's that playful smirk again, the one he's found so enticing when he's come home from talking to his mum last week.

"Oh, I've gathered that. You would have told me if that were the case. You are straightforward that way."

The Royal inclines his head smirking and Nick likes it very much, although there's still a shadow of heavier emotion lurking in those intense green depths. Sean grows serious then, obviously preparing for saying something important. Nick's gut tightens a fraction in fear.

What's going on?

"Okay, just to check a theory: Did you by any chance inactivate the glamour around your womb
Nick frowns.
„No. Not that I know of.“
„Oh."

This lack of eloquence isn’t like the composed Prince at all and puts Nick on high alert instantly.
„Why? Sean, what's the matter?“

In for a penny, in for a pound....
„I am able to see and feel your belly in its true proportions."

„What?! What do you mean? That cannot be!"

The Grimm lifts their blanket, which would have been amusing to watch, if he hadn’t gone from sleepily content to nearly hyperventilating in the space of a moment. Nick is no fool by any stretch of the word, he’s understood the implications at once. He looks up now, gaze wide eyed and intense.

„How... I mean... I see it like I always do when I have taken the zaubertrank... like it's slightly blurred around the edges. So how do you...? Are you sure? ....“

Sean raises an eyebrow at the last question.

„Nick, I am quite sure I can make out, if that rather round, heavily protruding belly I am seeing is real or just a figment of my imagination."

He sees his error as soon as he's uttered the last word. If Nick has been confused and frowning before, now he is fast approaching full fledged panic. He pulls out of their embrace to sit up and face him more fully.

„But if you can see it, although I have taken the trank, then everyone could see it! How can I...? How can I go out... and protect my baby like that?! This cannot be... it cannot simply be failing!“

At seeing the level of dread in Nick’s gray orbs, Sean pulls him back into his arms without even thinking about it and Nick melts into him without hesitation either. He perceives it only on the sidelines but it fills him with relief.

„Nick, love, calm down. There may be a completely reasonable explanation for all this. We’ll get to the bottom of it. Just take a breath and let’s think this over."

His hand cups his beloved’s cheek, thumb stroking over it in a soothing motion and keeping up the caress even after Nick nods and pulls himself together. Sean knows that these sudden spikes of overflowing emotion are what gets to Nick the most. He's always been known to react to stress and pressure with empathy but also level headed. To be overwhelmed by feelings particularly in situations when keeping his head is needed, doesn’t sit well with the independent Grimm at all.

It shows especially in how quickly to gets himself back under control now.
“Okay. Okay, you are right. Let’s…. We need to call your mum. We need…. Don’t we?“

Sean cannot help smiling at the sheepish expression. The things this wonderful man is doing to him. Hand sliding from where it’s resting on his cheek to settle on the back of his neck, he draws him in for a kiss, marveling silently at how normal... how good it feels to show affection this openly.

“Yes. Calling my mother is a good idea. We will do so at once. Just let me grab my phone.“

He stretches to snatch it from the nightstand and already makes to dial her number when he sees the slightly uncomfortable expression Nick is sporting. He raises a brow in silent query.

“Do you want to call her **right now**… when we’re in **bed** together?“

The shrewd Royal actually snorts, his tone dry upon answering.

“Yes, Nick, I do intent to. It’s not like she can see us or like we are teenagers doing something we aren’t allowed to.“

Now Nick grins ruefully at his own silliness.

“Hmm, you have a point there. Okay, call her then.“

“Shall I put her on speaker?“

“Nah. Enhanced hearing, remember?“

With a curt nod Sean proceeds to call his mother, who takes up on third ring.

“Sean, what a nice surprise. What can I do for my favorite son?“

“Good morning, mother. Apologies for disturbing you this early. And just for the record, as far as I know I am your only son.”

The Prince's totally deadpan reply pulls Nick right out of his antsy fidgeting and into trying to stifle a snort of laughter.

“And still my favorite. Don't worry about the time of day. I'm visiting friends in Europe so you caught me just after lunch. Now, as much as I want to believe this is merely a social call, your tone hints at something being amiss.”

Sometimes Sean hates her perceptiveness. He rolls his eyes....

“Don't roll your eyes at me, son.”

"Mother...", an irritated sigh from the mighty Prince: “Let's just get to the matter at hand....”

“Which you didn't explain so far.”

At this point Nick grabs his mate's hand, knowing all about exasperating mothers there is to know. Sean looks down upon their joined hands gratefully, finds back to his iron control and finally explains matters. Nick feels himself tensing again as soon as conversation turns back to their problem.
Oh, please, let there be an explanation... or more importantly a solution! The repercussions of this....

His anxious train of thought stutters to a halt as his hand is being squeezed. He nods at Sean and actually starts breathing again.

“Mother, is there a possibility for the shadowing trank to be failing?”

“Really Sean, you should know me better than that. What makes you think it has failed, anyway?”

“I can see Nick's womb in its true form even though he has ingested the trank.”

“Interesting. Say, why do you even get to see Nicholas' womb?”

Sean would like to bang his head against the headboard at her mischievous tone.

“As you very well know, Nick lives with me. It would hardly be possible to live in the same house without seeing evidence of his pregnancy occasionally. Except if you believe him to be wearing tents nowadays instead of shirts, which would surely disguise any bulge of a large womb.”

“Oh, be nice, Sean. I was only asking.”

“Hmmhmm.” The Prince doesn't sound convinced.

“Okay, back to the matter at hand. Is Nicholas with you right now?”

Sean throws Nick a sideways glance, to which the Grimm nods.

“Yes, he is and, frankly, we are both rather desperate to get to the bottom of this before we venture out to work.”

“Say hello for me. And, of course, I can see why that would be worrying. Since when are you able to see his belly in its undisguised form?”

“Since this morning.”

“Hmm. And say, did something important happen in the last few days?”

Sean doesn't like her tone – somewhere between smug and inquisitive – and by the amount of micro fidgeting going on beside him, Nick doesn't either.

“What would you term as 'something important'...?”

“Do I hear the rustling of bed covers in the background? Just where are you and Nicholas, dear?”

Sean grits his teeth while his Grimm beside him shows a myriad of different expression in an alarmingly short amount of time. First he gapes, then he glares and finally he mouths 'It's not like she can see us.' in comical impression of his earlier words. The ever composed Royal cannot help it, he snorts loudly at Nick's half scandalized, half pissed off expression.

“Son, is everything alright? You sound congested.”

“I'm fine. No congestion to speak of. Now back to my question. In case I haven't told you – which I have – we need an answer before leaving the house.”

The hexenbiest has the gall to chuckle.
"Yes, yes, dear. Why don't you just put me on speaker.... Okay, now that's much better. Good morning, Nicholas."

Nick's face is the shade of a ripe tomato as he answers and simultaneously glares holes into his lover.

"Good morning, Mrs. Lascelles."

"Call me Elizabeth. So, where were we? Ah yes, I was referring to things like maybe... life altering changes in your relationship...?"

They know that she knows that there's a whole lot of silent communication going on, but for once they don't give a damn. Finally they both nod at the same time, finding their decision mirrored in the other's eyes.

"You could say that. What does it have to do with my ability to see Nick's womb?"

"So you've finally come out of the closet about your feelings for each other? (Too much motherly glee by far!) You're in a relationship now and in acceptance of each other... all sides of the other?"

"Yes.” This is Nick and his answer comes out a little squeaky, which he acquits with a frustrated eye roll at his own silliness. He takes a fortifying breath then and when he continues, his voice has gathered not only strength but confidence.

"Yes to both of your questions. Sean accepts my Grimm side... and my baby and I accept his zauberbiest and royal status.”

"Oh, that's wonderful...."

Sean must profess that he has never heard his mother display such a distinctly weepy tone... until now. He exchanges a glance with his lover and on instinct he lets go of his hand in order to wrap an arm around Nick's shoulders instead. The pregnant Grimm smiles weakly, still torn between happiness at her obvious approval and fear about the failing glamour.

"That's great, my boys.... and long overdue. Anyway, you have nothing to worry about then. Nicholas, your child is still as well protected as it was before. It's known to happen, that someone already in the know about the zaubertrank, in full acceptance and... in love with the pregnant party may see him or her in their true appearance at all times.”

"Oh... that's... thank you, that's a great relief.” Nick stutters a bit, knowing his knees would buckle from sheer relief, if he weren't already sitting (and being embraced by his big man).

"It is, mother. But honestly, you could have told us earlier instead of making us wait to find out, you know?"

Just a bit of cold reproach there. Nick knows where it stems from... at least if Sean's tightening hold on him is any indication.

“I couldn't really tell you. You might never have admitted your love for each other with knowledge like that, but nonetheless I am sorry for causing you to worry. And on another note (mischief warms her tone now), I simply couldn't pass up on the opportunity to learn what you wouldn't have told me for ages otherwise.”

The Prince of Portland doesn't deign that with an answer. He thanks his mother stiffly – Nick throwing in something a bit more heartfelt – and they bid her farewell with promises of keeping her
After putting his cell on the nightstand Sean sinks back into the pillows with a long exhale. Well, that hasn't been how he's imagined telling his mother about his relationship with Nick but it's a relief to have it over with one way or another. He would have expected his Grimm to be faint with relief as well, but instead he has grown fidgety again.

Upon feeling his eyes on him Nick shoots him a quick, uncertain glance before looking back down to his big baby belly. Sean knows there's no chance to coax him into meeting his eyes now, not with whatever is troubling him and not without a little physical incentive. He's rubbing little circles on his bump, more to soothe himself than his little one most likely.

“Nick, what is the matter?”, he asks gently as he tips his beloved's chin up and to the side so that he can look into his eyes. Nick visibly swallows. It's not like him to be nervous like this, so Sean is on high alert.

“So... you're now always seeing my rather... whaley middle. You okay with that? I mean....”

Sean pulls him in for a deep and loving kiss, smiling against those enticing lips at the silliness of the question, although he knows that for Nick it's a real concern.

“More than okay, actually. In case you didn't know, my very pregnant Grimm, you are the most beautiful creature I've ever had the luck of looking upon. Seeing your womb... is one of the most amazing things I have experienced so far.”

Nick blushes fiercely, his eyes mist over and he cannot do a damn thing about it. Sean is good at distracting him, however, and at a suggestive tug on his wrist he complies all too gladly and moves to straddle his zauberbiest's lap. He needs to wriggle bit to get them comfortable – big baby bump between them and all – but he silently relishes in the feeling of his own belly touching upon Sean's where his shirt has ridden up while seeking a good position.... And Sean does, too, going by his smug expression.

When warm hands reverently slide over his bulging middle, Nick moans just loud enough to be heard causing his Prince's face to light up with mirth. There is a levity, that hasn't been there before. To Nick it feels like a valuable gift has been bestowed on him and watching Sean's totally transfixed expression as he explores every inch of his belly takes away any remaining doubts about how much his 'biest likes seeing evidence of his pregnancy.

They go from that to kissing, languid and slow, and clinging to each other. Nick yelps into their kiss when at some point Sean swats his ass (and none too lightly either) but cannot help a sheepish grin at what his mate murmurs into his ear right after.

“And just so you know, Nick Burkhardt: No more insinuations that you are getting fat. You are insulting not only yourself with that but your boy as well and I won't have that.”
“Yes, Sir.” When Nick uses the honorific, it is with warmth and acceptance that his zauberbiest appreciates him just the way he is.

>>>  

Hank fetches Nick roughly half an hour later and seeing the Afro-American in a chipper mood that can only stem from having a new love interest (or more likely from finally asking out his current one) he decides to come clean with his partner about his budding relationship with their boss.

“Hey Hank, wanna hear some weird news?”, Nick asks innocently when they've moved from Hank's first date with the coffee girl and latest station gossip to companionable silence. His partner chances him a look before indicating and changing lanes.

“Is it that kind of news where we buy coffee and then don't drink it?”

“Err, no. At least I don't think so.”

“You don't sound too sure, man.”

Nick's long suffering look and infamous raised eyebrow are more expressive than any exasperated 'Hank!' could ever be. The man shrugs unconcernedly.

“Just asking. So, you've said something about weird news. Oh and just in case, is this going to get more weird than you telling me you're pregnant?”

It's Nick's turn to shrug (and look a little uncertain).

“That would depend on your standards, I guess. Errr... and it's more unexpected than weird... I think.”

“Honestly, partner, I'm not sure I even have standards these days, so just shoot away.”

Picking at his shirt sleeve in agitation is not like Nick at all, so Hank awaits his answer with a certain measure of dread. He can pinpoint the exact moment when his partner has made up his mind and is ready to spill the beans. Working together for years does give you some insight into the other's mind, after all.

“Okay, listen Hank. You know that I’m not 100% a straight guy, right?”

“Jep. You told me that years ago on a beers and movies night while we were well on our way of getting spectacularly drunk. If this’s gonna be a confession of a secret crush on me, I love you like a brother, but I have this very nice coffee girl I’m dating and intent to get serious with.”

Hank says it with a teasing smile, knowing full well that whatever Nick's going to tell him, this isn't it.

“Haha, very funny. I'm sorry to tell you that you're not really my type. But yeah, love you like a big, bull-shouldered, exasperating brother as well.”

“I'm not sure, if there was a compliment in there somewhere and I would rather not think about it too closely, so why don't you tell me what you wanted to tell me before I started taking the mickey at my pregnant little brother?”
Nick glares but without any real heat behind it.

"Okay, here we go: I've recently noticed that I have... kind of... fallen in love with Sean... and last week I finally told him and it came out that he's feeling the same.... Sooo... we're actually together now."

It's a good thing Hank's used to puzzling out confusing witness statements. At least that means he's been able to follow the Grimm's line of thought. Seeing how nervous Nick looks despite his valiant attempt to keep his anxiety hidden, it's no wonder his tale has been a bit on the jumbled side.

"Well, that's great news, man, though hardly unexpected."

"What do you mean, hardly unexpected?"

Nick's honestly confused frown is adorable, really. He shoots his partner a sideways glance and does nothing to hide the smug grin spreading over his face.

"Oh, come on. You've hardly been inconspicuous about it."

Nick's expression darkens somewhat.

"Maybe not the smartest thing to say to a Grimm on a healthy dose of pregnancy hormones. Hank, three ex-wives should have given you some clue about what to say and what to keep quiet about. Or not."

"Are you saying I have kept this from you deliberately?"

"More like keeping it from yourselves, you and the Captain, haven't you?"

Nick huffs in annoyance but at least his glare has lightened somewhat.

"Well, I've certainly not known all that long. I mean, I've thought about it for some time now but not really... not like it could actually become reality at any point. Now I feel kind of stupid. Seems you all noticed earlier than I did. How's that possible? Maybe I've got the wrong job if I can't spot something everyone else gets at first glance."

Seeing Nick's dejected look Hank hurries to assure:

"Hey, don't think anything of it. I mean, you haven't been awake to see the way the Captain challenged me when you were sick and I asked him, if you would stay with him now. If you had seen how his glare practically burned me to cinders, you would have known ages ago."

The Grimm cannot help chuckling. He would have liked to see that.

"You could have told me, you know?"

Nick's easy smile and mischievous glint have reappeared. It emboldens Hank to waggle his finger in a comically exaggerated gesture.

"Nuhuuh, not my place to tell my mostly straight partner that his boss may or may not has thrown an eye on him. Playing matchmaker never ends well... not even for the matchmaker. And beside that, you've just suffered through a gruesome break up with your girlfriend, so sorry, but you had to
find out on your own.”

Nick still looks uncertain.

“Do you think it was too early? After... after things with Juliette?”

Stopping at a red light Hank uses the moment to shoot his partner a long and serious look.

“Honestly, Nick, I think it was about time you found someone who appreciates you just the way you are. Without expecting you to jump through hoops or change the world, because you know what, you deserve to be happy and be taken care of just like that little man inside you does and with Juliette that would never have happened. And just in case that wasn't clear, I know you are well able to take care of yourself but that doesn't mean it isn't nice to have someone to take a bit of weight off your shoulders from time to time. Believe a guy, who speaks from experience.”

“And that guy is you, oh wise Master Griffin?”

“Smartass. And once again this means you are paying for coffee.”

Nick pretends to pout and Hank smirks like a cat who got the cream. It's not necessary to say how grateful Nick is for the other man's support, Hank knows it quite well.

>>>  

A few hours later with a case way underfoot and another unknown wesen to identify the two Detectives decide to split forces to get things done faster. Hank drops him off at the Tea and Spice Shop before driving off to take another look at the crime scene. Nick slips out of the car with speed and dexterity (for someone heavily pregnant) that has Hank wagging his eyebrows and make silly comments about other areas where those skills may be of use to him now. Nick flips him off and grumbles about evil partners shamelessly using recently acquired information to tease him.

The Afro-American mutters something in return, for which the Grimm shoots him another dark glare, and finally promises that he'll pick him back up in about an hour or two.

Nick enters the shop through the back door, calling out to his friends to announce his presence. No need to startle Monroe into a wild woge – again – because he approaches 'on frickin' silent feet' as his blutbad friend has once put it. Rosalee steps into the room where he's waiting and greets him with a hug and a warm smile. She often does these days, hugging him that is, and he is content to let her.

“Hey, Nick. You've picked a good moment. I've just closed down the shop for the day. How's it going on the baby front?”

Nick's grin shows a hint of self-depreciation that she knows Sean would nib in the butt if he were to see it. His next words therefore don't surprise her.

“Getting whaley 'round the middle. Other than that it's great.”

Knowing that the ever perceptive Captain most likely has a hand in curbing their Grimm's more
self-conscious tendencies, she just chuckles, tuts and knowingly asks: “Did you tell Sean that, too?”

“Hmmhmm.”

“And what did he say?”

“Swatted me across the rear and told me I shouldn't insult my baby by thinking I'm fat and ugly.... Just this morning to be exact.”

Nick pouts adorably.

“Somehow I cannot pity you for that. Come on. I have tea ready and Monroe is already pouring over the books to find an answer to your question.”

“Brilliant. I could get used to that, you know?”

“Oh, don't let it get to your head, Mr. Grimm.” That mischievous twinkle in her eyes makes him happy. A few weeks back he hasn't believed that things could ever be good again. There's been so much tension and dread, so much grief and pressure to keep it together in front of Juliette despite their relationship slowly crumbling around them. He wraps his friend in a spontaneous half hug, which she returns with fervor.

“Not that I'm not glad to be hugging you”, she murmurs while they are still close together: “But is there a particular reason, hmm?”

Nick ducks his head.

“Um, no not really. Just... I'm happy, you know? And you and Monroe are part of that and... damn it, Rosie, you can't go about asking me things like that, if you don't want me to get all weepy and snoddy again.”

The fuchsbau pats his shoulder and ushers him into one of the chairs.

“You were the one to hug me out of the blue so don't complain, Mister.” Her tone is mild and she produces a box of tissues from somewhere, before calling out to her husband.

“Hon, did you find something about what Nick described earlier?”

“No, still slaving away on it. Do I get some help here?”

Rosalee's wicked grin shows her fuchsbau nature all too clearly as she shouts back: “I'm afraid we are a little busy with tea and....” She waves her hand in a vague prompt for him to make another suggestion. Grinning he pulls out the latest sonogram picture from his pocket.

“Ah yes, and looking at pictures of Toisie.”

Monroe's answer from the adjoining room is clearly of the grumbly kind.

“You two are evil. Slavery has long since stopped being up to date in case you haven't noticed!”

“You are the best husband I could wish for and I'll kiss you and make it up to you, if you are a dear and make an effort now.”

“As if I don't always do.” They can hear him mutter.

“Thanks”, Nick mouths.
Rosie winks at him and pours tea. “A bit of coddling for the pregnant is allowed from time to time.”

“You are the best, Rosie! Umm, do you think... Monroe could find an answer real fast so that we are ready when Hank comes to fetch me?”

He does the big puppy Grimm eyes for effect but the fuchsbau only laughs and tells him to negotiate that with her husband.

PW 29:

Sean, I'm doomed!” This is Nick calling from the bathroom. He sounds more exasperated than fearful so the zauberbiest is fairly sure it's not a serious matter.

“Why would you say that? If you haven't finished the edited version of your latest report, for which I set the deadline at Thursday, then, yes, you are doomed. If it is something else, I am sure we can find a solution, that involves minimal bloodshed or tears.”

The Grimm sticks his head out of the bathroom door, looking a curious mix of adorable and drop dead gorgeous with his tousled, shower damp hair and no clothes to speak of apart from a towel around his waist, baby belly protruding above it.

“Nah, Hank and I finished that on Wednesday. No, I'm doomed because I've slipped into yet another curiosity of late pregnancy that I could live without.”

The powerful Royal steps up to his mate, carefully placing his hands on Nick's hips, drawing him near and looking down on him with a small smile.

“And what would that be, oh greatly suffering Grimm?”

He's still careful when he touches Nick, still mindful of his beloved's past experiences, but so far he's never had any objections. It holds true now, too, for the smaller man looks up at him with warmth in the depth of his gaze and closes his eyes, apparently to inhale deeply and draw in his 'biest's scent.

“Hmm. Just noticed that there aren't only drawbacks to this new addition....”

He nuzzles his shirt clad chest, eyes still closed and in no hurry to explain. Sean lets his thumb run over naked skin, lightly clearing his throat to prompt Nick into spilling the beans.

“I've noticed over the last few days that I can smell way too well for it to be normal and then I perused a few of those advisory books Rosalee gave me and there was a part about how your senses sometimes strengthen at certain points in the pregnancy. My Grimm heritage must have pushed that over the top as it does with nearly everything and now... I mean yesterday I could tell
that Wu had Chicken Tikka Masala for lunch... and we were only in the parking garage.”

“Given your line of work I see how that could be uncomfortable, but then again you seemed to be enjoying yourself moments ago when you tried to sniff out my scent in its entirety.”

The smug smirk makes Nick grin in return and nod slowly, gaze never straying from his big man, expressive eyes, enticing lips and all.

“Maybe you should continue getting ready for work now. That dreamy gaze of yours tells me that we're going to be late, if we stay this close together for much longer.”

Contrary to his words, after he has turned his Grimm around in direction of the bathroom, his hands remain splayed across Nick big, shapely baby bump, wherein the little one moves lazily as is his habit this early in the morning. Nick throws a playful grin over his shoulder, stepping back so that he's resting flush against his mate.

“Toisie and I agree on not wanting to leave your vicinity any time soon.”

In response his own hand joins Sean's on his belly, rubbing, caressing and silently delighting in the abrupt increase of baby activity inside. The Prince laughs softly, his breath a warm gush against the skin of his neck, where he has buried his nose.

“While I agree with both of you, work doesn't, so its high time that you tug on some clothes and have breakfast with me.”

“I'm not sure this is a fair bargain but I'll indulge you... this once.”

A light nip of teeth against that soft spot on the side of his neck, then his Captain's voice directly next to his ear:

“It is no bargain at all, it is an order, Detective.”

There's no heat behind it, only teasing and a tenderness, that Nick has come to love.

“Yes, Sir. Right on my way, Sir.”

>>> 

With their latest case wrapped up Nick has the afternoon off and decides to heed over to Monroe, who's a bit lonely because Rosie is visiting an aunt of hers for a few days.

Having texted already and agreed on the time of meeting, Nick steers his vehicle into a parking space in front of his friend's home. The blutbad has promised to cook – an offer he all too gladly accepts these days when Toisie is needing all the nourishment he can get – and Nick decides to try and see how good his sense of smell really is. Still sitting in his truck he closes his eyes, draws in a deep, slow breath and smells....
Quinoa.

_Blerrgh!! Oh no, of all the things Monroe could have chosen, why does it have to be yucky _**quinoa pudding**?!_

Nick and the seeds have a special kind of history, including being forced to eat an entire portion of it at a friend's party and smile politely all the while, after finding out that he has no taste for the dish... at all.

All his colleagues at the station know (and threaten to force-feed it to him if he's been childish enough to play a prank on one of them), Sean and even Rosalee know, so Monroe should damn well know it, too!

He actually groans because with his enhanced olfactory sense he cannot get the tang of it out of his nose. Grumbling he takes out his phone and calls the clock maker turned tormentor.

“Hey, Nick. If I remember correctly what time we've agreed on, you should have been here about five minutes ago. What happened to politeness and punctuality...? Not something that's taught to fledgling cops anymore?”

Nick doesn't deign that with an answer.

“Monroe, _**quinoa pudding?** Honestly?”_

“What...? How...? Just where the hell are you, dude?”

“Outside. Look out of the window. In my car, still smelling _**quinoa**!”_

He can hear the blutbad swallow somewhat worriedly and decides that pregnant Grimm grumpiness translates well over line. When his friend only huffs instead of answering, he takes it upon himself to do so:

“I mean, you _**know**_ I hate the stuff!... Errr, don't you?”

Nick's rapid mood change wrings a little chuckle from Monroe. To go from angry to clueless in the space of a sentence, adorable.

“Uuh, yeah... (low rumble that might be a growl from the Grimm's end of the line) I kind of remember but then I thought, you haven't tasted _**my**_ quinoa pudding and....”

“No 'ands' and no 'buts', Monroe. You are a great friend but I draw the line at quinoa pudding. What were you thinking.... I mean, Toisie can actually taste what I eat.”

“You're point being?” That's deadpan blutbad, if he's ever heard one. Nick says nothing, just stares with unholy fury at the window, behind which his friend is standing, until he blanches and scurries away.
“I'll put it in the fridge, dude... Now that I think about it, what's the matter with you knowing about the dish, anyway? You are in your car!”

“Enhanced sense of smell. A 'you-know-what' thing. Not funny for a Grimm, whose genes are hellbent on taking everything over the top.”

“Oh, that's evil, man.”

>>>

After watching Nick trying to keep from gagging for ten minutes straight – because of the pudding that's gone into the fridge after he's placed it in a box... and that into two other slightly bigger boxes – Monroe takes pity on him.

“You can tamp down your sensitivity, you know?”

Looking up from where he's been silently moping, Nick's eyes widen comically.

“Come again? I mean... can I? How?... Damn, why are you telling me this only now?”

"It was so much fun to watch. That, and I was tired of finding yet another, bigger box to provide quinoa smell protection for our oversensitive Grimm."

Nick's glare is fearsome and focused solely on his turned back, so he digs out his remaining survival instincts and explains how to do it. While he oversees his friend concentrating on his inner 'me', he ponders the fact that it might not have been his survival instincts but a certain pregnant man muttering lowly to the unborn child in his womb. Not that it's been nice things....

“Mark my words, Toisie, Uncle Monroe is evil and tried offing us by a sneaky quinoa pudding attack. We will tell Sean and then he'll have his wrath to face....”

Still, in a weird way it's adorable.

>>>

Nick has spend the past hour evading and hitting when time's been right.

A conversation over lunch (thank God the pudding from hell has only been dessert) has evolved into a discussion of pregnancy safety measures while doing Grimm work and that into an impromptu training session in the woods.

Monroe had insisted and Nick, well, Nick has thought his argument a valid one. After all he couldn't very well tell all wesen of Portland: 'If you think about committing a wesen related crime, please wait 'til February when my baby is born and I'm available again to kick your ass and put you
behind bars with my work partner, my Captain and my civilian blutbad friend.'

Half way through he's send a message to Sean telling him that he'll stay a bit longer than anticipated and after that he has continued to evade... and kick Monroe's ass.

>>> Sean looks out onto this city, his canton, that's slowly sinking into darkness of a dying day only for a thousand lights to appear in its stead. It's a peaceful sight and a good feeling to know that all is save and in order. His phone vibrates, indicating an incoming message. A smile tugs at the corner of his mouth as he reads a text from Nick.

//Rosie out. Staying with Monroe. Coming home a bit later, if quinoa pudding hasn't developed life of its own and followed us to training session... to eat us.//

Hard to imagine that he could be experiencing something so... domestic.

He types out a text when he feels it, that prickle at the back of his neck. An instinct honed by decades on the run, destroying the peace, indicating danger. He doesn't move, let's his senses roam. He is outnumbered and surrounded by enemies. Sean looks down on his phone, the text he's written.

//I am sure a simple quinoa dish is no match for your widely varied skills. No hurry, take your time.//

A single word. It would only take typing a single word to warn the Grimm off and get him here. To help and to fight alongside of him against those, who are just now invading their safe haven. He presses the send button without writing another word, slipping the phone into his suit pocket just as they enter the living room.

This is the way it has to be. The usually so distanced zauberbiest cannot bear the thought of endangering Nick and his unborn child. He would rather let him pass his day with the blutbad in ignorance than push him into rushing to his rescue.

And don't I know who is waiting for me when I turn? With careful handling I might survive this unscathed. Or with as little harm done as possible.

Sean is no fool. He remembers well how Nick has told him about his increased sense of smell. He will smell the hundjager and the danger but hopefully by then it will have passed. He's prepared to deal with the fall out later. Now he has to deal with....

"Cousin Victor, to what do I owe the doubtful pleasure of your polite entrance?", he intones smoothly as he turns around to the current Crown Prince of the House of Kronenberg and four of
his henchmen.

The man smiles with malice.

"Sean. I advice you to abandon your arrogant demeanor at once. You are in disgrace and not nearly as powerful as you think you are. You may have claimed this city as your canton but your status as ruler is given to you only by the grace and generosity of King Frederic."

The zauberbiest wants to snort and politely point out that while he's made his own home and canton Victor is Crown Prince only by grace of his father's penchant for scheming but he restricts himself to curling his lip and letting silence speak for itself.

Victor's eyes narrow but before he can retort one of the hundjager addresses his master:

"Your Highness, I smell a Grimm. The Grimm was here!"

Sean doesn't wait for his cousin to react and levels a stare at the man, half pitying half menacing.

"Of course, you fool! He is my subordinate at work and as a Grimm loyal to me. He frequents the place on regular basis."

The hundjager growls low in his throat while Victor looks like he wants to do the same. It's what Sean has intended to happen. The Crown Prince is an arrogant peacock. He's bound to take offense to the Bastard telling off what should be his underlings more than thinking about the truth of Sean's statement. It's enough that there's a ring of truth to it because the mind is a fickle thing. While the action of undermining his authority is fought over, the statement in itself is automatically taken for truth.

Victor visibly blusters, dismissing Verrat member outside along with another one and telling him where to position the rest of their group. Renard listens closely, committing position and number of them:

Two on the premises, one by every entrance, one in the corridor and one in the living room with them. That makes six. Too many to fight alone.

The one standing guard directly over him is training a gun at his chest whereas Victor stands before him in the middle of the room, trying to project nonchalance and superiority but really not possessing the class and authority to do either.

Despite all this Sean is well aware of the danger he's in. Victor may be less cunning and devious than Eric yet he's not a complete idiot. He suffers no illusion that, should his cousin not like what he has to say, he will be dead or at least suffer greatly, Bastard Prince or no.

"Now, Sean, we have cause to believe that you have betrayed us."

Sean raises a brow and crosses his arms in front of his chest.

"Seeing that I have declared myself independent of the House of Kronenberg years ago, tell me how else I may have betrayed you?"

Again that telltale narrowing of Viktor's eyes. He has to tread carefully.

"Do you happen to know anything about the disappearance of Diana Shade-Renard, who is Royal
by blood and therefore ours to raise and use as we see fit."

He has feared that. Not a shred of emotion shows as he tilts his head in contemplation of the question. His answer could may well decide his fate. He won't let them get to his daughter, no doubt about that, but what has his heart beating wildly and his scent grow thick with fear, is the possibility of them finding out about Nick and worse, about his unborn child.

*My Grimm won't be hurt! I'll do whatever I can to protect him! It simply will not happen. Not as long as I've life left in my body!*

"If you want to know about Diana's whereabouts, maybe you should ask her mother?"

His show of polite if slightly condescending boredom gains him the butt of a gun smashed into the side of his head. He grunts and staggers just a bit. The silent communication between Victor and his last remaining henchman has been fast, he has to give them that. The hundjager has attacked at a single glance from his master and not held back! It's the lesser of two evils still, for revealing anything else would have meant death instead of injury and at least they haven't managed to knock him out.

The crimson trickle down his face may speak a different language but it could have been worse.

>>>  

Nick parks his truck a few houses down from Sean's as is his habit to divert attention away from his current living arrangements. He's in a good mood, the day so far has been enjoyable if he doesn't take that quinoa pudding incident into account. He shudders at the memory. If there's one thing he doesn't like it's squishy squashy quinoa seeds submerged in milk... or any other substance for that matter! The smell alone is enough to make him nauseous, which is a true pain in the ass given his recent upgrade in the olfactory department.

Apropos smell: What is tickling his nose like that? He knows that scent and cannot for the life of him repress a feeling of foreboding.

He inhales deeply, concentrating like Monroe has shown him to re-access the skill, and is tipped right over into a world of olfactory input: Hundjager... there for some time already. The sharp tang of violence. Fear, pain, blood!

How he knows? Taking up scent like that is a pregnancy thing. Interpreting the information is a Grimm thing that's closely intertwined with his most basic instincts.

He stops dead in his tracks, blood turning to ice with the implications. Hundjager... in their home!

 sean, oh God, please be okay!!

Another sniff, closing his eyes to strengthen the sense. Sean is in there with them. Pain, blood.... His beloved hurt.

No. Noo! I will not loose him. I've just found him, I cannot loose him now!

For a moment his chest tightens from sheer anxiety, heartbeat speeding up and taking Toisie's with it into panicked heights, then the cop and the Grimm wrestle to the fore and bring his analytic mind back on track.

*They won't get to harm him further and they'll damn well pay for ever laying a hand on him!*
A low rumble starts in the back of his throat. It is a growl, menacing and deep. His hands are balled to white knuckled fists, every muscle, every fiber tensing in anticipation of a fight. As he gets going again his primal side rolls forth like clouds heralding a rainstorm. A dark and violent aura that's pure Grimm.

>>> 

"Sean, I won't...."

Victor stops when the Verrat member tenses suddenly, cocking his head as if he tries to place a scent or something. The Crown Prince looks disgruntled.

"Warron, what's the matter with you?"

The wesen shakes himself out of it but looks like he needs to get rid of a bad feeling.

"Nothing, Sir. I thought I felt something but it was nothing. I am sorry for interrupting your conversation.

"Well you should be!", Victor snaps indignantly while already focusing his attention back on his cousin and dismissing the other man from his mind.

"So back to the matter at hand: I won't keep asking politely for long, Cousin. What's been your part in whisking that girl away? As you will remember there was a condition to sparing you from the king's wrath. You were to hand her over and not an hour later she was taken from us. If I find out that you were involved in this little scheme, you will be dead!"

Victor shakes with repressed anger and impatience. This is nothing, however, to the quaking of Sean's zauberbiest side behind the facade of his human shell! It desires to maim and kill and hurt this impudent little man, who dares to threaten him! He cannot give in to those desires, though. He has to protect his beloved Grimm. In face of this nearly insurmountable task even the proud, power hungry wesen bows its head. It's like a parasite gnawing at his insides... the thought of seeing Nick hurt again. He cannot bear it! He needs to wrap this up one way or another. To be abducted by his enemies, to be hurt... tortured.... It doesn't matter as long as Nick doesn't end up in their line of fire.

You have to play this right. No violence. You have to get through this with brains rather than brawn.

The gun is trained at his head again. The hundjager. That misbegotten creature. Sean's head hurts fiercely from the first meeting with the weapon, the trickle of blood hasn't fully stopped even now. His expression remains blank, maybe a trace of put upon displeasure at having his evening thus disturbed, and he stares straight into his cousin's eyes.

>>> 

He jogs back to his car, slight breathlessness he's experiencing another unfortunate twist of late pregnancy, takes out the kanabo stashed there after the training session and nears their house on silent feet. It's early evening in December, already dark and rather cold. This is good. Darkness means ambushing them will be easier.

Awareness of his surroundings and of himself sharpens by another notch as he nears the premises.

They have hurt his mate. They have invaded their home. Cold detachment settles over him as he contemplates his next steps, the risks to his baby and to Sean. He devices a plan of action: He's already texted Monroe, letting him know what's happened and instructing him to send backup if he
hasn't called in an hour, so that part is taken care of.

Taking cover behind a high hedge separating their garden from the neighboring one he takes out a wolfsbane stone like the one Monroe has introduced him to when they've tracked down that blutbad all these years ago. It’s effective not only to deceive blutbadden but a few other dog like wesen as well, which makes it a thing to keep on hand.

Application done, he closes his eyes and pushes his new ability to the point of where his olfactory perception becomes three-dimensional. It's a skill normally associated with bees but nowadays also with heavily pregnant Grimms.

He can practically map out each wesen's location in and around the house. Their positions lend themselves to his plan. He will sneak up on each of them and incapacitate one after another, silent and if necessary deadly!

>>>  

“I know as much as you do pertaining the current whereabouts of my daughter and I didn't whisk her away from under your nose. Don't you think I would rather know her in the hands of blood relatives – even with as much antipathy between us as there is – than see her with that devious hexenbiest, who's wanted to sell her even before she's been born?”

He lies through his teeth, playing the role perfectly. He has two children to protect, Nick's unborn child and Diana, who is currently on the run with Kelly Burkhardt. There may be no love lost between him and Adalind and way too much water under the bridge between Nick and her but Sean draws the line at sacrificing children to the battles of power hungry Royals.

Victor must have believed him for the gun is lowered at a wink from him and Warron takes a surreptitious step back. Sean shows no reaction to either. Doing so would only mean revealing that it affects him. Giving only a haughty sniff in direction of the dog like creature he waits to see what will happen next.

Master and guard look undecided and it's with a feeling of foreboding that the zauberbiest watches the cogs turn in his cousin's head.

“You may tell the truth.... Or you are the devious Bastard I know you to be and are trying to deceive us. We should put it to a test, shouldn't we?”

The hundjager gives a throaty chuckle at the prospect of hurting the arrogant half-breed.

Exerting iron control Sean keeps any and all emotion off his face, burying his worries and fears so deeply within that no one can perceive them. It's been enough that this trice cursed creature has smelled his fear earlier, he won't let that happen a second time.

>>>  

Nick slips through the darkness. All his senses are on high alert and he moves as soundless as a ghost and for all the emotional detachment he really could have been one.

The first two hundjager – those guarding the premises – are lured away and taken care of before they can make a sound. He fights like a phantom, embracing Monroe's lesson and evading each and any attack only to show and strike with force when there’s an opening. The man standing guard at the front door and blending in with the shadows of a cold winter evening is good. The Grimm is better, dead set on incapacitating the creature as noiselessly and quickly as possible. He sinks to the ground with barely a grunt.
The one at the back door is more work, has better instincts and spots him just before the first blow
hits him. Nick adapts quickly. An elbow driven into his larynx ending any sound threatening to
come out, another blow with the kanabo to knock him out. Nick doesn't outright aim to kill any of
them but if that happens, it won't rob him off his sleep. What would achieve that is....

Don't think about that now!! You need to concentrate, if you want to save him!

In sync with that desperate command his Grimm side truly takes over. He works methodically,
always aware that he must under all circumstances keep his child out of harms way even when he
fights the enemy. He slips in through the front door and he's able to channel anger and emotions
into action just until he takes down the wesen standing guard in the corridor. It is his hardest fight
yet for he knows Sean, another hundjager and a human are nearly within earshot and he mustn't
alert Sean’s captors.

He shows just enough movement for the remaining guard to perceive out of the corner of his eye
before backing away into the shadows behind the open front door. The man takes the bait, slipping
out only to be hit hard with the kanabo. Nick smashes him into the wall face first, strength fueled
by the pressing need to protect his mate and finally he lets another unconscious man sink to the
ground.

He re-enters the house, leaving the door ajar, and that's when he hears it.

They are talking about torturing Sean to see if he tells the truth! The guttural growl threatening to
emit from the back of his throat is held in at the last moment while rage like he's never known
before washes over him. The Grimm gets out of control, his very aura spilling over and for an
instant he's lost in a fog, which only one thought penetrates: Kill them all!! Kill anyone out to hurt
your mate!

It is the frantic heartbeat of his unborn child and a sharp kick from the inside as if telling him to
stop doing these frightening things... to stop having these violent thoughts, that brings him to his
senses again. His hand slips to his stomach as he stands there, silently panting and trying to see
straight again.

And it's not a moment too soon!

>>> Sean's mind should be occupied with thoughts of his own well being yet it is Nick his thoughts lie
with. What will happen when they take him? Will the Grimm follow and get himself killed trying
to rescue him? The thought alone is enough to make him nauseous.

“Well, Warron, what are you waiting...?”

There is a noise from the corridor, barely noticeable but putting them all on edge. Within the
Bastard Prince hope and gut wrenching fear fight for dominance, Victor and his lackey exchange
disturbed glances.

Oh, please God, don't let it be Nick! But it is, isn't it? Damn it! There is his heartbeat along with
that of his baby as clear as if it were my own! But... he mustn't face danger like that! Not now, not
at more than seven months of pregnancy!

Frantically he ponders what to do. He's just made the decision to attack the hundjager, gun or no,
when the man rears back as if hit by an invisible force. He himself isn't much better off but Warron
beats him to a reaction: The hundjager's growl is that of a deeply frightened haunt ready to snap at
the air to relieve oppressing tension.

And Sean feels it, too. Or rather his wesen side does. That aura. That tendril of fear originating from most basic instincts that are inherited by every wesen....

His Grimm has come, indeed, and he is angrier than Sean has ever known him to be.

“Warron! Go look what's up there!”

Victor's voice has turned shrill. He may be kehrseite but even he perceives the densely oppressive atmosphere that's slipped in like a cloud of poisonous fumes. The guard struggles to make a decision, this much is apparent to Sean: To leave the Bastard Prince unguarded is stupid but a Royal's order is an order.

Warron knows it, Sean knows it, Victor is oblivious to the flaw in his plan yet his servant cannot tell him in case that he, Sean, has not yet picked up on his advantage.

In the end he stalks over to the corridor and for once both Princes remain behind frozen to the spot instead of fighting and wait with baited breath. Now would be the time to overpower Victor but Sean cannot for the life of him tear his eyes away from the opening of the corridor where his beloved Grimm is fighting. At the same time – and this impotency nearly kills him – it's the very Grimm vibe of his mate that prevents him from taking even a single step forward!

Never in all these years knowing Nick has he felt anything like this. Raw power. Dark, angry... every wesen's nightmare.

>>> Warron stands no chance. Not now that Nick's outrage and worry have reached a crescendo. He rushes into the corridor with all his senses alert, intent on killing the freak who’s dared interfering with Prince Victor's plans. First he will do this and then he'll pick that bloody half-breed apart.

The blow comes out of nowhere and the accompanying person is only a blur, that grabs him as he staggers from a piece of wood smashed into his nose. He is thrown into the next best wall with such force that he passes out before he has fully realized what's happened.

The last thing the hundjager experiences is the terror of being subjected to the purely black aura of a rampaging Grimm.

>>> They hear an angry growl that is most decidedly not coming from the hundjager, then Warron hits the wall and the Grimm steps into the living room. Victor gasps and staggers a few steps back. Sean has no eyes for him. He stares at his beloved and although he's entirely unharmed, he's changed anyway. There is a darkness lurking in his gray orbs that disturbs even the zauberbiest, not because he fears for his own life but because of what pure cold has engulfed his good-natured Grimm. Evidence of his pregnancy should take something away from his menace. It does not. This is Nick and not his Nick all at once. His eyes are swirling black as he regards the cousins calmly. No one moves. Sean has no doubt that his empathetic, non violent mates in still in there, still influencing his decisions in part, but fear for him has made the Grimm's priorities shift.

Nick focuses his inky gaze solely on Victor who swallows thickly from feeling pure menace without being able to grasp its origin. Then Nick speaks up, tone deep and gravelly with his heritage willing out.
„Victor. You’ve been the instigator of all this. I should have known. Just so you know, I have heard how you discussed the merits of torturing Sean. Maybe I should return the favor so that you have first hand experience to draw back on when making your decision.“

„What?! You cannot…! I’m a Prince!!“

Victor staggers back, features arrested in uncomprehending terror.

>>> 

Sean sees it out of the corner of his eye: His cousin is drawing a gun from a hidden holster at the small of his back and pointing it at Nick. His hand trembles but even a shaking finger can pull a trigger.

No, no, NO!!

He acts on instinct, pivoting on the spot, pushing into Victor’s way right as his ‘biest breaks forth and roars with the force of his woge. He rams his knee into Victor’s gut, the hand holding the gun is grabbed and the wrist broken in a single snap!

Victor screams, the zauberbiest growls with its teeth gnashing, the gun clatters to the floor. Sean flips him over and onto the floor before he can do anything other than double over in immense pain. It steals his breath, it fills him with terror. The ‘biest in Renard takes up on his fear, revels in it, holds him pressed down in the exhilarating knowledge that doing this goes to lengths in protecting his pregnant Grimm.

Upon raising his head away from Victor he finds himself face to face with said Grimm. It’s still difficult to meet his eyes, to see past the incarnation of a wesen’s nightmare yet a shred of his feeling, sentient mate has returned upon watching Sean risk his life to save him and his baby.

For a long moment only Nick the Grimm and Sean his Prince exist. Their eyes say what their tongues cannot express in front of their captive, then Nick walks over and squats down next to the subdued man. As he sits there on his haunches darkness rises to the surface again as the inner mind contemplates all the terrible things that could have happened tonight.

This cold and detached version of his mate leans just a little bit closer to the wriggling man on the ground, whispering into his ear:

„In case you didn’t know, Sean Renard is my mate, my chosen, or whatever you call it back in Europe. If you threaten, bother or hurt him again, I will kill you. If you return to your home country only to send someone after us, our friends or family, I will come find you and kill you slowly. Tell your family that any involvement here is Portland is unappreciated and know that, should these wishes not be heeded, your life will be forfeit no matter where you are. I will hunt you down... and I’m sure you know the rest.”

Sean knows deep down and with absolute certainty that Nick wouldn’t do that, but right at this moment and if he hadn’t known him intimately like he does he would believe every word of it. Victor does, too, for he cowers on the ground, panting and only moments away from loosing control over his bladder.

„Do you understand what I have told you?”

The Prince doesn’t get out more than a strangled sound but Nick is unrelenting and giving off such dark vibes that Sean needs to avert his gaze or glimpse the entire darkness of his wesen side. He shudders inwardly. This is the Grimm they can be glad to never have met. It’s been unleashed by
Nick in order to protect him, the zauberbiest that should be his arch enemy. He swallows thickly at the enormity of it all.

No, he doesn't have to fear this Grimm. He only has to watch and protect him, love and support him. His Nick will resurface when danger has passed. He raises his gaze to meet that of his mate and this time he is able to hold it.

He sees it now. While Nick stares back at him black fades to dark gray and a shimmer of old feeling returns.

This doesn't mean they go soft on Victor. Sean shakes him roughly as Nick calmly repeats the question. There's no need to hurt him further than Sean's done in their defense, he's still quivering in terror.

“Do you understand what’s being said to you?”

„Ye.... Yes!!“

„Good.“ This is Nick again, all business and dark menace.

>>> Nick looks up to his mate, content to wait for orders now that their safety is ensured. Sean gives a curt nod much like he would do in capacity as his Captain and Nick is happy to oblige. He doesn't want to maim or kill, he wants to protect and put his Grimm side back under wraps but isn't entirely able to. Not yet.

“Guard him while I make a few calls to have them bound and escorted out of Portland.”

And so the Grimm remains as he's been, crouching down beside Victor, who's still on the ground, kanabo resting across his lap and staring down on the Prince with a look that makes your skin crawl.

Sean throws a last glance at his mate before concentrating on organizing his cousin's departure. He talks on the phone, gives orders, is as calm and composed as always, and all the while two heartbeats stay with him. They are both regular now whereas they've been fast and frantic before. Nick's is no surprise. Viewing events with a Grimm's callousness brings with it a calm state of the body. Toisie also seems to have grown less upset, however, even while adrenaline still courses through his Papa's veins. The ritual must be protecting him to some degree, soothing and reassuring the unborn child while his father's human side still struggles to grasp that danger has passed.

>>> All is done – Royal and henchmen bundled away, Monroe informed – and they are alone again. Nick should be able to calm down now. He cannot do it. He isn't frantic with fear or worry. He isn't overwhelmed by emotions as it's sometimes the case nowadays. It's the glacial cold of the Grimm that's getting to him, the lack of feelings. He can think, he can act yet the emotional turmoil which has pulled his darker side to the surface is buried under thick layers of a creature born to fight and give a damn about anything else. His world is one in shades of gray. Dimmed, lifeless, emotionless.... Until....

Sean touches his arm lightly, seeks out his eyes and holds them captive.

“Hey, love. Come out of it, will you?”
It's no command. This is not the Captain's voice nor the Prince's. This is Sean and there is worry and empathy and a world of other emotions untypical for the distanced zauberbiest. Neither of the first would have called Nick back, not in his state, but this...? He blinks, shakes his head as if ridding himself of a bad dream and must look like he's seen his 'biest for the first time.

Life is returning to him. He can feel it all coming back. There's worry, relief, fear and happiness and all of it must now be showing on his face. It's almost more than he can process or express but Sean doesn't need to have it spelled out, does he? He's right there with him and experiencing it all because that's what occupies his own mind.

Nick steps up to him and reality slowly trickles back in as he scrutinizes him closely. His eyes widen when they land on his face while in turn Sean's features become guarded.

_How could I miss this?!_

There's gash on his temple, still bleeding... explaining why he's smelled blood and pain earlier. Around it a nasty bruise has formed.

"That son of a bitch has injured you!! Let me take a look."

Sean takes a step back, projecting only the well composed and invincible leader. The Grimm can guess his next words already and they make his hackles rise:

"Nick, it is nothing...."

Of course he would be playing it down. Nick won't have that. He has the nagging feeling that Sean 'playing things down' is what's gotten them into this situation in the first place and that makes his blood boil.

"Right now, Sean!!"

>>> 

The zauberbiest Prince hasn't expected such a fierce reaction. His eyes widen, then narrow with anger in a flash! His proud and primal 'biest is just beneath the surface, indignant, threatened... aroused. Damn it! He hasn't thought it possible to get aroused by being put into place by his pregnant Grimm. He meets his partner's gaze squarely, ready for a fight over who's got the right to order whom around, and then he really looks Nick in the eyes. It's all there. He doesn't need to establish his strength and independence. Not with his Nick. He sighs and finally gives in.

And how could he not?

_Oh God, those eyes...._

Gray orbs have turned to steel, uncompromising yet containing a world of worry for his battered 'biest. Sean sits down, taking Nick's hand and guiding it to where the butt of the gun has hit him.

"Here. See for yourself that it's less grave than it looks. Just a scratch and a bruise."
He says this gently, finally acknowledging what his pregnant mate has gone through on his behalf. His beloved relaxes a little, taking his head in his hands and tilting it back just enough to get a better look. His frown doesn't lighten, if anything worry lines deepen and jaw muscles work as concern begins to cloud his expression. Nick might be back to normal but he's far from happy.

“I see a bleeding head wound and a nasty bruise. That's not 'nothing' and it isn't even 'a scratch and a bruise'. Stay here, I'll get the first aid kit.... Wait, where is our first aid kit and why the hell don't I know where it is considering the kind of dangerous lives we lead?!”

He works himself right into a state. They both know it, neither can prevent it.

“Nick. First aid kit: Bathroom, cupboard above the sink, metal box on the upper shelf, left side.”

Sean gives very clear instructions, more Captain than mate. Right now Nick doesn't need empty platitudes or even reassurance and an embrace. What he needs is to see and feel under his hands that his mate is going to be okay and he needs to have an active role in that. Sean is aware that this hasn't been all. To some extent they are both pushing the events away but there will be a point when they'll realize and then a meltdown will follow. What proportions it will have remains to be seen and frankly this frightens him. He should be damn well able to predict his own actions and reactions, shouldn't he?

>>> 

Nick has treated the wound and wants nothing more than to curl up with his 'biest, pull him close, make sure that he's really okay and not hiding anything in order not to worry him. But that's the problem, isn't it? Ever since he's resurfaced from his Grimm state there's the nagging feeling that Sean is hiding something.

And don't I know what that is?

Right after he's been finished doing first aid, Sean has placed his hands on his shoulders – hesitating for the fraction of a moment, still asking permission after all this time – and now he pulls him close to put every inch of him under close scrutiny just like Nick has done before. Seeing endless concern in those green eyes, that naked fear for him and his child, just cements Nick's suspicion. He's not a Detective for nothing. His basic side may have dismissed it as unimportant at the time but he's known it the moment he has stepped into the living room and seen the look in his Prince's eyes.

He needs to clear matters up but first he needs to do something else:

He steps even closer to his 'biest, takes the hands that are splayed on his belly into his own and squeezes them gently. Seeking Sean's gaze he lets some of his own feelings show, guides those wonderful hands to rest on his chest above his heart and kisses him. Renard moans lowly into the kiss, the sound as much appreciation as admission to worry and fear.

Nick is pulled into a tight hug, soaking up strength and love and comfort from it. Sean's forehead comes to rest against his own and the words that leave the powerful Royal's lips right are uttered in
a hoarse whisper:

“Oh God, Nick. To think what could have happened tonight. If they had hurt you....”

He breaks off with a shudder so untypical for the reclusive man.

“Yes. To think what could have happened”, Nick whispers back while swallowing around a lump the size of a baseball.

He's had his suspicion, now he knows. Sean has done it on purpose.

Carefully he extracts himself from their embrace, features becoming unreadable at the Captain's questioning gaze. He needs distance. He steps over to floor lengths windows before turning and pinning him with an intense gaze.

“Sean, I have a question and I want an honest answer. When did you send that last message to me? Was that before or after you knew they had invaded the house?”

The zauberbiest's expression becomes inscrutable as he crosses his arms over his chest and draws composure around him like a cloak. Nick waits patiently. Either Sean will give him an honest answer or... frankly he doesn't know what he'll do, if he lies to him.

>>> It should have been easy. Tell a lie, reassure his beloved, be done with it. Sean finds that he cannot do it. Not in face of Nick's questing, deadly calm gaze. This is not he Grimm asking, it is the man he loves and cherishes. Nick knows what's happened – instinct has supplied him with that answer long ago – but he wants to hear it from him. Sean firms his stance, clearly projecting that his reasons have been valid and are not up to discussion.

“I have send it roughly about the same time. I could have texted you but I didn't... to protect you and your child.”

Nick's expression doesn't darken, it gains a depth and intensity that gives an inkling to the storm raging beneath a calm facade.

“Hmm.”

The Grimm paces, hands unconsciously encircling his baby bump and drawing strength from it. At any other point Sean would have been glad to see that the baby has become a source of comfort instead of a burden, but there are more immediate concerns now. While Nick prowls, the zauberbiest holds himself very still. It's a stark contrast.

Sean waits him out, knowing that this is the time for the storm to break loose. He's right. When Nick turns to face him, his gaze has become piercing once more.
“So you did it to protect Toisie and me? To spare us from danger? I admit that I understand that part of your reasoning completely.”

Sean swallows and inwardly prepares for the proverbial clap of thunder. He has seen Nick hot headed, angry and feeling betrayed. This goes much deeper....

His Grimm comes closer, gaze now stubbornly glued to his big baby bump because he's either unable or unwilling to meet Sean's. Shoulders are set tensely, his whole posture hunched. Is it protective instinct or a bull about to charge? Sean isn't sure but whatever it is, here it comes:

“But do you know...?”

He is shocked to find Nick's voice suddenly thick with tears. When he finally raises his eyes the reason becomes clear: There they are, tears spilling over onto his cheeks and his beloved looks at him, hurt and lost and with a desperate fire lighting his eyes.

“But do you know, what it did to me to come here and smell hundjager in our home?! To smell blood, pain and fear – your blood, pain and fear – and to know that I haven't been there when you needed me?!”

“Nick....”

“DO YOU KNOW IT?!”

The desperate and angry shout is like a punch in the gut. Yes, Sean does understand. He can relate all too well, because two months ago when Nick has lain in a heap on the floor he has asked himself the same questions: Why haven't I been there? Why haven't I acted sooner?

Nick has turned away from him but he can still see his chest heaving under the force of harsh breaths, can still hear him trying to keep from sobbing outright. All this, it pushes even the ever controlled zauberbiest to the brink of tears! Almost hesitantly he steps over to his beloved, places his hands on his shoulders and feels even more wretched when Nick flinches at the touch. It's more that he doesn't want to be seen like this than feeling unease at his touch but it's still something Sean has never wanted to cause.

Tears now truly well up in his eyes and he cannot help drawing Nick near like a drowning man would a life line. The Grimm doesn't tear free from his embrace, body relaxing a fraction while the mind still cannot get over all the anger and gut-wrenching worry. When Sean starts speaking into his ear, Nick emits a gasp. It is his zauberbiest's tone, that affects him even before any words are perceived. It is rough with emotion and made paper thin by uncertainty and regret, that Sean normally doesn't show:

“I do know it, love. I understand, because that night when Juliette walked out on you and hurt you, I've felt exactly the same. And knowing that, I am sorry! I didn't want to make you go through all that. Never!! But for once I had no master plan up my sleeve. I didn't know what else to do because loosing you or seeing you and your child hurt was a thought I simply couldn't bear. I'm sorry.”
A few moments of oppressive silence, three heartbeats thundering with the force of suppressed emotions. Then Nick whirls around – dislodging Sean's hold as he does so – and embraces him so suddenly and forcefully that it steals the Royal's breath.

At first his pregnant mate just hugs him crushingly tight then he starts murmuring into his chest where he has buried his face. Sean doesn't catch the words, only the urgency contained in them, then Nick's breath hitches sharply and his words gain more volume:

“Please, don't go! Please, don't make me loose you!! I cannot...!”

Nick breaks off, unable to hold back his desperate sobs anymore! It's all rushing back. Fear, anger, desperation! He cannot stop, can just hold Sean tight and hope that he won't push him away in disgust.

His anxious thoughts couldn't be farther from the truth because the Bastard Prince isn't far behind. Tears drip down his angular face and into Nick's hair as Sean gathers him as close as he can, almost rocking both of them in an effort to soothe. For once he doesn't hold back, his voice reveals all there is to know about his feelings:

“Likewise, my boy. Likewise. I don't want to loose you.... Ever! Shh. It's okay. No one is going anywhere. We are safe now. I'm not going to leave you, so long as you promise me that you won't either....”

They stay like this for a long time, finally getting all anxiety and worry out of their system. At some point Nick starts initiating kisses, first shy, then desperate and Sean responds in full to every turn Nick ministrations take. The Grimm mumbles that he should hop over to the kitchen to get ice to put on Sean's bruise but he's firmly rebuked by his beloved Captain.

“You will do no such thing! You are more than seven months gone and you've just fought six hundjager. You will rest on the sofa with me even if I have to cuff you to it!”

“Yes, Sir.” A breathy whisper, Nick's tone warm and for once projecting easy obedience.

>>> 

They really end up on the sofa, tangled up, still unwilling to let even a hair's width of distance come between them. Nick is resting half on top of his powerful 'biest, baby bump somehow fitting perfectly against the bigger body, and just breathing deeply.

Sean chuckles, cannot help doing so when he notices what Nick is trying. He lets the fingers of one hand card through dark locks while the others gently tip up his mate's chin so that he can see his face.

“Are you trying to sniff me out... again? I'm sure you know my scent quite well already.”
The impossible Grimm just shakes his head, buries his face back against the crook of his neck and mumbles an answer that's nearly drowned out by lips moving against skin:

“...mo' calming than an'thin' else. Knew tha' months ago but couldn' act onnit. As I sai'... only goo' thing 'bout this smellin' crap.”

In response Sean just pulls him closer, hands alternately rubbing circles on his back or slipping under his shirt to caress the satiny skin of Nick's womb. He tells himself that he's doing it to reassure his mate but in reality Sean breathes just as deeply as he, taking in Nick's unique scent and drawing boundless comfort from it.

“I love you”, He whispers and says it a few times after that in case it needs repeating.

They are safe. They have braved another storm, the threat of Victor has been dealt with and neither Nick nor his little one have been harmed.

“I luv' you, too, Sean.”

As sleep claims him, the zauberbiest Prince truly thanks God for the first time in decades.

Chapter End Notes

Next chapter will feature the infamous 30th week of pregnancy, Christmas... ah, and we'll go from there. ;)

First of all: A thousand hugs for TeamRenhardt for brain storming, general info and listening to my questions and worries!

I had every intention of putting Christmas in here but Nick had a few issues he needed to have cleared first... and that took the entire first half of the chapter... soooo Christmas Fluff will be next time. ;)
Also, as these characters seem to like developing a life of their own and adding scenes I hadn't initially planned, the final number of chapters has moved up once more. I just hope that the prospect of more chapters makes you happy.
I won't say why because I don't want to spoiler you but here's the link to a Russian lullaby (Bajuschki Baju)... so that you know what it sounds like. :D https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=swFK_FBQeZ8

Now, have fun!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter 7:

PW 29 continued:

In the days following the attack Sean sets his contacts up to keeping tabs on Victor. Better to nib nasty surprises in the butt. They take more precautions and continue as they have before. In short, life returns to normal.

Except that it doesn't because Nick cannot stop the questions from crowding his mind. He turns it all over in his head until he's dizzy with it and the vague thought that they need to plan for such things becomes the very real question of why they haven't already planned out a whole lot of other things?

Maybe because a month back neither of them has planned on complicating matters by entering a relationship! They have acted on their feelings for once instead of letting their heads rule their actions and it's been good....

But ever since the day Victor has attacked their home something invisible has wedged between them. Nick cannot explain it and it drives him crazy! Their relationship has undeniably become closer yet something deep inside the Grimm is scared and torn. Some question that he doesn't even know how to define has him constantly on edge.

He isn't doubting their commitment to each other. He loves Sean and he is absolutely sure that his 'biest loves him in return. But that's the problem, isn't it? No matter how much Nick loves him, there is something holding him back.
Damn it! I don’t want to lose him now that I’ve finally found him, so why am I not able to shut up my stupid doubts?!

Maybe it’s just trepidation for the future. So much has happened in the last months. Time has fairly flown. Suddenly his son's birth isn't all that far away and his life plans seem to have more holes than he's comfortable admitting.

What will he tell people once his baby is born?

How will he manage to raise his child between Police and Grimm work?

A déjà vu to 4 ½ months back when he's been sitting in his bathroom having a solid panic attack. Existential questions piling up in his head and making him feel like he has slept through the last months without doing anything. These self-doubts may not be justified considering what obstacles he's had to overcome but this is how he feels and it scares him!

His mind goes into overdrive. So many problems and possible solutions....

And then the one and only crucial question rises up, telling him why he's feeling like teetering on the edge of a cliff:

What will happen in 8 weeks time when his baby is born? Will Sean be there to raise his son with him? Hell, can he even expect him to do so? And demand an answer no less? They've been a couple for all of two effing weeks! They should think about first kisses and first nights over not.... Well, not about everything that makes up Nick's world right now.

Knowing this is all well, but the protective father inside of him needs an answer all the same! He cannot simply wait it out and hope for the best.

I've done that one time and repercussions have nearly cost my son's life! This time I need to be prepared! I need to be sure yet I cannot ask that of him. I don't want to doubt his intentions either but I cannot lay my worries aside. Fuck it, I need a plan! I should have thought about all that a lot sooner but what did I do? Nothing! That's what I did!

Nick reigns himself in. He has to think of his little one now.

His hands wander to his womb. Instinct. Love. This little bundle of life is the most precious thing in his life. This is what counts... even if it breaks his heart.

"We can do this, baby boy. Daddy will find a way... hopefully with our big man as your Papa. But if all else fails I will do everything to protect and love you. Alone if need be." It's not more than a soft whisper and if his voice breaks just a little bit at the end, well, Toisie doesn't complain. Nick blinks heavily, tries taking a deep breath that hitches half way through and thanks the heavens that Sean isn't there to witness this moment of weakness.

As soon as he's finished the thought his heart clenches painfully. Never before has he thought like this. From the very beginning Sean has been the one where he needn't hide. His own fears push him to do it and he wants to scream in frustration!
For hours and days he tries planning for all eventualities but just like all those months ago when he’s learned of his pregnancy there are too many possibilities to take into account.

Will he need a flat or stay with Sean?

Will he be a single dad or raise his child together with the man he loves? Does he even have any right to expect the zauberbiest to love a child that isn't his own?

He fights to stay factual, to keep his head and plan calmly but no matter what, in the end it's always the same question: What will Sean do when time's up?

He wants to trust his mate, to let matters run their natural cause like would be normal.

… Only that he cannot do it.

He hates himself for doubting Sean and his mind for taking that turn. And does it, anyway, because fear sits too deep....
It’s all back. Rising before his mind’s eye.


He shudders at the memory.

No way! He will never put his little boy at risk again yet the thought of losing Sean hurts like hell! How is he supposed to solve this problem? He cannot rightly ask Sean, not with how new their relationship is. It would be too much to ask but he cannot go on like this either.

_Fucking dilemma!_

Sean Renard has been there every step of the way. Why is it suddenly so difficult to take that at face value? There is no reason to think that their 'biest will abandon them. But sometimes feelings are stronger than logical reasoning. Even that of a Detective.

It keeps him awake at night and it's a struggle to keep it from bleeding into his behavior by day.

A struggle he's quickly losing.

>>>}

Murky slush pelts against the windows as Hank navigates the car through Portland’s afternoon traffic on their way to collect witness statements. He keeps in a sigh but cannot keep his worry at bay. Nick has been awfully quiet these past few days. Of course he’s told him about that attack staged by the Captain’s cousin and after some prodding even about his near nuclear meltdown at learning what Renard has done to protect him but there’s still a load of things Nick either cannot or doesn't want to talk about.
Right now he is staring out the window while his index finger listlessly follows patterns of slushy trails on the glass and Hank is damn sure that he doesn’t see a thing of what’s in front of him. He knows that frown. Nick is clearly preoccupied with something and it’s not work related either. If that were the case he would have done some brainstorming with him by now and his gaze wouldn’t have that haunted touch that is the cause for Hank's worry.

In the end he decides that this uncertainty may either be killing him or his Grimm partner and as he isn’t fond of either scenario he will just have to test the waters.

“Okay, partner. What’s the matter? I mean, yeah, weather’s not much to look at but I’m sure that’s not what’s putting such a frown on your pretty face. Especially as it's stayed there for over an hour.“

Nick rolls his eyes, reluctant grin momentarily chasing worry lines away.

“It’s nothing (a significant sideways stare from Hank telling him to stop the bullshit)... okay, it’s not nothing. I just have a lot on my mind lately. I’ve kind of dawdled around these past few weeks and recent events have shown me that I've been stupid in doing that. In short, there are matters piling up that I should have long since planned out. “

Frustration is lacing his tone and to Hank’s experienced ears there’s also a lot of self-criticism. Nick's never been good with guilt and now it's showing again.

“Okay. But those matters... they are not you having doubts that getting together with Renard was a wise decision?”

“No! No... really, that's cool. No doubts there.”

“Good. So what does the Cap… damn it... what does Sean say to your problems then?“

Gray eyes stray to the side for an instant telling Hank already what Nick will say in a moment:

“I kind of haven’t talked to him yet. You see, this is all my fault and I need to get an idea of what to do before I come running to Sean with my problems like a little boy. “

The Senior Detective cannot help it. He shoots his younger and very pregnant partner a look like he’s lost his marbles. Shutters instantly fall, sapping any emotion from the Grimm’s usually expressive face. Hank explains himself quickly:

“Err Nick, just wondering but you do realize that whatever the problem, Renard would never think you stupid for coming to him with it? Now that I think about it, he might even award you a medal for actually doing so instead of just trying to plow through on your own.”

Nick glares at him for the last bit but Hank is unperturbed. It's common knowledge to his friends that their local Grimm has some issues with asking for help or not ignoring his own well-being in the heat of the moment, so he feels entirely justified in making this comment.

“Anyway, he’s your mate, your partner… whatever. And you are one of the most capable, quick thinking guys I know and whatever you think you’ve done… or rather not done, it can’t be as bad as you make it out to be.“
Nick doesn't look any happier but at least now he shows again what's going on behind those stormy gray eyes.

“Hank, you don’t know…!”

“Then why don’t you tell me?”, He interrupts calmly and pulls up on the parking lot of a diner so that they may talk more freely. Nick fidgets and fumbles with his hands, sooner rather than later ending up on what he knows to be his enormous baby belly and visibly calming himself through these familiar actions.

When he speaks the corners of his mouth tip up with a trace of his usual mischievous grin. It’s a start.

“Hank, why is it that we always do the heavy talking in your car?”

The broad shouldered Detective grins full out, even going so far to wag his eyebrows for effect.

“Because you like to pour out your heart in the unequaled homey atmosphere of this beautiful vehicle and because I’m a great listener.“

Nick chuckles almost against his will. He really doesn’t know what he would do without his friends… even the annoying, persistent ones that wash his head for giving them crap.

“Yes, I’m sure that’s the reason.” A note of teasing has slipped back into his tone and Hank cannot for the life of him be grouchy about it.

He pins his partner a steady gaze, clearly projecting that one who asks questions about talking is actually expected to do some of it himself. Nick catches on at once.

“Okay, okay. Give a guy a moment to gather himself.”

Hank inclines his head as if to say 'take all the time you need' and Nick knows that he means it.

>>>  

He rubs his hands over his face tiredly.

Okay, gather your wits and discuss the problem like a Detective would. You can do this! You're not a little kid.

Damn it, sometimes he feels like all that he's doing these days is gathering his wits to rack his brain for answers to questions he never thought he would have to ask!

For one - not even the most pressing one and isn't that a depressing thought - there's my totally over the top reaction to Sean's omission of being in danger. Yes, that’s been kind of foolish behavior for someone as level-headed as Sean Renard but then again, had our roles been reversed I might have done the same.

So why did I react the way I did? With tears and shouting and even sobbing against Sean's effing chest? Pregnancy hormones or no, normally I have better control than that. I mean, it's not like Sean has even batted a lash. Far from it. He's even shed some tears of himself and that is something I haven't thought I would ever see.
Nick has mulled it over in his head for some days now - along with that mountain of other things - and has come to a conclusion of sorts:

For months on end he has been forced to keep his emotions in check. First around Juliette in general, then while hiding the existence of his unborn child in a relationship that's slowly turned abusive – something he has realized by comparison once his relationship with Sean has started... or maybe even before that – and finally while falling in love with his Captain and keeping those feelings hidden. Add to that a big portion of emotional stress and trauma and you have an explosive mix.

Admitting his feelings to his Captain – their budding relationship and finally being free to express and live all that – has been a first step into letting out what's been bottled up for so long. And apparently the threat of losing him just after gaining a measure of happiness has been the bomb that's broken the proverbial dam. A bomb contained in a Grimm's icy shell and brought to a point where a single spark would set it off. No wonder that it all has exploded in their faces. From a complete lack of feelings to almost being crushed by them...? It has been a bit like drinking too much of the hard stuff in too little time. First you feel nothing and then it knocks you off your feet like a tidal wave.

Nick would be embarrassed as hell if it hadn't been for Sean responding in kind. To see this man – unflappable, always in control and near inscrutable at the best of times – so broken. It has gone right under his skin and achieved what no apology could have, no matter how sincere or heartfelt.

He swallows thickly even at the thought. Sean’s voice hasn't been polished right then. It’s been rough and swamped by emotions and Sean has clung to him like a truly desperate man. Well, thinking back his 'biest has had his own emotional hiding to do, hasn't he?

So no, he really shouldn't wonder why they have both reacted the way they did.

But that’s not even what I should be thinking about, is it?

It’s much more pressing matters like his future and that of his little baby boy who will be born in only 8 weeks time and needs all that he can give him.

And it’s the same damn questions again! What shall he tell people? What cover story do they have and what will Sean do once Toisie is born? Will he be a father to Toisie? If yes, will they make their relationship official or hide it? But what about permanently staying with Sean then?

What about the house, that he never uses these days?

How and when will he step down from work and what… what about Hank, his partner that he loves working with and values greatly…?

>>>
letting you stress yourself out."

Nick rubs the back of his neck and his baby bump simultaneously. It is amazing, really, how his partner can go without a single telltale gesture all day and do it constantly when in a safe environment.

„Uhh, sorry. Lost track I guess. I’ll get on with it now.“

And he does. All of it expect for the matter of how their work relationship will change once he takes pregnancy leave and his baby is born.

Hank's reaction is laid back and level-headed as always. He makes suggestions and manages to diminish his fear that in two month’s time Sean Renard might leave him because a newborn isn’t what he envisions for his future.

„Nick, think about it. I mean, really think about it for a moment. We know no one, really no one who is as obsessed with plans, back up plans and pulling strings as our Captain. There’s simply no way in hell Renard would even have considered taking up a relationship with you if he wasn’t damn sure about wanting the little one as well. This man is the epitome of a strategic master mind and that means two things: First of all, he’ll have some suggestions how to improve the very good ideas that you yourself already had. And secondly, talk to him! I might not know what he thinks on the best of days but I’m quite sure that you do and that he would never hurt you by first raising your hopes and then rejecting you. And more importantly, he’ll want to know about what troubles you. You two went through so much - and here I do not only talk about the bad things - and nobody can fault you for needing time to adjust before planning for matters up ahead. Are we clear, partner?“

He crosses his arms in front of his chest and gives a very good impression of stern senior partner, only that Nick sees concern flickering in Hank’s own eyes and that they are close friends as much as partners at work. The effect is the same anyhow. Nick feels calmed and, yes, he also feels like a certain Detective has just deservedly washed his head for talking bullshit.

„Yeah, you’re right. I was being stupid. It’s not as if I don’t have some ideas about how to make this work and I really need to talk to Sean about it all.... Even the bit about being scared witless about him deciding that raising a baby with his subordinate isn’t what he wants."

An explosive sigh leaves his lips and Hank waits until he meets his eyes again to say his next bit:

„That’s good to hear. And now why don’t we make this a proper session and you tell me about the other thing that’s putting your stomach in knots and that doesn’t have anything to do with our handsome Captain or how to explain a baby appearing out of nowhere?“

Nick gapes and sputters, instantly making to deny his words: “There isn’t…!"

Hank just raises an eyebrow and gives him that look he gives suspects who are telling the most preposterous lies and being totally obvious about it. After a moment the Grimm visibly deflates.

„God, sometimes I hate that you are such a good Detective.“

There’s no real heat behind it and they know it both.

„No-oh, you like it. It makes our clearing rates go up a notch or two and that makes our esteemed
Captain happy and a happy Captain means…. Ah, I think I’ll better leave that matter untouched. That’s only you and your mate’s business.

Nick huffs a laugh, grinning and crossing his own arms in front of his chest (more like on top of his womb).

"Don't worry, hell would freeze over before I would tell you what goes on behind closed doors… between me and my powerful, gorgeous, drop dead sexy mate... who also happens to be our Captain."

His voice is laced with relish and such deep love that Hank cannot help grinning broadly.

“Good. I don’t think I could ever un-hear that and I might be traumatized for life. So just tell me about the other thing and I’m happy.”

Delight and mischief vanish from his friend’s face as if someone had slapped it off. It makes him almost regret ever saying anything but he has a feeling what might worry Nick and they need to address the matter now.

The Grimm valiantly tries keeping his act together, that much is clear from his stony expression, but in the end he’s lost for words.

Jup, Hank can imagine very well what this is about. Time to face the music then:

“Nick, let’s make a deal: You actually look at me so I don’t need to guess wildly what goes on in that head of yours and in return I’ll tell you what I think it is that has you all worked up.”

Nick looks for all the world like this isn’t any better but he nods anyway.

“Good. Now my guess is…“, and here he finds that, no matter how brave his speech has been, even he wavers slightly upon spelling it out. He hides it well and soldiers on: „Okay, my guess is that you wonder what will happen once you need to step down from work – and you’ll need to do that no matter what your stubborn self tells you – and we cannot work together as partners anymore.“

Nick has gone very still. Sad, almost haunted gray eyes are glued to his own, not veering away for even a moment now. Seeing this Hank realizes that he needs to tread carefully or he could very well hurt this genuine-hearted man with only a short string of words. Nick nods, anyway, even if he doesn’t utter a single word. He’s waiting for a verdict, almost like a sheep taken to the chopping block.

“Partner, let me be honest… and hear me out. Yes, working with someone else will feel like crap compared to working with you. You’re a damn good Detective but you are an even better friend (Nick scoffs as if to say that abandoning him doesn’t necessarily make him a good friend,) and that brings me right to the core of the problem: Yes, I’ll miss working with you, make no mistake about that but, damn, you’re gonna be a father and I’ll be honorary Uncle and that... well, that’s gonna be worth finding a part time substitute for you.”

Nick abruptly averts his eyes. Presses his forehead against the cold glass of the side window and doesn't say a word. Hank cannot begrudge him this moment, he has his own emotional gathering to do, hasn't he?

Thankfully Nick finds back to his usual levity soon and grinning he turns back to him and gives his shoulder a light shove with his fist.
“Damn it, Hank. You’re gonna be honorary Uncle alright! You’re the best partner one could wish for and if you tell Wu I said that, I’ll castrate you with one of my dear ancestor’s weapons.”

The Afro-American laughs heartily, returning the bump and quipping:

“What a heart-warming speech. Especially the last part. And that reminds me…“

“We need to talk to Wu.“

“Jep, that’s what I thought. I mean it’s up to you what we tell him about the little tyke inside of you and about Renard but at the end of the day having Wu’s help is a great asset. And that's not even considering the fact that more likely than not I'll partner with Wu while you're on the baby sitting side of life.”

“Uhuh. Do you think that Wu will be able to stomach the idea of me 'adopting' a baby just weeks after learning about the existence of wesen?”

The other Detective just grins broadly.

“In comparison to that the baby part will be a walk in the park. Okay, maybe not the part about you doing the childbearing but the adoption thing I’m confident he can take.“

“Brilliant. Now I only have to talk to my personal strategic master mind otherwise known as Bastard Prince of Portland, plan the future and of course set my sight on world domination.“

„Definitely world domination, man. No one’s gonna say you cannot bring family and career plans together and make it work.“

When their local Grimm and pregnant Detective laughs out loud it’s more carefree and heartfelt than it has been in days and Hank is very satisfied with himself.

>>> They manage to collect useful information, get some good leads to follow up on and return to precinct in a better mood than with what they've started.

There might be a whole lot of problems left but they've found back to their equilibrium and now they put all their energy into doing their job and doing it well. Though at the end of the day Nick is still apprehensive about his upcoming talk with Sean, right now they have work to do and a hard ass Captain to please.

>>> On his way home he ponders the fact that now he thinks of Sean as his loving, reliable mate and of Renard as their unflappable and strict Captain, whose expectations are hard to fulfill but whose rare words of praise are something to work for.

When he enters their home he leaves all that behind. The distanced Captain and even his beloved zauberbiest, who may or may not be willing to raise a child with him. Upon dropping his badge and gun all that is left is Nick Burkhardt, ongoing heavily pregnant father, tired and troubled by questions he has no satisfying answers for.
After getting into more comfortable clothes he sinks into the couch cushions with a heavy sigh and rests his hands on his belly, rubbing slow circles and taking quiet pleasure in feeling answering movement from within.

"We're gonna think of something, won't we, my little boy?“

>>> When Sean returns home he finds his Grimm sprawled on the couch and dozing lightly. On silent feet he moves nearer, fondly remembering past incidents of finding Nick sleeping in similar positions and at all times of day and night. Letting it all wash over him he relishes in seeing his boy – his two boys actually – safe and sound. A smile comes to his lips and for some time he simply looks at them. His beloved Grimm and the new life he is bearing and protecting.

His large, almost globe shaped womb is lovely as always – a sight he wouldn't want to miss out on – but there are also dark circles under his eyes telling of exhaustion from pregnancy's strain and worries Nick hasn't yet disclosed to him. He knows they are there anyway. Over the last days Nick has been lost in thought more often than not and going by the frown on his face he's been contemplating heavy matters.

He places a light kiss on his forehead, takes up a blanket to cover him with and decides to let him sleep while he sees about warming up dinner that Hilda their housekeeper has left for them.

_I will protect them! I may be possessive and sometimes even selfish but I am not about to let anyone hurt what is mine! ...Or rather what has chosen to be mine and given me a feeling of belonging I haven't known before._

>>> Nick slips his arms around him from behind and just buries his face in the soft place between his shoulder blades. A warm gush of air against his back heralds a huff of whatever emotion his pregnant Grimm needs to let out.

“Hey, Sean. Sorry 'bout dozing off. I intended to sit for only a moment but baby decided that daddy needed sleep.”

A smile tugs at the corners of his mouth at hearing the sleepy apology. He keeps stirring the contents of the pot as he throws a quick glance over his shoulder.

“No harm done. I could have woken you but I decided not to. And your little one was right. You did need a wink of sleep. Especially after doing overtime again, hmm?”

“Defining overtime depends on what one takes to be normal hours. I worked 'til the end of my shift. And Hank was there, too, keeping an eye.”

“I cannot say I'm happy that you're working such long hours when you're tired already but I see the necessity. I'll let you do as you see fit but be sure that I'll be keeping an eye as well.”

The Prince's tone is half stern half teasing. Nick is unperturbed and when he answers he means what he says: “I'm glad you do, Captain.”
Nick is often tired lately and to some extent all of them look out and stop him when he's overdoing it. Their Grimm takes it with varying degrees of graciousness but today seems to be one of the good days. Sean can still tell that something is weighing on his mind but instead of calling him out on it and risking defensive shutters falling he waits him out. No matter that Nick is just as bad at sharing his worries as he is, he’s gotten better at it after the near catastrophe with Miss Silverton and that has to be enough. At least for now. He will watch him and take action as necessary.

Now he simply leans back into his mate – to let him know he's there and to press his body lightly against that big baby bump. He loves doing that and has done so from the very start of their relationship but it's only due to Nick's patient encouragement that he isn't afraid of showing it anymore. As if reading his thoughts Nick hums in satisfaction and hugs him tighter, lips wandering to his neck and peppering it with kisses. For the time being they enjoy warmth, intimacy and each others company.

>>> 

"Sean, we need to start making lots and lots of plans, don't we? We've... I've waited far too long in doing so."

There's the barest hint of a self-reproach along with an emotion he cannot place.

Hearing his beloved use 'I' instead of 'We' hurts. It's not that he feels slighted. It's more that even now Nick cannot trust him to be there every step of the way. Well, Sean intents to do just that! To be there during pregnancy and birth. And if the Grimm allows him, even to help him raise the unborn child he has come to love like his own.

It is as they say: 'Biester are possessive and fiercely protective of the select few they let into their lives. In Sean's mind there isn't a doubt about wanting to be part of Toisie's future. Apparently Nick isn't so sure about that. That flicker of sadness that Sean now recognizes is a telltale sign. This isn't about loving each other or not, this is about trust and fear of abandonment.

Sometimes they are more alike than is good for them. Nick isn't being callous, he is afraid to take Sean's willingness for granted and get rejected in the end.

*Can you fault him? Have you ever actually told him that you are willing... yearning even... to help him raise his son? No, you haven't because you are ever careful to protect yourself from harm and just as afraid of being rejected as he is!*

It is high time they talk about these things: About all that Nick has most likely worked himself up over and about some truths Sean should have spelled out much sooner.

He turns around in Nick's arms and then turns them both so that his Grimm's butt is leaning against the countertop and he is standing in front of him. One of his rare smiles wills out. The one that Nick loves so much. And it isn't for show either. Ever since becoming a couple – no, ever since their first tentative forays into friendship – this lively, genuine man has made him want to let emotions touch him and be more open about showing them. For a small eternity he loses himself in those gray eyes. He perceives warmth, affection but also wistfulness – as if Nick fears to be acting on borrowed time – and this is what gives him the strength to do what's necessary.

"Yes, I am afraid we need to get on with planning but one other thing first: Just now you corrected yourself. You said 'I' instead of 'We'. What was that about?"
His gaze turns sharp. He cannot help his nature. Nick reacts instinctively, face closing off as he pulls back into that protective shell Sean has last seen all those months ago when they've talked in his office.

“Nothing. Just a turn of phrase.”

“I know you, Nick, and I know when you use a turn of phrase. This wasn't, so why did you say that?”

“Sean....”

Nick's hand landing heavily on his chest, ready to push him away.

“No, something is bothering you and I won't let it stand between us.”

Sean doesn't try restraining him or even touching him. He just remains standing directly in front of him, not giving an inch and not letting him off the hook without an answer. Nick narrows his eyes in defiance, lips pressing into a thin line and jaw muscles working. His Grimm gears up for a fight and that's good because Sean needs him to reveal his doubts even if they hurt. It's that or letting unspoken matters poison their feelings for each other. After all, if the Royal knows about one thing, it is the destructive power of fear and mistrust.

Ruthlessly he squashes down emotion to school his features into an impassive mask. If this is what Nick needs to let go of his fear and see this through, then that's what he will give him.

>>> “No, something is bothering you and I won't let it stand between us.”

Nick registers the hint of steel, bringing the Captain and superior into a conversation that should have been between lovers. It irks him but if nothing else it helps him discussing his son's future factually when in reality this is what could break him.

In league with his tone Sean has become as inscrutable as he's ever been back then: Before his pregnancy, before becoming his safe ground. Now he presents a different kind of immovable force and his Grimm rises to the challenge! He narrows his eyes, letting the primal and fiercely protective creature in him fight a battle that his vulnerable side would shy away from. A last deep breath. His hand slipping onto his bulging middle and seeking strength from connecting to his baby boy.

“You really want to know? Okay. I have once been foolish enough to think that someone would love me enough to accept the child I am bearing and help me raise it. This error in judgment has nearly cost my son's life and I will not make that mistake again! So yes, although it hurts to say this and although I want nothing more than to trust your intentions, I cannot do so until you tell me where you will stand once my baby is born. Sean, I love you and I know that two weeks after entering a relationship I shouldn't be asking that...! I will accept if you decline but I have realized... I have realized that I need to know in order to go on.”

It's all Nick can do to keep the waver out of his voice. He balls his hands into fist in frustration over his inability to stay above his roiling emotions and clings to every ounce of determination. He ignores the way his heart clenches and the impossibly big lump in his throat. He wants to scream instead of waiting out that damn silence!
“Good.”

One word and it could have been spoken in a foreign language for all it tells him.

“What?”

Sean steps closer and just like that emotions start bleeding back onto the Bastard Prince's face. Hooded eyes regain their depth, their dedication and love and then Nick realizes that he has done all that on purpose. The impassiveness, the sharp words – all to provoke him into saying what needed to be said. Nick is undecided if he should punch or hug him but then again he hasn't even heard the answer so maybe he shouldn't get his hopes up at all. Right now his heart threatens to break for real but he pushes it all away as he steels himself for the worst and focuses on the small bundle of life within him.

This is who I need to think about. My baby boy. Not me, not Sean.... Fuck, this is killing me!

Warm hands cupping his face, one on his cheek and the other resting on his jaw, pull him back into reality and to look right into Sean's jade green eyes. For better or for worse.

“Thank you for telling me.” Velvet turned rough... like a cloth fraying along the edges. Now there's emotion alright. In his voice, his eyes, his whole demeanor. A bomb could have exploded in the room and Nick couldn't have torn his eyes away.

“This gives me the chance to say a few things I should have made clear from the very beginning.”

A thumb strokes lightly over his cheek. Soothing him. Is this reason to hope? Or preparation for the worst?

“Nick, from the moment we've decided to enter a relationship together.... No, let me amend that.... From the moment you told me about your impending pregnancy, I have known that I would protect your son in some way. But from the start of our relationship I have known that I would help you raise him, if you let me. You come as a double and I wouldn't want to have it any other way. I have long since come to care for the two of you and I will be right by your side whatever you do.”

Nick nods slowly, eyes swimming and still seeing his own vulnerability mirrored in his strong 'biest. He thinks carefully about what Sean has said before coming to a decision:

He doesn't want to punch his zauberbiest for being shrewd, for manipulating him into talking about what has scared him most. He wants to hug and kiss and love him for accepting him and his child. For offering him nothing less than what he has always wanted – a family.

He wants to tell him all this but finds his throat constricted when it all sinks in. He doesn't need to. Sean sees it all in his face. He knows him well. He moves into his big man's arms and is instantly welcomed, wrapped in a tight hug and kissed on the crown of his head. He hugs back with all his might, is calmed by Sean and his gently murmured words.

“Good. It's good that I could finally tell you. The rest will find itself. We will make plans and back up plans. No matter what, you are not alone in this. And just so we are clear: In the future I want you to tell me if you have doubts. This is important! Do you understand me? I know I am not the best example for openness but if we want to make this work we need to be open with each other, okay?”
Nick nods into the broad chest he's buried himself into and he's fairly sure that this time his 'biest
knows what he wants to convey without spelling it out.

>>> 

All that aside neither of them is foolish enough to forget what problems lie ahead. If nothing else,
the incident with Victor has shifted things back into perspective. Both let out simultaneous sighs
and as if steered by a higher force they move to rest their brows against one another.

"What do you think, dinner and then making plans?"

Nick's gaze turns distant. He cannot help it. His mind returns to questions, problems and he goes
through a thousand half minted plans in his head. His expression morphs into a troubled frown and
he only notices that his thoughts have wandered miles away when Sean murmurs: "A penny for
your thoughts, my lovely boy. You look like you try to shoulder all hardship of the world again and
I cannot say I'm happy with that."

Sean pulls away to get a better look at him and Nick smiles weakly. Trust this man to make him
feel better even when a thousand questions crowd up in his head and refuse to be brought into
order.

„Not shoudering all hardship of the world, just thinking about what we need to consider for the
future and asking myself why the hell I... (his smile turns rueful) we haven’t already thought about
that and….“

„...And you sound like you’ve worked yourself up over this instead of talking to me.“ There’s mild
admonishment but also warmth and affection that makes Nick feel sheepish rather than indignant.

„Maybe.“

„Hmhhmm.“

Sean doesn’t even need to prompt him this time. He buries his face back in the crook of that
alluring neck and hums when capable hands slip under his hoodie to stroke over his back.
"I should really stop acting like an octopus on cuddly war path some time soon", is mumbled
against warm skin.
„So far I am enjoying your octopus tendencies, so no need to hurry."
"Careful what you wish for."
"I have what I wish for right here in my arms."
Sean's gaze is tender as he says this, quite a contrast to the inscrutable man he shows at work. Nick
blushes fiercely.
"Hmm. My big softie. Damn it... if you don’t want to see how I get all kinds of mushy then you
should look away now."
"I’m not sure I can get myself to look away."

For being the distanced man he is, Sean’s gaze is suspiciously soft. Nick doesn't call him out on it,
enjoys the sight and merely grins when the Prince changes the subject.

“Anyway. Come on, dinner first and then we join forces to make plans for the future."

"You’ve forgotten world domination.“
"Pardon me?" Automatically Sean’s hand slips round to the Grimm’s big womb, caressing its large expanse and taking obvious delight from the simple act. The gesture has become so normal that it makes Nick smile. He's proud of his 'biest for following up on the urge and after days of worrying a heavy weight is finally lifted from his shoulders.

*We can do this. We’ll think of something like we always do and it’s like Hank said: I already have a vague idea of what to do and it doesn't matter that right now it’s all a jumbled mess… because Sean will know how to proceed where I come up short…. But back to matters at hand…. *

"Oh, just something Hank and I have talked about but it’s important to include that in our plans."

A quiet chuckle rumbles through the Prince's chest.

"Ah, of course. How remiss of me. World domination, you say? That’s right up my alley.”
"It is, isn't it, my high and mighty Prince?"
"Careful, my dear Grimm."

Renard's eyes flash but Nick just laughs, not cowed in the least. He snakes his arms around Sean and presses up against him – big womb and all – until they are touching almost from head to toe. This is comfort like he’s never had before and if he had to guess he would say his ever independent zauberbiest hadn't either.

As if in answer to his thoughts his big man tips his chin up and steals a kiss. Nick moans and deepens it, taking his time, adding tongues to the mix. Sean reciprocates with eagerness and the smile the Prince gets in return is warm and hopeful and telling of a man ready to take all hardship of the world as long as his mate is with him.

„Well then, food, planning for the future, world domination.“

„Let’s do it.“

Taking the zauberbiest’s free hand and disentangling gently from the one that’s still resting on his stomach Nick leads him over to their row of cupboards to fetch bowls and spoons for a much needed meal.

>>> They eat and make a list. Now that Nick's most important question has been cleared up they find back to factuality. The only thing belying that this is a discussion between Detective and Captain are their hands which are joined on the tabletop.

"The house", Nick says between bites: "I don't want to keep it and I bought it with my parents' inheritance so it is mine to sell and not Juliette's."
"All too understandable. With help of my contacts you could have it sold within the week most likely. And for a good price, too."
"Yeah, that would be great. And I should rent a flat...."

He makes to elaborate, fearing that Sean may think he wants to move out, but the perceptive zauberbiest has already caught on to his reasoning. He squeezes his hand and continues his line of thought:

"That would be a wise move. Let's face it, we cannot make our relationship official out of the blue and you need a credible place of residence once you have a son to take care of. That is not to say that I won't be there to help you raise him...."

Nick smiles at Sean's sweet attempt to assuage his worries even if this time it is unnecessary to do
so. Now that they've finally discussed matters Nick's trust won't waver at the slightest provocation. It's the pregnant Grimm's turn to soothe, running his thumb over Sean's hand.
"I know where you come from. We may be able to forge documents for Toisie's birth or adoption or whatever else we think of as cover story but I still need to present the public with a stable environment."

The Prince of Portland nods relieved.
"I hate to say this because if I can help it there won't be single a night that I will spend apart from you but you should consider spending a night or two of a week in that flat." It is a rare sight to see uncertainty and reluctance lurking in those intelligent eyes and it makes Nick's mouth quirk into a wistful smile.
"I should, shouldn't I? It needs to look lived in to be believable and a real home in case that...."
He doesn't spell it out, just looks onto his bowl with a frown. He doesn't need to. Both of them are realistic enough to know that there's always the possibility of a relationship not working out.
"We might be stubborn idiots on occasion but I'm confident that we will both do our best to make this... us... work."
It prompts the Grimm to grin.
"We already agree on being stubborn idiots, that's got to count for something."
The powerful 'biest shakes his head and gives Nick's head a gentle sideways cuff, which he dodges effortlessly and with a laugh.
"Careful, my Grimm, or we might be having a conversation about undue sass in the near future."
His gaze becomes intense while Nick's is filled with mirth.
"I would never dream of being sassy, oh Captain my Captain."
Sean chuckles, unable to keep it in and not caring for once.
"Hmhm. Why don't we turn back to our initial topic?... Before I get tempted to put you over my knee."
The impossible Grimm's smirk turns positively cheeky, tempting and taking the Bastard Prince in.
"Somehow I cannot see you managing that with my enormous womb and all...."
Nick strokes over it lovingly and gives it a smile that can only be called conspiratorial. Sean finds himself instantly enamored even though he hides it well to keep up his mock stern facade. Nick murmurs something to his middle that might be:

"See, that's my good boy. You're already keeping Daddy out of trouble before you are even born." before he adds louder: "But back to matters at hand: I really don't want to but at some point I will need to step down from work. I've already talked to Hank and he's good with it but I still don't know how to do it. It's not like I can take pregnancy leave."

"No, you cannot."
Sean ponders the problem for a moment before looking back up at him with a smirk.
"But luckily you are just as bad as Hank in regard to taking vacation days, so you have accumulated quite a number of them."
Nick face palms with a groan.
"Of course. Damn it, why didn't I think of that sooner? Sometimes I have the feeling that pregnancy makes me a bit slow on the uptake."
The shrewd 'biest's expression turns tender as he answers:
"Nick, there's a phrase for that and it's called 'not seeing the wood for the trees'. It's a simple matter of your head being overcrowded with questions and possible answers, so don't worry. You know me, I wouldn't hesitate to tell you if you were being stupid."
"I wonder why can I see that so well.... Ah, maybe because I have this hard ass Captain who doesn't hesitate to mark spelling errors and such in reports with a red pen."
"You have to admit that the quality of your reports did get better after a written dressing down or two."

Nick narrows his eyes in mock indignation.
"I was new to the job."
"You were malleable. And apropos malleable... don't teach your son sarcasm. That's unbecoming of a baby."
"Sean, only you could produce a sarcastic baby.... Were you sarcastic as a wee little thing? Maybe I should ask your mother...."
"Don't you dare!", the Royal states ominously but he has to work hard to keep from laughing so Nick doesn't feel too threatened.
"I cannot help noticing that we have veered off topic... again", is Sean's stern assertion.
"Yes, I'm afraid we have."
Nick looks suspiciously unrepentant and his face is fairly glowing with levity and happiness now so Sean cannot bring himself to mind their distraction. After a moment the Grimm visibly reigns himself in and becomes serious again.

"Okay, there's still the matter of a cover story for how I came to be with a little child."
The zauberbiest is loath to admit it but seeing that single minded, sharp focus reappear in his lover's eyes makes him a little weak in the knees. It's a good thing, really, that he's already sitting. Wouldn't do to let his Grimm see that, now would it?
"Do you have an idea on what you want to say?"
When Nick squeezes his hand again, this time seeking reassurance instead of offering it, Sean knows that a serious matter is coming up.
"Yes, actually I have a vague idea. It's just...."
Sean takes his hand and raises it to his lips to bestow a kiss on it.
"Why don't we move over to the couch and you tell me, hmm?"
"Yeah."

They suit actions to words.

Snugly aligned to his mate's powerful body Nick tells him of his idea and an hour later they've put together a believable story and Sean has a relieved and decidedly sleepy Grimm on his hands. He doesn't mind.... Doesn't mind at all.

PW 30:

The leads they've gotten a few days ago have been useful, tipping them off on a time and place when their suspect is likely to meet interested parties to sell his stolen goods. They haven't got the exact time but they have an inkling and that's why they are once again sitting in Hank's car, this time on a stake out to catch their perp red handed. They've been at it for a while and are equipped with food, drink and Sudoku to pass the time so everything ought to be set, shouldn't it?

"Hank?"
"What?"
"I need to pee."
"What?! Again? You went half an hour ago. How are we supposed to do a stake out, if my partner vanishes every 30 min?"
Nick makes a face of comical despair.
"It's the baby! I swear to you, he is planting his whole weight onto my bladder and rubbing his hands in malicious glee at making Papa run around for him."
"I should complain about you sabotaging our observation but hearing you say these things is simply too adorable."
"I am not adorable."
"Yep, that just makes it so much better. Now run before Toisie decides to try jumping to make you
They've just reached the 45 minute mark of uninterrupted observation work and Hank is enjoying the double chocolate cappuccino Nick has somehow managed to procure on his last potty trip, when his partner doubles over in his seat. He practically face plants on top of the dashboard and doesn't come up for some time. At first Hank thinks Nick is expressing acute boredom – a sentiment Hank could understand because this stake out is totally mind numbing – but then a low groan comes from somewhere between dashboard and Nick's face and he becomes worried.

“Nick? Everything okay there?”

No answer, then a muffled: “Haaank?”

The tone is a mix of chagrined, long suffering and fed up. He knows that tone, or at least half of it. The pained part is new.

“Do I want to hear the question? And while we're at it, will you tell me if there's something seriously wrong with you? I'm starting to get worried, you know?”

“No and yes. I know we've sat around here for more than two hours already but I'm afraid you need to drive me home.”

Nick raises his head from his personal dashboard resting place then, looking apologetic.

“And why should we do this? I mean, if we sit here for two hours and in the end catch our guy, that's cool. If we sit here for nothing, that kind of su....”

His reasoning is cut off by another groan and Nick resuming his doubled over position. His reply is muffled by dashboard once again.

“Hank, you remember that time I told you about my body needing to get a new hole so that Toisie has a way out when time is right?”

“Yes. Man, that was gross! Wait.... Are you...?”

“Uhuuh. It's just started and, honestly, when that damn hole is torn I don't want to be arresting or interrogating a perp. Mum said it will be the bitchy downside of painful – not her words, mind you, but not far from it either – and while I would most likely be able to hide that, in a few hours I will be bleeding like a pig and be sweaty and crappy....”

“You had me at bleeding like a pig. I'll drive you home.”

“Is home Sean's home?”, Nick asks while still face planting and not moving.

“Do you have a home these days, that is not the Captain's home?”

“Nggh.”

“I've thought so.”

“Hank?”

“Hmm?”

“I'm sorry.”

The Afro-American throws him a sideways glance.

“Don't worry about it. It's not like you're volunteering to have your bowels rearranged... gaah... that sounds even more gross when spoken out loud than it did in my head... err, anyway. I'll drop you off at home and then I'll fetch Wu. I'm sure he'll be thrilled to be stake out substitute.”

Nick nods with a grin.
“Don't get into any bets with him or you might have to catch our perp in only your boxers or stuff like that. Wait a minute, I'll call him.”

He gets up from his hunched over position to get out his phone and dial Wu's number. The Asian takes up after a moment.

“Hey, Wu. Could I interest you in stepping in for me and help Hank on a stake out? I think I've caught something and I'm afraid I'll sooner puke my guts out in Hank's prized car than be of any use, sooo...?”

“Sounds just peachy. If I were you I, too, would much rather crash at home than face our good Detective's wrath if anything were to happen to his beloved car.... And did you say it was a stake out?”

“Jup. Full stake out and car is already stocked with goodies to pass the time.”

Wu pretends to think about it for all of 10 seconds.

“I might be amendable to helping out. But you owe me a beer for that.”

“Thanks Wu. And you're definitely going to get that beer!”

Nick grins widely despite sharp twangs of dragging pain assaulting his bowels. He's known it wouldn't be difficult to persuade Wu. The man has a legendary love for stake outs – saying there's nothing like the thrill and happy anticipation of a good wait for baddies doing bad things only to foil their plans last minute – and Nick has counted on that.

And on the fact that Drew Wu is a true friend even if one, who'll constantly tease you and engage you in bets that you'll lose without doubt.

The rest is quickly sorted. He ends the call.

“He'll meet you at Precinct in 15. Thanks again and... uuh... there's a beer with your name on it as well.”

“How can I say no to that, partner. And it will also give us opportunity to talk to Wu about you know what.”

“Exactly my thoughts.”

Hank pushes the pedal to drop him off at home and fetch Wu. The odds of catching the bad guys are still good. Their contact has told them that the meeting would most likely be much later at night and they've only set up this early to take no chances. Sooo, the game has only just begun.

>>>
things will get messy and even though his fear that Sean will turn away in disgust has been laid to
rest, that doesn't mean being seen like this does not touch a sore spot.

He tries doing something useful like washing the dishes or something similarly as mundane but as
time progresses it gets increasingly difficult. At first the ache has been limited to a few intense
streaks – he's been able to brave those – but things have gotten much worse by now. When singular
episodes have blurred into continuous pulsing and he has nearly dropped a plate and a mug, he
abandons his sorry excuse for household work and sees about settling in for the truly gruesome
part.

Now he is standing in front of their king sized bed, unsure if he should get in or not. It has become
his bed as much as Sean's because after their first night sleeping together he hasn't spent a single
night apart from his 'biest but he doesn't want to sully it with blood and grime either. He's even
thought about staying in the bathroom to keep the mess to a minimum but a truly agonizing flash of
pain has decided matters for him. He is hurting, he wants to be as warm and cocooned as possible
and, damn, he wants to brave this where he feels safest!

But first things first: He calls Dr. Cransbury to inform him that the process has started and they fix
his next appointment for early tomorrow evening while they're at it. Nick will be on sick leave,
anyway, and it allows them to check if everything has gone as it should.

Of course the Welsh man will also be on standby tonight for Nick to call him should anything go
awry.

That settled he dons his oldest pair of sweatpants, fetches a whole army of old gym towels to
spread over the expense of their bed in a triple layer and puts their thick duvet off to the side. A
last longing stare at the huge and soft blanket then he steels himself to resist temptation. He's not
going to get it dirty even if that means using Aunt Marie's afghans. Settling on top of the bed and
waiting out a wave of nausea that nearly sends him to the bathroom anyway he drinks the antidote
to the shadowing trank and watches his enormous belly shimmer into existence. Of course he is
always able to see it but under guise of the trank it is somehow blurred... as if unreal.

“But you aren't unreal, are you, my boy? You are... arrgh... my lovely baby and Daddy is gonna
make sure... Oh, damn! ...That you can come out when you've grown a bit more. Now we just
have... to endure the next few hours and it's done.”

He curls up on his side, arms encircling his big baby bump.

“If you hear Daddy moaning... or groaning or cursing throughout, don't think anything of it and
forget any curse word I use.”

With that Nick braces himself for hours of agony.

>>> Pain.
Building, ebbing…. Scratch that, not ebbing only building up to a true storm raging in his guts!

Writhing under cramps and waves of more pain. Shivering like mad while sweating profusely. He
squeezes his eyes shut, moans low in his throat.

He's lying curled up under some of the afghans, still cold despite there being four of them, and he
is severely fed up with hurting! He wants to have Sean to curl up to and most of all he wants this ordeal to be over!

A feeling like someone is twisting something the wrong way low in his belly momentarily steals his breath and makes him pant wildly afterwards to stave of a bout of nausea. He keeps his eyes closed in an effort to shut out the world.

*Oh hell, why isn’t anything concerning Grimms ever easy??*

A high keening sound mixes into the next exhale and, really, it’s either that or outright screaming. He presses his face into the pillow, one hand clutching the bed sheets the other on his womb as if to protect his little one from the pain his father is enduring.

>>> Sean wouldn't say he's frantic when he finally makes it home. Really, he's too level-headed and used to hiding feelings to be, but he has to admit it comes awfully close. It’s been about four hours since Nick has send his text and he can only imagine how much he must hurt by now when even the tough and hardened Kelly Burkhardt has called it no walk in the park.

He hears low moans coming from their bedroom and all but flinches. Those sounds don’t leave much doubt about Nick’s state.

Upon entering the other room the trained eye instantly takes note of subtly changed surroundings as well as the lone occupant of the bed.

Their duvet has been swapped for thin blankets of questionable origin and there’s a thick layer of towels on the bed beneath his Grimm, who hasn’t yet noticed his presence despite his above average hearing. It’s clear why he hasn’t: He’s completely caught up in pain that comes with evolution doing its part. It hurts him to see Nick weakly trashing on the bed, pale as a ghost and slick with sweat, moaning and all the while fighting for control.

He takes care not to startle him when he steps nearer and places a hand on his shoulder.

>>> Nick has lost track of time but at some point a familiar hand touches his shoulder and words reach his ears that are delivered in a soft and concerned murmur:

“Hey, love. I came as early as I could make it. And although this might not be what I should be saying, you look terrible.“

He drags his eyes open. Either he’s nodded off at some point or he hasn’t heard his zauberbiest approach. Whatever it is he cannot deny that profound relief courses through him.

Another ball of fire burning through his abdomen. Closing his eyes again because the only alternative would be crying out loud.

The bed dips and Nick knows that he is put under closer scrutiny now. He blushes and turns his head half into the pillows to hide. There’s a soft tutting noise from above, then that large warm hand smooths away sweaty bangs from his forehead and continues its ministrations until Nick turns his face upward out of pure habit. He still groans, half in pain and half in embarrassment, and forces himself to squint up at Sean.
“Ah, there's my boy.” A soft murmur rich with approval.

“Hey... my big man. You really shouldn’t have to see me like this. I am totally sweat... soaked an’ whiny an’ just generally crappy to look at.”

Small crinkles around his eyes show the zauberbiest’s amusement beside his concern. He doesn’t even deign Nick’s’s comment with an answer, just continues stroking his clammy forehead and asks:

“How are you feeling, hmm?”

“Like 'tearing someone a new one' is about to get a whole new meaning”, he mumbles lowly.

“Sounds gruesome, indeed. Damn it, you are shivering like mad. And under those ratty afghans instead of our thick blankets. Our covers would have been much warmer, why not take them?”

The shivering is only the tip of the iceberg, of course. Nick’s heartbeat echos through his being in a fast staccato while Toisie’s is thankfully normal and he wonders how Nick manages to cope with the pain showing as little as he does. When he answers Sean gets an inkling:

“At first I...” Another episode of pain, even stronger than the others, makes further words die on his lips but it's obvious that the Grimm will force himself to continue anyway. For a moment he writhes in near palpable agony and all Sean can do to help is rubbing comforting circles on his back.

“At first I wanted to do that but then I... (taking short, sallow breaths to brave another wave) thought about the mess and that I didn't want to ruin the blanket and you shouldn’t smell blood every time we went to bed so....”

He trails off, exhausted and unsure. Renard shakes his head in mild admonishment even as his other hand starts rubbing over Nick's enormous baby bump to complement the one on the back. Nick wants to tell him to stop because he’s sweaty and yucky literally everywhere but it simply feels too good.

“Honestly, Nick. For future reference, I want you to get as comfortable as possible, especially when you are sick. Look at you. You are shaking with cold and let’s not even start on the pain. At least our bedspread would have been warmer... and much less scratchy.” The last is added with a sniff of distaste.

“I know.” Nick whispers desolately bringing the Royal up short. Registering that scolding doesn’t get them anywhere and that, on the contrary, it wears him down even more, he resumes gently stroking his fingers through sweat matted hair and doesn’t hide the chagrined expression that wills out.

“I’m sorry. I know you were only meaning well. I will fetch the thick duvet now - and no discussions about that - then you can curl up to me while we brave the rest of this together.”

The longing in Nick’s eyes tells an all too clear story but the Grimm shakes his head anyway.

“I’ll gladly take the blanket but you don’t need to lie with me. I’m all...“

“Sweaty and yucky?“
Nick nods miserably.

“And not getting any less yucky once that hole has finally opened.”
His words are barely audible, wrought with shame he shouldn’t need to feel. Sean leans down, places a gentle kiss on Nick’s temple, sweat and grime be damned, and whispers into his ear:

“You know what, my lovely boy? I find that I don’t care. In just a moment you can curl up in my arms and then we’ll see this through together.”

“Thanks. I… love you. You know that?” Nick’s words sound wet with barely restrained tears. Pain and emotions are slowly getting the better of him.

“I know. I love you, too.”

When Sean returns to his bedside he is clad in a loose shirt and sweatpants and carries their huge duvet in his arms. Nick has his eyes squeezed shut again but he perks up a bit at perceiving his ‘biest near by.

>>> It cannot be long now. Nick’s face is pinched with pain and his breath comes in quick, shallow gasps. Sean wastes no time, taking threadbare blankets away and gathering up their usual one to cover him with. He stills halfway through the action, though, eyes drawn to Nick’s lower abdomen where muscles can be seen jerking and tensing under cramps and changes going on within.

Roused by his mate’s next groan he spreads the covers over his shivering form and climbs in as well. Carefully pressing himself up to Nick’s back, he provides a solid line of heat and support and draws him back against himself to take some of his weight. Nick sags boneless against him, low sound coming over his lips that’s more relief than pain for once.

>>> Nick takes no heed of inane matters like looking crappy any longer, he just rests the back of his head against that warm, solid chest. When strong arms come around him in a tight embrace he actually moans in pleasure and relief. The ache is raging ever more, building low in his belly and setting out to overwhelm him. It isn’t long now.

“There, there. I’ve got you.” A gentle whisper against the crown of his head. Sean is here now. He can do this.

“Remind me never to become pr… Arrgh!!! ”

He howls in pain and writhes in Sean's arms when finally that damn hole tears itself! Throwing his head back his whole body arches in agony and quick breaths are half sobs now as he rides out the final aftershock. Sean’s hold is unwavering and Nick realizes that he must have turned to face him because his head is buried against his zauberbiest’s chest, he’s panting like mad….

"Fuck!... Damn... Toisie... you didn't... didn' hear tha'...!"
At that point he must have lost consciousness for a moment.

>>>
Even from under the blankets the coppery tang of blood reaches his nostrils as he holds his Grimm. There's a part of his zauberbiest that revels in the idea of bloodshed and gore, the darkest side of him that he keeps under tightest wraps. The bigger part of him – of his 'biest even – flares with rage at the thought of his mate being hurt.

And then there's another part that praises and respects the Grimm - archaic creature just like himself - for enduring all this to help and protect his young one.

It is this last sentiment that makes zauberbiest and man a union set on comforting and likewise protecting the being in their arms. He cradles him close, tugs his head under his chin – feels him relax a tiny bit within all that agony and finally go limp against him. He searches him with his eyes and all his other senses and is relieved to learn that he's already coming around again. His brave Grimm is quite a sight and clearly unwell but he has made it all the same and has been strong for his unborn child.

>>> The next thing he knows is waking in Sean’s arms. Tears, sweat, snot are all on his face and blood is running down between his legs. He shudders and hears barely audible keening noises, which he only notices are coming from him when Sean starts whispering into his ear:

“Shhh. I’ve got you. Shhh. It’s all done…. All done now.”

Sean's voice is scratchy as if the zauberbiest is waiting just beneath the surface. It only makes him feel safer, bury in deeper. Neither man nor ‘biest reject him. He is welcomed and held close while his body tries coping with what has just happened. He doesn't know how long he lies in Sean's arms fighting for control but his ‘biest is patient, his anchor and not budging an inch. He just strokes his back and his face and keeps up a gentle murmur for him to focus on instead of pain and blood and all else.

“Bath”, he mumbles after quite some time: “Bath, please. Need to wash away blood... all that.”

Sean hums in agreement. Rosalee has given them a packet of special bathing salts that will numb pain and prevent inflammation of the wound, which right now it is. By tomorrow or the day after that Nick's regeneration abilities will have done their part but right now it will help alleviating the symptoms and preventing complications.

“All right. I'll help you settle down, then I'll draw you a bath.”

He intents to guide him back down but Nick has other ideas. He tries pushing himself up onto his elbows and then into a sitting position. Discomfort marrs his ashen face but of course his stubborn Grimm is not stopped by that. Growling softly - his ‘biest must really be close to the surface - Sean grabs hold of his shoulders and firmly presses him back down. For once Nick is no match for his strength but that doesn't mean he won't glare up at his zauberbiest.

“Not a chance, Nick. Your body has just gone through drastic and violent changes. You will rest, not walk around unnecessarily. Why don't you let me do the work for once, hmm?” That velvet drawl holds a commanding edge and the last is not a question. It's obvious that the leader has gained the upper hand at seeing Nick's health at risk and he's not to be trifled with. The pregnant Grimm remains stubborn anyhow. Squarely meeting the gaze of the man who is both his chosen and his superior he says:
“Comin' with you. Need to get... blood out of bed.”

He's more breathless than he wants to admit but the scenario of his own blood seeping through all those towels and still dirtying their bed in the end is very high on his avoidance list and it shows clearly in his defiant stare. Sean opens his mouth to admonish him yet again only to change tack unexpectedly. His expression loses its uncompromising hardness to be replaced by something tender. Out of the blue he takes Nick's pale and sweaty face into his hands and presses a soft kiss against his lips, surprising him into responding and stopping to focus on his stubbornness. When he's sure to have gained his attention the tall 'biest leans further down and murmurs right into his ear:

“I know. I'm not keen on having a bloodied bed either but I've not been born a Royal for nothing.... I have taken precautions. The layer of towels you've spread under you is more than enough to hold anything at bay and I already have another duvet in store. Will you let me draw a bath now to help you wash and alleviate some of your pain? I promise I'll take care of the rest while you're soaking in there.”

For all his softness Sean doesn't sound like thinking him stupid but rather like he's realized yet again that butting heads with his stubborn Grimm is a fruitless endeavor. If anything Nick responds to logic best and true enough his expression loses its rebellious streak once he's thought his words through.

“Okay. But... not help you?”

The moment he's decided to give up fighting, after-effects of his ordeal come flooding back. He rubs a hand over his face with much less coordination than he would have liked and it's clear that the battle against exhaustion is one he loses quickly. He curses his weakness yet unbeknownst to him it is this show of vulnerability and sudden sleepiness that goes right to his Prince's heart, closing up his throat and making his voice incredibly soft when he's finally able to respond:

“No need. Just rest. I'll come fetch you. Your little one needs your comfort now. Just focus on that.”

Tension bleeds out of Nick's frame as Sean cards fingers through his hair yet again and then guides his hands to splay over the warm expense of his womb. He curls back up with a heavy exhale, limbs suddenly feeling like lead and everything below waist screaming abuse as if someone has turned the pain button back on.

 <<<

Sean helps him strip down – both a bit shocked at the extend of his bleeding – before half leading half carrying him over to the filled bathtub.
"Mom was right.... This is... ewww."
"If that is the last of your problems I'm glad."
"I'll call it... 'Operation bleeding piggy' when... I write to mom 'bout it."
His speech may be a bit on the mumblish side but their banter helps him stay upright and that's what counts. He looks down on the bathtub, breathing through a strong dizzy spell and instantly feeling Sean's grip on him tighten.
"Kay. I'm okay now", he manages after a moment and sets his focus on what's in front of him: Water is steaming and of light lilac color from Rosalee's bathing salts, which is only so much of a reassuring thought as it pales against the fact that soon his aching, bleeding nether regions will hit
hot water.

His fear has been justified. That very first moment feels like something fiery burning deep into him and he clutches Sean's shoulders in a death grip just to keep breathing! And for a moment he doesn't. It all threatens to overwhelm him. He gathers his strength, Sean right beside him, and finally manages to suck in a few harsh breaths while he waits tensely for the pain to ebb. Sean keeps holding him, not pushing him in any deeper until he's ready to go.

"You're doing well. Rosalee's salts will help. Just give it a moment."

Nick nods jerkily, eyes still squeezed shut and expression pinched. He counts to ten in his head before he forces himself to sink deeper. Sean is right with him and soon he's submerged up to his chin and able to breathe somewhat normally again.

"How are you feeling? Is it getting better?"

He nods again and whispers: "Yeah. It's still feelin' all raw but it's startin' to tingle down there... an' pain's getting' numbed."

"That's good to hear."

Another light kiss bestowed on his forehead making Nick smile despite everything.

"Thanks. Best mate ever."

His 'biest chuckles as Nick leans into the hand that's readily cupping his cheek before he's even finished the thought of wanting to do that.

"You've done so well. Let Rosalee's essences do their work now and I will soon return to help you wash."

"Hmm."

>>> The rest of the evening is a blurr.

He remembers talking to Sean while he's washed him practically from head to toe, so he must have been awake. He also recalls vaguely that he's been helped up, wrapped in the hugest, softest towel he's ever seen.... And leaning against his beloved's broad chest as he's being toweled off.

The next part he may have imagined for he remembers Sean murmuring: "You're asleep on your feet and still far too pale for my liking. I'll carry you to bed, okay?"

And himself mumbling: "Don' do. 'm too heavy. Double pack, r' member?"

He swears to have heard his always reserved Captain laugh softly and reply: "Zauberbiest strength, remember? I'll manage. You can help... by going to sleep, hmm?"

The in between part is blurry but then there's being poured into their freshly made bed... naked and cocooned by thick blankets....

Has he really asked Sean if he wouldn't sully their bed anew and been reassured that those essences have stopped the bleeding?

It doesn't really matter because there is being pulled right into Sean's arms and maybe emitting a tiny, relieved sigh.

The rest is blissful oblivion in the knowledge that their powerful zauberbiest will protect both him and his little boy.

>>> Sean Renard wakes with a soundly sleeping Nick ensconced in his arms. He's still pale but resting beside him in a boneless slumber that speaks of deep relaxation.
Good. He wants him to be hale and healthy. Which he isn't right now but they will work on that, won't they?

It must still be early. Only a pale moon lights their bedroom. It is enough for his Wesen senses to work with and reveals something truly lovely: Somehow their blanket has slipped down to reveal half of his gorgeous mate and his baby bump. His face is slack with sleep, lips slightly parted. Lips to kiss. A man worth cherishing and protecting. He reigns himself in although he knows that Nick likes to be woken by kisses.
It's way too early. He needs rest.
Instead he takes some time to simply look.
Beautiful.
Like being guided by a higher force his hand is drawn to that lovely womb. The privilege to do this, to feel this miracle right under his fingertips and have his Grimm near him makes even the cynical Bastard Prince smile tenderly.

As if in agreement the little one reacts to his touch, kicking and moving. His first instinct is to draw away. He mustn't wake Nick and a kicking, active baby will surely accomplish that.
He's undecided but he wouldn't be Police Captain if he didn't excell in solving problems. Another way presents itself: Why not try to soothe Toisie with what works wonders with his Daddy:

He starts rubbing slow circles on satiny skin, murmuring soft reassurances to the child within the womb.
"Come on, my little one. Daddy needs his sleep. He's worked hard for you last night and now he needs to heal and he needs to rest... just like you. You're a good baby. Settle down little man."

In retrospect he should have expected that. He's interacting with Nick Burkhart's son after all.
Kicking stops, movement calms down....
And then a full somersault by the feels of it!

Sean is torn between delight that apparently Nick's unborn child recognizes his voice and wanting his mate to slumber on. In any case he has to work hard to keep from laughing. This is adorable even though it puts him in a dilemma.

Now what to do? What has mother done when she's wanted me to settle down? And what the hell has this unusual Grimm done to me that now I ask myself what my mother would have done to soothe a baby.

Something comes to mind. If he's honest with himself he knows the answers to both questions quite well.
He chances a glance at Nick, still dead to the world. Toisie continues to roll and wriggle merrily.

Should I try it out? What do I have to lose?... Nick could hear me.

In the end it doesn't stop him. Propped up on his elbows he leans down until his lips are almost touching Nick's belly and starts singing softly.
What have you done to me, my lovely boys? I must be out of my mind and yet I gladly proceed.

"Baju Bajuschki Baju. Ne loschisja na kraju...."
His mind starts drifting. Back to Russia, his childhood home after they have fled from Austria. They have been on the run. Hiding. Ever hiding yet he's felt safe whenever his mother has sung to him while weaving her protective magic.
Safe and sound. Slumbering peacefully while the world has turned and toiled around them. He lets that feeling course through and fill him. Lets all those feelings of security and comfort slip into his voice as he sings the familiar Russian lullaby. Right now in the privacy of their home his singing is a mirror to his soul for the little bundle of life he has promised to protect.

>>> 

Nick blinks sleepily. He's drifting. What is he hearing? Music? Yes but.... Singing. Beautiful song. A foreign language. He keeps himself very still, knowing instinctively that if he moves the singing will stop. So much love and tenderness... words soft like snowflakes drifting down. Just as if that someone wants to sing for one without waking....

This is Sean! That familiar voice. Deep and silken. Sean Renard is singing to the unborn child in his womb, he can even feel his warm breath ghosting over his skin. Oh God, he needs to see this! Very carefully Nick props himself up on his elbows, delighted when Sean doesn't instantly notice. His mighty zauberbiest is too focused on singing to his little boy. It is a sight and sound he will never forget. There are no worry lines, no attempt to control what slips past an impassive mask. Sean is smiling, crinkles around his eyes and all, completely caught up in the moment. Nick finds himself very much endorsed, enchanted by his 'biest and his soothing lullaby. Toisie is moving around lazily now. His sleepy little lion. Settling down because of Sean's singing?

He cannot help it, he has to ask: "Hey love, what are you doing?" His query is as soft as that song, voice still gravelly from sleep. Sean looks up in surprise. Caught unawares for once. He stops singing, which is a shame. And then smiles ruefully like he only rarely does.

"Making a fool of myself I think." Nick shuffles over, ignoring any discomfort from his nether regions in favor of cupping his cheeks, nuzzling his nose and whispering warmly: "You? Never. You are my drop dead gorgeous, always in control Prince. You don't make a fool of yourself.... especially not when singing to my baby boy as beautifully as you just did."

Warmth floods the zauberbiest's face, he can feel it under his touch, but he distracts his lovely man by kissing him deeply and guiding his hand to keep rubbing over his belly. Sean huffs a laugh into their kiss, draws him nearer. Throughout all that he's careful not to jostle anything that's still sore and it makes this kissing session which soon becomes a full fledged sleepy morning cuddle all the lovelier.

"Why were you singing in the first place?"

Sean buries his face against his neck, nuzzling it. To hide? Highly unusual for his confident zauberbiest. Nick let's his fingers trail down the length of Sean's spine. Hmm, that powerful, magnificent body.

"Come on, I want to know...", he weedles and Sean huffs. "I woke to find the blanket slipped off your belly and I admit I couldn't resist touching...." Nick caresses his face, bumps their noses.

"You know that you are allowed to.... Encouraged even." The last is said with mischief. "Yes, I know."

"So how do we get from there to singing, my dear Captain?"

Sean blushes harder, which is dead adorable and a rare sight as well. "Your son seemed to like my touch as well as his father does and started kicking. I feared it would wake you, so I tried talking to him."

It's visible how difficult it is for a man like Sean Renard to admit talking to a baby in a womb. Nick
loves it.
"It's safe to say that talking had the opposite effect of what I intended...."
"Because my boy likes hearing your voice just as much as his Daddy does."
Now there's a smile alright.
"Ah, yes. I couldn't help but notice." The infamous eyebrow makes an appearance to accompany the words.
"And then?"
"Then I started singing. As I said, after last night I wanted you to get rest. I didn't want Toisie or me to wake you."
Nick initiates another lazy, loving kiss before replying: "I cannot say I'm bemoaning the fact. It's not every day one is woken by such beautiful singing and I would be happy to have that happen much more often."
Sean steals a kiss of his own, smiling against his lips as his hand starts languidly roaming.
"Why did I know that you would say that, my dear Grimm? How are you feeling by the way?"
"Still sore but notably better than last night. And that were two questions, now I get to ask another of my own: What song did you sing?"
"Ah, that will have to remain my secret."
Nick swats him playfully on the rear as Sean rolls over to get even closer.
"What? No! You have to tell me. You are evil!"
"I am a Bastard Prince and a zauberbiest, what did you expect?"
"From a Prince? Much more gallantry... or another song now that you ask."

They continue in that vain for quite some time, always careful not to worsen Nick's state but otherwise taking all the liberties a bed and a loving partner affords them with.

When at long last they end up tangled together and cuddling Nick cannot help asking: "And did the singing help to settle down the munchkin?"
Sean chances him a wry sideways glance.
"Frankly I'm not sure. I might have to put that theory to another test in the future."
"You know, that's music to my ears."
And as it is ridiculously early, indeed, he snuggles right up to his 'biest and settles in for a few more hours of sleep before Sean has to get up and leave for work. His Prince seems amenable to the idea for he draws him into his arms and buries his aquiline nose in his tousled mop of hair with a decidedly satisfied exhale.

Right now, surrounded by Sean's faint scent it's almost sad that his sense of smell has returned to normal a few days back.

>>>

Nick stays home and takes it easy like a good little pregnant Detective, talking to Hank on the phone for an update and not even batting a lash when around noon Rosie and Monroe look in on him.
'To check if he has learned spitting fire while he was at it with creepy evolutionary changes and to see if he isn't already planning his next marathon or something equally as harebrained.' as Monroe has put it. As payback Nick might have gone into a few gruesome details while Rosalee has been to the bathroom but pregnant men have to get their fun somewhere, don't they?

By early evening that day he is well enough to drive to his appointment on his own and, man, it promises to be the weirdest one yet.
It isn't only seeing that down to earth Welsh man fidget with child like glee after learning that his Grimm heritage has really taken care of matters but also the fact that they discuss if 'operation bleeding piggy' is a good code name. Nick has omitted that it is his mother he wants to write to but those are semantics.

Of course the doctor has also done his job and checked on his baby and the newly formed hole, the last of which has given 'weird' a whole new meaning. Nick really counts it in Cransbury's favor that he has engaged him in the piggy conversation while he's done that part of the examination, which has set him at ease at least somewhat.

In the end it's been all worth it though. Toisie is a healthy baby, growing and developing just as he should, and he's gotten another sonogram picture to take home. He looks down on it now, absent-minded smile playing around his lips, and marvels how something that's been so tiny in the beginning can be a real beautiful baby boy now. His baby boy.... His sleepy little lion. Elizabeth has been right all those months ago. Even while still in his womb he has already braved hardships. He's fought like a lion along with his fathers.

Showing the picture to Sean has been a peaceful, fulfilling experience. His powerful 'biest has stood in front of their floor length windows as he is often wont to do and put the print under close scrutiny. He hasn't gushed or fawned but when he has finally looked up, there's been pride gleaming in his eyes. A father's pride.

He has stepped up to him, tipped his chin up and kissed him long and deep and murmured against his lips with all the seriousness of a Police Captain, that his son has inherited his father's good looks and striking personality.

It's been one of the best compliments Nick has ever gotten, especially because Renard's tone has been matter of fact as if he was merely stating a given.

Chapter End Notes

The idea for Sean singing that song to Nick's baby in the womb came when I heard him speak Russian in season 6 and it wouldn't leave me. It also lead me to listen to Russian children's songs for a whole morning... an interesting experience for sure. Anyway, I simply couldn't resist. XD
Chapter 8

Chapter Notes

Hey, there. I've finally managed to put together the next chapter. There will be lots and lots of Christmas fluff. Taking care of Sean and the next angsty part were sadly pushed to chapter 9 by... Christmas, cookies and our boys getting ideas in their head. That said, this story is officially rated Explicit now... for reasons. If you still want to read it without those parts, I have encased the scene in:

!!!>>>!!!
Text
!!!>>>!!!

Have fun!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter 8:

PW 30:

During the night from Wednesday to Thursday Nick manages to gain some useful insights. With pregnancy's progress his sleep patterns have become erratic, showing their face in one or the other sleepless night. Between reaching globe shaped proportions out front, near constant pain in the back and healthy baby movement in the middle it doesn't take a genius to know why. But he has used his time well. Has lain awake and studied every inch of his magnificent zauberbiest at length.

He's not overly concerned with the lack of sleep. A Grimm's robust nature accounts for a lot and the still persistent 'pregnant Grimm sleep attacks' do their part to equal the odds.

He leans over onto his side to get a better view of his sleeping mate. Over time he has become proficient at moving without a single sound. It seems that the stealthy hunter in him still trumps clumsiness of late pregnancy. A small mercy. No. Not quite. All this is immeasurable mercy bestowed on him. To have a baby inside of him. To have Sean and look his fill. This gorgeous man lying in relaxed repose, tension absent while deeply asleep. He licks his lips as he lets his gaze wander over an aquiline nose, that likes to bump and nuzzle him, and a strong jaw line, that feels just right under his hands. Over broad shoulders and a well muscled torso.

I should have known.

No desperate shout, no self-recrimination. A realization, nothing more, nothing less.

Lust curling low in his belly. An almost foreign feeling. Certainly a welcome one.
I really should have known.

Relish. Not taking his eyes off his powerful 'biest for even one moment. If anyone could rekindle his desire for more, it would have been this man.

They have done the kissing, the touching and cuddling. Their attraction to each other hasn't been a spur of the moment thing, couldn't have been with what has happened to Nick. It has slowly grown just like Nick's desire for his big man.

He looks down on Sean with a slow smile playing around his lips.

I want him. To share the future, to raise a baby... And to do some very enjoyable things that I will need to read up on in the very near future.

What he let's out then is not a lover's moan or a lustful sound. It's a relieved exhale. An almost laugh. He sinks back into the pillows with a happy sigh, a weight lifting off his chest he hasn't known has been there until now. Until it isn't anymore.

The freedom to desire human touch – that very special kind of touch and activity, too – and to feel not revulsion but happy anticipation! He rolls over lazily, slipping his hand to the back of Sean's neck and feeling his independent, always guarded Prince unconsciously leaning into the touch. Into that soothing, repetitive motion that lulls not only him into deeper sleep but his pregnant Grimm as well.

And while warmth, affection and love fill his whole being – going out to his mate and baby along that ancient bond – an idea for the perfect Christmas present for Sean forms in his head. It's safe to say that when at 4:17am Nick Burkhardt falls asleep he is by a few insights richer.

>>> 

It's Thursday morning and they have just watched the video tape from Hank's interview with Elmar Norton, the reinigen who has been arrested with help of Wu Tuesday night.

“Letting slip that your partner is a Grimm and then making him stew over it for another day? Sneaky.”

Nick dodges the cuff to his head cheeky grin non-erasable. To his defense, Hank is smirking as well although he valiantly tries to hide it.

“What can I say, we can get him for robbery, violent assault and dealing with stolen goods – he knows it and we know it – but I have the feeling there's more. Look. This is the report from crime scene unit after they've searched Norton's car.”

His partner hands him a folder and Nick skims the content, eyebrows rising to his hairline when he spots what Hank's been referring to.

“They've found traces of cocaine in a hidden compartment of the car trunk!”

“Exactly. So how high are chances that he's not selling drugs on the side...?”

“...Or not so much on the side. Well, I would say chances are close to none.”
“My thoughts exactly, which made me think: What about his buyers and suppliers?”

“So you let him stew over the fact that a Grimm is working in direct vicinity to his holding cell in order to get him to make a deal and rat out – no pun intended – his buddies when we talk to him today.”

Now Hank is grinning alright. Like a Cheshire Cat.

“So wanna go in there, interrogate a baddie and with a bit of luck catch many more baddies?” Hank wags his eyebrows for effect. Nick snorts with a shake of his head but Hank knows better. He knows that look. Sure enough Nick quips “You bet!” as he rises from his seat and takes up the case file.

“That's what I wanted to hear, partner.”

>>>  

Nick regards the criminal in front of him with a steady gaze, drawing conclusions and getting an initial picture of their perp. Skittish, suspicious, meek looking but not to be underestimated. There is a gleam in those beady eyes that tells of a violent history and little scruples to speak of. Pictures of Norton's latest victim rise up in the Grimm's memory: Bruises, deep scratches... no, *slashes* littering his body. Almost enough to make him bleed out. It's clear that even though hiding behind a diminutive facade Elmar Norton is a vicious man who belongs in prison for what he has done. He lets the Grimm come forth, scratch at the surface of his being. It's just a trace, like a dark shadow creeping up on their perp.

“Mr. Norton, I am Detective Burkhardt. I'm sure my partner has already mentioned me.”

He shuffles a sheaf of papers into order, playing for time to let the fact sink in. The reinigen crosses his arms in front of his chest – as best as he can while still cuffed – putting up a defiant act but failing where unconscious ticks are concerned. He's leaning slightly to the side, in direction of the door, and his rapid breathing is given away by twitching nostrils and the quick rising and falling of his chest. He's nervous and not very good at hiding it no matter what he believes.

“Tuesday night you were caught in the act of selling stolen goods. You have also committed an act of violent assault on a man, unprovoked and nearly resulting in the victim's death.”

He pauses, eyes growing cold and hard. Norton twitches almost imperceptibly.

"We have the attack on security tape, so there's no getting out of that either. And lastly there were traces of drugs found in your car. You have some explaining to do, Mr. Norton."

The other man swallows thickly, looks between the two Detectives in barely veiled agitation. Nick leans forward, resting his elbows on the table between them, menace encompassing him like a dark cloud. This time his primal side surges forth without needing to be coaxed.

The reinigen's flickering woge becomes a full one and he barely manages to reign himself back in. If possible his eyes have grown even wider and no enhanced olfactory sense is needed to notice that he's sweating profusely.
Nick concentrates to let his Grimm aura swell. He has no bad conscience about intimidating him into telling them more. This is the very man who has viciously attacked another in order to satisfy his greed and then left him unconscious and bleeding on the ground. It's only been lucky coincidence that the victim has been found quickly, otherwise he would have died of his injuries. So without showing an outward reaction to the man's obvious fear he continues calmly

“Of course, there are other options than going to prison.”

He sounds innocuous enough, Norton's imagination supplying what his mouth has never even hinted at. The man all but squeaks, looking seconds away from trying to make a run for it. They let him stew for a bit before Hank takes up:

“Of course, there are other options.... Like a deal.”

“A d-deal?”

Norton looks frenzied. Having already imagined a violent end at the hands of the local Grimm, this is not what he has expected. Nick rises from his chair slowly, which causes their oh so brave criminal to veer backward. The Grimm, however, only moves over to the wall to lean casually against it as Hank takes his partner's former position. He seems far more approachable now – the voice of reason – while Nick becomes the evil being lurking in the shadows.

“Yes, a deal. You see, to sell drugs you need someone supplying you and others to take the stuff off you. If you were to give us detailed information about those you deal with, then we might be able to convince the district attorney to argue for extenuating circumstances.”

Norton looks like they've gone crazy.... And like he himself has done as well for actually considering to take them up on their offer.

“You may think that these people will be out to get you, if you were to tell us about them now, but believe me, going to prison with the chance of a reduced sentence... is by far your safest option.”

This is Nick speaking from the sidelines, words a cold drawl in comparison to Hank's stern but reasonable tone. It doesn't take long for Norton to decide what he wants to do.

“Okay, okay, I might know something. I could give you names, locations... whatever!”

Hank nods in grim approval while Nick gets back into his seat to take notes of what their perp tells them.

>>> An hour later both Detectives are back in the bullpen, Hank assembling their notes and Nick calling drugs division.

“Hey Devi, this is Nick. We have a case belonging to your area of expertise. Interested in detailed information about a local drug dealing ring?... Yes? Brilliant. Want to come over tomorrow to hear what we have?... Okay, then let's meet tomorrow round noon in Tina's Diner and talk.... Sure thing, I'll pass greetings on to Hank as well.”

Nick ends the call sporting a smug expression. Devi Kellerman is a cop from drugs division and
together with her partner Brad Kershaw one of the few wesen in PPD who know about his Grimm heritage. The four of them get along well, going for a bear from time to time and helping each other when possible like just now.

“Greetings from Brad and Devi. Wanna go report to the Captain now?”

“Thanks. And are you honestly asking that after we've just successfully cracked a case and then some? Of course I want to report that!”

“That's what I thought. Let's go.”

>>> 

The rest of the day is dedicated to paperwork, which is dead boring but at least it has them leaving on time for once. Seeing that it's still early, Nick makes a detour to the Spice Shop. He has some planning to do after all and he's giddy with happy anticipation all of a sudden. Like a small child he cannot wait for Christmas to arrive but first there's work to do and friends to nag.

Arriving at the shop he finds the main room vacated. Brilliant. A quick glance to check, if there's really no customer in attendance, listening closely for any sounds and finding only the familiar ones of his friends, then: “Rosie, Rosie, Rosie, Rosie, Rosie, Monroe!”

His enthusiastic shout manages what the doorbell hasn't. Rosalee steps inside from the backroom, eyes sparking with fondness, and hugs him.

“Is a certain someone in a good mood today?”

“Hmhmm. I….”

“Hey why is there only one Monroe in all those Rosies?” That's the blutbad, sticking his head inside through the doorway his wife has just come through and frowning.

“Because you look at me like you wanna say ‘What do you want this time?’ whereas Rosalee hugs me hello.”

The clock maker huffs irritably but ventures over to hug him as well. Nick has noticed that Monroe does this more often lately. So either his pack instincts have been peaked by his pregnancy or he's just the big softy he likes to hide behind his gruff exterior… or a mix of both. Nick doesn't care what it is, he just hugs him back (because pregnancy hormones are as good an excuse as any) before following them into the backroom and taking a seat at the big work table in the middle. They join him after Monroe has closed the shop for the day and Rosalee has turned down the heat below one of her brews.

"So what has brought your good mood about?"

"If it has happened in a bedroom and involved Renard, we don't want to know!" Monroe looks so comically panicked that the Grimm is tempted to elaborate and be it only to tease his quirky friend. In the end he takes pity, but then again Monroe nearly twitches with nervousness and a nervous blutbad can be... tricky to say the least.

“Actually I need your advice on a non wesen matter.”
“Hah, I knew it!” Monroe pumps his fist in the air, which gets him an evil glare from the pregnant party in the room.

“Too much glee by far. And totally the reason for one Monroe against five Rosies.”

“You've counted them?”

That question just begs to be answered with the epic, hackle raising Grimm eye roll, so here they are.

“Monroe, I'm a Detective. I am expected to retain that kind of information.”

At this point Rosalee leaves the boys to their banter in order to prepare tea.

>>> 

While she sets water to boil and measures out herbs her sensitive ears pick up the conversation from the other room:

“Soo, any new developments on the munchkin front?” That's her husband asking idly.

“Not really. Other than feeling like one half of a giant Easter egg and fun things like 'operation piggy' there's nothing new.”

“Huh. Still not able to spit fire?”

“No. And admit it, you would have liked the idea of that happening.”

“You spitting fire? Oh no, dude. The work hazard would be far too great.”

“Hah! Says the man who has gone all dreamy eyed upon asking about it. And anyway, I'm a Grimm, I know how to wield weapons.”

Rosalee chuckles at that. Yes, the dreamy eyed gaze is one she knows well.

“Tze.... Not sprouted wings either?”

“Nope.”

“Uhm... developed super sight?”

By the sound of it her husband is warming up to the subject.

“No-nopedy-no.”

“Super hearing?”

“I already have that. Being a Grimm and all, you know?”

And their resident pregnant Grimm is snarking right back. Most entertaining to listen to. Just now Monroe is huffing in clear disappointment.

“Learned anything new?”
“Nein!”

“Hey, that was German! So you did learn something new.”

“Haven't seen that coming, Mr. Know-it-all-wolf, have you? And it wasn't that hard to pick up considering that a certain someone likes to impart little German lessons into every second lecture he holds.”

Another one of Monroe's meaningful huffs that can express anything from approval or disbelief to smugness and irritation. Ah yes, and of course there's more: This time it's indignation. In the small kitchenette Rosie smiles fondly.

“Well, someone's got to instill some knowledge into that thick Grimm head of yours.”

“Monroe, du nervst.”

“See? Not particularly nice to tell me that I'm annoying you but passable in regards to grammar and pronunciation.”

The ensuing silence tells the experienced fuchsbau that Nick is either smiling smugly or is flipping her husband off. Going by Monroe's grumbling he's most likely done both.

Just as she takes the tea pot and mugs over to her two troublemakers Nick inquires succinctly: “And you, Monroe? Learned any new tricks? Like, I don't know... chasing a ball and bringing it back to Rosie? Something enjoyable like that?”

Rosalee beats her husband to an answer: “The only new tricks Monnie has learned are ones you really don't want to know about.”

The gleam in her eyes and slow smile parting her lips paint an all too clear picture of what she is referring to. Or maybe that's Monroe spilling tea over half of the table when he jerks in shock and embarrassment. Nick isn't overly fazed. Well, being a Detective and Grimm it figures.

“If it is anything like canoodling...”, Taking up Monroe's earlier line of conversation he throws a significant glance at the sputtering blutbad whose face has acquired the color of a ripe tomato: “…Then I'm all for not knowing details. Really, not everyone is hell bent on learning what new things their friends can do. Isn't that right, Monroe?”

Her husband nods vigorously at which point Rosalee takes pity on him, ruffling his tousled locks and pressing a light kiss to his flushed cheek.

“Nick, why don't you tell us, what question you wanted to ask?”

Monroe mumbles something like 'Brilliant idea!' into his tea cup and Nick starts talking.

>>> 

Seeing their faces after he has explained matters confirms that it has been the right decision.

“Oh Nick, that is a wonderful idea for a present!”

Rosalee's eyes are suspiciously bright and even Monroe nods in clear approval.
“It combines good craftsmanship with.... Well, with the right message.”

Nick nods along, his own smile becoming a little dopey in eager anticipation of what his beloved Captain may say when he hands the thing over.

“And you really think, it will work? No weird reactions or something like that?”

He looks to his fuchsbau friend for final confirmation of what they've already discussed in length. Smiling indulgently she takes up his hand and squeezes it gently.

“Yes, I'm sure. As far as I know there isn't any bad reaction to be expected. The books which I have consulted also support that.”

“Brilliant!”

It's safe to say that her words have made one pregnant Grimm very happy.

>>> 

With the matter of Christmas presents out of the way, that leaves only talking to Wu on Friday evening.

They meet up with him in one of their favorite bars, choosing a secluded table where nobody can easily overhear their conversation. Wu arrives last, taking off scarf and stiff outer uniform jacket before sliding into the booth with flourish. He accepts the proffered beer quite readily and looks between the two Detectives with apparent curiosity.

“Well gentlemen, what brings us together on this fine December evening?”

“Not your talent for reciting lyrics, that much is clear”, Hank quips with a grin. The Asian’s brows draw together in a theatrical frown.

“This hurts me so much.”

They clink their bottles together, one of which Wu notes to be coke instead of beer. He files that information away for later and instead of commenting on it rather states the question that has his curiosity piqued.

“So to repeat the very query that's brought unjustified ribbing my way: What brings us together this evening besides me collecting the debt from a certain stake out?”

He lifts his bottle once again in the approximation of a toast and observes with interest that Nick starts – not outright fidgeting but displaying subtle vibes of nervous agitation. It's not more than a hunch. Nick is a trained Detective, after all, yet there isn't much that escapes Wu's notice. Hank is obviously content to let his partner do the talking while said partner seems in need of a moment to work up the courage. Maybe a bit of levity in order to make things easier, Wu thinks:

“Really, the way you two look I am half expecting revelations about long hidden feelings going from bromance to romance and, although I would support you no matter what, this isn't really what this is about. Or is it?”

This gets him at least a weak smile from Nick and the attempt of a head cuff from Hank. It also
tells him two things: One, this is about something serious as their local Grimm hasn't lost all tension set in his frame and, second, Hank is in the know or he would be displaying curiosity of a whole other level. It's Hank after all.

Nick takes another sip of his coke before looking him straight in the eye. There's determination and – almost completely hidden – some trepidation. It's safe to say that Wu is very close to fall off his chair in a veritable mimic of 'curiosity killed the cat'.

“Wu, I've got something to tell you... as you most likely have guessed.”

A small smile lightens up serious features of his colleague and friend.

“Okay, I'll make it short. I'm going to adopt a baby.”

The Sergeant does the sensible thing and sets his bottle of beer down instead of taking a swallow and spraying the table. Cocking his head Wu decides what he's going to say. In the end he goes for: “Not what I excepted, man.”

Now there's some fidgeting on Nick's part. Busily peeling off the label of his drink his gaze strays between the table and him, trying to gauge his reaction most likely.

“Just so you know, this isn't some spur of the moment thing. It's not like I've suddenly slid into mid-life crisis and thought, hey, I need to adopt a child....”

Wu holds up his hands in a slightly soothing manner, catching the other man's eyes as he says: “Easy, Burkhardt. Not saying that you did. I'm still sitting here listening. A bit awestruck maybe, but still not freaking out.”

A sardonic quirk to the Asian's lips assures even Nick that he's talking in good humor and really prepared to let him explain.

“Okay.” Nick huffs a laugh, takes another sip. A glance to Hank then, who gives an encouraging wink.

“Well, I've always wanted kids and once upon a time... (He glares at the Sergeant for his way too amused smirk at the unintended fairy tale pun.) I thought it would be Juliette I would be doing it with. Obviously that one didn't come to pass. I hadn't necessarily thought about adoption but round the beginning of July a friend of mine from way back has called me.”

Any levity has vanished from the young Detective's face and Wu knows better than to be anything other than serious right now.

>>>
bad way. In a very bad way... and pregnant. So....”

For all of it being a lie Nick feels his throat close up with very real feelings. There's been a reason for choosing this kind of cover story. It involves every fear and emotion that he has felt over the course of the last months. He makes cautious eye contact with Drew, who is still focused entirely on him and his story.

“She didn't know what to do but didn't want to abort the child either. So she asked me to adopt and take care of the baby once it is born, because as matters stand she doesn't feel in any way able to give that child the life it deserves and there's... no father to speak of. I've thought about it long and hard. She's been three months along when she's told me. I would have involved Juliette from the beginning but things between us had been strained already. Over the course of the next months I've made up my mind and....”

Here he needs a moment to find his voice again. Talking about that day when Juliette has left is still wrought with heavy anguish for so many reasons. A friendly nudge. Shoulder to shoulder. That's Hank and Nick has to smile despite himself. With a tiny nod he goes on:

“By September I had myself talked into hoping that maybe she would do it with me regardless. After all we were still a couple and she... and I thought she still wanted a future with me despite everything the Grimm world dished up.”

“But things didn't go that way, did they?”, Wu asks quietly, his voice grave like it rarely is. Nick shrugs and the look they exchange is one of silent understanding.

“No, it's safe to say they didn't.”

“Is this why you were on sick leave for a few days at that time? Did she have anything to do with that?” The Asian's brows are drawn together, showing a protective streak and subtle anger on his part.

“Yes. She didn't take it well. Any of it. It would have been one thing for her to be against adopting a child not her own. I would have understood. But it seemed there's been quite a few things she's been angry about....”

“Let's just say that it all ended in Nick being the throw dummy to test the coffee table's stability.”

At Hank's grim assertion Wu only raises an eyebrow but they know him well enough to see the emotions churning behind his neutral facade. He leans back into the bench, crossing his arms over his chest.

“Why not file a complaint?”

Before either of them can respond he answers his own question: “Ah, let me guess: There's been a grimm angle to all that, which made going through official channels impossible.”

“Right on first try. Well, to conclude this tale, I want to do it regardless. I want to give this kid – going to be a boy by the way – a good future and I want to help my friend like she did when I needed it. But I'm not only doing it for her. I really want to do this even if I'll be doing it as single dad.”

Nick knows that his expression – finally hopeful and happy instead of fearful and wary – will tell the perceptive Sergeant more than any words could and he doesn't try to keep those feelings from showing on his face. If anything can persuade Wu that this is a good decision it is seeing all that. He feels he only has to add one thing before he'll be quiet to let Wu make up his mind:
“It will be a closed adoption, which is why what I've told you so far is all I can tell you about her identity.”

Silence ensues. A thoughtful one as Nick is relieved to note. He waits patiently for Wu to think this through and hopes to God that their friend won't suddenly take a stand against him and his decision after all the understanding he's shown throughout his narration.

“Yeah, I can see your reasoning....”

A slow smile comes to their friend's face.

“And I can see you with kids. Definitely seeing you with kids.”

He gives a slight nod, almost as if to himself, before his curious nature gets the better of him:

“Uhm, not like I want to be a killjoy but does the Captain know? I mean, it might not necessarily be his business on a private scale, but it's going to impede on work.”

Nick has expected that question to crop up somewhere along the way and is quite happy to answer it.

“Actually he was the one encouraging me to go through with it.”

Wu's mouth is very close to falling open.

“An again I repeat myself: Not what I expected, man.”

This time it is Hank taking up the narrative.

“If you had asked me a year ago I would have said 'impossible' but over the course of the last months and with everything that's happened, our Captain has been more than decent.”

Nick rubs the back of his head in embarrassment, clearly uncomfortable with what he's going to say next: “Once I knew that I wanted to go through with this I went to Renard to inform him. Turns out that I've been harboring a whole lot more fears about it all – the shit with Juliette included – and somehow he ended helping me through a lot of it. He's been unexpected but great help. And along the way we've become friends.”

Wu shakes his head in mild disbelief but it is with his usual sardonic smile, which really does a lot to put Nick at ease.

“So...Yeah. That's been the newest piece of mind boggling news. I've wanted you to know... and I've wanted to ask, if you would take over as Hank's partner for the time of my leave? It won't come to pass for another few months but I wanted to get it settled now. Cannot leave my partner with just anyone, after all. He needs someone clever enough to keep him out of trouble....”

At that point Hank ends his speech with a friendly cuff to his head and an indignant: “Hey! I'm not that bad. And look who's talking!”

Wu smirks the smirk of true evil, rubbing his hands and saying: “It will be my utmost pleasure.”

While Nick is relieved, Hank looks for all the world like he would like to put in a last minute veto.

“Oh, and it won't be a real leave, I hope you realize.”

“Why?”
The Asian grins broadly, leans over the table to get closer and whispers:

“Why, you're our weird-shit-o-pedia, of course, no matter if on parental leave or not.”

Nick rolls his eyes while inwardly a warm feeling spreads through his chest. Out loud he only says: “And here I thought that was Monroe's work description.”

>>> 

They've gone over details, had another few rounds of drinks and are just donning coats and other protection against the cold when Nick finds himself asking one last time: “So, you okay with this, Drew?”

In response the Asian draws him in a rare one armed hug.

“Sure. As long as you're gonna tell me about the other part some day, I'm cool with you being a dad.”

They look at each other and much is said that words cannot convey.

“That part I will tell you about as soon as it's safe to do so. Deal?”

He holds out his hand, which Wu takes without hesitation.

“Deal. I'll hold you to that.”

PW 31:

Christmas is approaching in leaps and for once even Portland criminals (which according to Wu sounds like a sports team) seem to be in a peaceful mood. Although on Sunday Hank and Nick get called to a crime scene, they have solved the case with minimal fuss by Tuesday noon.

Which is fortunate for the rest of the station because that way their secretly pregnant colleague finds the time to bake loads of cookies.... And the taste of Nick Burkhardt's chocolate chip cookies is almost legendary among cops of South Precinct. It's a tradition he has started some years ago: Bake a ship load of the stuff and take them to the station on the day before Christmas for all of those to enjoy, who have to work over the holiday. It's become a well loved tradition and one for which Captain Renard would have let him call it a day early, even if they hadn't been an item.

What can the zauberbiest say? It's good strategy (and not at all personal preference of certain baked goods or a certain pregnant Grimm). It raises the moral among his men and, honestly, those cookies are worth dying for.

>>>
Sean comes home to find Nick still in the midst of baking. Even while unwinding the scarf from his neck and slipping out of his thick wool coat he cannot tear his eyes away from his Grimm puttering about in the kitchen. He wears sweatpants that might not be as tight as the jeans he's worn before pregnancy but that still afford him with a nice view of his shapely butt. He's also having his womb truly out in the open instead of under the zaubertrank's disguise – a sight Sean thinks he will never grow tired of.

True, the kitchen looks like a pack of flour might have met the wrong end of an explosion but as soon as his lovely boy throws him a smile over his shoulder, half sheepish, half mischievous, any irritation is replaced by fondness. The fact that there's a speck of dough clinging to the tip of his nose just makes him more delectable. With a slow smile he steps up to his mate and buries his own nose into the crook of Nick's neck, which is allowed with obvious delight and by tilting his head for better access.

"Three questions, my dear Grimm", Sean murmurs against warm skin.

"Hmm?"

"First one: Do you want to explain why the kitchen looks like a war zone after a flour bomb has been dropped on unsuspecting counter tops?"

"I could.... But it would be embarrassing. If I were to do that, you would have to promise not to laugh."

"Promise."

"I'm not sure I should believe you."

"And I'm very sure your delectable ass will get a swat, if you don't start explaining soon."

As if to tease him, Nick presses said ass against his zauberbiest's front and wriggles in a decidedly naughty way. Large hands slip to his hips to keep him still.

"Careful, my boy."

Nick's answering grin is downright cheeky but shifts to sheepish as soon as he starts explaining: "Well, you see, today was a zaubertrank day, anyway, and so I decided to wait with taking the next dose until after baking. So when I leaned over the counter to reach one of the topmost cupboards and then leaned sideways to grab eggs as well I might have miscalculated the width of my girth... and bowled over the pack of flour.... which has then spread its contents across the whole counter top."

There's a suspicious absence of an answer leading Nick exclaim in faux indignation: "You are laughing!"

"No, I'm smirking."

"Hmpf. Smirking like the devil you are."

"I may admit to that. Now to my second question: Why is there a thick speck of cookie dough on your nose?"

Nick blushed and makes to wipe it away but Sean catches his wrist before he can do so.

"I'm afraid I cannot let you do this", he intones quietly. Nick's interest is certainly piqued and he
sneaks a look over his shoulder. The way his mighty 'biest is looking at him....

"Why?"

"It would defeat the purpose of my third question."

He is turned around then so that his butt is resting against the counter and his flour covered belly gently touching Sean's front. Nick cocks his head, smirking.

"Oh, we cannot have that, now can we?"

Sean snakes his arms around his lover's torso, moving deliciously close and somehow fitting Nick's womb in between.

"No, we cannot. So?"

"You are a very nosy man."

Leveling him a steady gaze Sean quips: "Calling me nosy may make me come back to the swatting part but it won't make me forget my question."

"It was worth a try. So to satisfy your curiosity, I was just concentrating hard on portioning out globs of dough on the baking tray when Toisie decided to do a Chuck Norris worthy round house kick and I jerked in surprise and right into it. I intended to wipe the stuff away after I came back up but then I got distracted because it felt like Toisie was wriggling his tiny butt inside of me... and I admit I was momentarily paralyzed by the cuteness factor... and by that time you had arrived. Sooo, that's all."

"Hmm. I see. And that leads me directly to my next question."

The way his Prince looks down on him, pupils blown wide and gaze slightly unfocused, it doesn't take a genius to know what he will ask and the way Nick smiles and tilts his head up clearly says yes. Sean asks anyway, huskily and with his hands settling heavily onto his shoulders: "May I?"

The eager noise tumbling from the Grimm's lips is all permission he needs. Delicately and slowly he dips down, lips and tongue descending on the bridge and tip of Nick's nose, tongue probing and mouth suckling. When Sean comes back up both are ridiculously dreamy eyed and smile at each other like love drunken fools.

"Delicious."

"Me or the dough?"

"Both. Certainly both."

Nick looks very satisfied as he presses up to his powerful 'biest, buries his fingers in close cropped curls and pulls him down for another deep kiss.

In the end it is the alarm indicating that the next batch of cookies is ready which interrupts their kissing session. Nick pulls away to throw the oven a baleful look that only vanishes once Sean has bestowed another light kiss on his lips.

"I think someone has a task to finish."

Nick sighs and with a last swat to his rear he is pushed in direction of the waiting oven.
“Maybe you're right but you'll have to go into the living room for some downtime. Otherwise I fear I will be too distracted not to let those cookies burn to cinders."


After getting into more comfortable clothes Sean uses the rare opportunity to stretch out on the couch with a good book. There are muted sounds coming from the other room. It is peaceful and... domestic. Half listening to those sounds, half concentrating on the words in front of him, he manages to relax like he hasn't done in a long time. Envisioning his future life he has never seen this but now, hearing Nick hum some mindless tune or talk quietly to the baby in his womb while moving trays and putting out new dough, there are few things he would want instead.

The evening gets even better when a while later Nick leans down to him over the back of the couch and catches his lips in a kiss that leaves him slightly dizzy and with the taste of dough and chocolate still on his tongue.

“Hmm. Finished?”

“Jup, all done and the kitchen squishy clean.”

“That's what I wanted to hear.”

He beckons Nick around to the front side of the couch and draws him onto his lap – an action with that his Grimm complies all too gladly. Call it a serious breech in his defenses but the zauberbiest is so enraptured by sparkling gray eyes and glowing cheeks that he misses Nick always keeping one hand out of sight until he murmurs:

“Can I interest you in tasting a cookie still warm from the oven?”

“You could certainly try to.”

“Brilliant!”

Watching Nick brandish the formerly hidden cookie and break off a mouth sized bit Sean doesn't know what's better: Seeing utter delight on his boy's beautiful face at the prospect of feeding him or seeing half molten chocolate ooze slowly out of the cookie chunk. They manage to get the piece into his mouth without mishap but, honestly, even if something had gone awry he wouldn't have cared because, oh God, this is heaven. His eyes close almost on their own accord.

Contained inside a crispy outer layer soft cookie dough and molten chocolate merge on his tongue and make him forget his surroundings for a moment. Only upon reopening his eyes and catching sight of Nick's smile – half delighted, half devious – does he notices that the sounds he has emitted have been very telling... and rather obscene.

“Liked that, my Captain?”

“More than liked it. Want me to return the favor?”

If his voice is more gravelly than usual Nick doesn't call him out on it, but that's maybe because he's occupied with nodding vigorously in answer to Sean's question.
On the day before Christmas both Nick and Hank have to work but otherwise they are in luck. No
new case lands on their desk and with a ship load of cookies delivered and all of their paperwork
completed, 48 hours off and Christmas may come.

Admittedly, finding their home tastefully decorated for the season where it hasn't been in the
morning makes Nick wary at first. However after silently checking the rooms for intruders and
reading the note a certain housekeeper has left on the breakfast bar, he is soon grinning like mad.
Walking through the main rooms again he describes what he sees to his little boy. That may be
sentimental and the general wisdom of telling an unborn child any of this may also be disputable
but that doesn't keep him from doing it. Somehow it feels right and what can he say: The little boy
that is not inside his womb but in his heart, the small boy Detective Nick Burkhardt has once been,
is delighted.

Bits of greenery here and there, a string of lights along the banister of the balcony overlooking the
forest, and last but not least in the living room a small Christmas tree decorated with silver baubles
and softly glowing fairy lights. Nothing overbearing and no mistletoe (which is a pity but Nick isn't
choosy). In short, it's brilliant!

Taking out his phone he types a short message to Renard:

/Hilda is sneaky but I like it./

An answer isn't long in coming.

/She's a true lioness. No one moves as silently as her, so what did you expect? Oh, and should I
have mentioned that she likes to force a minimum of seasonal cheer on me?/

Nick can almost hear the smug tone through the text. His completely non-sentimental zauberbiest
has wanted to surprise him. And his plan has worked.

/Nah, that's okay. I'll just do the little boy thing now./

Although Nick is careful not to write anything too conspicuous about their living arrangements and
relationship, he is sure that Sean gets the message anyway, and that right now the Captain is subtly
smirking at imagining his mate sitting on the floor in front of the tree and staring in awe.

To top things off, even Sean makes it home at a reasonable time. They suspect that this is Wu's
Christmas present for he has somehow managed to put off all of the Captain's appointments until
after the holidays. They certainly haven't planned for this and Wu isn't even aware of their
relationship but it seems that they'll get the chance to celebrate their first Christmas together.
With fairy lights and hearth casting a warm orange glow around their living room and temperatures outside below freezing point it's easy to get into the right mood for lounging on the giant couch together. Even Sean, though he has done his best not to show it, likes the atmosphere and the opportunity to have his mate all to himself. Nick watches some game on tv – touching his globe shaped middle with an implicitness that's endearing – while Sean gets on with his book, and at a satisfying pace no less. He can honestly not remember the last time he's even managed one chapter of a book without being interrupted by either Police or wesen or Royal matters.

*Seems that a certain Grimm has a good influence on my down time score. Oh well, better not tell him, otherwise any reprimand about giving me gray hairs will forever fall on deaf ears.*

When said positively influential Grimm nods off in his arms for the third time that evening he checks the time.... And snorts in amusement.

*Barely half past nine. Cute. Pregnant Grimm sleep attacks, indeed.*

Sean bumps his nose gently against the side of his face to wake him. Nick blinks, shakes his head and makes to go right back to sleep but the zauberbiest speaks up before that can happen: "Hey. I think my pregnant Grimm needs to go to bed now."

"You mean so I don' catch Santa 'pon eatin' cookies an' milk after droppin' off presents?"

Sean raises a questioning brow more at the content than at the sleepy mumble.

"We've never put out cookies and milk."

Nick perks up at that.

"Huh? Santa's loss then. My cookies are great."

The zauberbiest smirks.

"Yes, they are. Even though collateral damage to civilian counter tops was devastating."

Nick mock frowns, acting as if he has eyebrows as bushy as Monroe's to use.

"Hmpf. There always is a prize to pay. Be happy you get delicious cookies."

A kiss to his temple and the hint of a smile.

"Oh, I am."

Nick kisses him back and then makes to cuddle up for the long haul.

"That's good because the pregnant Grimm needs his grateful big man to come to bed with him."

"Oh, does he now?"

"Uuh.... That or stay with me right here on the couch to sleep. And ignore what time it is. I know it's ridiculously early."

A jaw cracking yawn interrupts an adorable pout.
"Hmm. Who am I to deny this lovely boy a wish, if he asks so nicely?"

Nick's sleepy, utterly happy smile is the only answer Sean needs.

"Come on. Let's get us into bed then."

>>> Waking up on Christmas morning brings about a level of excitement that Nick has rarely felt in the past. Nonetheless they laze around in bed for a while. Or rather when Nick is unable to contain himself any longer and tries waking Sean with a sneaky tickle attack, his 'biest takes the challenge and responds in kind. Before Nick can so much as squeak Sean has him wrapped in a tight embrace, entangled their legs for good measure and keeps him immobile and more or less docile despite his incessant wriggling.

“Oh no, my cheeky brat, I think you're in for a bit of down time.”

Another valiant attempt at wriggling free, a teasing nib from Sean at his neck to dissuade him. Nick is laughing breathlessly, which somehow defeats the credibility of his next words:

“But Sean, that's evil.”

“No, it's evil to wake your mate by tickling on a rare day off.”

When Nick pouts, Sean manages for all of 10 seconds to seem unaffected. The trace of a smile from the Bastard Prince. More than enough of a hint for a smug one to appear on the Grimm's face.

“It was for a good purpose because I really need to get a certain someone his present and that certain someone has to be awake when receiving it.”

He is embraced just a little tighter, his neck and bare shoulders given some more attention by warm lips and a hot tongue.

“Wouldn't you say my present is right here in my arms? I remember someone saying that it comes as a double pack and wants to spend its future with me.”

This is murmured against his skin in between kisses and nibs. Nick looks torn between agreeing wholeheartedly and getting his way and it is a true testament to Sean's above average persuasion skills that he manages to keep his over-excited mate in bed for another half an hour.

>>> “Off you go, impatient twerp.”

Nick's face lights up like the sun has just risen. A last peck to the zauberbiest's cheek then he is clambering out of bed with an agility as if he weren't more than seven months gone. On that account, at least the back pain has lessened somewhat. Seems that a Grimm's muscles are rather quick at adapting to a change of physical strain.
Sean cannot help smirking fondly as he watches his mate retreat. If he had known that Christmas would transform a capable Detective and powerful Grimm into a little boy.... Oh, who is he kidding? If he had known, he wouldn't have done a single thing differently.

“You won't regret it!”, the man turned boy shouts from what must be the kitchen.

“Hmhm.” The Bastard Prince is confident that those sensitive ears will pick up his answer albeit its quietness.

>>> 

Nick is still grinning broadly when he leans sideways against the kitchen counter, assembling sandwiches and waiting for milk on the stove to heat up. Aunt Marie may never have had a taste for seasonal decoration but she's certainly tried to make up for it by teaching him all the Kessler Christmas family recipes there have been to know. One of them is hot chocolate with spices and cream, which is what Nick is cooking up right now.

Finished with the food he takes his present for Sean out of its hiding place and puts it on the tray along with everything else.

“Did you hear that, little one, we are his present”, he murmurs down to his middle: “But he's going to get another present, anyway, doesn't...?”

The ongoing father cocks his head, listening closely. Then: ”Sean Renard, I hear you. Get back into bed because in a few moments I'm going to return with a tray full of delicious things and you might like the idea of breakfast in bed.”

He doesn't listen for a verbal answer but for telling sounds instead. A lithe body moving, rustling of blankets, a barely there chuckle.

With a satisfied smile he continues stirring real life chocolate into hot milk.

>>> 

After they've enjoyed food and drink and Sean has indulged in another sweet caress of Nick's bulging middle – much to Toisie's kicking and wriggling delight – it's finally time for opening presents. Sean is well able to detect his mate's excitement, so he just smiles mysteriously and says that he may go first because his own present cannot be handed over but rather needs to be shown.

Nick looks intrigued, inquisitive gaze searching his face for an answer. Sean however is not coaxed into revealing anything, so he nods with a little huff and finally hands over a small, rectangular shaped parcel. Now its the zauberbiest's turn to be curious. A last glance into gray eyes brimming with excitement, then he starts unwrapping. For Nick it is a marvel to see that formidable mind, that absolute focus and attention to detail set on something so tiny. Something Nick has taken time and effort to choose.

Oh, God, I hope he likes it! What if he thinks it silly or too sentimental?
Time for second thoughts has just run out because Sean lifts the sleek capsule pendant out of the box by its chain and holds it up for closer inspection.

>>> 

The pendant is made of burnished silver, its design simple yet tasteful. Sean spots an opening mechanism... a screw cap of some sort, if his guess is correct. A smile has come to his face wholly without his notice but when he looks up at his Grimm and sees his expression, he knows it is there. Few other things can turn Nick's gaze this tender.

“It's beautiful”, he murmurs and makes to unscrew the top only to be stopped by a hand wrapping firmly around his own.

“It's not time for that yet. For you see... this capsule...”, Sean notes with interest that his mates is blushing.

“Yes?”

“It contains the last dose of the antidote to the shadowing trank... because when the time has come for Toisie to be born I want you to be right beside me and I will need to take that antidote so that Dr. Cransbury can see my womb for what it is and...”

The rest of his rushed speech is silenced with a deep kiss of love and devotion! The pendant is carefully put down on the blanket while Sean's lips never leave those of his lovely boy. He pulls him in tight, understanding what he wants to tell him without any more words necessary. Nick wants him to be there every step of the way. More importantly, he trusts him to be. It is a gift greater than any piece of jewelry could ever be. It is trust and love.

“I love you, Nick. If anyone had asked my a year ago, if I would ever feel the pressing need to say something so sentimental... and repeat it... I love you... I would have scoffed at them. But you make me want to do so. You make me want to do a lot of things I've never thought I would or could do....”

“Love you, too, Sean!”, Nick echoes before he can say anything more and they smile against each others lips.

It's safe to say that for another half an hour the Grimm and his 'biest forget the world around them and indulge in a very extended kissing and cuddling session.

>>> 

Nick has just closed the chain's clasp and they watch the sleek silver capsule slide down to rest on the center of Sean's naked chest.

“Hmm. Looks good on you.”

“What can I say, being a Prince does have its advantages. Good looks and charisma are just two of
them.”

Sean smirks smugly, giving a veritable impression of a over confident Royal.

“Arrogant twit”, Nick quips with a laugh.

Leaning over Sean presses another kiss to the crook of his neck, making pleasant shivers run down his spine.

“What do you think, shall this... what did you call me so insolently... arrogant twit... show you to your own present now?”

Nick's smile turns mischievous, eyes sparking with it.

“Why not. At least my guide will be good looking.”

“Certainly. And do you trust me to blindfold you?”

“I can smash melons in flight while blindfolded so I think I'm safe. Hmm. This gets ever more exciting. Toisie thinks so, too. He's pushing his bum against my front as if to urge me to get up already.”

“Then we shouldn't keep him waiting.”

>>> 

Blindfolded Nick is led through the house. The way isn't long. Just across the hall, if his estimation is correct. A door is opened.

The guest room?

He is gently pushed inside, Sean standing right behind him and slipping the length of cloth off his head. They are in the guestroom, indeed, and it is completely bare. No furniture, the walls painted in an unassuming white. There's nothing at all. Before Nick can voice his puzzlement, Sean explains:

"I should say that my present to you is a delayed one and just like yours there's more to it than meets the eye. As you know very well at present date we can neither make our relationship official nor may I proclaim to the world that I want to raise your son with you. So – and feel free to call me sentimental – I thought that once the time is right we could decorate and furnish this room together... as a nursery for our son."

Nick cannot get out a single word. He doesn't need to. His 'biest is near enough to feel the minute tremor, to hear the slightest hitch in his breath. He steps closer still, envelopes his beautiful boy in a tight hug from behind and murmurs into his ear:

"I take it you like my idea?"

A jerky yet vigorous nod is the only warning Sean gets before Nick turns around in his arms and hugs him as if his life depended on it. When they kiss, there's wetness but if his mate's reaction is to cry from joy then there are truly no words necessary. A warm feeling settles in the Bastard Prince's chest and deep inside even his zauberbiest rumbles in contentment.
By early evening they head over to Christmas dinner with Rosalee, Monroe and Hank. Nick has been surprised but delighted when Sean has accepted his invitation to join them. That dinner has been planned long before the two of them have ever been considered a twosome and Nick would have been loath to let his friends down. It seems his perceptive 'biest has known because there's been a mildly indulgent look on him, that Nick cannot even begrudge him. For a solitary man like Sean Renard it must be quite the concession and leap out of his comfort zone to do this just like it would be for Nick to attend some fancy political dinner.

They take separate cars, no need to risk exposure of their living arrangements. It's a given to both that at some point they will make their relationship officially known but before that's the case they're going to keep things under the radar.

Nick arrives first, ringing the doorbell, waiting on the doorstep for someone to open and taking his time to look around. The couple's Christmas decorations are... opulent as always.

"Detective, I think you should call this in to the Department", the calm command is issued from close behind him. The Grimm has heard his Captain approach but he's confused nonetheless. He turns around.

"Sir?" His eyes ask for clarification, cop appearing the moment he hears that special tone of voice. Renard looks down at him, expression an inscrutable mask, and even when he resumes speaking there's only the cool countenance of a Police Captain: "Well, don't you think that for wielding that much Christmas decoration a weapon license is needed?"

It takes a moment to register and another to spot carefully veiled amusement. Nick wants to do what he would have done at home but out here he can only grin and mutter: "You're a mean one, Mr. Renard!"

To get in a halfway decent Dr. Seuss quote makes up for it, though. Monroe would be delighted.... Their host chooses that moment to open the door. And Nick thinks, it's a true testament to Sean's royal upbringing that he looks completely at ease and like the epitome of a polite guest whereas an instant before he's been glaring at him for the Grinch reference.

They have all gathered in the cozy living room. Though accepting that Sean might be uncomfortable with public displays of affection Nick's been delighted by one or the other close contact or chaste kiss. He wouldn't have pushed his Prince to do any of the sort but he sure as hell won't refuse if Sean initiates it.

There have been funny moments, too, like their conversation about Christmas cheer with him proudly brandishing a foto of their small Christmas tree and matters going typically crazy from there...:

"Look, Monroe, our first try at spreading the cheer for the munchkin."
"Admittedly that looks nice but somehow you've forgotten to put up the ogre heads with tinsel. Really, where is your sense of tradition? I'm sure dear Aunt Marie would have been delighted." For his valiant attempt at sounding scandalized he looks entirely too comfortable with his glass of hot eggnog and seasonal self-knit sweater.

"Nah, was a bit too rustic for the modern interior of Sean's house."

"Pity..."

They have continued in that vain, occasionally being joined by the others adding their own. Only Sean has seemed content to watch, listen and sedately meander around the room. That is to say when he hasn't been engaged in subtle displays of possessive behavior that Rosie's seemed to find absolutely adorable. And of course until…:

"Are these the famous Wichtelmann Figuren from Niederbayern?" Sean is standing by the window and examining a set of porcelain figurines that does look suspiciously like the aforementioned dwarfs. Monroe sidles over at once, eyes shining like those of a child on... well, Christmas.

"Oh, you know of them? Aren't they beautiful?"

The two Detectives in the room snicker and even Rosalee has a quirk to her lips while watching the two very different men. Nick even tries to warn his over eager friend that Sean might have discovered a mischievous side previously unheard of: "Monroe...."

But the clock maker is in Wichtelmann-Land and not to be stopped. Meanwhile their inscrutable zauberbiest gives every impression of listening closely, head cocked and expression perfected by a polite smile.

"Look at the craftsmanship displayed by the details...."

Nick and Hank exchange a glance. Maybe a more direct intervention is needed.

"Monroe, he's taking the mickey with you."

The Blutbad frowns, bushy brows in motion and eyes swiveling between them all.

"No way, how would he know of them otherwise?"

The 'knowing' party looks the epitome of innocence and polite interest. Really, that kind of poker face is enviable. Hank tries to come to their blutbad's rescue, anyway, never mind the mischievous glint lurking in his eyes.

"Just to bring up something reaaally far fetched: Nick might have told him. He told me. And look, our Captain sports the same expression like when he's managed to get one over Captain Robertson from North Precinct with the man none the wiser."

Monroe looks back to the tall Prince in suspicion, finally spotting a trace of what must be amusement. Throwing his hands in the air he grumbles at all of them, finally coaxing an openly teasing expression out of Sean. At first Monroe huffs and puffs but at seeing his wife's tender gaze he cannot keep it up any longer. He knows what has her looking like that: For Renard to show this kind of levity is extremely rare and he wagers that they have to thank a certain pregnant Grimm for it.

"I apologize, Monroe. In my defense I must say: Everyone has their own way of coping with a magnanimous amount of seasonal cheer and this, I am afraid, is mine. Oh, and of course, seeing
that you are the host this evening and under supervision of three trained Officers of the law, I'll refrain from asking, if you have a weapon license for all this….”

With that last bit delivered as deadpan as it is, it takes a moment for the others to react. Nick is the first one to crack, dissolving into helpless laughter and getting poked in the rips repeatedly for ‘too much amusement by far’ by their local blutbad. He swats at Monroe’s poking appendage half-heartedly to stop the assault, which only seems to spur the man on.

"That's no way to ensue that you actually get Christmas presents, Mister.... Or you, Captain, for that matter!"

This stern grumble is accentuated by another poke and further show of bushy browed disapproval. If Sean is surprised that he is now included in the couple's Christmas present list, he doesn't show it. Hank sidles over to him murmuring: "You're not going to help him, are you?" There's entirely too much glee for any serious reprimand to come across.

"I have found that Nick is well able to fight his own battles. And building a Detective's problem solving skills in real life situations is always a worthwhile endeavor."

"If you say so, Sir."

Renard gives a decisive nod, mien giving nothing away. Hank just shakes his head grinning. Typical for their shrewd commander: Start something drawing strings from the back and then watching amused as events unfold.

>>> 

Dinner is ready soon after. Sean and Monroe are seated across from each other, as are Nick and Rosalee with Hank taking the head of the table. While eating a delicious meal, that Nick swears the little one likes just as much, they talk easily and enjoy themselves. Out of them all Monroe takes longest to warm up to the new addition to their inner circle - whereas Sean himself surprises them all by being fairly open and at ease - but by the end of dinner at any rate they are happily exchanging witticisms.

Between bites Nick whispers to Hank: "Those two are fairly fluent in speaking sarcastic, aren't they?"

"Jup. What d'figure, there a course for that at Portland State Uni?"

"If there is, what might it be named?"

"Why, think of joining the course?" That's Rosalee from Nick’s left side.

"No need for that. Ever since living with Sean one could say I'm getting home schooled."

"Too true."

“Now, lady and gentleman, back to course name suggestions. Any ideas?"

Hank looks between the two of them, ignoring Sean and Monroe who have stopped talking in favor of listening in. Grimm and fuchsbau are really warming up to the topic, unheeding of their growing
audience:

"Sarcasm for beginners. Find your own approach to a foreign language."

"Your inner sarcastic voice: Make it your outer one."

"Uhm... Oh, yes. Sarcasm, end the tabu and tell the world."

"Oh, oh, oh, I have the perfect one!"

Their Grimm is grinning like a loon.

"Well, let's hear it then."

"Sean Renard, daily life experience."

Nick tries ignoring his scary big man's subtle glare, Hank tries keeping his amusement at bay.... Rosie doesn't, her laughter a warm sound in the joyously decorated room. She chances a glance at their respective mates, fully aware of their close attention, still chuckling and eyes alight with merriment.

"He could give courses on that, couldn't he?"

At that point Monroe ventures in Sean's direction: "Are they making fun of us?"

"Yes, I think they are. Well, I for my part can put my two Detectives on penitentiary desk duty for insolence. What are you going to do?"

Renard raises an eyebrow as the blutbad contemplates the question.

"Sleeping on the couch most likely, if I were to decide to do anything."

He huffs theatrically but they can all see that he isn't into it. Rosie indulges him, anyway, ruffling his hair and giving him a loving peck on the cheek.

"Oh, my poor Monnie."

If he hadn't already been mush before, her words at the latest have him melting on the spot and entirely forgiving her for that very satisfied smirk.

>>> 

After dinner they are all in a post meal haze, sitting on the couches with drinks (nonalcoholic for Nick, of course) in hand and quite content to talk or just be. Some minutes ago Rosie has asked Sean, if he would help her with some things, which leaves two Detectives and a blutbad to sit in the cozy living room. Monroe looks for all the world like on the verge of slumber, the epitome of content, sated wolf with his hands resting on his belly. Hank snickers and quietly comments to Nick: "He really looks like the big bad wolf after eating Red Riding Hood now, doesn't he?"

Nick grins, rubbing over his own belly in clear contentment and feeling his baby boy lazily respond.
"Jup, totally cliche."

Monroe opens one eye, glares half-heartedly and mumbles: "No dudes. No big bad wolf vibes here.... Only people with children inside of them... are Nick an' Rosie."

It may be attributed to Nick's and Hank's own state of haze that it takes them as long as it does. They nod, they stare first at Monroe and then between themselves and finally the penny drops. It’s about the same time that their clock maker realizes what he has unwittingly revealed and suddenly they have a very much awake, slightly panicked blutbad on their hands.

"Ignore I've ever said that! Just like... I don't know, Nick, ... when I tell you that you still owe me like ten vegan frappucchinos or whatever. Just don't tell Rosie I've ever said this!"

"Relax, Monroe, our lips are sealed. Cannot risk you dying of heart failure after all. Just answer one question: Is it really true?"

By now both Detectives are grinning like mad, clearly excited at the prospect of their friends having 'cubs' in the near future. Monroe can only nod mutely which is of no matter because the soft shine in his eyes tells them all about a father's pride and unadulterated joy. For secrecy's purpose they only mouth their congratulations silently but they are no less sincere and they all know when the time is right they will give their friend all the manly hugs such an announcement deserves.

>>>  

"Thanks, Sean. It's nice of you to help me. You looked to me like the least sleepy one, so I thought, the more alert my helper the less dropped plates."

The Captain smirks briefly, looking more at ease than ever before in their acquaintance.

"It’s no hardship, really. And I agree. Those three in the living room looked to be closer to sleeping than waking."

They share an amused look.

"Apropos sleeping, is Nick doing well?"

"Yes. The answer is prompt and there’s a flicker of something so tender that Rosalee feels a lump form in her throat. It’s from joy and when her voice is just a little clogged at responding, Sean certainly doesn’t mention it.

"I am happy for the two of you. And I hope being with us all – loud bunch that we are – isn’t too overwhelming."

The zauberbiest seems to be honestly contemplating the matter and Rosie knows that now is the time to let him make up his mind and speak.

"To be frank, it can be slightly overwhelming… but it is also a kind of friendship… or should I say chosen family… that I haven’t got to experience up until now."

He pauses – untypical for him – and both find themselves grinning ruefully. The powerful Prince
finds back to his usual self soon enough but the fuchsbau feels privileged to have been privy to this.

“It’s safe to say that I’ll manage. And as I’ve said before, everyone has their own way of coping with such things.“

The flicker of a barely there devious smirk makes Rosie chuckle and appeases any doubts she may have still harbored.

>>> 

Rosalee knows that the cat… or should she say cub… is out of the bag when her pregnant friend of all people asks in concern, if he should carry the heavy pitcher of punch that she's just fetching from the pantry. Fortunately they are alone in the hallway so she has all the time in the world to wheedle the truth out of him.

Pinning him with a stare that has him squirming on the spot and patiently waiting for it to cause just the right amount of tension she asks:

„Nick, is there something you want to tell me?“

„Uuuh… no…?“

The raised eyebrow makes an appearance along with hands being pressed into her hips. It takes Nick a moment longer to crumble than it would have for her husband but in the end she’s satisfied that she hasn’t lost her touch.

“Damn, you're as bad as Sean. Taking up everything and looking at me like that.“

He huffs at the injustice of it all and it nearly makes her laugh. She keeps her expression stern, though. No need to for Nick to know that she isn't as fearsome as he may think right now.

“Well, what did Monroe say?“

“Umm…. Why would you assume…? Oh damn, he said that Toisie might get a playmate some time in the near future.“

Wry amusement makes its way onto her petite face.

“Did he say exactly that?“

“Err, no. But I hope that this is what it will amount to.“

Her Grimm friend gives an adorably hopeful smile.

“Of course it will, Nick. Nothing would make us more happy than that.“

“Whohoo! So it’s true? You’re with a child?“

Nick is fairly glowing with excitement and in face of this Rosie finds the last of her reserve melting away. With moisture gathering in her eyes she nods vigorously and is at once wrapped in a tight embrace. When she grows aware of Nick rubbing her back she realizes that some of her joyful tears must actually have spilled over.
“Rosalee, this is brilliant!! Really, you’re going to be great parents!”

“Yes.... Yes, I think we will. Right after I’ve had a few choice words with my dear husband about keeping secrets.”

Now Nick feels bad, so he tries defending his friend.

“Don’t be mad at him! Odds were against him. He was in post meal haze when he accidentally revealed it. Honestly, he wasn't in his right mind.”

Unfortunately Monroe chooses exactly this moment to rediscover his above average hearing skills. Sticking his head in through the doorway from the living room he grumbles indignantly:

“Hey, Mister. Why would you say I’m not in my right mind!!”

Nick glares, rolling his eyes in a mix of exasperation and desperation.

“Monroe, I'm trying to help here!” This is stage-whispered as if Rosalee were in no way able to hear him. Finally becoming aware of his wife's less than amused glower the blutbad swallows audibly, pulls his head down between his shoulders like he's awaiting lightning to strike from above and scurries off with the proverbial tail between his legs.

“Uuh, was that Hank calling for a drink? I must be off.”

Well, that's a feeble excuse if there's ever been one. Nick chances a glance back at Rosalee only to find her looking quite satisfied with herself and leaving even him a tiny bit creeped out when she calmly says:

“Maybe I don't need to have a talk with Monnie, after all. Sometimes silent messages come across so much better.”

Seeking a slightly safer topic Nick asks quietly how far she is along already. Her smile this time is tender, cheeks glowing with tentative excitement.

“It's just six weeks now... which is why we wanted to wait with telling you all... but now that you know. Well, now I'm kind of glad because... uuh... I cannot even begin to imagine how you've managed to keep it all to yourself all that time. To think I would have had nobody with whom to talk about it all.... Oh Nick, I'm so excited but I try not to be because this early on so much can still happen.”

Nick does what Monroe and Rosalee have done for him countless times over the last months: He calmly reassures her and promises to be there for them no matter what. If her eyes are suspiciously bright at the end of his whispered speech, nobody mentions it.

>>> 

Nick's short period of alertness after lounging in the living room earlier with Hank and Monroe ends as soon as he retakes his seat next to Sean on the sofa. He stays awake long enough to think that Monroe and Rosalee love each other to pieces no matter if sometimes Monroe is a klutz and Rosie a bit scary, then he leans more heavily into his powerful Prince and decides it's time to make himself at home, public displays of affection or not. Sean raises a brow but Nick can see fondness
lurking deep in those jade green eyes. Throwing him a cheeky grin he cannot help asking: “Sean, do I get a belly rub?”

The Captain responds typically deadpan, something that Nick knows by now means he is teasing the hell out of someone... or this close to ripping off heads but this time his bet is on the first one. Sean even quirks an infamous eyebrow as he asks: “What are you, a dog?”

And true to form there's just a hint of warmth and fondness – reluctant by pretense – no matter how snarky the words. Nick doesn't miss a beat.

“No, I am a pregnant man with needs.”

Sean rolls his eyes in mock exasperation.

“Why didn't you say that before? Now that changes everything.”

Despite all that he pulls his Grimm just a little bit closer.

“Do I detect a smidgen of sarcasm there?”, Nick asks with his eyes widening in mock disbelief.

“Smidgen? I for my part detect a whole avalanche of sarcasm there”, Monroe mutters under his breath and is swatted by Rosalee though she's laughing all the while and rubbing the spot at once, which her blutbad seems to like exceptionally well. Sean doesn't pay attention to the others and just says faux innocently:

“I have no idea what you mean. You must have misheard.”

There's a playful spark in his eyes even if the rest of his face is completely serious.

"Uhuh. Anyway, yesterday you've said, you couldn't deny me anything, if I asked nicely, sooo...."

Hank smirks and his expression clearly says: Captain, he's got you there.

With a put upon sigh and a glare that includes every single person in the room and dares them to let any of this get past this very living room, he slips his hand under Nick's shirt surreptitiously, starts rubbing what they all know to be a nearly globe shaped baby belly and allows him to settle comfortably against his side.

It's safe to say that their pregnant Grimm is asleep even before any of them has spoken three sentences and that Nick's car will be fetched at a later date so that Sean may take his mate home with him in his own car.

>>>  

Second Christmas day is spent just between the two of them. It's almost a miracle in itself that nothing interrupts their time together. Early in the morning they take an extended walk through the wintry forest stretching out for miles below the house. A house that's become a home. No longer a high end building to house the wealthier than normal Police Captain, no longer a home to only a single person. Deep in the forest on rarely walked paths they are away from prying eyes and enjoy their freedom.

Nick is enjoying the outdoors with great enthusiasm, Sean is laughing at his mate's antics. Nick
couldn't enjoy it more. That rich sound speaking of a man finally at peace with himself. The zauberbiest's eyes have lost their calculating edge – the drive and need to think up plans and counter measures in case life deals another blow.

The Grimm himself is also changed. Gone the constant worry, that gnawing fear that he isn't good enough... hasn't achieved enough to offer his baby boy a good life. There's liveliness and hunger to take on the world – and to share all that with his mate and the child in his womb.

Around midday they return, happy and hungry, prepare a light lunch and take it with leisure that they rarely allow themselves. Afternoon is for sitting on the thick rug in front of the fire, enjoying hot chocolate (which Sean has bribed Nick into showing him how to prepare) and each other's company. It's all very cliche but who's there to judge them or begrudge them their own little dip into Christmas fluff. Not that Sean would ever call it that. In fact, he's careful not to put any name to it least doing that may burst the bubble. They have faced enough harsh reality and real life blows to last them a life time, the zauberbiest thinks and gathers his pregnant Grimm closer. Nick gives a content hum, leaning back into him and obviously enjoying the close contact.

>>> 

Nick is happy like he hasn't been in a long time. He hasn't expected this. Or anything that's happened over the course of the last few months. He closes his eyes, smiles. Cannot help doing so. He feels at home with his big man and it's this feeling of belonging, safety and honest to God love that makes him take the next step.

Okay, in retrospect maybe he should have waited with his revelation until Sean has finished drinking....

“I have read up on a few matters... like sex during pregnancy”, he murmurs, tone conveying the lazy contentment of a relaxed day as well as all the excitement such a statement deserves. Nick expects something typically smug like ‘Oh have you now, my dear Grimm?’. A tiny part of him even prepares for rejection....

He doesn't expect his zauberbiest to cough and sputter because in his unending surprise he has sucked in a harsh breath and gotten hot cocoa down his windpipe. His reaction of concern is instantaneous as he half turns in Sean's arms while the other man leans over to cough properly.

“Oh God, Sean. I'm so sorry!”

He claps his hands over his mouth in true dismay but he cannot for the life of him hide the bout of helpless laughter that wills out at seeing his mate mop his face with a hanky and all the while throwing him a royal death glare. Half a year ago he would have believed it, now he knows to look deeper. There's no real heat behind it and they both know it.

In the end he does what any decent mate would do, helping to mop up cocoa from practically everywhere and valiantly trying to keep further signs of amusement hidden. With his thumb he brushes away a stray tear from when Sean's eyes have watered and that at the very least seems to appease him. He also doesn't mention that Sean's eyes remain suspiciously bright even after death by hot drink has been avoided. After all he believes to know the reason for that and pointing it out would embarrass his proud 'biest.
And it really is a testament of how much their relationship has grown that Nick’s first response to Sean's sputtering has been amusement rather than fear of rejection.

Apparently his mighty zauberbiest has recovered now because he pulls him close again in clear possessiveness and starts nipping at his neck and ears. These nibs – noticeably sharper while still playful and loving – seem to be the Royal’s way of telling him that his indisposition hasn't been half as funny as he makes it out to be and Nick guesses he deserves that. Especially because intermittently he's still shaken by small bouts of helpless laughter.

“So my dutiful Detective thought it prudent to do a bit of research… on certain matters?” A purr if nothing else. A mix of smugness and teasing that Nick loves.

“Absolutely.”

“Hmm. Such a good boy.” That velvet drawl is right by Nick's ear, conveyed on a soft breeze of warm air against the shell and going right to his nether regions, doing the most wonderful things.

“Do you want to hear what I found out, Sir?” It would have sounded deferential if it hadn't been for that decidedly naughty streak and slow smile. Sean moves his lips to explore further. Ghosting over his ear shell once again. Eliciting pleasant shivers that don't go unnoticed by the ever perceptive zauberbiest. Sean's answer is a husky whisper: “I would be most pleased if you did, my dear Detective.”

>>> 

Sean finds himself very much intrigued by what his Grimm has outlined. This isn't only about desire. This is a leap and a sign of healing that makes him glad that any gravelly quality to his voice can be attributed to his special interest in the matter.... Not in any way to being moved on such a deep level that his voice goes out on him. He makes an effort. A smile on his lips that is felt not seen. Felt by Nick because Sean has buried his face in the side of his neck. When he's sure he has himself back under control he says quietly:

"Nick, I won't ask if you really want this because I know you to be a man who wouldn't have brought the matter up, if you weren't sure, but I have to ask, have you done this before?"

Nick throws a cheeky grin over his shoulder. There may be a sliver of uncertainty but mostly there's just that easy confidence which makes him such a capable Detective.

"Having sex while being pregnant? That's a clear no. Having sex with a man? Well, I've never been one to shy away from trying new things and College.... When to better do a bit of exploring if not then?"

Sean's own smile is appreciative and whatever doubts he has seen, he knows to place now. To place and dispel.

His hands slip under Nick's shirt and onto his beautiful bulging belly, splaying possessively over its expanse. He dips his head to Nick's neck to start suckling gently at his pulse point. Where to better put his lips than right where blood rushes through his carotid artery? It’s like a double echo. That fast and steady beat against his lips and two heartbeats reverberating through the magic bond. There’s nothing more reassuring. Sign of life and strength. His two boys being hale and healthy.
A low moan comes from the man he loves. That beautiful head is tilted to the side, access granted and, most importantly, Sean's reassurance accepted. Nick isn't shy or a prude. Any doubts he may have left would be attributed to his pregnant appearance and not the act itself. And one thing is for sure, by the time he has made his way to the Grimm's lips there's no doubt left whatsoever about how much Sean appreciates him.... With all that he currently entails.

>>> 

"So what about you, my high and mighty Prince?", Nick asks in between lazy kisses while he is still safely wrapped in his big man's arms. Sean smirks in a way only a man of higher breeding can. That mix of self-confidence and natural ease about such matters.

"A certain level of wealth makes allowance for some experimenting even within the rigid boundaries of royal expectations."

"And it most likely helped that by the time you were old enough to be interested in such things, you were well away from your stuck up relatives."

"Yes, that too."

Chuckling Nick turns around, kneeling in front of his 'biest on the very spot where so many important steps in their relationship have been taken, and draws him into a deeper kiss showing all too clearly what he wants. Between kisses, nubs and added tongues Sean cannot help murmuring:

"You have in your detailed and... highly informative explanations... forgotten to.... Hmm. Mention one thing...."

"Really? And... what would that be?"

He cocks his head, playfully moving out of reach when Sean wants to continue kissing. Those jade orbs gleam.

"You have forgotten to mention that in order to try any of that one should start by undressing the object of his desires."

While Nick ponders this intriguing proposition, Sean gets to steal his kiss, after all, and suiting actions to words he starts unbuttoning Nick's shirt. One by one. Taking his time and kissing every inch of skin he lays bare. The Grimm sinks back onto his elbows with an appreciative groan and Sean moves with him. Kissing his collarbone, his chest, the point where Nick's belly starts to bulge.

"You are right. How remiss of me. But...", he's just a little breathless: "I'm all for you showing me how it's done right."

Sean looks down on him, studying every inch and in a single moment revealing all those emotions normally hidden. Possessive pride, desire and love, only a few in between.

"I see you are, indeed, dedicated to learning new things."
Nick relishes in Sean’s exploration. Those lips ghosting over skin; that tongue licking its way. A moan wills out, he tilts his head back further. Sean leisurely dips down while his hands are roaming over his chest, coming upon already hard nipples. Rubbing, tweaking. Drawing sweet sounds and a gasp from Nick. Sean’s mouth is sucking and nibbling at the throat presented to him. His shirt slid off his shoulders and he is pressed back onto the plush rug with such tenderness that his breath catches. The gaze of his powerful ‘biest – once again taking in all of him as if to commit it to memory and never forget – draws him in like nothing else could. Gray and green meet. There’s no discussion, at least not a verbal one. It’s so easy. Happiness shines on their features even though it’s never expressed in so much as words.

Sean's fingertips wander lower, Nick following the movement as if hypnotized, and they come to rest on the waistband of his jeans. He chances a glance. Sean’s intent is clear yet he’s waiting for permission.

He could kiss his ‘biest for this alone.

*Hell, there’s no could about it. I can, I will... I want him all the way and this is the start.*

Rolling back into kneeling Nick does just that. Sean is very forgiving of the interruption, chuckling into their kiss when Nick’s hands develop a devious life of their own to return the favor of undressing. The Grimm is delighted, finding that unclothing Sean Renard is like unwrapping a very large, very gorgeous present.

„Hmm. Now I get to unwrap presents after all."

„I cannot say that I’m complaining."

Nick only listens with half an ear, more preoccupied with other things.

That bronze skin, well defined body all ridges and dips. Power coiled within a well muscled frame. Hmm. Throwing his mate a quick mischievous glance he does his own bit of exploring and draws the softest of sounds from his Prince. Barely there, almost entirely hidden under tight control yet more than he would ever have hoped to elicit this early on. Definitely worth the effort. Apropos effort....

Still kneeling Nick wriggles his butt just so, no longer shy and safe in the knowledge that his zauberbiest loves him just the way he is. And Sean has the gall to smirk evilly, which Nick rather enjoys because it promises fun and excitement.

"Is there something you want to tell me, my boy?"

Teasing. Smug. Just a touch of royal superiority. Or is that the Police Captain peaking through? Whatever it is, Nick finds it most arousing. No need to let his Prince know, however. He is drawn close and suddenly the evidence of their mutual arousal is more than clear. Somehow managing to fit snugly together despite Nick's bump it can be felt where their bodies meet, undeniable and very welcome. Nick moves in to nib at Sean’s throat, murmuring: "Arrogant twit", and laughing. His Prince responds without missing a beat: "Do you realize that you've made me want to swat you quite a few times these last days? For various reasons?"

His buttocks are squeezed in emphasis and Nick has to work hard to give a verbal answer instead of an abandoned moan. To think that there’s been a time when he couldn’t have born such closeness
and touch. A shudder of dark remembrance is repressed in favor of a cheeky retort: "Yes, I've been
told on numerous occasions that I tend to elicit that wish in other people."

Sean’s eyes lock with his own, all intense with mock reproach yet different from anything he
would ever have shown at work. Nick is fast falling head over heels for this mirthful, teasing
Prince in lieu of cool commanding Captain.

…Although that one has its very own appeal. Seeing Sean all in control, focused on handling
things…. Hmm.

A velvet drawl interrupts his thoughts: "And proud of it, aren't you? Cheeky brat. But you're lucky.
I'll let you off the hook this once... because I have much better things in mind about what to do
with you."

>>> 

“Hmm. That's what I wanted to hear. Why don't you tell me more.... Show me more.” Tender,
warm, husky with apparent desire. Sean could have plowed on and taken it as all consent needed. A
year ago and with anyone else he would have done so but this is Nick. His lovely, pregnant mate
and - excuse these sentimental thoughts - his everything!

He pauses, just holding his mate close, allowing the double heartbeat of his boys to cool his lust
for a moment of contemplation. Despite his earlier words a question rises up: Wouldn’t it hurt so
much more to overwhelm Nick now than to wait a little bit longer?

He has to be sure. Damn sure that this is what his lover wants and can handle.

Decision made he looks back up only to find Nick already watching him, expression turned tender
by an insight into his thoughts even before he has voiced a single one. Of course Nick has
perceived the change. He wouldn't be the man he is, if he hadn't.

In for a penny, in for a pound. He has bared himself to Nick so many times before now that this
latest touch of over protectiveness is only a minor blow to his pride.

His fingertips brush gently over Nick's cheek, tracing the outline of a cheekbone, feeling a hint of
stubble that he likes very much. For an instant he loses himself in that face, then:

“Nick, I know what I said earlier but I need to ask now, anyway. Do you really want this? I'm more
than happy to proceed, but if there's only a slight possibility that this is too much too soon, then we
will.....”

The pad of a thumb is gently pressed against his lips, halting his words, and now it's the Grimm’s
turn to caress his 'biest's cheek. He puts their foreheads together, a thousand feelings swirling
through that sea of stormy gray. His cheek is nuzzled, gesture so tender and loving that the mighty
Prince's throat constricts. A moment of absolute stillness.

“Yes, Sean. Yes, I want to do this with you. Right now, if you'll have me. It's okay. You are what
makes me feel safe. And loved.... And appreciated with every curve I've gained over the last
months.“

And with a huff of laughter: „Call me a sentimental fool, I know you are itching to do so. But I
don’t care, I want you right now and all the way....”

Sean presses his lips against Nick’s, sealing off further utterances.

“You may be a sentimental fool, but you are my fool…. And I may have to admit to similar affictions coming over me.”

“Then why don’t we quit talking and continue where we have left off?“


Sean gives a slow and seductive smile. It would have brought Nick down in a swoon, if he hadn’t already been kneeling.

And actions speak louder than words, isn't that what they say?

Continuing where he has started his zauberbiest pauses one last time before opening the fly and pushing Nick's jeans and boxers down. Slowly. Reverently. Two pairs of eyes drawn to the downward movement.

!!!>>>!!!

They are both naked, have all the time in the world. Nick is licking and kissing his way, indulging in something that has once seemed a lifetime out of reach. Sean growls low in his throat, primal need just beneath the surface. It’s sending pleasant shivers down the Grimm's spine and stirring his arousal. His buttocks are cupped by large, capable hands, he's pulled close, kissed deeply and then they sink down. Nick ends up lowered onto his back, bare skin against heavenly soft rug and his magnificent 'biest hovering above him. Touch. Pleasure.

Oh God, how good that makes him feel!

“You are so beautiful, my boy.“ A soft whisper with a gravelly edge, laced with warmth and desire. It's in his actions, too. Every inch of him is laved with attention as if Sean were seeing him for the very first time. Nick closes his eyes in absolute bliss only to snap them open with a gasp as a hot tongue licks a slow stripe along the underside of his proudly straining cock and just like that he's drawn to follow every move his Prince may take. Not out of fear, though. Far from it.

Lips close around the head, sucking gently, and the sight of it is so lewd, so sexy, the feel so incredible that Nick emits a startled gasp. Sean's head bobs down.

“Oh God, Sean. What… uuhh… are you doing to me? If I had known….”

Words die cleanly on his tongue. Another breathless gasp as Sean slides his hands beneath him, long fingers splaying... mapping the delectable curve of his ass and spreading his cheeks. Nick cannot help his hips bucking upward and considering his current girth and baby bump that’s quite a feat. The Prince rewards him well for his efforts, smiling around his length in clear satisfaction and humming in approval. Nick twitches from need and sensory overload, cheeks flushed, mind in
a haze of desire curling low in his belly.

Sean takes his time. What a beautiful sight. His Grimm spread out beneath him, evidence of his pregnancy right before him. His to touch and caress. To adore while his lips descend further on Nick’s straining length and his eyes take in every reaction and change of expression. He prepares him slowly, delighting in abandoned moans, helpless gasps and legs eagerly spread open the moment his first finger makes contact with that quivering pucker. It’s incredible. Natural. They are going with the flow and loving it. Every little push and pull elicits a minute reaction. Zauberbiest and human, both staring intently at their beautiful mate, this magnificent creature, relish in each and every one. And Sean himself isn’t unaffected either. His own cock is straining, leaking just from the sight and feel of this.

He pushes deeper. Knuckle deep and must have hit true because from Nick’s lips tumbles a most expressive shout!

"Oh God, Sean!"

A full body shudder. A sight worth dying for. With a wet popping sound his lips leave the hot and leaking length in lieu of speaking: "Yes, my love?"

Sean Renard is very satisfied with himself and it's showing in his entire bearing. He gives another slow push and pull of his finger just to see Nick’s eyes glaze over, his legs falling open wider and deep moans speaking of wanton desire.

“Seems… that pregnancy… nggh… has its perks…“ He huffs in a lovely breathless way.

“I am very… uuhh… sensitive right now. Do that more often and it will be over real soon.“

“Heh, we cannot have that, can we? We should take it nice and slow.”

Belying his words Sean pushes deep inside, adding a finger and watching his love arch his back and strong hands fist tufts of rug. He brings him slowly to the edge, preparing him well and truly for what is yet to come. When Nick’s breaths become small shouts and whispered endearments - pleas even - he leans down to capture him in a kiss. And his Grimm gives as good as he takes, hands wandering and mouth responding eagerly.

To Nick it feels like drifting on a cloud. A cloud where that bundle of nerves low in his belly is stimulated over and over until he is panting and meeting every single thrust of his powerful mate. Sean is obviously enjoying himself. It’s lighting his features, giving him a glow of happiness that he rarely shows.

And Nick hasn’t lied when he’s told him that he’s more sensitive than normal. Every movement inside of him feels like a tidal wave washing over him! Sean has four fingers inside him and the
aim of a sniper when hitting his most sensitive spot, leaving Nick in a haze of ever heightening pleasure.

He buries his own fingers in Sean’s curly hair, pulling his ‘biest close, enjoying those lips. His warmth and love. Body and mind are awash with incredible sensations. He gasps into their kiss. Everything seems more intense, his awareness sharpened.

And that’s when he grows aware: His lovely baby boy is as docile as if he were in a pleasant haze as well. Despite all that he’s read only this reassures him fully. This is right. What they are doing is not harming the little one and it’s… breath taking!

Capturing Sean’s eyes his message is clear.

*I want you all the way and I’m not going to last much longer!*

His silent plea is taken with a soft laugh and delectable lips moving near until hot breath is fanning over his ear shell every time a sound is uttered. Endearments. Moans. And then there’s that velvet whisper:

“My lovely boy, you are a truly captivating sight when you are this close to losing it. I have another idea, though. One that you might like very much."

“Hmm.” Nick can only nod jerkily. In this very moment Sean could have proposed anything and he would have gladly complied.

“*Good.*"

Those skilled fingers leave his tight hole and he moans with the loss, not ashamed in the least to voice it so. Then he is helped up, manhandled with care until he is straddling Sean’s lap while his Prince is kneeling with his buttocks resting on his heels. Nick’s facing away from him and wrapped in a warm embrace, one arm curving underneath his big bump in support and the other reaching across his chest. He feels safe and loved and once again a whisper by his ear suggests the most wonderful things:

“Why don’t you take control, my strong Grimm. Why don’t you ride me just the way you want to. Every move, every twitch is yours to decide and for us both to enjoy."

Nick throws his head back, shuddering and his cock leaking pre-cum at the very thought. At this moment his pregnant Grimm looks like a creature of archaic time: all primal need, raw power and breath taking vulnerability.

“Oh God, Sean. Yes, gladly. If you’re…."

“Shh. Yes, I am sure."

He needs no more incentive. Aligning their bodies, cloaked in the warmth and protection of his zauberbiest, he sinks down onto Sean’s impressive length. Slowly. The blunt head making its way. Stretching him, stimulating his hopelessly oversensitive channel every inch of the way. He’s panting, gasping. Lost in sensations and nearly losing it. Finally full to the hilt.

*God, that’s amazing!*

His eyes are squeezed shut, his body taut with tension and pleasure.

When he hears a long and drawn out sound - low, raw, wrought with emotion - he isn't sure what to
make of it. Is it him, that primal expression of lust?

No, it is Sean. His lovely, powerful 'biest. Losing control right alongside of him. Showing deepest parts of himself. This alone is nearly enough to tip him over the edge. With these broken moans filling his being, he stops thinking all together. They move in sync like they've never been made for anything else. At every descend his breath catches in his throat, echoed by his Bastard Prince. It’s too much, not enough by far. Supported and held he seeks release for them both. Penetration, pain. Pleasure overlapping everything else!

>>>  

Oh God, he's never anticipated that it would be like this! This incredible feeling of push and pull. Of his pregnant Grimm moving around him, riding him! He's long since closed his eyes, dropped any pretense of control. He tilts his head back, vaguely aware of his parted lips, his needy sounds....

He gathers Nick close, rush of love overcoming him with wave after wave of pleasure. His Grimm may have an enormous baby bump, he may be all supple, skin silky and warm.

... But he is still strong! Able to take control without taking away Sean's own. He opens his eyes. Suddenly he needs to see Nick move and cannot for the life of him tear his gaze away.

What a sight. Incredible. He hurtles toward the edge, soaking up every moan, every gasp of his mate. Another rise and fall of Nick's body. His cock sucked, buried. Overwhelming stimulation. His hand fists around Nick's length, just a few strokes. Moans become screams. His arm is still curled protectively around that lovely baby bump.

Two heartbeats beside his own. The world awash with sensations. Their screams merge and mingle like their bodies do. Climax. Wild pleasure. Vision whitening, taking Nick over the edge with him! Filling him. A warm body shuddering around him, in his grasp. It prolongs his own orgasm; it mirrors what Nick is feeling right now.

!!!>>>!!!

A haze. Pleasant. Urgency ebbing away, making room for affection, the need to cuddle close and protect. They move, curl up, tangle up impossibly close. Awareness is a fickle thing. Sean kisses his mate. Lips, forehead, crown of his head as he wraps him safely in his arms.

>>>  

Nick has never felt like this. His limbs are heavy with fatigue while his mind is still thriving on purest pleasure. He seeks his 'biest's warmth, buries close and is happy. His kisses are sloppy and, oh hell, he's sleepy all of a sudden. Sean is no better. They doze right there on the rug in front of the gently crackling fire and it is the most peaceful moment both have had in a long time.
Chapter End Notes

What do you think? Our two favorite boys have taken the next step and are closer than ever. Which they'll need to be to face what lies ahead.
By the way, the thing about sex during pregnancy hasn't just sprung out of my head. I've read up on the matter just like Nick did and apart from a few situations where it's not advisable, it's said to be okay and up to the pair. Most often it depends on how the pregnant party feels health wise and in regard to that in particular. (And Nick's little sensitivity change has also been known to happen to pregnant women. ;D)
Okay, enough of my ramblings, I hope you have enjoyed this newest installment.
Chapter 9

Chapter Notes

First of all: I'm sooooo sorry for the incredibly long delay!!
I had the whole chapter planned out scene by scene for months now but the words simply wouldn't come the way I wanted them to. Now they did and I hope that it's good enough and that you'll enjoy it!
And just let me say: I won't abandon this story. Its sheer length sometimes makes for a long time between posting chapters but I will definitely finish this.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter 9:

PW31 continued:

The days between Christmas and New Year's Eve are uneventful. They work a normal case and do the usual paperwork. Nick also starts sorting through his old things at home, which is – truth to be told – more disturbing than uneventful. What a thought to throw away the very things he and Juliette have accumulated over years. To say goodbye to the house that Nick once thought he would spend the rest of his life in. Now it's being put up for sale. What a pity.... What a relief!

He doesn't ask anyone to help yet every time he winds up on his old doorstep, one of his friends is there as well:

Smiling encouragingly in Rosalee's case or rambling something about being in the area anyway in Monroe’s. Hank…. Well Hank has dropped him off and simply never left. No matter how they do it, they are all telling him that it's okay and that he's not alone in this. His lover never once joins him but that's exactly what they have agreed upon.

Sean has a much more important role, Nick has known it right after that first night returning to his real home. Sean’s home. After going through the shambles of his old life he has been unsettled, thrown off his equilibrium. His Captain… or should he say his mate? Well, he has known what to do the moment Nick has come to him.

And he’s been proven right time and time again. When hours of sorting through stuff and braving hurtful memories has churned up a tangle of conflicting emotions, he comes home to Sean and finds solace. His zauberbiest is like an anchor, his very presence like a calming force. It also helps that he's damn perceptive and highly tuned to reading people.

On that first evening Sean hasn't initiated any body contact on his own, and not for nothing either. Not even Nick has known beforehand, if he would be comfortable with being touched after returning to the place where so many horrible and violent things have happened. The moment though he has seen his mate, has seen empathy and just a touch of protectiveness edged into every inch of his stance and expression, he has closed the distance between them and pressed himself -
baby bump and all – against his powerful 'biest. There has been a soft exhale from Sean – relief or maybe even astonishment – before strong arms have wrapped themselves around him.

"Eventful evening, hmm?"

A soft murmur, timber of that velvet voice just a bit rougher than usual.

Nick has nodded against Sean's chest, taking a moment to soak up his big man's boundless calming energy, before gently unfurling from their hug. He's kissed him long and with feeling and then he has told him about it. All about it, the good and the bad. It's become their routine ever since.

Nick hasn't gone there every day. A cop's life isn't known for regular work times and much of his stuff has already wound up in Sean’s house, anyway. But every time he has, Sean has been there afterwards. Either to welcome him home or, if his own schedule hasn't allowed for it, to have his Grimm curl up against him at night and be soothed by his embrace and his hand resting on Nick's enormous belly.

>>> One night Nick has lain snuggled up against Sean looking down on his big bump – on the bundle of life he knows to be resting and wriggling within – and he's whispered:

"Daddy will make sure that you have a good home once you are born. Or two homes more like. One will be here and one will be the flat I'm going to rent. And I've already found one, too. It's just formalities now."

He has stroked over his rounded belly, crooning softly, when Sean has pressed a kiss to his neck and placed his hand on top of his own to join the gentle caress.

"Two homes and one family. And just so you know, I will be there for the two of you no matter where you sleep at night", Sean has asserted in a matter of fact way that's been so typical for the exiled Prince and also just about the most beautiful thing he could have said. Right after that he has pulled him even closer, guiding his head to the crook of his shoulder and resting his chin on top of his head. Nick has felt whole and happy then, confident that his zauberbiest will be by their side every step of their stony way.

PW32:

There's the next appointment with his doctor as well. It isn't all that long to his due date – 6 weeks if anyone can imagine – which makes for a tighter schedule of check-ups as well.

Owen is satisfied with general growth and health of both father and son, so the only thing needing to be discussed is the position of his baby:

The Doc points at the sonogram image as shown on the screen.

“I know sonograms mostly look like bad black white movies with a baby inside, so let's get this disentangled. As you can see here, your baby is still positioned with its head upward. This is called breech presentation. Babies usually turn upside down some time before birth, because they can get out easier, if they are positioned facing head downward in the womb. Your son is a little late in turning but, first of all, it can still happen and secondly it's still possible to have a natural birth, even if he doesn't turn into what we call cephalic presentation in time for birth.”
Nick frowns, hand itching to rub over his baby bump in reassurance but hindered by ultrasonic gel covering its expense. He gives a soft huff of discontent.

“Uhm, okay. But what if he really doesn't turn around in time for birth? How much of a problem is that going to be?”

“Not a dire problem, Nicholas. It just makes the process of giving birth naturally a bit more difficult for mother... or in your case father and baby.”

Nick's pulls a grimace.

“Somehow that doesn't reassure me much. I mean, it's not like male instincts will help me much in ways of natural birth, anyway.”

They can both hear the touch of real fear but as always the Welsh doctor is a source of calm and comfort.

“Let me tell you something: Over the years I have helped many mothers through giving birth, Nicholas, and you know what? I think you'll do just fine. You are very good with your instincts and, if my guess is correct, then your heritage will further help you with adapting to this new situation. It will be okay. I will be there to help you and in case everything else fails, there is still the option of doing a cesarean. We would have to be careful doing that due to your... let's just say... unique physique but I am already taking precautions to aid that course of action. Next time we meet for a check up I am going to do a few more scans of your abdomen so that we get a better idea of how your anatomy and lay of organs differs from a woman's now that the rest is fully developed. That way doing a c-section will be a safer option in case natural birth doesn't go as planned. Don't worry, in the end it may well be you doing all the hard work but I will be there every step of the way.”

Nick feels a bit better now and nods with only a small shudder in the deep breath he takes.

“I'm taking your word for it, Doc. We can do that. And really, what's a whole lot of work and pain to the prospect of finally greeting my little lion man.”

Chuckling Owen pats Nick's shoulder.

“That's the spirit. You have entrusted your son's life to me and I will be damned, if I don't do everything in my power to help you through this. You and your son are strong and by the end of all this, you will hopefully have a healthy baby boy to raise.”

Nick's features light up instantly, cheeks fairly glowing:

“God, I cannot tell you how much I want to finally meet him!”

"Oh I know it", he replies with mirth: "Your big grin and gleaming eyes tell a pretty clear story."

The Doc cleans ultrasonic gel away, Nick takes his zaubertrank to re-disguise his womb and soon they are bidding farewell to each other.

"So, see you next week, Doc.”

"See you next week, Nicholas. Oh, and tell that Captain of yours that he is always welcome to accompany you as long as you aren't averse to it.”

The Grimm leaves that wisely uncommented but who needs to say anything when he's sporting
such a prominent blush.

>>> 

When Nick tells Sean about the result of his check up, his ‘biest predictably frowns.

“I have every faith in Dr. Cransbury’s expertise but that still leaves the question of how – in case that you need to go to that private clinic he has spoken of – he will keep it a secret that you are a male Grimm bearing a child?”

Nick is glad that his mate is experienced… or maybe paranoid enough to consider these matters. Leaning against the breakfast bar with a mug of tea in hand he explains:

“Owen has chosen his employees with great care to ensure that no wesen conflicts endanger the work with his patients. They are all kehrseite-schlich-kennen, which makes them knowledgeable without being partial to a particular group. And as far as they are concerned I am of a wesen species where males are able to bear children. So you see, while not entirely without risks, we did take all precautions we could.”

“Hm”, the Royal makes but Nick can see that he is at least partly reassured.

“It seems he really did plan ahead to keep wesen animosities to a minimum. I guess I’m satisfied with that for the time being. And did you take care to never show your Grimm around other patients?”

Nick has to smile at that. He tilts his head as pulls his ‘biest close with a little tug at his tie. Stealing a kiss, he quips:

“Two questions: First one, what do you think? Second one, aren’t these questions coming a little late given the number of appointments I’ve already had?”

Sean huffs, hands automatically coming to rest on Nick’s front and rubbing soothing circles. The Grimm almost thinks that his oh so stoic Captain and mate is doing it more to calm himself than him. Well, the imp likes it.

And he does, too. Very much.

“Okay, maybe I know very well that you have enough experience to weather this and more and maybe I am worrying too much. Life, however, has taught me to better be safe than sorry – sorry meaning dead in my family’s case – so forgive me for being overcautious.”

Leaning in – their foreheads coming to touch – Nick whispers: “I would forgive you almost anything, you know?”, and means every word of it.

This gets him another huff but also a deep and loving kiss, so who he is to complain?

>>> 

In the midst of it all Nick decides to ask a question that has been ghosting around in his head for some time now. It's something mundane but at the same time a very special thing, indeed. He wants to ask Sean to go baby shopping with him. The thought alone has him excited and isn't that peculiar all on its own? Nick has never been particularly fond of shopping in the past. The prospect of looking at baby cradles and the like with his stoic zauberbiest, however, is entertaining and makes him feel curiously fuzzy inside.
Now he only needs to ask and in case Sean really says yes, they have find a way to do it without drawing too much attention to themselves. He has come prepared in any case, plan at hand if he gets the answer he’s hoping for. He’ll ask ‘officially’ for his Captain’s company to get the last things necessary to close an old case. Hank is in the know so when he rises from his chair in the bullpen to make his way over to Renard's office, his partner gives him a thumbs up and a shit eating grin.

"Go for it, tiger."

Nick flips him off and liberally overhears any threats about burrito buying as punishment for rude gestures.

"Go tug on Wu's non existent coattails, if you want to complain."

When the younger Detective throws a cheeky grin over his shoulder, Hank is mock glaring at him (which really just hides how relieved he is to see him in high spirits despite recent spare time activities) and busily scribbling something on a sheet of paper. The Grimm cannot help chuckling. He's fairly sure that the scribble depicts the stick figure version of an evil partner named Nick.

>>> 

“Captain, can I talk to you for a minute?”

“Of course. Do come in.”

Nick closes the door behind himself, moving to lean against inner office wall, case folder in hand.

“Is this Wesen related?”

“In a way it is, Sir. You see I have this case dating back a couple of months. Middle of May to be exact...”

Renard raises a brow and Nick shows the slightest smirk in response. That's all however to reveal that this is more than a regular work discussion. The Captain’s keen gaze is resting solely on Nick as he signals for him to elaborate, just like it is his habit when having one of his Detectives report.

“There have been a few ups and downs but I have it all under control now... thanks to much help from my partner. To successfully close this case, however, I need to get a few items and I wondered, if it would be alright for you to accompany me, Sir.”

The way Detective Burkhardt calmly waits for his answer nobody would be guessing what he is really asking his lover.... Or that they are lovers to begin with.

Renard leans back, steeping his fingers atop his large desk. His expression is inscrutable as ever. Only deep within those calm pools of green resides the knowledge of what this really is about.

“What does Hank say to this?”

“Oh, he said that this would be a task right up your alley, Sir. He seemed to think that you would be much better qualified for it than he. If you are amendable, that is.”

Starting up his laptop the Captain contemplates the matter.

“I’m sure that can be arranged. Let me take a quick look at shift plans.”

He clicks through the program while Nick waits with carefully concealed delight. Outwardly he's
wholly the professional, dutiful cop whereas inside he nearly bursts with glee at doing his first real outing with his lover.

“Ah, yes. Saturday after next we are both free. Where do you intend to go?”

“I thought we might heed out into Salem. Less auspicious than Portland. It wouldn’t do to blow cover after pulling through for months.”

His superior closes his laptop with a decisive snap and rises from his seat as he gives his final answer:

“Then I suggest you be ready early on Saturday, 4th, so that we may get those items on your list.”

Now Nick grins alright but it isn't more than he would have given his superior had this really been a case related discussion.

“Thank you for your help, Sir. I’m sure that we will be able to bring the operation to a successful end.”

“I certainly hope so. And now you should get back to Griffin. Surely there’s enough work waiting for you, Detective.”

“Sadly there is, Sir.”

Nick returns to his partner grinning. At Hank’s raised eyebrow he gives an enthusiastic nod and cannot help adding:

"By the way, Hank, are you aware that you've drawn that stick figure on the final version of the report you were meant to hand in to the Captain? I mean, if you want ME to hand it in for you.... You never know, Renard may actually award points for creativity right after tearing you a new one for doodling on an official report."

Hank's comically shocked expression is hilarious and becomes ever better when Nick snatches up the paper in question and dances out of reach before he can get his fingers back on it.

Oh well, sometimes life is simply good no matter what difficult tasks wait at the end of a day.

They get as far as halfway through the room – much to their colleagues' collective amusement – before a well known silky voice cuts effortlessly through the general clamor and threatens them with desk duty for a week in case they don't manage to show their enthusiasm for paperwork in a less rambunctious way. It's safe to say that a certain pair of Detectives weasel their way back to their respective desks as quickly as humanly possible and that they nearly wet their pants in face of their Captain's glare of absolute displeasure.

>>> Tuesday evening sees them both at home and Sean is glad for it. As late as Nick has returned from work tonight, he has opted not to go to his old house. Or rather, after they have reported progress of their current case to him, Sean has strongly advised his two Detectives to call it a day already. In capacity as their Captain and as the one with a heavily pregnant, obviously exhausted Grimm on his hands later on.

Right now they are lounging on the couch, Nick sitting upright and petting his womb (much to their baby's delight most likely) while Sean is stretched out with his long legs resting over Nick's thighs.
After a while Sean looks up to study his surroundings: The book he's reading, his Grimm blinking, this close to dozing off... Domestic. Peaceful. Now that he thinks about it, it's not only this but the entirety of things making up his present life. It's more than a little disconcerting that in a reality where Nick had never become pregnant he would be alone, certainly plotting schemes to stay one step ahead of his murderous family instead of relaxing on the couch.

"Contemplating heavy matters, Sean? That kind of frown normally only graces your face when you're brooding over budget plans... or working out devious plans."

It seems his pregnant mate isn't too tired to catch him mulling over incongruity of life. An eyebrow raised, his answer is deadpan:

"Or finding my Detectives doing doodles on their reports...?"

Nick has the decency to blush but does not go into that. Sean knows the reason why. He has taken note of the slight dig against his scheming nature. It's not a secret that Nick is no happier about the web of royal intrigues revolving around his family than he is about the many strings of plans coming together in Sean's very own hands. Funnily enough he also sees outrage at his family's way of treating or more like threatening him.

He takes it with humor and a dash of carefully disguised marvel that someone other than himself is this intent on protecting him. As to the criticism of his own scheming ways....

Normally the Bastard Prince would at best not care about someone else's opinion or at worst he would mercilessly punish any individual daring to cross him in how he rules his canton. Nick is different... and has been long before he has come to him that night. His opinion has weight – more weight than Sean would have liked to admit back then when they have been allies at best and enemies at worst. And the most surprising of all: In a weird way, which his zauberbiest side opts to ignore, he wants Nick to take him to task for his deeds, good or bad. As independent and, bluntly spoken, power hungry as he has been at times, it has a certain appeal that there is someone now, who loves him enough to want him to be the better man. Apropos....

"You can quit scowling at me, you know? I'm not scheming and, frankly, I have found lately that I have other matters to occupy my mind than outwitting one of my many murderous cousins."

He cloaks his words in waspishness but fondness cannot be hidden completely. That, or maybe it is the significant glance in direction of a certain well rounded womb that gives him away.

Nick's expression mellows into something like reluctant delight. Though secretly pleased by this, Sean decides to be a tease, anyway. Because, beside latest forays into visible displays of affection, this zauberbiest has a well hidden mischievous streak to go with his shrewd nature.

"Oh, and in case you were wondering, pointing out my character faults isn't going to distract me from thinking up a fitting punishment for you and Hank. Maybe some cataloging. Must be right up your alley as you seem to be fond of getting all creative with your reports."

The dark scowl from his pregnant Grimm is rather impressive but only coaxes forth a satisfied smirk. While Nick mimics a punch to his thigh, Sean mildly shakes his head, determined not to get distracted by sentimental feelings in face of this show of Grimm grumpiness. Which begs the question: Is he really fighting these sentimental feelings or is this a battle he has long lost?

Seeing Nick watch him knowingly, he opts for the second. It's disconcerting. His mate knows him to the point where the 'biest who has once been unreadable isn't any longer. Damn it. Yet typical, isn't it?
A half smile warms sharp cut features at last and answers to so many matters unspoken between them. In the end Sean decides to be honest about what had him frowning in the first place:

"You know, sometimes all this strikes me as surreal. I wouldn't have expected this kind of peace. Or for it to be so domestic and... fulfilling."

While the zauberbiest very nearly scrunches up his nose in distaste, Nick's expression of badly hidden amusement is not really appreciated. At all. Sean's forehead creases in disgruntlement, there is a moment of silence, of loaded tension really, before Nick starts laughing in earnest!

_Bugger it all!_ Renard thinks.

_That man is way too perceptive sometimes! Honestly, when has anyone apart from my mother - in my teenage years, mind you - been able to anticipate a slip of expression even before it has happened?! Most frustrating._

The Royal huffs a silent sigh as he waits for his incorrigible Grimm to stop chortling, which just brings about another low chuckle. He tries staying cool, unaffected even. Usually he excels at this….

It's no use. For all his boundless control, he's still unable to maintain a dissatisfied mien.

_Damn this man and the effect he has on me!_

>>> 

Nick for his part strokes Sean's thigh with affection but doesn't try to hide his amusement in the least. After all, while his proud 'biest has sounded flabbergasted, he hasn't sounded disappointed by his life's development at all.

That, and Nick knows the ultimate weapon against disgruntlement of his one and only zauberbiest: He leans forward a bit, bringing his face closer to his baby bump and whispers:

"Note to adorable baby boy: Next time we should hide our insight better, otherwise Papa gets grumpy at being found out. Although there's no reason to be grumpy at all, for we love it when he shows emotions like that."

Looking back up at the aforementioned grumpy Papa, he finds himself faced with a glare that doesn't quite make it to usual Captain standards. Nick decides to let him off the hook:

"What can I say, me neither…." 

He ponders, if he should go on or leave it at that. In the end he decides, that he's done with hiding things. No matter if he feels sorrow or relief – all those memories swirling around in his head like ghosts waiting behind a veil – Sean won't think less of him for being himself or for communicating his thoughts. He has moved past this kind of relationship the day that Juliette has walked out on him and his baby and in all honesty, it's a bloody great relief!

_I'm done with vengeful spirits, even if this spirit is the woman I have once loved. There's no need to hide anymore. I have cut all ties and made new ones._

Sean has maintained eye contact just as he thought he would, perceiving the change from banter to serious at once. He understands. It's all in a single soft stare.

He quirks a smile. Tentative. Not his usual mischievous one but there all the same.
One hand resting on his globe-shaped womb, the other lightly caressing Sean's leg, he chances him a glance before explaining what's on his mind:

"It's nice. Really nice. All this, you know? After what happened in the last months I didn't think I would ever have any of what I have now. What I mean to say is... acceptance. To be the one that I am and never having to fear being judged. Just things like that. I once took acceptance as a given but now I know that it is a true gift."

He pauses shortly.

"Or... I don't know... to discuss wesen matters with the same implicitness with which we discuss what we want to eat for dinner.... It's liberating! I mean, yeah, I could do that with... Juliette... too. ..."

A small frown. His arm curling around his womb. All his protective instincts kicked up in association with a single name. Even after all this time. Sean looks like he wants to maim and kill her more than ever and, frankly, seeing this is all he needs to go on.

"Anyway. Once she knew about it all I could talk to her but it was still different from how things are now. With you. She was interested but she wasn't happy about it. Like there always was some disapproval on her part overshadowing everything I tried to explain about it. Now is different.... You are different.... And I like that very much."

>>> And there it is, as sudden and warming as the sun coming forth behind a cloud: That soft smile and glow of happiness chasing away the frown from before. It's adorable – and what a weird thought to use that word in association with anything. Seeing it, seeing Nick like that.... Sean thinks with a bit of disturbance that this is all it takes these days to melt his heart.

"I'm glad you feel that way."

Tender. Velvet just a little frayed at the edges. Normal by now for when Sean Renard is moved emotionally. And then on the wings of a sudden smirk: "And here I thought I might be difficult to live with but now that you put it like that, I can see why I am viewed as improvement."

It's callous, it's kind of sarcastic, it is all Nick needs to hear to know that Sean understands. Leaving all the heavy stuff to be conveyed through their eyes Nick whacks his 'biest on the thigh and Sean sputters in mock affront at this appalling show of sass. Months before this would have been impossible. The conversation in itself as much as saying all they need with a shared glance while they tease and squabble.

"It is, you know? Difficult to be with you, I mean."

The Grimm leans over – a feat he exercises with impressive agility considering the stage of his pregnancy – to steal a kiss and whisper right into his lover's ear:

"Yeah, that's right. You are distracting and confusing to the part of my brain that's normally termed my common sense.... What with your drop dead sexy voice and constantly looking ready to devour no matter if you're wearing a suit or damn sweat pants. Very distracting and thus very difficult to live with."

Sean pulls him in for a long kiss before drawing back - their faces only inches apart - eyes smoldering and quipping:
"Oh, is that so? Then let me guess: There aren't any guilty feelings on your part, Mister I-walk-around-only-dressed-in-a-towel-barely-big-enough-to-hide-my-modesty, are there?"

Pools of stormy gray dance with reignited mirth, not straying from his 'biest's face for even a moment.

>>> "There's no hidden agenda at all when I do that. (Sean scoffs surreptitiously.) Toisie just likes the freedom and if you don't believe me, ask our little one."

Nick takes one of his Prince's hands to slip it under his hoodie and presses it right onto his baby bump. Satiny skin, warmth, life. Movement can be felt, first slow and languid than stronger kicks and moves.

"See? Baby agrees."

Sean presses his forehead against that of his mate, growing still… almost reverent like he tends to do when feeling evidence of the life growing within Nick's belly.

Then:

"The only thing I see is that a certain baby already has his father's affinity for charming his way out of trouble. And now, my incorrigible brat, come here so that I may settle down for a lie in with this highly distracting double feature."

Nick complies all too gladly.

And while he wriggles to get comfortable in his big man's embrace, he thinks that never in the last few years has his heart been lighter than now. There may be difficulties ahead, storms to be braved but he and his unborn child have this! This man, this kind of acceptance and support.

The hum which he emits upon settling is more telling than a long list of words and he hopes it is enough to express his contentment because ever since he's started sorting things in his house and at work, his 'biest has been constantly worried. So what he wants to convey above all else while he snuggles even closer is that Sean is his anchor. He is helping. His lifeline. Nick remembers using that term all those months ago in Sean's office. It's still true. Or maybe more than ever. This is what he wants, difficulties be damned!

>>> It's quite a while later when Sean speaks up again:

"Just out of curiosity, what would you have done, if I said no to your shopping request?"

His tone reveals amusement. Nick gasps in mock affront.

"Are you backing out?"

The zauberbiest smirks and gathers him closer, large hands splayed possessively over his baby bump.

"No. Just my morbid curiosity of who you would have nagged in my stead."

"Nagged in my stead… as if it's such a hardship to go shopping with your partner…", Nick grumbles adorably. Sean isn't fazed, nuzzles and kisses his neck until Nick's no longer able to keep
up the pout.

“Well? Who would it have been?”

Nick huffs in reluctant amusement.

“Most likely Monroe and Rosalee. Or Hank if I could have thought of a good enough bribe.”

>>> It's New Year's Eve, shortly after 9pm to be exact, and most of his subordinates have either gone home to celebrate or are still out investigating. Nick and Hank are no exception, gathering some last witness statements before they’ll be heading home as well.

Renard massages the bridge of his nose while trying to appear like he's concentrating on work. As Captain of South Precinct he isn't lucky enough to make it home anytime soon. All day he's been brooding over budget plans, end of the year reports and a whole lot of other things needing to be finished before midnight. Sergeant Wu's mildly pitying stares he has ignored on principle. Doing the same with the splitting headache currently vexing him isn't that easy. A sigh escapes, speaking of exhaustion and pain. It’s something he rarely allows himself to reveal but the blinds are drawn and almost anyone else has left anyway. He presses his fingers to his eyes for a moment and breathes deeply through his nose. Not that it brings much relief.

*Seems that you have overdone it this year. Or more like, you have worried too much….*

His inner voice sounds suspiciously like a certain Detective of his. The one currently pregnant with the son he thought he would never have. Thinking about Nick and his child - normally a past time he engages in with embarrassing satisfaction - doesn’t get him anywhere, at least headache wise. And it’s no wonder really, is it?

*I need to get a grip! It's not like Nick is a little kid... or a damsel in distress. He's very well able take care of himself and trained to prevail under pressure.... Other than that he is pregnant, almost at his due date and sifting through all the components making up his old life. In short, everything still connecting him with the damn woman who has almost broken him. No reason to worry at all!*

Renard represses a low growl, he represses even thoughts of shedding Juliette Silverton’s blood (even though doing that has become another one of his favorite past times) and instead tries concentrating solely on the words written on the plain white paper.

*Concentrate on the damn paper! It will do you loads of good. No emotions attached, no worries that cannot be taken care of with a red marker pen. Just an innocent end of the year report....*

He keeps telling himself that for all of 10 seconds before admitting that for one, his worries won’t simply disappear and for a second, he’s feeling God awful. He grips his pen harder in frustration. It's degrading to fall victim to the shortcomings of his own body. He's a zauberbiest for God's sake! He's durable and tough. He sighs explosively, another concession to the late hour, his general state of health and to a myriad of concerns crowding his head.

Normally it's not even his habit to be this irrational. Up until now he has managed to detach himself from almost anything in order to keep a cool head but these days seem to belong to the past. It has started with Nick sorting through his old stuff in the evenings....

*Hah! Who are you kidding? It's started with a certain Grimm Detective appearing on your doorstep at shortly before 5am telling you he's pregnant.*
And while that’s true, ever since Nick has begun sorting and cutting ties with his old life, a diffuse sense of foreboding has settled in his innards. It's not that he fears commitment which comes with their new life together. Far from it, actually. He's ready to go all in with Nick, although the very idea of doing that with anybody would have scared him not even a few months ago. No, it's worry about Nick's health and emotional state, simple and nerve-wracking as that.

The memories come unbidden:

He thinks back to the aftermath of Nick nearly losing his child and suddenly the stoic zauberbiest has to breathe deeply to keep a bout of nausea at bay.

_Damn it, this is not getting any better!_

Another deep breath.

_Come on! Nick is strong.... And he has you...._

This unexpected thought brings about a sense of accomplishment that he hasn’t felt all day.

Nonetheless he needs to finish work before that trice-cursed headache from hell gets the better of him or he won’t make it home tonight. Already letters are swimming before his eyes and his neck feels like a single knot of tense and aching muscles. He really needs to keep his act together, if he wants to be finished before midnight.

_Ando I not have the most enticing incentive to make it home at a halfway decent time?_

The sentiment is new but not at all unwelcome.

>>> Meanwhile Nick and Hank are on the way back home after gathering all necessary statements.

"Have any interesting plans for tonight with a certain special someone of yours?"

Hank wags his eyebrows suggestively, Nick only rolls his eyes.

"I really don't want to know what you have in mind. But, yes, actually I have. It's just not what you may think."

"Okay, enlighten me then. What do you have in mind that I haven't?"

Nick smirks.

"You mean apart from well working gray cells?"

"Careful, Mister Cheeky! The imp may grant you some puppy protection bonus but it's not a free for all pass. Now spill."

"Bossy, huh? Oh well.... I simply want to make sure Sean gets a little rest and relaxation tonight. You've seen him. I mean, it's the usual end of the year chaos but he looks even worse than usual."

“Yeah, I see what you mean.... Takes some time getting used to think of him as Sean, your mate, instead of Renard, our hardass Captain, but, yeah, I see where you're coming from.”

"You’ll get there in time. I managed, too, didn’t I? Anyway, I have the feeling that his exhaustion stems from worrying about me and the imp on top of his normal workload, you know? So in short,
I want to do what he's usually doing for me."

"Sounds like a plan."

His partner nods to himself before fixing him with an intense stare just this side of patronizing. Nick knows this stare. It comes up every time Hank thinks Nick is feeling undue guilt over something. He's about to be proven right:

"Let me add this just for the sake of it: In case you're beating yourself up over may or may not being the reason for adding to our Captain's stress levels, come off it and look at it this way: If it hadn't been for getting involved with you and your little one, he would sure as hell have nobody trying to make him feel better tonight."

Nick sends him a grateful look and a small grin, which as far as Hank is concerned counts as a victory.

"I really don't know why your three marriages didn't work out. At times you're amazing at saying the right things at the right time..... Even when you're mother-henning."

"And then think about the added difficulties I am facing because I only have half a brain. At least if I were to ask a certain evil partner of mine."

"Yeah, must be hard. You have my sympathy and my full support...."

Nick is working hard to keep a straight face... and failing... while Hank looks a cross between peeved and reluctantly amused.

"Okay, fair warning: Puppy protection is officially used up now. And about the marriage thing, why don't you ask wife No.2? She must have had her reasons for trying to throw a vase at my head. I was never more glad that she was pants at ball games than when that thing missed my head by a few inches."

Chuckling just a little evilly while still managing to put up a halfway decent pout at the puppy comment, the Grimm directs his car into a parking space in front of Hank's house.

"I think I'll pass up on that one. No offense but Trisha was just a little too creepy for my liking. Anyway, have a good evening and see ya next year."

The Afro-American shakes his head grinning.

"That one never gets old, does it?"

"Nope, it doesn't. Off you go now. See that you put in some relaxing downtime and don't forget to call Elaina later saying that you've made it home, after all, and wouldn't say no to a New Year's Eve date."

"Will do, Mr I-don't-mother-hen-at-all."

Hank gets out of the car, before leaning back in and saying:

"You, too, buddy. And Monroe really did read you the riot act about down times, didn't he?"

"You don't know half of it! He and our dear Captain both. They have the wonderful habit of adding to each others lists", Nick groused with a slight grimace.

"What can I say? Better you than me but apart from that, if you need to vent, give me a call.... Just
not tonight. For reasons."

"For reasons… uhuh. Have fun."

Nick drives off with a last wave and a cheeky grin.

Elaina is the famous coffee girl and Nick has the feeling that his partner might have found his special someone at last.

>>> 

After arriving home and hurrying inside through the cold, Nick does all necessary preparations. Tonight it's his turn to make his zauberbiest feel good and that includes providing food, a place and a shoulder to rest on and, by the looks of him earlier today, a few painkillers. The meal is simple, filling and re-heatable. As to the rest…. He already has a plan.

At a quarter past eleven the sound of keys turning in the lock alerts Nick to Sean's return and upon seeing him peeling off his scarf, leather gloves and heavy coat, he finds his suspicions confirmed:

His 'biest is truly exhausted. Heavy lines mar his features and an unusual pallor gives tan skin a sickly appearance that reminds Nick uncomfortably of the time after the Captain has been shot. Sean Renard is a big guy, powerfully built and not easily shakable. Tonight he seems weighted down. At the end of his rope, really.

"Hey, my big man", a soft murmur, a chaste kiss as he steps up to him.

"Hey, love."

A fleeting smile ghosts over Sean's lips, almost at once swallowed up by tiredness, then a quick look at his watch.

"I see I made it home before midnight."

"You did."

Nick draws him into a gentle hug and somehow manages to align his big baby bump perfectly with Sean's front. He can feel the bigger man relax a fraction, almost unconsciously if he were to guess. 

"And I'm glad for it. I have chicken broth and dinner rolls ready to warm up."

"Food sounds heavenly. I don't know when I've had the last bite…."

"You hadn't. At least not while at work. I had my eyes on you."

"Oh, had you now? And who spied on me in your absence?"

"You know how it is. Never give your sources away", Nick says as he pulls him into the living room and then slowly over to the fireplace. Sean may be trying to repress the shivers but Nick knows better. He's not a Detective for nothing. Preempting any protests he simply says: 

"Why don't you just take a moment to relax and warm up, hmm?"

For all its softness it's not a question at all. It's gentle manhandling and Sean seems to mind less than both of them would have thought.

>>>
It becomes apparent quickly that his Grimm is very protective tonight. That, and observant. He has
him figured out in no time at all.

A few weeks ago the half-zauberbiest might have refused out of habit – learned responses are
difficult to let go of, after all. Now he reconsiders quickly when Nick pulls him back into his arms
and starts sliding his hands over his back and shoulders. Warmth is rubbed into muscles tense and
knotted from sitting in front of his laptop for hours and worrying about everything and nothing for
even longer. In the beginning he tries not leaning too heavily on his Grimm…. When those skilled
hands start rubbing right between his shoulder blades that thought flies right out of the window.

*To hell with keeping up appearances! This is Nick. If I cannot let go of all the masks with him, then
when will I ever be able to?*

He buries his nose in the crook of Nick's neck and gathers him close. His eyes slide shut almost on
their own accord, staying that way while he is caressed and simply held. Nick gives a content hum,
obviously approving of his 'biest's actions.

And although that doesn't take away his headache or all inner doubts about accepting help and
bothering Nick with these insignificant matters, it goes a long way in telling him that it's okay.

>>>  

Nick tilts his head in contemplation.

"Hmm. These muscles here aren't normally this tense, are they?"

When Sean unburies his face from against his neck, he feels the loss keenly, but he lets his
fingertips trail lightly over his zauberbiest's cheek instead, which is nearly as good:

"So, what's the matter? Just work or do murderous cousins nowadays do New Year's Eve visits?...
No, wait… that worry line here…", Nick smooths his thumb slowly over the line between Sean's
eyebrows as he studies him and he could have sworn that his mate leans into the touch, albeit
briefly.

"...You aren't only tired, you are in pain, aren't you?"

Sean tenses then, features becoming unreadable as he draws back a fraction. The fleeting smile,
that has appeared at Nick's earlier comment, vanishes in a flash. The Grimm isn't deterred. Has
expected this, actually. He knows his 'biest and right now he is slipping into defensive mode
without even noticing.

His approach is simple. Letting his hand slip to Sean's neck, where he rubs with barely any
pressure, he just keeps looking up at him, steady and calm. The powerful Prince is silent and
unmoving like a statue. This is more difficult for him than anything else: Admitting to what he
perceives as weakness. It's not even like Nick doesn't get the sentiment. What can he say? His
friends don't tell him off for not asking for help just because they like to hear themselves speak.

In the end it's like loosening those knots in his neck also loosens Sean's defensive armor. With a
silent huff he unclenches muscles bunching over broad shoulders, rolls his head almost like he's
about to woge:

"Okay, I may be afflicted by a minor headache."

Nick just has to smile at this understatement of the century. He steps back into his 'biest's personal
space, fingers trailing alongside his neck and coming to rest on his cheek once more. There's a hint
of stubble. He lets his thumb run soothingly over paler than normal skin.

"Make that a major one and we may have the truth."

In face of Nick's gentle correction Sean finally allows himself to relax completely, turning so that his lips touch the inside of Nick's palm. A chaste kiss, leaning into warmth and care for a moment more

"You are way too perceptive sometimes."

It comes with a rueful half-smile that Nick has rarely seen on him before. He likes it very much.

"I'm a Detective. Sue me."

"Hmmm. I would rather do other things with you but I'm afraid I'm too tired."

An idea blooms in Nick's head where it has rested just beyond the surface ever since he's first placed his hand on Sean's neck.

"I would like that, too, but I think we had better take care of your ailments first? Remember, there's food and painkillers with your name on them."

"That sounds much more heavenly than it should, considering that this is just a pesky headache."

Nick kisses first his nose and then his lips.

"Thing is, this isn't just a headache, is it?"

When Sean's frowns, the pregnant Grimm explains:

"Tension gives you away. It's located here, here… and here."

He touches Sean's neck, his jaw joint and finally his temple, where his fingertips remain to work their magic.

"If I had to guess, I would say it has started with a stiff neck and spread out from there to give you that spectacular headache."

Despite all of that being true Sean has enough energy – or maybe incentive – to pull Nick even closer and peer down on him as he keeps him wrapped in his arms.

"Say, has late pregnancy given you new insights I haven't been privy to or has this always been an area of expertise to you?"

Nick doesn't answer before he has given ample attention to kissing those enticing lips.

"I don't know. Maybe we should ask the imp."

He touches his womb as if to weight it in his hands.

"What do you say, Toisie? Did you give me the inner eye?"

He cocks his head slightly as if listening to his baby, then:

"Imp says no."

"Oh he does now? Must be interesting to hold this kind of conversations."
Sean raises a brow and quirks a smile that takes hours of exhaustion off his face. The Grimm shrugs unconcerned, happy to see the change.

"It is, believe me. Anyway, I just had many opportunities to watch and learn as a teen. Aunt Marie tended to get these headaches from time to time, so I know what to look for. That, and you're lacking your Greek God tan, which is kind of a dead giveaway."

He turns his sputtering mate around and gently pushes him in direction of the kitchen.

"Off you go or I'll feel guilty for keeping you here when you should be eating and taking something for the pain."

"Very well."

Sean still manages to let his fingertips ghost over the center of Nick baby bump in passing. A soft look comes to his face as he turns back toward him despite their best intentions. His fingertips continue their caress, both pairs of eyes following the movement. Looking up at last and catching Sean's gaze Nick finds: What once has filled him with horror beyond imagination, does now fill him with great joy. He has to force himself to utter the next words because, damn, they have yet to move apart.

"Shoo shoo, into the kitchen with you! Guilty conscience, remember?"

"We cannot have that, now can we?"

>>> Food is quickly divested off and even two tablets of aspirin are taken without fuss.

Soon the zauberbiest is sent to the bedroom to change into something comfy while Nick takes further preparations.

*Now what to do first? Move the armchair? Fetch the massage oil? Put on some music? Hmm, I guess I would better be fetching the oil while Sean is still away…. It shall be a surprise, shan't it?*

Suiting actions to thoughts he first fetches the massage oil, which Rosalee has given him for his belly some time ago, before setting his ipod to play something relaxing. He leaves moving the armchair for last. In hindsight that might have been a mistake.

He has just moved the heavy piece of furniture halfway across the room to where it shall sit to look out at their floor length windows when a well known voice inquires ominously from behind: "Nick, what are you doing?"

*Uuh, I should have done the armchair first.*

Throughout pregnancy Nick has well tested the fact that lifting or in this case pushing heavy things doesn't put him at risk for early labor like it does some pregnant women. It rather seems that his Grimm heritage does its part to make him adapt to such things quickly, just like it has when he was beginning to have back pains from added weight of his womb.

Problem is: Only because he knows this, it's not any easier to sell the same idea to his zauberbiest… or Monroe for that matter. Only Rosalee and Hank seem to have any faith in his instincts at all. But back to matters at hand….

He turns around to find himself faced with the epitome of dark, brooding Prince. Sean is standing
at his full height, arms crossed in front of his broad chest, dark stare conveying what little his question and tone have left to imagination. It's impressive, really, how he can switch to 'Captain’s mode' in no time at all. Not even his casual attire or Nick's knowledge that his mate is in quite a bit of pain do lessen the effect. Damn it.

Despite all that he knows one thing for sure: Tonight it isn't him who should be taking it easy, so that leaves only one course of action.

'I thought that would be obvious', is at the tip of his tongue. These words, of course, never leave his lips. He is well aware that Sean is unwell and has been worried about him. It wouldn't be fair no matter how much the mother-henning exasperates him. He goes for the neutral: "I am moving a chair."

Having said all to the matter that he's going to, he turns back around to continue with his task but a large hand on his wrist halts his movement. Inwardly praying for patience he turns back to his overprotective mate, who sure enough has his bit to say.

"You are 6 weeks from your due date. You should know to let me do this."

Nick decides he is not going to mention the 200 pound hundjäger he's cast over his shoulder just two weeks ago.... Or to say that it's just a chair, after all.

"Talk about the lame leading the blind", he mutters under his breath. Sean frowns.

"What was that? I didn't quite catch it."

"Oh, nothing. I just mumbled about letting down the blinds.... Decided against it. Now.... Ah, yes, Sean, would you, please, push that armchair over there so that it is facing the window?"

He points to where he wants it to go and has to give it to his 'biest that he doesn't ask for his reasons.

Besides that he isn't happy with Sean doing this, but if this is needed to help him in the end, Nick won't interfere. "Thank you", he says once Sean is finished.

"Now, will you take a seat?"

Sean makes to utter an objection but Nick shakes his head. Meanwhile his hand wanders back cup Sean's cheek, the gesture as tender as his kisses earlier. The Prince allows it, although the question is clear in his eyes.

"Sean, I let you do your fussing, now let me do some of mine. You are the one hurting tonight, so why don't you sit down and let me take care of things, hmm?"

"I'm not sure where this is going, but very well."

Sean complies with a dissatisfied huff. For all his misgivings, though, not even his zauberbiest can hide the visible slouch to his impressive frame as he sinks deeper into the comfortable chair. And this more than anything else tells Nick how exhausted and weary he truly is.

"You won't regret it", he promises, mirth re-entering his tone. Sean's expression is still on the skeptical side but Nick isn't deterred. Without another word of explanation he comes to kneel in front of his 'biest, slips his hands underneath the thick dark blue sweater and starts slowly pushing it up and over Sean's head.
And true enough, when Sean's head reappears after Nick has divested of sweater and vest, the expression he finds himself faced with is much more open. Apparently on occasion even Sean Renard can be persuaded to see the merits of another one's plan.

>>> 

Nick starts out slowly, just rubbing in some of the oil. Into shoulders. Into neck and back. Going round front and stroking well defined pectorals. This time his ‘biest definitely leans into the touch. There’s the tiniest of sounds. Moan, sigh. He's not sure. Then a last ounce of resistance, because once Sean Renard has started to care for someone he takes these matters seriously:

“Nick, are you sure you are okay with doing this?”

He knows what Sean is getting at: His late pregnancy, the strain from leaning over as he’ll have to do when giving him a proper massage….

The Grimm leans forward alright and presses a light kiss to one of Sean’s temples.

“Actually I’m more than okay with doing this.”

He lets his hands roam, takes up more oil, starts kneading in earnest.

“You deserve this, you know? It isn’t only me, who needs some taking care of…. Not only pregnant people or those who have experienced some shitty things are entitled to receive care and comfort. That, and I know you are tired and in pain, my lovely, stubborn man, which is why you are treated to a massage tonight. Because you deserve it.”

It’s a gentle murmur and as Sean finally reacts - allows himself to enjoy this and Nick taking charge - the Grimm can fully concentrate on making him feel good.

“That’s good. Just close your eyes and go with the flow.”

Nick presses a loving kiss to the crown of his Prince’s head. Praises him softly. Kneads and rubs and works all those tense and knotted muscles. Thumbs sliding down each side of Sean’s spine, from the top of his neck down the broad expense of his back. Once applying pressure, another time just stroking gently. He works his way from shoulders to arms. Feels this powerful, independent man fairly melt under his touch. His work. It’s the best reward to sense this change. He doesn’t see much of Sean’s face but he is sure that his eyes are closed and his lips parted just slightly. The thought alone makes Nick swallow in appreciation.

His right hand slips under that strong jaw, tips Sean’s head back with just the hint of a touch. This is what it means to trust someone. Nick doesn’t need to apply pressure, he just needs to give an incentive.

Sean complies, back of his head coming to rest against his front. Nick looks down on him with a world of affection. Oh yes, his 'biest is truly relaxing now. It makes him smile involuntarily and feel very warm inside.

When he leans forward just a bit to reach and work those impressive chest muscles, Sean even arches into the touch just a little bit, shoulders sagging as he gives himself over completely into his Grimm’s care.

“Beautiful.” A reverent whisper, tumbling out and not to be denied.

Nick moves higher, reaching the sides of his neck and finally his temples where he takes extra care
to rub and stroke. To bring the kind of relief and relaxation that painkillers never could.

A short glance at the clock on the wall. Perfect. The massage has gone on for maybe half an hour….

“Hey, my love?” A gentle murmur, coaxing the magnificent ‘biest from his almost slumber.

“Hmmm?”

More sleepy than Nick has ever heard him. He loves it. Cherishes it.

>>> Sean thinks he surely must be in heaven. Or maybe just that Nick's hands have magical powers. He has lost complete track of time, is for once just content to be and be molded to Nick’s heart’s desire. Muscles that have been tense and aching for days are loose now and it's an amazing feeling. All of this is amazing, if he’s honest with himself. Nick’s care. This sense of belonging. Of comfort and safety. He rediscovers what he has in reality known for a long time:

He hasn’t fallen in love with this man only because Nick has needed his protection…. Or because of the child he is bearing. He has also fallen in love with Nick Burkhardt because he has the means - the power and desire - to do for him exactly the same that Sean finds himself wanting to do: To protect and take care. To support and love.

He has finally found his own safe haven. With Nick and his child.

With that knowledge he lets himself sink deeper into relaxation and the truly awesome sensation of being kneaded and molded within an inch of his life.

Underlying it all is a soothing and comforting sound. A rhythm Sean doesn’t want to ever go without:

Two heartbeats, that of Nick and his child. Unerringly with him from that horrible night onward. Beating a steady thrum whenever he is in his Grimm’s vicinity.

A low murmur - maybe a question - rouses him at last. It’s more difficult to come back up than he would have thought. Mentally, that is. He’s not even going to talk about preparing to move anywhere anytime soon.

“Hey, sleepyhead. Why don’t you open your eyes, hmm? It will be well worth it.”

This sounds intriguing. After all, the last time Nick has said something along these lines, this heavenly massage has followed. He blinks his eyes open. Lifts his head away from the source of warmth it has been resting against. Toisie has been completely still for once – no kicks and such – as if sensing that Papa needs this kind of calm when his head is aching.

It feels like he’s been sleepwalking and he wonders stupidly what exactly Nick wants him to look at. In front of his eyes is only the skyline of Portland by night.

And then it happens, exactly in sync with a well loved, warm voice murmuring directly into his ear:

“Happy New Year, my lovely man.”

The sky explodes into a thousand lights and colors! All colors of the rainbow, really. Whizzing,
bursting, chasing away the dark of the night. Creating streaks and images and an amazing symphony of light, that takes his breath!

Now a few things make sense. Moving the armchair, choosing that moment and place for his massage instead of simply heading to bed....

He pulls Nick around to him, somehow makes them both fit into the large seat, gathers him close and pulls him in for a long and loving kiss. When they draw apart at last, he knows what he must look like: Elated and like a fool. He couldn't care less. He may be a damn sentimental fool, but he's one who has learned that nothing he has ever desired – power, acceptance from the royals, a throne even – could have given him more satisfaction and fulfillment than this!

His incorrigible Grimm moves in for another kiss then, chasing away all thoughts other than how amazing those lips feel on his just like they were some schoolboys.

After letting the world be the world for a while they take up a blanket, move out onto the balcony and watch the rest of fireworks lighting the sky all over Portland.

And as they stand at the banister - wrapped in one and the same huge blanket with Sean hugging Nick from behind - the exiled Prince of Portland thinks that he is quite content with how his life has turned out.

>>> 

December melts into January and for once winter enfolds Portland in a frosty, white cloak. Nick is excited, loving the snow, the pristine whiteness, the everything that's not slushy, muddy or rain showered.

Captain Renard is less delighted. It's in a slight tensing of his jaw when Nick talks about going out into the woods with Monroe and Hank or after reading his case report about that perp whose literal downfall has been a spectacular dive on an icy patch of road.

Nick is very well aware why his zauberbiest lacks enthusiasm - apart from the general fact that he doesn't show emotion as freely as others do. Sean is afraid. As cliche as it sounds, he is worried that Nick himself will take a dive and that their beloved baby will take damage... or his unruly Grimm for that matter.

For being the cool headed, pragmatic man that he is, Sean hasn't stopped displaying carefully hidden bouts of mother-henning. Every time it comes up the Grimm's heart swells with warmth and instead of getting annoyed like is his usual wont he steps up to his big man, kisses his frown away and murmurs into his ear the promise that he'll be careful.

Sean's expression will darken then – displeased at being found out most likely – before an almost rueful half-smile will soften his features and he will gather him close.

"See that you do, my brat. See that you do."

Stealing a chaste kiss the Prince sends him off to work with a light swat to his butt, reminding Nick that despite their banter he expects him to keep his promise. The Grimm throws him a lopsided grin, bundles up to brave the cold outside and slips out of the front door with a wink and a mouthed: "Yes, Sir."

PW33:
The night before their shopping trip Nick spends over at Monroe’s and Rosalee’s. He says something about things being less conspicuous, if Renard fetches him from there in the morning instead of starting out from the zauberbiest's house. As if it were a bother for them to have him over. Frankly, the pair is happy to spend time with their friend and to see him quietly excited about a shopping trip with a man who loves and accepts him with all there is to him. And a man who, Monroe points out later, is willing to go shopping baby stuff at all.

Of course any notion of being a bother or some such nonsense is firmly nipped in the butt as soon as Nick enters their home. Monroe does the epic bushy-browed frown and puts in right a bit of grumbling and growling. By the end of it their pregnant Grimm is grinning widely and blushing just a bit.

After a thankfully quinoa free meal they pass the evening coming up with an increasingly silly list of things a baby should have.

Nick’s favorite is the ‘corduroy pants plus green brown checkered slip-on’-onesie, which he finds endlessly amusing especially because Monroe is so serious about it. At the question of when the imp should need such a thing – when sleeping and slobbering as babies do or when candidating for congress – the blutbad just shows another impressive frown while staying suspiciously silent.

What he really likes is the idea of finding a musical box and he thinks to himself that he’ll try to find one playing ‘baju bajushki baju’, the Russian lullaby Sean has sung to his little one in the womb not long ago.

>>> 

The next morning Captain Renard fetches his Detective for their special field assignment and they start out for Salem sedately. Equipped with a decent list and a supplement drink from Rosalee, that has thankfully been altered to taste a lot less vile, it promises to be a brilliant day. Discounting the fact that Nick is throwing baleful looks at Sean’s big coffee paper cup from that expensive, taste to die for coffee shop round the corner. The half-zauberbiest takes it with a smirk. Of course, he does.

Arriving in Salem they decide on a nice, out of the way shopping mall whose website promises to have lots of shops selling baby articles and the like.

While Nick will be able to buy most clothes and stuff in the coming weeks once he has taken leave from work, he wants to order or purchase a few items today like a cradle, a baby stroller, a changing table and an emergency set of clothes for newborns. It's better to be prepared in any case, isn't it?

>>> 

They aren’t conspicuous about being a couple, both too much professionals to show anything that makes them stand out. They do enjoy their trip nonetheless. Here in Salem, while not as open as they would like to be, it’s easy to browse through offerings together, to tease each other and to be closer than they could ever be in public before.

They already have found a stroller, a changing table and a compilation of basic clothes – the last of which Rosalee’s help yesterday has been invaluable for – when they take lunch at a little Italian restaurant. So far so good. This only leaves the baby cradle, a stuffed toy (which the Prince of Portland seems to have his very own opinion on) among a few other things to be found.

>>>
Juliette walks the streets of Salem in search of a decent coffee shop. Her train back to Portland will take off in 2 hours which leaves enough time for a bit of window shopping.

It's been a little over three months since she has ended things with Nick.

*Since I've given him what he deserves.* A vindictive part of her thinks.

Her colleagues at work have been sympathetic... as they should be. After all it's been Nick's fault that things between them have gone to shambles. He has brought wesen and all that crap into their life.

*He has bedded that bitch, distanced himself and topped it all off by telling me that... that he's expecting a baby! Honestly, of all the preposterous things! How dare he?!*

She reigns herself in.

*No.* She tells herself.

After getting out most of her stuff under Griffin's hawk eyed stare and moving into a flat a friend could get her on short notice, she has decided not to waste another thought on Nick Burkhardt.

When her colleague Clara has offered that she could visit that veterinary weekend seminar in Salem in her stead, she has gratefully accepted. Get out, forget all that's made her miserable. Nick and his friends. Damn it, once she's thought of Rosalee as a true friend but when that shit with Adalind has happened – on their wedding day no less – she's been all sympathetic to the poor Grimm instead of seeing his actions for the betrayal they've been!

She huddles deeper into her Parker, walks to a smaller, out of the way mall and forces her thoughts away from the past.

>>>  

"Now that you've dragged me through at least 5 stores and we've had the little Italian lunch for three....."

"Which has been appreciated by all concerned parties", Nick adds with a quirk to his lips leading Sean to cock his head smirking.

"Oh is that so?"

"Yes, absolutely."

Nick looks very happy, indeed, and the small patting of his belly doesn't go unnoticed by his zauberbiest either. His smirk becomes a touch softer just like his keen gaze becomes a little tender. It isn't very obvious but Nick who knows what to look for feels humbled by its warmth.

"So, where was I? Ah yes, after dragging me through those shops and then thankfully escaping the post-Christmas hubbub into this restaurant, do you think we ought continue now? After all, the sooner we complete that list, the sooner we will be away from gushing mommies and half-dead looking daddies."

Nick huffs an involuntary laugh even as he mock glares.

"Hey, you have to admit that we had an 80% success rate. Okay, I admit that one store was just creepy. Honestly, I'll never tell Monroe that there actually is a store selling little 'corduroy pants
checkered slip on look alike'-onesies. Not if I can help it, anyway."

At the zauberbiest's smirk of true evil he adds: "And you won't either, if you don't want to find yourself on an impromptu 'clock part hunting' weekend with Monroe which I just happened to have arranged for you then."

The powerful Prince of Portland raises his hands in surrender.

"Faced with such a threat who am I to tell Monroe about a store whose offerings I don't remember all that well anyway?"

"That's my man."

A very jovial pregnant Grimm and a quietly pleased half-zauberbiest leave the little Italian restaurant to brave the next stop on their tour. And if said Grimm's hand slips briefly across his middle where his little one is residing, and if said zauberbiest puts an unobtrusive hand to the small of his back to steer him through the crowd, then nobody mentions it.

>>> Juliette is just enjoying a caramel-macchiato and weaving her way through the busy crowd when she sees something that makes her blood run cold and then boil! She has almost not recognized them at first glance but now there's no doubt: Even though slightly shorter now, she would know that tousled raven black hair anywhere. After all it's what she's found simply irresistible all those years ago when her friend Brianna had introduced Nick Burkhardt to her, Police Officer and single male.

The man with him has been more difficult to place: His clothes are no doubt expensive, the long wool coat, the dark red cashmere scarf wrapped around his neck. Instead of slacks and dress shoes he wears jeans and sturdy walking boots.

He is a good three inches taller than her former fiance and his left hand strays to his lower back right now in an inconspicuous gesture to steer Nick into the direction he's pointing.

There's no mistake. Sean Renard is leisurely walking through a shopping mall with the man who should have been hers! They are talking, they are laughing – albeit quietly but what else would one expect of the high and mighty, dignified Bastard Prince?

She follows them at a distance, cannot quench her morbid curiosity. She has to know what they are doing and she has to remind herself not to twist the paper cup in her hand.

Anger burns in her gut! They are subtle but she isn't blind and she knows Nick.

_A man? Really?! He looks happy. He looks well. He doesn't have any right to do so! This isn't fair!_

She has almost convinced herself to turn tail and make her way to the train station when they stop in front of a shop window. There are different items on display all made of wood, from children toys to... baby cradles.

Now she could tell herself that she's imagining things and go, but she knows what Nick has told her and what weird shit that damn wesen world can dish up.

Sure enough they enter the store leaving her to fume in the distance. Her heart turns cold and brittle then as if the Ice Queen herself had pushed one of her poisonous crystals into it. Nick doesn't deserve this, not after making their life difficult and ultimately destroying their relationship.
Not one thought does the redhead waste on her own doings, driven by indignation and jealousy. She doesn't see all the hurt she has brought to her once dedicated partner, all the harm and heartache she's caused. She sees only the injustice of the world.

And she vows revenge! It's that trice-cursed Grimm stuff that has started all this and while she returns to Portland on the train a plan forms in her head.

>>> 

For the last 30 minutes Nick has been prattling on about different baby cradles. Okay, maybe prattling isn't the right phrase. Really, he thinks with fond exasperation, his narration style has been much more that of reporting on a case, listing pros and cons and underlining everything with sufficient facts to proof his assertions.

Now to have a complete lack of comments makes Sean turn around to his mate in puzzlement.

He finds Nick not far away, staring down on a cradle made of teak wood and at once he understands his silence. It's awe because, wow, this cradle is a beauty, indeed.

It's all rounded, natural edges and soft curves. You could have put it right into a fairy tail without it being either kitschy or out of place. He steps up to his lovely man, seeking his contact and warmth without ever appearing to do so to the eye of an outsider.

"I see you've found something that's to your liking then?"

His own voice comes out curiously soft, taking up the suddenly almost reverent mood without a conscious thought. When Nick starts slightly as if coming out of a daydream, Sean's fondness wills out in form of little smile as he looks down upon his lover.

"Uuh, yes…. And no…." He sounds torn.

"I mean, it's beautiful but now that I see it, I cannot help thinking that it would look even more beautiful with a carving from Bud – he does amazing carvings, it's just his thing – and I cannot get the thought out of my head now that I've had it. I cannot have him do it, though, because he can keep virtually no secret…. And having it done afterward will scarcely be possible seeing that we need it for the imp, so…."

His shoulders are actually sagging.

"Hmm, I see what you mean. So this one is out, although you love it, because it's with a carving or nothing, right?"

There's no judgment in his tone, which surprises even Sean himself. If someone had asked him a year ago, if he would indulge such a notion, he would have firmly renounced that. But it's Nick and he isn't known to say such things just on a whim. It's important to him and now that he has brought the point up, Sean can kind of see it, too. Even if it's sentimental and irrational.

"That sums it up disturbingly well. And it sounds completely ridiculous…. Even to my own ears. And I'm the one with the problem. Still… Call it hor…. Just call me crazy but yes, that's exactly how it is."

Sean leans in close – as close as possible while still keeping up at least a feeble facade that they are not actually a couple – and then he whispers:

"If anyone is allowed a bit of hormonal turmoil it's you, my incorrigible Grimm."
Nick is sure that he's only been able to take that up through his above exceptional hearing. He keeps in the rueful grin but he's certain that Sean knows it to be there, anyway.

Louder his mate now suggests:

"Why don't you take that one over there. If I remember correctly, it is the one you've been waxing on about for longest."

Even as he pokes him into the side surreptitiously for that evil comment, he nods all the same.

"Apart from the waxing bit I have to agree. Sounds like the sensible thing to do."

"Somehow I hope that you'll never agree to the waxing part."

That's been as deadpan as they come. It's been exactly what Nick has needed to get those irrational hormones back under control. He makes a show of looking scandalized.

"What, don't like a good hairless chest?"

Yet for all their easy banter, the longing stare which he has send to that teak wood cradle before going in search of a shop clerk doesn't go unnoticed. Sean uses the time of Nick's absence to snap a photo of it with his phone and files the information away for later. He just might have developed a master plan.

>>> 

"What is this?!"

Even in face of that scary as shit thunderous Captain's frown Nick cannot help being amused.

"It's a stuffed toy."

The dirty look his zauberbiest throws him clearly says: 'I wouldn't have guessed.' and projects the whole nine yards of sarcasm.

"And why, pray tell, does a stuffed toy need horns?"

"Sean, it is a dragon."

That frown doesn't get any less thunderous. Nick shrugs nonchalantly while he tries his utmost best not to crack up. After all, always stoic, calculating and pragmatic Captain Sean Renard is just bashing baby toys for a lack of safety. His 'biest's dark stare tells him that, for one, he doesn't find this half as amusing as Nick does and, for another, that he has yet to answer.

"It's meant to be cute, you know?"

Not a satisfying answer, it seems.

"Oh, of course. Just as cute as having a baby poke its eye out with one of these dangerous horns!"

Call him suicidal but Nick cannot help smiling serenely while his zauberbiest continues laying into the disadvantages of different toys on display.

In the end he takes up a dark brown bear of medium size – all without horns or batteries or plastic parts, just a very adorable bear in short – and shows it to his big, 'very intent on their son's safety' man.
"Why don't we take this one?", he says almost as quietly as Sean has earlier in the cradle shop.

"To me it looks like a nice fella not intent on poking out a baby's eye at all, hmm?"

Sean huffs and does his best to look unaffected although somehow he looks suspiciously mollified as he snatches the toy out of his hand and takes it to the cashier to pay.

>>> Wednesday morning – Nick has the late shift today – Rosalee and he are sitting cross-legged on the floor of Nick's old house, packing the last boxes.

"What will happen to Juliette's stuff?"

It's obvious that the fuchsbau is hesitant to mention the redhead but also curious about the matter. Nick wraps a small lamp in paper and stuffs it into a box before replying:

"I've arranged for a moving company to come tomorrow. They will pick up what's labeled as hers and put it in a storage unit. She'll receive a missive with the key telling her that she can either pay the rent for the unit or take her stuff out. It will be delivered through one of Sean's contacts."

Nick drops his gaze to his lap briefly, troubled thoughts expressed by almost bending the marker pen he's holding in half. It's clear that his feelings for his former girlfriend are still heated, only in anger now instead of love or passion. When he looks up again, grim determination has settled in gray depths.

"I don't want to see her again if I can help it and I won't ask any of you to deliver it either. On the other hand it has to be done in person so that reception of the missive can be proven later on. Anyway. I have more important matters to think about and, frankly, I couldn't care less what she does as long as she gets the damn letter."

Rosalee quirks a sad little smile, taking the hand that's holding the marker and squeezing it gently.

"You're doing the right thing. She can be glad you aren't simply burning her stuff. And now that I think about it, it really is good that none of us will deliver that letter...."

She trails off, looking fierce enough to pique Nick's curiosity.

"And why is that?"

Her scowl seems to want to change to a smirk only with great reluctance.

"You see, you may have needed to arrest someone for punching her right in the face, if one of us were to deliver it in person."

"You raise a valid point. Now I'm half sad that I didn't ask one of you. Ah, but we cannot have everything, can we?"

And finally Nick is able to let go of his anger, grip on the marker relaxing a great deal.

"You only need to ask in any case. But now let's continue packing so that we can be out of here as quickly as possible."

They pass the time talking about babies – the one due in just a few weeks and the ones growing in a certain fuchsbau's womb. Monroe and Rosalee have been ecstatic and just a bit freaked out when the doctor has told them they are probably expecting more than one child and Nick has found
lately that nothing is better for conquering gloom than talking about the amazing miracle of new life. They discuss experiences, share fears and hopes, and generally talk like they haven't had in some time now. It comes as quite a surprise when Rosalee asks:

"Is this the last box?"

Nick looks around them in astonishment. Time seems to have flown by.

"Err, yes, discounting the one I'm currently closing up, it actually is the last one."

They both hear the wonder in his voice. Getting up from the floor – a mite bit more slowly in Nick's case – they survey the array of boxes, furniture and stuff, all ready to be packed and taken away. Rosie steps up to her friend, somehow sensing that in the moments to come he might need her.

"And everything else settled as well?", She asks carefully, watching him from the side and already seeing his expression clouding with a mix of relief and regret. Oh yes, she can very well imagine that he must be torn up inside. She would be, in any case, if she were to find herself in the same situation. He's still holding up, though, or more like, he's hiding how much this truly disconcerts him – from himself as much as the people around him, if she had to guess.

"Jup, all settled. I signed the contract and will get the keys to my new flat on Friday, so the move can happen on Saturday as planned, and Sean has already found someone willing to buy the house for a decent price. An old army veteran, who thinks holes from crossbow bolts in the wall are charming and indicators for a lively history. Something along those lines I think it was. So I guess all is well."

He puts on a brave smile, less to fool his long-time friend than to get a grip on his emotions. They remain silent and unmoving for a long time, eyes sweeping the room and conjuring up a myriad of good and bad memories for both of them.

An explosive exhale from Nick breaks the silence at last and he seeks his friends proximity although he wishes he would be strong enough not to. He doesn't want to bother her with his problems. With maudlin thoughts and emotions that haven't overwhelmed him like this in quite a while now. He doesn't have to, she already knows, intuition spot on as always. Without a word she turns to him and envelopes him in a gentle hug, imagining in bittersweet reminiscence that under a clever bit of magic lies evidence that her best friend is already eight months gone with a child.

"Oh, Nick."

A low murmur rich with warmth and shared pain.

Damn it, he doesn't need this cluster of negative emotions right now and I could strangle Juliette for making him live through all this in the first place!

Nick really needs a friend right now, so when at last he melts into her embrace with another explosive exhale, she just keeps holding and comforting him.

"Why does it feel so shitty then?"

A whisper as low as hers, that tears at her heart and makes her throat close right up. Rubbing soothing circles on his back she takes a moment to gather herself.

"Because some things are horrible no matter what good has happened beside them. The positive things may make it easier to see that the bad isn't all but it doesn't undo what you have gone
through either. What happened here…. You have the right to grieve, you know?"

He nods against her shoulder mutely and Rosalee will give him all the time in the world. Nick is so strong and genuine-hearted. He is her friend and he deserves all the help she can give him. A thought comes to her as she continues to hold him while he comes to terms what he's pushed away ever since starting to sort through his old life. The good and the bad. Relief and closure but also grief, feelings of betrayal and regret.

"You know what, Nick? Tonight when you return home to Sean, you will remember the good things. The things you've gained…. The perfect little baby boy you will soon have and the loving father that is going to help you raise your son…. All that and more. But always remember this: Gaining positive experiences after going through tragedy doesn't exclude you from mourning what you have lost and what could have been."

Another mute nod that Rosie knows could have become a sob if Nick had tried to speak. She hugs him all the tighter, humming softly and just being there for him.

When a long while later he looks up and gently disentangle himself , he has found back to his usual control. His eyes are still suspiciously bright, his small smile only a shadow of his usual one. Yet as he rubs his baby bump and takes a few deep breaths, he visibly straightens and it seems that touching and connecting with his lovely boy inside does strengthen his resolve. He gives a decisive nod.

"You are right, Rosie. Thank you, you are the best, did you know that?"

He bestows a small kiss only her cheek, gratitude clear in the tender gesture.

"And, yes, I already know what I'll do once coming home tonight."

Her smile is sweet and conspiratorial.

"Does it by any chance involve a certain tall, dark and handsome someone with strong arms?"

"It just might."

With a last glance around - not nearly as weighted down by grief but rather hopeful - they leave the house and Nick Burkhardt's old life behind.

>>> 

Nick does exactly what he has said. He goes to sleep in his zauberbiest's arm, feeling safe and whole.

The nightmares come anyway:

*Her smile is cold and brittle. So much anger... cruelty.*

*She's playing coy. Mocking him. Invading his space.... Panic rises!* 

*Adalind! No, Juliette!* 

*Her hands everywhere. On his chest, touching him, hurting him deeply. Emotionally.*

*How could you?! Why do you want to hurt me? Get away from me! Leave my baby alone!*

*She doesn't. Merciless. Cold. He feels sick. Hurt and used and dirty.*
He needs to protect his little one.

How dare she?!

Anger, protective rage building.

No-one hurts my baby!!

Nick starts up with a half scream, heart racing with terror and gasping for breath. There's someone next to him. Talking. Or shouting? He's still caught up in his nightmare. The presence draws near. It all comes back…!

"Nick?"

Panic.

"Noo!"

His reaction is pure instinct. He doesn't even turn to look, just rams his elbow sideways. Flesh meets flesh. A grown, then silence.

His thoughts are jumbled, head clearing only slowly.

It has felt so real! It's been a nightmare…. Only a horrible, real life color nightmare.

>>>>

Sean sinks back into the pillows, dazed and wondering who is wielding a sledgehammer in his bedroom?

Damn, that has hurt!

Only the sound of Nick's harsh breathing and his tangible shivers finally manage to redirect his focus. He forces himself to think around the pain blooming in his jaw and spreading into his head.

Must have been a nightmare….

And going by Nick's reaction he can imagine fairly well what it has been about.

What's he to do? Other than keeping his distance and trying to repress another deeply felt groan, because his heavily pregnant lover deals one killer of an elbow check even at three in the morning and after being woken from a nightmare.

Focus!

On the sidelines Sean is surprised about his own lack of a defensive reaction. His subconsciousness must have recognized Nick sooner than his waking mind, otherwise he himself would have lashed out at the perceived danger.

Focus on Nick. You can clearly hear it. He has not recovered yet. He needs you.

At least Nick is still in the bed, half sitting up and turned away from him. That's not necessarily reason to hope, though, it might just mean that he's too terrified to move. Once that thought has registered, his head for thinking returns. He keeps a careful eye on his Grimm while slowly sitting
up. Pain from his bruised jaw is pushed away, more important matters taking up his attention.

Nick is pale and clearly still shaken. Maybe not even fully free from the nightmare's clutches, for all he knows. Anger wells up at the bloody women responsible for all this! Adalind and Juliette, sometimes he wants to….

_No, not now. Nick needs an anchor, not righteous anger._

The angsty question, if a single nightmare has brought them back to square one, is also pushed away in favor of acting on his observations. In favor of staying sane.

_Go about this rationally. Give him space, pull him back into reality, talk to him._

"Nick", he says softly.

"Nick, you are safe. Your baby… our son is safe. You are at home. It's only been a dream. It cannot hurt you."

As he keeps up a soft murmur, he's relieved to see his Grimm's shoulders slowly unclenching and his breathing becoming more even. He himself cannot relax one bit as he watches his lover, unsure what Nick's final reaction will be. Will he tell him to leave him alone? Will he flee? Or lash out again? Has his hope that he has helped Nick heal been foolish? Have all those hours in his old home brought about the inevitable? A broken man, damaged for good?

He hopes to God that this is not the case! Even the thought of seeing his vivacious Grimm broken and sick makes his throat close up.

What happens next must have done so only moments after his initial thought, but if anyone were to ask him, it could have passed an eternity without his notice.

A violent shudder goes through Nick's body, his next moves almost explosive and accompanied by a hitch of breath, then the zauberbiest has an arm full of Grimm and could have passed out from sheer relief that Nick has come to seek his comfort rather than pushing him away.

_This is how dependent you have become of him…._

That inner voice sounds hard and cold. It's how he would have thought a year ago. Now he couldn't care less! As Nick presses his face to the crook of his neck, he only hugs him tighter and silently thanks God as he listens to Nick apologizing in the rush of a single harsh exhale.

"Fuck, Sean, I'm sorry!"

The zauberbiest only hums in a vague shushing way, protective instincts still fired up all the way. Frankly, right at this moment he wouldn't have cared, if Nick had broken his nose.

"No need to be. It was hardly a reaction you could control half caught up in your nightmare as you still were. And I'll certainly sleep better at night knowing that even at late pregnancy you can still hold yourself in a fight."

He rubs his lover's back with a gentleness that only ever comes to the fore, where his precious Grimm is concerned. He feels Nick relax at his last words and even thinks to have felt him huff a tiny, reluctant chuckle against his chest.

"It was hardly a fight. You were barely awake."
Sean decides to go along. If a bit of teasing helps Nick calm down…:

"That's what you think. I was alert the second you rose from the bed, you just downed me right after."

>>> 

Nick has to laugh now, even if it is a bit on the watery side. 

*Oh, damn it. Hell… I cannot say how much I love this man!... And how good it is not to talk about all that nightmare stuff right now….*

"Do I detect self-deprecating humor in your words? I am astonished at how humble my proud Prince has become. But now let me fetch some ice for your jaw. That bruise starts looking nasty."

He has ascertained the last by chancing up a long, assessing look when has still been clutching at his mate a little earlier. Seeing it now matters don't look any better. Rather worse, actually.

Nick flushes with chagrin. He really shouldn't go about sucker punching his mate at… 3am in the morning.

He makes to get out of bed but Sean takes his hand to halt him. In light of Nick's recent nightmare it's just a feather light touch. He loves his 'biest all the more for this kind of consideration and observance. Emboldened by his Grimm showing no adverse reaction, Sean raises his hand to his mouth to place a small kiss to palm and pulse point and Nick finds himself becoming less troubled in an instant. Sometimes it's just that simple these days.

"Why don't you leave the ice pack where it is and come to me instead. If you are comfortable with it, that is."

Nick doesn't hesitate. Not in regard to seeking his Prince's arms again, anyway. He does grumble about villainous zauberbiester sabotaging first aid attempts, but he doesn't hesitate at all.

After a long time of simply holding on to each other - of kissing slowly and stroking each others back and face and arms – they start talking about Nick's nightmare. And after that, at about 4:30am in the morning, Nick can finally persuade Sean to let him fetch an ice pack.

>>> 

Friday evening Nick is too wired up to sleep. Sean has gone into his office to take a call, so he is alone with his thoughts and the little tyke in his womb. His son. About to be born very soon. He can scarcely believe it. Only four weeks to go, his official leave starting tomorrow.

Over the last days news that he'll adopt a baby have been spread around the station. That's okay. It's what they've planned even. Reception of the news has varied from open support to head shakes from a select few. Nick has been relieved that the majority of his colleagues is okay with his decision and he has chosen to ignore the few exceptions. After all, as a Grimm he's used to getting shit from some people and even if he yearns to strangle anyone indirectly insulting his child – his precious baby boy – he's doing okay. It's just all a bit much right now. All these changes. Home stretch, so to speak. A world from how he would have envisioned his life months ago. It's like being plunged into the wesen world all over again, only that 'wesen' is 'raising a baby' now and 'researching in the trailer' has become 'getting advice from Rosalee and Owen'.

Today has been his last day at work, an occasion that’s gone over with a load of mixed and conflicted feelings. Hank, Wu, Franco, the Captain…. They have all been great. Even some of
those who he wouldn’t have expected to act on the matter at all, have taken the time to wish him their best. The challenge has actually been not to look like he’s about to weep every time one of his colleagues or friends has said or done something nice. Lately he’s been getting better at that – contrary to how it’s been at the beginning of his pregnancy – but today has seemed to be more than his countenance has been able to cope with.

Rolling his shoulders to relieve the tension there, he puts on some relaxing music and moves over to the big windows overlooking Portland to gaze out and let his thoughts drift. At first he keeps returning to his troubled pondering, then slowly, oh so slowly the music pulls him in. He looks down onto his heavily swollen belly, puts his hands to it and starts rubbing broad circles. Round and round, warming up the skin he touches…. Feeling Toisie move. Nowadays these moves aren't single kicks anymore but rather a baby barely small enough to fit into its confinement wriggling around. He smiles. It's just so mind boggling! This is his boy, his little lion. Warm pressure against his hand. He stills right there, keeping in contact. Truly amazing.

Concentrating so completely on his baby he doesn't even notice starting to sway to the gently flowing music. Or Sean entering the room for that matter.

>>>  

Sean steps out of his home office, slipping his phone back into his pant pocket and taking a look at his watch. Quite late already. Talking to Europe always seems to be more time consuming than initially planned.

Hearing soft music he lets his gaze sweep through the darkened room.

… And what he sees stops him dead in his tracks.

What a beautiful sight.

He shakes his head at his own antics. How often has this happened since Nick has weaved his way into his heart? How often has he been arrested in awe just by the sight of his lover?

He finds that it doesn't matter as long as he may continue to look his fill!

Nick is a black silhouette painted against the windows by a sea of city lights:

His beautiful pregnant Grimm. The way he's turned projects him in half-profile. A swollen belly protruding in almost a half globe. His capable hands resting on its expense. Nick's chin is pointing downward. He's looking down on his womb most likely.

The corners of Sean’s mouth turn upward as he continues leaning against the door frame content to watch his Grimm. It looks like he has completely forgotten the world around himself.

He’s humming along to the music. Humming to his baby. Connecting. Gently swaying his hips, taking up a rhythm whereas his voice takes up a melody.

God, what a sight.

Sean can imagine the gleam in his Grimm's eyes, the quiet joy. He doesn't need any light to know it's there.

Nick doesn't sense his presence for once and how should he? He's completely absorbed in connecting to his baby. The innocence projected by these simple actions takes Sean's breath and wakes the wish to protect his two boys against all evil in the world. To wrap his arms around them
and never let go.

Following that impulse he crosses the room. A short moment of stalling to give Nick the time to take note of his presence, then he moves in.

He places his hands on Nick's hips, the body between his hands relaxing instantly. Melting and drifting backward right into his embrace. His lips ghost over the side of Nick’s neck. Leisurely. Tenderly. Nick looks up, his smile reflected in the glass. Sean finds himself smiling back and murmuring against his mate's warm skin:

"Did you know what an enticing sight the two of you pose?... Beautiful."

"Hmm. Oh really? I don't know about that…. But I know that I like what you are doing."

A low chuckle.

"Do you now? And do you like it even more than swaying to the music? Because, you know, that's what you have been doing for quite a while now and it makes me want to do this…."

>>> He grabs Nick's hips more firmly, guiding him into what is less swaying and more like very slow dancing.

"Oh, this is new. New but I like it…. Really like it."

Nick leans his head back on Sean's shoulder, content to let his zauberbiest take the lead and move them as he likes. Lips brush over his temple, chaste and loving, before his big man leans his cheek onto the top of his head, almost in a nuzzling caress. He feels the chest against his own expand and knows that Sean is inhaling his scent. Soaking it up and - going by how he pulls him closer still - liking what he senses.

He nuzzles right back. Turns his head to press a kiss against his zauberbiest's cheek.

This feels so good. I think I could get addicted to this. Haha, funny. Who are you kidding? I already am.

He feels Toisie moving. Slowly, almost sleepily at first then with more lively. As if…

As if he liked the gentle motion very much. He huffs a laugh.

"Sean, I think our baby likes what we are doing."

"The kissing or the swaying?"

He knows the raised eyebrow is there, doesn't need to look at all. Grinning he says: "If it keeps you kissing me, then definitely the kissing, too. But if you'll keep up the kissing and swaying, anyway, then I’ll be honest and say, most likely the latter."

He laces his fingers with Sean's and moves their joined hands to rest on his womb. After a while a foot presses heavily against where one of their paired hands touch.

"I see what you mean. Both of it, actually. Well, if he likes that, then maybe he will like this as well."

Sean turns his Grimm around in his arms in the very slow approximation of a dancing twirl, gathers
him close again and starts sedately dancing with him.

"Did you ever dance with a man before?... Like this?"

A low and velvet murmur. It does the most wonderful things to the Grimm.

"No, I don't think I have. But it's very nice. And I've always thought you got to be a skilled dancer…. What with being a Prince and all."

"Oh, and did you think of me as a knight in shining white armor then as well?"

Nick knows he's being teased but he cannot for the life of him find anything bad about it.

"Nah. More like a black knight. That's not an insult, you know, because I've never really liked white knights in shining armor."

"Well, will you give your black knight a dance then?"

In answer Nick puts his head on his shoulder, humming and quite content to let his Prince take the lead.

This is truly amazing. Everything. To feel Sean pressing his own body against his so that their bellies keep in contact. To be able to touch and kiss and lean against him. Feeling safe. And loved.

At some point as they move across the room to the slow and easy sound of music, Toisie starts moving again. It really feels like he is leaning forward to rest right where his fathers' abdomens are touching. Sean notices it, too. And although Nick cannot see his face right now, he doesn't need to. It's enough to feel his big man's breath catch and hear him swallow audibly.

To be gathered closer and be kissed is kind of a hint as well. Toisie's starting to settle now, staying right there. In touch. He seems to like it. They all do.

In the near darkness they continue to dance, enjoying the moment. Cherishing it. Cherishing what they have as if they were aware that soon their world will be plunged into upheaval again.

Chapter End Notes

Okay, I know, a few more or less open declarations of how much they love each other…. Hope it wasn't too many. I just felt that by now especially Sean finally feels comfortable enough with loving someone to actually allow himself to think about it and be just a tiny bit dazzled. ;)

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