Summary

Relationships are hard when you can’t be honest, and in their line of work that was simply not possible. Lies were a necessity and keeping people at arms length ensured their safety, but it was a lonely existence. Or at least it used to be.

This is the story of how Dalton and Jaz found themselves backing into a relationship unexpectedly, because even a pair of battle worn loners need someone to lean on.

FYI, this story has a companion story Call Me Joseph, you do not have to read it to enjoy this one, but I’d definitely recommend it. :)

Also, check out the pinterest companion here...


Notes

This is my first time posting here and I don’t have a beta, so all mistakes are my own. Obviously, I do not own The Brave or the characters associated with it, I just enjoy dabbling...
in their world from time to time.
“You’re the only CO I’ve had that doesn’t see a woman first.”

“Well, I may not see it, but I don’t forget it because I know that getting here was harder for you than I’ll ever understand.”

Life is full of little moments. Moments that change your perspective and cast people in different lights. This was the moment that Dalton and Jaz started to see some light where there had once only been shadows.

The lives they led rarely translated well in long term relationships. It was hard to involve outsiders in a life that for the most part would have to be a lie. Or at the very least, a whole lot of omissions necessitated by the kind of work that they did.

They’d both tried and failed over their years of service as they learned that no matter how much love their partner had it was almost impossible to ask them to understand when you had to pick up and leave on a moments notice for god knows where and had no idea when you would be back. What made it worse was that you couldn’t tell them where you were going, and when you came back even though the missions might haunt your dreams and hollow you out inside, you couldn’t talk about it.

It was hard on those who did the work, and even harder on those who were left in the dark.

Neither Dalton nor Jaz had made any attempt to have a relationship in the three years that they had been working together. It was better that way. Or at least that’s what they’d been telling themselves.

Amir was still a mystery to most of the team, he didn’t talk often about the things that set him on this path and he seemed to cope best with a little solitude. McG on the other hand would cope by getting right with a pretty girl if time allowed, but he made it clear he had no need for emotional entanglements. And Preach, he had his kids. He was one of the few that had a real life to go home to.

Dalton and Jaz simply put the walls up and retreated to their corners of the bunker upon returning from a mission.

Or at least that’s what they used to do.

It had only been 48 hours since the bomb went off on the beach shattering any sense of security their “home” had provided. Sure, it was a bunker of sorts, but they’d been calling it home for long enough that they’d been lulled into thinking that it was safe.

On this night, the eerie silence of the place had settled around them. Everyone had fallen asleep hours ago, but Dalton was awake tracing every shadow wondering what might be lurking in the dark. He was on high alert, listening for any sound in the distance.

That’s when he heard it. It was a soft mewling sound coming from down the hall. Dalton stood silently as he pulled on a pair of flannel pants that sat at the foot of his bed and crept towards the door. The next time he heard the noise, it was followed by a sharp cry. It wasn’t loud, but he knew where it was coming from.

He carefully crept down the hall and opened the door to slip inside the room. The moonlight spilled in from the window behind her illuminating the bare skin of her shoulder and deepening the shadows that fell upon her face. The nightmare held her firmly in its grasp as she whispered about the kids and
the beach.

He knew all to well what was playing along the recesses of her mind in that moment.

He’d intended on simply waking her up and asking her if she wanted to talk, or perhaps recommending a few more sessions with the shrink but just as he was about to reach out to her his name fell from her lips.

He stood frozen to the spot. Had she noticed him? Was she awake?

When her eyes didn’t open, he started to rethink his plan. Maybe he should just leave her be.

Dalton turned on his heel and started to leave when he heard her strangled plea, “please don’t go.”

When he turned back towards her sleeping form he noticed a single tear clinging to the sweep of dark lashes that caressed her cheek.

“Jaz.” He whispered as he skimmed his hand gently over her shoulder.

She didn’t open her eyes, she just whispered his name once again and begged him to stay. He didn’t know if she was dreaming or if she was somehow aware of his presence, but as he looked at her he saw a shiver course through her and he just reacted.

“Jaz, it’s ok. I’ve got you.” He whispered as he carefully drew the covers back and laid down beside her.

Dalton allowed his hand to ghost over the soft skin of her arm before he turned on his side and watched her relax back into a dreamless sleep for a few minutes before he felt his eyes start to get heavy. He let his head fall back to the pillow and finally let sleep claim him.

He was jolted awake a short time later as Jaz started to thrash restlessly and murmur in her sleep. Without thought, he pulled her back into his chest and wrapped an arm over her as he pulled the blankets up over their shoulders and brushed the barest whisper of his lips across her shoulder that was left exposed by her tank top.

He didn’t have time to think about whether it was appropriate, and frankly he was too exhausted to think about how many lines were being crossed here. In that moment, it didn’t matter.

All that mattered was that she had relaxed into his embrace and breathed a sigh of relief as she settled back into his warmth. He caught the warm scent of apples that always clung to her skin, even when she was sweaty and covered in dirt. The scent had a calming familiarity that had him curling in around her once again as he let his exhaustion pull him back under.

Consequences were for clearer heads. Something he felt certain would prevail in the morning, but for now he was too consumed by exhaustion to care.
With the Light of Day Comes a Serving of Awkward

Chapter Notes

Again, I own nothing but the mistakes I make. But boy do I love pulling the strings

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“People like us don’t do powerless very well.”

It was still early when Jaz started to wake up, the sun was starting to creep over the horizon, but it wasn’t quite beating down on her back from the window behind her yet. So, why did she feel like she had a furnace blazing against her skin?

Dalton was almost instantly aware of his surroundings when he woke. Part of it was a hazard of the job, the other part was that he was 100% aware of the woman currently stretching like a cat in the sun against him. And it was in that moment of full stretch that said woman realized their current predicament.

Dalton was firmly pressed up against her back and she had just raised a very real and prominent issue with just enough direct contact. It was unintentional on both their parts, or at least that’s what their body language screamed as they both froze and waited for someone to respond.

“Top,”

“Jaz, I’m...”

They both sputtered out at the same time.

Dalton held up a hand and she turned carefully so as not to make the situation any more awkward, but the low groan emanating from her CO told her that she was failing at said mission.

“Sorry.” She stated with a sleepy smile as a light flush colored her cheeks.

Dalton cleared his throat and said, “No, I’m sorry. I didn’t intend to stay here all night. You were having a nightmare. I was just going to see if you wanted to talk, but...”

There was no explanation he could give. Spending five seconds in her bed would have been inappropriate and yet he’d spent the whole night.

“Top, thank you. It’s the best night of sleep I’ve had in weeks.” Jaz replied as she tried to ease his mind.

In the light of day, she could almost hear the gears turning in his big, messy, complicated head.

He was already calling himself names and berating himself for crossing a line with a subordinate. And maybe he was...or they were. Whatever, in their line of work there is little comfort to be had and she damn sure wasn’t going to apologize for a good night of sleep. They would all be better for it in the long run.

“You know it’s not like anything happened.” Jaz added.
“No, but clearly it crossed my mind, or...something.” Dalton said as he waved a hand towards his lower body which was blessedly still being camouflaged by the sheet on her bed.

“Oh come on. Like that doesn’t happen when you’re alone in your own bed.” She laughed.

Now a faint blush rose up on Dalton’s cheeks as he laughed.

“It’s not like I’m some teenager. I do have some self control.” Dalton grumbled as he sat up and turned his back to her.

“I know that you idiot. I’m just saying I know it wasn’t me. You’re off the hook.” Jaz said as she tried to diffuse the situation.

Dalton stood up abruptly trying to put some distance between them and started to walk towards the door. He stopped and took a breath before he looked back at her and smiled.

“I never said it wasn’t you.”

He left her dumbfounded as he stepped out into the hall and softly closed the door behind him to make his way back to his own bed. He was hoping that the rest of the team had not been aware of his absence.

“Morning Top.”

No such luck...

Preach’s greeting came from the kitchen as Dalton halted in his tracks and glanced in his direction. There was a knowing look in his eye, but he refrained from broaching the subject for which he was thankful. He was still trying to wrap his head around what he had been thinking the night before. Fortunately, Preach was the only one awake, Dalton wasn’t sure the others would have been so quick to let it go if they had known.

“Morning.” Dalton said as he rubbed his beard and started back on his path toward a hot shower.

He didn’t see the smile on Preach’s face as he watched him walk back to his quarters.

Neither Dalton nor Jaz had a lot of time to evaluate what happened that morning, or how they came to find themselves in that situation, because they got called out to the Ukraine for a new mission just hours later.

They were tasked with locating Cassie Connors and bringing her back to safety after her entire team was executed by the Russians, who were clearly determined to find the young agent first.

To say it didn’t go as planned was an understatement, but the woman was a force. Dalton couldn’t help but admire her determination and quick thinking.

Not unlike a certain raven haired sniper ninja who seemed to have invaded every corner of his psyche in the last few months. He wasn’t sure when things started to change exactly, but he knew that they were changing.

He also knew that it was wrong.

He was her CO, and any lines crossed could put them all in danger, but with every rationalization he made in his mind there was another thought that entered into the fray. That was the first real nights
sleep he’d had in he didn’t know when. Months? Years?

Was that bad for the team? The answer was no.

He also knew that was exactly how more lines got crossed.

Jaz spent a good portion of the trip back to Turkey thinking about that morning she’d woken up blissfully warm wrapped up in Adam Dalton’s arms.

She knew it was all kinds of wrong, but the more she thought about it the harder it was for her to just cast it off as a mistake. He hadn’t done it with some plot to corrupt her, and let’s face it she was corrupted long before Dalton ever became a fixture in her life.

It’s not like he crawled into her bed with the intent to seduce her. He’d simply intended to comfort a friend. And that’s what they were. Yes, he was her CO, but there was a mutual respect between them that went well beyond rank or experience.

Dalton didn’t see her as a woman who happened to be a top notch sniper. He saw a top notch sniper. Period.

In her experience, most of the men she had served with always saw her as a woman first and as a sniper only after she saved their asses.

Usually several times.

And even then, as soon as the hail of enemy fire was over it was back to snide remarks and leering looks. With Dalton, and really the entire team it had never been that way.

Part of that was the team as a whole having a mutual respect for one another, but another bigger part of the picture started at the top. If Dalton had treated her the way her past CO’s had that door might have been opened.

But he hadn’t.

Not once.

As soon as they landed back at their home base, Jaz took off in search of a hot shower. She was starving, but nothing felt better than washing the mess of a shit day (or several in their case) from your skin. Sure, they’d gotten Cassie out safely, but not without a lot of effort, too many close calls, and a good amount of head butting among them.

She felt bad for going against Dalton. She knew it had been wrong, but sometimes she let her emotions rule when logic says the best thing to do is sit tight.

She doesn’t do sitting tight well.

The only time that works for her is when she is in a sniper’s nest waiting for a target to step into her site line.

Then it’s game on.

But this had been different. There was a woman out there on her own and no matter how capable she was, and Cassie had proven herself a very worthy adversary for a veritable army of Russian mercs on her trail, she was still out there all alone and injured. It was hard for Jaz to just sit back knowing
that it was different for women in their situation.

She didn’t want the men around her to acknowledge that, but she knew that no matter how skilled she or Cassie were they were never on equal footing if they were captured by a bunch of armed men. All she wanted was to make sure the army hunting for Cassie didn’t get that opportunity.

She knew that the guys in her unit wanted the same thing, but she vented her frustrations in a manner that wasn’t exactly constructive and Top made sure to call her, and really all of them on it. At least their morning hadn’t changed that.

So, once she was showered and had some time to think, she made her way out to find Dalton and make sure he knew that she hadn’t meant to question his decision.

She owed him an apology.

She spotted him over by the old dilapidated grill trying...and failing to teach Patton some manners.

“ Seems like no one wants to listen to you.” She said with a smirk.

“Yeah, I’m sensing a pattern.”

She could tell he was going to let her off the hook easy, but she needed to say what she came out there to say. She owed him the words, and she meant them.

“Listen, I was wrong to question you when we were waiting on DC.”

“You were frustrated.” He corrected, again trying to let her off the hook.

“I was wrong. Doing nothing was the right call. It was your call and I’m sorry.”

He heard her, she knew he did, but he still let it play off as a joke.

“What was that? I thought I heard something...” he said as he cast a brilliant smile in her direction.

“I don’t think anyone said anything.” She said glancing over her shoulder as she laughed with him.

For the second time in the last few days, Preach looked on casting a knowing glance at the pair. They may not be ready to see what was before them, but he saw it.

The moment had passed and Jaz could tell Dalton had something more serious on his mind as he looked back in her direction. He didn’t talk about himself much, but for whatever reason, he cracked the door on his past for her in that moment.

His eyes were cast down when he started to talk, but she made sure to keep her eyes focused on him. If he was willing to open up to her, she would damn sure give him her full attention.

“Look when I was a kid, my old man used to get sloppy as hell. Only thing I could do was wait. Just sit there, take whatever he threw at me, let it pass. Sometimes, all you can do is wait.”

She smiled at him and said, “People like us don’t do powerless very well.”

He laughed as he pulled dinner off the grill and started to walk away before he threw back, “Ya think.”

They were more alike than either of them had been aware. It was in part why they worked so well together. And it was also what had started to draw them closer together.
Dalton wasn’t an open book, and it was a rarity that he opened up about himself to anyone. Jaz knew that, so it was difficult for her to put away the story he’d just shared. She wanted more than anything to put her arms around that little boy that peeked his head through the door he’d opened, she just wasn’t sure he would let her.

Chapter End Notes

I’m not sure what my update schedule is going to be going forward, but for now I have a plan for the first nine chapters so I will get those out as quickly as I can. I am going to stick with the episodes for the moment, but I’m not going to always go that route since I don’t think this is going to be 13 chapters or less. But I haven’t gotten that far yet. Obviously there are little pieces of the actual episodes in here, but I am working on focusing on what might be happening in between what we see on screen, so it is unlikely to impact how long this story can go. If you have any prompts, feel free to throw them my way and I’ll be sure to credit you if I work them into the story. I hope you enjoy this one! Thanks for the comments and the kudos.
“Haven’t you ever felt that way about someone before?”

That was a loaded question, and one that had been flitting through Dalton’s mind for weeks now. But even as Vargas had asked him that question not expecting an answer, one popped into his head anyway.

Jaz.

Did he love her? That was a question he couldn’t answer, but it was no longer the deep end of the pool that he dare not wade into.

He had crossed a line, and now he was torturing himself as he did everything he could to keep from crossing it again, or completely wiping the line off the map entirely.

There were lots of little things that drew him.

She was kind, and compassionate. She genuinely cared about the people they were tasked to help, just as she did the team. As a sniper, it was all too easy to disconnect from the world, but she dug in and tethered herself to those she cared about. She leaned into the people around her to stay grounded even though her specific skill set often lent itself to solitude.

She also called him out when he was brooding, and was quick to make him laugh when things got too serious.

Jaz had a sense of pride that she brought to her work, but she also had the humility to admit mistakes. A lot of people in her position would never allow someone to see even the slightest shade of vulnerability, but she’d been fearless in allowing him to see that even her pride wouldn’t keep her from doing what was right.

Her apology last week had been sincere, and while he had appreciated the gesture he wanted her to know he understood and that even if he didn’t agree with her, he valued her opinion as much as any other member of their team. The apology was unnecessary, but he knew she needed to get it out there. Perhaps it was her way of trying to set the ground level after that awkward morning.

Dalton decided that it couldn’t happen again. And it didn’t.

For a while.
Funny thing is, this time he wasn’t the one that crossed the line first.

Jaz was having a tough time getting to sleep when they returned from Mexico. Agent Vargas’ unwavering dedication had given her a glimpse of where this could go if neither of them had the guts to test the waters. Vargas was so clearly haunted by a woman he could never have, and Jaz was currently under the same roof with a man she shouldn’t have, but desperately wanted.

For some reason, the parallels were not lost on her.

Ever since she woke up beside Dalton she’s had something to miss. Sure, she’d fall asleep when sheer exhaustion took hold, or when she knew there were only fleeting minutes of sleep to be had on mission. But, on nights like this where they were tucked into warm beds after hot meals and hot showers with threats being few and far between she struggled.

Her eyes might flutter shut momentarily, but she was always shocked awake by the ghost of his arms, and his warm breath coasting over a sliver of her overheated skin. It was torture knowing what that kind of comfort felt like when she’d had so little of it to hold onto throughout her life. It had always seemed fleeting and never failed to slip through her fingers.

These thoughts were what kept her awake on this night.

It’s what sent her meandering down the darkened hallways of the bunker in search of....Something.

As she walked past his door, she saw a slice of light spilling out from beneath its metal frame.

Maybe she had been looking for someone instead.

Jaz stood outside his door for what felt like hours before she finally worked up the courage to lightly tap her knuckles on the door. It was light enough that he might not have heard her. So much so, that she started to turn and walk away as her determination ebbed away momentarily.

Then she heard his bare feet hit the floor and pad across the tiles, his own shadow now dancing over the only light she could see. That light spread like the warmth of a fire on a cold winter night as the door inched open, his shadow reaching towards her as he finally came into view.

“Jaz?” He whispered as he glanced around making sure she was alone.

“Sorry, I couldn’t sleep and I saw...”

She couldn’t quite figure out how to explain herself, so she simply gestured towards the light that swept towards her feet.

“Oh, well if you want to talk, you know...” Dalton said as he stepped back and gestured for her to come inside.

“I shouldn’t have. I mean, it’s not. We shouldn’t.”

“Look Jaz, that’s a bell we can’t unring. So, stop over thinking. We can sit in the same room and have a conversation without it having to mean something. Right?”

Dalton wasn’t sure if he was trying to convince her or himself.
“Right.” She said as she carefully slipped past him and walked into his room.

She didn’t touch him, but she might as well have for the way her eyes coasted over every inch of exposed skin.

“Yeah, right. I can totally do this.” Jaz thought to herself as she rolled her eyes at her own stupidity.

This was just another step over the line and they both knew it.

“What?” He asked as she walked by.

She mentally smacked herself because apparently her brain to mouth filter had vacated once again.

“Nothing. It’s nothing.”

Dalton watched her as she glanced uneasily around his room. She was looking for a place to sit, but there was only one option. His bed. So, he grabbed a pillow and set it against the foot board as he casually leaned back into it while pointing to the other pillow at the head of the bed.

Jaz smiled, but her eyes wouldn’t meet his as she sat down facing him and held his pillow to her chest protectively.

It virtually ensured he would struggle to sleep whenever he had the opportunity, because it would now undoubtedly have the scent of warm apples clinging to it. A scent that he now knew was all Jaz.

Which is funny, because over the last three years he had spent countless hours in tight spaces with his sniper and he had never noticed that intoxicating scent. It was almost certainly there, but he’d never once registered it. It wasn’t until that morning that he held her warm, sleep softened form in his arms that the scent became his newest addiction.

Now he smelled it everywhere. Or he wanted to. Shit, he was in so much trouble.

“So, talk to me Jaz.” He whispered as he placed his hand playfully on her foot. “What’s going on in that head of yours that’s keeping you from shutting down?”

“I could ask the same of you.” She said.

“I asked you first.”

“You.” She said as she glanced up at him through her lashes.

He looked at her stunned for a moment before he regained his composure, somewhat.

“I, uh, me? Did I do something?”

“It’s not what you did, so much as what we did, or didn’t do.”

Dalton searched for words, but she spoke again before he managed to get anything out.

“I mean we woke up together. It shouldn’t be a big deal, right? But, it kind of feels like a big deal.”

“Look, I’m the one at fault here,” Dalton began.

“No. That’s not where I was going. Maybe this was a mistake.” She said as she dropped the pillow
to the bed and started to stand.

Before she got a step away, Dalton was standing in front of her staring into her expressive eyes. He’d never been much of a romantic, but as he stared into them he knew that he’d already lost the battle. Everything he wanted was standing right in front of him, just waiting for him to do something. Anything.

Dalton reached his hands out and tentatively slipped them underneath the curtain of her hair so that they rested against her neck and his thumbs gently feathered over her jaw on either side. It was the most he’d allowed himself to touch her in weeks and it felt a whole lot more intimate than waking up with her cradled in his arms had.

Yep, he was going to cross this line with Olympic level accuracy. No baby steps for Adam Dalton.

“Jaz, I’ve played by the rules my whole life. First, the rules set by my drunkard old man. Then, the Army. And finally, by my own personal standards. Never once have I been tempted to break those rules. Not once. Until recently.”

She stared up at him wondering what he was saying to her. Was he acknowledging the charge in the room, or was he about to toss a bucket of ice water on the situation?

He knew that if he pushed her away now this was over. And that was probably the right thing to do, but he just couldn’t bring himself to do it.

“Dalton, I’m standing in the dark here. I can’t make you cross a line you don’t want to cross, and I don’t want that responsibility, but if you want to walk away from whatever this is...then I need you to say it. Because when you look at me like you are right now, I can’t walk away. I don’t want to. So, tell me, am I in this alone?”

She got her answer only a second later when his hands threaded into her hair and his lips just barely ghosted over hers.

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It happened so fast, she felt like a butterfly had landed on her skin and flitted away into the distance. As she stared up at him, she wondered if perhaps she’d just imagined it. But as she took stock of the situation, a fiercely determined look came over him.

It was like watching that moment when someone just says, “fuck it” and throws all caution out the window because a second later she was crushed up against him and he was all but consuming her.

Damn but this man could kiss.

He was fierce in the best way. The passion that he fought with had always been something she admired, but having that passion directed solely at her was something she wanted to drink in. Memorize.

His kiss was relentless, but gentle as he brushed his lips against hers seeking an invitation. One she gave willingly. Electricity seemed to hum between them as they deepened the kiss. His beard stung her delicate skin but she couldn’t be bothered to care. Even though it would certainly raise some eyebrows come morning.

Her hands went immediately to his stomach hoping to find purchase in his favorite Army t-shirt to ground herself, but all she got was a couple handfuls of his perfectly sculpted abs. A realization that tore a soft moan that somehow escaped into the sliver of air between them.
Dalton pulled back momentarily to stare into her eyes looking for the slightest bit of apprehension, but all he got was a mirrored look of blissed out blown pupils. It was stunning to see and something that up until that moment had seemed like a distant fantasy.

Yep, he’d wiped that line out like a bad magician yanking a tablecloth out from under priceless china. And there was a good chance it could all come crashing down and shatter around them, but he knew that was a chance he was willing to take.

Vargas was right.

Sometimes you have to risk everything. Even if you end up with nothing in the end.

They were both breathless, chests heaving as they sucked oxygen into their lungs trying to regain some composure. As Jaz watched Dalton in that moment, she was gifted with a blinding smile that made his blue eyes sparkle and her heart flutter just a little bit faster. If that was even possible.

“What?” She asked.

“I’ve been thinking about that since that morning a few weeks ago.” He whispered as he rubbed his thumb over her kiss stung lower lip.

She started to question him, but he shook his head and took one more gentle taste of her lips before he whispered, “About this whole not sleeping thing, I think I have a cure.”

He leaned away from her as he lifted up the sheets on his bed and threw the pillows back to the top of the bed. He grazed his hand down her arm all the way to her hip before giving her a gentle nudge in the direction of his bed and then followed her in.

The moment had passed and exhaustion followed heavily on the heels of the endorphins that flowed through them, but it didn’t stop her from leaning into his arms and stealing one more kiss.

This one was different, it was one of comfort and assurance.

With that, Dalton stretched out and pulled Jaz into his side with her head laying to rest against his shoulder as she listened to his heart beat slow to a steady rhythm that quickly lulled them both to sleep.

The light of day would bring fresh eyes to the situation, but it would bring no regrets.
Walking on Bombshells

Chapter Summary

As always, I own nothing but my mistakes.

I am splitting the Prison episode in half because otherwise this is going to turn into a 6000 word monster. But I should have the other half up tomorrow for you.

For those that may have noticed the quotes heading up the chapters which are usually directly tied to the underlying feelings running in the background. In this one, I thought it was worth clarifying that even though these two have some things to work out, when things go off the rails one certainty is they can count on each other no matter what. Job comes first because their sense of duty means everyone comes home. That will come into play later.

So, who do you think is going to figure this out first? Cat remains in the bag right now, but it’s not going to stay that way forever...

“Ok, Jaz. I need you to find a tower and set overwatch.”

It was barely passed 0500 when Dalton’s sat phone started to rumble on the table beside his bed.

He groaned at the intrusion, but promptly turned to grab it in the hopes that he could enjoy the soft little kitten beside him before she woke up and fell back into her standard full tiger demeanor.

Admittedly, that was kind of hot, too. But this side was a well kept secret that he had only witnessed once before and he really didn’t have the time to enjoy it with the awkward “biological” intrusion.

It was a side of her that he knew only he had seen, one that he was sure he’d never get enough of.

This time would be different as a phone call from Deputy Director Campbell was sure to quell any urges that might have risen to the surface.

“Deputy Director.” Dalton answered as he rubbed his beard and attempted to sound half awake and a little less guilty.

He was fairly certain he flat out failed at one of those two things as he made the mistake of looking at the pint sized ninja currently burrowed into his side.

He should have gotten up, but the idea of disturbing her wasn’t high on his list because he knew she’d head back to her own room as soon as she thought anyone else might be awake.

Selfishly, he wanted a few more minutes to hold onto before they flew off to whatever hell hole Patricia was planning to send them to.

Apparently his inner musings took a bit more of his attention than he’d intended because Patricia was impatiently calling out to him on the other end of the line.
“Dalton. Hello...Dalton. I know it’s early, but I need your team wheels up by 0700. Do you think you can manage that?”

“Yes. Of course Deputy Director. I’m sorry, I’m just a little tired this morning.”

“Well, you’ve got just under five hours of flight time to catch up.”

Patricia took about ten more minutes to get Dalton up to speed before she let the cat out of the bag and blew his guilty conscience out of the water in one shot.

“I’ll see you at the prison.”

Dalton did the best he could not to choke on the breath of air that caught in his lungs, but he failed miserably which inevitably had Patricia wondering what the hell was going on and a very sleepy Jaz about to protest the sudden movement.

Just as the words were about to slip free from her pretty mouth Dalton gently put a hand over her and abruptly ended the call while muttering some incoherent excuse.

Surely, that wasn’t going to come back to bite him in the ass later.

“What’s going on.” Jaz asked as he removed his hand from her mouth.

He didn’t answer her, instead he leaned in and delivered a kiss that should’ve been illegal on several continents.

While she certainly hadn’t been hooking up like McG did on occasion, she hadn’t exactly been celibate either, but kissing those men hadn’t even been in the same league as kissing Adam Dalton.

She’d never felt like she’d been deprived of such an experience, but in this moment she knew she would measure anyone that came after him against it. Even in her very brief experience with Dalton, she was pretty sure no one was going to measure up.

He moved with unspoken discipline as he brushed his nose lightly against her upper lip, begging entry which she willingly gave. As she opened to him, he savored her lips as if she’d been the finest wine he had ever tasted. All the while, his calloused hands were anchoring hers to his head board as he stretched out above her never allowing his full weight to land on her even though her whole body was practically begging for him to do just that.

Dalton quite literally had her purring.

His lips graced every inch of skin that her tank top would allow and perhaps infringed just a bit before returning to her neck being careful not to mark her up, if only because they were going to have a captive audience for the next few days. As it was her lips were already kiss swollen and abraded from his beard.

He was praying that a shower and a little makeup would cover that up, but the reality was makeup on Jaz heading into a mission in an Afghan prison would be more telling than a little beard burn.

He knew that he had moments before she’d have to leave him and they almost certainly wouldn’t be able to do this again for several days. So, even with her currently warm and willing in his arms right now, he already missed this.

He had yet to tell her that Patricia was going to be meeting them in just a few hours.
And damn if that thought wasn’t all it took to lay waste to this perfect moment. That single thought being the ice bath that it was.

“Fuck.” He muttered into her neck.

“What’s wrong?”

“We have to be wheels up in...less than two hours.” Dalton said as he blew out his frustration.

“What, why didn’t you lead with that?” She practically shouted as she jumped up and started for the door.

Dalton stopped her just before she could escape and whispered, “I just wanted one more minute before I gave up the fantasy where we could stay in bed all day.”

She smiled and he wrapped an arm low around her waist as he leaned in to steal one more kiss before he opened the door and glanced toward the kitchen trying to determine if anyone was up yet. When he decided that it was clear, he stepped back and watched as Jaz made her way back to her room, then he made his way out towards the kitchen.

Dalton was sure he was the first one up, but apparently Jaz wasn’t the only one with ninja skills. Preach was standing next to the sink with a knowing look and a pot of coffee that had some strings attached.

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“Preach, just give me the damn coffee. We have to be wheels up in just over an hour now.”

“Mmmhmm. I heard the sat phone almost an hour ago. Care to explain why it took you so long to get out here and tell me?” Preach said with a smirk.

Dalton gave him a look that clearly stated he had no intention of explaining shit to him, so Preach made sure to get the last word in.

“Ok, well, I took the liberty of waking the team. Except for Jaz, I couldn’t find her. Any idea where she could be?”

Preach was eyeing him up good, and when he recognized the guilty puppy look that his kids gave him he had the audacity to laugh out loud.

“Top, you are about to get yourself in a world of trouble. You know that right?”

“I do.”

“Just gonna to march right into the fire then, are you?”

“Can’t think of a better way to go down.” He answered as he poured a cup of coffee and jogged back to his room to catch a shower and gear up.

Preach laughed and shook his head as he watched his friend disappear.

This was going to be fun.

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Jaz took the bit about Patricia meeting them at the prison well. That is if abject horror was a good reaction.

“What the hell Top. She’s totally going to know something’s up. I’m already sure Preach knows something.”

“Oh yeah, he totally knows.”

She didn’t get a chance to respond as the rest of the team was rolling up on the tarmac essentially ending their discussion. Dalton was laughing, but Jaz was completely freaking out. It would take the full five hours in flight for her to settle down, and the tension was certainly not lost on the others.

“What’s going on with you Jazzy, you’ve said like three words all morning.” McG said.

“I’m sorry it was about five hours too early and I’m still about three cups of coffee short of the threshold required to be stuck staring at your ugly face.”

“There she is. I was beginning to think Top broke you.” McG mused.

Both Jaz and Dalton had a look of panic before Amir jumped into the fray.

“Geez, you two need to lighten up, whatever it is that you two were arguing about I’m sure it’s nothing.” Amir added as he gawked at the two of them.

“You two really need to get laid or something, it’s bad for your health to be coiled so tightly all the time.” McG offered.

“Yeah, maybe you two should get on that. McG can be your wing man.” Preach joked.


“What about you Jazzy, what’s your poison? Tall, dark and dangerous? Athletic?” McG asked oblivious to the can of worms he was spilling all over the place.

“Let me guess, blonde, blue eyed, and broody.” Preach whispered for her ears only.

In that moment, she realized that he did totally know and Dalton had been aware of that fact.

“Payback is a bitch pretty boy.” Jaz shouted towards her CO as the tension finally started to ease back.

Or at least it was until Dalton responded.

“Counting on it.” He shouted over the hum of the engines before he gave her a wink.

Jaz glanced around, but only Preach seemed to be in on the joke. McG was already plotting out a trip to a some red light district in the first real city they landed in.

“Ooh, maybe we’ll get sent to Paris or Amsterdam. Bad stuff still happens there, right?” McG threw out with a little too much enthusiasm given their general reasons for travel.

“Seriously McGuire. Paris or Amsterdam are the best places you can think of to find a hook up?” Dalton wondered aloud.

“Right, and when was the last time that you’ve even had a hook up, Top.”
Dalton caught a glimpse of her out of the corner of his eye. She looked horrified at the prospect of being outed, but Dalton wasn’t too worried about the team. Sure, he knew McG would have a field day with the information, but he knew deep down the team would be fine with it provided they kept things PG-13 and that they were both happy. Of course, there would be the concern for if shit went sideways, but Dalton was fairly certain they could handle whatever came their way.

Besides, his only plans for things going sideways with Jaz involved a bed and a whole lot more privacy.

For now, he would play along with their banter until he’d had a chance to discuss things with Jaz.

“You’re absolutely right McG, I defer to your superior knowledge on sketchy hook up locales around the globe.”

“See, now that’s all I wanted.”

With that, laughter flowed and Jaz started to forget that Patricia Campbell could sniff out lies like a bomb dog in three seconds flat.

At least the whole team would be there, hopefully McG’s constant banter with himself would dull her spidey sense, or at least get her to tune out.

“So, did you get the house rules.” Preach asked as Dalton came back to the group after speaking to the man in charge of the prison.

“Yep. Hands outside the cages at all times. I want you three on the outside. McGuire, you’ll be with us. Side arms only.” He said as he walked over and placed his gear on the bed of the humvee and cast a reassuring glance in Jaz’s direction.

She was still listening, but the chorus of “well this could go fifty shades of fucked up” was running in a loop the whole time he spoke. She wasn’t sure if her weariness was over the idea of Dalton and McG in there with a master interrogator, or if it was the fact that the three of them were going to be in a prison with some of the worst men The Taliban could offer, which is truly saying something.

Both were terrifying, but Patricia had a slight edge.
Ok, so this is well over 3000 words...so there is going to be a third chapter tied to the Prison episode coming.

FYI, I did take some liberties with the relationship with Dalton and Patricia. I do think they have a very close relationship on the show, but I pushed the envelope a little bit on that relationship and their history...hope that you don’t hate that bit.
I think maybe you’re going to like this one though!
Please let me know what you think, I really enjoy hearing from you!

“Status is whole, healthy and delivered like a sinner on Sunday.”

To say things had not gone according to plan would be an understatement of epic proportions. The prison rescue had been a shit sandwich at a table for seven in a dumpster fire.

Whatever could have gone wrong did, and it didn’t end outside the walls of the prison.

Heavy fire, a rocket launcher, a stupid kid with a pseudo death wish, and a drone strike followed. And yet, Dalton still felt lucky.

Sitting on the chopper was a moment of quiet. Not literally, but everyone was sort of taking stock of the day. Trying to shelve the bad shit and dwell on the positives. A lot of people would live because of that intel, and the team was walking away relatively unscathed all things considered.

In their line of work, it was a win, even if they’d be feeling this one like the after effects of running an iron man race under heavy fire for weeks.

It was going to hurt.

For Dalton, maybe a little more than the others.

His ears were ringing from the blast by the humvee, and he felt like he might vomit at any moment but he was hoping that would pass. At least until they got home and he could safely collapse on his bathroom floor away from prying eyes.

He wanted to close his eyes so badly, but his equilibrium was off. It just made him feel like the helo was in a tail spin and that made everything worse.

Home. That’s all he could think about.

He glanced around slowly taking in the faces of his team. McG was working on the kid who looked like he had stabilized. Amir was beside him holding an IV bag, he didn’t seem to be any worse for wear.

Patricia was watching the kid. Her eyes were haunted, undoubtedly seeing her son in that kid. And
he was literally just a kid.

It was hard to see how he got on his path, but clearly he believed he was right. At the end of the day, he would pay for those convictions, but he did the right thing and helped them save a lot of innocent people.

Preach looked to be sleeping, but in reality he was probably just drifting to the place in his mind where his kids reside. Pushing them on the swings in the back yard and listening to them laughing as they run around that yard. It was his happy place, the place he went when they had days like today.

Finally, his eyes landed on Jaz. Her eyes were taking a mental inventory. Not of her ammo, or her gear, but him. Her eyes were focused on the blood that was smeared down his left leg. Dalton didn’t think it was his, but he couldn’t say for sure until the pants came off.

As her eyes traveled up, they zeroed in on his vest, that’s when her hand came up and skimmed over the very real bullet hole.

Without the vest, Dalton’s mode of transport might have been very different. McG might have had two patients. Or maybe still just the one, maybe Dalton doesn’t walk out at all had that shot made it to its intended destination.

Maybe they’d have been forced to leave him behind, carrying only a jar of sand like Patricia had been forced to do.

Dalton shook his head at that thought. He was alive, and he was going home. Can’t really ask for more than that after a day like this.

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Jaz watched Dalton for the entire flight. His focus was off, she was sure he was feeling the full effects of that blast. The fact that he wasn’t dry heaving in the fetal position was a testament to his mental toughness, because she had no doubt that’s exactly what he’d be doing if no one was watching.

She hadn’t meant to touch him, but the hole in his vest had drawn her attention, and it was just instinct. She’d caught herself before it looked like something inappropriate, but she knew Patricia wouldn’t need a billboard to figure out that something was different between them.

That was the last conversation Dalton needed with the way he must be feeling.

That feeling was confirmed when he didn’t even move as they landed to rendezvous with a medical transport who would get Nate to a nearby military hospital where he would have surgery. Once he was stable, he’d be escorted back to the US to face whatever consequences await him.

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When they finally touched down near their home base, they’d gotten word that Nate was stable and would be ready for transport in a couple of days.

That was good news, but it meant there was a good chance Patricia would be sticking around in order to escort the kid home.

Ordinarily, Dalton didn’t have an issue with Patricia sticking around. He’d known her for a long time and had been close with her son.
In a lot of ways, Patricia had been a mother figure to him even though he’d been a teenager when they first met. Maybe it was because his own mother hadn’t been a big factor in his life growing up, and his dad, well he wasn’t a model of parental anything.

Patricia had been the first person in his life that had made him feel like they had his back in a way that a parent should.

That probably wouldn’t make sense to a lot of people, but when you grow up the way that he did you generally either venture further into the ways of your parents, or you seek out order. That’s almost certainly why he wound up in the military.

Somewhere along the way he’d landed in Patricia’s orbit and she’d seen through the soldier and saw that little boy he never really got to be. So, while she was unquestionably in charge as much as he was to those in his team, there was definitely a different dynamic between them.

They had a bond because of their relationship as well as his relationship with her son. Perhaps, an outsider might question her ability to oversee Dalton’s unit because of that relationship, but for those that had the privilege to work in the field office or out in the field there would be few that would cast doubts. The trust they had not only between them but within the field unit was above reproach.

All that aside, it didn’t mean Dalton wanted her around while he dry heaved on the bathroom floor. So, the prospect of her staying behind was not helping his level of discomfort.

Not to mention the fact that he was hoping for a little more time to figure out how to deal with the whole Jaz situation. He knew he was going to have to put it out in the open at some point, but he and Jaz needed to talk about that before he even considered talking to Patricia about it.

It could blow up in his face, but in reality having Patricia out in the field where she could see that they could work together without major conflict could work in their favor. The reality is, it’s not any more unorthodox than his relationship with the Deputy Director. Certainly, it was something that might not be ideal but there would be no stuffing this one back into the box.

Even if he could, he didn’t want to.

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The ride in the humvee had been excruciating. Dalton felt like his brain was rattling around in his head. Unfortunately, at the same time he also felt like his stomach was attempting to turn itself inside out.

But he was muscling through.

Jaz could see the thin sheen of sweat on his brow and the way his eyes would roll back every time they hit a bump a little too hard. All she wanted to do was reach out to him, but there were entirely too many eyes in that humvee.

She glanced at Preach who immediately saw the despair in her eyes. He’d seen her hands twitch every time Top looked uncomfortable.

“Hey McG, maybe you should hop on back and check on Top. He’s looking a little rough.” Preach said discreetly.

He knew if he’d said it loud enough Dalton would protest.
McG moved towards Dalton casually as he tried not to alert his CO to his real motivation.

“Hey Top, that was a hell of a blast.”

“Yep, and I’m fine.” Dalton said.

He knew full well that the medic wasn’t just back there to reminisce about a shit day.

“I get it Top. I do, but maybe you could just let me have a look and then I’ll leave you alone.”

Dalton waved his hand for him to get on with it. He knew if he continued to protest every one in the vehicle would be paying more attention to him. Better to just get it over with.

McG checked his eyes, pulse, and all the usual vitals. Even Dalton knew that he would conclude he was concussed and maybe a little shocky, for sure there would be no missing the massive bruise he would have from that shot to the chest, but it was far better than the hole he could have had.

McG didn’t look thrilled with Dalton’s situation, which meant he was likely to helicopter over him for the next 24 hours. That was just perfect.

“I know you don’t want me fussing over you, but at least let me give you some fluids. I’ll do my best not to hover, but I’m not making any promises. You got rocked today, and you look a little like shit.”

“Fuck off McG. I just need a hot shower and a bed.”

“Humor me, and I’ll do my best to make sure you get what you want as quickly as possible.”

Dalton gave a faint nod after he noticed the concern in Jaz’s eyes. For her, he’d stop fighting this, McG wasn’t going to give up anyway.

An hour later, Dalton was shivering on his bed still in most of his gear as McG started IV fluids and some oxygen, and checked him over more thoroughly.

He really wanted to take him in for further testing, but he knew as long as Dalton was conscious and somewhat ambulatory that wasn’t going to happen.

His gut said it was a concussion, and he needed to be monitored and that he was definitely showing signs of shock, which wasn’t exactly out of the ordinary considering he’d been shot at, actually shot, had two explosions go off in his near vicinity, spent several hours on two flights before wrapping up the day in a bumpy as fuck humvee ride.

Even one of those things would throw any normal person for a loop, so the fact that Dalton is coherent, and rather pissed off at being poked and prodded is amazing. But, he’s going to have to deal because there was no way they were letting him just go to sleep.

“Hey.” Jaz said as she poked her head in to check on Dalton and McG.

Both looked a little agitated but no blood had been shed, so that was a good sign.

“You want to keep him company for a minute, I think he’s had enough of me.” McG said as he stood and walked towards her.

“Sure, I brought some clean towels. I thought maybe you’d want to clean up once the IV is done.” She said as she looked him over.
“I’ll send Preach in for a sponge bath.” McG joked before turning serious, “A shower may have to wait until tomorrow my friend.”

With that, McG left them alone.

Jaz looked him over as she ran a hand over his forehead. It was a small gesture, but one that Dalton leaned into.

“Dalton...” she whispered as her concern practically came off her in waves like heat off of fresh pavement.

“Adam.”

It had been so faint she barely heard him.

“What’s that?” She asked as she continued to smooth her fingers across his cheek.

“Call me Adam.” He said as his blue eyes focused on her more directly.

She smiled.

“Adam.”

He smiled as he closed his eyes and pat his hand on the bed beside him.

“Just give me a second.” She said as she stood up and walked into his bathroom with the towels.

Dalton listened as she shuffled around for a minute, and then heard running water before the taps went silent and she appeared in the doorway.

“Would you mind if I grabbed a change of clothes for you?” She asked.

“That’s fine.” He mumbled as he watched her.

She set a pair of sleep pants and a t-shirt on the bed, and went back into the bathroom before returning with a bin of warm soapy water and a couple of towels.

He smiled and said, “If Preach walks through that door, I’m never speaking to you again.”

She laughed out loud.

“I can go get him if you want. Otherwise, you’re stuck with me.”

“Do your worst.” He said as he scooted over on the bed.

“Do you mind if I...” She waved at his shirt.

“Jaz, if I was bleeding you wouldn’t even ask. Besides, you’ve seen me without a shirt before.”

“I know. I’m just...never mind.” She said as she grabbed the IV bag off the hook and laid it in her lap while she carefully went about removing his shirt.

Once the shirt was out of the way she untangled it from the IV and hung it back on the hook before she sat back down facing him and dropped the shirt on the floor.

He closed his eyes as he listened to her wring the water from a wash rag.
Jaz was careful as she wiped the grit from his face knowing there were bound to be scrapes and
scratches hidden by the dirt he knew was dried into his skin. Her hands were gentle and he couldn’t
help the tiny shiver that coursed through his body.

It was the first thing that had felt good all day.

When her hands stalled in the middle of his chest, he opened his eyes. He was taken aback as he saw
the shimmer of unshed tears clinging to her lashes.

“Adam.” She whispered with a noticeable tremor to her voice.

“I’m alright Jaz.” He said as he laid his hand over hers and held it to his heart.

They were so consumed that they didn’t hear the door creek open, but anyone who witnessed the
exchange would have to be blind if they didn’t see that this was not a subordinate taking care of their
CO.

The door was quietly closed and no one would be back to check on him now that they’d been
discovered.

He was in good hands.

Jaz felt like she’d taken a round to the chest when she saw the deep purple bruise that had been
camouflaged by the dust and dirt that had dried and caked against his skin.

She knew from experience that it would have knocked the shit out of him and stolen every bit of
oxygen he’d had in his lungs when he got hit. And that he’d be feeling this for days. It was better
than the alternative, but taking one in the vest was no picnic.

She trusted McG, and she knew if he’d had serious injuries as a result he’d already be in the hospital,
but it didn’t stop her from worrying. She knew she’d worry about any of the guys, but she didn’t
think she’d be on the verge of tears...or giving them a sponge bath.

Yeah, this was probably a terrible idea, but she needed to do this for him. She wanted to.

When he let go of her hand, she gently went back to wiping the grime away from his torso. She
refilled the bin twice before he finally felt clean. Once that was done, she had to figure out how to
deal with his lower half.

“Do you think you can...”

“Jazzy, if you want me to take my pants off you just have to ask.” He said with a laugh.

She laughed, too.

“I can take your fucking pants off, just don’t be getting any ideas. If I want to get in your pants there
won’t be any doubt about my intentions. Got it?”

Dalton gave her a smile and a salute, “noted.”

He understood what she meant, but it didn’t mean he was prepared for her hands pulling on his belt.
He shuddered and drew in a steadying breath as her fingers grazed his stomach while she pulled his
belt open and then went about releasing the button on his pants.

When she made a move for the zipper, he said, “better let me handle that. You can tell a guy your undressing him for medical reasons, but when it’s your hands on my zipper, my body is probably not going to listen to logic.”

He looked at her as he unzipped his pants and pushed them down his hips as far as the IV would allow before she took over. She could see that the blood on his pants had seeped through, but she could tell it wasn’t his and her relief was clear.

“Be right back.” She said as she walked into the bathroom.

When she came back she had a towel in her hands. She laid it over his lap and said, “if you can stand up for a sec, I’ll hold up a towel, cause I don’t think you want to leave those on.”

He ran a hand over his face. This was seriously testing his resolve.

He stood and she held up the towel while he dropped his boxer briefs to the ground. He could hear the dirt landing around them. This was definitely a good call on her part.

Jaz kept her eyes focused on his the whole time as she tried to make sure he knew she really was trying to keep this from becoming really uncomfortable.

Without letting her eyes stray from his she leaned over and grabbed a damp wash cloth and handed it to him. He rolled his eyes, but when you’re diving onto the ground during a drone strike you’d be surprised where the dirt ends up.

She knew, but that thought wasn’t helping him as he imagined her washing the layers of grime off before she came in.

He could still smell her shampoo as her damp hair laid over her shoulder.

“Talk to me. Tell me about McG trimming his nose hairs in the kitchen or something.” He said as he tried to finish up.

She laughed out loud. A big boisterous laugh. “You really want to hear about McG trimming his nose hairs?”

“No. I just need to stop thinking about you in the shower.” He said as he ran his fingers through her damp hair.

“Mmmm. Well, that’s not as bad as the time I walked in on Preach taking...”

“Ok. Forgotten.” He said as he dropped the wash cloth and looked at her wondering how they were going to get his pants on without him having to hear the rest of that story.

“Ok, here’s the plan. I’m going to set your pants on the floor and you are going to step into them. Then I’ll pull them up while you hold the towel. Real PG 13 like. Ok?”

“Sure.”

They managed to accomplish the task without incident, but there might have been a good amount of laughter that carried down the hallway. Surely, they’d hear about that later, but laughter kept them from focusing on other things.

Dalton felt so much better after getting cleaned up. It wasn’t a hot shower, but it was much better
than trying to sleep covered in dirt and filth.

“How are you feeling? If you want, I can use the sprayer in the bath and wash the dirt out of your hair. “

Dalton ran a hand through his hair and made a face that said not doing that wasn’t an option.

“Yeah, it’ll feel better. I’ll be quick. Then maybe we can get you a little something to eat and a bed.”

“Ok.” He said as she led him over to the edge of the tub and had him sit on the toilet and lean forward.

The warm water felt amazing.

A moment later she shoved the sprayer in his hand, “hold this.”

“Yes, ma’am.”

A second later, the laugh that he’d been holding in turned into a groan as she started massaging shampoo into his scalp.

He’d never really put much thought into washing his hair, but if her hands felt this good on his scalp he was so fucking screwed.

“So tell me about that time you walked in on Preach.” He said.

She laughed.

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A little while later, Dalton and Jaz walked into the kitchen looking for something to eat. Patricia was sitting at the table with a glass of wine and a book watching as they walked in.

Jaz pushed him into a chair beside her and hung the IV off the latch on the window. Nothing they hadn’t done before sadly.

“I’ll grab you a plate.” She said as she walked back towards everyone else standing around the island.

“Feeling a little better?” Patricia asked.

“Yeah. Nothing a little sleep and a couple days of not getting shot at won’t cure.”

“Looks like you’re in good hands.” Patricia said as she continued to look Dalton square in the eye.

Dalton stared back trying to unravel what she was thinking.

“You know, there are some who thought I shouldn’t be charged with your team. Thought I wouldn’t be able to handle it given our close relationship. Came up again after...”

Dalton put a hand on hers and said, “I trust you with my life, under any circumstance.”

“I know that. That’s not why I’m telling you this.”

“I don’t understand.”

“Not everyone is going to understand, but if this is real, then I will fight for you. For both of you.
But, that doesn’t mean you shouldn’t be discreet about it. All I ask is that you talk to your team. Don’t hide it from them. You had a shit family, but THIS family....it’s a good one. They’ll support you.”

“We haven’t...we aren’t...”

“Adam, you may not be, but you want to. You will.”

“How did you...”

“I came to check on you. I didn’t hear anything, I would never invade your privacy like that. But, I saw enough to know there was more than concern passing between the two of you. I will never get to meet a girl who stole my son’s heart or watch him raise kids of his own, and maybe that’s not where this is headed for you, but you are like a son to me, too.” Patricia said as she rubbed her eyes and glanced away.

Dalton got what she was saying.

He put a hand over hers and nodded. He felt the same way, but the words were stuck in his chest which ached as he thought about all the moments she wouldn’t have with her son.

Everyone filtered into the dining area with dinner.

McG removed the IV before he sat down since the bag was almost empty and Dalton was looking a lot better. He was still concerned about him sleeping and already preparing himself for a grumpy CO when he had to wake him up throughout the night. But, for now, he’d just keep an eye on him.

Soon the room was filled with chatter. Dalton sat with his arm across the back of Jaz’s chair as they ate, watching her and thinking about what Patricia said.

That hadn’t gone the way he thought at all.
Again, mistakes are mine...The Brave is not. Sigh.

This is the conclusion of the monster 4 chapter Prison episode related stuff.

A little bit of a rough one for Dalton, but there’s some good stuff, too.

“Humans are tribal. When the tribe that we’re born into fails us, we seek out another one.”

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Jaz noticed that he hadn’t eaten much. They’d only offered him toast and some plain scrambled eggs. They were going with the whole idea of something in your stomach, but hopefully not upsetting your stomach since concussions generally didn’t lead to the most restful night of sleep. So far, he hadn’t been puking his guts up, but it certainly wasn’t outside the realm of possibility.

“I’m going to go grab a sweat shirt, do you need anything.” She asked as she stood up.

“A bed.” He answered.

“Well, I can’t carry that, but yeah we can help you get to bed in a minute.” Jaz said as she made her way back to her room and was digging through her drawers when a dark shadow fell in from her doorway.

She looked back to see McG who was looking a little sheepish.

“Hey, can we talk to a minute?”

“Sure, what’s on your mind?”

“You know I’ve been dying to give you shit for this all day, but I’m going to put it on the shelf for now because Top is clearly going to be more receptive to you waking him up several times tonight than he will me.”

“Oh...”

“Seriously? Jazzy, you look like you got mauled by a jungle cat and I know Amir doesn’t have the facial hair to do all that.” He said while pointing out the beard burn she’d completely forgotten about as soon as she’d heard the words ‘wheels up’. “But Top, well he might as well have signed his handy work. Must have been one hell of a make out sesh by the looks of you.”

Jaz stood there with her mouth hanging open.

“What? I tried to bait you on the plane threatening to take him to a brothel, but you gave me nothing.
Lucky for you Campbell was waiting for us, or we would have given you two the full interrogation over comms.”

“What the fuck McG. You could have saved me the trouble of trying to hide it from you.”

“What, and miss you two squirming every time anybody got too close to the truth?”

“How long have you known?”

“Wait, how long has this been going on?” McG said as the gears started turning.

“It’s not. It hasn’t been going on. It’s... We haven’t really had a chance to talk about what is going on.”

“Well, it doesn’t take much to see the eyes you two make at each other when you think no one is watching. I thought it’d take another three months before you guys actually did anything about it. Preach gave you a week, a week ago. Amir thinks something already happened.”

Jaz sat down on her bed as she digested this news.

“So, is this going to be a problem?” Jaz asked.

“You two? Pfft. Only if I find you re-enacting porn on the kitchen counter.”

“Fuck off McG.” She said as she launched a pillow at his head.

“What, we’ve got money on this...so feel free to drag this out. I’ll split the pot with you.” McG said as he threw the pillow back on the bed and threw an arm over her shoulders as they walked out.

Dalton felt her presence in the room before he saw her. All he wanted to do was crawl into bed and curl up with her.

“Let’s go Top, I’m going to take first shift.” She said as she reached out for his hand.

He didn’t question her, he simply stood and let her help him to his room.

Once they were inside, she closed the door and glanced over at his bed. There was dirt and sand all over his sheets.

“Shit. I forgot about that mess.” She said.

She was about to start stripping his bed when he blurted out, “Patricia knows.”

He was expecting her to freak out, but she shocked the shit out of him when she just grabbed his hand and said, “well, so does everyone else apparently, so I guess we can worry about this tomorrow.”

With that she helped him walk down the hall with four sets of eyes at their backs and walked him into her room.

He glanced at her bed with several big fluffy pillows and a giant down blanket. It looked a lot more comfortable than his bed did. He already knew that it was.

“Don’t forget that I share a bathroom with McG. And he forgets to lock the door on my side
sometimes. It’s not pretty.”

He laughed as he watched her pull the covers back and helped him crawl in. She walked into the bathroom and grabbed a towel and a trash bin and set them on the floor by his side of the bed.

“Most of the time, my mom didn’t know what to do with me as a kid. But when I was sick, she would always put a bowl and a towel by the edge of my bed.” She said by way of explanation. “You’ll have to settle for an empty trash bin, because I can’t handle going into the lions den to get a bowl right now. When I face that firing squad, I plan to have you by my side.”

With that she crawled into the bed beside him and shut out the light.

Dalton woke up to the feeling of a cool towel on the back of his neck. He was sweating profusely as nausea was tying his stomach in knots.

“Oh fuck. I don’t think I’m going to make....”

“It’s ok, I’ve got you.” Jaz whispered.

She had already set the bin beside him and was rubbing his back as he started to dry heave.

He hadn’t eaten enough for much to come up thankfully but, it didn’t really matter his stomach was trying hard to evict whatever was there.

He was sure it was the last thing he wanted to be doing in front of Jaz, but at the same time the hand rubbing circles on his back was kind of nice.

“I know this sucks, I wish there was something I could do for you.”

She was wiping the sweat from his forehead with the wash cloth and continuing to rub his back as he started trying to pull his shirt off.

“Easy there, I don’t think you’re in any shape to be getting naked.” She said with a laugh.

“Sticking to me.” He said as his stomach cramped again.

She gently kept moving the wash cloth across his skin trying to give him some kind of comfort until he finally settled again, then she reached over and carefully worked his shirt up and off his body. She laid the cool cloth on his stomach and gently laid a kiss on his shoulder as he fell back to sleep.

McG stuck his head in from their shared bath and asked her if she needed anything a few minutes later.

He set a glass of water and some ibuprofen on the night stand, “if he keeps puking let me know. I might give him some more fluids. If not, try to get him to drink some water and give him the ibuprofen. I’d rather not give him anything stronger since we need him to wake up and be somewhat coherent throughout the night. I’ll leave my door open, just call me if you need anything.”

“Thanks.” She whispered as she set the bin back on the floor and pulled the covers back up.

The next time she woke him up, he didn’t immediately reach for the bin, but she woke up a little later to him retching painfully over the side of the bed. Fortunately, she hadn’t removed the bin.
“You alright? Do you want me to get McG?”

“Mmm. No. Could you just do what you were doing before.”

She leaned into him and pressed the towel to the back of his neck, but this time she threaded her fingers into his hair and gently raked her fingernails over his scalp. He shivered as goosebumps rose up on his skin but he stopped her when she started to pull back.

“Don’t stop. Feels good.” He whispered.

He fell asleep just like that.

McG came in an hour later and asked him some questions, flashed a pen light in his eyes and opted to hit him with more fluids just to be safe.

Dalton decided he much preferred Jaz waking him up to McG, but he suspected they all knew that to be fact. Even if no one knew anything about whatever was starting between them.

Not too long after, he started to turn a corner.

He still didn’t feel good by any stretch, but the dry heaving had finally subsided.

Jaz woke him up a little before sunrise to grill him about the date, and ask who the president was. All the things everyone asks when you got your bell rung.

She got him to drink some water and take a couple Advil without him feeling like his stomach was going to revolt, too.

What he liked even better was that he fell asleep this time with his head resting against her shoulder as she ran her fingers through his hair. It felt really good.

Good enough that he forgot about the pounding in his head for a few minutes.

McG popped his head back in around dawn and said, “how’s he doing?”

“Better. He hasn’t been sick in a few hours and he drank some water last time I checked on him. Took the pain meds.”

“Still answering coherently. Not having any problems waking him?” He asked around a big yawn.

“Nope. All good.”

“Good. Get some sleep. He should be ok to let him be for a few hours. I’ll check on both of you later.” McG told her as he messed up her hair and headed back to his room.

The next time Dalton woke up he could feel the sun at his back. And Jaz was curled up facing him with her hand on his chest. He carefully lifted it off and grabbed the IV bag that McG had clearly administered at some point last night before he headed into the bathroom.

He still had a head ache and definitely felt the after effects of being shot, and basically blown up but he didn’t feel like he was going to lose his stomach anymore. So that was a plus.
As soon as he turned the water on McG walked in. He grumbled something that could’ve been good morning as he reached under the sink handing him a new toothbrush.

“I don’t feel like going to get yours. I’m sure you would have gone wandering off to go find it. Don’t. Just crawl back into that nice warm bed and go back to sleep. K?”

McG looked tired. He guessed he’d probably been up with Jaz a fair amount throughout the night.

“Would you mind taking this out?” Dalton asked as he held his arm out to him.

“Sure. Then go back to bed. You’re probably going to want to sleep all morning since we woke you up all night.” He said around another yawn.

“You might want to take your own advice. Thanks brother.” Dalton said as he started to brush his teeth.

“Jazzy had a long night, too. I’m sure she’ll be happy to snuggle up and keep you company.”

“Yeah. She told me that you know.” He said after he rinsed his mouth out.

“I can’t say it’s a surprise. You two have been dancing around each other for a while now.”

“We would have told you. We just decided to see where things went the night before we got the call for the prison.” Dalton explained.

“I know you guys weren’t trying to hide it. And really, it’s about time you two had someone to help shoulder all the shit you have to deal with. Neither of you manage the casual shit that works for me, and I’d be concerned if you started getting into all that zen crap that Amir is into. And we’d all be so lucky to have a couple of kids back home to put a smile on our faces like Preach. This....whatever it is. I think it’s good.”

“Yeah?” Dalton asked as he rubbed at his eyes over a yawn.

“Yeah. As long as I don’t catch you banging in the shower. You have your own bathroom for that.” McG said as he walked back toward his room.

A minute later he shouted, “try not to bang in the shower for a couple days though. Doctors orders.”

“You’re an ass.”

“Good talk.” McG said as he gently kicked his door shut from his bed.

Dalton headed back into Jaz’s bedroom and just watched her for a second. She looked tired but peaceful. He felt bad for keeping her up all night, but the idea of spending the morning in bed with her kind of made it hard to feel too bad about it.

He crawled in behind her and pulled her back into his chest snuggling down into the pillows and promptly falling back to sleep. This was something he could get used to.

Jaz was exhausted. The clock read 11:30 when she woke up and Dalton was still sleeping, so she decided to get up and make some tea before he woke up.

Coffee seemed like a bad idea for someone who’d been trying to turn his stomach inside out a few hours ago, so it’d have to do.
She was just setting the pot on the stove when Patricia walked in, so it’d be a little obvious if she bolted.

“I was just getting ready to make some tea. Can I get you one?”

“That’d be nice. Thanks Jaz.” Patricia said.

“So, ummm, I’ve never been great at the whole elephant in the room thing…” Jaz started.

“One of the many qualities I’ve always admired about you.” Patricia said with a genuine smile on her face.

“We know this is probably a terrible idea. Breaking all sorts of rules…but as hard as we tried to do the right thing….well, this is the thing…doing what we do, we basically have to lie to anyone that’s gets close to us. Top and I, we aren’t made for that. McG, he can meet a girl tell her what she wants to hear, have fun and make a clean break. That’s just not a satisfying experience for me. I want more. And I want that with someone I don’t have to lie to. Someone that understands. Someone that can lean on me too.”

“And that’s why you picked Dalton?” Patricia asked.

“No. I mean, yes. That’s obviously a really nice perk, but Top…he’s different. I respect the hell out of him, and as my CO he’s, well he’s the best CO I’ve ever had. He doesn’t see me any differently than he does Preach, Amir, or McGuire. That’s all I can ask for. But, in here,” Jaz pointed to her heart, “Dal…Adam is an incredible man. Any girl would be lucky to have him. I think you are a big part of that. This didn’t come from too many tequila shots and us falling into bed together. That hasn’t even happened actually. It started because I was having a nightmare and he didn’t want to wake me, so he just held me and made me feel safe. After that, we tried to avoid each other. But, the switch had already been flipped. The possibilities were out there in full daylight daring us to do something about it, and staying away from each other was just making us both miserable. And now…I’ve officially made an ass of myself. God, I’m so sorry. I’m sure you didn’t want all the details before you even had breakfast.”

Jaz turned back towards the pot completely mortified, but when she turned back around Patricia was just smiling and Adam was standing in her space as he brushed his lips against her forehead then threw the most stunning smile her way and said, “what she said.”
Control is Overrated

Chapter Notes

FYI, this is a little bonus chapter. After a couple of chapters that had Dalton kind of in a bad place, I thought he needed a break.

Also, since this is a "bonus" chapter it is not associated with an episode, so the quote is from the chapter and may have a direct role in a certain episode at a later date....and there might be more to read into it if you really wanted to go that direction ;)

Enjoy. FYI this is now officially living up to its rating and pushing for an upgrade perhaps. You have been warned.

“There is nothing that I wouldn’t do if you were taken from me. Nothing. I will always come for you.”

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After they drank their tea, Jaz helped Dalton back to her bedroom. He was still laboring as he moved a bit, but overall, he was looking a lot better than he did 24 hours earlier.

Fortunately, no one else had ventured out yet, and Patricia headed off to make some phone calls regarding Nate’s transfer.

Neither Jaz nor Dalton had gotten much sleep the night before and the prospect of lounging around in her bed together wasn’t at all unappealing. She set fresh mugs of tea down on her night stand and pulled off her sweatshirt before she crawled under the covers. She’d meant to just curl up to Dalton, but she couldn’t help taking a quick look at his chest.

For purely medical purposes of course.

“How are you feeling? Are you really sore?” She asked as she kissed her way up from his rib cage over to the bruise which was now a particularly vibrant shade of eggplant.

“Sore? No, not at the moment.” He said with his eyes closed.

“Come on. While I’d love to magically heal you with a couple of kisses, I know there is no way you feel good right now.” She said as she gently rubbed her hand over the bruise.

“Good is relative right now. I feel like hot garbage, but your hands...or your lips anywhere near me are an excellent distraction.” He said as he stilled her hand and pressed it over his heart which was beating wildly. “And by the way, anytime you’re touching me, it feels good.”

When he opened his eyes again, she was resting her cheek on his shoulder smiling back at him.

“Well, I don’t really believe you, but I’m more than happy to help take your mind off the pain if this helps.” She whispered as she kissed her way up his shoulder.

“Jazzy, I would probably have spent the night curled up freezing on my bathroom floor last night if it
hadn’t been for you. Maybe even still in my gear, with dirt in places it should never be.”

“Oh, that makes me sad.” She whispered as she pressed her lips to his.

“Don’t be sad, instead I got to spend the night in warm bed with a woman who kind of tilted my world on its axis in ways no blast ever could. In a way that I kind of don’t want to turn back.” He said as he drank in her warmth.

Jaz could feel his heart fluttering under her fingers as he spoke. It danced like she wanted to as she listened to his words drifting as he started to fall asleep.

As he was drifting in and out, the most beautiful noises were rumbling from his chest as her fingers rubbed circles at his temples before she started to let her fingers a slip through his hair.

Chills ran across his skin as a full bodied shudder rolled over him in waves.

“I love that.”

“What’s that?” She asked as she watched his peaceful expression while a blush crept up from his neck to his cheeks.

“The way my body reacts to you, its kind of not in my control when you do things like that.”

She gently grazed her fingernails from his armpit to his rib cage leaving goosebumps in their wake, then followed them with the soft pads of her fingers. Dalton’s eyes were half lidded as he dreamily gazed at her following the motion before laying a hand over hers.

“You have no idea how badly I want to make you feel what I do.” He whispered as he kissed the tips of her fingers that were tangled with his.

“What makes you think I don’t.” She wondered.

“I want to be taking care of you. But, then I don’t want to think about you hurting for one-second. No. I can’t think about that. If anyone ever hurt you, I don’t think I could let them live.” He said.

The tone was lethal, and she had no doubt he meant what he said.

“You know the chances of me getting hurt in the field at some point are a virtual certainty.”

He looked at her like he wanted to will that prospect away, but they both knew that he couldn’t, no matter how strong or brave he is. And he was both of those things. And lethal...when he needed to be.

“Not that I would have felt any differently before we were....this, but the idea of you being hurt has never been particularly palatable.” He said as he let his fingers drift into her hair.

“Ditto.” She said as she laid her head on his chest and closed her eyes.

It was a prospect neither of them wanted to spend too much time thinking about.

They were both leaning more towards sleep than wakefulness when he whispered, “There is nothing that I wouldn’t do if you were taken from me. Nothing. I will always come for you.”

She felt his lips against her forehead, but then sleep claimed her. It could have been a dream, but if it was she still believed every word.
Dalton woke up to a pair of big brown eyes staring at him a couple of hours later.

It was his worst nightmare.

“Good morning sunshine,” McG said as he smiled down at him.

“Oh Jesus, get away from me. Those were not the brown eyes I wanted to see first thing.” He said as he shoved McG to the floor. “Where’s Jaz?”

“Shower.”

Dalton looked past McG towards the bathroom.

Fingers snapped in his face. “Hey, Hey…Focus. I already told her that if you two are going to bang in the shower, do it in your own bathroom.”

McG tapped his forehead as he looked down at him and added, “And for god’s sake, give that brain of yours a couple of days to settle in before you do whatever it is that’s going on up there right now…”

“What do you want?” Dalton asked as he kept his eyes on the bathroom door.

He could see just the tiniest sliver of the mirror from his vantage point and it hadn’t steamed over quite enough to completely conceal her form through the murky glass of the shower door. He literally wanted to walk away from the conversation he was currently ignoring and slip into that shower so badly his skin practically itched with the prospect.

“Damn it, you’re not even trying to listen to me!” McG said.

“Nope.” He answered unapologetically.

“You getting an eyeful or something?” McG said as he started to turn around, but Dalton literally slapped his hand over his eyes.

“No. Not happening.”

McG was laughing, but Dalton’s hand wasn’t budging as he watched her hand slip out of the door and reach for a towel that had long ago dropped to the ground. Dalton was on is feet so fast that McG was knocked to the ground a second time in the process.

As her hand reached blindly for the towel, it landed against a wall of rippling abs. As soon as she felt him take in a shuddering breath she rubbed her hand over the glass to confirm who she was groping. Adam…

“Can I get that for you?” He asked.

Jaz smiled as she watched him lean over and pick up her dropped towel. He held it up in much the same way she’d done the other day, but his eyes looked a little more unfocused than they’d been when he was gripped by the worst effects of his concussion, and it wasn’t because he was in pain.

Once she stepped forward, Dalton wrapped his arms along with the towel around her and breathed in a lungful of her spiced apple scent.

He didn’t think he’d ever be able to look at an apple without thinking about her fresh out of the
shower again, and that could prove problematic when they’re stuck in some safe house with only apples and power bars and virtually no personal space.

“So, I guess this means you’re feeling better today?” McG shouted as he lounged on Jaz’s bed.

He didn’t get an answer, just Dalton’s foot kicking the door shut in his face.

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Dalton started to lean in to kiss Jaz, but he came up short, “Now, I really feel like I need a shower. As much as I didn’t hate the sponge bath, it can only do so much. Though I have to admit, even concussed that wasn’t an altogether horrible experience.”

“How about you give me a few minutes, and I think I can give you the best of both worlds.”

“Mmmm. I’m intrigued.” He hummed as he sucked her bottom lip between his.

His hands were currently gripping her towel so tightly, it was almost as if he needed it to keep him from reaching for any inch of exposed skin. Of which there was currently plenty.

“You better hurry up, or I’m going to push you back into this shower and really give McG something to whine about.”

“Compromise? Why don’t you let McG give you a quick once over, and I’ll go change the sheets on your bed and get everything going? Then come and find me.”

“I will grudgingly agree to your terms only because you asked so nicely.” He said as he released her and left her to get dressed.

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McG gave Dalton a pretty thorough look. He thought his CO looked much better, but he knew the more Dalton felt like he was back to normal the harder it was going to be to pin him down.

He definitely had the residual headache one would expect from a concussion, and certainly he wasn’t feeling quite as steady on his feet just yet. He was happy that it appeared he had not broken any ribs with either blast or the high shot he took.

That was always a concern when you took one in the vest, and while it might not always cause problems instantly, they can really make a mess of things if they go unchecked and wind up getting displaced after the fact.

Dalton was sore, but not enough to indicate anything more than some deep bruising.

While the whole team had been involved in the humvee wreck and both blasts, Dalton had been right on the front line for all three. It’s a wonder he wasn’t screaming over ringing in his ears actually.

“Go on, let Jazzy help you get a shower. Do us all a favor.” McG said as he held his nose dramatically.

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When Dalton walked into his bedroom, he noticed her down comforter was now on his bed, and her damp towel was hanging over the door knob. He could see the lights had been dimmed in the bathroom and steam was rising off the tub.
“I was thinking shower, but I could be convinced.” He said as he glanced over at her.

She was wearing a pair of his boxer briefs and his favorite t-shirt and he had to admit he liked it even better on her. Especially because it was clinging to her skin where her hair had dampened the fabric.

“I don’t suppose I could talk you into joining me?” He asked with a hopeful wink.

“Not today, but I promise you’ll feel so much better.”

She walked into the bedroom and shouted, “Get in, I’ll be right back.”

He undressed and eased into the steaming hot water and realized a bath had been a really good idea. He leaned his head back and let the warmth soak into his aching muscles and was almost asleep when she returned.

“Lean forward.”

He did as she asked and was rewarded with her hands rubbing soap into his shoulders as she went about working the muscles. The water splashed as she sat on the edge of the tub and slid her legs in behind him letting them rest on either side.

He let his hands coast over her calf muscles as she started to wash his hair. When she was done, she pulled him back so that he was leaning against the tub with his elbows resting on her knees.

Jaz grabbed a washcloth and some soap as she carefully started to scrub down his chest, reaching all the way down to his abs before her long hair skimmed the surface of the water in front of him.

It hadn’t taken him long to realize just how close she was to being in the water before he decided it was a situation he had to rectify.

With one gentle tug on her arm Jaz was cradled in his lap and water was sloshing all over the floor.

“Top we just made a huge mess.” She said as her laughter carried.

“Does it look like I’m even a little bit concerned?” He asked as he wrapped his hand around the ends of her hair before he surprised her with a bruising kiss.

Facial hair had never done much for her in the past, but Dalton’s beard somehow just set off an electrical current as it abraded her skin. Especially when he let it brush against her neck. Jaz was sure it would feel good with any bit of skin it came into contact with.

He wasn’t sure what she had been thinking about, but the soft little moan that broke through the sloshing water and heavy breathing was more than he was prepared to handle.

She gifted him with a soft little gasp allowing his tongue to invaded her mouth as his hands pulled her forward so that she was straddling his legs with her back pressed to his knees. He was literally vibrating with need as he poured everything he was feeling into that kiss.

Her lips and chin stung as his beard, lips, and teeth all worked to devour whatever reservations she might have had about his injuries. He had forgotten them almost as soon as her fingers broke the surface of the water minutes before.

She was instantly drowning in the heat that was pouring off of him with his hands skimming up the inside of her thighs before they made the jump to her stomach lifting the edge of his shirt to expose her hip.
Dalton released her hair long enough to brush it over her shoulder and expose the side of her neck where he could see her pulse thumping wildly. It was begging for attention as he let his tongue trace the rhythm all the way up to her ear.

“You were right, this is just what I needed.” He whispered breathlessly as he sucked on the spot just below her ear that made her melt into him.

He knew this should stop, but the way she was gasping and clutching at his back he just couldn’t bring himself to throw cold water on the situation. He tried, but his partner in crime was already way ahead of him.

“Jaz…”

“Uh….huh?”

“We should…”

“Yes…” she whispered, only she wasn’t on the same page anymore.

This time it was her eyes that were glossed over. His legs had slid down and Jaz was now very firmly pressed up against a very firm part of Dalton.

“Mmmmmmmm, Adam.” She hummed almost involuntarily as he pulled her in a little closer.

The water was sloshing on the floor more than it was staying in the tub at this point, but neither of them noticed at all.

“Fuck, Jaz. Oh, fuck.” He groaned as she dug her nails into his back.

She was starting to purr into his ear as she whispered his name over and over and it was more than he could shut down at this point.

Threshold crossed. This was happening even if the entire team walked into the room right in that moment.

“Fuck. Oh god. Ah…” she whimpered before her teeth found purchase between his neck and his shoulder to keep from screaming out.

And that was all it took.

Dalton threw his head back and gave in to the rolling tide that was about to pull him under as she rocked him through it with her lips sealed to his and her fingers digging into his lower back like little lightning bolts rocketing him higher. He should be bothered that he'd literally come like a teenager, but he really didn't think she'd be lodging any complaints.

He sat there staring at the ceiling sucking oxygen out of the air like he’d run a marathon with Jaz fully clothed and soaking wet curled into him as she smiled and blushed.

“That wasn’t where I was thinking this would end up.” She said.

“Me neither. We might have to practice a little. I think there was a little too much splash.” He joked as he picked up their once dry towels that were now soaked on the floor in an even bigger pool of water.

Dalton carefully stood up with her still essentially in his lap and leaned over to deposit her on the floor before grabbing her towel from off the doorknob. Apparently, something in the last 20 minutes
had done him a world of good, because that was a show of strength even he didn’t think he’d been capable of just that morning.

The towel was still fairly dry, so he extricated himself from her and wrapped it around his waist.

“Stay here.” He said as he jogged off to get a couple more dry towels.

When he opened the door he was met with McG and Amir holding up score cards and discussing the fact that there had in fact been entirely too much splash before throwing an armful of towels his way.

The game was on, no one would be dancing around Jaz and Dalton’s latest exploits come morning.

Dalton turned around and handed Jaz a towel before he went back to his dresser and pulled out a pair of pants and another t-shirt for Jaz.

They’d have the rest of this night to prepare for the coming barrage of jokes at their expense.

At least they could still count on the team to treat them as they always had, but now they would face it together.
This one is a short chapter, but I promise it has some big emotional payoff.

As Usual, I own nothing but my mistakes. I did take some liberties with Jaz’s backstory that may or may not be canon since we haven’t learned all that much about her upbringing thus far. So, just FYI...

Thank you all for your comments, Kudos, and continued support for this story. It’s one that I love to tell.

Hopefully, I will get another chapter out today (Sunday) and I am still going to try and get caught up to the last aired episode by Monday night time permitting, but we’ll see how that goes :) Enjoy and get some tissues!

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“See, I’m Not Alone.”

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It had taken another two weeks before Dalton was cleared for field work after the prison, and no one was complaining over that downtime. Even though the rest of the team had been relatively unscathed, there is no amount of training that prepares the body or the mind for rocket launchers and drone strikes.

Patricia had escorted Nate back to the States a few days after Dalton and Jaz had thoroughly outed themselves to the entire house by flooding the bathroom. Obviously, everyone had pretty much established that it hadn’t been a state secret, but this cat was out of the bag and it was sopping wet and yowling at the top of its lungs.

Even Patricia got in on the ribbing that came later that evening and would probably continue for however long they remained a part of each other’s lives. Odds were good this team would remain together for the foreseeable future and there was little doubt long-term friendships had been made, so Dalton figured it would last for...maybe the rest of eternity.

They’d earned it, but it had been so worth whatever shit they would have to endure.

As far as their shelf life went, he didn’t think either one of them would be looking for an off-ramp anytime soon. Hopefully not ever. But, he knew there would be bumps in the road. It was par for the course in their line of work after all. At least they wouldn’t have to lie to each other about what they did.

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Dalton and Jaz spent most nights curled up together, but they still trying to figure out how to just
BE together. Things had been one way for so long that there was still a learning curve.

But, it was nice that they were able to lean on each other in a way that they couldn’t with their other team members. They really got to see how much their emotional connection had grown when they got sent to Nigeria.

It had been one of those jobs that stays with you, the kind that was hard not to bring home with you after it was done. When kids are involved, it’s always tough.

Especially for Jaz, and especially when it was a little girl who had been caught in the crosshairs. Jaz had once been that little girl. Only no one had come to help her. So she grew up to become a bad ass ninja and learned how to help herself, and others in the process.

Like him, growing up in chaos made her seek out order. She wasn’t quite as rule oriented as Dalton, but she was still very much cut from the same cloth in terms of duty and honor. It was one of the qualities that he admired most. Her ability to just switch off all the instincts that tell you not to seek out danger are what make her such a beast in the field.

She was small and feminine which made it easy for an adversary to underestimate her. But, viewing her through that lens was a huge mistake and more often than not it ended with a dead-on kill shot for those that crossed her.

And she was an angel with an ax to grind when you messed with a child.

Jaz had made the shot. It had to be precise or a father would leave without his little girl. Those were the ones that landed hard once the adrenaline drained from her system. The ones where you play that ‘what if’ game. What if I’d hesitated. What if I had been off by a fraction of an inch and he’d gotten the shot off. What if the little girl had moved and become collateral damage. None of it happened, but it was impossible not to process those what ifs once the fog of adrenaline had worn off.

Dalton had had to make similar choices over the course of his career, but snipers relied on pinpoint accuracy in the most uncontrollable environments. And when things went wrong, it was all about the things that you didn’t account for or couldn’t predict.

When there’s return fire, you react, but a sniper doesn’t have that luxury. You plan, you prepare, and you execute. Of course, you adapt, but in a situation like they had in that mall, she had no time to do anything but execute, no time to run through the scenarios or worry about consequences. So, all that weighed on her once her mind had a chance to unravel the mission as a whole.

It was a burden she had always carried alone, but now, she had Dalton to help carry the load. He would shoulder anything for her.

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They had been home for less than an hour and Jaz had been almost silent all the way back. She had always sought out solitude after a mission like that, and she was just going through the motions. It was habit, and sometimes that was comforting to fall back on.

She walked into the bathroom in the room she was now sharing with Dalton and turned on the shower as hot as it would go. Once she had shed her gear, she stepped over the side of the tub and pulled the curtain closed.

It was always easy for her to shut down her emotions when her cheek was pressed to her rifle, but afterward those emotions sometimes hit her like searing hot doubt. Not always, but when there were kids in the line of fire, it was really hard for her to unpack the undesirable scenarios that could have
been.

Today was going to be one of those days.

At first, there were just a couple of tears as she imagined the emotional scars that that little girl would undoubtedly be burdened with because she happened to be in the wrong mall, on the wrong day with her daddy. But those stray tears quickly became a torrent as she considered the girl being injured, and full of hysteria as she considered the possibility of Dalton having to carry a small lifeless child to her waiting father.

Any of those things could have happened. Just one misstep from any of the four people in that room and those scenarios could have been their reality.

A few tears and some lingering doubts she could handle, but for some reason on this day, all of those emotions felt more raw.

She sat down on the floor the tub and curled her arms protectively around her legs as she tried to let those toxic emotions run down the drain, but she was struggling with the last image.

Dalton carrying a lifeless child to her father.

She knew that reality would have gutted him and that was why this one just handcuffed her with searing hot despair.

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Hot water wasn’t exactly plentiful in the bunker that they called home, so after twenty minutes Dalton decided to go check on Jaz.

And when he knocked on the door and called out with no answer, he simply opened the door and stepped into the bathroom.

“Jaz?” He asked a second time.

When she didn’t answer again, he finally pulled back the curtain.

What he saw was heartbreaking.

Jaz was sitting underneath the cooling water, shivering as tears mingled freely against her skin.

“What…What if I’d missed?” She wondered aloud as she stared off into the distance.

Dalton didn’t think, he didn’t speak, he didn’t even take off his clothes. He just kicked his boots aside and crawled in behind her shutting off the now freezing water and surrounding her with his warmth.

“Look at me.” He said as he lifted her chin up so he could stare into her eyes.

“I would never ask you to take a shot I didn’t think you could make. You have to know that.”

“But…”

“No. I believe in you. I will always believe in you, and I would never ask you to take a shot if I wasn’t sure that you could make it.” He said as he wrapped his whole body around her.
He held her in his arms as her shoulders shook and her tears were carried down the drain.

“I am the buoy that can keep you afloat when the skies open up and the waves are crashing, so hold on to me.” He whispered into her hair before pressing a kiss to temple.

Jaz turned into him and looked into his deep blue eyes as she tried to gauge what his words meant. What she saw was a man who would protect her from any threat, stand beside her through any storm, and love her in a way that no one else ever had before.

She saw home.
Perfect

Chapter Notes

So, now the team is in Seville. I wonder what these two could get up to in a nice hotel room instead of some safe house with a complete lack of privacy.

If you need some music to set this one up, I suggest Perfect by Ed Sheeran (Hence the title :)

We already know what happens after McG takes Paloma home, but I wonder what happened after the bar where they celebrated the mission they’d been assigned BEFORE McG fell into (literally) a new mission the next morning? Probably watched a movie, right?

So, you may have noticed I changed the rating to E. I did that for a reason...If that's not your thing you might want to back away now. You've been warned. Also, if you are reading this at work or in your local Starbucks with your Sunday afternoon coffee and pastry, I will not be held responsible for any embarrassing situations you find yourself in.

As usual, I do not own anything but my mistakes and a vivid imagination.

Enjoy.

“That’s not a problem; it’s an opportunity.”

After the job in Nigeria, the team had very little time to decompress as they had been called in for another assignment in Seville less than a week later. It hadn’t exactly gone off without a hitch, but Dalton was happy to see that Jaz was able to bounce back. Her quick thinking had saved Preach from a life-threatening situation and given the team a much needed win after several really tough missions.

It had been cause to celebrate, and they were in a beautiful city with some nice amenities that they weren't always accustomed to, like private hotel rooms and the luxury of a little downtime.

The team had opted to venture down to the hotel bar that evening to decompress and revel in a successful mission before they returned to their humble home base the following evening.

Amir and Preach were off somewhere discussing their plans for the following day as they had hoped to explore Seville since they wouldn’t be lifting off first thing in the morning as they usually did, and McG was doing what he did best.

Talking a beautiful woman out of her clothes and into bed.

That left Dalton who was sipping his glass of whiskey as he gazed up at the peaceful night sky and
Jaz who was more focused on gazing at the beautiful man beside her.

She smiled as she listened to him talk about the different constellations. It hadn’t been something that she’d ever found particularly interesting, but this man could have her enthralled with a reading of the phone book.

Dalton paused as he realized that she was watching him speak intently, but not really listening to his words as much as she was taking him in.

“You know, I think we may have a better view from the balcony upstairs.” He said as he laced his fingers through hers.

“I’m positive the view will be better upstairs.” She responded as she let her eyes roam over him.

With that, Dalton rose to his feet and held out his hand to her.

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Jaz was standing out on the balcony when she felt his arms wrap around her from behind. He carefully grazed his hand over her shoulder as he smoothed her hair away from her neck so that he could press his lips to her pulse point and feel it thrumming underneath the surface of her soft skin.

“When I was little, my grandfather used to tell me stories about the constellations, but the one that always stuck with me was Vega and Altair. They represent a mortal boy and the daughter of a god who had fallen in love. They married and began to neglect all of their responsibilities, and her parents forbade them from continuing their love affair. Her father even separated them by a river, which is represented by the milky way cast between the stars Vega and Altair. But, because he loved his daughter, he allowed them to meet once a year so long as they continued to honor their responsibilities for the rest of the year. Sadly, the river was too difficult for the lovers to cross. The Princess was inconsolable when she couldn’t cross the river, so a flock of magpies flew out and made a bridge for her to cross allowing the lovers to be reunited. Anyway, legend has it that if it rains, the lovers are destined to wait another year.”

Jaz was entranced by one of the few nice memories Dalton had shared of his childhood. It made her smile to think of him as a little boy gazing up at the stars with his grandfather with a look of wonder in his eyes.

When she turned back towards him, she saw that same look of wonder in his eyes, but he was no longer staring at the stars, his gaze was focused on her instead.

Dalton laid his hand against her cheek and raised her eyes so that they were level with his before he spoke, and she knew in that moment that she was 100% completely and irrevocably in love with the man before her. She didn’t need the words, but he gave them to her anyway.

“Jaz, there is not a single obstacle in this world that could separate me from your side. I don’t know when it happened, and I honestly don’t care because I can’t imagine my world without you in it anymore. I love you.” He whispered with a noticeable tremor on those final three words.

Jaz had an ache in her chest that made it impossible to speak, and she could hear the thunderous beat of her pulse in her ears as her heart fluttered in her chest. So, she did the next best thing. She pushed him up against the wall and kissed him with everything that she had.

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Dalton could taste the tears that fell from her eyes as he took his time savoring her lips. He loved the
breathless little sigh that escaped as he lifted her up and wrapped her legs around him.

Her arms had wound around his neck, and her fingers found their way into his hair as her fingernails started to rake gently over his scalp raising goosebumps on his flesh and making him think about all the ways he could return the favor.

They were blissfully alone and had a plush hotel room awaiting them, and Dalton was not going to waste this time they had together.

He turned and carried Jaz back inside setting her to her feet as he gazed down at her. Her eyes were wide with desire, and her lip was captured by her teeth as she looked back at him before her focus moved down to the front of his shirt.

She let her hands trail down his sides only touching enough to ignite a slow-burning haze of lust beneath the surface of his skin. When her fingers reached his belt, she looped her index finger through the tail and released it before pulling it tight to disengage the buckle allowing it to drop open. Jaz yanked it from the belt loops and let it clatter to the plush carpeting under her bare feet.

It took all of her concentration to pop the button on his jeans as Dalton leaned in and pressed his lips to her pulse point applying just enough pressure that she was certain it would leave a mark.

But, she was nothing if not determined.

Once the button had popped free, she refocused on his shirt letting her fingernails graze over his stomach as she chased it up and over his broad shoulders. She pressed her lips to his collarbone for the briefest moment before she traced the line all the way to the little hollow point just below his throat and relished in the way his hands bunched up in the back of her camisole as a shudder worked its way over his body.

“Do you have any idea what you do to me?” He asked.

She didn’t answer; she just followed the roadmap carved into his torso. First with her fingertips, and then with her tongue.

The salt of his skin mingled with the scent of his cologne was intoxicating, and the noises that vibrated from his throat only made her movements more frenzied.

“I love when you make that sound.” She whispered as her lips closed over one of his nipples while her fingers mimicked the move on the other side.

“It makes me feel powerful.” She shared as she looked up into his deep blue eyes that were reflecting the same urgency she knew he would find in hers.

“You have no idea.” He told her as he braced both of his hands against her cheeks and raised her mouth up to his for a toe-curling kiss.

He was so consumed by her that he lost track of her hands as she ran them from his shoulders down the muscled planes of his back, but he was jolted back into focus as they slipped beneath the waistband of his jeans and under his boxer briefs so that her nails could scrap over the curve of his ass.

“You have no idea how long I’ve wanted to do that.” She whispered as she did it again.

“Fuck.”
In that instant, the spark that had been thrumming along below the surface ignited and Dalton let go of all thoughts except for one. His girl was over dressed.

“This needs to go.” He said as he deftly slipped the camisole over her head.

Jaz laughed and dropped her feet back to the ground before she pushed him back until his knees hit the bed sending him sprawling out before her. She wasted no time crawling over him sitting directly on his thighs as she laid her hands flat over his stomach following the trail of golden blonde hair that disappeared into the top of his pants.

Her eyes remained on his as she let her fingers glide ever so gently over the front of his jeans. But the real payoff came when his head dropped back, and the air left his lungs in a rush as her fingernail clicked excruciatingly slowly over the teeth of his zipper before she finally released it.

Dalton threaded his fingers through hers and pulled her down with him as his hands went to her ass and pulled her pelvis towards him so that she could feel him pulsing beneath her.

“Fuck, you feel so good pressed up against me.” He gritted out as he helped her ramp up the friction.

His lips started at her shoulder before moving in towards her collarbone as his fingers went to work on the clasp of her bra. He wanted…no he needed to feel her skin pressed up against his.

As soon as the scrap of black lace fluttered to the floor, Dalton had Jaz spread out beneath him, and his mouth began to devour every inch of skin that was displayed before him. His calloused hands ran down the sides of her rib cage before settling just below the swell of her breasts and his eyes locked with hers just as his tongue took its very first taste of her.

“You are so incredibly beautiful.” He whispered as he let his teeth barely graze her nipple.

She gasped as her back arched up over the bed and whispered, “More.”

He needed more too.

Dalton was all too happy to give her what she wanted as he dragged his calloused hands down to her hips. He had her pants open in seconds as she raised her hips just enough for him to pull the garment from her body and deposit them in a forgotten heap of their discarded clothing leaving her before him in just the tiniest scape of black lace he had ever seen.

“Fuck me.” He muttered to himself as he allowed his gaze to take in the stunningly beautiful creature laid out in front of him. As his gaze was occupied, Jaz was able to get the upper hand once again pulling him towards her by the front of his pants.

She let her fingernails trace into the v etched into his hips as she slipped them beneath both his pants and his boxers before she looked up into his eyes. He was licking his lips in anticipation as she pulled them out enough to clear the head of his straining cock before she pushed them down just enough so that she could finally get her hands on him.

For as much time as they had spent together at this point, neither one of them had been completely naked in front of the other under purely carnal circumstances.

Well, Dalton had been, but under the cover of a bubble bath, so this was new to both of them. Her hands shook as she glanced towards him almost asking his permission to touch him. He laid his hand on her shoulder in answer, and she didn’t hesitate.

As her fingers wrapped around him he gasped at the overwhelming pleasure that ricocheted through
every nerve ending in his body. He almost felt like his knees would buckle, and they just about did when her tongue lapped at the underside of his throbbing cock.

As much as he wanted nothing more than to feel her lips surround him, he knew if he let that happen this was going to be over well before he was ready for it to be. He needed her naked, and nothing was going to stop him from making that happen.

His head fell back as he tried to gather up the will to remove himself from the temptation of her plush lips and he allowed her one last taste before he went on a mission to level the playing field.

An instant later he was kicking the rest of his clothing to the floor as he eased his fingers into the tiny scrap of lace that was still standing in his way. Once it was discarded, he pulled her to the edge of the bed and knelt before her looking his fill before he pressed her knees open against the bed and finally pressed his lips almost reverently against her skin.

When his name fell from her lips in a desperate plea, he opened her up with his tongue and got his first taste. It was like pure adrenaline coursing through his bloodstream as he traced a circuit from her opening up to the little nub that he knew could send her over the edge if he stroked it just right.

He lapped at her over and over until she was chanting his name and gripping his hair like it was the last tether holding her to this plane of existence and he was on a mission to snap that tether and send her right over the edge. With that in mind, he slowly slipped a finger inside drawing a string of curses from her pretty lips before he added a second and started to stroke along the front wall in search of the spot that he knew could take her the rest of the way over.

As soon as he found it, he crooked his fingers and went to work sealing his lips over her clit and fucking her with his fingers until he could literally feel her clamping down the moment before she screamed, “Fuck, oh fuck, Adam.”

Her cries were no longer quiet and her fingers no longer gentle as his lips, fingers, and beard tore the most exquisite orgasm from her.

When she had finally come down, she opened her eyes to see him looking quite satisfied with himself as he ran a hand over his sex dampened beard and lips.

“Fuck that was good.” He said as he smiled down at her.

“I think that is supposed to be my line.”

“Yeah?” He asked.

She nodded dreamily as he laid down beside her while they both caught their breath.

“I’m not finished with you yet.” He said as he turned towards her and lifted her up into the pillows at the head of the bed before settling his hips back between her legs and kissing her breathless once again.

“Adam, I need to feel you inside of me.” She whispered as the kisses started to ratchet up the heat level even higher than she had thought possible.

She whimpered when he pulled away from her and walked across the room to locate his discarded pants, but he returned a moment later with a condom in hand. Jaz took it from him ripping the foil packet open and watched as he rolled it down his cock while his eyes remained trained on hers.

She was practically shaking with anticipation when she felt the head of his cock press against her. As
he slowly slid inside, he closed his eyes as he tried to record every sensation that coursed through his body. She surrounded him like she was made only for him and he could already feel the pulses of an orgasm starting to coil low in his belly as he started to move.

He watched as a thin sheen of sweat glistened against her perfect skin over a barely concealed flush that was creeping from her breasts to her neck. Her eyes were half mast, and her back was arching like a bow on the verge of releasing. He had to close his eyes to regain some composure, or this wasn’t going to last long enough.

Once he’d found his focus, he opened them again and lifted her legs up over his hips sliding ever deeper into her as he leaned forward and allowed his whole body to make contact with every inch of her skin.

“Beautiful.” He whispered as he continued to rock into her locking his fingers with hers above her head.

“Adam…I need…” she gasped unable to get the words out.

She didn’t need to; he was on the same page. He started to snap his hips back more forcefully as he sat up lifting her with him to gain some much needed leverage.

He felt a single bead of sweat trickle from his forehead down through his beard and watched it land on her belly as his eyes followed its path towards her belly button before making a detour around to her back out of his sight. For whatever reason, that was what pulled the coil tight, and he knew he needed to bring her with him.

Dalton let his right hand traverse from the spot where he had been anchoring her knee to his side and followed the path over her hip until his fingertips grazed hers as the lay across her stomach.

He guided both of their hands so that they were hovering right over her clit as he whispered, “Show me how you make yourself cum.”

He didn’t pull his hand away as she started to move her fingers. Instead, he let her guide him as he worked the tiny nub just the way she needed him to.

“Oh…Oh Yes. Just like that.” She hummed as her hand fell away and he doubled down thrusting even harder into her as he rubbed tight circles on her clit.

“Oh fuck, Jaz I need you to come with me.” He growled as he leaned into her and sucked the pulse point just below her ear.

And just like that he felt her clamp down on him as she screamed his name and her legs began to shake and that hot coil of pleasure that had been residing in his belly snapped free as he came so hard he tasted blood from where he had bitten his lip in an effort not to wake an entire city block.

Dalton flipped back to the bed carrying her with him still locked together as aftershocks rippled through their bodies. They were both spent, sweaty and blissfully happy as they sucked oxygen back into their lungs before she leaned into him for a lingering kiss.

“I love you Adam Dalton.” She whispered just as they finally succumbed to their exhaustion.
A Line in the Sand

Chapter Notes

This one got a bit more emotionally charged than I had initially intended, but as I re-watched the episode this is where I thought it had to go. There is probably going to be a second chapter revolving around Paris, but this seemed like the right place to stop here.

I hope that you enjoy it.

As usual, mistakes are mine....The Brave is not.

Thank you all for supporting this story and sharing all of your amazing insights and commentary. I love it all. You are amazing!

I'll be posting the second half of Paris tomorrow ahead of the show.

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"You won't be walking into the lion's den. You'll be walking into the mouth of the lion disguised as a steak."

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Dalton was tired. They arrived back in Turkey several days later than anticipated from Seville after McG fell dick first into a job keeping them occupied until Friday night. Dalton had had a long, but very enjoyable night with Jaz, but the moment came to an abrupt end when he got the call from McG after Paloma had discovered his Special Forces tattoo.

To say Dalton was a little short on temper with McG interrupting what was sure to be some explosive shower sex would have been an understatement of the highest order.

To make matters worse, when they finally did head home late Friday night with the hopes of a quiet weekend, there was another interruption first thing Saturday morning just as they were about to settle in for a late breakfast.

Dalton had squeezed in a workout early hoping that he might catch Jaz still sleep warmed and content in his bed ready for a rain check on that shower. Unfortunately, she strolled in rubbing the sleep from her eyes and looking absolutely ready to go a few more rounds if he could just turn her back towards the bedroom when Patricia interrupted with a secure call that had come into one of Amir’s undercover aliases.

So now, Dalton was hot and sweaty without any hopes of continuing what he had started before McG’s unforced error in Seville. He wasn’t getting the amazing breakfast that Amir had working, and they were all staring down the barrel of another flight less than a day after they’d returned home.

Dalton was not a happy camper.

The only plus to the whole situation was that the call had come from Paris instead of some festering desert locale, so at least there was that. If he were lucky, he’d get a couple more nights away from
the bunker with Jaz in another beautiful city.

But finding a suicide bomber and the location that the cell was targeting with virtually no information wasn’t exactly going to make this job an easy one.

Jaz could see the strain the last week had taken on Dalton. He was hanging on by a thread after one job turned into two and now they were turning around to try and stop a suicide bombing from a tip that came in off one of Amir’s old burners.

He was tired, frustrated and likely feeling like he had no control over things which happened to be a perfect storm in the world of Adam Dalton.

He was a man that liked control, and it had served him extraordinarily well throughout his career. No doubt, all these variables were about as discomfiting to him as a bus full of children within range of a target would be to her.

Once all the gear was loaded, she climbed into the Humvee and took up the jump seat facing towards Dalton. She reached out and ran her fingers through his beard as he leaned into her for just a moment as she tried to convey some kind of comfort to him.

He smiled and put a hand on her knee giving it a squeeze before he went back to staring out the window. No doubt trying to figure out how to reel in this situation that was currently a bit too far outside of his grasp for his liking.

Jaz stared at him as he silently brooded on the way to the landing strip wondering why he felt the need to control everything to the extent that he did. Obviously, some of that was his training, but it certainly didn’t stop once the fatigues came off.

She made a mental note to try and wrest control away from him sometime when they had a few hours and some privacy to themselves.

As that thought flitted through her mind, Dalton glanced in her direction. He must have noticed the mischievous glint in her eyes because he looked at her with an interested gaze over the top of his aviators, but he was quick to shutter it as McG noticed the stolen glance.

“Something’s different here. Top, I think I just saw a muscle twitch in your face, because that almost looked like a smile for a second there.” McG said as he turned his scrutiny towards Jaz.

“Yep, something is definitely different. I can see that little pink tinge crawling up your neck and….Huh, Top I would never have taken you for a biter.” He finished as he glanced at Dalton while gently prodding the little-abraded patch of skin at the base of Jaz’s neck.

It had been mostly concealed by her shirt, but McG was nothing if not observant.

Its part of what made him such an asset in the field, and a giant pain in the ass the rest of the time.

Dalton kept staring out the window, but he was no longer brooding as a brilliant smile was reflecting back at Jaz in the glass. He was no doubt remembering exactly how that mark came to be.

Dalton reached a hand out and placed it on Jaz’s calf confirming that he too was thinking about that night just a few days back.

“Is that why you were so pissed at me?” McG wondered aloud as the wheels continued to turn.
Then all of a sudden he made a dramatic display as something dawned on him.

“You weren’t pissed off that I got it on with a spy’s daughter. You were pissed because I brought an abrupt end to you getting it on with your girl in Seville.” He mulled that over for a moment as two sets of eyes cast in their direction from the front of the vehicle.

“Damn Top, I’d hate me a little bit, too.” He said sincerely to Dalton.

Then he leaned over towards Jaz and whisper-yelled in a conspiratorial tone, “I hope you were gentle with him.”

Just as the words left his mouth one of Patton’s most well-loved toys that was thoroughly encrusted with half-dried slobber collided with the side of his face. Clearly, it had ended up in the Humvee somehow while they were loading up the car.

“Gross Top. Just gross.” McG said as he attempted to wipe the drool and sand from the side of his face without getting it all over his black shirt.

Jaz giggled from her spot between them, and Dalton gave her a bright smile as he enjoyed that sound. It was yet another sound he would never tire of coming from Jaz.

Dalton may not have enjoyed his lack of total control over the situation, but as the team took up their posts outside of the deserted warehouse that Amir had been taken to Jaz had a minute to take him in with a fresh set of eyes.

Sure, she had always admired and respected him, but she saw everything he did now cast under a different light. He was at his best when the situation was out of his control. He was calm, and level-headed even though she knew he was probably anything but calm watching two strangers hold guns to Amir’s head.

But, he read the situation and assessed it with clarity and confidence that many would never have under much better circumstances.

“No one fires, do you hear me? No one fires. That’s an order.” He said with a steely calm settling over him as the rain pelted his back.

She couldn’t see him as she had her eye trained on the two men with guns pointed at Amir, but she knew that his blue eyes danced with fire as he commanded his team. There wouldn’t be a shred of doubt cast over the planes of his face if she could have looked at him, of that she was certain.

In that instant, she knew that there was no one she would trust more to keep her safe if it had been her standing in the line of fire. Even if his emotions were running high, she knew he would do right by any member of their team.

He would make any sacrifice.

Dalton knew that leaving that boy behind had cost Amir greatly and that it would also ramp up the tensions that had been an undercurrent in his relationship with Jaz since he had joined the team.

Those tensions came to a head as rain washed away all pretense and Jaz unleashed her fury on the former CIA operative.
It was in these moments that he knew his relationship with Jaz would be tested. He couldn’t talk to her as the woman that he loved; he had to talk to her as her CO.

In this, he could not bend.

It was for her safety and the teams.

There were a lot of things that he knew about his team that he chose not to share with the others. They were often painful, and they were generally not his story to tell.

But, he knew that Jaz and Amir were going to be at each other’s throats with both parties believing that they are in the right and he desperately needed his team on the same page if there was any hope of saving Asim and stopping the cell from detonating a bomb in a populated area.

So, he took a deep breath and broke one of his unwritten rules for the good of the team.

For Amir, and for Jaz.

The tensions between them would do no one any good, and it needed to stop. He needed to put an end to it.

“Amir’s kid sister, she was a piano prodigy. In fact, she was so good at 14 years old that she gets asked to play with the Lebanese Philharmonic. First day of rehearsals, Amir’s supposed to drive her. Except he’s a 19-year-old kid right…so he has a…has a long night out with his friends, and he asks her to take the public bus.”

Jaz closes her eyes as her heart sinks. She knows that she's misjudged Amir, and she was upset that she couldn’t have just trusted Amir because she knew that Dalton did.

She knew that it was causing Adam pain to relay this story and that it went against everything he believed in to betray a confidence to tell her this.

She couldn’t help but wonder if it was a line he crossed only because it was her, or if he would have crossed it for any one of the other team members and that upset her even more. She didn’t want him to do things because of what they were to each other. Things that he would not have done if it had been Preach, or McG, or Amir.

She’d forced him to cross that line.

Jaz could see what this was costing him emotionally, and she was upset that SHE had caused him this pain, especially because she knew the story wasn’t finished.

“The bomb that went off blows the bus into such small pieces all they can do is identify the victims by their DNA,” He said as his anger was starting to roll off of him.

Anger at her for making him share someone else’s truth. Anger at himself for allowing the tensions between them to boil under the surface for so long, and anger at the situation they now found themselves in.

“So yeah, I would say that the choice to leave Asim behind probably wasn’t the easiest for him to make.”

Jaz felt shame crawl over her skin like fire ants burning a hot trail in its wake. She deserved his anger and disappointment. She deserved the uncomfortable silence that now engulfed the car.
And Amir had deserved better from her.
For the record, I am once again taking some liberties with Jaz's upbringing since we don't know that much about her childhood. From what I do know it seems like her parents were present, but that it was not a close relationship, so I am coloring in some reasons for why that may have been the case. In my mind, I think they might not have been terrible people but that they were deeply flawed (though not so much so that the relationship became irredeemable in the future...)

Well, we all knew this was likely going to come to a head. Time to air out their issues and see where they go from here...I am going to try and have the Mongolia chapter up tonight sometime.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

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"Yes, I'm the traitor. I have devoted my life to bringing down men like you, and I'm not going to sleep until all of you are in the hell you deserve."

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Dalton knew that there would be some speed bumps in his relationship with Jaz. And Paris had exposed perhaps the biggest one.

It wasn't that unusual that his fiery sniper would at times make contradictory statements or openly disagree with him. He'd come to expect that and though he wouldn't admit it he also kind of respected that about her. She didn't stand down to anyone.

His ego wasn't so big to think that he was always right. He needed his team to be prepared and willing to call him out if they felt he was making a bad choice, it was part of what made them such a good team. They could rationally discuss their options, and sometimes, his way wasn't always the decision that came out of those discussions.

But, there were certain things that he needed them to accept no questions asked.

At the top of that list, Dalton needed them to accept that he had vetted every member of his team thoroughly and trust that he did so with the safety of the entire team in mind.

That was why he was so upset with Jaz.

It had been a gut shot. Dalton knew Jaz trusted him, but for some reason, she didn't trust his decision to bring on Amir. He wasn't just angry with her; he was angry with himself.

Angry that he'd let this tension simmer because he didn't want to argue with her. Angry that his decision to let it go had forced him to share Amir's story when it should have been Amir's story to tell when he was ready to tell it. If he was ready.

On its face, that lack of trust should be a deal breaker, but Dalton knew her well enough to know that
it was in part an emotional decision given her close relationship with Elijah. But, that didn't stop him from dwelling on the idea that maybe she didn't know him well enough to know he would never bring anyone onto this team that he didn't trust with his own life, let alone those of his team members.

That should have been enough for her.

Jaz returned home with a new found respect for Amir.

Knowing about the path that had led him to this line of work changed everything. That kind of experience permanently alters a person on a fundamental level.

At 19 years old, Amir had learned the harshest of realities.

She'd had an unconventional childhood. Absentee parents might be the kindest label to put on it.

And sometimes that allowed her to prejudge someone like Amir, a man she thought had never known a day where you wonder if there will be food on the table, or if the screaming would ever stop, or whether you would be the one taking care of your mother at seven years old because she’d run out of money and couldn't pay for her next fix. He'd never been deprived of a mother to kiss his knee when he fell off his bike, or someone to help with his homework, or a father to reassure him when he had a nightmare.

She'd never had those things, and for whatever reason, she had judged Amir unfairly because he had.

Now, she understood that her childhood full of things she never had informed her decisions, but a profound loss that she was certain he carried like a two-ton weight on his heart every day had sent the walls that had always sheltered him crumbling to the ground.

In so many ways, for her knowing only hardship had been a blessing. You can't truly miss something you never had to begin with, but, she also knew it made it harder for her to trust.

She trusted Dalton. She did.

But, her preconceived ideas about who Amir was kept her from recognizing that Dalton's faith in Amir should have been enough for her. She had broken Dalton's trust.

She knew she was going to have to fix that.

But first, she had to talk to Amir. She owed him an explanation. But more than that she owed him an apology.

Dalton had walked past the kitchen just as Jaz and Amir had finished up their talk. He was glad that they had mended fences and found some common ground.

It was what the team needed, and he was relieved he wouldn't have to mediate any further. He could no longer be in the middle of that situation without Amir and possibly everyone wondering which side he was on. The teams, or the woman who they all knew he loved.

That was a major hurdle, and he knew that was exactly why he wasn't supposed to get romantically involved with a subordinate.

He knew that, but he did it anyway.
Jaz felt like her heart had sunk low into her stomach as she approached the door that led to Dalton's room. Their room she supposed, but it didn't feel like it right now.

She knocked and waited for him to pull open the door.

When he did, her heart sank even further because he wouldn't even look at her. He just turned and walked back over to his bed. He sat on the edge and rested his head in his hands as he hunched over.

The tears started to fall when she reached a hand out to touch him, and he visibly flinched at the contact forcing her to drop her hand back to her lap.

"Adam, I know that I can't take back what happened. You have every right to be upset with me." She started.

Dalton turned to her with a broken stare as he stood and shouted, "Upset. Upset! That's what you think this is? No Jaz, I'm pissed off! More than that, I'm hurt. You know me. You know who I am, and you damn well know that I would never...NEVER put you or anyone else on this team at risk by bringing in someone that was less than qualified to do this job."

"I do know that. I know you. It was a horrible lapse in judgment. I wasn't thinking. I let what I thought I knew color an opinion that was way off base, and I forced you to cross a line that I would never knowingly make you cross. For that, I am so sorry." She said as she stood and stared into his eyes.

She was willing him to understand her, but his eyes still flashed with hurt.

Hurt that she had caused.

"I love you Jaz, but I need time to figure out how to do this job without letting those feelings compromise my judgment. I crossed a line that I shouldn't have because I needed you to understand. But, as your CO, I shouldn't have let the situation escalate to that point to begin with." He said as a single tear slipped from his lashes taking cover in his beard.

Her heart felt like it had been split in two as she walked towards the door. She placed her hand on the knob as she turned back and whispered, "I love you, too."

Jaz walked back to her room and found that he had carefully placed all of her things on the dresser and replaced her fluffy down blanket on her bed. She'd wanted him to keep that, at least then she'd know he would still have a piece of her surrounding him until they'd figured this out.

They had to figure this out.

_____

Unfortunately, they would have to figure it out at a later date because the following day they got the call that they were being tasked with retrieving a piece of a Russian drone that had crashed.

It had cutting-edge stealth technology that made it virtually invisible and set them years ahead of the United States.

It also put everyone at risk of a strike that they would never see coming.

They would have to wait.

Chapter End Notes
Pardon me while I run away.
OK, this one is very short. That hadn't been my intention (again) but, once again there was a lot of emotionally draining feels here and they needed to stand on their own. If I can get it finished tonight (probably not up before the episode...) I will post the first Tehran chapter. If not, it'll be up as early as I can get it done tomorrow.

Sadly, after Thursday I am back to work...so the once, twice (sometimes three times) a day updates are unlikely to continue, but I will do my best to keep chapters coming as quickly as possible and no less than once a week. Just thought I'd give you fair warning.

And since I'm giving warnings, grab that box of tissues before you read this.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

_____  
"Saying nothing is better than saying the wrong thing."

_____  
As a team, they were fine. Amir and Jaz had worked their shit out, and everyone was back to the easy manner in which they had been accustomed.  

As a couple, they were anything but fine. They had barely spoken for much of the trip.  

The most interaction they'd had came when Jaz had suggested that she would get the sample from the back of the truck. She was right, she was smaller, but Dalton wasn't prepared to put her in that situation.  

What irritated him is that he was starting to question himself. Was he hesitant to put Jaz in that situation simply because it was risky, or because he loved her?  

Logically, he knew it was both, but at the end of the day, he made the choice because he knew that if anyone should be taking that kind of risk, it should be him.  

The reality was if it had simply been about who was the smallest, or the fastest, Amir was a better candidate. And he had voiced that thought, but that wasn't an option either.  

It wasn't up for debate.  

As it turned out, he was glad he'd made the decision. That Russian had almost dropped him; he wasn't sure how Jaz OR Amir would have fared under the circumstances.  

As it stood, Dalton had been laboring as he literally fell into the clearing hoping like hell that his team had gotten there first, because if they hadn't, they were going to stumble into a kill box and discover his lifeless body at the same time.  

It had been eerily silent, and there was no sign of his team when he heard and felt the first shots slice
through the air around him. But, his team was top notch, and as he fell, they stood.

By the time they'd dispatched the Russians that had pursued him, he had somehow managed to catch his breath.

McG had been the first to kneel beside him, "Talk to me. What's going on? Where's this blood coming from?"

Dalton was quick to explain that it wasn't his but he didn't miss the very real concern in Jaz's eyes when she thought he could have been gravely injured. And that look didn't change all that much when he'd explained that he was only suffering from a couple broken ribs and a bruised ego.

They had managed to get the sample, and for now, the tensions had lifted between the team and some of the anger and hurt that resided between Dalton and Jaz had deflated just the tiniest bit.

On the flight back, Jaz had observed Dalton closely. She could see that he was laboring, it hadn't been that long since he'd taken a shot to the vest and a laundry list of other injuries that followed. She didn't want to see anyone on the team hurt, but the others would accept help.

Dalton was stoic.

He rarely, if ever, admitted that he needed anything.

She didn't care. They had a lot to work through, but she could still be there for him. She needed to make sure that he was alright.

When they got home, she waited patiently sitting on his bed as he showered. He'd been surprised to see her when he came out, she could see it in his eyes, but he didn't ask her to leave. For that she was grateful.

She stood and slowly walked towards him watching for any sign that he was going to push back, maybe ask her to leave him alone.

He didn't. He needed this too.

When she was standing directly in front of him, she looked into his eyes and placed her lips against his jaw as she carefully put her arms around him. She released a sigh of relief when she felt him wrap his arms around her as well.

When he kissed her, she could still feel the pain she'd caused him radiating off of him. He wasn't over it, but she was willing to accept whatever he was willing to give her in that moment.

They didn't talk as Dalton unwound her damp hair from the knot at the top of her head. Not a word was said as he lifted her shirt over her head, or let her flannel pants flutter to the floor, or as his towel dropped beside them. Not even when they settled back into his bed.

This wasn't about fixing what had been broken; it was about comfort.

There were tears shed, and there was comfort given, but words were never spoken.

It had been slow, and gentle and if they'd been in a different headspace, she might have used the word perfect, but they weren't there. Not on this night.
When they were both sated, she placed a kiss on his lips as a single tear landed against his cheek then she quietly got dressed and slipped out of his room and back to her own.

Her heart ached, but she knew he was ok, and for an hour she pretended that they were ok.

They would be, she knew that. It had been clear in that hour that the love was still very much there, but it was going to take time for the hurt to dissipate.

All they needed was time.

Chapter End Notes

I'm going to run a little further away this time...

iwishiwasisobel, I too am an angsty bitch apparently...
I wanted to get caught up so that the show tonight didn't change my plans :)

Also, not a lot of editing since time is running out. Mistakes are my own.

I did use a lot more dialogue from the actual show than normal, but I wanted to use it to convey what they were thinking at that time...

Hang on.

_____

"Alright command. She's going in."

_____

It had been less than a week since the team had returned home from Mongolia to the news that their bug had yielded some actionable intel on the beach bombing.

They knew who was behind it, and Patricia and her team were putting together a plan while Dalton and his team began doing some research of their own.

There had been virtually no time for Dalton and Jaz to close the divide that had opened up between them, it would simply have to wait until they returned home. They had far more pressing matters.

It didn't help that they were going in as husband and wife. A couple of weeks ago the idea might have been entertaining, but now it only amplified the issues that were plaguing them.

They were all quick to joke about the ruse, but they didn't soften the edge of the blade both of them currently had lodged in their hearts. Just one step in the wrong direction and the blade could prove to be a lethal blow.

After they'd discussed the mission, Hossein pulled Dalton off to the side.

"You work with women now?" He asked.

"I work with whoever gets the job done," Dalton said as he cast a glance towards Jaz. "Hossein I never took you for a chauvinist."

"Not a chauvinist. Just a man who lost his daughter to those animals. And I know what they will do to her."

"I understand that, but I'll tell you this...You need to be a little more worried about what she can do to them."

_____

A short time later, Jaz and Preach were sitting up in their chosen perch watching as their whole mission started to unravel like a cheap sweater. There had been kids on that beach, and she wasn't
about to let an opportunity to stop the man responsible slip through her fingers.

As if Dalton could read her mind, and she was certain sometimes that he could, he broke over their comms.

"I don't want anyone risking their life when we don't have a chance. Jaz that means you. Jaz?"

His call went unanswered as she and Preach sprinted down to get a better angle.

A missed shot was a rarity, and it was a huge risk in a crowded street, but she'd had to pull off her mark at the last minute. She knew it wouldn't go unnoticed.

"Jaz, What the hell was that?"

"I missed it. I missed my shot. There was a kid; I had to pull up."

This wouldn't be the end of it. And it certainly wouldn't do anything to bridge the gap that remained between them. If anything, it would have the opposite effect.

There was a reprieve, and she had hoped that it would help him calm down before they had to talk about it as they'd found the woman who had been coming to meet Jarif. Unfortunately, she turned into a dead end. Literally.

She ingested a suicide cap before they'd had a chance to question her.

When they arrived back at the storeroom at Hossein's, she listened to the conversation. She could see Dalton bristling, and she knew eventually he was going to turn his anger towards her.

"You guys want to tell me what the hell just happened out there?" He shouted.

He'd been talking to both of them, but he had stared directly at her.

"I tried to get a different shot." She answered defensively.

She might have been wrong, but she wouldn't have apologized if it had meant that Jarif was no longer a threat to anyone.

"Did we plan for that?"

"No. But I saw an opportunity so I took it."

"You do not ever...Ever go off book!" He shouted.

The anger was just vibrating off of him in hot waves now.

She knew she was most likely wrong, but that didn't stop her from digging in. She was angry, too. She knew if he'd been up in that perch the thought would have crossed his mind, too. Would he have made a different call?

"Top, we improvise all the time. That's what we do!" She answered.

"No. I improvise. YOU stick to the plan. Period. DONE!" He shouted as he leaned into her.

At the end of the day, Dalton knew that it was his burden to make sure that all of his team members
came home alive.

If someone died because she or any other member of the team rewrote the script on the fly, he was still the one that would have to deliver the letter they were each required to write to a loved one. And he had to answer to Patricia. Just him.

"You guys think we have the same wiggle room in Tehran as we do in Paris or Mongolia?"

She didn't answer him, but her body language just set him off again.

"Oh, and I'll just leave the part out where you almost dropped a kid!" He shouted.

Dalton was livid. He had given an order, and she had disregarded it without a second thought. He knew she would when he'd given it, and that pissed him off even more.

Preach attempted to diffuse the situation, but another distraction let the boiling rage simmer out of the air surrounding them.

A text message to Aida Hareb's phone

Sorry I couldn't make it, something came up.

They were being forced to formulate a plan on the fly because they had one shot and Dalton had to make a call. He didn't have time to over think it, he didn't even have time to evaluate how he felt about it. His emotions wouldn't help anyone. Not him, and certainly not Jaz.

It was his call. His risk, but he asked each of his team members what they thought about it.

There was only one person he hadn't asked yet.

"Give me five minutes," Dalton said as he pulled Jaz away from the group and the call with the field office.

It may have been his risk, but it could be her life.

"Look I know what we just talked about over there, but I don't want that affecting your decision in any way. You don't have a damn thing to prove to me." He said as he kept his eyes forward.

"We don't have to do this mission, as far as I'm concerned, we can walk out of here with our heads held high."

He took a breath and finished, "In fact, we probably should."

He couldn't look at her because he knew that if he did the words would be very different. He'd beg her not to go. He'd tell her he was afraid of losing her. Hell, he'd tell her whatever he had to to keep her as far away from Jarif as he could. But Adam wasn't the one that was talking right now; he was her CO.

He had to be.

"When that truck was coming towards the beach that day, what was going through your mind?" She asked calmly.

She couldn't look at him either. Her heart was racing in her chest, and all she could think about was how many ways this could go sideways. All the things that could be left unresolved. Unsaid.
But she cast that aside for the same reasons that she knew he would.

"I was pissed. He attacked soldiers, that's one thing. He'd come after the kids..."

"Yeah, we got lucky that day." She answered.

"Yeah. We did."

"The next people might not be so lucky. Let's make sure there are no next people."

She knew he would see it the same way she did. She was going to do this. Neither of them liked it, but both of them knew the risks.

She was doing this!

"Yeah?" He asked.

And he was going to let her.

"Hell yeah." She answered.

When they pulled up outside the hotel, Dalton opened the door and slid over essentially blocking her way temporarily. He had something he needed to make clear to her.

"Hey." He said as he reached for her arm. "Anything goes wrong you improvise."

She nodded and patted him on the side on the way out.

Everything would have gone to plan if only Aida's brother hadn't called.

But he did.

Jaz had been forced to improvise, and now she was running down a corridor with Jarif's men closing in from all directions. All of her options were bad options, but she'd take a broken leg if it meant she'd see Adam again.

"I don't need the lobby. I'm gonna come out through the window."

She knew if she'd had time to think she would back out, so she just committed.

"No, Jaz. You're not. That's crazy" Dalton said.

Jaz could hear his voice waver over the comms line. They all could.

"It's what you would do."

She knew she had him there. He would absolutely do just that, but she didn't give him a chance to respond.

"OK, I'm looking at a plate glass window that faces the alley. I'll be there in 20 seconds. Please don't keep me waiting 'cause I'll probably have a broken leg."

Preach could see the look of anguish on Dalton's face.
"20 seconds."

"10 seconds."

"Ho...This is gonna hurt."

A moment later, the entire team watched as Jaz was grabbed by one of Jarif's guards.

Dalton felt his stomach drop and that knife that had been lodged in his heart since they'd been fighting twisted. The only way to stop the bleeding was currently struggling for her life on the other side of that glass, and there wasn't a single fucking thing he could do about it.

"Adam, they got her. I say again; they have Jaz." Hossein said through comms.

It was only then that he was able to put the reality of what he was seeing and what Hossein had said together.

They had needed time, and now time was something they did not have.

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All Jaz could think about as her world started to fade from a lack of oxygen was that she hoped Dalton wouldn't find the letter that she'd slipped into his pocket as she left the car before she had a chance to get it back. She knew it would gut him, but she couldn't risk leaving so much unsaid if she didn't get the chance.

She knew he would come for her. She just hoped that she was alive when he did.
Goodbye Letter

Chapter Notes

FYI, if violence towards women of any kind are a trigger for you please be warned that there are a number of triggers in this chapter.

I am pretty sure I am blowing canon out of the water as far as Jaz's childhood goes and I am ok with that. And I am amending my previous assessment that her parents may not have been irredeemable based on the scar from the episode and how I decided to play that. I don't think you guys are going to care that I've taken some liberties with her family life, but just thought it was worth mentioning since there is a good chance the show will delve into that later. I figure I'm already running on the edges of canon anyway, so why not just run it right off the tracks :)

This chapter is going to be split in two because it was getting super long and very emotionally charged. But, I promised you the letter and I am delivering on that promise.

I don't think I have to tell you to grab a box (or two) of tissue, but I will anyway...do it.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

_____ 

"You know what, you are exactly right. We do not have a choice."

_____ 

"Top..."

"Top..."

Preach was yelling, but he couldn't hear anything over the sound of his own blood rushing in his ears.

"Adam!"

"Uh, Command they got Jaz. I repeat they've got Jaz." He said, the words left his mouth, but his heart remained inside that hotel.

Dalton immediately flipped the switch and went into command mode. It was the only way he could manage to get his body to engage and move the way he needed it to.

Within a minute or two he was in the garage breaking into his second car. He had moments to get it moving before the opportunity was lost and his hands were shaking. He could hear the vehicle carrying Jaz drawing near, and he was in the one car in that garage that just wouldn't turn over.

As the vehicle rounded the last corner, Dalton looked over his shoulder, he saw Jaz staring back at him. He saw hope for a brief second before they both realized he was already out of time.

For the first time in his adult life, Dalton felt completely helpless.
Dalton sat listening to her voice on comms.

French. Smart girl. He knew she spoke the language fluently. He also knew that she would use it to keep her identity a mystery for as long as she could.

He just hoped it would be long enough for them to find her.

Of course, that would only work if they could pinpoint her location based on her directions.

Patricia had wanted to extract the team, but Dalton wasn't going to hear it. Leaving Jaz behind was not a choice he was willing to make.

No matter what he felt for her.

He wouldn't have left Amir, Preach, or McG behind either.

He understood the risk he was taking to stay. They all did.

Jaz was worth the risk.

When Jaz started to come around her eyes stung, everything was so white.

Was she dead?

She didn't think so.

That thought was confirmed when she noticed a bowl of food; it looked like mac and cheese. Strange.

She also noticed a guy dressed all in white. It was like that weird room in that Willy Wonka movie she remembered seeing as a kid. Oddly, this was way creepier, and she was certain there wouldn't be any Oompa Loompas coming to her rescue.

She didn't want Oompa Loompas though. She wanted Dalton. What she wouldn't give to feel the roughness of his beard against her skin, his arms wrapped around her, or even just to look back into his eyes and know that everything would be ok.

Because right now, nothing was ok.

Just then the door opened. A man who introduced himself as Arthur sat before her. He acted all civilized, but she had no doubt he was anything but civilized.

He began to question her, and she answered in French. Jaz had been speaking only in French since they took her because she knew the longer she kept them from figure out who she was and what country she was affiliated with the longer they would keep her alive.

Jaz was buying herself some time, though she was certain that however long that was, it was bound to be very unpleasant.

That was confirmed as Arthur grew frustrated with her lack of cooperation and had one of the two men in the room acquaint her with their methods.

The beating didn't last long, or at least she didn't stay conscious for long.
Dalton had stepped out of the room where everyone else had been analyzing what the feed before Jaz's comms cut off would tell them to have a private conversation with Patricia.

He had intended to fight her on the exit plan, but she didn't let it go that far. She didn't like it, but she knew him well enough to know that he would never be willing to leave Jaz to die unless there wasn't even a shred of hope.

Right now, the hopes were slim, but it was still hope. As long as that was the case, Dalton was willing to risk anything to bring her home. Even his own life.

Preach, McG, and Amir were watching him closely when he returned. They'd all been burning the candle at both ends, and Dalton was clearly torn up, but he refused to let even a second pass that he wasn't actively trying to locate Jaz.

Hossein was concerned, too.

He had already barked at McG about the go bag and told the others to get some sleep which they all knew he clearly needed himself, but there was no telling Dalton to do anything in that moment, and they knew it.

If he'd gone to sleep and something had happened to Jaz, there would be no coming back from that for him.

Preach had his doubts that there would be any coming back at all if Dalton lost Jaz.

This was going to end one of two ways, either Jaz came home, or this team came home without either of them because Dalton would almost certainly go all scorched earth on whoever had taken Jaz.

As he glanced over at McG packing the go bag for the second time in an hour, he knew he wasn't the only one thinking that.

When Jaz came around the next time, she had no idea how much time had passed, but she could taste the blood in her mouth, and she could feel the ache in her head. They had roughed her up pretty good, but she could handle a beating.

She just hoped she could handle whatever was coming next.

It was more than a little disconcerting when Arthur mentioned that he had 'gone over the body' while she was out. That was pretty fucked up, and he seemed to enjoy making her uneasy as she tried to catalog any other injuries that weren't standing out over the pain in her head.

She didn't think he'd done anything else, but there was still plenty of time for them to add rape to the menu. It wasn't something that was ever far from her mind as a woman in the kinds of situations she could find herself in doing this job.

Her attention was brought back to the present, and the past as Arthur touched the scars on her knee.

It was ancient history, but it was one of the first times she had felt utterly powerless in her life. It was the first time that she had vowed to herself to make sure when she was grown that it never happened again.
Parents were supposed to protect their children. Her mother might have, but she was a slave to her addictions. Jaz had spent far more time taking care of her than the other way around. She had always known her mom had wished to be better, but drugs ruled her world in ways that no child could ever really understand.

She learned later why her mother had turned to drugs. It was her father. He had beaten out every ounce of fight she'd had in her long before Jaz had been old enough to understand. She didn't figure that out until her mother had passed away though.

That was when her father had turned his rage on her. She was eleven. That was the last day that she considered herself a child. From that day forward, she was building the warrior that sat in this white room today.

She wouldn't give in. She wouldn't give up.

They would have to take this life from her, but there was nothing that she would give them. Not. One. Thing.

With that mantra in her head, she tried to stay calm as Arthur pulled a black bag over her head.

But when she felt the business end of a gun touch the back of her head, all she could do was picture Dalton. His beautiful blue eyes, the way they would crinkle at the corners when he smiled.

If she was going to die, that was the last thing she wanted to see.

Instead, she heard the round discharge right beside her ear and felt her stomach turn inside out as the shock reverberated through her spine. It had been close enough to shake her, and her ears were ringing so loud she wondered if there would be permanent damage.


Dalton had been listening to that tape for hours on end. But there had to be something that they'd missed. He knew that Patricia had the best working on it and that they had all the cutting edge tech the US government had to offer dissecting every minute sound, but he was sure they'd missed something.

He was sure because if they hadn't they would never find her and that simply wasn't an option he could accept.

The team came in looking fresh and showered. Preach patted him on the back and handed him something that was being passed off as coffee. It tasted like motor oil.

He unplugged the headset that he'd had on since the last time Preach had seen him.

It was probably hours ago, but Dalton couldn't be sure.

He knew he was just looking out for him, but Dalton just couldn't let it go. He knew that if he just listened hard enough, he would hear something. Anything.

He plugged the headset back in and within a matter of seconds a sound that he'd heard hundreds of times that day finally jumped out at him. He was certain.

Noah had been skeptical, but after isolating it, the sound was confirmed.

Sheep.
They finally were able to narrow the dozens of potential locations down to a handful. That was something they could work with.

Hope was blossoming in Dalton's chest, and he would do anything to hang onto that feeling. He had to.

McG was concerned. Perhaps that wasn't a strong enough word.

He was freaking the fuck out. Dalton had shot a man. Literally shot him to get the location of the slaughterhouse where Jaz had been taken.

He wanted to get Jaz back as much as anyone, but even for Dalton, that was reckless. If they had been discovered, there would be no reinforcements to get to Jaz. Amir and Preach were good, but two men did not rescue a woman from a black site suffering from god knows what kind of injuries and walk out alive.

It had worked, but they could have just as easily been joining Jaz in that black site, and eventually, they'd all be executed.

Dalton was one piece of bad news away from going off the rails. McG just hoped that something went right. Soon.

When they got back in Hossein's car, Dalton sat in the back. He knew he was starting to unravel. He knew that he wouldn't be any help to her if he didn't get it together.

As he leaned back, he put his hands in his pockets. His heart sank as he felt the envelope. Without even thinking he'd known that Jaz had put it there as she was getting out of the car the afternoon that they'd dropped her at the hotel. He knew the exact moment.

He turned it over in his hands for a minute looking at the pretty script. It was her handwriting, and it had only one word printed on it.

Adam.

He vowed not to read it. As long as there was a chance, he wouldn't read it.

It could have been minutes. Hours. Days.

Jaz didn't know. She supposed that was the whole point of the white room. To disorient.

It was working; she had no concept of time anymore.

When Arthur returned, he was almost jubilant. She had no idea what to expect, but what she got was beyond horrific.

He'd shown her pictures of the team. They knew. The city would no longer be safe for them. Time was running out.

Before she could start to think about what that meant, Arthur showed her a picture of Adam. He was beaten and bloodied. He looked dead.
For a moment, her eyes believed it. But her heart wouldn't allow that. Before a tear could be shed, she squinted at the picture, and the faintest of smiles came across her face.

"You're lying."

Her voice wavered, and the fear was definitely still there, but she was certain it had been a lie, and she had told him as much.

They would have simply dropped Adam's head at her feet. But they didn't.

The picture she knew was a lie. There wasn't a single doubt in her mind because she could see the moment she'd said goodbye to him as if it had happened only moments ago.

He wasn't wearing a vest then, and the coat wasn't the same coat either. It wasn't the coat that now carried her letter.

Those were the clothes he'd been wearing at the airport. Not the car.

They might know she had a team in Tehran, but they didn't have them.


Those were the words she continued to say, even as one of Arthur's men went about carving up her flesh. They continued as she felt the warm almost gelatinous flow of blood dripping from her fingers, and even as she felt her consciousness begin to fade from the blood loss.

Not. One. Thing.

_____

After Amir had visited the slaughterhouse, Dalton knew that there was no chance they were getting inside. If they did, there was virtually no chance any of them came back out breathing.

There were too many questions without answers. More risks than he could ever ask his team to take.

Dalton sat down on the steps as Hossein's and turned the letter over in his hands again running his fingers over his name as a tear clung helplessly to his lashes.

It fell when he slid his finger under the flap and opened the letter.

Adam,

I did this once before, but it didn't matter because I knew the person who would read it didn't matter to me. I didn't matter to him.

This time, it's much harder because I know how much this letter will hurt you. And you matter to me.

You. Matter.

The funny thing is that love was always a careless word to me. There were so many people in my young life that used it, but none of them really meant it. None of them knew what it meant.

I didn't know what it felt like, much less what it meant to love someone else.

I do now.
I know how it feels to be truly loved, and how it feels to love someone else.

Because of you. Only you.

It feels like the sun on my face right before I wake up in the morning wrapped in the comfort of your arms. It's the stunning look in your beautiful blue eyes that first night we made love in Seville. It's the way that you lean into my touch no matter whether you're happy, or hurt, or sad. Even when you're angry.

It's your unwavering faith in me, even when I don't listen to you. It's there.

Sometimes it's harder to see, but it's always there.

Adam, I know that it is a lot to ask anything of you right now, but I'm going to do it anyway. That's what I do.

I have two things that I need you to know. It's important.

First, I love you.

I wish I could have said it just one more time. I wish I'd had a lifetime to say it.

And the second, I know you'll resist, but promise me you'll try. Please.

I need you to know that I believe you tried your best to find me. I also know that as you are reading this, you're saying that it wasn't good enough. You're blaming yourself.

Don't.

Know that you did absolutely everything you could.

Because I know you did.

Know that I never gave up.

Because I would never give up on you.

And know that I was lucky because I got to feel what it felt like to be loved by a man like you Adam. And I loved you back with my whole heart. Always.

No matter what happened, even a lifetime with you wouldn't have been enough time. I would always have wanted one more day.

Live your life. Take a day off once in a while. Find love. Have kids (I know they'll be beautiful and you'll be the best dad).

But, don't you spend even one moment regretting the circumstances that were never ours to control. You are not to blame.

I will love you until the end of time. I need you to love me enough to let it go. Let me go.

Live the life you deserve. Live the life I want you to have. For me.

I love you always.
Dalton leaned his head into his hands and for the first time since he was a little boy he cried, not just a couple of tears but a torrent. His shoulders shook with the force of it, and his heart shattered.

Chapter End Notes

The rest of the episode will be up tonight (Tuesday), this felt like a good place to stop. I figured if I felt wrung out after that letter, I'm betting you're feeling it, too.

I look forward to hearing what you think about the letter. And anything else that you got from this chapter!

Your thoughts and comments mean more than I could ever explain to you. So thank you. You guys are the best!
This is a long one, and it does jump back and forth in the timeline between Jaz and Dalton's experiences of the rescue, but I tried to make those jumps as clear as possible without actually announcing them. I hope that it isn't too confusing.

This will wrap up what we saw in last night's episode, but there will be at least two chapters that deal with the fallout before the next episode is aired :)

Thank you so much all for the kudos, and wonderful comments. They make my day!

Enjoy!

Oh yeah, mistakes are my own...The Brave is not.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

_____

"I've got you. You're alright."

_____

36 Hours Later

Dalton was seated in the hallway outside of Jaz's room at the medical center turning an envelope over in his hands when McG found him.

"At least you won't have to deliver that letter. Who is it for?" He asked.

He wasn't prepared for the answer when Top turned it towards him, and he saw 'Adam' scrawled across it in pretty looping script.

"Oh man. Did you read it?"

Dalton didn't answer, but his eyes told him everything he needed to know. He'd known there was a moment in there where all hope had been lost, and he could only imagine where Dalton's head had gone as he read that letter.

"She's gonna to be ok," McG said as he patted him on the shoulder and left him to process whatever he needed to process while he went to check on Jaz.

It had been a day and a half since he first opened that letter, and now she was lying in the room behind him, alive.

_____

It was another three hours before she woke up, and Dalton had finally given in and fallen asleep on the bed across the room once he'd finally been assured that she was absolutely going to be ok. So McG and Preach were sitting in the chairs beside her bed while Amir tried to find out what was
happening with Patricia back in DC.

They knew Dalton would want to know when he woke up after he talked to Jaz of course. Until then, they were sure he wouldn't think of anything, or anyone else.

It had been nearly three days as it was since he'd eaten a real meal and or slept until he finally gave in to the latter with a lot of prodding from his team of course. They'd work on the eating part later.

"Adam," Jaz rasped as she started to come around.

McG was up by her side before her eyes even opened eager to assess her himself.

"Hey. Hey. You're safe." He said as he saw her unfocused eyes scanning the room.

Fear started to settle around her as she glanced around to see white walls, white ceiling panels, her white gown. Everything was still white, but McG was standing in front of her.

She was struggling to place him in that room. He shouldn't be there.

When Preach stood beside him, her confusion started to bubble up into a panic. She could feel herself hyperventilating, and she was powerless to stop it.

"Adam." She gasped. "Adam? Is he ok?"

McG carefully wrapped an arm around her shoulders as he helped her to sit up so that she could see across the room. Relief flooded her system in an instant as her eyes landed on Adam's sleeping form. He looked peaceful; he wasn't covered in blood or harmed in any way just asleep.

As she skimmed her eyes over him, they landed on a small rectangle that she recognized immediately clutched in his right hand. It was her letter.

"Did he read it?" She asked softly.

Preach shook his head, but McG answered, "He did. He did, but it was a dark time. We were going to be forced into extraction, the slaughterhouse was a fortress, and we would never have made it out. None of us."

She understood. She wouldn't have wanted the team to lose their lives attempting the impossible for her.

McG lifted a gentle hand to her chin and looked her in the eyes as he finished what he had been trying to tell her.

"I know you probably hoped he'd never have to read it, but it might have been just what he needed. He never gave up, in fact, he was ruthless, even for Top. I think he read it when we were out of options, but you should know he came back with a plan that was so crazy that it just might work. And here you are. Here we are..."

She smiled, but there was only one thing she wanted.

Adam.

Jaz sat up and looked at Preach and McG as she slowly dropped her legs over the side of the bed and slid to the floor. McG grabbed her IV pole and wheeled it after her as the two helped her get to her destination.
They watched as she crawled in beside Top and laid her head against his chest. He was so exhausted he didn't wake up, but on some level, he knew she was there because his arm came up around her as he leaned his chin towards her and placed his lips against her forehead.

Jaz was exactly where she needed to be, so the two of them arranged the blankets up over them and left to find Amir.

Dalton had been gutted by that letter. He was leaned against the wall trying to draw a breath as his comms came on. Patricia was in his ear, but her words weren't quite registering.

It was over. He knew that, but he was trying to delay the words he knew were coming.

The conversation had been a blur, only a few words leaking through his consciousness.

"Sorry Um...Line cut out."

"You did everything that you could."

"I know. I know it's impossible..."

"...Extraction plan."

"...Careful...Outed..."

"Outed." Dalton's mind came into focus. "Outed."

From that one innocuous word, a plan started to form. It was crazy, possibly a suicide mission, but it was the only sliver of hope that they had. That Jaz had.

He gripped onto it so fiercely it was like holding onto a runaway horse, but he wasn't going to let go.

The team had been on board, eventually. It was crazy, but it could work. Of course, it could also be the end of Patricia's career, but that had been her choice to make, and she'd made it willingly once she'd understood what Dalton had in mind.

She knew it could work, and her job was to protect her people in the field. If bringing Jaz home alive cost her her career, it would be a job well done and a sacrifice she would make every time.

They had a plan that was too crazy for the Quds even to consider they might attempt it, and they had the element of surprise. There would be no halfway in the plan, either they would succeed, or they would all suffer the same fate together. But, they couldn't leave Tehran without knowing that they had tried.

He couldn't leave without her.

He knew what she wanted for him, but he didn't see a future without her to love. Or kids that didn't have her dark hair and fiery spirit. He didn't see a happily ever after without Jasmine Kahn. It was the one promise he knew he would break if this didn't work.

If she died, he would follow. Scorched earth, guns blazing he would go down fighting. For her.

When the motorcade came into view, Preach took out the lead. McG and Dalton were already on the move towards the second vehicle as soon as it had been disabled. Dalton could feel how close he was to getting her back; he just hoped when they blew those doors she wasn't in such bad shape that
McG couldn't get her patched up enough to cross the border.

McG was good, but there would be no stopping, no hospital until they were safely outside of Iran. Whatever he could do for her would have to happen in the back of the van, because there would be no room in the truck Hossein planned to use to smuggle them out.

Once all the men had been dispatched Dalton blew the door and smiled as he saw the man slumped over on the floor, her chains still loosely wrapped around his neck. She had taken him out before he could fire on her team even though it must have taken every bit of her strength.

Pride swept through him, but it was short-lived.

They pulled the man from the truck and McG double tapped him. One for Jaz and the other for anyone who might have found their way into his house of horrors.

Dalton couldn't be bothered; he was only focused on Jaz.

He noticed the blood that had coated her fingers and was now running down her arms as they hung from the ceiling. He cut her hands loose, then went to work on the chains that secured her ankles. There had been a lot of blood as his eyes traveled from her hands to her feet, and his gut clenched as he wondered if there would be enough time for McG to stabilize her before they had to cram themselves under the floorboards of that fruit truck.

It would have to be enough.

Amir and Hossein pulled up as McG quickly administered a shot of epinephrine to get Jaz through until he could assess her more thoroughly, but they would have maybe 20 minutes tops until they got to the truck. Anything after that would have to wait until they had safely crossed the border, and even that wasn’t a certainty.

They were far from out of the woods.

While the team was formulating a plan, Jaz was fading in and out of consciousness.

She knew that she was suffering from blood loss. They’d spent hours carving into her skin. None of the wounds by themselves would have been fatal, but she knew together they almost certainly could be.

She was so close to closing her eyes and just picturing Adam one last time allowing his blue eyes and bright smile to guide her into a peaceful place where she could just let all the pain go.

So close.

But, leave it to Arthur to shit on her moment of peace. She noticed he was no longer wearing his white asylum suit, which probably wasn’t good.

He’d returned to let her know that her team had outed her as a spy.

They wouldn't do that. Adam would never allow them to do that. Jaz thought.

Her chest ached as she considered that she might be completely out of options, or more precisely they were out of options.

But she knew she would never give them what they wanted. If she was going to die, she would die
on her own terms.

Arthur wanted to take her for a ride.

Her mind was turning over that idea when a smile barely ghosted her lips. Adam absolutely would out her if he thought it would get them to move her out into the open.

It was crazy, and it could get them all killed, but she knew they were coming for her.

As they led her out of the compound, the smell of animal excrement was overwhelming, and her eyes stung from the light. The white room had been bright, but the sun was much more intense, and there was a lot more to take in.

Jaz had her head on a swivel; she glanced towards the high points looking for any sign of a spotter. She didn't see anything that would provide enough cover, so she knew whatever was coming would have to happen outside of the walls before her.

Her muscles were tense as she waited. Arthur was yammering on about getting inside her brain, but she was just bracing for an opportunity. She needed it to come fast because her strength would only hold out for so long. She didn't think she had much time before the blood loss overpowered her will to survive.

Like the mind reader that he is, Dalton chose that exact moment to announce himself. There was a loud bang as the convoy came to a screeching halt jolting Jaz and stunning Arthur who slipped at her feet as he was clamoring to draw his sidearm.

That was the opportunity she needed; she used the jarring motion to get her legs off the floor and quickly wrapped the chains around Arthur's neck. Her strength was limited, and he was fighting hard forcing her to bite him several times as he tried to claw his way free, but she outlasted him.

Her last ounce of fight fell away as Arthur crumpled to the floor in a heap. She heard Adam shouting about a blast and had just enough energy to turn her face away from the doors, but her mind was drifting away again.

She didn't hear the shots that ended Arthur's life, she didn't feel the chains break free, and she didn't hear Dalton yelling at McG. But she did feel the sharp stab of a needle before she jolted to a more wakeful state, and she definitely felt his arms as they wrapped around her.

"I've got you. You're alright." Adam said as he pulled her into the van.

His beard felt like sandpaper against her abraded skin, but it also made her feel alive.

She was alive.

The van ride had been a blur. McG was shouting orders at Preach and Dalton was quietly talking in her ear.

She followed his voice letting the pain fall into the periphery. She didn't need to know what McG was doing because she knew that he wouldn't let anything happen to her. She trusted him. She trusted all of them.

"It's ok Jazzy. I've got you; I'm not going anywhere." Dalton whispered as he breathed in her scent.

It had been almost as much of a comfort to him as it had been for her. For days he had worried that
he had already held her for the last time. Or kissed her. Or told her he loved her.

When was the last time he'd said it? He couldn't remember, so he made a new memory.

"I love you," he whispered.

"...You, too." She mumbled incoherently.

He knew what she was telling him, but the drugs were keeping her under the fog. But, at least now he knew there would be time.

_____

At nightfall, they were loaded into the truck bed bouncing down a dirt road. Jaz was leaned into Dalton as he tried to soften the blows with his own body as much as he could. She was curled up in front of him when he noticed the slight shake in her shoulders and the sniffle that told him the shock of the day was starting to resonate.

"Talk to me."

"I should've played things differently. I got us all into this mess." She said quietly.

He took a minute to think as he sighed behind her. He wanted so badly to touch her, to give her comfort, but from his vantage point, he couldn't see where her injuries were, and he didn't want to cause her any more pain. But his hand floated above her shoulder and moved towards her hip anyway. It didn't make contact, but he itched to give her that comfort.

"Did you kill Jarif?" He asked. "The guy who orchestrated the murder of civilians and children and your fellow servicemen?"

"Yeah." She answered quietly.

"Yeah." He agreed.

"Are we getting out of this country?" Adam prodded.

"Yeah." She answered with a little more conviction.

"Yeah, we are." He responded with a certainty the others still didn't feel just yet.

"So then that's it, alright? You did good. Job Done." He finished as he finally let his hand come to rest over hers.

He laid his head down against his arm as her fingers threaded with his. It felt like an anchor had lifted off his chest as that had been the first time she had really responded to his touch since they'd gotten her back.

In that moment she'd leaned into him and taken the comfort he was offering.

_____
The hollow sound was all it took to prompt further investigation, and before they knew it Hossein was talking, and shots were fired.

Jaz could feel the tension rolling off Adam; he had his weapon pointed towards the floorboards where the guards were attempting to gain access. Preach, and McG had been ready too. But they never had to fire a shot as the guard dropped when the second shot rang out.

Jaz could feel Dalton flinching behind her when they heard Hossein get hit as he yelled for Amir to get them out of there. He was listening to his friend die violently, and she could do nothing except hold his hand as the truck broke through the border.

The sense of relief didn't come for at least an hour. The Quds wouldn't follow, but it had taken about that long for them to accept that they had made it out. They were safe.

Amir had pulled over and helped them crawl out of the compartment, and they took a little more time as McG assessed Jaz without the threat of being caught. Once he was certain that she was stable, Preach, and Amir climbed into the front while Dalton finally gave into sheer exhaustion rested up against one side of the truck.

Jaz laid his jacket over him and leaned up against McG as they stared off into the distance. No words passed between them, but they were both grateful to be in each others company. They were had been friends for a long time now, and neither one of them had any illusions about how close they'd come to losing each other.

Dalton woke up less than an hour later as the sun was hitting his face, he immediately glanced around searching for her. He needed to make sure that she was still there, that he hadn't succumbed to sleep and woken to find it had been the cruelest of dreams.

It had been real. There she sat as he stared at her.

A warrior.

It would take time, but she would heal, and he would do everything he could to help her.

________

After a couple of days, the team finally made their way home.

Adam carried Jaz back to their room as she slept and laid her in his bed. He left her only for a moment as he returned with her fluffy down blanket and a couple of bottles of water before he climbed in behind her and folded his arms carefully around her.

She sleepily snuggled into his side and whispered, "I knew you would come for me."

"Always." He answered as he kissed her forehead.

Within moments they were both blissfully asleep.

McG looked in on them a little later as Preach leaned over his shoulder before returning to the kitchen where Amir was preparing dinner.

"This isn't going to be an easy one to come back from. The things they did to her are going to leave marks that last well after her wounds have healed." McG said.

Amir nodded before Preach shared his thoughts with the group.
"No, it won't be easy, but if Top can orchestrate that kind of Hail Mary pass to get her back, and he did, I have no doubt he can help her through whatever lies ahead."

"We all will," Amir added as he carried a pot to the table.

McG ambled off to wake Dalton and Jaz, it was time they both had a real meal and took a minute to spend a little time together as a family. That's what they were, and they had made it through.

Together.

Time was a luxury they had stolen back against all odds, and none of them planned to waste another second of it.

Chapter End Notes

More coming your way tomorrow...
Life In Slow Motion

Chapter Notes

There are a lot of emotions unpacked in this one...so tissues at the ready.

As per usual, I do not own The Brave, but the flaws are mine.

No quote since this is not episode based...instead, a song lyric for the song I was listening to as I wrote it...take listen if you are so inclined.

enjoy.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

_____ ~While I was watching, you did a slow dissolve ~ David Gray - Slow Motion _____

The team sat together for about an hour after dinner as they read, or looked at their tablets, and Jaz fell asleep leaned into Dalton's shoulder. No one said anything, but they just needed to be together after what they'd been through.

They were home. Just a day ago, that seemed like an impossibility.

Dalton lifted Jaz into his arms carefully trying not to disturb her as he carried her back to bed and arranged the blankets over her. He left the door ajar in case she needed him before returning to the living space off the kitchen.

Dalton and McG had been the only ones still awake when they heard the pipes grumble to life. They both glanced at each other knowing Jaz was awake, and she really wasn't supposed to be getting her sutures wet for another day or so.

"Shit." They both said in unison as they jumped up and started to move towards the bedroom.

What they found was far worse than the bull-headed Jaz insisting on a shower. Instead, it was a broken Jaz tearing at her clothes and her sutures in the process as she struggled.

"Jaz. Jazzy? Talk to me. You've got to calm down." Dalton said as he wrapped his arms around her body trapping her hands in an attempt to keep her from causing further damage to her already wrecked body.

She felt so small in his arms as the weight of her experiences were crushing down on her.

He hadn't seen the injuries up close yet, but he knew what they were. He'd seen the reports.

Dalton was trying to give Jaz time to come to terms with things without her worrying about him. About what he might think, but she was determined to force his hand without even realizing it.

Dalton glanced back at McG who was standing in the doorway with a sedative and a suture kit, but
Dalton thought it would be better to try and calm her down without having to subdue her with sedation—it would only amplify her panic when she came around again, and hurt her already fragile trust. She trusted them explicitly but she might not if she felt like they would sedate her against her will. They would if they absolutely had to, but only if there was no other way.

"Jaz, tell me what you need." He crooned in her ear as he rocked her in his arms trying to let the calm he was trying to project wash over her.

"I need to get the stink of that place off of me. I can smell him in my hair. I can still feel that place on my skin." She sobbed.

Dalton looked at McG silently asking him if he could fix whatever sutures had come free, but he was going to let her do what she needed. He was going to help her.

"Ok Jazzy. I'll help you. But, you're going to have to let McGuire check out your sutures afterward. Is that ok?"

She looked into his eyes and nodded. The fight she had been preparing for hadn't come to pass and he and McG both relaxed as the tension in her shoulders fell away.

It wasn't ideal, but if it meant she'd regain some sense of calm and control over her situation, they weren't going to stop her. They'd just have to deal with any consequences later.

McG gave a nod and pointed towards the living room, "I'll be out here whenever you're ready."

Dalton silently thanked him as he closed the door.

_____

Dalton led her into the bathroom where he steeled himself for the aftermath of her time at the black site. He knew what the injuries were, and he had a good idea how each one had occurred based on the reports, but seeing them up close and personal was going to be one of the hardest things he'd ever done.

He knew that.

He knew there was no way to prepare for something like that either.

He could see similar thoughts flitting over her expressive eyes as well.

"Don't hide from me. I promise you that I will never see you as anything less than beautiful." He said as he lifted the sweatshirt over her head revealing everything.

She stood in front of the mirror looking at the dark bruises that bled into her hairline as her fingers brushed over the split in her lip. She mapped out the deep purple darkness that crept out from under both of her eyes and glanced over her swollen cheek, and the yellow-green tint that crawled under her jaw and down her neck that was littered with rough abrasions.

All Dalton could do was watch and offer her a warm body to lean into for comfort as his eyes followed the path of her hands.

When they fell to her collarbones, he noticed the two-pronged burns that littered her beautiful skin. Below them, there were rows of short straight slashes lined up in perfect, calculated rows.

He knew they had been inflicted slowly, with precision. Inflicted for maximum pain. They covered
her skin from shoulders to hips, down her rib cage, down her arms and her back, and even across her 
thighs. He knew there had been over 40, but his eyes thought there had to be more.

They were in places that no man should ever see without permission below her hipbones, and high 
on her thighs. He knew from the medical reports that she had not been sexually assaulted, but they 
had made sure that that prospect hadn't been far from her mind. They wanted her to think that would 
be the next violation if she didn't cooperate. And Dalton knew that it was their playbook. He had no 
doubt it had been more than just a threat. The last indignity suffered before they ended her life 
perhaps.

They'd intended to inflict pain and terror, but a part of that had clearly been about humiliation and maximum emotional distress. Fortunately, they got to her before they'd crossed that line.

Regardless, Dalton knew two shots to the head had been far too merciful for a man like Arthur. He wished like hell he'd had time to turn his tactics back on the man before they'd ended his miserable life.

When she turned, Dalton had to hold the air in his lungs to keep from making a noise that would betray his emotions.

She needed him to be strong; she didn't need him to crumble right along with her.

Her knees gave out as she saw there was a large deep purple, almost black bruise that looked like it 
had been poured over her back and side. Her left kidney had been lacerated with brutal force.

It hadn't required surgery, but it would be tender for weeks, if not months. Dalton knew first hand how badly any injury to a kidney could hurt, and that it generally hurt long after the visible signs of injury had receded. He also knew that it was the result of an extremely brutal hit that would have caused her tremendous, lasting pain as they worked to break her.

His body ached for her, and his heart broke as she surveyed all of the damage for the first time. She had blood dripping from a couple of the wounds covering her arms, but her eyes were stuck on that ominous looking bruise.

"Jaz, I know it looks bad, but the doctors felt strongly that there was nothing that time wouldn't heal."

Her eyes locked on his and he could tell that she wanted to call that statement a lie. Of course, there would be scars. Lasting reminders on the surface and beyond, but he needed her to see what he did.

"These marks, the scars that remain, they will be with you always, I know that, and I wish I could erase them for you. But, someday, they won't be the stark reminders of the pain you went through, they'll be a reminder of a battle that you won. To me, they are reminders of your will to survive, your strength. And when they heal, they'll be beautiful because they'll remind me every day that you fought to get back to me. That we fought together."

Tears glittered on the surface, but they never fell.

She just whispered, "together."

Once she had inventoried the injuries, she turned for the shower. Dalton had turned it off when he'd come in earlier, so at least there would still be some hot water.

Dalton kept a hand on her elbow as he quickly stripped off his clothes before he stepped into the shower and carefully helped her step over the edge of the tub.
She wanted to scrub and scour her skin, but it only would have opened the still freshly sutured skin, so he drizzled the soap into his own hands and took over.

He washed the first of what he knew would be many layers of painful memories from the surface of her skin with painstakingly careful strokes of his fingers across every inch of her skin. A washcloth would have snagged endlessly on sutures as it went.

He knew that tears had freely mingled with the water cascading around them, both hers and his own as he went, but he never let them throw him off course.

He knew this was the only comfort he could give her right now. The rest would take time. But, it was time they now had.

Once she was satisfied that the stink had been removed from her skin and her hair was freshly washed, Dalton gently towel dried her skin and helped her into a pair of his shorts and a worn old t-shirt that was about three sizes too large on her tiny frame.

McG came in a few minutes later and tidied up the sutures that she'd disrupted in her haste to get undressed earlier and gave her one of the pain pills that had been prescribed to her before she was discharged.

After McG headed to his own room after telling the pair to call out if he was needed, Dalton looked towards Jaz and whispered, "Tell me what you need from me."

"I just want you to hold me. Please." She whispered as relief flooded over him.

He'd been prepared to give her space if she'd asked. He would have done it, no questions asked but it was the last thing he would have wanted to agree to.

He held up the blankets as she crawled into the bed following her in.

"I'm going to just lay back, and then you just get comfortable however you need to." He said allowing her to situate herself so that her sutures didn't pull and her back didn't throb.

She surprised him when she carefully crawled up over him with most of her torso draped over his, her face tucked into his neck and her legs very carefully tangled with his.

He smiled as he envisioned her stuck on him like a starfish, but he was willing to let her siphon off whatever comfort she needed from him if it helped her sleep. He didn't care if he had a crick in his neck come morning, or that his arm fell asleep within five minutes as long as she was comfortable.

She fell asleep not long after as Dalton gently ran his fingers through her hair.

The night moved in slow motion as Dalton spent much of it aware of her. He listened to her soft cries as her dreams took her back to that place, and he stillled each time she adjusted her position all while quietly assuring her that he was always with her, keeping her tethered to the reality that currently surrounded her.

Home.
Back to work tomorrow, but I will try to post as often as I can. There will probably still be a chapter tomorrow though.
Sorry that I couldn't get this up yesterday, real life brought that plan to a grinding halt. I didn't get home from work until well after dinner and an early morning kept me from jumping in to finish this one up. This chapter is not super long, but it's starting to dig into the emotional wounds that they are going to have to start dealing with.

I will have a couple more chapters out this weekend and I am off on Monday!

This one is a tough chapter to read as the emotional baggage for both of them is starting to make its presence known and its raw for both of them, so you have been warned.

No quote, but the song I was listening to begins the chapter. Jaz isn't quite there yet...but she's working on it.

I hope that you enjoy it. Can't wait to hear what you think!

Mistakes belong to me, The Brave sadly does not...

See the end of the chapter for more notes

_____

All my windows still are broken
But I'm standing on my feet
~Demi Lovato - Skyscraper

_____ 

Guilt is a useless emotion. It is almost always misguided or weighted on shoulders that should not have to carry it.

Dalton carried that weight every day. He'd lost people in the field, and at the end of the day it was a burden he signed on for, but that didn't mean he needed to bear the burden of guilt for Jaz.

He did anyway.

His mind was spinning back to every choice he'd made in Tehran as he tried to figure out where he had gone wrong. What one decision had sent the mission off the rails and Jaz into harm's way.

It was stupid; he knew it was because there had been so many decisions made in minutes and everyone had weighed in from his team, Patricia, her team, and more importantly Jaz. They didn't have time for contingency plans, and they all knew that Jaz was going to take an inordinate risk to eliminate a soulless monster.

She'd done her job, but they all knew getting out once it was done was going to be a near-impossible task even if everything had gone exactly as they'd planned. She had seconds to travel unnoticed down multiple levels that were under heavy guard to get to a lobby that was crawling with armed guards who were just a call away from Jarif's men.
Yet none of them had been prepared for Jaz to get caught up in their nets. None of them had been prepared for Hossein to lay his life down for them. And none of them had been prepared for the oppressive guilt pressing down on their shoulders like a tunnel collapse.

What made things worse is their team had been decommissioned for the time being as they were going to be forced to travel to the field office to speak with a counselor next week. It was probably a good thing, but the wounds were still so raw, for Jaz both literally and figuratively, the idea was anything but appealing.

Not that it ever was all that appealing, but Dalton couldn't recall a time where he'd dreaded this aspect of his job more. Not when he'd been coming off his first tour, not when he'd lost his first friend, not even when they'd lost Elijah.

He was struggling himself, and that was only compounded by his concern for Jaz.

Jaz was right in front of him, but he could feel a raging river flooding between them carving out a deep chasm that would soon put them out of reach. She had started to pull back from him physically after he saw her injuries first hand.

He didn't expect anything from her; it wasn't about sex. It was about the fact that he wanted to offer her comfort. Yet, Jaz had started to avoid physical contact with one exception. At night, as she slept with her mind shut off she sought all the comfort he'd wanted to give her in the light of day.

At night, Jaz gravitated towards the warmth he provided. She tangled her limbs with his and let her head rest over his heart, but the apologies and distance returned when the sun spread across their bedroom floor.

Dalton knew she needed time, and he was going to do everything he could to keep building a bridge across the chasm between them. She was worth it. She was strong, he knew that she was, but until she realized it, he would do whatever he could to hold her up.

If that meant allowing her the emotional distance she thought she needed for the time being, then he would give it to her and relish the moments when sleep allowed him to add a few more planks to the bridge.

Jaz wanted nothing more than to take Dalton's offered hand, or to lean into the kiss placed on her forehead, or even to revel in his warmth as he wrapped her in a protective embrace. Her mind just wouldn't let her forget that if it hadn't been for her, his friend would still be alive.

How could she take comfort from him if she couldn't give it in return?

Her choices deprived Hossein of a future. A man that Dalton cared about, a man he respected. Hossein had already lost too much, and he'd been forced to sacrifice himself to save people she had put in danger.

What made it even worse was that she couldn't get beyond the things she saw in the mirror. Dalton had been so gentle as he'd cared for her, and she was grateful for that, but she was afraid that look in his eye would always be there.

It wasn't pity. Jaz knew Dalton would never pity her because he respected her too much for that, but it was so different from the look he had in his eyes when he'd kissed her that first night, or Seville. He hadn't even looked at her like that when he was raging mad after she'd blown her shot in Tehran which is what forced them on this path to begin with. Even then, there had been a fire in his eyes.
Now she saw sadness, regret, pain, but no fire.

There was love there, but she didn't think she could handle a life without the fire that licked at her skin when she was naked before him. And she wasn't sure how he could look at her like that again when every inch of her skin held a blunt reminder of all the mistakes she'd made and what they had cost him. What it had cost all of them.

It was different, and Jaz was afraid that the pain in his eyes would never dissipate. When he looked at her, he would always be reminded of a mission that he blamed himself for, the pain she'd suffered, and the friend that he lost. How could he not?

As it was, Jaz was standing in front of the mirror behind a locked door staring at the marks that traversed her skin.

The stitches were now gone, but the scars would never go away.

Sure, they would fade, and the pain associated with them would dissipate on the surface, but how would she get rid of the pain that lingered like molten lava in the center of her chest.

How do you treat something that can't be seen?

She had lost her closest friend not that long ago, and she thought that was a pain she would never be free of. But, with time it had turned into a different feeling. Instead of being constantly reminded of the pain of loss, she had started to recall the good times.

The times that Elijah had made her laugh, the way that he had enjoyed every minute of his life, and all of the good times that she and the team had shared with him. When he died, the color had receded from her life, but eventually, those memories spilled over and filled in the white spaces.

Now, there were no good memories associated with Tehran. There was nothing good that came with the lines that would permanently score her flesh. What was worse is that for her, she was stuck inside that white room, but there were windows. Windows that allowed her to see all the color, but she couldn't touch it.

Dalton stood just beyond her reach with his gentle smile and bright blue eyes. Amir was just beyond that barrier making the team laugh as he accidentally revealed something about his privileged childhood. McG was just outside the walls wondering if maybe the team could go back to Seville so he could revisit Paloma, the one woman who had kept his interest even after she dragged them all into a mission, and finally there was Preach face timing his kids.

They still lived in a world filled with color, but somehow she was still stuck in that fucking white room. It didn't matter that Arthur was dead, or that she knew she was home and safe. She still wore the roadmap of suffering on her skin, and it was getting harder and harder to hold the gaping wound in her chest closed.

They didn't make stitches for that.

Chapter End Notes

There are still more bumps in the road, but they're getting there. Next chapter will be up
tomorrow sometime!
So the team has landed stateside, and there is still a very real divide between Jaz and Dalton but Patricia might have a plan...what could she be up to?

I am officially diverging from source material at this point but, I'll still work in the episodes in some manner. I've kind of decided that this needs to happen and it might not mesh with Monday's episode so pardon me while I just jump into the deep end of the pool.

I figure there are three episodes left and I'm going to have two choices keep going with this story or stop until next season (there better be one!!!). Obviously, the second option doesn't work for me (you)...so I might as well just rip off the band-aid, right??

Anyway, hope you all agree. Let me know what you think!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

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Say something; I'm giving up on you
I'm sorry that I couldn't get to you
Anywhere, I would've followed you
Say something; I'm giving up on you

~ Great Big World - Say Something

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The team landed stateside three weeks after they'd barely escaped Tehran. On the outside, Jaz's wounds were healing, but on the inside, she was falling apart.

Dalton was worried that she was slipping away from him, so he had spoken to the one person who might be able to help him. The one person he trusted to have Jaz's back as he did.

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Patricia had landed in hot water, but nothing would have stopped her from meeting them at the airport. She'd put everything on the line to bring Jaz back, and wanted to make sure that she knew it was a decision she had made freely, and one that she would happily make for any one of them. It had been a calculated risk, if they hadn't made it Jaz would have died within a compound they had no hope of breaching. If they had, she would have been in even hotter water for allowing her entire team to get killed and that's what would have happened. She had no doubt they would have tried.

It had been her job to make sure her team returned home from every mission, and if she'd done what was expected of her, they would be returning to the states for a funeral over an empty grave instead. That wasn't an outcome she had been prepared to live with.

And she knew it wasn't an outcome Dalton would have lived with either. It almost certainly would've been his funeral as well, because there was no way he would have left without her.
He would have walked through fire to get to her, Patricia knew that. She knew him.

And there was no way that he would have left there accepting that they would never know what had happened to her. Wondering if she was still a captive. If she would be one of those prisoners, they kept in a dark hole somewhere left to endure unending torture. Dalton would have died trying to find her before he would have let that happen.

If she had been able to convince him to leave, the unknown would have haunted him. All of them.

In all the years that she'd known him, she'd never seen him even lean far enough towards that line in the sand to cast a shadow, let alone cross it. But she could see in his eyes that Jaz was a game changer. For her, that line no longer existed.

He loved her. She heard it in his voice as he asked her for help. He'd sounded even more broken than when her son, one of his oldest friends had died, and Jaz was still right in front of him. He'd felt her slipping away, and she was going to take his heart with her if she did.

Patricia had a plan, and it required enlisting the help of another person. Someone who might be able to help Jaz see a way forward. Of course, it would be just one more line crossed, and it meant sharing their secret, but if Tehran had done anything it had allowed her to see what her people were made of.

Preach, Amir and McG were the first ones to make their way across the tarmac. They all had smiles on their faces as the approached her. They were happy to see her and relieved that they were doing it as a unit, instead of with heavy hearts.

No matter how good it felt, the alternative outcome was still there in the back of their minds. Returning without Jaz, maybe even Dalton. In fact, there was just as much of a chance that none of them walked out of that situation.

They all could have ended up like Hossein, in an unmarked grave with no one to mourn the loss, or maybe they would have been captured, and she, Noah and Hannah would have been forced to watch them be executed one by one.

Patricia shook off that thought as she hugged each of them and waited for Dalton and Jaz to make their way off the plane.

"They'll be a minute." Preach said as he hugged Patricia.

When they stepped down, Dalton waited for Jaz with his hand held out to her. Patricia's heart ached as she watched Jaz bypass his outstretched hand and fall in line behind Dalton with her head down. The fiery sniper looked so small.

She wore defeat when they all knew just how hard she fought. She knew that Jaz was not going to be happy that she had shared their secret with someone else, but as she watched Jaz, she knew that they needed someone who could understand exactly what Jaz had been through.

Patricia hugged Dalton before she moved slowly towards Jaz. Jaz stared at her with tears in her eyes and an apology on her lips.

"I'm so sorry that you had to put your job on the line for me..." Jaz started.

"Stop. I did nothing for you that I wouldn't have done for any of you. My job is to bring everyone
home. I would make the same choice for any one of you, and if it happened again tomorrow, I would still make the exact same decision. Every one of us would do it all again if it meant bringing everyone home in one piece."

Jaz laughed, but there wasn't any humor in it. She didn't feel like she was in one piece at the moment.

"Well, we've got you set up at the hotel across from our offices. What do you say we head over there and get you all settled? Then we can meet for dinner. You'll finally get a chance to meet Noah and Hannah. Especially since they'll be taking the lead for a bit." Patricia said.

Dalton looked at her with concern in his eyes. He knew that there was still a very real chance this would be the end of her career, but he was taking it as a positive that she had been allowed to meet them at the airport.

Hopefully, the good outcome would smooth things over, but that was not a given since she had crossed just about every line in the playbook. Although, Noah and Hannah had gone along for the ride and the fact that they were still going to be on comms with the team going forward was hopefully a sign that perhaps there would be a way back for Patricia.

Dalton and the team had gotten their bags situated in their rooms. Jaz had a room by herself while McG and Dalton had been put together in a room down the hall and Preach and Amir were a couple of floors away.

Just because Patricia was aware of their relationship didn't mean they were in the clear. They hadn't really considered what could happen if someone higher up the chain discovered they were sleeping together, but it could have all sorts of repercussions and Patricia was already in enough hot water.

Still, Dalton decided to go and check on Jaz and make sure she was ok with being alone. She probably wouldn't admit that she needed him at this point, but he knew the nightmares were still plaguing her mind late at night and he wanted her to know that he would be there if she needed him.

If he was being honest, Dalton needed to be near her just as much if not more than she needed him. She'd cut him off for the most part during the day, so sometimes the only way he could be close to her was when she was asleep. Thinking about it, it sounded kind of creepy, but it was always Jaz that initiated the contact when her mind wasn't actively engaged in the effort to push him away.

On some level, she knew that she needed him, but she couldn't see past the hurt when they stood face to face.

When Dalton got to her door, it was ajar, and she was just inside pacing back and forth in front of the king-sized bed.

"What's the matter Jaz?" He asked as he approached her carefully.

When she looked up at him, her eyes shimmered with unshed tears.

"It's ok. I'm right here." He said as he pulled her into his arms.

He felt her stiffen for a moment before she wrapped her arms so tightly around his neck that his collar was abrading his skin, but he didn't care because he could feel her heart pounding against his chest.

So he just stood there and held her as he waited for her to calm down.
"I can't."

"Can't what?" Dalton asked her as he gently loosened her hold on his neck so he could look at her.

"I don't know how I'm going to do any of this."

"What? Do what?"

"Talk to a shrink. Sit down to dinner with everyone and pretend I'm ok. Stay in this giant bed by myself with nothing to keep my mind from spiraling away from me. What if they decide I'm not fit for duty? What happens if Patricia loses her job? What if....What if I'm really not fit for duty? What if....they let me go back and I can't do what you need me to do? People could die. You could die. Hossein died." She said as a sob finally broke free and the tears could no longer be contained.

And there it was.

All the things she hadn't been able to say for the last few weeks finally came spilling over.

Dalton lifted her into his arms and sat down against the head of the bed with her cradled against his chest as he ran his hand over her back. He didn't have the answers, so he gave her the most honest answer he could.

"No matter what happens, I will always be here. I'm not going anywhere. Whatever comes we will figure it out. Together." He said as he raised her eyes to his.

She watched him for a minute gauging his words before she leaned in and pressed her lips to his. It started out gentle, and Dalton just let her come to him as he tried to do his best not to send her running. It was the first contact she'd initiated since the night they'd first come back to the bunker.

"Are you ever going to kiss me the way that you used to?" She asked as she straightened her shoulders and pulled away from him.

"Like what?" He asked with a sigh.

"Like I'm not some injured bird, because this," She said pointing between them, "hurts more than thinking that we're over."

"Jaz, I know you're not some injured bird. And we are not over. Is that what you think?"

"You don't look at me the same. You don't touch me. What am I supposed to think? I can see the pain in your eyes. How could you not look at me and be reminded of everything? And who would want to be with someone who is so clearly damaged?"

She was just ramping up with a long list of reasons, but Dalton had to stop her there because he was starting to get a little pissed off.

"Don't! I don't want to hear you talk like that again." He all but growled. "You couldn't be farther from the truth on that one. Yes, I am sure that you see pain in my eyes. How could I not be in pain when the woman I love is hurting? But, damaged? Really? What I see is one of the strongest, bravest people I've ever met. You walked into a fire with no exit plan and not an ounce of trepidation. I was so afraid for you walking into that room. It took everything in me to let you go knowing that I couldn't protect you. And...." He broke off as his emotions started to clog his throat.

After a minute, Dalton rubbed his fingers over her still bruised chin and said, "And when they took you...when I sat in that car and looked back at you all I could think was that I'd failed you. That I had
just looked into your eyes for the last time as they sped by." He said as he looked down at their hands linking his fingers with hers.

"And then I read your letter. I didn't save you because I'm some kind of superhero, you saved you. We had all but given up. The slaughterhouse was a fortress. But, you still believed in me. You told me to believe I had tried everything, because you believed it. You are the reason I didn't give up. Not me. So don't you for one second think that I see you as a wounded bird." He said as stared into her eyes.

For the first time in weeks, she saw that spark glittering in his pale blue eyes, and she felt it when his hands shifted to her face as he leaned in and kissed her like she was the oxygen feeding the fire inside of him.

She yelped in surprise as he effortlessly lifted her into the air before dropping her back in his lap with her knees on either side of his hips. When he claimed her mouth again, his hands shifted to her hips. One anchored her to him while the other slid underneath her shirt as he carefully lifted it away from her body.

He kept his eyes focused on her for any sign that she was having second thoughts, leaving her only long enough for the shirt to pull free and flutter to the bed behind her. Again he looked for any sign she wasn't feeling this but she wasn't looking at him anymore, she was focused on the buttons of his shirt.

She popped the first two free without much effort, but as she got lower her hands started to shake and she blew out a frustrated groan. Then she got this adorable determined look on her face as she just yanked the sides of his shirt and buttons flew in every direction bringing a huge smile to her face and tearing a guttural groan from his throat.

"Fuck. You will be the end of me. " He said as he pulled her against his chest.

Her heated skin had never felt better against his, of that he was certain. Just as he was about to deftly unclasp her bra to get the full skin on skin experience, there was a knock at the door.

"Fuck!" they both said in unison.

Dalton couldn't help but notice how she pulled her shirt back and covered herself once the moment had evaporated. It stung a little as she pulled back from him again, but he tried not to let her see it.

Jaz opened the door expecting to see McG or Preach; she had not been expecting a complete stranger. Served her right for not looking through the peephole.

"Hey. Sorry to barge in on you, Patricia sent me." The woman said as she took in Jaz's flushed cheeks and disheveled appearance.

"Oh. It's fine. Really." Jaz said as she tried to figure out how she was going to explain this and who she was explaining it to.

"I was just, uh, bringing her bag in," Dalton said as he came around the corner.

The woman was trying her hardest not to smile, and even harder not to laugh out loud. She really was, but it was an impossible task.

The two of them just stood there looking at her like she was given the punchline to a joke that they hadn't been told.
"I'm sorry, it's just Jaz, your shirt is on backward, and Dalton you have two buttons left and your hair is standing up in every direction. Clearly, I have really terrible timing." She said as she still struggled to keep from laughing.

"Oh. I'm sorry. Hannah Rivera. We've spoken over comms, but it's nice to put names to faces." She said as she held out her hand.

"Shit," Dalton said as he glanced toward the ceiling.

Chapter End Notes

Sorry for the ice bucket...pretty sure they didn't appreciate it either. More tomorrow!
Once again, mistakes are all mine...The Brave, not so much.

I am breaking from what I think is going to happen on Monday's episode, so be aware I am likely stepping all over the future plot line. I'm ok with that, I hope that all of you are as well :)

Anyway, let's see what Hannah has to say...

Enjoy.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

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Like wildfire
It starts in my chest
The silence grows louder
Ringing out in my head

I feel the Earth shaking under my feet
I feel the pressure building until I can't breathe
And it takes everything
And it all spills out

Atlas: Anger - Sleeping At Last

—

"Before you start freaking out, I know. Patricia mentioned it. I promise you I'm not here to blow the lid of your secret. I'm here because Patricia thought that I might have some insight that could help you Jaz." Hannah said as she saw the panic rising on their faces.

"I don't understand," Jaz said as she looked between Dalton and Hannah.

It was clear that her reason was clicking into place for Dalton, but Jaz was still in the dark until Hannah reached for the collar of her shirt and revealed a mottled deep red scar.

"I've been where you are right now. I know how hard it is to regain your sense of control after someone so carelessly strips it away from you. So, if you wanted to talk..."

Clarity shined in Jaz's eyes as she looked at Dalton and nodded before answering, "I'd like that."

Dalton placed a hand on her cheek and looked into her eyes seeking any sign of hesitation, when he didn't find any he kissed her on the forehead and said, "you know where I'll be if you need me."

As he walked through the door, he laid his hand on Hannah's shoulder and gave her a terse nod. He didn't say the words, but she knew he was grateful for her willingness to share her story. It wasn't one that she shared easily or often.
Jaz liked Hannah right away. She was straightforward and didn't dance around the issues which was a little unsettling, but just knowing that she had been through something similarly life-altering and that she survived and found a way forward made Jaz feel a little less alone.

"Would you mind if I asked what happened? You don't have to answer if you don't..." Jaz asked.

"No. It's fine. Do you remember the job with Ranier Boothe?"

"I do," Jaz said as she rubbed her hand over the marks on her left arm.

Hannah reached out and stilled her hand as she looked at the marks and said, "Seems you and I are more closely connected than we thought because my past caught up with me when we landed the Ranier Boothe case. The case that eventually put you on a collision course with Jarif."

"Ranier did this?" Jaz said as she pointed to her neck.

"No. Urzua. Not by his hand, but by his direction. Like you, I went into a difficult situation, and my team was too far away to help me. For you, there was no choice, I had a choice, and I got too comfortable. I told my team to hang back, and it almost cost me my life." She said as she walked into the room and sat on the edge of the bed.

Jaz sat down facing her as she waited for Hannah to continue.

"It was early last year. I was under with the Sinaloa Cartel; I was on my way to a meeting, the next thing I remember is being pulled out of the car and having my skin carved open and bones broken before I was left for dead on the side of the road. My team was five miles behind. Close enough to know I was in trouble, but too far away to help. Sound familiar?"

Jaz nodded as she stared at the mark on Hannah's neck.

Hannah stood and unbuttoned her shirt before turning her back to Jaz and allowing it to slip from her shoulders eliciting a gasp from Jaz as she saw deep, lengthy scars traversing her back and shoulders. The experience must have been horribly painful, and there was little doubt that had her team been much further away she might not have survived. Blood loss and shock would almost certainly have claimed her.

For a moment, Jaz couldn't help thinking about how awful it must have been, flayed open on the side of the road, alone and under cover of darkness.

"I'm so sorry that happened to you," Jaz said as Hannah replaced her shirt and turned back around.

"I'm a different person now for sure, and it certainly took me some time to come to terms with things, but it also put me in a position to stop the Urzua's of the world. Undercover, we worked contacts for months, sometimes years and too often came up with little to show for it. Now, I have a chance to make a real difference. And ultimately, with your teams help, we got Urzua. Do I wish it never happened? Of course, but I'm stronger having survived it, and you will be too."

"Yeah," Jaz nodded as she considered all that the analyst had shared with her.

"You have something I didn't have. I was alone. You have your team. It's pretty clear that they all care about you. And Dalton, well its obvious that he cares a great deal for you, and trust me even if Patricia hadn't told me about your relationship it was hard to miss when they were trying to find you. He was beyond distraught, and when we all thought there was nothing left to be done, he was
broken. I don't think he would have come back from that...if he'd lost you. I wasn't the only one who thought he was going to go down fighting a losing battle to get to you rather than give up."

Jaz gave Hannah a watery smile as she swiped at the tears that were clinging to her lashes.

"Yeah, I'm glad it didn't come to that." Jaz finally responded.

"Me, too. Anyway, I want you to know that I am always here for you if you need to talk. Anytime." Hannah said as she gently laid a hand on her shoulder before she headed for the door.

"Wait," Jaz said quietly before she could leave.

When Hannah turned back to her, Jaz couldn't make eye contact with her, but she had to ask, "After...do people...men....I'm sorry, I'm prying where I shouldn't be. It's not my business."

"I promise you it gets easier. I'm not in a relationship right now, but I'm betting Dalton doesn't care about the scars. You might, and that will get better, they won't always be the first thing you think about when you're with him. And at least he knows about them, so you won't have to explain them. But, if I had to guess, when he does see them...now that they are healing, he's probably not thinking about the scars all that much. Didn't seem like he was thinking about the scars at all when I interrupted." Hannah said with a smile as she leaned in a hugged Jaz.

"You probably weren't either." Hannah threw over her shoulder as she opened the door and walked through.

Jaz sat on the edge of the bed and thought about everything she'd learned from the analyst who had been a virtual stranger an hour ago.

With Hannah's openness, the ground under her feet felt just a little more level. She'd been through a similar ordeal, and no one would have blamed her for crumbling, but in a little over a year she had battled back and found a way to use that experience. And they'd helped her to take out the man responsible.

Jaz was never going to feel bad about a guy like Urzua becoming collateral damage in the Boothe case, but with her knowledge of Hannah's situation, she couldn't help but feel pretty good about his demise.

They'd taken away his tightly held control and made him feel the fear that he wielded against those he harmed when they exposed him to Boothe, and in doing that Hannah had been gifted with some closure on a difficult chapter in her career. That was as close to a win-win as they got.

And it was yet another parallel for the two. As difficult as Jaz's ordeal had been, Jarif and the men who harmed her were all dead. With time she would heal as Hannah had, but the men who were responsible would never hurt anyone else again.

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Later that evening, the group got together with Patricia, Hannah, and Noah who they met for the first time. They had dinner and got to know the people who they relied on to keep them safe in dire situations.

Dalton took a minute to pull Hannah and Noah aside as they sipped cocktails after dinner in the hotel bar.

"Listen, I just wanted to say thank you for what you did. I know it couldn't have been easy to put everything on the line for people you hadn't even met." Dalton said.
"We may not have met in person, but we appreciate what you guys put on the line every day. It's our job to make sure everyone that goes in comes out." Noah said.

"Still. No one would have faulted either of you if you had walked away."

"That was never an option," Hannah told him.

"There is something that I have been meaning to ask you though," Noah said as he glanced at Hannah almost in confirmation.

"Shoot," Dalton said as he looked at the pair.

"There's a hearing. For Deputy Director Campbell." Hannah started.

"We were hoping that you and the team might be willing to speak on her behalf. It might go a long way towards getting her back." Noah added.

"Let me guess; she told you not to say anything," Dalton surmised.

Hannah and Noah nodded as they all glanced in Patricia's direction.

"She didn't want Jaz to..." Hannah started.

"I'll talk to the team, but I know they will all feel the same way I do. Just get me the time and place, and we'll be there." Dalton answered as he put a hand on each of their shoulders. "This team is whole because of what all of you did for us. Because of Patricia."

Chapter End Notes

Thank you again for all of the support, comments, kudos, and most of all reading every chapter! You guys are amazing and make it so much more fun to write this story!

Hopefully, I will have another chapter up late tonight or tomorrow. After that, it might be a day or two, but I will post as often as I can now that work is encroaching on my free time again :)
OK, so the teams have met and Jaz has had some bonding time with Hannah. Let's see what the crew is up to shall we?

If you are prone to blushing, please be advised that work, a quiet corner of Starbucks, or any other public venue is bound to lead to some questioning stares. ;-)

No, really...I'm not kidding.

Also, I love this song that is listed at the beginning. I think it's perfect for where Jaz and Dalton are right now.

Looking forward to tonight's episode. I'll try and get another chapter up tomorrow if the snow continues my airport time will likely be longer than anticipated. So here's hoping for a quiet corner!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Bring all that you're scared to defend
And lay it down when you walk through my door
Throw all of it out on the floor
Your sorrow, your beauty, your war
I want it all; I want it all

Bring your secrets, bring your scars
Bring your glory, all you are
Bring your daylight, bring your dark
Share your silence
And unpack your heart

Show me something the rest never see
Give me all that you hope to receive
Your deepest regret dies with me

Unpack Your Heart - Phillip Phillips

Dalton watched as everyone talked and got to know each other better. He'd known Patricia for a while, so he never really felt all that disconnected with the people on the other end of their comms, but for the rest of the team, they were disembodied voices or bad resolution video conferences from halfway across the world.

It was nice to see everyone together.

Dalton had hoped that Hannah might approach Jaz given what he knew about her history, but he honestly hadn't expected it. He certainly never would have asked her to, but Patricia had a different
relationship with her analyst, and clearly, she had been comfortable enough to broach the subject.

Still, there had been no guarantee Hannah would be open to such a discussion. Knowing that he or Patricia had seen her file and actually having to sit down and describe her experience to a stranger were two completely different things.

He hadn't had time alone with Jaz to ask her how things went with Hannah, but she seemed lighter, like some of the burdens had lifted from her shoulders. Of course, this kind of trauma wasn't like a light switch. It wouldn't be just that simple to turn off the emotions that coursed through her and change directions like a ship on rough seas, but if it gave her a moment of breathing room to reflect, then it was worth it.

He felt like they had turned a corner, too. She hadn't just pushed him away earlier, and he would take that as a small victory. And at least now he knew where her mind went when she was letting it control the situation.

She was struggling to see herself as he saw her, she still felt like a wounded bird, and he now knew that his careful handling of her had contributed to that in some way. He wasn't prepared to push her on that too much, but he thought he could try and help her see what he saw and maybe shut off the negative thoughts that seemed to filter in uninvited even if it was just for tonight.

If she'd let him.

_____

It was after 12:30 and the bar was pretty much cleared out save for their group. Patricia had gone home after one drink, and Preach had long since retired to go call his girls.

Amir and Noah were having a conversation, and Jaz was pretty sure McG was trying his level best to charm Hannah.

As usual, Jaz found Dalton sitting off by himself watching over everyone else with his glass of whiskey.

It was kind of his thing. The watching anyway.

Always observing, but rarely joining the fray.

They could celebrate wins in every destination, but Dalton's head was always on the next mission or the prospect of a new mission given the lack of notice they often got. It didn't mean he wasn't happy to relish the victories when they came; it was just harder for him to fully disconnect from the job.

"You solving all the worlds problems over here?" She asked sounding just a little bit tipsy.

He smiled, it was a good look on her. Her cheeks were flushed and her eyes danced over him as she graced him with an easy smile.

"Nope. Just thinking." He said as he took her hand and pulled her down beside him on the bench.

The corner booth he was seated in was darker than the rest of the bar affording them a little more privacy, and the liquor was doing the rest.

"About?"

"You. Hannah."
"Easy now, we're not getting into some kind of threesome here." She said with a laugh.

His eyes crinkled at the corners as he smiled that heart-stopping smile she'd been missing the last few weeks. He really was beautiful when he smiled at her like that.

"I don't share." He told her as he laughed at the suggestion and brushed her hair back over her shoulder.

"Good to know." She answered as she leaned into him and pressed her lips to his.

She didn't care for whiskey, but the smoky flavor on his lips was something she wouldn't mind bottling up. He was as always intoxicating.

"I don't want to sleep alone." She whispered as she trailed her lips down his neck.

"I didn't intend on letting you."

"Maybe I don't want to sleep at all." She told him as she stood and wandered back to the group glancing over her shoulder.

He watched as she said her goodbyes to the group and moved towards the elevators.

It took him all of three seconds to tip back the remainder of his drink and sneak out of the bar to step through the elevator doors just as they were closing.

They rode the elevator on opposite sides, but his hands were itching to touch her. And her eyes were relaying a similar vibe.

As a ding marked their arrival at their floor, Jaz reached for his hand and practically dragged him to her room.

As soon as the door closed behind them, Jaz was pulling the buttons on his shirt.

"Easy there. I only have two more shirts with me, you keep popping the buttons off, and I'll have some explaining to do." He said as he stilled her hands and slowed things down.

She gave him a look that told him she was considering doing it anyway, but instead, she turned and walked back into the bathroom dropping her sweater on the floor when she reached the doorway.

He heard the shower turn on, and the faucet start to run as he walked further into the room.

She smiled at him as she washed the makeup from her face. It wasn't something he could explain, but he liked seeing her like this.

Relaxed.

He could see the flush on her cheeks from the alcohol, and him. He knew he could claim some of the credit for the color on her cheeks.

"You are stunning." He said as he swept the wisps of hair back away from her face toward the adorable messy knot she'd created.

Instantly her eyes cast down, she was more comfortable with him, but she still didn't believe he saw beyond the marks Tehran left behind.
Dalton pushed off the door frame and took a step closer to her.

"Can I?" He asked as he lifted the hem of her shirt a fraction of an inch and rubbed his fingers gently against the sliver of skin he'd exposed.

She hesitated and drew in a breath before she gave the slightest nod.

He stepped behind her and raised her arms up as she leaned into him letting them come to rest behind his neck as her head laid against his shoulder. He stared into the mirror at their reflection willing her eyes to follow as his hands went back to the hem of her shirt.

"When I look at you, I see a woman who makes my heart stutter in my chest. She makes me feel alive and happy." He told her as they both watched his fingers coast up her skin slowly inching her shirt higher as they went.

Her skin ignited as goosebumps chased the trail he left, and his eyes turned dark. She couldn't drag her eyes away from him in the mirror, but his eyes were focused on the path he was blazing across her skin.

"I see a warrior. I see beauty." He said as the shirt tangled in her arms before she pulled her hands free.

When her eyes hit the mirror again, he saw a glint of sadness as they honed in on the scars that stood out against her pale skin.

He didn't give her a second to think about it as he traced his fingers across one making her shiver, "These will fade, and with time they won't be all you see. But, I need you to understand that when I look at them, I'm not reminded of anything except your bravery, that you fought to survive, and that you came back to me. You may not feel whole yet because of what you see, but I only see one thing when I look at you."

"What do you see?" She questioned.

"I see my future. My everything. I see the only person that has ever held my heart in her hands. I see you."

A single tear clung to her lower lashes as she turned to him and threw her arms around his neck as her lips found his. His heart was thundering like a stampede of wild horses in his chest as he watched that last shadow fall with that single tear.

The road forward wasn't a smoothly paved surface, but at least now it was under construction.

At the moment, Jaz was firmly in control of this ride, and he was a step behind as her hands landed once again on the front of his shirt. He caught up quickly to salvage the buttons, or he really would be making an impression on the counselor.

While he managed the buttons, she went to work on his belt. Once his shirt hit the floor, he went to work on her jeans, and before they knew it, they were standing underneath a cascade of warm water.

Dalton was nervous. It felt like months since they were in Seville, and he knew that the footing they had gained was fragile.

He understood that the scars he wore on his body were not the same as the ones that she lived with. There was a big difference between being shot or cut in a fight and being tortured.
With the steam dulling the edges, she seemed to let go of the thoughts that anchored her mind to that place, and Dalton saw glimpses of the confident woman she has always been.

"What do you want?" He asked her as he let her control the situation for now.

"Anything. Everything. You." She answered as she leaned up to kiss him and pressed her skin against his.

He could taste the sweetness of the wine she'd been drinking earlier as he deepened the kiss while his left hand traveled down the curve of her back and his right swept through the loose wisps of hair to cradle her neck anchoring her to him.

It was like completing an electrical current as her hands found their way into his hair pulling him further into their kiss.

When she pulled back to catch her breath, he struggled to find his. She looked up at him with swollen pink lips and a beautiful fire raging in her eyes. He knew she must see the same thing as she looked at him.

Dalton reached behind her and shut off the water as he pulled down the towel that lay over the glass enclosure. He carefully dried her skin placing kisses intermittently as he went and took note of the little breaths that he elicited from her.

Once he was satisfied, he ran the towel through his hair and quickly dried himself off before he opened the shower and guided her back to the waiting king sized bed and encouraging her to lay down as he shut out the lights.

He left the bathroom light on and closed the door most of the way allowing just a tiny sliver of light to creep across the floor and left the curtains open so that the moonlight cast a shimmery glow over her beautiful skin.

"I don't think I'll ever get tired of the way you look right now." He told her.

He watched something shutter in her eyes briefly, and her hands started to come up to hide herself from his view, but Dalton was quick to put a stop to that.

"Please don't hide from me." He whispered as he climbed into the bed and chased her hand away with a kiss placed over her already racing heart.

As he worked his way up to her shoulder, across her collarbone and up over the racing pulse that hummed just under the skin of her neck, he felt her hands fall away. Her eyes had gone dark again as need started to cancel out the hesitation that often clouded them over.

"I need you to talk to me tonight. Can you do that for me?" He asked her.

"What do you want..." She started, but the words evaporated as he traced the shell of her ear with his tongue.

"Tell me what you need. Tell me how good you feel. Tell me when you're going to come for me." He whispered as he let his hands coast over her skin.

He started at her shoulders as he moved to the center of her chest. He kissed and traced every notch of her breastbone as he slowly made his way lower before he ran his tongue under the curve of her left breast.
"Tell me." He said as he felt her shudder beneath him.

"My skin is on fire. The roughness of your beard, the softness of your lips....So good."

He loved how breathless she sounded.

She was writhing beneath him as he traced a spiral pattern with his tongue around her nipple. So close, but never touching where she need him the most.

"Please." She whispered as she clasped her hands at the back of his head and directed his seeking tongue to the spot where she wanted him.

When his lips closed over her nipple he smiled against her skin, he could feel her back stiffen, and her body was starting to shake against him.

"I need more." She whispered into the air.

Dalton was happy to give her more.

He locked onto her eyes, "Look at me."

When her eyes opened, he sucked his first two fingers into his mouth then slid them down over her belly and pressed them against her already slick center as he watched her eyes flutter shut.

"How does that feel?" He asked her as he moved his lips to the nipple he'd been neglecting.

"So...good. Gah, I want to touch you." She said as she reached out.

"Nope. This is all about you. I only want you to think about how you feel."

She looked at him like she was going to vehemently disagree until he slid those two fingers inside of her and stroked over her g-spot. The building argument was completely forgotten as she let out a moan that lit up every nerve ending in his own body.

He was starting to think that he might be able to get off just by making her come.

He loved the way her back arched up and how her legs jerked every time his fingers slipped over that spot. How a flush started at her neck and worked its way towards her belly as she got closer to coming apart. Most of all, he loved the way his name started to fall from her lips as she got close.

He followed that flush as it led him right to the tiny nub that gave her so much pleasure. When he finally got to his destination, he slowed his strokes and blew out a breath that sent a shiver over her until her eyes opened and she looked directly at him.

"I want you to watch." He stated as he leaned in an gently pressed his tongue to her clit.

Her eyes started to close as she pulled in a shaky breath and he stopped until they were once again focused on him.

At first, he only gave her long, languid strokes, but the more vocal she got, the more he gave.

"More."

He wrapped his lips around the tight bud sucking as his tongue fluttered over it.

"Harder."
He could feel a sheen of sweat break over his skin as he felt the first pulses of her orgasm start to ripple over his fingers as the worked in and out of her.

His beard was saturated, her thighs were abraded, and the muscles in his right arm were burning as he worked to rip an orgasm from her body. Her eyes had long since closed, but her words flowed freely.

"Fuck. Adam, oh god, right there. Oh. Oh." She cried out.

He smiled as he crooked his fingers and pressed hard against her g-spot as he sucked her clit into his mouth until her whole body was shaking beneath him. He had her on the edge, and with one final pull, she lost it.

"Cum." He commanded.

She was powerless to stop it.

And he wasn't ready to relent just yet. His motions were more gentle now as he coaxed her into another dreamy, almost soft orgasm.

"Oh god, I don't think I can..." She whimpered.

He wasn't listening as he softly rubbed his fingers against her and lapped at her with his tongue as one last blissful shudder broke over her. She could.

"Jesus." She whispered when enough air filled her lungs to speak.

"Adam." He answered making her laugh.

He was sweating, his beard was dripping, and his lips were swollen, as he crawled towards her like a feral jungle cat. He loved the unfocused look that she had in her eyes as he moved toward her. Her body was still shaking from aftershocks, and her skin was now a vibrant pink that glowed in the moonlight.

"So beautiful." He said as he pressed his lips to her breastbone before he turned to his back and carried her with him.

He swiped a hand through his beard and saw a spark light in her eyes as she leaned in and devoured his lips. Her body was relaxed, but her heart was still fluttering hard enough that he could feel it against his chest.

He knew that the endorphins ramping through her system would soon dissipate and pull her into a sleepy fog as her kisses became more languid, and her limbs started to get heavy, so he gently eased her into his side and let her curl up against him.

He smiled as he felt her breathing level out when she finally gave in to sleep.

It took him a lot longer to rein it in and fall asleep, but the feeling of her lost in the pleasure he gave her, and every negative thought that had been plaguing her cast aside was all that he had been after tonight.

He would give her anything to chase the shadows from the corners of her mind, and there had been a certain satisfaction in knowing that he had allowed her to sleep peacefully throughout the night curled into his side.
It was the first night where she didn't wake in the clutches of a vivid nightmare. Instead, she woke with his name spilling seductively from her lips.

Chapter End Notes

To be continued...

I love hearing from all of you, and I can't express how much it means that you have stuck with me through 20 chapters now! You are incredible!!
Remember the warning from the last chapter? Still applies to the second half.

I figured you all deserved this bit of fluff since I tortured you for nine chapters with feels....

I'm not saying you have to, but you should listen to the Halsey song at the beginning.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Ready to face this, dying to taste this, sick sweet and warm
I am not afraid anymore
I want what you got in store
I'm ready to feed now, get in your seat now
And touch me like you never
And push me like you never
And touch me like you never
'Cause I am not afraid, I am not afraid anymore

Not Afraid Anymore - Halsey

"Adam."

His name sounded like a prayer as it floated around his mind drawing him from a dream he was trying desperately to hold onto.

Dalton woke up with the moon still casting light across his skin. As the room came into focus so did everything else.

His skin was on fire, he couldn't see her face as her soft hair pooled across his chest, but he could feel her lips, her tongue, and her teeth as they ignited a path across his flesh like a trail of gasoline meeting a match.

He watched helpless to stop what he knew was coming. He didn't want to.

His chest rose and fell like he'd run sprints in the desert, but his body was anything but tired. Jaz's hair slipped over his chest like silk, cool against his skin while her mouth was scorching a path down the center of his stomach.

She purred as his fingers sifted through the strands unmasking her. Letting him see everything. She smiled when her eyes locked with his and licked her lips as her fingernails scraped over the tops of his thighs.
His skin prickled as every nerve started firing to life in anticipation, and the air left his lungs in one deep huff as her lips finally closed around her target, her eyes never left him and it was hot as fuck.

"Ahhh." It was a sound that settled between absolute pleasure and a tortured groan.

She hummed in approval as she tasted the bead of pre-cum that met her tongue and watched as his abdominal muscles rippled when he tensed against her, and his eyes slipped shut.

There was nothing that made her feel more powerful than when she watched and listened to this man ceding control to her, if even for a few minutes. He could overpower her in moments, but he wouldn't.

Not yet. He was enjoying this too much.

The muscles in his arms flexed as he gripped the sides of his pillow working so hard to keep his hands to himself. To keep from breaking the sweet spell that Jaz was casting over him.

"Fuck Jaz. Uhhh." He breathed as he threw his head back and arched into her.

She felt his words vibrating through her body licking at the pulsing nerves thrumming beneath her skin. As she pulled back to catch her breath, her thumb slipped over the head of his cock just as his eyes focused back on her.

She smiled as she brought her thumb to her lips and sucked it into her mouth. She could see his fingers flex and his eyes darken as he watched her.

"Gah, I can't..." He growled as he sat up in one motion before she found herself on her back with him hovering over her.

Watching.

Just taking her in.

She could hear his breath drag in and out through his nose as he tried to rein himself in. She wanted so badly to snap that control and untether the fog of desire that she knew he was feeling. She was feeling it, too.

She let her fingernails graze over the sculpted muscles of his arms, she knew she was leaving marks on his skin, but she also knew that that tightly held control was slipping with each stroke.

As her fingers came into contact with his neck, she dragged him down for a kiss. Nipping at his lower lip as she pulled him closer with her legs tangled over his locking his body into the cradle of her thighs.

The pleasured moan that fell from her lips practically vibrated with need as she felt him pressed against her heated core. He was just as affected as she was as his breath stuttered in his chest and his forehead pressed to hers.

"Is this what you want?" He asked as he pressed himself against her delivering the friction they both craved.

"Yes..." She breathed as her lips captured his.

Dalton could feel a bead of sweat rolling down the planes of his back as he tried so hard to hold back an ounce of control. But, every slip of her tongue against his, every shift of her hips, every sigh,
every time his name fell from her lips he was closer to giving her everything.

Everything was exactly what she wanted. And she planned on getting it as she placed her hand in the middle of his chest and pushed him off of her. He fell back against the pillows knowing the time for control was officially over.

When he glanced up at her crawling back towards him, she tore open a little foil packet just a second before he felt her hands on him. It felt amazing for about three seconds, but all of that was forgotten as she hovered over him and locked on his eyes.

He pulled her in for a kiss as he whispered, "take whatever you need Jazzy."

And she did.

She slipped her arms under his and gripped onto his shoulders for leverage sinking down onto him with a shuddering breath. When she started to move, he could almost hear the blood rushing through his body.

"Ahhh." he groaned as her nails bit into his skin while he met her thrust for thrust.

He could feel the strings of a release pulling tight like the strings of a bow low in his spine, and he could hear the little stutter in her breath every time he bottomed out inside her. She was right there with him.

She slowed her movements as she stared into his eyes. Her fingers were brushing sweat from his brow before they scraped against his now damp facial hair.

"I need..." She started as he moved within her.

"Tell me what you need." He answered as he thrust a little harder and sucked on her lower lip.

"I need you to fuck me, Adam." She hummed over their labored breathing.

That control he'd been holding so tightly incinerated as he flipped their position again slipping her knees into the crook of his elbows as he slid back into her with one hard sweeping stroke eliciting a gasp from Jaz.

"Yes."

Dalton got about four deep strokes in before he felt her nails break his skin, and about three more before his teeth closed over that patch of skin between her neck and shoulder that always drew a breathy moan from her lips. It took one more before he felt her orgasm ripple through her as he chased his own with one last deep stroke before he felt the heat explode over his skin and she pulled every ounce of pleasure from him.

It could have been a couple of seconds, or it could have been hours before he finally came back to himself and took in her flushed skin and the sounds of their labored breathing.

"Wow," he said as he swept damp tendrils of her hair from her cheek.

She laughed as sweat dripped from his beard and dripped against her skin in cool droplets making her shudder and eliciting a groan from him as he felt it course through her body and ripple through his as he carefully pulled out of her.

Jaz actually whined as he walked into the bathroom to clean up.
He splashed cool water over his face and glanced at his reflection in the mirror. Dalton laughed as he saw the crescent-shaped marks at the top of his shoulders and the fine welts she'd left on his left bicep, those would not go unnoticed by McG.

Once he had cooled off, he grabbed a cloth and ran it under the cool water before returning to Jaz.

As he stretched out beside her, he carefully ran the cool cloth over her heated skin as he kissed her breathless. He loved the way everything about her softened when she was well loved, and he was confident that she was exactly that.

He loved everything about her in fact.

When they finally caught their breath, Dalton spooned in behind her and wrapped himself protectively around her as they took advantage of the last few hours of darkness.

Tomorrow would bring new challenges, but they wouldn't worry about that tonight.

Chapter End Notes

Tomorrow (today depending on where you live) I will tackle the chapter that goes with tonight's episode. I will have some changes that stray from canon on that for sure.

Let me know what you think :)
Ok, so this is by far the furthest I have deviated from Canon, so please let me know what you think. I must admit I am a bit nervous about it.

There were a couple of things that I envisioned differently and since I already had them in DC, that broke canon anyway so I literally ran with what was in my head. I hope that you guys are cool with that. Also, there will be a second half of this chapter because there was a gold mine of Jaz/Dalton moments at the end that I couldn't just tack on briefly to the end here.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

"My Dad was pissed off from the minute I was born a girl."

As the light of day crept through the sheer curtain, Dalton got up and closed the heavier drape hoping that Jaz might sleep for a few more minutes. He needed to grab his bag from the room he was supposed to be sharing with McG.

He tried to be quiet as he opened the door, but he realized that McG wasn't going to hear him anyway as he heard a distinctly female sound coming from the shower. Figures McG would find a way to entertain himself while in DC.

Dalton snuck in grabbed his gear and headed back to Jaz's room before he got an eyeful of something not intended for his eyes. With McG you never know, he's not above taking his show on the road so to speak.

When he got back to Jaz's room, she was still curled up the way he'd left her.

He crawled into the bed and wrapped his arms around her as he kissed her shoulder, "Morning."

"Mmmmm," she murmured as she leaned into his kiss and stretched like the soft little kitten that he found so adorable mostly because it was a huge contrast to Jaz when she was fully awake.

This Jaz was only for him.

Her eyes landed on the angry welts on his bicep going wide as she realized that they had not settled at all as he slept. "I'm so sorry. I didn't mean...."

"Stop. You didn't hear me complaining then, and I'm sure not going to start now. Besides, McG isn't going to be one to talk today."

"Ohhhh, tell me everything," Jaz said as she pulled him the rest of the way into bed.
An hour later the group was gathered together for breakfast. Jaz was headed across the street to meet with some head shrinker, and Dalton, McG, Preach, and Amir were heading out to speak with the review board on Patricia's behalf.

Jaz was planning to meet them there when she was finished, but her main priority was to be cleared for duty, and she knew the boys could handle this without her if needed.

The rest of the team was scheduled to talk with the doctor as well, but none of them were going to be held back from active duty, so it wasn't exactly a pressing matter for them. It didn't mean it wasn't expected of them at some stage, but it didn't have to happen today, or in person.

"Top, I didn't notice any woods nearby," McG said with a smirk on his face.

"Uh, no. This is DC. Did you fall and hit your head in the shower this morning?" Dalton asked as he wore his own smirk.

"I was just asking because you look like you got attacked by a bear cub or something." McG said as he pointed out the welts peeking out beneath his shirt sleeves.

"Nah. It must have been when I tripped over that pair of stilettos on the floor when I came by your room this morning. They looked a little small for you." Dalton fired back as McG tried to gauge what he thought he knew.

The whole table quickly turned their interest to McG as Jaz turned to Dalton with her eyes shining, "You know more than you're saying."

"Come on Adam; You already know the answer to that." She said as she pointed towards the elevators where a familiar face was walking out towards the street entrance.

He started to laugh before his eyes went wide and he mouthed, "No. You think...."

It wasn't lost on either of them that McG's eyes were following her to the entrance as well.

After breakfast, Jaz walked across the street to the DIA offices like she was marching to her execution. She hated head shrinkers. This Doctor could ultimately pull the plug on the rest of her deployment, maybe longer. She wasn't prepared for that.

When she walked into the office, she glanced around at a series of photos on the wall. As she followed them towards the office door, she noticed one of two tall blond men. One of them she was certain was Adam.

"Your CO, Dalton. We go back a ways." Said the man she recognized as an older version of the one in the photo.

Jaz turned around and looked at him wondering who he was and how he knew who she was.

"I'm Captain Xander Martin. You're here to see me I believe."

"Xander. Your parents not like you?"

She realized that probably wasn't the best thing to say given his ability to shut her down, so she went for a different tone.

"Jaz. Jaz Kahn," She said as she held her hand out to him.
He shook her hand then opened the door to his office and followed her in offering her a cup of coffee and pointing towards a couple of chairs.

"You can call me Xander if you like."

"So...You know Top?" She asked as she sat down in the chair facing him.

"I do. Met Adam a while back."

"Huh. So, how do we do this?" She asked trying to move things along.

"Listen Jaz. I'm here if you want to talk. That extends beyond today. I am going to recommend you for active duty effective immediately, but I'd really like to talk to you about what happened. If you want to."

"Not much to say really. It's not so much the getting captured. It's what happened after."

"Well, I've seen your chart. Everything is healing well. Any concerns?"

"No. That part is fine. It's just that I...I don't know I guess I just felt like...My dad was pissed off the moment I was born a girl. That's been my life. It just was. Now..."

"That was the first time someone had your back."

She nodded.

"When they came back for me. I realized that they put their lives on the line for me. I realized I have something to lose now. I mean it's not like I wasn't aware of the risks we all take, but I never thought of it in terms of them risking their lives for me. There was no scenario in my head where I was the one they had to rescue. WE do the rescuing, you know?"

He was quiet as she let her thoughts roll for a moment before adding, "How do you deal with that?"

"You learn to appreciate it while you've got it." He answered thoughtfully. "You hope that it never happens, but you learn not to take those relationships for granted."

They spoke for another forty minutes, and he told her how he'd been injured and what led him to his current position. She genuinely liked him.

When she finally walked out of his office, she turned her phone back on and noticed a couple of text messages. The first was from Dalton.

We've been called into a hostage situation, no time to wait for clearance from the doc.
Head up to Ops when you get done Noah and Hannah will fill you in.
Be back ASAP.

Jaz didn't like the idea of her team out in the field without her. She liked it even less that she didn't know anything about where they were headed or what kind of situation they were walking into.

So she didn't hesitate to get up to Ops and find some answers.

When she arrived, Noah and Hannah gave her a quick briefing as Hannah loaded up her go bag.

"I'm going with you," Jaz stated.

"Jaz, you haven't been cleared, and Dalton isn't going to like this. I can't..." Noah started to explain...
as she handed him the paperwork she'd gotten from Captain Martin.

"I appreciate what you're saying, but I'm going. That's my team walking into this mess, and I'll be
damned if I'm not going to have their backs." Jaz said.

"Your gear?" Noah said.

"Is across the street." She said as Noah looked at her like she was nuts.

"What? Technically we are all still on deployment and could be called into action anytime." She told
him.

"Noah, if Martin said she's good to go, then get her on that plane with Hannah," Patricia said as she
walked into Ops.

"Deputy Director Campbell, I thought you were still downtown."

"It's Patricia for four more hours. Technically I'm still on suspension until then, so think of me as an
advisor."

"The board?" Jaz asked.

"Turns out they found it a lot harder to hold my decisions against me when you are in DC alive and
breathing. Dalton may have helped out a little too." Patricia said as she gave Jaz a one-armed hug.

"Good to have you back, unofficially. Does the team know?" Jaz asked.

"Not yet. They got called out before the hearing ended."

"Jaz, Wheels up in twenty. Let's get your gear and go." Hannah said as she held the door.

"Noah."

He turned to Jaz as she said, "Don't tell Dalton yet. I don't want him to be thinking about me in the
field if he's in a dangerous situation. I'll let him know when we're on the ground."

Noah glanced at Patricia who mimicked zipping her lips.

Once they arrived in Bogota the situation was evolving quickly, Hannah was introduced to the team
that had been negotiating on the ground and Dalton had already set a plan in motion to get himself,
Preach and Amir out to the plane with the refueling truck in the hopes that Hannah would get that
plan in motion once she'd been in contact with Mira Diaz.

Jaz hadn't been able to talk to the team until Dalton was already belly up to a bomb, and at that point,
she felt she would be more of a distraction to him. So, she scoped out all the nearest high points and
took in the site lines. She wasn't going to be able to get near the plane without drawing unneeded
attention to herself, and she wasn't going to be able to talk to the team so she did the one thing she
knew how to do.

She found the clearest line of sight, she got comfortable, and she watched.

Hostage situations were always fluid. There were just too many unknowns. Dalton had managed to
disable the trigger, but in doing so tripped another trigger. What's worse was that there had clearly
been someone on the ground helping them because the team on the plane was always a step ahead of
them.
That much became clear as she heard Dalton say someone was in the cargo hold with him. Her heart beat wildly against her chest as she could only hear the struggle on his end of the comms, but she was relieved when she heard him say he was alright.

Even more so when he said he'd disabled the bomb moments before she heard a muted boom. Then all hell broke loose. McG, Amir, and Preach were down under the plane making a commotion with the ladders as they worked to distract the three remaining hostiles on the plane.

She could see Dalton creeping in from the rear hold and the three hostiles towards the front. She knew Dalton could get at least one of them before they started to return fire, but there were two more, so she watched the front of the plane. When they made a move, she would have a shot lined up.

The first shooter went down announcing Dalton to the others, the other male put his hands up as he approached and Mira Diaz fired a shot dropping him, but as Dalton lined her up for a kill shot one of the passengers panicked and stood directly in his line of sight.

Diaz wouldn't hesitate to pull the trigger, but she knew Dalton would never fire at an unarmed civilian for one target. The bomb had been neutralized; his team was closing in, he wouldn't be able to justify putting that kid in harms way if he could stop it.

She didn't even have to look to know Dalton would lay down his weapon to keep her from firing towards a civilian to take him out. Without a seconds thought, Jaz let her instincts take over and squeezed the trigger.

She heard the glass shatter and a shot ring out inside the plane. But she couldn't see Dalton anymore. A moment later, his voice came over comms, and she breathed a sigh of relief.

"That was a nice shot McG, but I thought I told you to breach with Amir and Preach."

"Yeah, that wasn't me," McG said as he came face to face with Dalton when he opened the door. A moment later Patricia came over comms and said, "I sent you a care package."

"Deputy Director. Did they reinstate you?" Dalton asked.

"They did. It turns out I'm not the only one." She told him.

"Jaz," Dalton said with a smile.

"You didn't really think McG could've made that shot did you?" She said as she stood waiting at the bottom of the staircase waiting for the passengers to be unloaded.

When Dalton finally got to the bottom of the steps, he looked at her and said, "Good to have you back."

"Once that kid got in the way I knew what you would do. She would have shot you both." Jaz said as she tried to rub the dried blood from his skin.

"It's not mine." He told her as he put his hand on her shoulder and started to walk her back towards the tent where Hannah was still talking to the ground team.

"You didn't think it would be a good idea to let me know you were on the ground?" He asked as they walked across the tarmac.
"When would have been a good time? While you were disarming the mercury trigger? Maybe when the guy came down into the cargo hold? Or, just as you were moving in on the three shooters? When exactly did you want me to interrupt and tell you that I had my target?" Jaz asked as she poked him in the side. "Besides, you would have asked how I got clearance, and who approved my transport, and all sorts of other questions that were less important than disarming a bomb."

"Point taken."

"Hey Jazzy," McG said as he mussed her hair when he caught up to them.

"Good to have you back," Preach said.

"Nice shot. Frankly, I was concerned when I heard McG was overwatch." Amir said as he fist bumped Jaz.

When they walked back into the tent, Hannah had the man who had been feeding Mira Diaz intel pinned, and McG quickly went over to help her secure him. She smiled and said, "Joesph."

"Joesph," Amir said as he glanced at the rest of the team.

"What, that's my name," McG said defensively.

"Told you," Dalton said as he eyed Jaz who laughed out loud.

"You didn't have to tell me; I knew where that was heading last night." She whispered for Dalton's ears only.

The team took the charter back to DC with Hannah and met up with Patricia and Noah at the hotel later that evening. They would be headed back to a bunker in less than 48 hours, but everyone was keen to welcome Patricia back and congratulate Noah and Hannah on a job well done in her absence.

Chapter End Notes

I hope that you don't hate the alterations made to canon. I think you'll understand why Jaz not being on this mission didn't quite fit where this story has been going.
This chapter isn't at all what I had originally planned to write, but for some reason, the backstory just wouldn't leave my head. So, get ready for a big break from canon on this chapter.

They haven't really gotten too far into the backstories of the main group, and it's been something I've thought a lot about throughout the season. Initially, I thought maybe Jaz's parents had some redeemable qualities, but after the episode in the white room with the scars on her knee a different idea started developing. One I thought was worth delving into here.

I hope that it's not too confusing as it is relayed from several perspectives, but I tried to make that clear.

I hope that you like where it goes...

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Clipped wings, I was a broken thing
Had a voice, had a voice but I could not sing
You would wind me down
I struggled on the ground, oh
So lost, the line had been crossed
Had a voice, had a voice but I could not talk
You held me down
I struggle to fly now, oh

Bird Set Free - Sia

The team celebrated Patricia's reinstatement and headed back to Turkey shortly thereafter.

They had roughly four weeks left on their current deployment before they would get several months wherever they called home.

On their first night back, the group found themselves laughing around a bonfire as the sun settled against the horizon. Once Preach, McG and Amir tired of horseshoes, the trio moved inside to play a game of pool leaving Dalton and Jaz alone with a lot on their minds.

Jaz had spent a lot of time thinking about what she'd talked to Captain Martin about. And Dalton thought a lot about his own experiences with the man.

Xander had helped him a lot when he was an angry kid at a military academy, and later when he'd been consumed by a different kind of darkness as he'd lost his first friend in battle.

Xander had given him the tools to stand in the pitch black current that wanted to pull him under its surface. He'd helped him quell the rage he'd had from his childhood and channel his rage as a young
"Xander's good people. Yeah?" Dalton said.

"You know him?"

"We're well acquainted." He said as he smiled at her before he got lost in thought. "You know what, in our line of work I think experience, it comes at a pretty steep cost."

Jaz hadn't been doing this as long as Dalton, but she knew all about the high costs of battle. She'd started to wage hers long before she'd ever held a gun in her hand.

"I was in Fallujah in the fall of 04, and the op tempo was so high, we...we couldn't even keep track of the numbers that we were racking up. By that time, I mean, I had spilled so much blood...You get a taste for it you know?" Dalton said as the memories started to spill up like bile after a night of binge drinking.

"My CSM had to pull me off some asshole whose throat I'd just slit 'cause he killed one of my friends." He said with a haunted faraway look in his eyes.

"And it wasn't enough that I'd killed him. You know. I wanted to take his head, and I wanted to hang it on the wall, over my rack. I lost sight of what made me better than them. I don't...I don't know if, um ...we need to have a dark side to do what we do Jaz. But I know that I met mine, and uh...no matter what I do...that guy never goes away."

Jaz had met her dark side, too. Only hers didn't push her to spill more blood. Hers allowed her to lock down her emotions and go on autopilot. It's how she'd survived the white room, and it was how she'd survived her childhood too.

Unfortunately, as she'd learned talking to Xander, you could only lock things down for so long. She'd spent so much of her childhood preparing for a life where she would rely on no one but herself. Life was easy that way.

Now, she couldn't do that. Self-reliance, ambition, and skill had driven her to this point. No one cared about her, and she cared about no one. At least that's how she'd planned to live her life.

Until three years ago.

Things started to change when she met Preach, a surrogate father. The first man that actually cared about Jaz. Then there was Patricia who was like a mother figure which she'd never really had. They broke through the first line of defense.

Then came McG who easily slipped past her defense and into her life as the older brother she never knew she wanted. And Elijah, who had been the best friend she never knew she needed.

Finally, there was Dalton.

There hadn't been a box she could fit him into. He'd been a lot of things to her in the three years they'd known each other. First, he'd been her CO, and he'd been the first to respect her as a soldier, then as a woman. He'd been her friend. And now, he was all those things, and he was also the man she loved.

Then Amir came along. She'd been hard on him not because she didn't like him, or even that she didn't trust him, but because Jaz didn't know how to deal with anyone replacing Elijah. Her heart had
been broken so many times in her short life, and now she knew it wasn't distrust, but fear of caring for one more person and being let down or worse, losing them too.

Somehow, without realizing it, she'd managed to build a family. But, with that came the inevitable truth, she could lose them.

"You know, I was never afraid, truly afraid when I was in the white room. Not for me. It wasn't until they showed me pictures of all of you that I actually felt fear." She said as she stared up at the stars.

Dalton glanced over at her as the dying embers cast shadows over her skin.

"You see, they showed me pictures of all of you. Then Arthur showed me a picture of you. Dead. Covered in blood. It looked so real, but my mind knew it was fake almost as soon as I saw it. The clothes were wrong, and I was certain they would have just dumped a severed head in my lap, but..."

Jaz paused as she rubbed at her eyes before she felt Dalton's thumb brush a single stray tear from her cheek.

"For the first time, I realized what was at stake. In that letter, I told you I knew you'd do everything you could to find me, but I realized how selfish that thought was. I'd rather die than put you, any of you in harm's way. It was the first time I realized that I could lose you."

Dalton pulled her hand into his and rubbed her knuckles.

"For the first time in my life, someone cared enough to look for me, and that put all of you at risk." She finished as she stared at him.

"We were already at risk, Jaz. We are at risk every time our feet touch foreign soil. It's what we do. What's the difference between putting ourselves at risk for complete strangers and putting ourselves at risk for people we love?"

She shrugged as she stared at the night sky.

"I didn't want you to go up to Jarif's room, but I had to accept that you would take that risk. You have to accept that I love you and there was no way I was leaving Tehran without you. None of us would. It's just that simple."

He leaned in and kissed her cheek before he finally said, "I know that you never had anyone who cared about you growing up, but you have a family now. I know that's a lot to take in. I've been there. In fact, I think our similar backgrounds are part of what makes us work so well together."

As he considered their similar upbringing, Dalton thought back to that late summer day when he'd first met Patricia setting his course in motion, and just a few years back when the two of them had started looking through personnel files to build their team when it dawned on him.

"Patricia saw something in both of us. Sometimes, I think she saw this." He said as he slid his fingers through her hair and pressed his lips to hers.

Patricia knew a thing or two about being broken. She'd walked that path as a child, fought hard to overcome it, and found herself right back on that same road paved in the blood of another loved one. Her son.

She survived a childhood that saw her mother dying at the hands of a drunk driver when she was ten,
and her father giving up his life in service of his country when she was just a few years older leaving her a ward of the state.

She'd never wanted her son to be a soldier. She wasn't prepared for him to lose his life the way her father had, or to come back to a world he didn't know how to live in anymore like so many others.

She wanted him to be a banker or a doctor. She'd wanted him to find love, have babies and grow old.

He didn't, and he wouldn't.

What he did have was a good friend who he'd met at the military academy in DC that he'd insisted on going to when Patricia had joined the DIA. She'd allowed it because it was close by and ultimately she couldn't say no to him. He'd been so proud of his grandfather's legacy, a man he'd never met but idolized nonetheless.

That friend that he made was Adam Dalton. He was fifteen when she met him for the first time. He was a cute somewhat scrawny blond with sad blue eyes. She'd never forgotten the way he would stare through people as he spoke. He always made eye contact, but he never made that emotional connection.

What does a child have to endure to lay such an icy foundation at such a young age she'd wondered back then.

Over the years, Dalton had become a frequent visitor in their household spending holidays with them over being alone in the dorms. She'd started to stitch together the threads of his life.

His father had been a nasty drunk who took his rage out on his mother until she finally had enough and took off leaving a six-year-old Adam behind.

James Dalton had quickly refocused his rage on the boy. Some nights he would get falling down drunk and swing wildly at the air as Dalton deflected his fists or hid. But on the nights when the liquor was scarce enough to only get a heavy buzz the rage would boil over, and the punches would land.

As a teenager, Dalton's own rage frequently landed him in hot water.

He'd been fortunate to wind up in front of a judge that saw through the angry young boy. He'd pulled some strings and remanded Dalton to the Mission Bay Military Academy in part because he lacked discipline, but also to get him out from under his father's reign of terror.

The broken boy she'd met at fifteen quickly started to become the man she knew today. But, that undercurrent of rage still simmered beneath the surface. It always would.

Patricia had lost track of the boy until 2014, over a decade after his 18th birthday when his file landed on her desk for a new team she was assembling.

He'd been recommended to lead the team, and she knew he was the man for the job.

Dalton had an exemplary service record and had come highly recommended, but she already knew what kind of man he'd grown into. He was a born leader. Sure, he had been known to get creative in the field, but that ability to adapt was one of the qualities that made him such an asset for this kind of work.

Dalton had accepted on the condition that he be allowed to have final say on his team. With that, the
two of them had gone about selecting the people that would walk into the fire beside him.

Preach had been easy, Dalton had served alongside the man for almost seven years. He'd been an excellent soldier, and Dalton trusted him implicitly. He was a jack of all trades, adept at disabling bombs, crafting bugs and small explosives, and he was a critical thinker.

Preach rounded out the rough edges on those around him.

McGuire was the next find. He'd been a combat medic for about six years when his file landed on Dalton's desk. Patricia had vetted him and a handful of others, but Dalton chose McG because he'd seen action in some of the most violent corners of the world and still managed to get the job done.

Of course, there were a lot of combat medics that could get the job done, but McG's ability to keep calm under the most dire circumstances and his ability to project calm stood out. What really set him apart was his compassion, he came off as a bit of a joker, but he had an easy way about him that put everyone around him at ease.

Especially those who were injured.

Elijah hadn't been Dalton's first choice because he was a little bit on the smaller side, but he'd won both Patricia and Dalton over with his exceptional mechanical skill set. He was the guy you wanted with you because he could fix an engine or craft a makeshift bomb on the fly using only what was on hand. It was a gift really, and one that came in quite handy on more than one occasion.

Finally, there was Jaz, when her file crossed Patricia's desk her first instinct had been to move to the next file, but something stood out about the 23-year-old sniper. She had come highly recommended for her skill, but she also had a bit of a chip on her shoulder. Not one of her past CO's had recommended her.

They were all quick to confirm her skills, but they'd also been quick to point out an attitude and sharp tongue. They'd felt she was disruptive and didn't work well with others. Based on her jacket, she'd saved countless lives in her young career, yet they could barely be bothered to say a kind word.

It was Dalton who had asked those same CO's who they wanted on overwatch if they came under heavy fire. They'd been reluctant to answer, but ultimately they confirmed what Dalton already knew.

She was up to the task.

Jaz was also fluent in a number of languages and had a knack for picking up different dialects.

She definitely had a sharp tongue and a chip on her shoulder, but he was willing to bet those were a product of her experiences.

Dalton and Patricia both knew that she had been treated like a second-class citizen for her entire life but she'd thrived in spite of that. She'd been forced to grow up too quickly caring for a mother hopelessly addicted to heroin.

Her father had been much like Dalton's, though his rage was something that came naturally, not fueled by alcohol.

Jaz's dad was more of a 24/7 psychopath who enjoyed tormenting his daughter. He'd read her file including several reports from Child Protective Services, painting quite a dark picture of her childhood.
At least with his dad, the alcohol could only fuel him for a few hours before he passed out in a pool of his own vomit. His father was an asshole, but he wasn't incapable of caring when he veered towards sober.

Her father had been a monster.

Life had never taken it easy on Jasmine Kahn. She was born to a mother who was too consumed by drugs to care for her, hollowed out like a jack o’lantern long ago by abuse and addiction.

Her father, he was even worse. While her mother had been a slave to her vices, her father was fully aware and almost gleeful that he was leaving lasting scars on the little girl he never wanted.

Jaz paid for her father's disappointment in blood and bruises after her mother died. When that no longer gave him the satisfaction he desired, he'd graduated to more lasting reminders.

She was thirteen the first time he'd knocked her unconscious. When she'd come to, she was choking on the smoke of his cigar while he laughed.

"You're weak just like your mother. One hit and you give up. It's pathetic!" He'd shouted. "It's about time you learned how to toughen up!"

That day was the last time she'd cried. The tears fell as he put out his cigar on the inside of her knee as she begged him to stop. He'd loved the way her fear poured off of her like vapors of gasoline.

After that, she made sure that she never reacted.

Not a word, not a tear, not even a whimper. It didn't stop him, but it took the thrill out of it.

She'd started taking self-defense classes when she was fourteen at the local rec center, and by the time she was 17, she'd finally turned the tables on her dad.

He lived the rest of his days with a small circular scar under his eye that matched the grouping of scars he'd inflicted on her throughout her childhood.

She'd enlisted as soon as she was legal and quickly set herself apart as she developed her skills as a sniper.

Patricia had hand-picked the young sniper for Dalton's crew as she saw a kindred spirit. She'd put them together because she thought their shared experiences would make them a formidable team, and they did.

In the three years that they'd worked together the pair had formed a tight bond. They'd learned each other's strengths and weaknesses and figured out how to use their skill sets to even each other out. The entire team had excelled in that respect.

But when Elijah was killed the dynamic changed, the cracks in the armor they'd both been erecting since childhood started to crumble. Jaz had been best friends with Elijah, and his death rocked her.

Dalton had been shaken by the loss, too. They'd spent three years together as a team, and while they all knew loss was a possibility, nothing every really prepared you for it.

For two kids who had known only hardships and brutal losses, Elijah's death had been particularly painful, and it had forced them to lean on each other in a new way.
Preach, and McG didn't lean into the darkness like they did. They grieved, they felt that pain, but the darkness didn't lick at their skin the way it did for Jaz and Dalton.

But, at some point, that darkness had been consumed by something new. Something stronger.

Friendship.

Hope.

Love.

Chapter End Notes

I don't know why it is so much more nerve-wracking to deviate from canon, but it is...so please let me know what you think.
Howling at the Moon

Chapter Notes

This is the backside of their fireside chat.

And for those who are looking for a little more banter with McG, etc.

You may or may not find a little something here :) 

See the end of the chapter for more notes

I knew I loved you then
But you’d never know
’Cause I played it cool when I was scared of letting go
I knew I needed you
But I never showed
But I wanna stay with you
Until we're grey and old
Just say you won't let go

Say You Won't Let Go - James Arthur

Dalton and Jaz had talked until the fire choked out its last dying ember leaving them with two choices. Head inside where Preach, McG, and Amir were playing their tenth game of nine ball, or find an alternative.

Given his penchant for stargazing, Dalton already had an alternative in mind.

"Stay here; I'll be right back." He said as he ran inside.

When he came back, he held two sleeping bags and a pillow in his hand as he held the other one out to her.

"Come with me."

Dalton led Jaz to the far side of the bunker away from the commotion the others were creating to where the Humvees were parked and dropped one of the tailgates. She watched as he jogged back over to the area where they'd been lounging earlier and returned with a pad from one of the lawn chairs throwing it down on the hard metal surface before he unzipped the two sleeping bags and arranged them.

Finally, he hopped up into the bed of the Humvee and helped her up before he kicked off his boots and climbed into the makeshift bed. He smiled at the way Jaz's cheeks flushed as she followed suit crawling in beside him and curling herself into his warmth.

"I used to come out here a lot to think. Sometimes to get away from McG's snoring." He started.

"Sometimes?" Jaz laughed. "I'd have been out here every night if I'd thought of this. That man could
be cited for noise pollution in Midtown at rush hour."

"True," Dalton said as he paused and looked into her eyes. "For so long, I thought that I needed to be alone. It's what I was used to; that sort of detachment was something I thought made me a better soldier even. But I know now that being alone doesn't make you self-reliant, or strong, it just makes you alone."

"You're not alone." She whispered as she laid a kiss over his heart.

He smiled at her as he brought her lips up to meet his. The kiss had started out as a gentle exploration, but it didn't take long for them to shift gears.

His hands found their way to the soft skin of her lower back as he pulled her into his lap while hers quickly worked their way under his shirt until it lay somewhere within their makeshift bed.

As Jaz savored every inch of exposed skin she'd uncovered he kept talking, though it was becoming harder for him to string together coherent sentences but he muscled forward knowing he'd never say what he was thinking if he let the moment steal his train of thought. It felt too important.

"I hated leaving you behind in DC. After all this time, it felt like walking into battle naked. We all felt it." He said as she glanced up at him with her chin resting on her hands over his chest.

"I would've felt the same way."

"When that kid stood up, I knew there wasn't a shot to take. If I'd fired at her, that kid was going home in a body bag by my own hand. If I didn't shoot, I might be going home in that body bag, but at least the kid had a chance. I'd been in situations like that before, and it was a sacrifice I'd never really thought about in terms of what I could lose. For the first time, I didn't think at least it's me because I don't have three kids and a wife who would miss me or two devoted parents who'd already lost their daughter, or a mom who desperately wished her son would be anything but a combat medic. This time, I thought of you." He said as he rubbed his thumb across her cheek.

"I thought about your smile and that throaty laugh that makes my skin come alive. I thought about waking up surrounded by your warmth. I thought about where we might be in ten years. About a little girl with long dark hair and big expressive blue eyes. For the first time, there was someone to miss me, someone, that I would miss."

"Then I heard glass shatter, and I felt a stray bullet fly past me and lodge in the ceiling of that plane. Stupidly, my mind was screaming at McG for disobeying orders and lining up that shot, but I knew it wasn't a shot that he could have made. And, I wanted to be mad at you for not telling me as soon as you were on the ground, I did, but if you hadn't been there...if you hadn't taken that shot who knows what could have happened."

"But, I was. I was there." She whispered as she crawled up over him and tried to siphon off the pain the what if scenarios brought to the surface.

She knew it well; it was a game she often played with herself no matter how destructive she knew it could be. In fact, it hadn't been all that long ago; Dalton had witnessed her locked in the undercurrents of these same kinds of doubts.

“A few weeks ago, you told me that you were the buoy that could keep me afloat when the skies open up, and the waves were crashing around me. Do you remember?” She asked as she tasted the fear and regret on his lips.

"I do. Nigeria."
"Yes. Well, that goes both ways. I hated that you guys were walking into a situation like that without me. But, I know that all of you are capable and that you will always take care of each other. Maybe McG doesn't make that shot, but we both know that he and Preach and Amir would've done anything they could to keep you and every passenger on that plane safe."

He nodded as he stared into her eyes.

"And just so you know, these boots will always be on the ground if I have anything to say about it." She said with a laugh.

With that, he did what he'd been dying to do since he'd first laid eyes on her standing on that tarmac. He pulled her in for a searing kiss that laid everything bare.

"In that moment when I first saw you, I wanted to yell at you for not clearing your status with me, for not alerting me the second you'd landed, for not telling me that you had a shot, but then your eyes met mine and all of that fell away. All I wanted was to feel you in my arms, to kiss you breathless, and to make love to you until the sun rose at our backs."

Apparently, she'd had a similar idea now that they were alone with only the stars keeping watch. Her fingertips fluttered against him coaxing goosebumps from his flesh before they made their way to his belt.

Her fingernails lightly scraped against his skin as she worked to pull his belt free with a clang as it landed on the bed of the Humvee.

He was preparing himself for her seeking fingers to pry the button free, but instead, she was frantically pulling at the sweater and t-shirt she still wore. So, he took advantage and skimmed her leggings down her thighs until they hung up on his torso.

They both laughed as he flipped her onto her back and yanked the offending garment the rest of the way down while letting his rough beard abrade her skin to push the cup of her bra out of the way so he could latch onto her breast.

"Fuck, your skin looks gorgeous under the moonlight." He said as he flicked the clasp open and look his fill at every inch that was now on display.

He popped the button and shoved his zipper down before he settled himself between her legs and reveled in her soft skin warming against his chest while they kissed like the last ounce of oxygen was lingering between them.

Her hands found their way under his pants only to find bare skin.

"Mmmm." She hummed as her fingers kneaded into his sculpted ass amping up the friction and drawing a moan from his lips.

They both shuddered as he slid against her with only her panties between them as she shoved his pants down with her feet.

He needed more.

She shivered as his fingers skimmed up her thigh pushing the fabric off to the side. A moment later, they were skin to skin, and he was literally shaking with need.

"Please." She whispered as she tilted her hips up to him when he rocked against her.
"What do you need? Tell me what you want." He hummed against her neck.

She didn't answer him, she just canted her hips once more and allowed him to slip forward just the tiniest bit.

"Oh fuck." He said as his eyes slid shut.

He could feel the blood rushing away from his head as he tried to talk himself down.

"Jaz. God, as good as this feels, we..." He started to argue.

"I have an IUD." She said on a shaky breath.

She whined as he pulled away, but she didn't want him to do something he wasn't comfortable with.

Although, Discomfort was not what she saw reflecting back at her when she looked into his eyes as he sat back on his heels and gazed down at her. What she saw was raw desire flash as he worked the tiny scrap of silk from her body.

She held her breath as she watched him stalk forward until she could feel the head of his cock pressed against her. His eyes blazed as he sheathed himself in her silky warmth and settled against her pelvis.

"This is a first for me," he told her as he leaned in and took her mouth in a long, languid kiss.

He couldn't bring himself to move, not yet. He wanted to stay right there, locked into the cradle of her hips feeling her rippling over him as they gently rocked against each other.

"Me, too," came her breathless response.

There was no urgency to their movements. He was absolutely consumed by the kaleidoscope of sensations that were dancing over him. With nothing between them, he felt every ripple of pleasure that Jaz did, every ridge, every press against that soft little spot that made her shudder and cry out when he rubbed his fingers over it.

Each one of those sensations caused a thin sheen of sweat to break out over his skin as he watched her skin pebble with tiny goosebumps, and her back arching allowing him to sink even further into her. The moonlight glittered over her skin as he watched her eyes slide shut and her head tilt back while she hummed her approval.

"I need you to move; I want to feel everything." She breathed into his neck as she pulled him down so that his skin slid deliciously against her own.

"I...I can't. I'm so close, and I'm not ready for this to end yet." He whispered as he rubbed his beard against her neck.

He was hovering in the space between pleasure and pain, but he didn't want to let go yet. So, he moved over her sucking one of her nipples into his mouth as he rubbed his thumb over her clit.

He could hear how wet she was, hell, he could feel it. He was drowning in it as she shifted her hips seeking out every ounce of friction she could pull from him. He was trying so hard to walk the tightrope, but he knew that it was a lost cause when he felt her fingernails drag over his biceps as she clamped down like a vice around him and cried out as the head of his cock slid over the soft spot that made her melt.
"I'm going to come Adam." She whined as she begged him to give her what she knew she needed to get her there.

"Fuck. Come for me." He growled as he sucked her lower lip between his teeth and he slammed his hips forward giving her everything she needed.

"Oh...Ah...Adam. Please, don't stop." She whimpered as he picked up the pace.

He could hear the blood rushing in his own ears as the sounds of his hips meeting hers filled the air, and his breathing became labored. A hot spike of pleasure traveled down his spine licking over every nerve ending in its wake as his skin prickled in anticipation.

"Fuck," he shouted as he felt the warmth of her orgasm flowing over him.

In that instant, he lost the battle as he stroked into her with staggered jerking motions until he couldn't hold on any longer. Hot sparks flashed behind his eyelids as the pleasure that had concentrated low in his belly finally burst free causing her to flutter around him as she hummed his name.

When he collapsed over her, he could feel his heart thundering violently in his chest. He could feel her's too.

Dalton eased back with his weight on his elbows as he let his fingers brush against her cheek and flutter gently over her eyelids hoping to coax them open.

"You are so breathtakingly beautiful with the moonlight glowing off your skin." He told her.

She smiled up at him as she scratched her fingers against his beard, "You look pretty good yourself."

He leaned into her fingers like a cat seeking her touch almost purring.

"You know in three years; I've never seen you without this beard." She stated.

"Do you want to see me without the beard?" He asked as he looked down at her.

"Maybe. But, I think I'd miss the way your beard feels. I like the way it prickles against my skin. The way it feels when you kiss me."

He leaned in and gently coaxed her lips open with his chin before sinking into her kiss with a hum of approval, "I like kissing you."

"Or the way it feels when you let your control start to slip just a little and let it rub against my skin here," She said as helped him glide his calloused hand over her breast.

He followed the path as he rubbed his facial hair over her neck and down between her breasts until he reached his destination and sucked her nipple into his mouth. He rubbed his chin over the translucent skin and watched it flush pink as he worked his way over to her other breast.

She moaned as she felt him jerk inside her, and her body was more than receptive to the idea.

"How about here?" He asked as he let his hand travel down to her inner thigh pulling back just enough to let his fingertips graze her clit.

"Mmmm. As much as I'd love to see your beautiful face, I find I'm rather attached to the way it feels against my skin." She said as he turned so that his back was against the wall of the Humvee bed with her straddling him.
She'd never get tired of how easily he manipulated her body.

He helped her move over him with his hands anchoring her hips as he sucked on that little hollow below her neck.

"I'm barely holding it together; I need you to touch yourself."

She loved when he did that. He never hesitated to tell her what he was thinking or what he wanted. It was kind of freeing, and it was a lot hot.

He let his forehead rest against her chest as he watched her fingers travel over her skin and settle between them.

"Oh Jaz." He said as he watched before turning his attention back to her lips as he stole her breath away. "So fucking good."

His hands were clamped over her ass as he helped her keep pace while he met her thrust for thrust until she finally pushed him back and placed her hands on his chest sinking all the way down on him.

"Oh fuck, you need to come. Now!" He almost shouted as his eyes slammed shut.

He couldn't keep his eyes off of her when he felt her fingers brush low on his pelvis though.

"Yes. Mmmm." He said as he pressed his thumb over her fingers as they rubbed frantically over her clit.

"Come with me Jazzy," he whispered as he threw his head back and released one of the most primal noises she'd heard fall from his lips as she felt her body convulse with pleasure around him.

She started to move as the cool night air started to chill their sweat-dampened skin, but his hands flew to her hips as he groaned like he was in agony.

"Fuck, don't move yet." He said as he laughed. "Just give me a minute to come down."

She smiled and curled around him stealing his warmth as he pulled the sleeping bag up over her shoulders and wrapped his arms around her.

After a couple of minutes, she finally eased off of him and curled into his side.

"Are you good?" He asked her as he pressed his lips to her forehead.

It was a small gesture, but one that he did every night just as she was falling asleep. He'd never struck her as the kind of guy that would cuddle, or press little butterfly kisses to her forehead, but she had to admit she was quite fond of Adam Dalton's bedside manner.

"Perfect." She said as she rubbed her fingers over the tattoo on his bicep feeling the raised little welts she had once again carved into his skin. "Sorry about these."

"Don't be. I'm not." He said as he slid his fingers through her hair.

"Are you two done howling at the moon?" McG yelled from the doorway.

Clearly, the alcohol had continued to flow once they made it inside.

"Awooo." Dalton bellowed in answer as Jaz laughed.
A moment later, McG appeared next to the tailgate flailing around with his fingers over his eyes and two bottles of water in his hands. Dalton reached out and grabbed them hoping that would deter him.

"Night McGuire."

"Hydrate, you guys have undoubtedly expended plenty of fluids."

"Gross McG."

"Your words Jazzy." He shouted as he cleared the front of the vehicle and uncovered his eyes now that they were safely out of sight.

Dalton and Jaz laughed as they shared a bottle of water and finally fell asleep.

Chapter End Notes

Also, I am toying with a one shot of a certain night in DC that ended with Hannah doing the walk of shame as McG watched her go. I don't think it would amount to more than a chapter or two, but it might wind up linking into this story as things go so...

Thoughts?
Fun fact: Someone thought it would be a good idea to call Preach’s character Juice thankfully, someone told that person what a terrible plan that was on so many fronts, but it still made it to the promo images (link below). SMH


Anyway, this is the lead up to the next couple episodes.
A quiet day alone :)

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

________

No, I don't go to church, can't quote a bible verse
I couldn't sing a song but that don't mean that I don't talk to Jesus
Girls say I push them off, that I can't open up
But I ain't afraid of love, when I say it I just want to mean it

Dark Horse - Devin Dawson

________

The team was getting restless. It had been about a week since their last assignment, and they only had six days until they rotated out. Those were the worst days because everyone was starting to anticipate heading home and enjoying some time with their friends and families, but they also spent a lot of time waiting for the sat phone to ring, or their pagers to go off.

Inevitably, an assignment would come, and they had to be ready, even if it was at the very last minute.

Dalton woke up early that morning; he wanted to get a workout in before it got too hot. Ordinarily, Jaz would join him, and they'd catch a run afterward if there weren't a more pressing matter to deal with, but today she had looked so peaceful he just couldn't bring himself to wake her.

He'd gotten dressed as quietly as he could and was about to leave her when she turned towards him kicking her legs out from under the blanket. He'd noticed the scars before, and he knew that they weren't from Tehran, they were much older, but he'd never asked her about them.

She'd always kept them well hidden from everyone. He'd caught glimpses of them before, even run his fingers across them when they'd made love, but they'd never talked about how she got them.

Dalton pulled the blanket carefully back over her legs and ran his fingers gently across her exposed shoulder. Her skin prickled, and she sighed in her sleep making him smile.
He had known this woman for over three years now, they'd lived in this bunker for more than half of each year together in that time, been on countless missions, and in too many precarious situations to count. Yet, he'd never seen this coming.

Maybe they'd both been in denial. The way Preach, and McG talked they'd been circling around each other for most of the last three years, but it seemed they'd both been clueless.

Until Elijah died.

Losing him was the catalyst that forced them to open their eyes he supposed. Maybe it punctuated the argument that life was too short, or maybe it was about comfort or wanting to feel something other than the void he'd left, the pain. He didn't know.

What he did know was that he loved her more than anything, and he could no longer imagine his life or his career without her by his side. He wanted her with him always.

Dalton watched her for a few more minutes before he decided to get his work out in. He knew if he didn't get out of there he was just as likely to crawl back into bed with her and wake her up.

When Dalton finished his workout, he was drenched in sweat, found Jaz still sleeping, so he planned to take a quick shower and crawl back into bed with her and maybe work up a sweat again.

When he stepped out of the shower, he smiled as he saw a beautifully naked Jaz standing in front of the mirror. He stepped up behind her and was about to pull her into his arms when he noticed her fingers running over the scars on her abdomen, and haunted glassy eyes that had filled with unshed tears.

Dalton placed his hands over hers, and her eyes snapped to his in the mirror. She blinked a few times and shuttered the look as she smiled at him.

"Morning." She said as she turned her hand into his and clasped their fingers. "Why didn't you wake me, we could have at least gone for a run."

"You looked so peaceful; I couldn't bring myself to wake you. Plus, selfishly I was hoping I could crawl back into bed with you after my shower." He told her.

"Mmmm. Sorry, I ruined your plans." She said as she turned to him and pressed her lips to his.

"S'okay." He said as he wrapped his arms around her. "What were you thinking about?"

"Hmm. Oh, it's nothing. Just kind of zoned out. I was thinking about surprising you in the shower actually."

"Well, I guess I ruined your plans then, huh?" He said, letting it go for now. "Want some coffee?"

"Mmmm. Yes please." She said.

"I'll go get that going if you wanted to grab a shower." He said as he kissed her.

"Or you could get back in the shower with me." She said.

"Tempting as that sounds, the rest of the team is probably going to be up soon, and I'm guessing they'd like some hot water. There won't be any if I get in there with you now." He said as he pat her on the hip and gave her one more kiss before tossing his towel in the hamper and leaving to get
dressed.

He laughed as he heard Jaz whistle knowing she was watching him walk away.

Dalton was just pouring two cups of coffee when she came out in a pair of yoga pants and a tank top towel drying her long hair. She hopped up onto the stool next to the counter and Dalton set a mug in front of her on the counter before leaning in to press his lips to her neck. It was the spot where the warm spiced apple smell that was all Jaz was the most concentrated, and he couldn't resist.

A moment later, they heard footsteps coming from around the corner, and then McG broke the spell.

"Preachhhh, mom and dad are making out again." He whined.

Preach laughed, and McG continued as he poured himself a cup of coffee.

"You two should really get a room....oh wait, you have a room, it's right over there."

Dalton scraped his teeth over that spot on her neck again just to annoy McG and then placed a chaste kiss on her lips as she smiled at their friend.

Dalton had asked Preach to keep tabs on things for a couple of hours this afternoon. He'd wanted to take Jaz off base for a bit. As much as he loved having her in his bed every night, it wasn't like they ever had any privacy in the bunker. Everyone could hear everything echoing off the corrugated metal walls.

"Well, we're heading out for a couple hours anyway. Need anything while we are in Adana?" Dalton asked.

"Adana? What are you gonna do in Adana?" Amir asked as he came around the corner.

"Probably take a walk around Kapikaya Kanyonu or maybe head to the beach, and figured we'd make a grocery run on the way back. Probably don't need much though, you know that call is coming. It's always something crazy when the clock's winding down on a deployment." Dalton answered.

"Yep." McG agreed.

"Anyway, just figured we'd get away for a bit. I feel like all I've done the last four days is stare at the monitors waiting for the other shoe to drop."

"Well, the list is on the fridge. I'm going for a run." Amir said as he headed out.

"I've got this for a couple of hours; I'll page you if anything comes up." Preach said.

McG just pointed to the cage and said, "I'm going to organize my med bag. It's been quiet for too long and it's making me antsy. Have fun."

Jaz hopped down from the stool and pointed towards Dalton's Computer, "Let's go before Campbell pops up on that monitor."

Dalton and Jaz spent the afternoon at the beach. Dalton packed a cooler and a blanket, and they found a quiet spot to spend the afternoon away from the rest of the team.

It wasn't that they didn't enjoy hanging out with everyone, but this was still a new relationship, and
they rarely had time to themselves to talk. And Dalton had a few things he'd wanted to talk to Jaz about.

They were lounging in the shade away from the blinding mid-afternoon sun, and Dalton was watching as she pulled sunscreen from her bag.

"I can help you with that." He said as he took the bottle from her.

As he smoothed it over her shoulders, he decided to ask her about something that had been on his mind for a couple of days.

"What are your plans when we rotate out?"

"I don't know. I don't really have a home base, but I wanted to go to New York and visit my mom. Her birthday is coming up, so she's been on my mind for a while."

Dalton knew that she didn't have a conventional relationship with her mother given her struggles with addiction, but Jaz had been a little girl, and it was clear that she'd loved her regardless. He also knew that after her mother passed away, Jaz's life got much harder. He wondered if she would see her dad.

"What about after? Anyplace that you plan on visiting?" He asked.

"Yeah, I was thinking about maybe going to Switzerland seeing a part of the world that isn't a war-torn hellhole would be nice. I don't know, I usually travel around. It sounds kind of sad, but I feel most at home when I'm with the team. What about you?"

"Well, I think I feel at home when I'm with you. The team, too...but it'll be nice to sleep anyplace where I won't have to listen to McG snoring. And Switzerland sounds nice." He said as he kissed her shoulder.

"Really?" She asked as she smiled at him.

"Yeah, if you wouldn't mind some company." He said.

"If you're the company, I'd love it." She said.

"I have to stop in DC for a couple of days to handle some paperwork and briefings, but I could meet you in New York."

"Oh, yeah, I guess that could work."

He sensed some hesitation, but he didn't push.

"It's just well, I'd love to take you to see my mom. I don't know I feel closer to her when I go there, but sometimes my dad shows up and well...I don't really want you to have to meet him.

Now Dalton was sure he did want to go. He hated the idea of her having to face him by herself, even though he knew damn well she could handle herself.

"It's strange, I took care of her more than she ever took care of me, but when I think back on my childhood some of the happiest memories were of her. Maybe the only happy memories," she said wistfully.

"She was your mom." He said as he helped her to recline into him as she sat between his legs.
She was silent for a few minutes as she kneaded her fingers into his quads. He just sat quietly with his arms wrapped around her as he looked out at the water waiting for her to continue.

"I remember some of the times when she would get clean. Dad would sometimes leave for weeks at a time on work trips, and she'd try and get things together. At the time, I never really understood that he was the thing that drove her towards some of the more destructive habits, so I just thought she was sick and that for the moment she was better."

"How old were you when she died again?"

"Gosh, maybe ten or eleven. Too young to really understand what took her from me. But, as I got older that got a lot clearer. It's funny though, even when I was cleaning up after her or scared to death trying to take care of her when she was in really bad shape I never really resented her for it. I guess maybe on some level I knew that it wasn't entirely her fault, or maybe it was just that I didn't understand. Who knows." She said as she glanced back at him.

"Anyway, the things that I do remember are the fun times. Like when I was maybe six or seven, she came home with groceries. Dad had been gone for a while, and she was working at this diner down the street, and she'd been so proud that she was able to buy the groceries with money she'd earned. I mean it wasn't like my dad wasn't providing, he paid the rent and the utilities while he was away, and mom had money for groceries, but I think she just felt like...like a good mom."

Dalton pulled her back so that her head rested against his shoulder so he could see her face while she spoke. He loved seeing her smile when he talked about her mom; he'd never heard her say much of anything about her life back then.

"So, anyway, she met me at the bus stop after school with this bag of groceries and announced that she's going to teach me how to bake a pie. So, we got home, and she gets everything started, and I was little, so any excuse to make a mess without getting yelled at was great, you know?"

He laughed.

"Long story short, we made this pie together, and it was hideously ugly. The crust was all raggedy because we couldn't get it on top of the pie in one piece, so we just slapped the pieces together and Frankensteined them together but it was the best thing I had ever tasted in my life. In retrospect, I don't think it was anything special, but we'd made it together, so I thought it was perfect." She shared.

"I bet it was." He told her as he kissed her forehead.

"I know now that my mom was a deeply trouble woman, and that she should have gotten help and that we should have left my dad. But, I know that she loved me, and I know that she would never have done anything to intentionally hurt me. I think she would have changed things if she could have, but her addictions controlled her, and my dad drove her addictions. It was a toxic combination."

"Yeah, I know all about addiction." He said. "I think my dad was similar to your mom. Don't get me wrong, he was a hateful bastard when he was drunk, but he had his moments when he was sober."

"I think because of the way I was raised I never really planned to have an ordinary life. You know the picket fence and the 2.5 kids, the dog..."

"I didn't either, but I think I'd like to have those things someday now."

She looked up at him and smiled as she ran her fingers through his beard, "I think maybe I would,
"Yeah?"

"With you...I think I would."

He smiled that beautiful smile that made her heart stutter and leaned in for a kiss.

"I never planned to fall in love either, but I guess maybe I was just waiting to mean it. I love you." She told him.

"I love you, too." He said just seconds before the pager sitting beside them went off.

He kissed her once more, and they both stood to collect their things.

"I knew we wouldn't get through this week without a hitch." He said as he threw the bag over his shoulder and picked up the cooler before taking her hand and heading back to the bunker.

Chapter End Notes

Hope you liked this one. I just wanted them to talk about what happens after this deployment ends.
I was hoping to have this up yesterday, but there was sooo much going on that it took me a lot longer and about 6000 words to tie it all up. I used a lot more dialogue from the episode than I normally do, but it was hard to relay some of the info without some context.

I'm still not sure what to think about the episode. I enjoyed it, but it was a little jumbled. Also, did anyone else notice how Anne Heche completely changed the way she talked and the tone of her voice in the flashbacks? It almost came off like she was a little girl. Maybe they were trying to paint her as a little naive and it just went a little too far, but that was bothering me.

I did not include any of the material from the flashbacks because I wanted to tell the story as the team lived it, and they wouldn't be privy to that information since Patricia kept that under lock and key.

Maybe they'll play into the next half, but I guess we'll have to see how the rest of this plays out. I really hope that one of the team members doesn't die, because it sure seemed like they were trying to sell that hard in the preview.

Not sure how Patricia walks away from this one, so that'll be interesting to watch though. I'm guessing they'll leave that and the fate of Preach (I'm guessing) on the line until the second season. Rude.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

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"He is...Radioactive."

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Dalton and Jaz made it back to the bunker about twenty minutes later as the sun was setting. A teenager had hacked a nuclear sub, and the DIA tracked her to Adana. Her father worked on the base in Incirlik.

So, they weren't flying off to parts unknown; this was right in their backyard. Dalton could only imagine how much danger this kid had inadvertently put herself and her father in. It was unlikely that she was some kind of 16-year-old criminal mastermind.

The team geared up for what they hoped would be a low-key extraction, but when they approached the apartment complex and found it dark, that hope evaporated.

"Alright command, power's out. Doesn't seem like an accident."

Dalton had Preach and Amir secure the entrance while he, McG, and Jaz headed further into the building in search of the father and daughter, but when they found their door kicked in, they knew they might be doing recovery over rescue.
"Preach, Amir; I want you to lock down that lobby. Nobody leaves this building." Dalton said as they entered the apartment.

It was never a good sign when the first thing you see upon entering is blood on the floor. The chances of them finding either of them alive were dwindling by the second. All three of them were on high alert as they moved through the apartment with guns drawn carefully clearing rooms as they went while covering each other's backs.

"Top upstairs hallway," McG said over comms.

"Two in the chest, one in the head." He said when Top got to the top of the stairs.

"Alright command, the father's dead. Got a professional hit. There's no sign of the daughter."

Dalton left the two of them to sweep the apartment while he headed back down to talk to Amir and Preach and get eyes on the people trying to leave.

They'd passed several people on the way out, but Dalton hadn't really paid them much attention knowing his team was at the bottom of the stairs.

They had one man with a gun, but there was a second man who was behaving like he was ill. Dalton had been about ready to cut him loose when Patricia was barking in his ear not to let him go.

"Let me see that man's face." She growled over comms.

Dalton had never heard her so much as change her tone even in the worst situations, but something about this guy was burrowing deep under her skin. He didn't know what to make of it.

"You know I could have actually been dying." The man said as he removed his hat and looked right at his body cam like he knew it was there.

He'd actually sounded like he was talking to whoever he thought was on the other end, not to Dalton. Which was weird.

"Dalton you need to button that man up, and I mean airtight. No one can know that you found him. I will be wheels up and on route to you within the hour."

"Hold on you're heading to me? What about the girl?"

"This man is more dangerous than the girl. The man you're looking at is Alex Hoffman, decorated field officer gone rogue. Guilty of more crimes than I can count and dead for the last nine years. Or so I thought."

"Hello, P," Hoffman said as he looked right into the camera again.

He knew who was watching him, and he wasn't privy to the conversation in Dalton's ear. That didn't make him feel real good about where this was headed.

There was more to this story than Patricia was telling him, and he didn't like it one bit given that he and his team would be hosting this man in their 'home' for the foreseeable future.

"Top, what's going on. One minute we're on the hunt for a misguided kid. The next, we're smuggling someone on to our base." Amir asked.

When Dalton didn't answer, he continued, "If you can't tell us, do you at least know what's going
"No. I don't, but I'm going to find out. So, in the meantime, you guys take the first watch outside. Remember nobody, comes in here unless I say so." Dalton said as he followed McG and Preach who were moving Hoffman inside.

For now, he wanted to keep Jaz as far away from this guy as possible until he had more information, if he had Patricia this freaked out, Dalton had no doubt that this was a very dangerous man.

He knew she would be on to his plan the second the words fell from his lips, but he didn't care. Not even a little.

Preach secured Hoffman to a chair as McG dumped his bag and started doing an inventory of his things.

As he and Dalton rifled through the piles on the table, they knew they weren't dealing with an amateur, though Patricia's reaction had told them as much already.

He had several different rolls of foreign currency, half a dozen passports, a couple of guns, and extra mags. He definitely wasn't popping by the apartment for a cup of tea.

Dalton was almost certain the gun they'd found on the Turkish man had been planted on him by Hoffman, so there was a good chance that he'd been the one that had been contracted on the dad. And there was little doubt he'd had orders to take the daughter; she'd be a high-value asset given that she'd managed to hack a nuclear submarine, so Dalton was certain he would've been paid top dollar for that get.

Dalton needed answers, and he was going to get them. He didn't like that his team was sitting on a guy who was clearly not dead and had managed to stay in the shadows for almost ten years.

"Any problems?" Patricia said as she answered her phone.

"Oh, you mean besides being completely in the dark?" Dalton said with an edge to his voice.

When he got no response he continued, "Yeah, we got him stashed at base. Nobody saw us bring him in."

"You're going to have to trust me that the less you know about Hoffman, the better."

Dalton couldn't help thinking that those were famous last words.

"Okay, but what about the girl? Clearly, this was no coincidence that he was there." He said.

"No, I don't think it is which is why I wanted him buttoned up."

"So, then should we lean on him?" Dalton asked.

"Waste of time, he's trained."

"Yeah, but so are we...." He started before she cut him off.

"Damn it, Adam. You keep one eye on Hoffman and otherwise DO NOT ENGAGE. Noah and Hannah are working on finding Verina, interface with them. Bringing her home safely is still a matter of national security." Patricia said brooking no further arguments, not that that's ever stopped Dalton.
"Okay, so then at least let me know who this guy is."

"He is...radioactive. And his being alive...When the dust settles, I don't want you among the ruins."
She answered cryptically.

Dalton disconnected knowing that he would get nothing further from Patricia. She was clearly rattled by this man's reappearance, and he didn't like it.

Not for him, certainly not for Jaz, and not for his team.

He had a bad feeling about this, and he knew this was only the beginning. He had Preach and McG clear out the cage so they could further secure Hoffman.

If he was going to let Jaz back in, he was going to be as secure as they could get him. He knew he couldn't keep her out forever.

But he wanted to.

Dalton talked to Noah and Hannah trying to get a read on what they might know, but they seemed to be as in the dark as he was. The guy's files were so redacted they might as well have been printed on black paper.

He was starting to think Patricia was in way over her head, and he feared that the fallout was going to torpedo her career and maybe her life right on the heels of her previous suspension.

Later that night, Preach came out with coffee to fill them in on what he knew, which admittedly wasn't much. As he talked, Jaz pointed towards the building and headed inside.

Jaz glanced at Hoffman as she walked by and looked at McG trying to gauge what he was thinking, but decided that the only way she'd get anything was if she talked to Adam.

"Adam," She called quietly as she walked into their room.

She found him sitting on the lid of the toilet with his head in his hands. She knew that posture well, it's what he did when the shit was hitting the fan, and he was trying to come up with answers.

It was funny she had envisioned him sitting on the stairs at Hossein's place pulling on the tips of his hair just like this when she'd been stuck in that white room. She'd held onto that image of him through everything, because it had reminded her that he was still looking. That he was alive.

She squatted down in front of him and pulled his hands from his hair, "Hey. Talk to me." She whispered.

"I would if I had anything to tell you. I'm as in the dark as you are. Patricia sounds more locked down than I've ever heard her. She called him radioactive for Christ's sake. Hannah and Noah are looking for Verina, but so far nothing. Probably have to wait until morning to locate her, if she's smart she'll be staying off the streets tonight."

"Okay, so what do we do? Maybe a few of us should try and get some sleep so that we can get out there early and find her before someone else does?" She suggested.

"Yeah, I suppose. You should sleep. McG, too. If we're going to find this girl, I want you two with me. She'll be more likely to trust you, and McG just in case she needs medical attention. So, you two should sleep first."
"What about you?" She asked as she rubbed her fingers under his eyes which were already shading over from too much stress and too little sleep.

"I'm going to take first watch, and I want to loop Amir in on everything since he's the only one I haven't talked to. I want you to sleep in your room since it's further from this asshole and so that McG is close by, just in case." He said as he kissed the tips of her fingers before he stood up and walked out of the room.

"Okay then," She said to his back.

He didn't hear her.

She knew he was concerned, but he couldn't burn the candle at both ends when they had no idea how long it would take them to secure the girl and figure out what to do with Hoffman.

She grabbed something to change into and pulled the blanket from his bed as she headed back to her old room.

"You've been benched too?" McG said from the bathroom.

"Yep." She said as she leaned against the door frame and watched him as he brushed his teeth.

He spat out the toothpaste and said, "let's leave this door open, just in case."

"Yeah, Dalton is on edge about this guy. I don't think he's going to sleep at all." She said as she stepped up to the sink.

"I'll make him switch out in a few hours," McG said as he messed up her hair.

The two of them crawled into their respective beds and tried to shut out the restless whir of thoughts spiraling through their minds long enough to get some sleep. It was after three when she felt the bed dip as Adam climbed in behind her and pulled her into his chest.

"Sorry, I didn't mean to wake you. McG said you were having a nightmare. Everything okay?" He asked as he pressed his lips to her shoulder.

She rubbed her hands over his arms and smiled; she owed McG for that one.

"Mmmm. Better now." She said as she fell back to sleep with his warmth surrounding her.

When the sun came up, Dalton stirred. She was happy he hadn't left as soon as she'd fallen back to sleep.

"Come on, go grab a shower, and I'll meet you out there. Probably best if we don't show Hoffman anything, he'll just use what he sees to manipulate the situation." She said as she got out of bed.

She was right, the less Hoffman knew about any of them, the better.

Dalton threaded his fingers through her hair and kissed her long and slow; he wanted to savor it because he didn't know how long it would be until he could do it again.

Then he was gone.

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About thirty minutes later, Dalton relieved Amir and Preach as he made a fresh pot of Coffee. Jaz came out a couple of minutes later and poured herself a cup as they sat at the table and started going
through Hoffman's gear again. They'd been over it a dozen times between them, and all it told them was that he'd been good enough to fly under the government's radar for nine years.

That was a long time to stay hidden, no matter how skilled you were.

Jaz was absently flipping a grenade of all things as Dalton picked through the passports again when Hoffman said, "I can help you find her."

Adam didn't trust the man. He stood as Preach returned freshly showered and changed.

As Dalton approached the cage, Hoffman said, "Seriously Adam, you don't want to gag me again, that's not the right play."

That halted everything that was in motion as it dawned on all of them that they had been very careful not to say names in front of him.

"That's good; you didn't take the bait, ask me how I knew your name. All your names for that matter, right Zeke?"

"I'm serious about Verina. You're looking at it all wrong. You're looking at it like a hero. You're acting like you need to save her. You don't. You need to do your job Captain."

Dalton laughed, "Is that right? Can you help me do that? Help me do my job? Why should I listen to you?"

"Because I'm good."

"Mmmm."

"Good enough to fake my own death. Good enough that Patricia's rushing here to deal with me. You're acting like your mission is to save the girl. It's not, the girl's meaningless. Your mission is to find the code, the hack."

"Hackers are just like the rest of us. They back things up. Not online but on air-gapped computers and thumb drives. That's what I was looking for when you all rode in on your white horses."

"So your not denying that you killed the girl's father?" Jaz asked.

Dalton prowled protectively behind her. He wanted to put a hand on her shoulder and pull her back from the cage, but he couldn't wear his feelings on his sleeve, not with this piece of shit in their midst.

He's an opportunist; he'd feed off of every little scrap they gave him and use it against them, he knew it because it's exactly what he would try to do under similar circumstances.

"I'm telling you to go to the apartment. Search and find the code, protect the country, that's your job right? Protect your country at all costs. Or am I dealing with a bunch of boy scouts?" Hoffman spat as he cast a glare in their direction.

He was leading them, trying to read them, find information to prod them in a direction that he wanted them to go in. Dalton knew this. But, he also knew they were going to have to go back to the apartment.

Still, Dalton did take a small amount of joy in cramming the gag back into his mouth.

______
This guy made Preach really uneasy. He knew way too much.

He knew about his family, and that had his hackles up. There was no reason to bring his family into this life. They were off limits.

When he started talking about the team rotating out and his retirement, he started to think this guy had wanted to be caught. He'd planned it even.

Researched each one of them.

He didn't like it.

Dalton, Jaz, and Amir had returned to the apartment. They all knew it was a risk, not only because it was crawling with police and the like, but because it was clear that Hoffman had wanted them to go there.

Preach had relayed what he'd gotten from his enlightening conversation while they'd been en route as McG took watch for him so he could step out of earshot.

Dalton was certain they were playing blind, and he really didn't like it.

Hopefully, Patricia would shed some light once she was on the ground, but he wasn't holding his breath, she was clammed up so tight she was more likely to cough up a pearl than information.

Hannah and Noah were keeping eye out for the real Army CID using traffic cams and well-placed satellites, as Amir was going in posed as one of their agents. Not ideal when the real deal was bound to show up at any time.

This was going to have to be a quick trip, or they were going to have a lot of explaining to do.

Out of all of them, Amir had the most reservations about this whole mission. He'd been deep undercover, and he knew this guy was real bad news. He didn't like any of this, but he also knew that they had to follow the leads if they wanted to find the girl. And it wasn't like they could just walk away from this, he was too dangerous to dump on the police, and there was no way they could just let him go.

Besides, the girl was sixteen, and while Hoffman may have deemed her unimportant, none of them liked the idea of leaving a kid in the wind to fend for herself when they were sure all kinds of bad people would love to get their hands on her. And like it or not, in the wrong hands, the girl was a dangerous weapon.

"Whoever this Hoffman guy is, he's got Patricia spooked like I have never seen," Dalton told Jaz as they waited for Amir to gain access to the apartment.

Jaz knew he was concerned, and she wished there was anything she could say to put him at ease, but the reality was that they were all feeling the tensions that came along with Alex Hoffman.

Something was very wrong here, and they were just bracing for the fallout. It was coming; they just hoped they could contain it before it took any of them down in its wake.

Amir was on comms talking to the two of them and their counterparts in DC as he looked for a needle in a haystack. A zip drive that a 16-year-old had hidden among all of the crap sixteen-year-olds kept. Mountains of CD's, pictures, board games, cables, and all kinds of other junk.
This was going to be easy; Amir thought as he rolled his eyes to himself.

Of course, the real CID was minutes away. Perfect.

But, then Amir laid eyes on a puzzle box. Bingo.

"Army CID pulling up two o'clock," Jaz stated in his ear.

"Amir, we're running out of time here. You need to solve that puzzle." Dalton said as he watched the CID Officer exit his vehicle and head for the entrance.

Amir being the resourceful guy that he was dropped the puzzle box on the carpet and stomped on it. Worked like a charm.

"Got it." He said as he stuffed the thumb drive into his pocket and stood back out of the real CID officers sight line. Once he rounded the corner, Amir made his way out undetected.

He hit a snag at the door when one of the residents recognized him from the other night, but he managed to shrug it off like she was out of her mind and the guy stationed at the door bought it. After all, he did think he was Army CID.

Unfortunately, it was a dead end. It was the inner musings of a teenaged girl not the holy grail of hacking they had been looking for.

Of course, Hoffman felt the need to rile everyone up with his two cents.

"Not the secrets we're looking for. It's got to be there though."

"I don't want to sound negative, but we're not going to get very far stopping a hack with some teenagers diary," McG whispered.

"No, but we might find the teenager," Hannah said. "There's a lot of mentions in this diary about a girlfriend named Esma. How Verina felt guilty about hiding her from her dad."

"Yeah but, no record of calls from someone named Esma to Verina's cell phone, and no mention of an Esma anywhere in our write-up of her." Noah shared.

"Well, if Verina is trying to hide this girl from her dad, then she might have another phone or even a burner," Amir added.

"Kids, they grow up so fast these days." Hoffman injected much to their annoyance.

"Got her. Esma Reis, 17. Lives in the north section of Adana. Social media brings up Verina with facial recognition." Noah interrupted over comms.

"I got a ping on Esma's cell. Nine miles east of you on the outskirts of the city. I'm sending you coordinates now." Hannah shared.

"Okay, well we're going to be dealing with a terrified kid here, so Jaz, McG you're with me. Amir, you stay here and keep an eye on our friend." Dalton said as he pulled his jacket on.

As he was on his way out, he turned back to Amir, "He does anything you don't like, Make sure you shoot him someplace that isn't vital."

"Adam, I think you're forgetting something that's really important. Like a 'thank you', partner!"
Hoffman shouted as they left.

Dalton just kept walking, the sooner this asshole was out of his space, the better.

Patricia had some explaining to do when she landed. He was pissed. He hated that he knew nothing about what was really going on and that he and his team were essentially sitting on what felt like a ticking time bomb.

One that knew an awful lot more about them than they did about him.

No, Dalton was not happy.

And this time, he wasn't going to dance around the issue with Patricia. She had them standing in front of a target, and they had no idea which direction the kill shot was coming from.

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Amir watched Hoffman over his computer. He didn't like the way he was always evaluating them. He knew exactly what he was doing. He was sizing them up. Tenderizing them by pushing all the right buttons.

He'd used the tactics himself.

His ears really perked up when he started in on Jaz.

He couldn't tell if he was fishing, or if he knew something concrete when he referred to Jaz as, "that firecracker who seems to be in denial about who she is and what she wants."

If the man was dumb enough to take that route with Dalton, he had no doubt his CO would flip the switch on the guy no matter what Patricia had said about him.

It didn't matter if Top knew he was being played, Amir knew Dalton would walk into a fire to keep her name of Hoffman's lips. In fact, he had no doubt he would have shielded her from him completely if she'd allow it. But Jaz would never willingly walk away from an op.

Especially if she thought Dalton was going to put himself at risk for her.

When Amir remained stone-faced, Hoffman tried to appeal to their similar backgrounds.

That didn't sit well.

If there was one thing that got to him was this guy implying that he was like him, that he could betray his team and his country as it would seem Hoffman had.

"I don't share your moral flexibility," Amir growled as the man had implied he might.

Hoffman just continued to pick at that scab. He knew more than Amir was comfortable with, but he couldn't tell if he had actual intel or if he was just riffing off what he knew from his own experiences, either way, it felt way too close to home.

Amir wanted to put a bullet in him just to shut him up, but he just gripped the side of the table and tried to shutter his emotions from his view. But Hoffman was unrelenting, and Amir finally gave rise to that anger, and resentment he held at being compared to a man he knew to be a criminal.

"What are you trying to accomplish? You think by playing some mind games you're going to compete with what I've endured. Or by appealing to our similarities, what? You're going to win yourself a favor, or the benefit of the doubt? You have no idea who I am or what I've been through."
Amir said through gritted teeth.

"Someone once told me that the most important details are not in what a man says, but in how he says it. A pause, an inflection. And you just told me a lot." Hoffman said.

He had gotten under Amir's skin, and he knew it.

Dalton, McG, and Jaz were closing in on Esma's location; they just had to hope that they were on the right track. This girl was out in the open in broad daylight, and they all knew they wouldn't be the only ones looking.

"Top, I have a very bad feeling about this," Amir said as he broke into the comms line.

"Why? What happened? Did Hoffman say something?" Dalton asked as they drove down a crowded street.

"Nothing specific. It's just that I've been doing this for a very long time now, and I know when I'm out of my league." Amir said.

All three of them had an uneasy feeling in the pit of their stomachs as they listened to Amir, a man who had infiltrated and torn down some of the most dangerous terrorist cells without a second thought sounding genuinely unnerved.

This couldn't be good. Amir's gut was reinforced with pure steel; if he was feeling ill at ease, there was a good cause.

"There's something much bigger here," Amir added as they closed in on the girl's location.

"Alright, we'll keep our footprint to a minimum. McGuire I'm going to post you at the door, and once you tell us its clear, Jaz and I will head inside. We'll engage the girls, and I'll grab Verina. Should be in and out in less than 30 seconds."

Best laid plans.

As they approached the building, Esma came staggering out and fell right into McG's arms. There was no sign of Verina.

"What have you got?" Dalton asked McG after they swept the cafe.

"Yeah, she's got a small puncture wound on her jugular; they must have hit her with a strong sedative." McG told him as he assessed the girl.

"Three of them, maybe two minutes ago, the manager just called 1-1-2," Jaz added when she came back out.

They didn't have a lot of time; they couldn't be there when authorities arrived. They didn't need anyone else posing questions they couldn't answer.

Dalton eyed the cameras on the streets and in the shop and put Noah and Hannah on that as he continued to take in everything around them.

Jaz and McG were trying to rouse Esma. When she did come around, she didn't have anything that they could use. Verina didn't have a phone on her to track, and she didn't see anything to report to them before she'd been knocked out.
Everyone had been a step ahead of them ever since this whole op started, and it was really starting to fucking piss Dalton off.

They had to get out of there, but it was killing them to leave Esma out there on her own. McG was especially torn. You can't put a victim in front of the medic without letting him take care of them. It just wasn't in his makeup.

Dalton could see that it was tearing him up to get in the car and drive away from her.

It only got worse from there.

The traffic cams and coffee shop cameras were taken out. They were running in the mud and gaining no ground in the process. If anything, they felt like they were losing ground, meanwhile their were people running behind the scenes that were steps ahead of them, and that included the man that was locked in the cage it seemed.

"I was gonna say, hitting a spot that exact on someone's neck for an injection like that...I mean that's a 50-50 shot even with me." McG said. "Whoever got to her, they were some serious pros."

"You think its a coincidence that we got a serious pro tied up back at base right now?" Jaz asked.

They were all starting to feel like puppets on a string right now, and Dalton wanted to take a crack at the puppeteer. Badly.

"Where's the guest of honor?" Hoffman asked.

Fuck what Patricia said.

Dalton jerked the cage open and threw a punch connecting with the side of Hoffman's head with a satisfying crack.

"Where is she?" He growled as he held him by his collar.

The man had the nerve to smile at him as he said, "I have no idea."

"Yeah, what were you gonna do with her if you got ahold of her today?"

"My orders were to grab her and then await instructions. That's how these things work, that way on the off chance I get picked up, I don't know anything about the others involved."

"Oh yeah?"

"Even you know that," Hoffman said with a smirk.

"You're gonna tell us everything we need to know to find this girl. Do you understand me?" Dalton all but growled.

"Does your boyfriend always have such a short fuse?" Hoffman asked as he stared down Jaz.

"My what?" She spat.

"I think I know a little bit about crossing the line with co-workers." He said as he leered at her.

Dalton really wanted to remove his eyes just for looking in her direction, but that wouldn't accomplish anything other than making a mess and making him feel a little better.
“Yeah, enough with the mind games.”

“Come on Adam; I haven’t even had a go at you yet.”

Dalton was about to spit fire; this was crossing a line he wasn't going to allow. He didn't need this piece of shit kicking around in his head or playing games with Jaz, or anyone else in that room.

“Oh, is that right?”

“Yeah, it’ll be fun. That one, I'm looking forward to.”

“Great. Well, then why wait? Let's get at it right now.” Dalton said as he glared down at Hoffman. He was itching to drop this guy when Noah's voice crackled over his comms, "Dalton, we've got some bad news."

Perfect he thought as he waited for Noah to finish.

"Another sub's gone offline. This time in the South China Sea, this just got a lot bigger than one teenaged hacker."

Yeah, like one wrong move and the world is at war. This day just gets better and better.

"Alright, where's Patricia?" He asked.

She might be his superior, but he wanted to reem her a new one regardless. They'd all been subjected to this epic mind fuck, and she'd left them open to it by keeping them in the dark. She may think she's protecting them, but Dalton was starting to think she'd exposed them instead.

"Wheel's down and heading to you."

"Well, maybe she can get what she needs out of this guy." He said as he walked out of the cage trying to contain the hot blast of rage that was boiling beneath the surface.

If she didn't, they might all be fucked anyway.

Hoffman all but confirmed that.

"Please don't tell me that you think Patricia is coming to help you find Verina."

"Oh shut the hell up!” Dalton shouted.

"She's coming here for me, to take me home. And in so doing, she'll destroy not only her career but her entire life."

"No, this is just more mind games," Dalton said as he shook his head.

"Mind games? Come on, think. The moment you found me you destroyed her. And I'm not talking some slap on the wrist suspension like she got for Tehran,” He said as he glanced over at Jaz.

"I'm talking about life in prison. Talk about her falling on her sword with you as accidental executioner.” He sneered at Dalton.

"For what?” Dalton asked.

"For everything we did.” He said with a smile as if that clarified the whole situation.
Dalton wanted to wipe that smirk from his face. He hated the way he looked at Jaz like he had some inside secret knowledge that he could leverage against her. Against all of them.

He could handle that look being directed at him, but he didn't even want him to look in her direction, even though he knew his girl could more than hold her own. But, Dalton knew this guy would dirty all of their jackets.

That file that was kept in some windowless room and filled with all the things you wished to keep hidden.

It was a pile of papers kept for future use if you ever crossed the line. If they ever needed to erase you.

This guy had long since been erased, and his return was bound to be a stain on all of them. He just hoped it was a stain that they could wash off when the dust settled.

He wasn't sure that Patricia would be able to outrun this one though.

If he'd had doubts about her seemingly Teflon coated armor, they were confirmed as Preach led her in and she stood before Hoffman.

"Hello, Alex." She said as she stared at the ghost from her past.

"Hello, P." He said as he smiled her way.

Dalton had a sick feeling that they had unwittingly played right into his hands. He'd set the trap and reeled her in like prey, and they'd helped him do it.

Chapter End Notes

I'm curious to see how you all felt about the episode. I'm still trying to decide how I feel about it...

I probably won't have another chapter until the finale airs since there are too many threads hanging right now, but I will update Call Me Joseph in between now and then :)
So, I wasn't planning on writing another chapter until after the finale, but this idea has been kicking around in my head since we first saw Hoffman working the team. I just couldn't let go of the idea that he is some kind of master manipulator who was ten steps ahead the whole time.

The flashbacks were bugging me, so I decided to create some new flashbacks, only this time they hit a lot closer to home.

This is who I think Alex is...essentially I think a man who can fake his death and stay 'dead' for nine years has to have a damn good reason to come back to the world of the living.

Anyway, I almost didn't post this because I realize that I am essentially going to up-end whatever the plot is going to be on the finale, but I decided that I was going to do it anyway and hope that you guys will be okay with me potentially blowing canon out of the water. Again.

I figure if I can write my way into a mess, I can write my way out of the mess I am creating with this...I hope that I'm right about that :)

So, just know that I may be writing the actual finale in a totally different manner if it doesn't fit this narrative. I do hope you like it. Please let me know what you think, you know I'm prone to freaking out when I blow up canon and this time, it's like leveling a city block.

Anyway, I hope that you enjoy it.

Brave = not mine
Mistakes = all mine

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

_____  
Blurring and stirring the truth and the lies (so I don't know what's real)  
So I don't know what's real and what's not (don't know what's real and what's not)  
Always confusing the thoughts in my head  
So I can't trust myself anymore  

I'm dying again  

I'm going under (going under)  

Going Under - Evanescence  

_____  

For nine years, he'd been sitting back watching and waiting like a cobra readying to strike.
Alex Hoffman was nothing if not patient, and that's what this had taken. He'd moved around the board undetected for years as he toppled the dominoes one by one.

You see, Patricia Campbell had set a plan in motion nine years ago, and she'd intended to make him the lone casualty.

For that, she would pay.

First, he would take all of her pawns off the board, and then he would exact his revenge.

He'd planned on carrying out this plan a little further down the road, but one of her ground team associates had stumbled upon him forcing him to accelerate his scheme. The young man had been in the wrong place at the wrong time.

It didn't matter that he planned to kill them all anyway, he hated deviating from a plan.

Elijah had been relatively easy to eliminate. Dalton and his team had been on a mission outside of Kabul chasing down an arms dealer who was getting ready to distribute a chemical weapon. The young bomb tech had followed the arms dealer into a market when he saw a glint of light flicker from the building across the street, and the kid knew Jaz was on the ground.

Alex knew he'd been made the second the kid glanced up in his direction. He couldn't afford to show up early to this reunion, and he certainly couldn't have this kid alerting the team to his presence, so he did the only thing he could.

Alex had been watching the arms dealer ever since Patricia had called for boots on the ground, so he already knew the kid was standing within a few feet of that bomb. A well-placed bullet and Elijah would take his secret to the grave.

"Sorry kid, in war there's always collateral damage," Alex said as he lined up the shot and squeezed the trigger.

Jaz and Dalton were about a block away on the opposite side of the street when the blast went off. They knew that Elijah was standing right at the epicenter of the blast because he was inside the market and it was now a pile of rubble with a haze of noxious gas rising from the ground.

It had a sickening pink tinge to it.

No one that had been in that market would have survived, and if they had their lungs would have filled with the toxic gas liquifying them in an instant. Being blown to bits was merciful in comparison.

Jaz started to run towards the blast when Dalton threw his arms around her; she struggled as her voice broke on a harsh scream, "Nooooo! Lijah!"

She was struggling hard so all Dalton could do was pull her to the ground and hold her tight as she screamed herself hoarse for her closest friend while he held his shirt over her nose and mouth to keep her from breathing in the chemicals. In the state she was in, she would breathe in twice as much as he would.

McG and Preach came running up behind them and threw a mask over both of their faces. It wouldn't help much, and they couldn't stick around because they weren't equipped to handle this kind of chemical explosion.
As a medic, McG had wanted to help people, but there wasn't a single thing in his med kit that could help the people who were in the primary blast radius.

They had to leave.

Without Elijah.

Alex thought that maybe he'd blown it with the premature annihilation of a member of Patricia's team as she had pulled them out of the field, but that had been a short-term issue. And it would give him a little time to continue to observe the team in a situation where their guard was down.

At home.

He'd loved California. The weather was beautiful, and families enjoyed their weekend on the beach making sand castles and charging into the waves.

That's exactly what Zeke was doing when Alex sat under the shade of an umbrella snapping pictures on a Sunday afternoon. He couldn't spend all day out here, he had a package to deliver, but Alex was having fun watching the man they called Preach be the family man.

He headed to his hotel first and uploaded the images of Preach and his happy little family to his cloud so he could figure out how to use them to the best of his advantage down the road. Then he headed to the cute little bungalow he shared with his family and slipped inside to place a listening device behind an electrical outlet in each room, and a few well-hidden cameras.

His last gift required him to crawl underneath the house, so he'd come prepared with a pest control jumpsuit to avoid tipping off nosy neighbors as made his way into the crawl space.

It was an insurance policy, and he was hoping he wouldn't have to use it because he hated taking the lives of children, but Preach was a man of morals, and he would be much harder to manipulate without a little leverage.

His next stop was the base in Incirlik since he had no idea how long the team would be away.

He had to forgo the cameras he'd been hoping to plant because the bunker was so sparse that it would be nearly impossible to hide them, and it kept him from bugging every room, but he'd managed the main living space and the bathroom off Dalton's bunk.

The room was so small; he was certain he'd be able to catch something even if the bug was in the bathroom.

He didn't dare tamper with the computers or communications hub; Preach, and Dalton would almost certainly catch on if he did, so he would just have to listen diligently.

Dalton was a pretty boy, but he wasn't dumb. Patricia had assembled a good team.

He followed Jaz in New York, but she stayed in a hotel, and he hadn't been able to get into her room because she hadn't left it once until the day of the funeral for her friend. Unfortunately, she'd checked out the same day, so bugging the room would've been a waste of time.

After that, she headed for DC and stayed in the hotel across the street from the DIA, and the place was crawling with agents, so it was far too great a risk. Plus, he knew too many people in DC.
making it nearly impossible for him to move about freely.

He'd have to find another way to get to Jaz.

McGuire had two things that Alex knew he could use as leverage his mother, who he adored and beautiful women.

McG might not be an easy target in the field, but he knew that he could manipulate him using his mother or a pretty woman and get him to go into knight in shining armor mode.

Dalton would be one of the hardest ones to get to. Patricia had selected well when she brought him into the fold. He was driven by a strict code of conduct, and he rarely made mistakes. He also happened to be really good at adapting on the fly.

But, Alex was confident that the team was his Achilles heel. If he targeted the people around him, his makeshift family, he knew he could crack the Captain's well-honed steel exterior.

For now, he was content just to listen. He was certain that he could use their work to draw Patricia out, and hopefully, he'd get a little more dirt on the ground team in the process.

You never knew when you might need a little leverage.

Amir Al-Raisani made Alex a little nervous. He was quiet and mostly kept to himself, and he was far from being an easy mark. He'd cut his teeth in some of the world's deadliest terror cells and lived to tell.

That in and of itself was enough to make him wary of the man. You don't infiltrate those kinds of cells without a big pair of balls, airtight covers that take months to perfect and being frightfully adept at selling lies.

It took incredible discipline and nerves of steel.

This kid scared him.

Alex made his next move somewhere that would hit closer to home.

If Patricia wouldn't come out, he could still spill her blood. In fact, this one might be more satisfying. This pain would have a lasting effect.

He was standing ten yards away from her Achilles heel. And he was ready to tip the next domino.

It figures her only son would grow up to be a soldier. The one thing he was certain she didn't want him to be.

Yet there he was standing at the side of the building as he and his team worked to hoist the beam so they could start framing out the roof on the school they were building.

He looked so much like her. Big blue eyes, and pale blonde hair. Alex wondered when he'd last spoken to his mom, days, weeks? He hoped it had been a little while.

He liked thinking of Patricia's gut roiling as she tried to recount the days since she'd last spoken to
him. The last time her son had said goodbye.

He smiled as he flipped the guard on the remote he was holding. Alex set up his camera and lined up the perfect shot with his tripod setting the timer for 10 seconds so he could count it down.

"Ten."

"Nine."

"Eight."

"Seven."

"Six."

"Five."

"Four."

"Three."

"Two."

"One," He finished as he pressed the button on the remote and heard the shutter click on the camera simultaneously.

"Boom." He said as he watched the earth and sand flash up and collapse back down burying the men and women that had been working so hard for the last few months.

More collateral damage, but he couldn't be bothered by that. Not when he had her in his sights.

He would draw Patricia out if it took him ten years.

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When she returned to work after just ten days, he was reminded that Patricia was an expert at compartmentalizing. He would just have to work harder to get her in the line of fire.

_____

He'd spent months manipulating the team; he'd helped locate an American doctor in Syria with Doctors Without Borders in exchange for fresh passports and $400,000 from a terror syndicate.

The team managed to execute the rescue without getting caught and killed Baghdadi and his wife but fortunately, he'd already been compensated, or he would have had a very difficult time plotting his next moves.

Of course, he'd almost had to watch his whole plan go up in smoke when a truck bomb careened towards the team on the beach in Turkey shortly thereafter.

Just a couple weeks later, Alex alerted a Russian contact of a team of US spies in Ukraine. He'd gotten another influx of cash out of that deal and once again hoped his efforts would pare down the team.

Alex had sent Ranier Booth to Mexico knowing Patricia wouldn't be able to resist a chance to untangle the web of his organization.

He'd been hoping that any of these assholes would do some of the dirty work for him, but Dalton
and his team were good. He'd have to give them that.

They'd walked into all of those situations basically blind with the chessboard rocking and swaying beneath their feet as he worked to keep them off balance, but Dalton was a master at evolving his plan.

It was damn frustrating.

Alex was going to have to up his game.

So, Alex had made sure to get the DIA looped in on a terror threat that would send the Deputy Director right into the fires of hell itself. An Afghan prison full of Taliban.

He'd paid a couple of Taliban soldiers a small fortune to allow themselves to be captured with the promise of a weapons cache after he helped them break back out. He also told them they could have the women.

Though he'd only intended to allow them to keep Jaz; He had other plans for Patricia, but that information was need to know. If they didn't like it, he could always kill them once they were on the outside.

Unfortunately, things had gone all shades of wrong at the Prison, and once again this team found a way out. He almost lost his opportunity to get to Patricia altogether as the crazy fuckers who'd turned up to the fallen prison had chased after them firing rocket launchers.

They'd survived that, but Dalton, who was pissing Alex off with his cowboy antics had called a drone strike while the lot of them were standing inside the blast radius.

This guy was a crazy motherfucker, and he was starting to admire him. That was pissing him off even more.

Alex had been forced to lay low after the prison, and he spent a good deal of it figuratively licking his wounds. He'd been so close to Patricia, and yet she'd managed to slip through his fingers.

He was going to enjoy dismantling this team; they were far too much trouble for his liking.

Of course, while he was stuck playing the waiting game, he started to hear some more salacious intel from the bugs he'd planted in the bunker.

Dalton did, in fact, have a flaw. He was in love with the little sniper.

This he was certain would be useful at some point.

For the next several months he'd taken shots at the team.

He'd even helped a group of kids plan a bombing while the team was babysitting an ambassador at a consulate meeting in Nigeria.

He'd lured them to Spain where he'd almost gotten McGuire in some hot water by telling a pretty local girl that he was a spy.

He'd had some colleagues that had tasked him with locating a Russian spy. That spy was the
woman's father, and he was in a predicament.

He'd been diagnosed with cancer and brokered a bad deal figuring he was already looking at a death sentence. Die at the hands of the Russians like the lame racehorse he was, or die at the hands of criminals but leave his daughter with enough money to live her life comfortably.

He'd chosen the latter and found himself on a hit list instead.

So Paloma had been easy to manipulate, and she'd been none the wiser as he'd slipped away after placing the napkin with a note alerting her to the spy in her midst. She'd never even laid eyes on him, but he knew she'd take the bait.

Desperate women did desperate things, especially when family was involved.

After months of failing to draw out Patricia or take out any other members of this team, he'd grown frustrated. Until he'd overheard them talking about that bug they'd planted on Ranier Booth.

He knew they would go after Jarif.

They'd planned to take him out at a tea house in Tehran, and he was going to sit by and wait until they did before alerting the authorities to their presence.

He figured he could take out one or two of them relatively easily that way.

They were spies in a country that the US could not operate in, so they'd be taken into custody immediately, and he really didn't care what happened to them after that.

Unfortunately, like every other time he'd tried to use the situation to his advantage the team had to re-plot their course. He hadn't been counting on the team sending Jaz in alone, but it couldn't have worked out better if Alex had planned it.

She'd executed Jarif and been captured trying to escape.

Not only was she off the board, but Dalton had been a total wreck. He felt certain that he would make some fatal mistake under this kind of stress and without sleep.

Perhaps, if he was lucky, he could eliminate two strong players in one shot. He was certain that Dalton and Jaz had to be fucking. He'd caught bits and pieces of conversations after the Prison, but the bug he'd planted behind the toilet had shorted out on the night he was certain he was about to hit paydirt.

Alex had heard the water splashing followed by a deafening buzz.

So, he'd been down to the bug in the kitchen on the wall beside the refrigerator. He'd wanted to plant more bugs, but there simply hadn't been a lot of options in the bunker. The best places were behind things that no one moved much.

Considering how open the bunker was, that didn't leave many options. He could have stashed them under tables or beds, but both could be jostled enough that bugs eventually came loose.

His were small, but they weren't invisible.

Either way, he couldn't confirm his suspicions, and he wouldn't be able to use what he'd heard to prove the pair were screwing each other, so this was the next best option.
Jarif's men could kill Jaz, and maybe if he was lucky the rest of the team would get caught up in the net trying to save her.

So, he arranged to have some surveillance photo's of the group as they arrived in Iran delivered to the Qud's.

He thought for sure he had them in Tehran, but Dalton and his team were turning out to be a bigger pain in the ass than he thought.

They'd somehow managed to force the Qud's to move her and taken out the caravan as it moved through the city. They'd even managed to make it through the roadblock after he'd informed the Qud's which crossing they'd planned to hit.

It had been the same one Hossein had used to smuggle things in and out for years.

And somehow, they'd evaded capture again.

Alex was going to have to take this to their backyard.

He'd had a month to plan his introduction as the team had rallied around Jaz who needed a little time to recover from her ordeal in Tehran. When they'd headed to DC, he'd been unable to follow without risking himself.

He needed them to come to him. So, he'd meticulously planned his next move.

He'd been lingering on the dark web chatting with the daughter of a man who worked cybersecurity on the base in Incirlik. It was almost too perfect; he'd been able to prod her towards the projects he wanted her work on.

He'd posed as a teenager himself as he chatted with the young girl. When he'd earned her trust, he started off small with relatively innocuous hacks that wouldn't draw much attention working his way up to hacking a nuclear sub. It had worked out two-fold.

He was completing a job for a group of mercs that wanted control of a specific sub in the south China sea, and once she'd hit the first sub, he'd been tasked with picking the girl up. He also knew that once Patricia knew he was alive, she would be on the first plane to Turkey.

Everything was falling into place. He'd intended to grab the girl, deliver her to the mercs, and then cross paths with Dalton as they searched for the girl.

It didn't go down quite as he'd planned, but the Mercs eventually got the girl, and Dalton and his team had taken him into custody as Patricia made her way to Turkey.

It hadn't been easy, but he was finally going to look Patricia in the eye and repay her for all of her sins. He knew he was going to go down this time, but he was going to take her and anyone else he could down with him.

Chapter End Notes

So....what'd you think??? Do I need to run away?
Okay, so this one is monstrous. I considered splitting it, but I never really could find a good place to break the chapter. So, grab a drink and get comfy.

There is a lot going on as the last episode/chapter left a lot of loose ends to tie up. Hopefully, this one will give you the answers you want and more of the team that everyone was missing from the first episode of the finale/chapter. I even tied up Verina's story (Kind of wish we'd seen a little of that on the show)

Overall, I really liked the season finale (2nd half a lot more than the first). Fingers crossed for a renewal!

Also, there might be a little carrot for those of you following Call Me Joseph in here. If you're not following, give it a shot.

I hope you enjoy it!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

——

"I won't say anything if you don't."

——

As soon as Patricia stepped into the bunker, you could feel the electricity crackling through the air.

Dalton already had an uneasy feeling from the moment he'd laid eyes on Hoffman, but now he knew this man had a plan. He wanted Patricia standing in front of him, and he had a sick feeling in his stomach that said they weren't seeing the whole picture.

He was already sure Hoffman had planned to cross paths with his team. If he'd wanted to escape them, he could have gone out the same way Verina had. Or, he could have forced his way out before Patricia had learned his identity.

Dalton knew that if he'd managed to stay hidden for nine years, the only way he gets found, even by a team as good as his was if he wanted to be found.

But to what end?

What was the plan?

Dalton was determined to find out.

"You're not going to ask me how I did it?" Hoffman asked.

"No," Patricia answered.

She had lost her patience with him already. There was a 16-year-old girl that was in danger and
reliving the past wouldn't get them any closer to finding her.

"You're not the least bit curious?"

"No."

Dalton had a bad feeling that Hoffman and Patricia might be talking about two different things. She'd finally given him a sliver of their backstory ending with him getting into a car that she'd had rigged to blow.

It did.

He didn't.

But, Hoffman was almost shaking with anticipation. No, this wasn't just about how he "died," this was something else. This was a game he was still playing, and they needed to get on the board quickly.

As he listened to Patricia and Hoffman talking, it was clear that there was a lot more to their relationship than her just being his handler, though Hoffman had alluded to that earlier, seeing it was a different thing.

It also became pretty clear that Hoffman still very much held onto those feelings, what wasn't clear was whether he brought Patricia here in an attempt to rekindle something or whether those feelings were fueling something darker.

His gut said it was the latter.

Dalton had had enough of the dance Hoffman, and Patricia were doing. He needed to think.

For that he needed space, so he headed out to the courtyard and took a seat.

Of course, Preach knew him well enough to know he was getting into his own head. He was always there to pull his thoughts out into the open and whether he was willing to admit it or not, Preach always got him thinking on a more productive track.

"What's on your mind, top-shotter?" Preach said as he sat down beside him.

"Keep thinking about what Hoffman said here. How by capturing him, we somehow destroy Patricia."

"Hey, you know every word that man says seems to be poison."

"Yeah, but you know how this works, Preach. The guy wraps himself in a flag, he walks out the door, and he does things that jeopardize everything you and I fight for. Just like a rabid dog, with a guy like that, you do one thing, you put him down."

Dalton just had a feeling that he was going to have to make that decision. If Patricia couldn't do it, he would.

This man was a danger to his family, he was sure of it.

"I don't think she's here to put him down. I think she's gonna take him back, and so, liar or not, he's still right. She's gonna take the fall for everything that he's done. Now, does that seem right to you?" Dalton asked.
"No. It does not." Preach answered. "But we've been doing this long enough, Adam, to know that right doesn't always win."

Dalton felt like there was more to what Preach was saying, but Noah had interrupted on Comms, and he had to cut it short.

As if this day couldn't get any worse, that sub was headed for China, and they had about three hours to find the girl and get control of that sub before 151 lives were sacrificed to keep their technology from winding up in the hands of the Chinese.

Dalton had to loop Patricia in.

It took less than thirty seconds for Dalton to draw his gun on Hoffman. If he didn't need answers, he'd already have a bullet in his head.

And this time, he'd stay dead.

"Oh, she already tried that option, sport," Hoffman said with a smile on his face.

Sport? Who the fuck did this guy think he was talking to?

"Yeah, she's not me, sport."

"I see you've been listening. That's good, 'cause you're gonna have to do it, you know. Sooner or later."

Oh, Dalton was sure that's how this would end. His real concern at this point was finding the girl and keeping his team safe.

Hoffman agreed to set up a meeting with Victor, and they'd made the call, now it was just a waiting game. Patricia had walked away for a bit, clearly, she needed to process some things, so Dalton and Jaz were keeping an eye on Hoffman.

He wanted to keep her as far away from him as he could, but Jaz had a mind of her own, and Dalton was sure she was there to keep an eye on him as much as Hoffman.

"You know Dalton, you don't strike me as the kind of guy that breaks the rules, so this little firecracker must really be something in the sack," Hoffman said as he leered at Jaz.

Dalton looked like he was going to shoot him right then and there, mission be damned before Jaz stepped in front of him.

"Yeah, I wouldn't mind going a few rounds with her either," Hoffman said as he smirked at Dalton.

"He's just trying to get in your head," Jaz whispered. "Don't give him the satisfaction."

Alex watched the pair as he ran through things in his head, if he couldn't get at Dalton, maybe it was time to switch targets.

"So when was it, sweetheart? Was it after his friend died? I mean I did that to get at Patricia, but I'm sure it was tough on Dalton, too. Were you there to make him feel better?"

"What are you talking about?" Dalton asked.

"Adam, he could have heard about that, it doesn't mean he made it happen." She whispered.

Dalton knew she was right; he was probably just taking credit to get a rise out of them.

"Adam, huh? Alright, so maybe you took her to your bed to comfort her. You were close with Elijah weren't you sweetheart?" He said as he smiled at them.

Jaz turned, Hoffman was scratching at something, she knew he was manipulating her, but she had to know what he knew about Elijah. They knew he was in the blast radius, but they still didn't know why the bomb had gone off.

Elijah was too good at his job; if he'd thought he couldn't disarm it, he'd have told them to evacuate. He'd never said a word.

"Ah, so I've got your interest."

"You're right, he's just messing with us Jazzy," Dalton said as he kept a hand on her shoulder.

"Jazzy, that's adorable, and you're absolutely right. I am messing with you. I've been messing with all of you for a very long time," Hoffman said with a laugh. "Though I have to say, Elijah wasn't in my plans, that was pure improv."

"Seriously, what are you talking about?" Dalton asked as the rest of the team came in.

He'd had enough. He knew they shouldn't engage with him, but he just wanted him to get to the fucking point.

"He was collateral damage. He saw me before I was ready for my close up. So, I had to take him out. I was just keeping tabs on you; I was waiting for Jaz to take her shot and then I was going to point the authorities towards you in the hopes of taking a couple of players off the table." He said as Jaz stood in front of Dalton with tears welling up in her eyes. "I have to give you guys credit, you were harder to play than I thought you would be. You made me work for all of this. Hell, I'm still working."

Hoffman was enjoying this show, "I didn't take out the players I was hoping for, but I did help paint the streets with Elijah's blood."

"No." She said as shook off Dalton's hand.

"Actually, I couldn't have planned it better, it was quite fortunate really. I was going to have to shoot him, and you would have known that someone was out there working against you, but then he stumbled on that bomb, and I saw an opportunity. The bomb went boom, and I walked away without giving myself away. I didn't even have to hide my tracks; the bomb did all the work for me."

"He...he. You son of a bitch." Jaz spat as she charged towards him.

She got in one good swing before McG was pulling her back whispering in her ear, "Jazzy, he's going to get what's coming to him. I promise. But, we need to focus on that little girl, and you and I have a date."

"Don't go! I was just starting to have fun. Was it something I said?" Hoffman yelled as they rounded the corner.

Preach had already dragged Dalton from the room because he was looking for any reason to put a bullet in Hoffman's head.
McG led Jaz into the room she shared with Dalton, and she ran into his arms the second she saw him, "He killed him. He killed Elijah!" She cried. "If he...Patricia's son. Oh my god, would he kill her son?"

"I don't know, and we may never know how deep he's embedded himself to get here, but I promise you Jaz, he won't be breathing when he leaves here. Not if I have a say." Dalton said as she pressed her face into his chest.

Dalton rubbed at her knuckles, they were already starting to bruise, and there was blood that obviously wasn't hers. That made him smile.

"I'm still here. Why don't you tell me how brilliantly you've pulled our strings." Amir said.

Hoffman looked at him with trepidation as he tried to wipe the blood from his lip on his collar. He wanted that little firecracker to come back; she was fun to play with, and it got at Dalton, too. Win-win.

"I'm not sure that's a good idea. You and I are more alike than you think."

"Oh come on, you've been playing the long game. I know you must be dying to take credit for your work." Amir said calmly as he pulled a chair up and sat across from him.

"You're right, I have been playing the long game. You have no idea."

"Well, you've already claimed credit for two people we cared about. So, what's stopping you from laying claim to everything else? You and I both know you aren't walking out of here. Patricia might have plans to take you back, but Dalton isn't going to let that happen." Amir said as he stared Hoffman down.

"I personally didn't know Elijah, but I know that he mattered to these people, and they matter to me. As you said before, I've gotten my hands dirty, so if Dalton doesn't get you, I will. I'll gladly live with your blood on my hands."

Hoffman knew Amir wasn't the type of guy to make idle threats.

He really didn't like the eerie calm that Amir wore either; he knew this kid was lethal. You don't get a jacket like his without ice water in your veins. On the surface, he was a mild-mannered guy with a sense of humor, but he was quite possibly the most dangerous player on the board.

He knew Dalton wanted him dead, but he would probably shoot him while he looked him in the eye. Amir, he was more cerebral, he's the guy you never see coming.

"So, what...you started with Elijah? What else did you do? You have to be itching to take credit for all of it; you haven't had Patricia to stroke your ego for nine years." Amir said as casually as he might talk about the weather.

"Elijah was a lucky break, but I did orchestrate that meeting with Baghdadi. Oh and Booth, I might have had a hand in that. You should be happy about that one, Urzua's blood is on all your hands, but seems he earned it since he spilled the blood of that pretty analyst, McGuire's girl, no?"

Amir looked at him as he tried to mask his reaction. He'd had his suspicions, but how the hell did Hoffman know anything about it?

"He didn't tell you did he? That has to sting."
"Tell him what?" McG said as he strolled into the room wearing flannel, cheap cologne and ripped jeans.

"We were just talking about that pretty analyst, Hannah isn't it?"

McGuire went from his general easy demeanor to murderous in seconds.

"Don't even say her name!" McG growled as he grabbed Hoffman by the collar and shoved him so hard he up-ended the chair he was tied to.

Hoffman was laughing.

"McG, save it for the op!" Dalton barked as Jaz came around the corner dressed to entice an egocentric asshole with a hero complex.

Hoffman gave a whistle which had both Dalton and McG ready to just put a bullet in him and be done with it.

Jaz and McG headed out to find Victor a little while later as Amir and Preach kept Hoffman busy, Dalton and Patricia watched their camera feeds.

It made Dalton uneasy to have Jaz out there without him, but he trusted McG to have her back. Of course, it was a little harder to do that when McG’s role was to play the king of the douchebags. But, if the shit hit the fan, there was no one better at switching gears than McGuire.

And Jaz was pretty dangerous on her own.

He loved listening to her speak in other languages or using different accents. It was kind of hot, but he’d have to shelve that thought for another time.

McG was getting his ass handed to him, and Dalton knew that had to piss him off because he’d smoke this guy if he hadn’t been handcuffed by the mission.

But, Dalton still got a little chuckle out of it.

"I hope that was fun for you," McG said to Jaz as he passed.

"For the record, I could have kicked that guy's ass," McG said for the guys on the other side of his comms.

"Mmhmm, alright, put a Band-Aid on it, sugar."

There was no way Dalton was letting that one go without taking a little shot at McGuire.

Now they just had to wait for Jaz to finish the op. Noah and Hannah were happy to have a bit of good news when they'd been alerted that Victor had been ID'd.

A few minutes later, Jaz finished the job, and the pair were headed back to the bunker.

Although McG’s face was a little less pretty, Victor had as it turned out been a relatively easy mark.

Dalton followed Jaz back to their room when they returned.

"You good?" He asked as he wrapped his arms around her from behind.
She leaned into him and said, "No, but I will be once we get a location on the girl. Just promise me, if he goes anywhere, he goes there in a body bag."

"He's not going anywhere. I'll make sure of that." Dalton said as she turned in his arms and rubbed her cheek against his beard.

"He killed them didn't he?"

"I don't know. But if anyone can get into Hoffman's head it's Amir. He's been working him for the last hour."

The group got together to go over the plans for the compound where Verina was being held. They were out of earshot from Hoffman, but they still had eyes on him.

The team followed the signal from the tracker to a Junkyard.

Unfortunately, it really was a perfect base of operations, not a lot of ways in or out, it didn't rely on the power grid since there were generators and didn't require a ton of manpower to secure.

Noah chimed in on Comms looking for a shred of good news, the Wyoming was quickly approaching a pair of bad choices, either scuttle the sub with 151 souls onboard or cross into Chinese waters and get captured.

Neither of those were options they wanted to entertain, but without another solution, they were the only options the Wyoming had, and there was simply too much to lose if China got ahold of her.

"Well, we found where Victor and his guys are keeping Verina. Of course, she's locked up in a junkyard fortress." Dalton said.

Jaz piped in, "But you don't see antennae like that in many junkyards. IR sweeps and night vision-defeating strobes."

"Got a Vanguard 2K camera systems, probably thermal," Dalton said knowing this wasn't exactly the good news Noah had been looking for.

"Cut the power?" Jaz wondered aloud.

"All right, so the generator's right here in the back of the yard. It's shielded. We could use the Barrett to take it out, but then there goes surprise. Right now, surprise is pretty much all we got, and time is not on our side." Dalton added.

Once they'd thoroughly scouted the facility, they headed back to base to work out a plan that they could carry out at nightfall. It was going to have to be a clean op; they had no margin for error and no time to formulate a backup plan.

If anyone realized they were there before they got to Verina, she was likely dead, and 151 crew on the Wyoming would die with her.

McG went over the site plans with the team so they could figure out how they were going to breach the compound and how many men they were dealing with.

"What's the updated intel on the strength of their opposition?" Preach asked once they'd figure out their positions.
"We only saw two perimeter guards, one at the main building and one at the gate. You know, the numbers don't look bad." Jaz shared.

"No, the numbers won't be bad. Victor doesn't want a lot of eyeballs on what he's doing, not to mention he doesn't even need it. He's got every square inch of this place covered with multiple redundant systems." Dalton added.

With all the tech they had, they didn't need a ton of men. Besides, in Victor's situation more men meant a lot of loose ends to clean up, chances were every man on that site was going to get a bullet to the head once the mission was done.

More money for Victor.

For sure the girl was dead as soon as China had their sub or it was resting at the bottom of the ocean.

"Noah, Hannah, you've got to do something," Patricia said to the analysts.

"Look, even if we shut down the power grid, they still have those backup generators Dalton's talking about, and we can't risk a drone strike because we have no idea where Verina is inside that compound. If she dies, so does the crew of the Wyoming," Noah said.

Everyone was feeling the frustration, they all knew that one wrong move meant a lot of people wouldn't be coming home.

Dalton didn't like it, but they were going to have to work with Hoffman. With his help, Preach was able to hijack their network with a little help from McG on-site.

If he could get a message to Verina, they might be able to disable the generators and figure out how many men Victor had inside.

Hopefully, they could draw as many of them away from her as possible. If Victor was all that remained, they had a much better chance at getting Verina and the crew of the Wyoming out alive.

Once contact was made, Preach with a little help from Verina went about shutting down the power and kicking off the generators giving the team a window to execute the mission.

The team split up and went about dismantling Victor's team one by one.

The first guy on the perimeter went down seconds later. Jaz and Dalton were squared up on the other guy at the entrance.

She had him lined up and got ready to take her shot, "I got him."

But she heard the muted pop of a shot on her right before she squeezed the trigger.

"Did you just take my shot?" Jaz asked as she glared at Dalton.

He just smirked and said, "Whoops."

Dalton knew he would pay for that one later, but he was sure that he'd enjoy whatever she had in mind.

"Commencing Breach," Dalton said over comms as the team closed in.

Jaz set trip wires for one unlucky man, as she anchored the second wire high she laughed, this guy was going to think he was so smart when he notices the first wire, but she knew he'd walk right into
the second.

She didn't wait around to watch the show, but she knew she'd hear it when her little trap snared someone.

Jaz wasn't the only ninja, Amir crept right up on his man and popped off a shot with his muzzle an inch from the back of his head.

Jaz was rewarded seconds later as a loud boom sounded in the distance.

McG went old school as he choked the life out of a guy, once that was done, he strung him up and waited for his buddy to come to him. When he did, a knife to the jugular was just what the doctor ordered.

He'd had a little extra rage to burn off thanks to Hoffman; this seemed like a good way to use it. But, he was hoping he'd have another go at that prick later.

Dalton picked up the radio from one of Victor's men and said, "Hey Victor, we've got your security neutralized, and I've got Hoffman under wraps back at base. Now, this only ends one of two ways. You alive, or you dead. You really want to go down for this? You've got five seconds before we come in there."

Seconds later two shots rang out.

"No, no, no...." Dalton said as the team took the door down with a shot.

When the door swung in Victor yelled, "Don't shoot, I'm unarmed."

Fittingly, he went down like a coward McG thought.

Verina was hiding under the desk, but thankfully unharmed.

As Dalton zip tied Victor's hands, he glanced back and recognized Jaz, "Ah, You. You got to be kidding me."

Jaz just smirked at him as he glared at her. Of course, that meant he was too busy to realize he had a sucker punch coming his way.

"And me!" McG growled as he leveled him with every ounce of rage he'd had brewing over the last several hours. "Cheers, mate."

Dalton stood a little dumbfounded, "Feel better?"

"Yeah," McG said, he had to admit it felt real good to drop that asshole.

Unfortunately, there was a real big snag. Victor had shot up all the computers in the room. And Noah had just alerted them that they had five minutes to right the ship, or the sub as it were.

Fortunately, they weren't dealing with your average sixteen-year-old girl. Verina was going to talk Noah through the coding necessary to return control of the Wyoming to its Captain.

Dalton set Verina up with a SAT phone and lined her up on his body cam, so she popped up on Noah's feed.

"How good are you with advanced coding in Ada?" She asked.
"Uh, not as good as you, but to be honest, we have a lot of computing power here, but we have tried every trick we can think of, and we have no idea how to get this sub back online," Noah said.

"Sometimes, to build a better mousetrap, you just need the right kind of cheese."

"Sounds good. What does that mean?" Noah asked.

"Uh, we're going to need to create a ToT botnet running Mirai 2.0 embedded in the sub's PLC override package. I-I can give you all the codes."

"Even if we could create that package, the sub is at depth and offline. It's a closed loop."

"Uh, it's-it's not quite closed. Do you guys like TV and movies?" Verina asked.

"Yeah."

"And so do sailors on subs. They've wired LAN for MWR."

"What's MWR?" Noah asked Hannah.

"Of course, morale, welfare, and recreation. It's genius. They pipe in content via ELF antenna." Hannah answered.

"Yeah, so instead of uploading a movie, we're gonna upload the override codes so the Captain can take back control of his boat. Okay, um, grab a pencil. I'm gonna rattle off a lot of codes at you."

Dalton listened as the codes were conveyed and waited for the confirmation that the sub was out of danger.

This girl had watched her father die and been held by several men and forced to re-route a sub into foreign waters, most people would be a basket case, but Verina was one brave kid.

Dalton couldn't help thinking this girl had a future sitting right next to people like Noah and Hannah someday. Someone needed to make that happen.

Maybe Patricia once the dust settled on this one.

If the dust settled.

It would if he had any say in the matter.

Once they got confirmation, Dalton let everyone know they were on the move with Victor and Verina.

Preach was really happy to hear that Verina was okay. He couldn't help thinking about his daughters being in a situation like that. He hoped that never happened because they could barely work the microwave, but Verina, she kept it together and won the day for all of them.

Once the mission had been completed, Hoffman was running his mouth again. Preach didn't like it. He knew he was running a game, and he couldn't help thinking they were still on the wrong side of it. For a guy that was facing a life sentence at best, he was way too calm.

And Preach couldn't help thinking Patricia's personal feelings were clouding her judgment. He just
had a sick feeling in his gut. It had been with him since they'd first met Hoffman.

In Fact, he'd been so uneasy after Hoffman had mentioned his family that he'd asked Noah to get his family to a safe house. It was probably overkill, and his wife might kill him when all was said and done, but that was a risk he'd happily take to keep them safe.

Preach couldn't wait to get this piece of garbage out of there so he could call his wife and make sure everyone was alright.

He didn't care how it happened, whether he left on a plane or in a body bag. Preach just wanted him gone. Though truth be told, he suspected the safest place for a guy like him was in the ground, and he knew Top agreed with that.

Preach listened as Hoffman baited Patricia, none of it raised any alarms until he said, "And now you think you're going to do it again. I don't think so, P. I died last time. This time, it's your turn."

Preach had just enough time to drag Patricia to the ground, after that everything went dark.

The team was pulling into the main gate at the base when the blast went off. Dalton was out of the Humvee as soon as he had it in park, he screamed at the team to stay back and call it in as he headed straight for the bunker.

McG was hot on his heels; there was no way he was going to stay back when he could help. There was no telling what they were going to find once they got inside.

Dalton ran into the building without even thinking twice, and McG was only a few steps behind him. As Dalton carried Patricia out of the smoke-filled bunker, McG did his best to drag Preach a safe distance away without causing more harm.

Patricia was banged up, but she was stable. Dalton made sure he knew that so that he could focus on Preach whose circumstances appeared to be pretty dire.

Preach was struggling to pull air into his lungs, he knew his lungs had been affected, by the sounds of it, the right one was collapsed for sure, the left wasn't, but it wasn't functioning very well either.

McG had to intubate Preach and re-inflate his lung in the dirt outside the bunker; then he had to hope that he could keep him alive long enough for the ambulance to get there.

All while keeping his emotions in check.

That normally wasn't a problem, but this was Preach. The man who had been a father figure to all of them, and the only father figure McGuire had ever had. And he had a wife and three kids at home who were expecting their dad to come home in a few days.

When the ambulances arrived, they loaded Preach first, and McG insisted on riding along. He couldn't leave him in the hands of strangers.

Patricia was loaded onto the second one, and Dalton told Amir and Jaz to head to the hospital. He'd told Jaz that he wanted to take a look around the bunker, but he'd meet them there.

When they all arrived at the hospital, Jaz tried to pick him up on comms to let him know that Preach was in surgery and that Patricia was going to be fine, but he wasn't answering.
She didn't have time to think about it, as Amir suggested she needed to contact his wife.

She knew he was right, so she stepped out to get an update and then went to make the call. She had hoped that Dalton would have been there to do it, but his family needed to know now.

Amir sat with Preach as Jaz headed out to make the calls, and McGuire was sitting with Patricia. He wanted to know what happened, and Amir was really concerned for him.

McG was taking this really hard. He was closer to Preach than any of them. Amir knew that no matter how dire Preach's condition was to begin with if they lost him McGuire was going to blame himself.

Amir usually tried to stay out of everyone's personal business, especially when they weren't ready to share, but he was going to break that trend because McGuire needed him to.

"Hannah, can you go to a private line?" He said.

"Yeah, go Amir."

"Are you sending a plane for Preach's family?"

"Yes. Why?"

"You need to get on it."

"Okay?"

"He needs you here," Amir said as he cut off the comms link.

McG sat watching Patricia as she slept.

He needed her to wake up. He needed to know how this happened. All McG wanted to do at that moment was sit with Preach, but he had to know.

When she started to wake up, McG walked over to her bedside.

"Ma'am. What happened?"

"The phone. It was an impact bomb. Dalton didn't press an unlock code. He pressed an arming code."

"How's Preach?"

"Not so good."

"What? Who's with him? Dalton with him?"

"No. Honestly, I don't know where he is. He yanked his comms, left his phones. We haven't heard from him in hours. He went dark." McG told her.

Noah came on comms as they were discussing Dalton and told the team that Preach had asked him the day before to send a team to check on his family.

They'd been moved to a safe house that morning.
Preach had an uneasy feeling.

Noah knew the man well enough to know that if Preach thought something was wrong, it was worth taking a look.

When the team arrived, they did a sweep of the house. They'd alerted the bomb squad when they found a device under the house. They were able to disarm it, but it had a receiver that appeared to have been linked to another device and they'd found a number of other surveillance devices throughout the house.

It looked like either Hoffman could set a remote trigger, or it was designed to go off when the other device went off. The trigger was very similar to the device Patricia had described.

An analog phone that appeared innocuous, until it wasn't.

Dalton walked into a quiet apartment. He knew he'd only be waiting minutes if that, so he tried to think like a teenaged girl as he looked for the laptop Amir couldn't find earlier when it was teeming with police and Army CID.

He'd found it in the wall vent in her bathroom. So he took it and sat down at the dining room table. He'd have a clear view of the room, but anyone coming in would have no idea that he was there.

Now all he had to do was wait. Hoffman would come, he knew he would. This computer was probably worth too much for him to pass it up and he was going to need a lot of money to go back underground.

It was much harder to hide when people were looking for you. And Alex Hoffman had to know; this team would never stop looking for him, especially now that they knew about the blood he'd spilled. And god help him if Preach or Patricia are added to his list of fatalities.

He'd taken their family; Dalton planned to take his life.

This time, there would be no doubt.

All he had to do now was wait.

"Think you're probably looking for this," Dalton said after he'd watched Hoffman look around for a minute.

"Do you have any idea how much that laptop's worth?"

"I knew you did."

"May I?" Hoffman asked as he pointed to the chair across from him. "Well, I guess this means you're better than me."

"Nah, just that I'll live longer."

"Yeah? I suppose this is how it ends for guys like us. Not with some 21-gun salute and a field full of weeping loved ones."

"Yeah, just in a dark room with another quiet professional."

"You know, I grew up in California. You?"

He didn't like the small talk. He knew Hoffman was buying time, he wasn't sure what he was buying time for, but he watched his hands carefully.

"I wanted to be an astronaut."

"Firefighter."

"Only child? No, that's right, you had three younger sisters. One of them died when you were 16, thanks to your dad, a drunk. You think that's what makes men like us? Pain like that?"

That stung. Dalton had been taken from his home at fifteen not because of his father, but for his own mistakes and that had cost his sisters. He wasn't there to protect them, and they'd lived under his father's rule for a year before that accident ended his father's life and took one of his sisters.

His two youngest sisters had been placed in the system, and he'd lost track of them. One day, he'd find them, but so far he and Patricia hadn't even found a breadcrumb.

"I think it definitely fuels the fire. But I believe we are who we are."

"Nature over nurture."

"Mm-hmm."

"I'm inclined to agree," Hoffman said as he watched the man Patricia thought so highly of. "You know, it's funny. I'm looking around the room memorizing all the details. But you don't have memories when you're dead."

"You know, maybe hell is the perfect memory of everything that we've ever done."

"You better hope not, for both of our sakes."

"I think I'll take my chances."

"So? You're not gonna take me in, are you?" Hoffman asked.

"There's this quote that I love. It says that, uh, people sleep peacefully in their beds at night only because rough men stand ready to do violence on their behalf."

"That what this is? Violence on their behalf? Nice try, Adam. Nice spin." Hoffman said as he reached towards his pocket. "You know what you can call this. It doesn't matter how dangerous I am. This is simple. It's just murder. Basic murder."

Dalton caught the movement out of the corner of his eye as he stared down Hoffman and fired a shot that sent his weapon sailing out of his hand. Dalton waited for Hoffman to look at him, it hadn't been a kill shot just enough to disarm him.

Dalton wanted the man to look him in the eye.

"I won't say anything if you don't," Dalton said as he fired a fatal shot right to the head.

Not even a man like Hoffman would walk away from that.
Dalton cleaned up making sure that no one would be finding Hoffman. He would always have Hoffman's blood on his hands, but his team would never have to look over their shoulders wondering when he would turn up again.

Hoffman had shed blood in his house, among his team, his family and for that, he had to die. Period.

Once that was in order, he made his way back to the bunker. He wasn't ready to face the team just yet.

He didn't really know what he was looking for, maybe answers, but the only thing he found was that little trinket that Patricia always fidgeted with.

It was a necklace that her mother wore.

He knew it meant a lot to her; it was the only piece of her mother that she'd had left.

He decided he couldn't keep the team waiting any longer.

Dalton wanted to see Jaz, and he needed to know how Preach was, but first, he needed to return the necklace to Patricia.

He needed her to know it was finished.

It didn't take words. Just one look and she knew.

When Dalton left Patricia's room, he headed down the hall to check on Preach.

Jaz was still standing out in the hallway talking to Hannah about Preach's family when she saw him.

"Hannah, I have to go." She said as she put the phone down and ran towards Dalton.

"He had Preach's sidearm." She said as she ran her hands over his torso as if looking for injuries. When she didn't find any, she threw her arms around him and pressed her lips to his neck.

"I was so worried about you."

"I'm okay Jaz. We're okay." He said as he pressed his lips to her forehead. "How's Preach?"

She gave him the short version as they made their way into his room with McG and Amir.

He was so still.

If you took away all the machines, he looked like he was sleeping. Peaceful even.

But the machines were still there, and he wasn't asleep.

They all stood vigil at his bedside as they laughed about how he would have some long philosophical explanation for everything that had happened over the course of the last few days, and any one of them would have given just about anything to hear him say it.

For all the times they'd rolled their eyes or had a chuckle at his expense, right now they'd have given anything for him to break this silence.

Verina was being transported back to DC where her aunt would be waiting for her. They'd have to
go into the DIA for a briefing, and certainly, the DIA would be keeping tabs on Verina.

Perhaps, they would groom her for a career in intelligence, she certainly had some useful skills, and she was only sixteen. In five or six years, she could be even more dangerous, but at least she'd be playing on the right side.

A little over 24 hours later, Jaz was standing in the hall with Dalton. She was concerned for McG, he hadn't left Preach's side since he came out of surgery, and nothing they said could convince him to leave.

He had barely slept or eaten for days unless you counted the horrible stuff they called coffee at the hospital and the scraps they'd all survived on during the mission which wasn't much.

She'd brought him food several times, but he'd told her he'd eat when Preach woke up. There was no telling how long that would be, or even if he would.

"We have to get him to get some sleep," Jaz said. "It's been like four days since he's had a good night of sleep. Since Verina went missing really. He can't keep this up."

Dalton smiled as he kissed her forehead which confused the shit out of Jaz.

"What the hell are you smiling for?" Jaz asked him.

"I think I have a solution to this problem," Dalton said as he turned her to face the hallway he'd been facing.

Preach's family was at the end of the hall with Patricia and Amir talking to the doctor, and Hannah was heading their way.

"Where is he?" she asked.

Before any of them had a chance to answer, McG was standing in the doorway.

He took the two steps to close the gap between them before anyone could say a word, and Jaz leaned into Dalton as she watched him finally break.

Hannah just wrapped her arms around him as he fell to his knees, she went right down with him and held on as tight as she could.

"I'm here. I'm right here." She hummed as she rocked back and forth with him rubbing her fingers through his hair.

So...firing squad this time? Public stoning? I don't have my running shoes on this morning.

All kidding aside, I'm pretty happy with this chapter. No, there isn't a lot of Jaz/Dalton time, but there's enough that hopefully, everyone will be happy.
And no, I didn't answer the Preach question, but I will I'm not going to leave it hanging forever. Promise.

There might be a little more to the whole Alex narrative that didn't play out in this chapter, but it would mostly happen in conversations with the team...Alex is definitely DEAD.
Never Be The Same

Chapter Notes

You know when you have a plan to do one thing, but then you sit down and start writing and something completely different comes out?

Well, that's what happened here.

Let's go visit the dark side, shall we?

The following warnings apply NSFW, maybe a few tissues, and keep the glass filled...

As usual, I only own the bad grammar and punctuation...sad, I know.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

_____

It's you, babe

And I'm a sucker for the way that you move, babe

And I could try to run, but it would be useless

You're to blame

Just one hit of you, I knew I'll never ever, ever be the same

I'll never be the same

Never Be The Same - Camilla Cabello

_____

Dalton and Jaz were concerned about McGuire. They'd tried everything they could think of to get him to get some rest, or at the very least eat something, and nothing had gotten through. Not even a direct order.

He was determined to stay by Preach's side until he woke up, and god forbid if that didn't happen.

Jaz had tried to reach out to Hannah, but her phone had gone straight to voicemail. At this point, they were at a loss in terms of what else they could do.

Amir had gone back to his room to get some rest leaving them to watch over McGuire and Preach until his wife arrived, and Patricia had made the trip out to the base to meet their flight.

Dalton hoped that McGuire would finally get some rest once Preach's wife and kids arrived, but he was no longer certain that would make a difference.
Jaz was beside herself, and Dalton was obviously never going to be happy when she was hurting. She and McGuire were always close, but after she lost Elijah, the two of them had become even closer. Most of the time they hovered around a tight-knit sibling's kind of relationship, but when things got tough, it was easy to see that their bond was forged in steel.

The reality is they all were; it's why this team worked so well.

In fact, as Dalton thought about it, McGuire was the steel that held them all together.

He had been the bridge when the team was still trying to figure out Amir and how he fit with the group. McGuire had accepted him right out of the gate no questions asked.

McG had been a rock in Tehran, even when Dalton was going off the rails. He'd put up with a lot of ups and downs and put out fires along the way. He'd also on more than one occasion patched up every member of this team. McG understood and appreciated Preach's philosophical ramblings better than any of them.

And Dalton wasn't sure where he would be if McGuire hadn't been there for Jaz in Tehran and especially after. He'd physically put her back together, but he'd also been there for her emotionally.

The bottom line is he was the common thread among them. They all had their moments, and each member of this team was integral to the rest, but McGuire was the constant. He never took sides, he never made snap judgments, and he always had everyone's back.

So to see him carry this burden by himself was something he hated to watch.

McGuire was blaming himself for a situation that was not of his making. If that blame landed on anyone, it was on him for not realizing the danger Hoffman posed to his team and Patricia for not being more forthcoming about what, or who they were dealing with.

Dalton knew he should have pushed harder. He should have insisted Patricia tell him everything. He felt confident that things could have been very different if he'd known exactly what kind of threat they'd been dealing with.

The team would be getting ready to head to DC, and then back to their homes and families. Not sitting here standing vigil over one of their own.

Dalton didn't think the blame belonged with McGuire, but he was struggling to find any way to convince him of that. So, he was just standing in the hallway watching his friend tear himself apart.

His thoughts were interrupted as Jaz joined him. Dalton turned and wrapped his arms around her as she spoke.

"We have to get him to get some sleep," Jaz said. "It's been like four days since he's had a good night of sleep. Since Verina went missing really. He can't keep this up."

As he listened to her words, he caught the movement at the other end of the hall. It wasn't Preach's wife that had drawn his attention, it was the person who wasn't supposed to be there.

Hannah Rivera was pushing her way through the crowd when she stopped by Amir who pointed her towards Dalton and Jaz.

She looked frantic, and her focus was on finding one person. It certainly wasn't him or Jaz. He couldn't help the smile as a lot of the anxiety he'd been marinating on for the last little bit started to fall away.
"What the hell are you smiling for?" Jaz asked him.

"I think I have a solution to this problem."

Dalton watched Jaz as she turned and it was impossible to miss how her body language changed. Relief flooded through her the same way it had for him when she saw Hannah.

He knew Hannah being there was just what McGuire needed. He was sure of it.

Hannah couldn't fix everything for McGuire, but he was confident that she could get him out of his head because that was a really lonely place in this kind of situation. Dalton knew that all too well.

"Where is he?" Hannah asked as she approached.

Jaz and Dalton just pointed towards the door behind them, and she took another step in that direction before McG was standing in the doorway looking stunned.

Dalton watched him as disbelief, and then just pure unabated joy washed over McGuire. But the second Hannah had wrapped her arms around him everything crashed in on him.

Guilt for being happy, fear for Preach, disappointment in himself. It was more than he could handle and his knees just gave out, but Hannah was right there with him.

Jaz wrapped her arms around Dalton as they watched McGuire finally give in to the emotions he'd been holding down for so long. Exhaustion followed closely on its heels as Hannah just held him until he'd purged himself of everything.

McGuire had asked Hannah the question Dalton had been dying to ask, the answer had been Amir. He'd been the one to call her and make sure she was on that flight with Preach's family. It was the right call, and Dalton needed to make sure he thanked him for doing that for McG.

Dalton knelt beside McGuire after a few minutes passed and told him that he and Jaz would keep an eye on Preach and let them know if anything changed. When they saw that he was going to relent and allow Hannah to take care of him, Dalton stood and offered him a hand up.

They watched as the pair made their way down the hall. McG had stopped to speak with Mrs. Carter and Patricia before stopping at Amir. He didn't know if McGuire said anything, but he saw the shock in Amir's eyes when he was pulled into a hug.

Once they were out of sight, Dalton and Jaz headed over to Amir.

"That was a nice thing you did," Dalton said.

"I was worried about him. He needed something none of us could give him."

Jaz pulled him into a hug then shocked him as she kissed him on the cheek and said, "You continue to surprise me."

Amir smiled and even blushed a little.

Once Preach's family arrived, the room started to get a little crowded, so Amir and Patricia headed back to their rooms to catch a few hours of sleep. Mrs. Carter looked like she needed a few minutes, so Dalton and Jaz took the girls to the cafeteria to get some ice cream.

The good news is they didn't realize how bad things were, but because of that, their mother was at
her wits end with three girls full of energy and the oldest two bickering back and forth.

Dalton suspected Preach would laugh at the two of them and lay some deep wisdom about how people come and go in your life, but sisters will be by your side forever.

Dalton smiled as they sat out in the courtyard with Jaz running around playing tag and purposely letting herself get caught by Preach’s youngest, as he played the middleman sitting between the older two.

They continued to bicker for a bit, but they eventually joined in on the game of tag leaving him to his thoughts.

It's funny he remembered a couple months back he and Jaz had been talking to Preach about his daughters and they’d both said they didn’t want to have kids, but as he watched Jaz running around with Preach's daughters he couldn't help but think about what kind of mother she would be.

She'd be the cool mom Dalton had no doubt. She'd be the one that could play catch with their sons just as easily as she could have tea parties with their daughters.

Their.

There it was again.

He smiled to himself because he'd been so sure he'd never wanted kids. He didn't want to risk being the kind of dad his was.

Of course, Dalton knew that was ridiculous because he'd made a point never to drink in excess and he kept his dark side on a tight leash until it was time to let it off.

He'd done that with Hoffman, and he knew he'd have to tell Jaz what he'd done when they finally had a moment alone. Dalton couldn't keep it from her; he could already feel it burning a hole in his gut, scratching and clawing to stay at the surface.

If he kept it in, he knew it would just get harder to bridle the rage that burned in his gut. It was always there, it had been for a long time, but he'd always found ways to keep it locked down.

Until it was useful to him.

With Hoffman, it had been tearing at his skin from the moment they'd first brought him into the bunker. Dalton heard it buzzing as that rage pounded through his bloodstream pleading to be set free.

It was that feeling when your mouth goes dry, and the bitterness lingers on your tongue as you try to swallow it down. There always comes a point when there is no spoonful of sugar that makes it go down easy.

For him, that point came when he watched his best friend die, or when he was watching one of his own struggling to fill his lungs with air. When they listened to Victor firing shots that he'd been certain were tearing holes in a sixteen-year-old girl. When he watched Alex go at Jaz.

The monster inside of him had wanted to cut the bastards tongue out just for speaking to Jaz. But, it was Dalton that wanted to feed him his own eyes for the way he leered at her.

"Adam," Jaz said as she laid a hand on his shoulder.

He shook off his thoughts as he focused on her and the three girls who were huffing and puffing and
wearing tired smiles. It was time to get them inside to their mother.

Jaz and Dalton had taken over sitting with Preach so that his wife and Daughters could get some sleep. It was the first time the girls had been out of the country and the time difference was bound to wreck havoc on their systems.

They'd sat in relative silence for the last few hours with Jaz dozing off against his shoulder when he saw Amir and Patricia heading down the hallway towards them.

Dalton stood and carefully leaned Jaz's head against the back of the couch so he could check in with them.

"We thought we'd come sit with him so you two could get some sleep," Amir said.

Dalton nodded and glanced at Jaz who was sound asleep.

"Yeah, that's probably a good idea." He said as his phone started to ring.

It was Hannah looking for an update, so he let her know there had been no change.

She'd mentioned that McGuire was still sleeping and Dalton thought it was best to let him sleep for as long as he could. It had been far too long since he'd gotten a good night's rest and he knew that the stress and long hours weren't likely to dissipate overnight, so they all needed to take advantage of whatever downtime they could find.

With that in mind, he walked into Preach's room and picked up Jaz who was still dead to the world. She snuggled into his shoulder as he turned to leave the room, but he didn't wake up.

Dalton made it all the way back to their room and set her down on the bed as he stripped down to his boxer briefs. He carefully removed her shoes and socks thinking Jaz was going to wake up, when she didn't he carefully went about removing her pants and finally her shirt and bra before he slipped one of his t-shirts over her head.

With that done, he lifted her in his arms enough to pull the blankets back and settled her before climbing in behind her and pulling her into his chest.

"I Love you Jazzy." He whispered as he pressed a kiss to her forehead and finally gave in letting his body shut down.

Dalton woke up to the feeling of being watched a few hours later. When he opened his eyes, Jaz was staring at him.

"Were you going to tell me what you did when you left the bunker that night?" She asked.

"Yes. I was. I am..."

"Tonight? Or am I going to have to wait until this boils over? Do I need to be worried? I mean I'm sure he's dead because I knew there was no way you would let him walk away unless he killed you. Do you know how that feels? Do you know what that did to me?"

"Jaz..." He started, but she put her hand on his chest, she wasn't done yet.

"I called and called, but you went dark. No one could find you. I knew you went after Hoffman. I
knew you wanted him dead, but I was terrified that somehow that rage that bubbles and hisses in here," She said as she stabbed a finger into his chest. "Maybe it wasn't going to be enough. What if his dark side was just a shade darker than yours?"

Tears were flowing down her cheeks as she pressed her lips his chest, "I can't build a future with you if you can't let me see everything, even the ugly parts. I'm not afraid of the dark, Adam. The only thing I'm afraid of is losing you!"

Dalton hadn't thought things through when he went after Hoffman. He didn't worry about what Jaz would think, or what would happen if Hoffman had gotten to the apartment first. What if he'd been the one sitting at the dining room table? It didn't happen that way, but it could have.

"I'm sorry Jaz. I let my rage blind me to the consequences; I didn't think about what might have happened if Hoffman had gotten the drop on me." Dalton said.

"I don't want you to be sorry. I'm not questioning why you did it. I already know why. You were protecting your family, and I can't say that any one of us might not have done the same thing. I just want you to talk to me. I need you to know that I love you. I love the man you are with me, and I love the man that lives beneath the surface. The one that comes out when there are no good options left. That's the man that saved me in Tehran, and that's the man that I have no doubt ended Alex Hoffman for good this time. I love that man, too." Jaz said as she punctuated her words with a searing kiss.

Dalton felt like she had reached in and removed the last partition that separated them. She'd seen the man behind the curtain, and she loved him anyway. For the first time in his life, he'd let someone all the way in, and it didn't feel oppressive, it felt like freedom.

There was a weight that came with hiding pieces of yourself from the world. He'd accepted that before he was even six years old. It's what he knew.

But, for once in his life, he was going to let someone help him carry that weight. Dalton told her everything.

He told Jaz how when he was little; he hid the bruises and the pain. And when he got old enough to fight back, he had to hide the rage, too.

At first it just simmered beneath the surface, but eventually, it became so much bigger, and it was harder for a teenager to contain. That's how he wound up in military school. By the time he was in Fallujah, he'd found himself feeding that rage like it was some rabid animal living inside him.

After that, Dalton found ways to contain it. To shove it down and keep it hidden. Now, it only reared up when his family was threatened.

And make no mistake, Hoffman had been a threat. So, he told her about him, too.

"Jaz, the beast it's always in here, it can be soothed, or it can be fueled, but it will never be silenced not completely." He told her as he ran his fingers through her hair and pressed his forehead to hers.

"I am alive because that beast resides in here." She said as she laid her hand against his chest.

"I love you." He whispered as he kissed her forehead and pulled her into his arms.

"I love you, too."
Dalton woke up hours later to a familiar voice. It was someone who had woken him up countless times with that imitation of a construction zone that they labeled snoring, but this time it was something else altogether.

Jaz woke up just a couple minutes later and started laughing as she figured out what was going on.

"I guess McGuire and Hannah are in the next room?" She asked.

"Sounds like"

"Mmmm. You know what they say?" She asked as they were finding it harder and harder to tune them out.

They were laughing as the pair got more vocal, and a lot more vigorous.

Dalton wanted to be annoyed, but he could hear Jaz's breathing pick up and her fingernails scratching against his skin as she tangled her legs with his.

He could think of far worse ways to deal with this situation than where she was headed currently.

"Join them," Dalton suggested as he yanked his shirt over her head and latched on to her nipple.

"Oh...yeah." She hummed as she threaded her fingers through his hair.

Dalton climbed over her as he settled her on her back before moving to her other nipple.

"Your skin is so soft; I love the way it feels against my tongue." He said as he sucked hard on the sensitive flesh of her breast and watched as the skin turned an angry shade of red.

He knew that would leave a mark, but she was scraping her fingernails against the nape of his neck as he did it, so he knew she was enjoying how it made her feel.

"I need to make you come Jaz." He said as he let his fingers trail down over the front of her soaked panties.

It had been days since he'd touched her and even longer since they'd had sex. Alone time was at a premium in the bunker, and they'd spent the last several weeks going from one mission to the next with safe houses often lending even less in the way of privacy.

He wanted to taste her so bad his skin was prickling at just the thought.

"First, I want to taste you; then right as you're about to come, I want my cock so deep in you that I can feel you ripple and clamp down on me."

"Shit, it's really hot when you talk dirty to me," Jaz rasped as she scraped her nails over his cheeks before pushing him down towards her pussy.

"Mmmm. You want that don't you?" Dalton asked.

"Wait." She said as she sat up abruptly and pushed a hand to his chest making him fall onto his back.

"What are you..."

"Off." She said as she pointed to his boxers.

Dalton was all too happy to comply as he watched her shimmy out of her panties.
They both snickered as they heard Hannah and McGuire ramping up. Mostly McGuire, but they knew he wasn't in there by himself, so Hannah was guilty by association.

Of course, Dalton forgot all about them when Jaz leaned down and took his cock to the back of her throat.

"Ohhhhh Fuuuck." Dalton moaned as she pulled almost all the way back before repeating the move.

"What happened to me tasting..." He started as he threw his head back and moaned when she hummed an incoherent response.

He could feel cum starting to leak as she squeezed the base of his cock and he had to put an end to this because the only way he wanted to cum was inside her.

She felt the ripple of his abdominal muscles under her fingers a second before she was in the air and landing softly against the pillows. Jaz pouted as he flashed a wicked grin and leaned in to take her lips in a blistering hot kiss.

A second later he sat up and grabbed her by the thighs spreading her out before him. His lips closed over her clit forming a tight seal as he sucked hard on the little nub.

"Mmmm, Adam."

He stared up at her as he hungrily licked and sucked at her clit until her eyes started to close before he slowly eased two fingers into her. She was already soaked.

"So sweet." He hummed as he lapped at her greedily.

Jaz was rolling her hips as she threaded her fingers through his hair while he pressed a third finger into her.

"Oh, holy fuck." She cried as she adjusted to the full feeling.

"Is that good baby?" He asked.

She shuddered as he pressed his fingertips against her g-spot and he grabbed her free hand in his pressing both of their hands against her pelvis increasing the sensations tenfold.

"Better?" He asked.

She didn't answer she just tightened her hold on his hair and started to whimper incoherently.

He could feel the burn in his right arm as he started to stroke hard into her pussy and her walls began to flutter violently, she was going to cum any second.

So was he.

He had no doubt that he could cum just watching her, but he wanted to be inside her.

So he worked her as hard as he could until he thought she couldn't take another second, he pulled his fingers from her and wrapped them around his cock giving it a jerk as a drop of pre-cum landed on her thigh.

"Oh fuck." He growled as he watched another drop fall.

He was so close to coming that it was like the constant drip drip drip of a faucet. It didn't help when
she let her fingers rub through it carrying it up to her lips.

Dalton slipped his arms under her knees and lifted her towards him slamming his cock into her on one fluid stroke. The instant he bottomed out he was rewarded as she went rigid and clamped down hard, she was already coming around him.

"Oh Jaz, god you feel so good." He hummed as he started to slam his hips against hers.

"Adam. A-dam. Oh, fuck yes, Adam." She cried as he kept fucking her through her orgasm.

He rubbed his thumb over her clit as he pounded into her with brutal force and she begged for him to give it to her harder. He could feel his muscles burning with the exertion, but he couldn't stop. she was soaking wet, and her eyes were glassy as she stared at him. He knew Jaz was on the verge of losing her mind.

Dalton was dying to get her there.

"Fuck, fuck. Oh, A-A-A-dam." She bellowed as she shoved his hand out of the way and started to rub her clit as fast and hard as her fingers would allow.

A second later her back bowed, and her legs started to shake violently as he felt her go liquid around him and her eyes rolled back.

Dalton happily lost his battle as he slammed his hips home one more time and let go.

"Jesus Jaz. Oh Fuck," he growled as she fluttered and shook through both of their orgasms.

When Dalton let go of her legs, she fell back to the bed in a spent heap as he laid down beside her. He ran his fingers down the inside of her thigh and watched as she shuddered. When he let his fingers dance over her pussy, she squeezed her legs together.

"You still with me?" He asked.

"What the fuck did you just do to me?" She rasped as she put her hand over his and held it still.

He didn't get a chance to answer as they heard, "Baby if I fuck you any harder, it's gonna leave a mark."

Dalton and Jaz burst out laughing.

"Uhhh, fiiuuuuck." McG shouted. "Oh god, nothing feels better than when you cum on my cock."

"Well, he's onto something there," Dalton said as he scraped his teeth over her shoulder.

Jaz just laughed, "all kidding aside, that was..."

"Amazing?"

Jaz turned towards him and ran her fingers through his beard before she kissed him and said, "No, it was like an out of body experience."

"How so?" He asked as he leaned up on his elbow.

"Like, I started to come and then it was like being at the top of the drop on a roller coaster and hitting pause. You have that high, you know like when your stomach is about to drop, and the adrenaline is spiking, and everything feels heightened?"
"Mmmhmm. I'm with you." Dalton said as he traced circles over her hip with his fingertips.

"Only when you hit pause, those feelings they keep growing. It was like being suspended in this incredible orgasm and then when you started to...all of a sudden everything started again, and it was just like an explosion, only I felt it from my head to my toes. Like a, like a supernova." She smiled as she pulled him to her for a kiss.

"You looked gorgeous. Like you were about to lose your mind. It was fucking incredible." He told her between kisses.

"Has that ever..."

"Happened before? No, but I kind of like having some firsts with you. I thought all my firsts were out of the way a long time ago." He said as he kissed her.

"Oh, fuck. FUCK!"

"Jesus McGuire! That's like twice in what, thirty minutes?"

She laughed, "yes, because we've never done that."

"Good point," he said as he climbed over her and laved over that hollow at the base of her neck that made her purr. "How about this time we take it slow and easy?"

"Mmm. I kind of like it when you're all sweet and gentle." she hummed as she wrapped her legs around his ass and pulled him into her.

Dalton gave her a languid kiss as he let his hips rock against hers.

She hummed her approval as she pushed up onto her knees before she took his cock in her hand and slid back onto him.

She loved hearing the sharp intake of his breath as he placed his hands on her hips and slowly pulled her hips back against his.

"Fuck you look so good like this," He said as he set an easy rhythm.

They didn't feel the same kind of urgency now, so they just rocked together as they danced close to the edge for several minutes.

"Mmmm." Dalton hummed as he ran his hand down the curve of her spine.

When his hand traveled back up, he wrapped his hands under her arms until they clasped the front of her shoulders and he pulled her up, so her back was flush against his chest.

The angle made her gasp as he rubbed against that sweet spot that felt so good and his hands quickly gravitated towards her breasts.

"You feel so tight like this," He said as he kept working that slow, steady rhythm while he pinched her nipples and took her mouth with his.

He loved how intimate this felt with her whole body pressed against his. Dalton's right hand was wrapped around her torso as he rubbed delicious circles on her clit while his left kneaded her breast, and his teeth and tongue went to work on her neck.

She could feel the haze of pleasure starting to wrap itself around them building up slowly as she
reached back and raked her fingernails over his thighs.

"Adam?"

"Hmmm?"

"I want to see you."

He let her go and helped her lay back against the pillows with her hair fanned out around her. She looked stunning, and he knew he'd never get tired of seeing her like that with her pink cheeks and kiss stung lips.

Dalton laced his fingers with hers and held them just above her head so that nearly every inch of their bodies came in contact with the others. He never took his eyes off of hers as they rocked together stealing each others breath and giving it back as their lips met.

When he started to feel that telling little flutter, he reached down and pressed her knees to his hips so that he could drive a little deeper, a little harder. Dalton knew just what she needed to topple over that edge, and he would be right there with her.

They didn't have a long history together, they'd only ever made love a handful of times, but they read each other like they'd spent decades learning how to give and take pleasure from one another.

It wasn't explosive, but it didn't need to be.

It was soft and slow as the warmth spread through them. They felt it like a dull current as it traveled through their hands and burned in their eyes. It was in the friction of their lips as they brushed together, their hearts beating in sync and the gentle rock of their hips.

It was the perfect calm after the storm, and they had weathered everything it had thrown their way.

_____

Less than an hour later Dalton's phone started to vibrate on the nightstand.

"Dalton." He answered.

"Preach is awake," Patricia said.

Chapter End Notes

Hope you liked this one. I didn't intend to get as far into Adam's dark side as I did here, but I liked where it went, so here it resides....
Hello Darkness My Old Friend

Chapter Notes

I know the song at the beginning is by Simon & Garfunkel, but I'm referencing a version by disturbed because it kind of fit the narrative better. Not generally my kind of music, but S&G would have sounded a little too melancholy and not enough menace for what this chapter delivers :)

Anyway, Preach is awake, and Amir and Dalton have some explaining to do...and maybe a few other people.

Enjoy!

No warnings except you'll still hate Hoffman and someone else will likely dig up some rage...

See the end of the chapter for more notes

_____  

Hello darkness, my old friend  
I've come to talk with you again  
Because a vision softly creeping  
Left its seeds while I was sleeping  
And the vision that was planted in my brain  
Still remains within the sound of silence

Sound of Silence - Disturbed

_____  

Preach's eyes were open when the team rounded the corner. Amir and Patricia had moved to the hall to make room for his family; they had been the first ones called and the first to arrive of course.

Dalton, Jaz, and Hannah hung back at the doorway, but McGuire went right to his side and started looking at all the machines that surrounded his friend. Preach wanted the tube out, but they all knew they needed to wait for the doctors who were on their way down the hall.

When they entered the room, McG started peppering them with questions. As soon as they said they were going to take him off the vent, McG was carefully peeling the tape from Preach's skin.

The doctors were aghast at his behavior, but Patricia just told them that he had the training to pull the vent and that it was unlikely they'd be able to stop him.

"Maybe everyone could step out for a minute. We'll get Preach cleaned up, and everyone can come back in a minute." McGuire said as he looked around the room.

Dalton stayed along with a couple of nurses who were waiting with suction and laying out a drape.

"Okay Preach, I'm going to pull this out. Take a deep breath." McG said as he pulled.
Preach coughed and gasped once the vent was out as one of the nurses wiped the tears that ran from the corners of his eyes and helped him clear his throat.

"Don't try to talk. It's gonna be a little rough for a bit." McGuire told him.

"Hoffman." Preach mouthed as he looked to Dalton.

"Never gonna bother anyone again."

Preach just laid his head back and closed his eyes as he took in a big breath.

"I need you to wear this oxygen mask." The nurse said. "Just until we're sure your O2 sats are where we want them."

"It'll keep you from delivering that philosophical diatribe I can see you preparing," McGuire said with a smile as he placed his hand on Preach's arm and gave it a squeeze. "It's really good to see you."

"My wife." Preach rasped as he pulled the mask down.

McG pulled the mask back in place as Dalton went to get Preach's family.

Everyone filtered back in, but the team just came over and squeezed his hand. Hannah and Jaz both kissed him on the forehead and told him how happy they were that he was okay.

Then they all left Preach to spend time with his family. He was in good hands.

McGuire spoke to the doctors for a few minutes, no doubt getting the rundown on his recovery time and any setbacks that they felt could be looming.

Once McG rejoined the group Amir said, "We should probably talk."

"Okay," Dalton said as he took in Amir's serious tone.

The group moved to the family room down the hall which was large enough for the team and offered privacy.

"I talked to Hoffman a lot while we had him in custody. He thought we were kindred spirits, and I think ultimately, he just wanted to brag about all the things he'd done to move us around the board."

Dalton crossed his arms over his chest as Jaz rubbed a hand over his knee.

"Did he kill Elijah?" Dalton asked as he wrapped his arm around her.

"Noah and I have been tracking all of the identities we had, and it sure looks like he was there. We may never know for sure, but he sure went to a lot of trouble to point us in that direction, so yeah. I think that he did. He was also in Baghdad when that doctor was taken. We tracked him to Mexico and picked up some communications with Urzua and Booth that indicate he'd facilitated that meeting."

McGuire pulled Hannah into his arms and ran his fingers carefully over her back when Urzua came up. It was reflex, Dalton knew, but it was nice to see his friend offer comfort to Hannah.

He'd been a little leery about that relationship at first. It wasn't that he thought McGuire would ever
set out to hurt her, that wasn't how he operated. It was just that he felt Hannah might have believed she could handle a no strings arrangement, but Dalton didn't think she was built that way.

He still didn't think she was equipped for that, but it was clear as day from the first time McGuire laid eyes on her that his concern was misplaced.

McG threw out the playbook the minute he'd set eyes on her. And when he saw McGuire get off that elevator the day they left DC, Dalton was certain Hannah was the only future McG saw ahead of him.

"We also found backdoor communications regarding the US team in Ukraine. We can't say for certain that it was Hoffman, but he did claim that. My gut says it was him also. I believe that he had a hand in nearly every mission that crossed your desk Patricia, and I am truly sorry, but I also believe that he killed your son." Amir said solemnly.

Patricia's hands shook as she swiped at her eyes, Amir wasn't telling her something she hadn't already suspected, but it still felt like taking a couple of rounds to the chest.

"He played the perfect game, and we had no idea because we weren't looking for a link. Nobody looks for a dead guy, and there had been no reason to believe he wasn't dead all this time. Hoffman was good. You don't stay off the radar like that unless you have time to plot a course. Patricia, I think he knew what you were going to do almost as soon as you knew you had to do it. There's a good chance he had you bugged all along."

She looked angry. Dalton knew getting played like that had to sting.

"So far as I can tell, the only op we did that he didn't puppeteer was Zarif. That one had been an accident, he'd given him our location for the beach, but he couldn't control how that information reached us once we bugged Booth. So, that one, he just sat back and watched. He got his hands dirty later when he sent the Qud's the images of the team, but up to that point, he was just an observer."

"I think he was almost pissed off that we might have all been taken off the board without him pulling the strings, to be honest. Though, I don't think he was happy when he learned we'd all made it through the welcoming committee he'd made sure was waiting at the border crossing either. By then, he was getting tired of the game. Impatient." Amir said.

"He wanted Patricia in front of him so he could tell her how well he'd played her."

Amir told them about the missions he and Noah had been able to confirm Hoffman had orchestrated. The Taliban he'd planted in the prison break, how he'd taken down the Russian drone, and how he'd helped rile up a band of misguided kids to take out that mall in Nigeria. The plane in Colombia, all of it.

Amir looked apologetically to McGuire and Hannah as he finished with how Hoffman had facilitated McG's meeting with Paloma. He'd tipped her off without her even seeing his face, and he'd put everyone in danger as he'd put a target on her father, too.

Hannah had worked that mission from DC, so it wasn't a secret, but McG hated that it made her uncomfortable.

"So, basically. Hoffman has spent months working behind the scenes to what, get us all killed?" Dalton asked.

"No, at first, I think he was just enjoying making things difficult, except for Elijah, his desire to stay hidden had facilitated that move. Initially, I think he wanted to draw Patricia out. But when the team
kept finding ways to succeed in spite of him, I think he just decided it would be easier to wipe us all off the board."

"What about the beach? He wasn't trying to wipe us off the board there?" Jaz asked.

"No, Zarif was a wild card. It didn't sound like he was upset that you'd killed him. He'd given him the location because he thought Zarif could help keep tabs on us. Hoffman hadn't been expecting him to try and kill everyone. Like Booth, he hated Zarif because he was a loose cannon. But, he needed the eyes so that he could go and put other plans in motion. Hoffman thought Zarif had been his one critical error."

"How so?" McGuire asked.

"He'd almost inadvertently gotten Patricia sidelined and possibly sentenced to a lengthy prison sentence. That was the last place Hoffman wanted you. He needed you out in the open. He needed you to come to him, and Zarif had very nearly put you out of reach permanently." Amir told Patricia.

Dalton rubbed his fingers through his beard as he thought through everything Amir had told them.

"So, he had me arm that bomb with the date Patricia had him killed, but why would he do that when he was right there? Why face to face? He could have just as easily wound up in one of these rooms here. Why risk it?"

"Honestly, I don't think he'd decided whether he wanted to kill Patricia or turn her. I think he had some deep-seated Bonnie and Clyde fantasy where the two of you ran off together. Hoffman wanted you in that room because he thought he could have you back. When he realized that wasn't an option, he went with a contingency plan." Amir said as he watched Patricia.

Patricia just pushed to her feet and walked out of the room. She'd had about all she could process at this point.

"So, Dalton...Do you want to tell us what went down while you went dark? You know he went there to kill you." Amir said.

"At the end of the day, Hoffman was his own worst enemy. He did the one thing you never do; he went back to the scene of a crime. I knew he wouldn't be able to resist. So, I got there first. I found the laptop, and I sat there in the dark waiting for him. And he didn't disappoint."

"He had Preach's sidearm. He could have killed you." Amir said. "You should have at least told me. I would have gone with you."

"I appreciate that, but I didn't want his blood on anyone else's hands."

"I would have painted my face with his blood if it meant he couldn't hurt this family again," Amir stated.

"Me, too," McGuire added.

"And me," Jaz added.

Dalton nodded.

Hannah just sat there staring at Dalton. McGuire watched as they sat silent.

"You helped him, didn't you?" McG asked.
"My old team was wrapping up an op in Georgia. They owed me a favor, so I cashed it in. They came in to run clean up. No one will ever know that Hoffman walked away from that explosion except the people on this team." Hannah said. "I told Patricia I'd do whatever was needed to keep this from getting up the flagpole. And I wasn't about to let Dalton go down for that asshole."

Hannah glanced at Dalton as she said, "Noah tracked you back to the apartment; he'd been watching the location for Hoffman. You know, if you'd kept your comms on we could have helped you."

"I appreciate that. I realize now that I should have looped everyone in instead of going rogue, believe me, Jaz has driven that point home already." He said as he kissed her forehead and pulled her to his side. "I couldn't think straight after I saw Preach; I just needed to end it. Blood and rage were clouding my thinking, and I didn't want to unleash that darkness on the rest of you."

"Top, if you think we don't see that undercurrent of darkness you're a fool." McGuire shared. "Hell, I strung a man up and ripped into another's jugular just a couple days ago. I could have shot them both, but after everything, I needed to feel the life drain from their bodies."

"And if you think we don't all have those triggers that cause our shadows to take over, you haven't been paying attention. Do you think I walked in the light in Paris? I would have done anything to keep Asim from the path he'd found himself on. I would have bathed the whole city in blood if I'd had to. You're not the only one with a dark side Top." Amir said.

Everyone was quiet for a moment until Jaz spoke barely above a whisper, "My dad took pleasure in causing me pain. He hated me simply because I was a girl, and I happened to look like my mother. She died when I was young, but that woman had been a shell long before she took her last breath. He'd made her that way, and he'd worked really hard to set me on the same path. One of his favorite past times was putting out his cigars on my skin. He loved when I screamed."

Jaz pulled her pants leg up to reveal deep scars that looked like they’d been built up over years of repeated torture. Dalton had seen them, and he knew bits and pieces of her history, but he ached as he listened to her relive it now.

"I had learned to block out pain before I'd even finished eighth grade, and it would have been easy to pull back into myself and follow after my mother, but I didn't," Jaz said as she felt Dalton rubbing her back in a show of support.

"Anyway, when I was seventeen, I let my dark side out for the first time. My dad had his friends over playing poker, and he'd yelled for me to refill their drinks. When I came in one of my dad's friends was leering at me, and my dad offered me up to stay in the game." Jaz glanced at Dalton as she felt him stiffen, she'd never told him this part, and she felt a little bad for sharing it with everyone before telling him, but there was no stuffing this elephant back in the box, so she carried on.

"He was losing like he usually did. Anyway, when I didn't get on board with the idea he grabbed my wrist and put his cigar to my skin, and I had just had enough. So, I grabbed that cigar and pressed it to his eye. When he started screaming, I pressed harder. The fear was coming off him in waves, and I was drunk on it. I loved it. For the first time in my life, I was in control." Jaz said as she let that feeling wash over her again.

"That was the last time I stayed under his roof. I spent some time on the streets and eventually, I enlisted. I figured I could find a more productive way to channel that darkness. That's how I got here; it's how I found all of you. The family that matters to me." She finished as she leaned her head against Dalton's shoulder.

It felt good to put that out there. To finally own it with the people she knew would never judge her.
"Your dad still breathing?" McG asked.

"To the best of my knowledge," Jaz answered.

"You see him?" Amir asked.

"Not if I don't have to," She told him. "But he sometimes shows up when I visit my mom."

"Maybe we should all pay your mom a visit." Dalton offered. "I'd like to pay my respects."

Jaz knew he wasn't talking about her mother anymore.

Before any of them could delve further down that road, Patricia came back into the room.

"Preach is asking to see all of you."

Preach's wife had taken the girls to get some lunch, so they were the only ones in the room.

He looked better, even though it had been only a few hours, he was breathing without the mask and sitting up a little more. He'd have a long road to recovery, but he would recover.

"I want to know everything." He told them as he looked at each of them.

Amir laid out Hoffman's whole game plan starting with Elijah and ending with the bomb. Then Dalton and Hannah filled in the rest. Patricia had relayed the info that Noah had shared about Preach's intuition that Hoffman had been after his family as well.

He looked exhausted by the time they'd finished, but he'd looked relieved, too.

"I hope you made that son of a bitch look you in the eye when you ended his game." Preach told Dalton.

"I did."

He nodded as he closed his eyes.

"Let's let him get a little rest," McGuire said as he ushered everyone out of the room.

"We'll see you in a couple of hours," McG told him before he turned down the lights and closed the door.

Preach was transported back to a DC hospital once the doctors felt he was well enough to travel. Patricia and Hannah had returned a few days ahead of them.

The rest of the team stayed behind with Preach and flew back on the med flight with him and his family.

McGuire spent the entire flight barking at the staff and keeping a close eye on Preach.

When they touched down, they made sure Preach was situated before everyone headed off to the hotel to get some rest. They'd have to spend the next week walking through the mission with Hoffman, though they'd use one of his aliases in order to spare the heat that would come down on Patricia.
It was better for everyone if Hoffman stayed dead.

For Dalton, this week meant a mountain of paperwork, too. Everyone was itching to break free for a couple of months and forget about this side of their lives for a while. This most recent deployment had been much harder than any over the past few years. This one had gotten personal for everyone.

Hoffman had managed to dredge up dark shadows from all of their pasts.

Those were all things they'd deal with on Monday though, for now, they'd have the weekend to decompress.

Dalton, Jaz, and Amir headed to the hotel as it was late, and McG took a cab out to Alexandria. He wasn't going to spend one more minute apart from Hannah now that they were on the same continent.

They were home, and everyone was still breathing, so the rest could wait until Monday.

Chapter End Notes

Back to DC...Next update with be Call Me Joe (tomorrow), and hopefully another one here before Monday.
Supplies and Demands

Chapter Notes

What would you do on your first night back on US soil after surviving a man like Hoffman?

I know what Jaz and Dalton would do.

Hint: NSFW, like not even a little.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

_____

‘Cause I'll be the light when you can't see
I'll be the wood when you need heat
I'll be the generator, turn me on when you need electricity
Some shit's 'bout to go down
I'll be the one with the level head

Supplies - Justin Timberlake

_____

Dalton walked into their room and sat down on the bed as Jaz sat down beside him and leaned her head on his shoulder.

They were finally home with no threats looming, and Preach was a little bit better each day. That oppressive weight that had been crushing down on them was finally receding.

Jaz sighed as she turned into his arms and pressed her forehead to his neck.

Dalton was tired, but he didn't want to sleep.

"Come here." He whispered as he pulled Jaz into his lap and brushed her hair from her face.

He just looked at her. Her expressive eyes, the curve of her lower lip, the pale pink scar that peeked from her shirt reminding him how close he'd come to never having this moment.

It was one of many that bisected her skin as he slipped his fingers over the buttons revealing more skin as he freed each one.

Jaz's injuries healed, but he would never forget what it felt like to stare down a future without her in it. How his heart stuttered to a halt for a moment when he realized there might not be a thing he could do to help her.

That memory rolled up on him sometimes unbidden, and unwelcome, but it ebbed away faster when he held her bare skin against his. Nothing dulled that pain like her warmth.

Dalton pulled his shirt over his head once hers floated to the floor behind her just in time to watch as she peeled off the lace camisole she'd had on underneath. It was almost a shame not to appreciate
how her skin contrasted with that black lace, but he couldn't complain about all of the soft, warm flesh that was revealed to him in its absence.

"You are so damn beautiful." He said as he took her in and pressed his lips to her breastbone.

Jaz loved the feel of his soft lips against her, the way his beard roughed up her skin just so. The way she felt that subtle rumble of pleasure that was building up in his chest as he hummed against her, tasting her flesh as he went.

When they were face to face, she rubbed a fingertip over his full pink lower lip, "Do you have any idea how much I love your lips?"

Dalton smiled as he kissed that fingertip and waited for her to tell him.

"I love the way they feel when you kiss me, or as they move over my skin. How I can't take my eyes off of them when you talk, especially when you're mad. Sometimes, I just want to..." Jaz started as she leaned forward and pulled that lip between her teeth before sealing her lips over his.

Dalton smiled as he remembered one such argument.

They'd been locked in a battle as they were putting their gear back in the cage. He couldn't remember why they were arguing, just that he'd been so angry until he saw her eyes locked on his mouth with her teeth anchored into her own lip. He'd been expecting her to return fire on the argument, but instead, he got a glimpse of unfiltered raw desire.

That argument was forgotten.

Jaz raked her fingernails through his hair eliciting a shutter as she deepened the kiss and Dalton anchored her to him with his fingers pressed into her shoulder blades, so their skin was in full contact.

"God, there will never be enough of this. I'll never get enough time with you in my arms. We could have an eternity, and I'd still want more. I love you so much Jaz."

"I can't believe there was ever a time when we thought we could live without this. Us," Jaz said. "I think I always knew you were different. You were the first man in my life that didn't let me down. All of my boys, you're my family, something to fight for, and you all fought for me."

"We fought for us," Dalton said as he turned so her back met the bed and he climbed over her. "Sometimes, we aren't born with a family that loves us the way we deserve; we have to find that for ourselves. When we find that, we fight for it. I'll never stop fighting for you."

"And I'll never stop fighting for you, Adam Dalton. You are everything. My Everything." Jaz said as she rubbed her thumbs over his temples.

Dalton never understood why he'd had to endure the things he'd endured as a child. How he'd come back with any semblance of humanity from Fallujah. He couldn't even comprehend how Jaz became the person that she did given her father's cruelty. But, somehow those things seemed so insignificant when he stared down into those big expressive, soulful eyes and saw the one person that could light up his darkness.

"You're my moon, the one that will always light my way through the dark," Dalton said as he stole her breath with one gentle kiss. "When I was sitting in the shadows waiting for Hoffman, all I could think of was making sure his darkness never touched you, any of you again. And then he pulled Preach's sidearm and I probably never should have seen it coming, but just then, the curtain blew in
from the open sliding glass door, and the moon glinted off the barrel. Just a sliver of light, but it was
enough."

Dalton brushed his fingers over her collarbone as he watched her chest rise and fall while he pressed
his lips over her heart.

"Adam." She whispered as she let her fingers thread through his hair.

"I don't want to spend one more minute thinking about Hoffman when I can be right here with you." He said as he closed his eyes absorbing the shudder that passed through her when his beard scraped
over the sensitive skin of her stomach.

Dalton sucked on the soft skin just above her hipbone as he slipped his fingers between her skin and
the band of her leggings. Jaz raised her hips just enough for him to sweep them down her legs.

Dalton stood and released the button on his jeans and followed with the zipper before he skimmed
them down his hips and closed the distance between them again.

Jaz moaned as he scraped his beard across her neck before his teeth grazed that pulse point below her
ear.

"Mmmm. I dream about the way your beard feels against my skin." She mumbled as he moved
lower.

"You dream about me?" He asked as he let his lower lip drag over her nipple.

"Oh yeah. All the time." Jaz said as she scraped her fingernails over his shoulder blade.

"And what do I do in these dreams?"

"Everything, but do you know what I see the most. You probably won't even remember doing it, but
it's burned into my memory of that night in Seville. It was one of the hottest things I'd ever seen. Still
is."

"Mmmm. That was a really good night."

"I remember coming down from the best orgasm I'd ever had to that point; I had no idea you'd just
keep raising the bar though. Anyway, I opened my eyes and looked down to find you with this look
of complete satisfaction, and then you did the sexiest thing I'll ever see."

"Tell me, Jaz."

"You ran your hand over your beard, and this lip," Jaz said as her fingers traced over it, "and it was
soaked, from me. I thought I was done, but the second I saw that I was turned right back up to
eleven. I think that's why I love this beard so much. And this lip. Because they always remind me of
that."

"I remember it a little differently," Dalton said as he tugged at the scrap of lace that kept him from
reliving that moment.

Once it was out of his way, he continued, "I was nervous. It'd been a while, and I wanted you to feel
good. I was dying to taste you, and when I did, Uhh, you tasted so good." Dalton said as he pulled
her to the edge of the bed and pressed her legs open with his shoulders.

Jaz watched as he inched closer to reliving that moment until she felt his tongue press against her.
"Mmmm, just like that." She hummed.

"It was intoxicating, and the way you hummed with pleasure, I could feel that on my tongue just like you are now." He said. "I was so impatient, I wanted to know what you would feel like when I finally slipped inside you for the first time, I'd been fantasizing about it for too long, so I slipped a finger inside and felt that tight, hot warmth."

Dalton closed his eyes as he slipped two fingers inside her again and felt that flutter and the flood of warmth that eased his way as he found the engorged little bundle he'd found that night.

"I could feel this. This spot that makes you shiver and shake and go all liquid around me, and I was surrounded by the scent of you, and the sighs and the way you say my name when you're about to tip over the edge. Like you are now, and it makes me want to devour you." He said as he did just that.

Jaz was practically vibrating under his assault on her senses as his lips, his tongue and that beard pleased and abraded her so perfectly.

"Oh, A-Adam. So, good."

"The muscles in my arm were burning just like they are now as I worked so hard to make your walls clamp down against my fingers and you looked so incredibly beautiful as that tell-tale flush started to creep over your skin. And then you came, soaking my fingers and drenching my chin. I've made women come before, but that was different, it was powerful and visual, and visceral. It was unmistakable, and I did that for you. It was so fucking incredible." He said as he went to work and didn't stop until Jaz was panting his name and dripping from his chin all over again.

This time, when he looked up her eyes were blown wide in bliss and raw desire.

"And you said, something along the lines of fuck that was good." She said. "You'd just given me this incredible orgasm, and you reacted like I'd given it to you."

"You did. You did give it to me, and it was so fucking good. Every time it happens I feel the same way."

"Come here," Jaz said as he crawled towards her and rubbed his hand over his beard.

Her eyes went half-lidded, and she actually shuddered at the motion.

He smiled as he felt the evidence of her pleasure and it made him want to beat his chest; he had no doubt that it had felt good to her.

"Kiss me, Adam," She hummed as she tasted herself on his lips.

"Do you know what's even better than that night?" Adam asked her as he continued to kiss her.

"Hmmm?"

"That I get to feel that little flutter that lingers after you come, and the fluid warmth as I slide into you with nothing between us right after I've just made you come. Oh god, you feel so fucking good rippling around my cock." He said as he drove his hips forward.

"Yesss." Jaz hummed as she canted her hips forward until he felt his cock bottom out and her eyes opened wide.
Adam started to pull back thinking he'd hurt her when she reached for his arms, "No, it feels really good."

So, Adam pressed in and let Jaz rotate her hips to draw out the contact. He could feel the tip of his cock rubbing up against her cervix gently as she went fluid around him.

"Move just a little bit," She said as she arched towards him.

"Hold on, can we try something?" Adam asked.

Jaz nodded, trusting that he would make her feel good.

Dalton lifted Jaz from the bed and had her get on her knees then stretch forward with her arms extended in front of her, and her body pressed against her legs allowing him to slide as deep as he could.

"Mmmm, y-yes." She hummed as goosebumps broke out over her skin.

"How's that?" He asked as he leaned forward covering her body with his before he slipped his arms around her and pressed low on her belly.

They didn't have the freedom to move as much, but the intimacy level was through the roof for both of them. They were completely surrounded by each other, and Adam was touching Jaz in places he knew no other man had or would ever touch again. That in itself was a heady experience.

"Mmmm, what do you feel?" Adam asked as he rocked their hips together gently.

"Ohhh, I feel, warm. Like it's here," Jaz said as she moved one of Adam's hands over her belly button. "and it's going to just break loose and spread over me like spilled wine spreads across the counter."

"I can feel it; it's right there lingering, just waiting." She said as he rocked forward just a little harder.

"Uhhhhh. Whooo. Yeah." Jaz rasped as he repeated the motion.

"Still good?" He asked as he brushed the hair that was clinging to her forehead back so he could see her face.

"So, so good," Jaz said as she shuddered beneath him.

Adam rolled his hips forward again a little harder, "Uhhhh, pffft, I might die for real this time." She said.

"From pleasure?" He asked.

"Mmmmm." Adam laughed, but he didn't relent.

"Gah, so close. just a little..." Jaz hummed. "Oh, mmmmm."

"Yeah, you feel so good." He told her as he leaned into her and braced against his hands for leverage.

"Oh. Oh, uh. Y-y-yeah. Don't stop. Just short, fast...." She started as he tried to follow along. "F-f-fuck. So good."
Jaz was gripping the sheets so tightly Adam thought they might rip as she started to meet his thrusts. He was dangerously close to coming just listening to the sounds she was making, and he knew that they were on the cusp of something incredible.

Jaz was literally gasping for air, and he could feel every muscle in her body starting to go rigid, he knew when she let go everything was just going to snap like a light bulb shattering on a tile floor.

"Ohhh, Yeah, yeah, yeah," Jaz hummed in time with every movement he made.

His cock stayed buried deep inside of her as they just rolled together like waves crashing on the beach in rapid-fire succession.

"Yes, just a little more." She groaned as she finally uncoiled her legs and laid flat granting him a little more freedom to move.

"Fuck," Adam shouted as he grabbed onto her thighs and pulled her back into the rocking motion of his hips and his back went rigid.

The second she felt the pulsing waves of his release the proverbial light bulb shattered and her orgasm flooded her system like a hot wave pulling her under as her body shook with pleasure.

The release was as much an emotional tidal wave as it was a physical one and she craved the contact only Adam could give her. As she shook in his arms, he pressed open mouth kisses to every inch of her skin he could come into contact with.

"You still with me?" He asked as he pulled her into his chest and covered her still shaking body with the blankets.

"Every time I think it'll never get better than this, we raise the bar." She said with a smile as she looked up at him.

"Yeah, well we both might feel differently tomorrow. I feel like we just ran a marathon."

"Mmmm. It was draining, but it was really, really good. Different. Intense."

"Yeah, really intense." Adam offered.

They both knew that wasn't something they could do every night, it was exhausting, and emotionally draining, but it felt...incredible. It wasn't the fast, explosive, immediate pleasure that made them want to fuck like bunnies on every flat surface available to them, but there was something about that level of intimacy, the patience, trust, and the communication that made it...more.

That night, they slept like the dead wrapped around each other until the sun was poking through the crack in the drapes.

They stayed in bed basking in the blissful soreness that came with being well loved.

"I need a shower, but I don't want to leave you yet," Adam told her.

"Mmmm. Five more minutes." Jaz said as she turned to her side and rubbed her fingers through his beard.

Dalton laughed, "Now that I know what you're thinking about when you do that, it's kind of a turn on."

Jaz smiled as she kissed him and continued to run her fingers through his beard.
Before things could continue on that track, Dalton's phone pinged on the nightstand and Jaz grabbed it.

_I need your help, can you meet me at 2?_

"It's McG. He needs your help today. Oh. Ohhh! He's gonna buy a ring!" Jaz exclaimed.

Dalton laughed as she responded. He was sure McGuire hadn't been planning on sparring with Jaz this early in the morning.

_You're gonna put a ring on it aren't you?_

_Jazzy, why are you answering Top's texts?_

"He didn't say no when I asked if he was gonna put a ring on it."

"Tell him I'll meet him."

_Top says YES!!!_

Jaz snickered as she continued to bait McGuire, the two were really long lost siblings, Dalton was convinced.

_Sometimes, you're a pain in my ass_

_Only sometimes? I'll have to try harder_

_I'll forgive you if you hang out with Hannah_

_Done_

Dalton smiled as he and Jaz aided and abetted McGuire's plan knowing that Hannah would never see it coming.

He no longer had the same reservations as he once had, but he was looking forward to talking to McG later that afternoon.

"You know, Abbie wants us to come to Montana. We should go."

"Yeah? Maybe we could go after we go visit your mom." Dalton offered.

"You're going to come with me?" Jaz asked with a sweet smile.

"Of course I am. If your dad feels the need to stop by, I'd really like to introduce myself."

"He always does. Dad's the head groundskeeper at the cemetery. There's no way to see her without seeing him."

Jaz watched him as a menacing look crossed over his face, she no longer needed protection from her father, but it was still nice to know he wanted to protect her.

"I love you, Adam."

"I love you, too."

"How about that shower?" She asked as she got up to run for the shower.
She stopped in her tracks as she realized just how sore she actually was, "Oh wow. That's..."

"Come on Jazzy, I'll kiss it and make it better," Adam said as he picked her up and carried her into the bathroom.

Chapter End Notes

Yeah, so that happened.

Up next, another chapter of Jaz and Dalton with Dalton's perspective on some of what happened in Chapter 10 of Call Me Joseph. If you're not reading that one, I think you'd like it :) but they can stand-alone.

Hopefully, the next one will be up in a couple of days.
For whatever reason, it is getting harder and harder to write these two stories as stand-alone stories. The longer each story goes, the more they want to intersect, so I don't think I can really write them as stand-alone fics anymore. This is the downside of taking a two-shot and carrying it on a lot longer.

But, I knew this would probably happen at some point and I think the solution goes one of two ways. First, keep going with both and just make sure everyone knows that they need to be read together...or abandon one which I am really not inclined to do at all.

So, going forward, I am going to try and keep both stories on the same timeline so that they can be read together. I know a ton of you are already reading both, but please let me know what you think.

For me, it is just starting to make it really hard to cover two perspectives from one story to the other without being redundant, but I feel like I have to do that if the assumption is not everyone reads Call Me Joseph. So, I'm just going to stop trying to do that if you guys are on board.

I know that a ton of people would be upset if I stopped with either of the stories, so this is what I came up with.

Having said that, this chapter is Dalton's perspective on his conversation with Joseph from Chapter 10 of Call Me Joseph.

This chapter was a huge struggle for me, and I think it was because I am trying so hard to keep the two stories separate and really, once Call Me Joseph went beyond two chapters it was silly of me to think I could do that...but I'm a stubborn little fool, so it only took me 8 more chapters to figure that out...

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

_____

_It's a cowboy code it's an unwrote law_
_When you mess with one you gotta take us all._

_Blood brother's closer than your next to kin_
_Thick as thieves and the best of friends_
_Take a bullet for each other_

_Yeah brothers like that don't come cheap_

_Blood Brothers - Luke Bryan_

_____

Dalton considered McGuire to be one of his closest friends. In a lot of ways, he felt like they'd grown
even closer in part because of McG's relationship to Jaz as well.

His respect for him had grown as well, and that was pretty extraordinary, because, in spite of their differences in opinion on how to approach the fairer sex, before Hannah anyway, he always knew McGuire was a good man.

So, when they headed out on their mission to find a ring for Hannah and McG had started to explain his perspective, Dalton was truly interested in how he'd gotten to this place with her.

He'd been leery of the possible relationship at first because he knew the analyst had been through a harrowing experience and the last thing he wanted to see was for her to get attached to McG and get her heart broken.

Dalton's reservations had nothing to do with McGuire's reputation because he was never dishonest about his expectations, but he felt like without telling him Hannah's secrets, McG couldn't have fully understood what her expectations might have been.

Dalton wasn't even sure Hannah fully understood what she had been asking of McG. He'd been certain his friend would handle her with great care both before he knew her secret and after, but when you're coming off of that kind of low, Dalton was afraid she might misread that caring he knew Joseph would offer her.

Because at the end of the day, McGuire would need to help her.

But, after seeing them out the other night, he was pretty certain that McGuire's expectations were the ones that had course corrected.

He'd watched McG work his way through a stable of women who he'd never doubted would jump at the chance for a lasting relationship over the last three years, but McGuire wasn't looking for that, nor did he ever make promises of that nature.

McGuire was a player, but he was always upfront about it, and he was more than capable of walking away without moving forward if he felt he wasn't on the same page with a woman regarding those expectations. Dalton had to respect the fact that McG had never run a game on a woman to get her to warm his bed.

He'd had no reason to believe he would do that to Hannah either.

That didn't mean he didn't have questions though. And McGuire had been full of answers.

Dalton had recognized all along that McGuire's misguided attempt at distance had been more about protecting himself than it had been about protecting the women he spent time with.

Of course, knowing that his path had been altered was one thing, but hearing McGuire talk about kids, and the dreams he'd had about his future with Hannah had been more than he was expecting.

"I look at Hannah, and for the first time, I see a future. I look at the smooth skin of her belly, and all I can think of is what she'll look like with my child. I hear a little girl laughing with Hannah's smile, and little boys chasing dogs out on the land in Montana. It's a future that I never let myself even fantasize about, but I can't imagine a future without her now." McGuire told him as they'd discussed how much his perspective had changed.

He couldn't help drawing parallels to his own relationship. It was funny to him that he'd had three years to prepare for Jaz, and McG had gotten there in 30 days.
"How's this for perspective, you and Jaz both avoided hookups because you didn't want to lie. I avoided relationships because I thought I had to lie. Different means, same end." McGuire told him.

McGuire's assessment of their respective choices was actually pretty profound, and it made it hard to see why either one of them would put off what they both knew was inevitable.

What he hadn't expected was that Hannah had almost ended the whole thing before it had started. And Dalton couldn't help thinking maybe he should have shared Hannah's story with McG when he'd realized they were both circling around one another.

"I was worried that day when I introduced you. I saw the mutual interest there, and whether you know it or not, you have a certain intensity. And that's fine when the woman is on the same page, but most women aren't holding onto the secrets that Hannah was. I almost told you, but it wasn't my story to tell." Dalton said.

"If you'd told me, she would have been hurt by both of us, because I'm positive I wouldn't have been able to hide that from her. Both of us would have broken her trust if you had. So, I'm glad you didn't." McG shared.

But as he always seemed to do, McGuire saw a dark situation that appeared to be a black and white image to Dalton in full color. It was an attribute that had helped them in the field many times, but Dalton realized he hadn't given McG enough credit when it came to Hannah.

Mcguire's intuition was almost flawless when he chose to put it in play. And Hannah had put off enough vibes that forced him to go into this like a chess match evaluating every move as he made them and adjusted course based on the moves she'd made.

For all the things Dalton thought were obvious to him, McGuire seemed to see things much clearer as he'd explained his assessment of his relationship with Jaz; it had been right on the money.

"You and Jaz were like a car crash that everyone could see coming but you two until the glass was exploding all around you."

And Hannah's assessment had been insightful as well. Only he was starting to think her assessment had been a more intuitive statement about where she and McGuire could go when she'd said it because on some level Dalton thought they both saw the broad strokes of Starry Night when he'd been staring at a fingerpainting the whole time.

As McGuire had relayed it, Hannah said, "For some people, it's just like gravity."

They were both orbiting their sun, and it was time for both of them to stop fighting it.

When they'd left the hotel that afternoon, Dalton had set out to have a real conversation with McGuire about Hannah, but he'd wound up with a brand new respect for his friend, and a much clearer picture of his own path.

He needed to talk to Jaz about it, but he was no longer afraid of what he had to lose professionally because the only thing that mattered to him was Jaz. Dalton would protect her career at all costs if it came down to it because he already had what he wanted most in his life.

Jaz was his future.

If push came to shove, he knew he had a lot of options, but right or wrong, it would never be that easy for Jaz. She'd earned her spot the hard way, and he wasn't about to let her be punished because of his choice to meet her at that line in the sand that they'd crossed together.
They weren't there yet, but they both knew that day would come. Eventually.

Once they'd arrived at the family-owned jeweler, Dalton had taken in the whole experience. McG had selected a ring that was subtle and stunningly beautiful and Dalton had no doubt that it was precisely how McGuire viewed Hannah.

The ring was perfect, and McG had known it the second he'd laid eyes on it. It wasn't a cookie cutter showpiece, it was simple and beautiful, and it was Hannah.

The mighty Joseph McGuire hadn't fallen, he'd willfully leaped from the highest plain and risked everything he'd fought so hard to control believing in his heart that Hannah would be there to catch him.

Dalton didn't think he'd be far behind. In fact, he'd told McG that it wasn't a matter of if he planned to ask Jaz to marry him, but when he would do it. So, as McG paid for his purchase, he'd asked for Lizzie Gordon's card fully intending to reach out one day in the very near future.

Dalton and McGuire headed straight to the hospital to spend some time with Preach and catch up with Amir once they'd finished up at the Jeweler. But mostly, he thought McG wanted to share his news.

They'd all needed a little something to be happy about; the last couple of weeks had everyone feeling a little shell-shocked.

_McG just gave Amir a RING, he's going to come meet us for dinner. See you two at the hotel bar later?

_Uh-oh, Mama McG is calling._

Dalton couldn't help thinking that conversation should be interesting. He wondered if Jaz would let Abbie talk to Hannah.

After spending a little time chatting with Preach and Arlene, Amir, McGuire, and Dalton headed back to the hotel to grab dinner and wait for the Hannah and Jaz to return.

They'd talked about their plans while they were home and McGuire had invited both of them to come out to Montana. Dalton was definitely going to make that happen. He knew Jaz wanted to go, and he really enjoyed McGuire's mom.

"I want to go with Jaz to visit her mom, but after that, we're in."

"What are you going to do if her dad turns up?" Amir asked.

"Apparently he's the groundskeeper, so Jaz will have no choice but to see him." Dalton shared.

"Maybe it's time we introduced Jaz's dad to her real family. What is it a four and a half hour drive?" McGuire asked.

"I'd love to see the look on his face," Amir said.

"As far as I'm concerned, Jaz will never have to face that man alone again. I know she is more than capable of handling her dad, but that won't stop me from standing there giving him a murderous glare." Dalton said.
"So, let's go rattle his cage a little," McG said. "Then we can all go out to Montana and hang with Abbie."

Dalton smiled. Her dad had no idea the world of shit he was about to step into.

It was almost ten when Hannah and Jaz walked into the bar at the hotel. Dalton had his back turned to the door as he leaned against the bar when he felt Jaz's arms come around his waist.

"How was your day?" Jaz asked as he turned and wrapped his arm around her.

"It was going pretty well, and it just got better." He said as he smiled and pressed a kiss to her temple.

"How was dinner and movie? Were the girls happy to get away from the hospital?"

"Yeah, they're good kids. Though I think Preach and Arlene enjoyed the break more than the girls enjoyed their night out." Hannah said as McGuire pulled her into his lap and kissed the scar on her neck.

It was the first time he'd noticed it, but Hannah was no longer working so hard to keep the marks covered. It brought a smile to his face because he could see the positive impact McGuire's acceptance had on her confidence.

"What are you smiling about?" Jaz whispered in his ear.

"Nothing, just happy to spend time with everyone without looking over our shoulders." He told her.

The five of them had a couple of drinks and talked about Montana as they worked on getting Amir to come out. They regaled him with story after story of Abbie McGuire and her amazing ability to extract information from all of them.

"She really could have been CIA, I mean her interrogation techniques are legendary." McGuire joked.

"Oh yeah? Maybe I should take some notes." Amir laughed.

"Seriously, I was talking to her on the phone this morning, and I happened to mention 'they' when I was talking about Top and Jaz, and she instantly jumped on it. She's actually only seen the two of them together in the same room twice, and even she knew that they were destined to be together."

"Your mom sounds like she's a whirlwind. I have to say I'm kind of looking forward to meeting her."

"Careful what you wish for, she's probably going try and set you up with the young nurse she'd been trying to hook me up with the last two times I was home as soon as she finds out you're single," McG said.

Amir might have blushed a little; he was still a bit of a mystery to this group personally speaking anyway.

McG just laughed.

When they got back to the room, Dalton and Jaz booked their flights to Montana a week from Monday. Amir was making his arrangements as well, so Dalton texted everyone their flight info.
Jaz didn't know it yet, but everyone was planning to head to New York with her over the weekend as well. There was no way they were going to let her face the monster that haunted her childhood alone even though she had grown up into a woman who was far scarier than her father could ever dream of being.

He was a coward that preyed on a little girl, but that little girl grew up to be a lioness.

With their travel plans squared away, Jaz and Dalton got ready for bed.

"So, where else do you want to go?" Dalton asked.

"I don't know, wherever you're going I suppose."

"So, Switzerland for sure, but how about someplace warm, I certainly wouldn't be opposed to a white sand beach, sun on my face and you in my arms preferably in a bikini."

"With some little fruity drink?" She smiled.

"You can have the fruity drink if you want?" He laughed as shut out the light and pulled her into his arms.

Dalton was starting to doze off with Jaz snuggled into his side when she gently raked her fingernails low on his stomach and said, "And what if I want you?"

"Jazzy, I'm a sure thing for you, all you have to do is throw a leg over, and I'll get on board in a hurry." He told her as she did just that.

No matter how tired they were, Dalton and Jaz never seemed to get enough of each other.

Chapter End Notes

Next Chapter, we'll go visit dear old dad, then Call Me Joseph will pick up with Mama McG :)

Let me know what you all think, are you reading Call Me Joseph? Not Reading it? Not interested??
Fighter

Chapter Notes

First of all, thank you so much for all the comments and thoughts on the last chapter. It helped me figure out how to direct things going forward that should make writing both of these fics easier. As always, you guys make this worth doing and I can't thank you enough for all the feedback, kudos, and support.

I'm about an hour later than I'd hoped to post, but hopefully, you'll forget all about that as this one is a long one that covers a ton of ground starting with the team's debriefing in DC and winding up with a little visit with Daddy Dearest.

There's quite a bit of Amir's take on Hoffman and some of his family history, and a bit more backstory for Jaz, so hopefully you'll like this one :)

I hope that you enjoy it.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

______

Makes me that much stronger
Makes me work a little bit harder
It makes me that much wiser
So thanks for making me a fighter
Made me learn a little bit faster
Made my skin a little bit thicker
Makes me that much smarter
So thanks for making me a fighter

Fighter - Christina Aguilera

______

Over the next week, the team went over the events leading up to the explosion in the bunker. Dalton spent hours going over everything that they already knew; it was beyond frustrating.

But, it was clear that no one knew about his excursion after the bunker incident because they were asking whether Hoffman had given him any clues as to what his plan might have been. Where he was before he turned up in Turkey, and where he might have gone.

"Did he say anything about where he'd been prior to Turkey?" One of the suits asked, he'd introduced himself as Agent Marks, but Dalton didn't really think his name mattered.

"No. I don't think Hoffman was, um, looking to pull up his Instagram and show us all of the places he'd been over the last nine years."

"And the passports, any currency he was traveling with?"

"Kenya, Uganda, Germany, Iran, South Africa, there might have been a few others. Unfortunately,
they weren't recovered after the blast. I assume they were destroyed as they were on the table with our equipment which looked like it'd been run over by a tank then hit with a blow torch."

"Or he could have escaped with them." The suit offered.

The guy was pissing him off, but he had to just suck it up, because odd as it seemed, it was probably better for everyone if they thought Hoffman was in the wind.

They would be looking for a man that had been a ghost for nine years, and when they don't find any clues, they were bound to assume that he was in the wind, rather than simply dead.

Which of course he was.

Given what they had learned about Hoffman, they were much more likely to think he'd found his way out of Adana and gone dark. Especially since there was no trace of him in the bunker, it wasn't a stretch to think he'd walked away unscathed.

Which of course Dalton knew he had, but he didn't plan to confirm that or share the details of his meeting later that night.

"Did he seem like he had a plan in place?" The second suit asked.

It took everything Dalton had in him not to visibly roll his eyes as he said, "you tell me, he came equipped with an impact bomb, and had somehow managed to stay off your radar and remain 'dead' for nine years."

This was why Dalton never aspired to be one of these guys when he was done chasing the monsters even your worst nightmares couldn't touch.

The second agent was one of the men in the room nine years ago when they'd ordered Patricia to take Hoffman off the board. He was a little softer around the middle, and a lot more shiny on top with just a few wisps of gray combed over now, but he was her handler nine years ago.

Dalton met him only once when he'd stopped in to see Patricia while on leave after his second tour. He didn't like the man then either.

This guy was part of the team that set up that bomb, he'd sat there as Patricia led Hoffman to the car, and he'd celebrated as they'd watched him burn. Yet here he sat acting like he was better than her, even though he'd been every bit as duped by Hoffman as his protege.

At least this time Patricia knew the real score though.

The whole team knew Hoffman was dead, but none of them felt like shining a spotlight on that fact. The world was better off with one less Alex Hoffman.

And certainly, Patricia was in a much better place with him out of the equation. Sure, there was an inquiry coming since Hoffman clearly had not died nine years ago, but as far as Dalton could tell Patricia was as much in the dark about that as the agencies that had ordered his demise.

All of the audio that had been collected in the bunker pretty much confirmed that fact.

While Hoffman had alluded to the problems that his re-emergence might cause for Patricia, so far as they could tell, that argument would have been far more successful if he'd been sitting in one of these rooms to spin that web.
He was not, and he never would be.

For Patricia to be the sacrificial lamb, he would have had to convince a lot of people that she had, in fact, tipped him off and that she had known all along that he was alive. Even that she might have been helping him line up jobs, collect identities and drop bodies all while remaining a ghost.

If Campbell had known, it was news to Dalton and the team. And if that were the case, she'd sure done a good job playing the victim.

Dalton just wasn't buying that scenario.

They could get on Patricia for her personal relationship with Hoffman nine years ago, but that wasn't a state secret at this point. It had become common knowledge well before the night Patricia's handlers showed up on her doorstep telling her that Hoffman needed to be subtracted from the equation.

Whatever punishment had been doled out at the time was all she had coming on that score, it was a little late to relitigate that argument.

Though on a similar note, Dalton knew that he needed to talk to Jaz about their situation. He knew they had a little time with Patricia, Noah, and Hannah in their corner, but he also knew that at some point they would have to get ahead of it and make a plan before the choices would no longer be theirs to make.

The thing was, they could have lots of time before anyone really figured it out given that they spent so little time with anyone that wasn't a part of their team, provided they were somewhat discrete about it.

The group had always been close-knit, and apart from a scant few occasions, it wasn't like they'd been packing on the PDA in public places. That was only a huge risk when they were in DC anyway. Outside of DC, their missions were of the need to know variety, so it wasn't like they had an inordinate amount of eyes on them.

Still, no matter how careful they were, they knew it was a risk, and even if they were super diligent about keeping it hidden, there was always that chance that it would get out.

Either way, they needed to have a talk and come up with a plan, because they both knew this wasn't something they could expect to hide forever. And at some point, Dalton knew that he wouldn't want to hide it.

Hopefully, Jaz wouldn't either.

Dalton knew what he thought about the situation, but it wasn't fair for him to make that choice without discussing it with Jaz. She was certainly not one to defer to anyone, not even him, so she needed to have a say in the matter.

It was a conversation for them to have over the next few weeks while they were away from the stresses DC brought to the equation. It wasn't likely to get solved with one conversation, or even several. They were going to have to really evaluate their feelings as well as their goals both personally and professionally, but Dalton was sure they could figure out a way forward.

They had to because he no longer saw a future that didn't have Jaz in it.

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After about four days of repetitive questioning by an army of suits who looked like they'd never been on the front lines a single day, the team was ready to get out of DC.
There were only so many stupid questions one could take, and they'd all reached their limit about halfway through day two.

Amir was especially fed up since he'd been subjected to twice as many questions given the knowledge he'd been able to garner from Hoffman. Though he was much better than the rest of them at wearing that calm I couldn't give a fuck facade no matter how dumb the questions, especially Dalton.

Dalton had the I couldn't give a fuck look, it was the calm in the face of stupidity part that he struggled with.

Amir walked them through every incident that Hoffman had claimed in the hours he'd spent stroking his ego and generally lubing him up until Hoffman was practically preening in the glory of his own mind.

Amir had thought him a fool. Hoffman had so easily been coaxed into sharing every last detail, and in doing so, he'd managed to paint a vivid picture of how he operated. How he moved from place to place. Who he trusted when he couldn't be hands-on, where his money came from, and who he got his papers from so he could vanish after a job was finished.

Amir had given the agents the dots on the map, but he'd held the lines that connected those dots closer to the vest. He was way too smart to share any of that information with the desk jockeys they'd sent to interrogate the team.

It was information that he was certain the team could use down the road because if there was anything Amir was sure of, it was that even dead, Hoffman probably still had a few contingency plans hanging like loose threads on a sweater.

You don't plot a long game as Hoffman did without setting a few things in motion in case your best-laid plans go to shit. And, Amir wasn't about to put the team's safety in the hands of a bunch of bureaucratic stooges whose idea of a bad day was finding out the coffee shop was out of chocolate glazed donuts.

On Friday afternoon, they'd finally completed all of their meetings and wrapped up with Patricia, Hannah, and Noah before they all got ready to head out and start enjoying their break.

They all knew it would be over way too soon.

Dalton and Jaz walked down to the lobby and checked out as Amir and McG stood waiting by the door. When they met up Jaz gave them a questioning look.

"What, you didn't think I was gonna let my little sister face the monster in the closet all by herself?" McG said with a laugh. "And we all know if we can't scare him with brawn, Amir could give him night terrors for the rest of his life without breaking a sweat."

"Jaz, you don't need us to protect you, you can do that all on your own. And we know that." Dalton said, "But that doesn't mean we can't be there to support you. And if we get to scare the shit out of dear old dad, I'm not going to lose any sleep over it. Are you?"

Jaz just laughed and said, "The look on his face is going to be priceless. Dad's only ever picked fights he knew he could win."

The four of them walked to the train station together as they talked about their plans for the rest of
their time off. They were all planning to catch up with Abbie, if only because she'd never let them hear the end of it, but after that, they would be venturing off on their own.

Amir was planning to go back to Lebanon and visit with his parents; he hadn't been home in almost eight years.

Being undercover with the CIA didn't afford him with a lot of downtime, and with the assignments he'd taken, he never wanted to risk bringing that home.

His family had already suffered a horrific loss at the hands of similar terror cells to the ones he'd infiltrated, so the last thing he wanted was to bring any of that back to their front door.

The last time he'd been in the house he grew up in was the day they'd laid an empty casket in the ground. He'd missed his parents, but things had been strained after his sister died. They didn't blame him, but he'd blamed himself. And they were too lost in their grief to help him see where the blame should fall.

It was the catalyst that set his course going forward, but his parents could never know that.

They believed that he was a successful stock trader in New York, so that made it even harder to go home. Of course, it helped that he did legitimately have a very diverse portfolio and he did on occasion make investments for his parents that had done very well, so he didn't have to work too hard to sell his cover to them. But it was still lying, even if on the surface it appeared to be the truth.

McGuire was planning on staying in Montana for two weeks since Hannah had extra time off. She had some things to take care of in DC, so she was planning to meet them in Denver where they connected to Bozeman on Monday.

They got lucky as Hannah was granted extended leave since Patricia needed her to be available if Preach wasn't able to return when the team re-deployed.

No one was certain when or even if he'd be back, or perhaps he'd just return later. If that were the case, Hannah would likely just head back to DC when Preach was available to return. So, for the time being, they were going to move ahead like she was going to replace him when they re-deployed.

And if Preach couldn't return at all, or chose not to return, Dalton would look for a permanent replacement. But, he had no plans to do that until his CPO specifically told him he wouldn't be back.

Dalton was still hoping Preach would have his back for a long time to come.

After a decade serving beside him, he didn't even want to contemplate the alternative.

Jaz and Dalton were planning to spend about five days with the group before they headed out to spend some time together.

While they'd been together for a couple of months now, they were looking forward to getting to spend a little time alone together.

Time with their team in the room beside them, or on the other side of a curtain in a safe house really wasn't quite the privacy they'd wanted. They'd made things work when they could, but both of them were looking forward to not giving the team any additional fodder.

And it certainly wouldn't hurt to spend some time getting to see some of the beautiful places that they never got to visit. It's not like there were a ton of terror cells in tiny out of the way destinations. They
usually preferred crowds and tourism.

So, they were heading to a little mountain village in Switzerland for a week; then they were planning to just hop on a train and travel for a bit. Wherever they felt like going. And Dalton had every intention of getting to that white sand beach somewhere along the way, too.

They'd have to get back to DC for a few days before they re-deployed since they'd stored all their gear there, but beyond that, they were just going to enjoy their time away from the stresses and conflicts that would be waiting for them when they returned.

They were going to go be a normal couple, without the constraints of rank and rules.

That wasn't going anywhere, and hopefully, by the time they returned, they'd have an idea of how they were going to handle that, too.

Jaz had only stayed in touch with one friend from her childhood; Andrew lived in an apartment on the other side of the block from them. He'd frequently let her sneak in from the fire escape and sleep on his bottom bunk when her dad was in a particularly foul mood, or if his sleazy friends were over late.

Sometimes, she thought Andrew's house had been the only thing keeping her from waking up to one of her dad's drunk friends in her bed.

A stark reality even then, but looking back, Jaz knew all too well how narrowly she'd missed out on a whole different kind of abuse. One she wasn't sure she'd have been able to bounce back from.

Even now, Jaz wasn't particularly big. She was muscular, but her frame was still on the smaller side, as a kid, she was all limbs and little muscle. So, if she'd found herself in that type of situation back then, Jaz really wasn't certain she'd have been able to fight them off.

It was a line she was certain her father had never been inclined to cross himself, and for that she was thankful, but Jaz wasn't naive enough to think her father's friends didn't look at her like a piece of ripe fruit ready to be consumed.

And her dad had never given her any reason to think he would stop them.

Hell, there had been times when he'd offered her up to cover his debts. Fortunately, the offers were declined until that night that Jaz had been forced to fight back.

After that, she didn't stick around to see whether the next guy took her dad up on his offer.

She'd left with the clothes on her back and a backpack with whatever essentials she could fit inside. Jaz never set foot in that house of horrors again after that night.

While she hated being in the same zip code as the man who she'd called dad, Jaz was looking forward to reconnecting with Andrew.

He and his husband Marco owned a boutique hotel in Brooklyn now and had offered them a two bedroom duplex when she'd called on the train ride up.

She was looking forward to introducing Andrew to Adam, as well as McG and Amir.

Obviously, they'd have to go easy on work talk since he only knew she was in the military, not that she was a sniper or that she worked with the DIA. But, she had no doubt they'd all be able to find
some common ground.

Dalton was a bit broody, but Andrew would like him right away because he'd see how much he
cared for Jaz. She was certain that McG would win them over because he was just a character and
that person who shows up to a party knowing no one and leaves with the life story of everyone in the
room.

Andrew had always been a bit of a foodie, so Jaz was certain that he and Amir would bond quickly
once that topic came up. Since the hotel had a cool little restaurant that Andrew managed, Jaz knew
it wouldn't take long at all.

In fact, she figured it would be a matter of minutes before Amir was in the kitchen sharing recipes
with Andrew.

And if all else failed, they could all bond over a shared hatred for her father.

Jaz wanted to get the visit with her mom out of the way first. It wasn't that she wanted to rush the
visit itself as much as she just wanted to get the visit with her Dad out of the way. Unfortunately, it
was already after six, so it would have to wait until Saturday morning.

So, once they'd gotten off the train, they headed to the hotel to get settled in. Andrew had been in the
kitchen checking in a delivery, but Marco greeted them at the front desk and showed them to the
duplex.

"Wow, the pictures don't even do it justice," Jaz said as they walked in.

The unit was two levels with a small kitchenette and an open living room that led to a bedroom and
bath with two double beds on the main level. There was an iron spiral staircase that led to a loft on
the second level with a massive bathroom that had a raindrop shower that spanned the entire glass
enclosure and sweeping views of the city. The glass frosted when the shower turned on, but the
views of the city remained clear from about the shoulders up.

"Did you renovate the building yourselves?" Dalton asked as he walked through the living area.

"We did. It was an old factory that we repurposed. It took us almost two and a half years, but it was
worth every minute." Marco told them.

A moment later, Dalton was on high alert as a ginger whirlwind blew by him and swept Jaz into a
hug.

"Oh my god, Jazzy it's been way too long!" Andrew said as he spun her around until his eyes landed
on Dalton who was watching them with amusement.

Dalton recognized the joy on Jaz's face, and he instantly liked anyone who put it there. It was that
simple.

"Adam. Dalton." He said as he smiled and held his hand out to Andrew.

He couldn't remember if she'd referred to him as Adam or Dalton when she'd spoken to him earlier,
so he'd supplied both names. Though Dalton supposed it would be hard for Andrew to miss the way
he looked at her, so it wouldn't have taken him long to figure out who he was.

"Andrew." He said as he shook his hand while nodding in approval towards Jaz.
Dalton just laughed.

Andrew introduced himself to Amir and McGuire when they returned from dropping their bags in the bedroom off the living area.

Dalton was just observing as he often did putting the face to the boy whose name came up whenever she recalled a happy memory from her childhood.

Dalton had heard little bits and pieces of her childhood over the last few years, and Andrew had always factored into the stories. She’d always managed to leave her family out of her narrative until recently, but Andrew was still heavily featured.

He knew it was likely Andrew had been one of the few parts of her childhood she’d recalled with any kind of fondness. It wasn’t hard to deduce given how little she’d shared about her mom and dad until very recently.

"So, I'm just going to introduce the elephant to the room, when are you going to see your dad?" Andrew asked.

"I figured we'd go in the morning. Hopefully, we can get in and out while he's busy." She stated.

"Honey, your dad doesn't have the same kind of work ethic he once had. He hasn't been sober in years. He lingers somewhere between buzzed and powered by rocket fuel. And it varies greatly no matter the time of the day." Marco said.

"Since when? He never drank that much before."

"Yeah, he got evicted a couple years back. He lives in the groundskeeper's quarters now, which is probably nicer, but I don't think the change did him any favors. He pretty much drinks and works in some order every day. So, it's probably a good thing that you'll have some muscle with you." Andrew said as he wrapped a hand around her bicep. "Though, by the looks of you..."

Jaz felt uneasy about the prospect of seeing her father. It was simple to hate him, but she didn't like that she was almost feeling sorry for him now. Though, she suspected she'd get over that quickly once they were face to face.

Her dad had a way of reminding her that he was still the same irredeemable piece of shit she remembered.

"Well, we're going to let you all get settled. Why don't you come down to the restaurant when you're ready, I'll save the corner booth for you, and we can get to know your friends." Andrew said as he pulled her into a bear hug.

"See you later," Jaz said as she followed them to the door.

It was about seven already, so they all made a quick change and headed down to the restaurant shortly after that.

Jaz had enjoyed catching up with Andrew and getting to know Marco a little better. She’d known him when they were kids, but he was a couple of years older, so it had been more in passing.

It took less than five minutes for Amir to start talking about food once he’d realized that Andrew was a chef, and the two of them were quickly speaking a language that was foreign to Jaz, McG, and Dalton.
It was always fun to see Amir engage with real people though. For once, he was just enjoying the company instead of reading the room and analyzing every nuance of every conversation.

Since he was still relatively new to the group, it was rare that they got to see him in an environment that had no perceived threats. At home, or at the bunker rather, they saw the fun side to Amir, but anytime they left the safety of their home he was all business.

Sure, he was always good at wearing whatever facade he needed to in a given situation, but they knew the difference. With Andrew, he was the Amir they knew to be genuine. The one that enjoyed sitting by the fire to talk and joke around, loved to cook, and was ultra-competitive no matter what the game was.

McGuire, well, he was McGuire. He fit in no matter what the situation was. He could look like he was taking a walk on the beach while taking heavy fire, it was part of what made him such a good medic, he was seemingly unflappable.

In general, it took McG about three minutes to charm everyone in the room. If you happened to be a beautiful woman, maybe one and a half.

Except Jaz, she'd been the anomaly. She adored McG, but from the moment they'd met they'd bonded like siblings.

Perhaps that was why she'd gotten along so well with Abbie. She was like the mom she'd always wished hers would be, the kind of mom she'd pretend hers was on the good days.

They'd spent over two hours talking about a variety of topics and enjoying each other's company before Andrew had to get back to the kitchen with a full house and a line out the door as the late-night crowd filtered in.

Rather than take up one of the largest tables, they opted to head back to their room. They'd had a couple of drinks before Jaz headed up to take a shower and get ready for bed.

Dalton, Amir, and McGuire stayed in the living area talking until Dalton heard the shower turn off and ventured up the stairs.

"See you for breakfast. Nine-ish?" Dalton asked.

McGuire gave him a thumbs up as he walked into the other bedroom.

Dalton loved walking into the room after Jaz had finished her shower, he was surrounded by the warm spiced apple scent that he’d become addicted to. He inhaled deeply as he stripped down to his boxers and laid down on the bed waiting for her to come out of the bathroom.

Jaz came out in tiny boyshorts, and his Army t-shirt as she towel dried her hair.

Dalton got up to brush his teeth and get ready for bed, and by the time he returned, she was curled up on the far side of the bed staring out the window. He crawled in behind her and wrapped his arms around her as he listened to her slow easy breathing.

"See that old building over there?" She asked as she pointed to an old gray apartment complex off in the distance.

"Mmmhmm."

"We used to live there. Andrew lived in the red brick building on the other end of the block. I met
him the first day I rode the bus to school after my mom died. She wasn't much of a mom by most standards, but she'd walked me to the bus stop every day that she could up to that point. Anyway, I got on the bus, and all the kids were whispering and pointing about the skinny girl whose mom had taken her own life. So, I just went to the first empty seat and tried to pretend I didn't hear any of it." She said quietly as she turned to her back so she could look at him as she spoke.

"I'd seen Andrew every day since I'd started riding that bus for several years, but that day he got up and sat down beside me, and I remember what he said like it was yesterday."

"What did he say?"

"You look like you could use a friend." She said as she smiled up at Adam. "That's it. He just put his arm around my shoulder and sat up straight daring the other kids to keep up with their teasing. He was the biggest kid on the bus, and no one dared challenge him."

Dalton smiled thinking about the smaller versions of the people he knew sitting on a bus.

"He sat beside me every day after that, and became my defacto guardian until I learned how to defend myself."

At that moment, he kind of loved Andrew. He was a giant teddy bear; he looked like Ed Sheeran if Ed Sheeran had been a linebacker.

Dalton pulled Jaz into his arms and pressed a gentle kiss to her forehead. "I'm glad you had him in your life."

"Me, too. Not sure how I would have survived the years after my mom died without him."

Dalton couldn't help wishing he could erase the flash of pain that cast a shadow over her expressive eyes. Then again, she might not have become the warrior he knew, and who knows what that would have meant for them. Would they have found each other some other way?

"I wish that you'd had a normal childhood filled with love, but I can't help thinking our experiences set us on the path that led us here." He told her.

"I'm not sorry. Neither one of us had ideal upbringings. I choose to believe that we are making up for whatever love we missed out on when we were kids. And if we have kids, I know for certain we'll be better than our parents were."

"When," Dalton said.

"Hmmm?"

"When we have kids, that is if you want them," Dalton stated.


"Jaz, I don't want to talk about this tonight, because I know that this is far from a stress-free visit for you, but sometime in the next couple of weeks, we should talk about how we're going to deal with this. Us."

"How so?" She asked.

"We won't be able to keep this under wraps forever. I just want to have a conversation about how we deal with that situation when it comes, preferably while we can still control the outcome."
"Okay. Maybe after Montana, when we have plenty of time, just us."

Dalton leaned in and pressed his lips to hers in acceptance, "I love you."

"I love you, too Adam."

The next morning they met up in the restaurant for breakfast before heading out to the cemetery. It was warm enough that they decided to walk.

When they arrived, Dalton, Amir, and McGuire opted to hang back as she approached her mother's headstone.

Dalton wanted to go with her, but he'd recognized that she needed a few minutes to herself. Though, that didn't stop them from watching for any sign that her dad was lurking in the shadows.

By now, he knew that she was in town. Half the neighborhood had been in and out of the restaurant last night or that morning, and she had been bracing for him to have the upper hand. Especially being that she was on land that he was familiar with.

"Hi, mom." She whispered as she let her fingers glide over the letters of her name.

Zara Kahn Cassevetes

Jaz refused to use her father's name once she'd escaped his grasp, it killed her that her mother wore that label even now knowing that her dad had done everything in his power to erase the woman she was before him.

He'd effectively smothered the spirit Jaz remembered when she was really small.

Dalton was leaning against a tree in the distance watching as she rubbed her fingers over the letters etched in stone again when he noticed the older man walking towards her. McG and Amir noticed the second he pushed off taking a step towards her before he stopped.

Dalton wanted to go to her, but he also wanted to give her a chance to handle him. Jaz didn't need Dalton to fight her battles; it was enough that she knew he was there.

"Hello, daughter." Her dad sneered as he approached her from the fence line.

"Dad," Jaz said as she turned to face him.

"You look more like her every day. Though I never could take the fight out of your eye, not like your mother. She'd given up easy."

"Easy? Easy!" Jaz shouted as she took a step towards her dad. "Nothing about her life was easy. Nothing!"

"She didn't love you enough to stick around. She took the easy way out." He laughed.

"You made it impossible for her to love anything. She was an empty wrapper by the time I was in kindergarten. That wasn't her failing; it was yours. You destroyed her."
"I didn't put the drugs in her hand."

"You might as well have," Jaz growled as she took another step towards him.

He couldn't hear their conversation, but Dalton smiled as he watched her father take the tiniest step back, though he was still standing ready as he didn't trust the man.

"Dad, the drugs numbed her to the damage you inflicted with your words and your fists, but you were the real addict."

"I was no filthy addict you little bitch." He shouted as he took a step forward.

"Oh, you were, you just didn't know it. You were addicted to fear. Hers, and mine. It made you feel powerful and brave, and big, but I can see the man that you are now."

"Can you?" He sneered.

"I can. I see a sad, wasted little man who preyed on women and children. But, you failed to realize I was never your victim. I'm better than you; I rid the world of men scarier than you could ever be." She told him with a measured growl.

"Little girl, I bet I still haunt your dreams at night." He slurred as he lurched towards her.

Jaz stood her ground prepared to take whatever he thought he could dish out knowing she had the upper hand, but his punch never landed as Dalton held his fist in his like it was an apple he intended to crush.

"I don't think you want to do that sir," Amir said from a few steps away with a look of disgust.

"Who the fuck do you think you are, son?" Her father barked as he glared back at Dalton and back down at the hand he'd captured.

"Captain Adam Dalton, and one day, I will be your son, technically speaking. I do plan to marry your daughter, though I think your invite will be conveniently lost in the mail. But, right now, I'm the only thing stopping you from getting your ass handed to you by the woman standing right in front of you." Dalton said as he smiled at her.

"Phfft." Her father spat as he tried to wrest away from his grasp.

Dalton let go, and he landed at Jaz's feet in a heap, "Suit yourself."

Jaz reached down to help him up, and he slapped her hand away as he stumbled back to his knees.

"You know, it was so much more fun when you screamed. You used to scream for your mom as I watched that perfect baby soft skin bubble and bleed as tears stained your cheeks." Her father spat as he grabbed her knee knowing she felt it as he dug into the scar tissue that marred her skin.

"She was never going to save you!" He growled as he squeezed harder.

Dalton itched just to level this asshole, but when he looked at Jaz, she looked defiant, even amused, anything but scared.

"Dad, I'm not sure there was ever a day that you were a good man, somehow, I doubt it. But you lost all your power over me when I figured out that you wanted to hear me scream. You stole a lifetime from my mom, but you won't steal one more minute from me." She spat as she swept his leg out from under him causing him to face plant in the dirt before her.
She smiled down at him with a look of satisfaction before stepping over him and walking towards Dalton.

When her dad moved to get up, McG stood over him and said, "You may not know who your daughter grew up to be, but I can assure you that she is more than capable of making you scream now, and I'd be inclined to let her. So, stand down."

Amir just stood off to the side with a smile that told him he knew exactly what kind of man he was looking at. He'd seen many men who preyed on children, and every last one of them turned out to be a coward.

As they all started back down the hill towards the street, Jaz turned back and marched up to her dad stating with lethal clarity, "You preyed on women and children. Now, I prey on men just like you. I can't imagine women are beating your door down at this point, but if you so much as scratch another living thing, I swear to you there will be no place for you to hide, and you won't ever see me coming."

Dalton laughed as she jogged back down the hill and took up her spot with his arm around her shoulder. McG slung an arm around her from the other side, and Amir just bumped her fist as they walked back to the hotel in silence.

Jaz felt good. She'd finally confronted her dad, and while her boys had been there to back her up, they never stepped in to handle her dad for her.

Her message had been delivered. As far as she was concerned he could live the rest of his days looking over his shoulder because she'd meant every word.

If he turned his twisted ire on anyone else, she would find a way to make sure he wouldn't live long enough to regret it.

Chapter End Notes

Next update will be here, followed by Call me Joseph. Hopefully, both will come this weekend. I have a crazy week next week, so I'm not sure how many updates I'll be able to squeeze in before the weekend, so I thought I'd give you a heads up now.
For the record, I am changing the time of year to fit the story here...so consider it early fall-ish.

I'd planned to have this up over the weekend, but I changed my plan on what was actually going to go down and it got a lot more complicated. I'd planned on part of this plotline to come up later, but it just seemed to fit here so that was behind the delay.

I'm getting started on the next update for Call Me Joseph and hope that will be ready tomorrow or Wednesday depending on how much my RL cooperates.

A little NSFW, but it's a small portion of the chapter.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

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Have no fear for giving in
Have no fear for giving over
You'd better know that in the end
It's better to say too much
Than never say what you need to say again

Even if your hands are shaking
And your faith is broken
Even as the eyes are closing
Do it with a heart wide open

Say what you need to say

Say - John Mayer

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Dalton, Jaz, McG, and Amir walked all the way back to the hotel in relative quiet. Apart from the occasional comment.

"I always knew you were a bad ass Jazzy, but damn." McG joked as he mussed her hair and gave her a little side eye wondering if she was going to go all sniper ninja on him.

"Revenge looks good on you," Dalton whispered as he kissed her temple.

"Hey, hey. You're just in time." Andrew bellowed as he came flying out the front door like the devil himself was chasing him.

"Good to see some things don't change." Jaz laughed as he picked her up and squeezed her like she was his favorite childhood teddy bear.

If she had actual stuffing, she was certain a little puff was going to come out of her ear at any second.
"Breathing. Necessary..." Jaz said as she tapped out.

"I know, I know. I've got some lost time to make up for. Oh, and yes, I'm running late. I assume that's the lack of change you were referring to?" Andrew asked as he set her down again.

"Where are you off to?" Amir asked as he took in the bags in his hands.

"Greenmarket, I have to go pick up ingredients for tomorrow's Sunday brunch. And you guys just signed up for a field trip!" Andrew said as he clapped his hands and started to pull them along.

"More like pack mules," Jaz said as she rolled her eyes and fell in line beside him.

McGuire just smiled and followed along certain it was going to be worth the trip, and Amir was clearly thrilled to have another living, breathing human that loved the whole routine and artistry that came along with cooking.

Brunch was his personal favorite.

Dalton just wrapped his arm around Jaz and smiled as he watched Andrew weave his way securely into their core group. He could even see him sipping a scotch and happily wandering into Preach's Yoda-like ramblings.

It only made sense that the one person Jaz had hung onto from her childhood would fit almost seamlessly among them. Marco too, but they hadn't had a chance to get to know him yet really.

As they walked down an old brick road, Jaz started laughing, "Andrew and I used to wander down this street until the street lights came on pretending that we lived in one of these perfect brownstones. With a perfect family, dinner on the table at six every night, and a mom and dad that helped us with our homework at the dining room table afterward."

"Yes, and the chocolate lab that chased the mailman, and big family gatherings for the holidays." Andrew reminded.

"Andrew's parents weren't like mine, they were just absent," Jaz explained.

"Yeah, my parents loved me, they just loved their jobs more," he joked. "But, I had a safe place to sleep at night, and food in the fridge. I think that's why I learned to cook. Self-preservation."

"Are your parents still around?" Dalton wondered.

"No. Dad died in a car accident a few years ago. He was a psychologist. And Mom was a Cardio-Thoracic surgeon who worked herself to death before she was 60. Good people, not amazing parents, but I never wanted for anything. My dad actually had the idea to convert the old factory, a side project that would allow him to spend more time with his family. He was going to give up his practice finally. Anyway, he bought the building about three months before he died. I just wanted to open a restaurant, so I was going to sell it, and that's how Marco came back into my life."

"So, if you were going to sell it how did the two of you wind up converting it and owning a hotel and a restaurant?" Amir wondered aloud.

"Well, Marco came to look at it, and we started talking about growing up in the neighborhood, and he asked me what I'd planned to do with it. So, I told Marco about my dad's dream to have a really unique property with incredible views of the Brooklyn Bridge and the streets we all used to play on. I'd planned to use the money to buy a small space nearby, and convert it to a restaurant."
"But you didn't do that," McGuire stated as they walked through a bakery stall with dozens of freshly baked loaves of bread.

Andrew picked up a couple of different kinds of bread and held them up to Amir, "I'm thinking french toast, and maybe something a little savory for brunch tomorrow."

"Chaka Kahn!" McG said excitedly.

Amir just shook his head and laughed as he explained what McGuire was so excited about.

They left that section with a couple of bags full of bread for Andrew's French toast and Amir's Shakshuka. From there, they just followed along as they loaded their bags with fresh eggs, and farmer's cheeses, fruit, and a few other items as Andrew continued to tell his story.

"Anyway, Marco left, and I didn't hear from him for a few weeks until he called me out of the blue and asked me to meet him at the factory in the middle of the night. He's an architect, so he'd gone a little crazy and started drawing up all these elaborate ideas. By the time he reached out, he had these amazing plans and full-color renderings. He'd been looking at the factory for his firm's new architectural offices, but he'd shown up that night with plans for the hotel my dad had always dreamed of and the restaurant that I was looking to plan."

"So you didn't sell the old factory, you wound up with a business partner and fulfilled your dad's dream and your own," Dalton said with a big smile on his face.

"And you wound up married how?" Jaz asked as she smiled at her friend.

"Well, essentially Marco convinced me that I could make my dad's dream come true without giving up on my own dreams. Initially, he offered to help me see it through because he'd fallen in love with the building, but about halfway through the project he fell in love with the hotel, and I fell in love with him." Andrew said as he smiled at the memory.

"Luckily, that feeling was mutual. Next thing we knew, we were married and running this gorgeous boutique hotel that Marco dreamed up with one of the hottest restaurants on this side of the Brooklyn Bridge. He gave up being an architect to run the hotel, and I run the restaurant."

"Do you live nearby?" Amir asked.

"We built a penthouse on the back half of the rooftop deck, so it's private. Speaking of which, We'll have to head up there and gather some herbs, tomatoes, and peppers." Andrew added as he paid for all of their items and the group headed back to the restaurant to drop off all of their bags.

After they'd dropped the bags with his sous chef, Andrew took them up to the penthouse and gave them a quick tour. Then he led Amir out to the greenhouse that sat between their loft and the rooftop deck that was open to hotel guests.

Dalton walked over to the rail with Jaz tucked beneath his arms as they both leaned against the railing and stared out at the bridge.

"I'm glad we came back here, and I'm happy I got to meet Andrew. And Marco." He said as he rubbed his beard against her neck.

"I'm really glad you got to meet them." She hummed as she reached back and skimmed her fingers over his cheek before sifting through his beard.

Jaz felt like Dalton was someplace else. Even though he was right there, and her fingers could feel
the warmth of his skin, she shivered.

"Take me someplace that made you smile. Someplace where you were happy." Dalton said.

She looked into his eyes, but all she saw was a storm reflecting back.

"Adam, are you okay?" She whispered as she rubbed her thumbs over the shadows forming beneath his blue eyes.

He nodded before he leaned in and kissed her like he needed to siphon off every bit of her warmth. Something dark was licking at his skin, she could feel it.

"Marco, we're going to go for a walk. We'll catch up to you all later. I'll text you guys if we're going to be long. Okay?" Jaz said as she took Dalton's hand in hers and pulled him along until they reached the stairwell effectively avoiding the laughter that was filtering out onto the terrace from the greenhouse.

She could feel Marco watching them; she wasn't the only one who felt this storm cloud rolling in.

When they got to the far end of Prospect Park, Jaz led Dalton to the old carousel. She could still hear the music playing. It would close any day now for the winter, but she smiled as she heard the old chords swirling through the air.

"You wanted to go someplace that made me happy. This was one of my favorite places when I wanted to hide from the world."

Dalton lifted her onto a gorgeous lavender and gold carousel horse then leaned his forehead against her hip. She could feel his fingers as they pressed into her thigh on one side, and her hip on the other. He was clinging to her like she was a lifeline, drawing strength from her as he worked up to whatever he needed to share with her.

For now, they were basically alone on the carousel; it was just a little too cold for most parents who might ordinarily be out there with their kids.

"It's okay if you want to hide away from the world, just please, don't hide from me," Jaz told him.

"There's something I haven't told anyone, not even Preach, something I've kept buried for almost twenty years. I gave up so long ago; it just seemed like opening old wounds, so I locked it up tight. Then Hoffman..."

"Adam..." She said as she brushed her fingers through his hair in soft, sweeping motions.

"I had three sisters Jaz. Katherine died when I was sixteen; she was eleven, my dad picked them up from school drunk. She died on impact along with dear old dad. Emelie and Allie survived, but I never saw them again after I was sent to military school." Adam shared.

"Oh, Adam, I'm so sorry," Jaz said as she swung her leg back over the carousel horse so she could wrap them around his back.

"Patricia is the only other person that knows. She has been looking for them for the last 20 years. They'd be 25 and 26 this year, and they probably don't even remember they had a big brother. They were only four and five the last time I saw them."
"I'm glad you told me, you don't need to carry that weight by yourself anymore, but what brought this to the surface after all this time? I've never heard you mention them before?"

"Honestly? I'd given up on finding them a long time ago. Then Hoffman...Hoffman brought them up. I'd kind of passed it off at first, but it's been scratching and clawing at my brain for a while now. I can't help thinking that he knew something about them."

"Why do you say that?"

"Because he calculated everything. Hoffman planned every web he spun, every truth he told, and I just don't think it was a coincidence that he brought them up. He did it right before he drew the gun from his jacket, so he was using it to stall, but I just can't shake the idea that he could have used any number of tactics, why use my sister's."

"For whatever reason, watching you find and reconnect with Andrew and Marco just put a laser focus on this." He added. "They're out there somewhere; I need to find them. I need to know if Hoffman found them."

"You're right, and we should start digging around in his psyche. That seems like the place to start."

"I killed him, that's going to be a little harder to manage." Dalton reminded her.

"No, it's not. You aren't the only one that's been thinking there were other threads left hanging on Hoffman's grand plan. Trust me." She told him, Jaz knew exactly who could help them with that.

Dalton had turned over every rock he could think of if Jaz had another idea he wasn't about to turn it down.

"I do trust you. More than you could know."

"Come on, let's go home. We're going to figure this out. If Hoffman found them, we can, too. And I need you to put that worry out of your head, if he'd hurt them, you know he would have used that. Hoffman wasn't the kind of man that let leverage escape him." Jaz said as Dalton pulled her from the carousel horse and wrapped his arms around her.

"Yeah, hopefully, you're right." He said as he took her hand while they walked back toward the hotel.

It had started to drizzle an icy rain on the way back sending a chill-chasing over his spine. Dalton would never be sure if it were the rain itself or thoughts of Hoffman, but the effect was the same. Either way, it was unsettling.

Dalton was consumed with this nagging feeling that there was more to the puzzle Hoffman left behind, and he was worried his sisters somehow factored into that, but at the moment, he just needed to hold onto something positive.

Jaz was right; if Hoffman had some big bombshell to drop, he wouldn't have hesitated to use it to create maximum devastation or to buy himself time. Dalton needed to believe that because the alternative was more than he could handle.

For now, he just wanted to hold onto the warm feeling he got when he was with Jaz.

She was home, and while most of her memories hadn't been fond ones, it was nice to see her surrounded by the people that had given her a basis for love. He couldn't help thinking that Andrew
had allowed her to still see light in a world she'd known was full of darkness.

He'd kept her from succumbing to the sticky soulless tar her father had spilled over her life.

And Jaz was the lightning in a night sky that kept Dalton's world from being consumed by his own shadows.

She was the color in a world he'd once only viewed in black and white. Good, or evil.

Rules. Guidelines. Rigid control had always done the job before, but now, Dalton couldn't understand how either one of them had managed to stay away from the other for three years.

"I'm going to head upstairs and take a shower," Dalton told her as they neared the main entrance. "You coming?"

Jaz just smiled and took his hand as they headed for the elevator.

When Dalton walked into the empty duplex, he smiled as he picked Jaz up and carried her up to the loft depositing her on the bed. Jaz fired off a text as he walked into the bathroom to turn on the shower.

Need to ask you a favor.
I'll come find you before dinner.

I'm in the kitchen with Andrew. McG is having a drink with Marco. Come find me when you're ready; we won't come looking for you ;)

When Jaz heard the glass door close, she stood and shed her damp clothes before she joined Dalton in the shower. The warmth rolled over her almost instantly.

He was staring out at the overcast sky when she stepped in behind him and wrapped her arms around his waist rubbing her fingers over the ridges of his abs.

"If we ever build a house, we need to have a view and a shower that has this rain thing with PG-13 glass," Dalton said as he turned her and pressed her back to the glass.

"Better yet, let's just see if Marco will design it." Jaz offered with a laugh.

Jaz reached over to the dispenser on the wall and rubbed a bit of shampoo between her fingers before she carefully threaded them into Dalton's hair and scrubbed it gently into his scalp with a slow, massaging motion that she continued down through his neck and out over his shoulders earning her a deep groan.

Dalton just stood with his palms to the glass and his head hanging forward as he relaxed into her. Jaz pushed his stance wider so that she could reach further towards his shoulder blades. When that didn't allow her enough access, she slipped under his arm and stepped up behind him.

Jaz loved the way his corded muscles felt beneath her fingertips as she let them map his skin. From his broad shoulders and his biceps where he still had welts from her fingernails scoring his flesh, to the defined ridge that ran from his hips down into the deep v of his pelvis, and his ass. He had a really nice ass.

"Come here, baby." He whispered as he turned towards her and ran his fingers through her hair.
Dalton leaned in and brushed his lips against hers as his hands slipped over the slick skin of her lower back pulling her flush against him. He loved the way her damp skin slid against his suffusing him with her warmth even as he felt the chill of the glass at his back.

Jaz smiled as she reached up and swept his wet hair back with her fingers.

"I'm sure you're gonna hate this, but you really are beautiful," Jaz said as she traced his full lower lip with her finger before following with a kiss.

"I don't think anyone's ever called me beautiful." He laughed.

"Mmm. I think it's the eyes." Jaz laughed as she wrapped her arms around his neck.

She squealed when Dalton slipped his arms down her sides and swept her off her feet as her thighs were cradled in his arms and Jaz's eyes locked on his.

"Is there something you wanted?" She asked with a smile.

"Mmm, always," Dalton said as he palmed her ass and shifted so that there was no mistaking his desire for her. "You."

Jaz closed her eyes and leaned her head back as she slid down his length.

Dalton couldn't help the groan that fell from his lips as he watched her lean all the way back from him arching her back with her fingers anchored into his forearm and her heels dug into his ass.

Dalton wrapped his hands around her forearms as well, and suddenly they'd found this perfect leverage. He watched as beads of water cascaded over her skin towards her shoulders where her hair clung in heavy loops and whirls.

He never got tired of watching her; her lower lip trapped between her teeth as she studied the way his abs flexed with each thrust. Dalton could feel the burn in his thighs as they both worked towards an end they could feel building rapidly.

After a few minutes, Jaz finally let go of his arm and braced back to the low tile bench with her left hand changing the angle and giving Dalton one hell of a view as he anchored his free arm in the dip of her lower back.

"Uhhh, fuck. You look so good right now." He groaned as he watched the hair that had been clinging to her neck and shoulders start to slip free with the water streaming over her skin.

Dalton could see the ripple of exertion as her abdominal muscles flexed against each thrust of their hips. They were both going to be sore as hell in the morning, but right now, they were so close to coming they weren't feeling that dull ache in their muscles anymore.

Instead, Jaz and Dalton were consumed by the low pulsing waves of pleasure getting ready to crest.

"Hold onto my hips," She said in a breathless whisper.

Dalton did as she'd asked letting a deep groan mingle with the steam when her fingers slipped over her stomach until they landed against her clit.

"I hope that you're close because I'm dying here." He growled between gritted teeth.

His fingers held so tight he knew there would be marks on her skin come tomorrow.
"Y-yes. Come with me." She hummed as her back went rigid and her heels started to slip from his ass.

"Ffffuck." He groaned as he slammed his eyes shut and drove into her in short erratic bursts until he couldn't hold off a second longer.

Dalton swept his arms around her pulling her back up to his chest and turning so that her back was against the glass. Her cheeks were red in part because of the exertion that he was certain he wore on his skin as well, but part of it was the blood that had been rushing to her head for the last several minutes.

"You good?" He asked as he swept her hair back over her shoulders. "That was...exhausting."

"Yeah, that was a lot of work, but I'm not complaining. Plus, I can count that as my workout for the day." Jaz joked as she struggled to catch her breath.

"If it makes you feel any better, I feel like I just ran sprints and did about a thousand crunches."

Jaz let her feet slip back to the tile and went about washing her hair before the water started to cool. They definitely were not doing their part conserving water today, so it was a really good thing they weren't at the bunker.

Then again, this would have been over twenty minutes ago, or they'd have frostbite.

Dalton watched as the suds ran over her skin when she rinsed her hair. When she reached for the conditioner, Dalton stepped behind her and took over carefully smoothing it through her hair as she leaned into him.

"Mmmm, that feels good." She hummed as she shivered and twisted closer to him with goosebumps breaking over her skin.

Once he'd smoothed it all the way through the length of her hair, he anchored her hips to his and helped her lean back to rinse. Dalton was mesmerized by her kiss stung lips and the pink of her cheeks; he always loved the way she looked in the quiet moments after.

Once her hair was rinsed, Jaz shut off the water as Dalton wrapped her in a big fluffy robe that looked like it could swallow up her tiny frame. He grabbed a towel himself and dried off before following her out to the bedroom.

She was laying across the bed reading a text message with a smile.

"What's that for?" Dalton asked as he brushed his thumb over her lips.

"Mmm. Happy." She said.

Dalton crawled over her and laid his head on the pillow beside her with a towel still wrapped around his waist.

"I like happy on you." He said as he stretched before laying his head back on his arms.

Forty minutes later, Dalton and Jaz wandered into the restaurant with a faint glow of happiness surrounding them. Sure, there were a lot of things hanging over the pair, especially Dalton, but nothing seemed nearly as insurmountable when they tackled it together.
"Hey," Amir said as they waved him towards an open booth.

They wouldn't have too long as the doors would open in about an hour, but it was time the team knew what they did. McGuire joined them a few minutes later.

"What's going on? You two looked like you were having a serious talk when you left earlier." McG said.

"I need some help," Dalton said.

"Anything Top. You know that." McG responded with clear concern.

"I have been keeping a secret for most of my adult life, but Hoffman managed to unearth it, and now I'm a little concerned that there was a reason he did that."

"What is it?" Amir asked.

Amir didn't want to cause more concern, but he tended to agree. If there was one thing he was sure of, it was that Hoffman only revealed what served his own purposes. If he used this secret as leverage, it wasn't an accident.

"I have....had three sisters. The oldest, Katherine died in a drunk driving accident with my dad when I was 16, but the younger two survived and wound up in the system. When I turned 18, I tried to track them down, and eventually, Patricia got involved, but we've never managed to make any headway." Dalton shared.

"Top, how old would they be now?" Amir asked.

"They would be 25 and 26."

"And you think they're in Pennsylvania?" Amir questioned.

"No reason to think they aren't, but I suppose it's not out of the question."

"Don't take this the wrong way, I'm all for helping you reconnect with them...but what changed. If you haven't found them with Patricia's resources, what makes you think it'll yield different results now?" Amir wondered.

"I'm not, but Hoffman mentioned them that night..."

"And you think he knew something?" McG supplied.

Dalton just nodded.

"Let me look through everything we got from Hoffman. I have a couple of cell phones and a computer that Noah found when he linked one of Hoffman's identities back to a safe house in Amsterdam." Amir offered.

"Hannah is bringing them on Monday," McGuire added.

"I know I don't have to tell you this, but odds are if Hoffman thought they were worth mentioning, he knew something," Amir interjected.

"I know, that thought has been lingering since he first mentioned their names. For the longest time, I've wondered where they were, but at least I had the comfort of being able to believe they were safe someplace. Loved. But with Hoffman's interest, that delusion is a little bit harder to sell myself."
"I can understand that, but I think he would have owned it if he knew something that would skew your judgment or hurt you. If there were something for him to use, he would have used it. That doesn't mean he didn't know something, but maybe he just didn't have the time to leverage them." Amir said.

"No matter what we find, we're here for you," McG told him.

"I know, and that means a lot."

"Speaking of which," Jaz started. "We haven't really had a ton of time to talk about this with Hoffman and all of that, but I wanted to thank you guys for everything you did for me both before, and after Tehran."

"Jaz, leaving you behind was never an option, it wasn't even a discussion," Amir told her.

"I know that. I appreciate that, but I need all of you to understand that you guys are the first people in my life that fought for me. Put their lives on the line for me. Andrew always had my back, but he was just a kid, there was only so much he could have done, but you guys...for the first time in my life, I have a real family. I know that now." Jaz told them.

"It's like Patricia says, humans are tribal. When the tribe that we're born into fails us, we seek out another one." Dalton said. "Obviously, not all of our families have failed as mine did, or Jaz's, but still, your tribes got a little bigger."

"You know, I thought I was going to hate being on a team after only having to rely on myself for so long," Amir started. "Now, I don't know how I did it for so long. It's a lonely existence, and maybe that's what I thought I deserved after...I guess maybe I thought I would either stop the kinds of attacks that took my sister or die alone like she did trying to stop them. In a lot of ways, I think that pain of her loss made me almost covet a similar end."

"I know losing your sister will haunt you forever. I get that; there isn't a day that goes by when I don't think if I'd been at home my sisters wouldn't have been in that car with my dad. Or that I'd have been able to take care of my sisters when he died, but that's just not the hand life dealt either of us. We play with the cards we hold, we may never like the hand, but together, we might be able to stack the deck in our favor." Dalton said as he put his hand out on the table.

Amir put his hand over Dalton's and reiterated, "Together."

Jaz and McGuire followed suit.

They may not be tied together by blood, but their bond was forged in steel.

Chapter End Notes

Let me know what you think. Next up an update for Call Me Joseph and finally Abbie McGuire in person!!! Probably at least one chapter there, maybe two.

And we'll get into what Amir can dig up in the next couple of chapters here as well.
Okay, so I lied...I was planning to write the next chapter for Call Me Joseph, but that's clearly not what happened :) So, Call Me Joseph will be up in a few days.

This time I promise Mama McG will be in the house.

Until then, enjoy.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

There's a moment in this journey that I gave up
My boots just couldn't walk another mile
And that cloud above me had no silver lining
I couldn't buy a break with my last dime

Oh but when I saw you standing in the corner
I'd never thought that you would have my back
But then we rolled in like the thunder and the lightning
Threw some punches then we had a laugh

*Friends* - Blake Shelton

In years past, the team had always gone their separate ways once they'd tied a bow on their deployment for the DIA back in Washington. So, this was the first time any of them spent a significant amount of time together after their deployment was over.

If anyone had asked Dalton how he felt about that six months ago, he'd have shrugged it off. They loved each other, but they didn't need to spend any more time together than they already did.

How quickly things can change.

Dalton couldn't put his finger on any one incident, but there was no denying this last deployment had been horrific by anyone's standards.

They'd lost Elijah, added Amir, Dalton himself had suffered a significant head injury, Jaz was taken and suffered through days of torture, they'd lost Hossein, Patricia lost her son, and finally, Preach, and Patricia had been blown up.

But the real bun on this shit sandwich was Hoffman.

Hoffman kicked off their deployment with Elijah's death and finished it by taking a shot at Preach and Patricia. Hell, he'd very nearly taken Preach off the board entirely.

Maybe all of those hardships tightened the bond, or maybe they just needed to hold on a little tighter
knowing how close they'd come to losing one of their own.

Whatever the reason, none of them could bring themselves to retreat and lick their wounds in solitude. They were stronger together, and no one could really dispute that.

The DIA had only a handful of teams such as theirs, but none of them had racked up the kind of track record Dalton's team had. This team was the one you called when all hope was lost.

They made the impossible possible.

Dalton, McG, Jaz, and Amir didn't spend a lot of time trying to unravel the changes in the groups dynamic. Instead, they reveled in it.

Amir woke up early on Sunday morning and reported to the kitchen where he helped Andrew prepare one of his families favorite brunch traditions. He also learned the beautiful simplicity of a baked Nutella french toast with fresh strawberries and an assortment of other brunch favorites.

Once all the prep work was completed, Andrew and Amir excused themselves from the kitchen and let his staff run the show. It was a rarity, but Andrew wanted to spend a little more time with Jaz and her team before they left the following day.

"I've been trying to get Andrew to take a day off forever," Marco commented as they sat down together. "If I'd known all I needed to do was bring all of you around, I'd have done it ages ago."

"It's true, and I've tried, but it's almost impossible for me not to get behind the line and start cooking most days. But, today, all I want to do is spend time with this girl." Andrew said as he pointed towards Jaz. "Lord only knows how long it'll be before we can do this again."

"I promise, I'll try not to stay away as long next time." Jaz smiled as she wrapped an arm around his shoulder.

The group enjoyed easy conversation, good food, and a few laughs over the next two hours. Both Andrew and Marco fit seamlessly among them. Andrew was the kind of guy that bowled his way into your life with his effusive personality. Marco was quieter, but no less engaged as he shared stories of Jaz and Andrew as children that he had witnessed from afar.

Marco had grown up on the same street and known both Jaz and Andrew, but being three years older he'd always been just slightly removed from their day-to-day lives back then. But he still recalled Andrew and Jaz's first introduction, and how he'd probably fallen for Andrew that day as he watched him stand up for a little girl who had just lost her mother.

As they wrapped up brunch, the group decided to head up to the rooftop deck where Marco built a fire to combat the late fall chill in the air. Then, they sat around talking about future goals and where everyone thought they'd be in a few years.

"I don't know what I'll do once I retire. I've thought about operating a training program for combat medics, but sometimes I think that I won't be satisfied if I'm not helping people, so I've considered staying in the medical field as an EMT, or even going back to school and getting into emergency medicine. I'm not sure I know how to operate without being on the front lines with adrenaline flowing. But, an ER environment would certainly take care of some of that." McGuire said.

"I think I'm going to keep working with the military. Either I go to the other side of comms or get into training. Maybe both. I'm a lifer." Dalton shared.
His answer surprised no one.

"I used to think I'd stick in the military forever; it was a place where I fit in. Now, I'm not so sure." Jaz offered.

That surprised everyone.

"What do you see yourself doing?" Dalton asked.

"Find a special guy, maybe even start a family? Something like that. Maybe not tomorrow, but it's on the radar." She said as she winked and smiled at Dalton.

Dalton kissed her cheek and said, "Well, I think that sounds like a really good plan, but you know you'd also be a great asset in a training environment. There are a lot of women coming up who could benefit from a strong role model, hell there are a lot of men that could learn from you, too."

Jaz smiled, "I'm a ways from making that decision, but I wouldn't rule anything out."

"What about you Amir?" McG asked. "You ever give any thought to what you'll do when you hang it up?"

"I think I'd like to open a restaurant." He answered.

"If you do, and you need a partner, you better come knocking on my door first," Andrew said.

"Yeah? You think you might want to expand your business?" Amir asked.

"We've been talking about it for a while. Marco wants to expand the whole thing, maybe another hotel." Andrew shared.

"Maybe it's the architect in me, but when most people see a decrepit old shell, I see a world of possibilities. I'm just waiting for the right opportunity to arise." Marco added.

Dalton smiled as he listened, it was nice to know that his team was all looking towards the future. Just a year ago, he didn't think any of them had given it much thought, but now they were all envisioning some kind of future.

Perhaps they'd all taken a moment to reflect after Preach almost lost his life, or maybe it was just a natural progression, but they all knew they were taking huge risks everytime they went wheels up.

There would come a time when it would be someone else's turn to take those risks.

They talked for about another hour before the skies opened up on them. Everyone made a mad dash for the penthouse, but Jaz and Dalton who got soaked as they dropped the aluminum cover to smother the fire.

Andrew was laughing as he stared at Jaz with her shirt clinging to her skin and her hair plastered against her neck and cheeks.

"Ha ha." She growled as she went to wring out her hair over the sink in the kitchen.

Dalton just peeled his shirt off as Marco handed him a towel and Jaz just shook her head as she continued to shiver.

"Come on; I'll get you a sweatshirt." Andrew offered.
She followed him up the stairs to the bedroom and started to peel off her shirt without giving a
second thought until she heard Andrew gasp.

"Jaz, what the fuck?" He all but shouted as he stared in shock at the scars that littered her body.

"Oh, it's...It's not that big of a deal." She said as Dalton crossed the threshold into the room.

"Really? Because this looks like a big deal to me." He said as he waved at her torso.

"Andrew, you know that we're soldiers. With that comes a certain amount of risk." She stated
uncomfortably.

"I know that, but these aren't healed bullet wounds, these...they look like torture." He shouted as the
rest of the team came into the room.

"How could you let this happen to her?" Andrew growled as he turned on Dalton.

Dalton looked guilty as he stood by and let Andrew rail at him.

"He didn't let anything happen to me. It was my choice. And I was able to make that choice because
I trust my team 100%. I knew they would come for me, and they did. I'm here, I survived, and these
guys are the reason I stand here today." She told Andrew as she put her hand on his shoulder.

"What happened?" Andrew asked.

"I can't tell you that. I'm sorry. All I can tell you is that we made the world a little safer that day, and
if I had to make the same decision, I would do it again in a heartbeat." Jaz stated.

Andrew just stared at her as his fingers coasted over the burn that was visible at her shoulder and the
slew of raised pink lines that covered the bit of skin that was still on display as she held her wet shirt
to her chest.

The drip, drip, drip on the wood floor finally broke his trance-like state as he turned for the closet and
returned with a sweatshirt that she pulled on.

Later that night, after the group returned from dinner Andrew pulled Dalton off to the side and said,
"I need you to promise me that she comes back. I've always been there to protect her since the day
we met, and it kills me that she's been living in a world where I can no longer protect her. I'm putting
that on you now, and I know that you are up to the task."

"I would lay my own life down for her in a heartbeat. We all would, but make no mistake, Jaz
doesn't need protecting. Having said that, as long as I draw breath, I will do everything in my power
to make sure she comes home."

"Then we have an understanding. We lost track of each other for a little bit after Jaz left home, but
there hasn't been a day that goes by where I didn't think about her. Now that we've reconnected, I
don't even want to think about losing her again." Andrew stated solemnly.

"Then we're on the same page because I'm not letting her go. Period." Dalton said.

Andrew smiled and pulled Dalton in for a bear hug that he usually reserved for Jaz, "Well then, I
guess we're on the same team."

"We are. I love her, and I know you two are like family. And one day, I hope that you will accept
me as family because I do intend to make this a forever thing."

"I can see that. I can see that she loves you as well. That's really all I need to cement our friendship."
Andrew said with a smile.

With that, they rejoined the group for one last drink. Andrew hated the fact that they were leaving the following morning, but he knew that this time she would be back.

They all would.

Chapter End Notes

Call Me Joseph will be up next in a day or two.
It Will Rain

Chapter Notes

Let me first start by saying, they are in Montana if you are not reading Call Me Joseph. I know most of you are, but just in case. It has become impossible to keep the two completely separate, but for those who just don't want to ready CMJ, I am really trying to make it work so you don't have to.

Anywho, this might just be the most NSFW chapter I've ever written ANYWHERE...so, YOU HAVE BEEN WARNED

I think that's all I can really leave you with...

Enjoy.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

There's no religion that could save me
No matter how long my knees are on the floor
So keep in mind all the sacrifices I'm makin'
To keep you by my side
To keep you from walkin' out the door.

'Cause there'll be no sunlight
If I lose you, baby
There'll be no clear skies
If I lose you, baby
Just like the clouds
My eyes will do the same if you walk away
Everyday it'll rain, rain, ra-a-a-ain

It Will Rain - Bruno Mars

______

Dalton and Jaz spent a lot of time together with the team, even when they were lucky enough to stay in a hotel they still usually shared walls with at least one of their teammates.

It was fun, but they wanted a little bit of time just by themselves.

When they'd visited Montana in the past, they'd usually stayed in the little farmhouse with Abbie since the main house had been under construction. She had two guest rooms, so it had always been the best option.

McGuire always stayed in the barn loft back then. And since it was almost completely open, it wasn't exactly conducive to guests. Especially guests that weren't your significant other since it offered little in the way of privacy with its one lofted bedroom and a lone bath that was separated only by a barn door off that bedroom.

So, that was always how it worked out. McG in the loft, Jaz, and Dalton in Abbie's guest rooms so
that they had a modicum of privacy.

Though in fairness, even before Dalton and Jaz started seeing each other, there wasn't much that any of them hadn't caught a glimpse of at some stage. Whether in the bunker or in a safe house there just wasn't a lot of room for modesty.

It made him almost feel bad for Jaz, but she never seemed too fazed by it.

She certainly didn't walk around naked back before they were together, he was sure he'd have noticed that, but it wasn't like Jaz was having them hold up towels or hiding in corners. Still, it made them appreciate absolute privacy when they had it.

This time, things were different. The main house was finished, so McGuire and Hannah would stay there, and Amir had been situated in the guest room off the kitchen affording all parties in the house plenty of privacy.

Dalton and Jaz got the old barn all to themselves, too.

No shared walls, or teammates under the same roof and plenty of space for them to enjoy just being a couple, a luxury they just hadn't had to this point.

When they put their bags down, Abbie showed them the little kitchen which had been stocked with the basics like coffee, beer, milk, juice, fruit, and snacks.

The main house was fully stocked and only steps away so they'd all take meals there if they didn't go out.

Once Amir, Jaz, and Dalton got the grand tour Abbie took Amir over to the main house to show him the guest room where he'd be staying, and the two of them finally got a few minutes to themselves.

"Do you hear that?" Dalton asked.

"Hear what? The creek running behind the house? The breeze sifting through the tall grass?" Jaz asked as she tried to listen harder.

"The silence."

Jaz smiled.

"For the first time since we finally stopped denying ourselves of this love that's between us, we are utterly, and blissfully alone," Dalton told her.

"Mmmm, I do like the sound of silence," Jaz whispered as she stood on her tip toes and pressed her lips to his.

Sadly, all silences are eventually broken. This one was shattered by the sound of Abbie McGuire shrieking in pure joy and had them jogging into the main house a few seconds later. They met Amir in the kitchen as the trio followed the commotion out onto the porch.

Apparently, McGuire had found his moment and asked Hannah to marry him.

Dalton smiled, he knew this day was coming and he was thrilled for both of them. McGuire and Hannah were two of the best people he knew. Hannah had been through so much, and McG had insulated himself from ever getting emotionally attached, but when the two of them collided he filled in her cracks, and she lit his world on fire.
It had been fun to see them both give in and allow themselves to take the one thing they’d both convinced themselves they’d never have. Love.

It was a path Dalton had become intimately familiar with himself.

Jaz was thrilled as well. She and McGuire had a special relationship, and she'd always wanted him to find love. He was such a teddy bear, and she knew that he had been shortchanging himself, and some lucky girl of happiness as long as he'd continued on his quest to bed a woman in every city they visited.

In fairness, McGuire wasn't quite that bad, but Jaz knew that he had more to give than empty one night stands, and she had always been certain that there was someone out there who would make him believe that he was worthy of love.

Before Hannah, McGuire had been certain he'd repeat the mistakes of the men in his family. He'd thought himself unworthy of love.

But, Hannah had shown him that being vulnerable and putting your faith in the people you love is one of the purest joys in life.

Jaz knew that was true, she'd let down her walls for Dalton, and he had done the same for her. Sometimes, there were still half-walls to scale and moats in front of them, like when Adam went off after Hoffman, or when Jaz went rogue in Tehran, but they were finding their way.

It hadn't been easy, and in a lot of ways it was a struggle to watch Hannah and McG reach milestones they knew they weren't ready for yet, but it was worth it because Dalton and Jaz both knew together they would get there. They were determined.

Both couples had all the trappings of a home with each other. McG and Hannah's love was pretty and neat like picket fences, patios, and fresh coats of paint on an already strong foundation. Where Dalton and Jaz were the steel that held up the roof and walls, it wasn't always pretty but that steel was just as much a necessity as the pretty finishes.

Hannah and McG had a lot of obstacles, their road had been far from easy, but Dalton and Jaz had the added pressures of professional limitations and the stresses that Dalton's position put on them even if their relationship wasn't considered completely off limits.

But it was, and they were going to have to deal with that.

Soon.

Dalton and Jaz had talked about it, but they had yet to work on finding a solution that they could both live with. It rippled beneath the surface and hid in the background, but every now and again it would jump out from the shadows and bark at them like a rabid dog.

That's what happened later that night when they returned from dinner.

Their bond had yet to be really tested beyond Jaz's capture in Tehran, and it's aftermath, but that was about to change.

The thing with steel is that sometimes you have to burn it and bend it before you can make it stronger.
Dalton and Jaz were the last ones left sitting around the firepit after McG returned to Hannah, Abbie headed back to her house, and Amir ventured off to finish the book he'd started when they left New York.

Dalton looked over at Jaz shivering as a cool fall breeze licked over her. She'd been dressed in jeans and a sweater with a vest over it, but it wasn't enough to fight off the chill.

"Come here, I'll keep you warm," Dalton said as he rubbed a hand over his knee.

Jaz curled up in his lap with her head laid against his shoulder and just waited for him to press his lips to her forehead as his fingers slipped into her hair. It was reflex, but it always made her feel cherished when he did it.

"We don't get to do this often enough." He said as he rubbed her neck under the curtain of her hair.

"No, we should do something about that," Jaz responded.

"Yeah. We should."

"You know, even before everything was finished, this place was beautiful. But, McGuire has made quite a place for himself here. It makes me think he might be closer to being ready to move on to the next stage of his life than I thought." She said.

"Yeah, I think that the whole thing with Patricia and Hoffman kind of put things in perspective for him. Preach, too." Dalton offered.

"What about for you? Did that not affect your perspective? Because it did mine." She wondered.

It only took a second to realize he'd bristled at her questions.

"Of course it did. I know that we can't do this forever, and I know the longer we do it, the more it becomes a game of Russian roulette. Every time we go out there, I think about whether or not this is the mission where we don't all return. I've lost way too many people to think that isn't a very real possibility." He growled.

"We all know the risks we're taking Adam," Jaz replied.

"Yeah, you do, but that doesn't make me any less responsible. And you know what, this line that we crossed," Dalton said as he mimicked drawing a line in the sand. "That only makes it worse. Since we crossed it, I can't stop thinking about making that one bad decision that takes you away from me."

"Adam, I can't speak for you, but I had those same concerns for you long before you ever crawled into my bed to soothe me from a nightmare. I'm going to be honest with you, it didn't take waking up in your arms, or a first kiss, or an incredible night in Seville for me to worry about losing you. I knew exactly what you were to me long before any of that happened, the fact that I couldn't admit that to myself really made no difference. It still would have broken me if anything happened to you."

Jaz was just winding up, "And if you think for one second that I believe you would risk anyone because of how you feel for me, you are an idiot because deep down, I think you felt it long before you gave into it, too. So, I call bullshit; this isn't a new thing for you either."

"It wouldn't matter though, you feeling like this is inappropriate, but me acting on it is so much worse. My feelings for you put everyone at risk." He started to shout.
"We should probably take this behind closed doors; I don't want to burst the bubble that Hannah and McG are residing in and Amir is already caught in the crosshairs too much between all of us," Jaz said when she realized this wasn't going to wind down anytime soon.

She stood and tried to pull Dalton to his feet.

He sat rigid for a minute with a stern look on his face. He wasn't happy that she had turned the conversation in this direction because he wasn't ready to deal with it, but Jaz was done dancing around the subject.

Jaz squinted her eyes at him and said, "Since you're such an expert on reading women, I'm not going to say anything else. These little lady eyes shouldn't leave anything lost in translation." She whisper shouted as she jerked her hand away.

Jaz headed through the house to the loft shutting off the lights and the gas that fueled the fire pit leaving Dalton to stew under the clear inky black sky with only the stars to keep him company.

Dalton watched her as she went, he could see the rage rolling off of her in bright waves, and he knew he had two choices.

The wise choice would be to stay put and let her cool down; two hot heads did not always make for rational discussions, especially when it was their two heads.

Then there was the choice that he made, to pursue her with his own anger vibrating through his bloodstream.

When Dalton entered the loft, he carefully closed the door momentarily concealing his feelings. He'd wanted to slam it, but in spite of sharing so much with their team, they were both still intensely private. For now, this fight didn't need to be spilled in front of an audience.

Jaz stood in front of the fireplace as she tore her vest and sweater off dropping them on the floor and kicked her shoes aside. For whatever reason, the stark white t-shirt that remained tucked into her jeans just accentuated the harsh rise and fall of her rage, and it fueled his.

"Do you think it's been easy for me?" Dalton shouted as he stalked towards Jaz. "Do you think I enjoyed holding you back as you tried to run into a fucking chemical explosion to save your friend? As you screamed in unconsolable agony and cried for Elijah? Or that I don't blame myself every single day for letting him die on my watch? For depriving you of one of your closest friends? I carry that with me every day, and I think about it every time I look into your eyes. Tell me that didn't happen because of how I feel about you!"

This conversation had started because they needed to hash out their future, but somehow it had turned into Dalton needing to purge a burden she didn't even know he was carrying.

"Adam..."

"No, shut up for a minute. Just shut up and listen," Dalton growled as he pushed Jaz against the wall and blocked her from moving away from him with his arms caging her in.

Jaz wasn't afraid of him, for all the jokes she'd made about his perceptions, she could see right through him, too. What had started as pulsing hot rage had morphed into searing pain in the time it took him to go from the patio to the loft.
"Elijah never should have been out there by himself. I should have been with him. It's my job to make sure this team comes home in one piece, and I failed him. That doesn't sit well with me."

"But," Jaz started.

"No, I'm not finished." He growled. "I failed you, too. I deprived you of your best friend because I made a choice. A bad one at that. I let him go in there alone. And that...that haunts me."

"Adam..." Jaz started again only to be cut off.

"I'm not done." Dalton bellowed.

"I don't fucking care if you're done. I have something to say, and you're going to fucking listen to me even if I have to tie you down and gag that god damn pretty mouth of yours." She shouted.

Dalton gaped at her like a goldfish at feeding time, it might have made her laugh under different circumstances, but she was way too pissed off.

She was fuming.

Jaz put her hand in the middle of his chest and shoved him hard until he was standing with his back against the post that was anchored to the stairwell leading up to the bedroom.

"You know as well as I do that I was supposed to be with Elijah. I should have been standing right next to him, but instead, I was fucking arguing with you. Like always!" Jaz railed. "I wanted to go up onto the rooftop, and you wouldn't let me, so Elijah got fed up and walked into the line of fire all by himself. You are so fucking full of self-loathing that you can't even see the events clearly anymore." She shouted as she poked him in the chest with such ferocity that it almost knocked the wind out of him.

"I-I..." Dalton said as he ran the events through his head with a new clarity.

"Yeah, that's right. You had nothing to do with the stupid shit we get in to. Elijah was standing next to that bomb because he went off book. And I should have been standing next to him, but I wasn't because I didn't listen either. And there's something else that you clearly don't recall."

"What's that?" He growled as he grabbed her hand before she could poke a hole right through his chest.

That shit was starting to hurt.

"Where did I want to be?" She asked.

"The rooftop..." Dalton answered not sure where this was going.

"That's right, the fucking rooftop. The very one that Hoffman was sitting on. So you want to throw blame around, you can cast it at me." She screamed. "If I'd walked up on that roof, Elijah and I would both be dead, maybe everyone else too since I might have exposed him to you, or McG, or Preach from their vantage point."

"Yeah, well you're still here, not because I wouldn't let you go up to that rooftop, but because I wanted to keep arguing with you. I wanted you, but I couldn't have you. I craved you with every fiber of my being, and fighting with you was the only way I got to feel what it was like to let you under my skin. I couldn't fuck you, but I could sure as hell fight with you. How's that for leadership?" Dalton shouted.
Jaz looked like she wanted to hit him, but instead, she jumped into his arms and latched onto his mouth as teeth and tongues clashed. Her hands were anchored against his cheeks as she drove the kiss, and his were dug into her ass as he tried to pull her closer.

This wasn't about comfort or love.

This was a hot pulsing wound, and they were about to rip the scab right off.

Jaz ground her hips against him as he pushed off the pillar they'd been leaning against to set her on the dining room table. As soon as she was settled, he threw his jacket to the floor and yanked his shirt over his head.

Jaz was jerking his belt from his pants and tearing the button free when her eyes landed on his chest; his eyes followed her gaze to a deep purple bruise blooming on his right pec.

He'd expected her to hesitate upon seeing the bruise she'd created, but instead, his heart slammed against his chest wall as she sunk her teeth into the already angry purple mark.

"Fuck, Jaz." He growled as he literally tore her shirt trying to remove it from her body.

She sucked harder as her hands anchored themselves on either side of his fly and yanked breaking the lockjawed teeth of his zipper irreparably.

It was fucking hot.

A second later, Dalton found himself seated bare-assed on the dining room table as Jaz shoved him back sending her purse and a couple candles clattering to the floor shattering into shards of wax that bobbled across the tiles.

Before Dalton could think too much about the mess that would be waiting for them, her lips wrapped around the head of his cock and she sucked him all the way to the back of her throat tearing a pained groan from his.

"Ohhhhh, Fuuuuuuck." He bellowed as she swallowed around him making him jerk as her throat contracted around him.

Dalton reached for her several times before he finally managed to get a hold of one of her back pockets and used it to leverage her ass closer to him.

Fuck if he was going down alone at this point.

As she continued to work him over, he popped the button on her jeans and yanked the zipper down before he jerked them down to her knees along with her soaked thong and hefted her tiny frame into the air like she weighed nothing.

When Jaz landed, Dalton's head was between her knees, and his teeth were scraping over her dripping pussy as she moaned her approval over his cock making him jerk in her mouth.

Dalton was determined not to let go yet; he was intent on finishing this the way it started.

Face to face.

So, he played a little dirty as he sucked her clit hard and shoved two fingers deep inside of her pulling vigorously against that already engorged bundle of nerves.

The angle made it harder to get leverage, but it took him all of three minutes before she was forced to
relinquish her grip on his cock to scream out her orgasm, and another ten seconds for him to press her back to the table and slam his cock home.

She was still fluttering and clenching from her previous orgasm, so the force alone tore another one from her leaving him drenched as the first one dripped from his chin and the second...everywhere else.

"Ohhhhhh, fuck. Too...too much." Jaz cried as he continued to fuck her through the second orgasm.

"Never enough." He murmured as he leaned over her and rubbed his damp chin against her neck before he sunk his teeth into her pulse point tearing another little aftershock from her.

Tears were leaking from her eyes as the intensity started to overtake her, and Dalton slowed the motion of his hips to a slow roll as he kissed her gently and whispered, "Don't ever let anyone, not even me put this fire out. I love it. I love you. I love everything about you. But most of all, I love the way you fight with me, for me."

"For us. I'll always fight for us." Jaz whispered as she canted her hips up towards him drawing a shudder from Adam as he bottomed out inside of her.

Jaz felt like the ripples of aftershocks were never ending at that point, she couldn't seem to ever come down from one before another one started and she needed him to come. Her whole body was shaking, and she knew she was on the verge of going full-on supernova.

The problem was, so did he.

When his fingers ghosted over her clit, and his hips snapped forward then rolled over the nerves that were firing like faulty wiring she knew he wasn't going to let her down easy.

"No...Please, I c-can't. I can't." she cried as he repeated the move again.

Dalton pressed his arm to the table beside her as his fingers continued to work and his cock started to jerk with each ripple of pleasure she could no longer control.

"I want you to come so hard those candles won't be the only thing we'll be cleaning up in the morning." He growled as he continued to drive into her.

"Mmmmmm, I, oh fuck, Adam!!!" She screamed as everything went white and little stars littered her field of vision for a second.

Dalton lost his rhythm a second later as he came so hard that he could feel the muscles of his back spasm almost painfully.

"Fuck, oh fuck." He bellowed as his hips jerked violently against hers before he finally collapsed against her.

They were both breathing hard, sweating, and sore as shit, but fuck if it hadn't felt incredible.

When Dalton pulled out, they laughed, and Jaz put a voice to what they'd been thinking, "We can not let anyone eat at this table in front of us."

"Jazzy, I'm not sure I'll ever be able to sit at this table again without thinking about being buried inside of you and you screaming my name as you come on my cock." He told her.

Jaz just groaned.
"I can't think about that; I think I'm going to need to sit in an ice bath as it is."

"I could kiss it and make it better."

"You know, you've said that before, and it's some seriously flawed thinking because it always winds up with that fat cock slamming into me again anyway." She laughed.

"Yeah, but I still kiss it, and in the end, we both feel better."

"You're right, point for Adam." She said as she mimicked chalking one up on an imaginary score sheet. "Now, take me to bed so we can wrap up this apology tour the right way."

"As you wish," Dalton said as he climbed off the table and pulled her into his arms before carrying her up the stairs.

Once Dalton had her in the bed, he went to work soothing the ache between her legs.

He started by gently laving her clit with his tongue and rubbing her g-spot with excruciatingly soft strokes. It didn't take long before she was humming in pleasure as a tiny fluttering orgasm worked its way through her.

It wasn't earth-shattering on a physical level, but emotionally it was next level. Adam Dalton had just given her a straight up feel-gasm as he carefully brought her down from the savage fuckery that they'd unleashed on each other downstairs.

Both had their merits, but this one was like tattooing his name on her heart. Adam was leaving a permanent mark.

As the ripples started to abate, he turned to his back and settled her onto his cock helping her to just rotate her hips. Neither one of them thrusting or fighting for release, just reveling in the soft waves of pleasure that came more with the emotional connection than the physical one.

Adam stared into her expressive chocolate eyes and saw a love so pure that there was no need for mind reading to see it. He knew Jaz saw it reflected back at her.

This time when he came it felt like a sink that was slowly overflowing, there was barely anything left in the faucet, but it still felt amazing as his skin warmed and pleasure rubbed over his skin like a warm breath against your neck first thing in the morning.

By now, his heart had stopped trying to keep up with their make up session; it pulsed slow in his chest as he cradled her against him and they both drifted towards sleep.

Before Dalton finally gave in to sleep, Jaz whispered, "There are people above us that will see this, us as a liability. I know that, but I also know there isn't a team out there that is better than this one. They know that, too. I don't have all the answers, but I know that if we make decisions together, we can find a way through. But you can't shut me out; you can't carry these burdens alone. If you do, we will break."

"There is still so much we have to talk about. I know that, but I know that you're right. We will find a way, because this is worth fighting for. And if all the fights end like this one, I'm not going to complain about it."

Jaz laughed, "That was...Mmmm."
"I love you Jaz. More than anything in this world."

"I love you, too."

Chapter End Notes

Yeah, so that was fun...

Next up, we venture back to CMJ to meet Dani then we'll probably be right back here before the end of the weekend.
Neverland

Chapter Notes

As always, my plans are pretty fluid...I had intended to write a chapter for Call Me Joseph, but this is what came out.

So, you get two TLAS chapters in a row and this puts Dalton's sisters in play.

Enjoy

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

_____

In a place so far away
We'll be young, that's how we'll stay
Every wish is our command
When we find ourselves in Never, Neverland

Neverland - Zendaya

_____

The team spent the morning enjoying the cool, fall air as they hiked a trail behind McG’s property. They talked about Preach and his family, and the progress he was making and how much trouble Amir was in now that Abbie had set her sights on his personal life, and they talked about everyone's plans for the rest of their time off.

When they returned to the house, Hannah went upstairs and returned with her computer and a file folder.

"Dalton, I meant to talk to you about this yesterday, but...Sorry, Joseph mentioned your sisters, and Amir had mentioned that Hoffman might be connected, so I spent last weekend pulling together all the information I could find."

Dalton understood, yesterday had been a bit of a whirlwind for McG and Hannah, it was understandable that she was a little distracted.

"Listen, what I've been doing hasn't gotten me any closer to finding my sisters, so if more eyes can get me closer to getting some answers, I'm all for it. Thanks for doing this." Dalton said as he took the folder and set it on the kitchen table.

Jaz came over and sat beside him as he stared at the folder while the rest of the team joined them. Hannah started up her computer as well, and Dalton finally opened the folder.

On the top of a stack of papers were three photographs. One was old, and Dalton recognized it immediately.

It was of him and his three sisters when Adam was about twelve. That was his best guess because Katherine was holding his baby sister Emelie and he was holding Allie, both were still in diapers.
At that age, Dalton and Kat had practically been the sole caregivers for their baby sisters. Their mother had taken off, and their father was a worthless drunk, so they'd been the ones to feed them, change their diapers, rock them when they cried and read them stories at bedtime. Those were some of his most cherished memories of his childhood, of which he had very few.

McGuire watched as Dalton ran a finger over the faces he hadn't seen in decades.

They had to find them.

The second picture showed two blonde girls beside each other on a swing set. Dalton didn't recognize them. They were close to ten or eleven he guessed.

"Is this..." He asked.

"Emelie and Allie, I think so. Yes." Hannah answered. "We found an old foster care file, but it was a dead end."

"They were in foster care until they were that old?" He questioned.

The thought made his stomach turn. He knew that the foster care system wasn't always a great place, especially for two young girls. And the odds that they were ever adopted, or even kept together at that age seemed highly unlikely.

But, at least that picture seemed to indicate that Emelie and Allie had been at the very least fed and cared for and that they'd had each other up to that point. That didn't guarantee they were loved or treated with kindness though, and that stabbed at his gut.

Dalton got excited when he saw the next one; it was clearly a screenshot of an Instagram post, but Hannah was quick to shut it down, "The account has been shut down. I've been trying to track it, but it's been scrubbed. Surgically. Someone didn't want it found."

"Hoffman?" He asked.

"If I were placing bets, I'd say yes. Why else would someone want to wipe out the account of a twentysomething girl leaving no trace, but I suppose there could be another explanation?"

It was closer than he'd ever been. Dalton was sure that he was looking at pictures of his sisters. The Instagram post showed two women with pale blonde hair floating on a breeze outside of a house they recognized.

The house he'd grown up in. It had fresh paint and a new family, but he could still see the stains of his difficult childhood in the framework.

One of them was clutching a well-loved teddy bear that had once been his. He'd given it to Emelie one night long ago as she cried while their father went on one of his blistering drunken rages.

Dalton broke from that memory as Amir spoke, "I'm going to forward this stuff to Preach, he might be able to connect some dots."

"That's a good idea, and he's probably itching to do something by now, too," Hannah said.

"This is a longshot, but is the DIA still working with Verina? The girl from Turkey?" Dalton asked.

"Yes, she's been working with Noah to unravel the operation behind the submarine hack. Why?"

"Maybe nothing, but if she was an asset that Hoffman cultivated and manipulated, isn't there a
chance that she might know how he operated? Maybe she can unscramble some of the leads he buried." Dalton said.

"That's actually a good idea," Amir said. "I'm going to call Deputy Director Campbell and see if maybe I can sit down with her. She knows more about Hoffman's methods, and with what he told me, maybe we can start to sift through the relevant threads."

"Thanks, Amir," Dalton said.

His heart wasn't beating faster, but Dalton felt like it was beating harder against his chest.

His sisters had always been in the back of his mind. After years of fruitless searches, he'd packed them away in the deep recesses because it was the only way he could do his job. But now, he had hope.

Now that he had Jaz in his life, he wanted to set the rest of the pieces in place. Reuniting with his sisters finally seemed like a possibility, and he was willing to do anything to make that happen.

He didn't know how their lives had gone. Dalton now had reason to believe that they were together as adolescents and that they were together as adults. He didn't know whether they'd had each other in the time between, but it was comforting to know that at least they hadn't been as alone as he'd been.

And while Dalton knew they probably didn't remember him, he thought that they had to be looking. Why else would they be standing outside a house that they probably had no memory of holding a teddy bear that had once been his? A single cherished memento that they'd managed to keep all this time.

It was a connection, a link to him, and he couldn't help feeling a sense of optimism for the first time since his search started.

They didn't know where this would lead, and there was no guarantee that it would have a happy ending given Hoffman's possible involvement, but it was more than he'd had just an hour ago.

For now, that was enough.

Amir had sent the info to Preach and fired a few text messages back and forth before they finally got on the phone to discuss the information that Hannah had put together.

Preach was excited to dig in and work on something. Anything to take his mind off the therapy, and doctor's visits he had to endure.

It brought him a sense of normalcy and purpose.

Once Preach had been fully briefed, Amir dialed the Deputy Director.

"Good afternoon Hannah, what can I do for you?" She answered clearly having checked her caller ID.

Amir had made the call from Hannah's secured phone given the sensitivity of the conversation he'd intended to have.

"Deputy Director Campbell, it's actually Amir. Al-Raisani. How are you?" Amir asked awkwardly.

Patricia laughed at his formality; Amir was still trying to find his place among them.
"Hi, Amir. I'm doing well, but I'm guessing that's not why you're calling."

"No. I'm sure you're aware that Hannah has been looking into finding Top's sisters..."

"Yes, I asked that she and Noah take a fresh look once I'd been briefed on Hoffman's comments. In fact, we have some equipment en route from a safe house in Paris that Noah just located last night. We're hoping there might be more info in the cache found there."

"That's great. I have another idea." Amir said.

"You know what, we've been looking into this for years to no avail, so I am open to any ideas that might help us find them. Dalton deserves to know what happened to them, and hopefully reunite with them. So, please what's your idea?" Patricia asked.

"Hannah said Verina is still working with the DIA."

"She is. She's been a big help in unraveling the criminal organization behind the sub; they had several other moves in the works that would have compromised thousands of service members and put a lot of our military technology at risk." Patricia offered.

"Well, what if Verina and I, and maybe Noah sat down and went through Hoffman's stuff. He'd been communicating with her through back channels and manipulating her, what if he'd been doing the same thing with others? Maybe that could lead us to clues about Top's sisters, too." Amir said.

"Okay, I think perhaps that's an avenue worth exploring." Campbell agreed.

"I figure there was more to Hoffman using Dalton's sisters than just trying to get under his skin. He had a reason for every move he made, so maybe the answers are there. If he targeted Top's sisters maybe they had something he needed, like Verina." Amir told her.

"I agree, it's unlikely he brought them up in his final moments just to hurt Dalton, but what are the odds that they grew up with lives that ran parallel to a brother they never knew?" Patricia wondered aloud.

"Maybe they didn't. Maybe they are just two ordinary girls. But, what if they grew up with more knowledge of him than we thought?" Amir questioned. "The thing is, if they were trying to find him, it would likely be just as hard given his job. He's practically a ghost. Top doesn't own a home, he has no roots, and his work with the DIA is highly classified, so maybe that was enough to push them into a realm that exposed them to a guy like Hoffman."

"Okay, so maybe we need to broaden our search. I'll set something up with Verina and Noah when you get back to DC next week." Campbell said.

"Thank you."

"No, Thank you. I will see you next week." Campbell said before she disconnected the call.

When Amir returned to the group, Hannah and Jaz had left to pick up Abbie from her shift at the hospital and headed to the grocery store to prepare for the barbecue they'd planned with Abbie's co-workers and some of McGuire's friends growing up.

Amir was dreading it because he knew Abbie was corralling him into her brood and had clear plans to try and set him up with a friend of McG's who also happened to be a nurse. He honestly didn't know how he felt about that.
Instead of fighting it, Amir decided to just go with it.

He didn't get a lot of opportunities to meet new people in his line of work unless he counted the people that held guns to his head or tried to blow him up.

One thing they had all learned in the last couple of weeks was that life was precious and way too short.

"Preach says hi, and thanks for the diversion," Amir said as he sat back down at the table.

Dalton was still running his fingers over the picture of his sisters outside the house he'd grown up in with a wistful look in his eye.

"Yeah? I bet his wife is going to be thrilled." Dalton said with a smirk.

"Probably not, but he seemed pretty happy to help." Amir offered.

"And Campbell? Did you talk to her?"

"I did. She's going to help me set up some time with Noah and Verina, and we're going to take apart Hoffman's operations piece by piece if we have to. We're going to find them." Amir said solemnly as he put a hand on Dalton's shoulder.

"Yeah, I've spent so much time trying to pack away any hopes I had to find them, but for the first time, I feel like there's a shred of hope. So, thank you...both of you. All of you." Dalton said.

He was quiet for a minute as he glanced at the oldest photo.

"I never had much family in the traditional sense, but now, I have a chance at getting them back, and I have all of you. That's more than I had ever allowed myself to hope for since the day my dad died. It means a lot." Dalton shared.

"It's like Patricia says, humans are tribal. When the tribe that we're born into fails us, we seek out another one. All of our families had their shortcomings, especially your parents and Jaz's. Mine love me, but they can't show it, and they certainly don't love each other, though I'm not sure they ever did." Amir started.

"And I always had Abbie, but the rest of my familial relationships are strained or non-existent. And Preach, well he's the dad that none of us ever had. So, we all had our reasons to seek out deeper connections, and we have all been lucky enough to find each other. We were meant to be a team, but we're stronger than that. We're a family," McGuire finished.

Dalton just nodded as he looked at both men. They were his friends, the brothers he'd never had, and more than anything they were good men.

He felt lucky to have them, and once again he couldn't help thinking that Patricia had known exactly what she was doing when all of their files landed on his desk in the early stages of building this team, and after Elijah's death.

The more he thought about the future, and what he had with Jaz, the more Dalton was certain there wasn't a team without every one of them. Now, he just needed to find a way to convince the higher-ups of that or figure out another way to keep the team together.

He wasn't ready to retire, or get into training, but he knew now that the idea of working with another team wasn't going to work for him. It was this team or no team at all.
Dalton was more determined than ever to make that happen.

Chapter End Notes

Thoughts? This is going to be an ongoing storyline that involves the whole team even though they will be going their separate ways shortly while on Leave.

It is also going to deeply impact at least two team members going forward. But, don't be expecting this thread to tie up neatly in a chapter or two :)
This one has a bit of everything. Jaz and Dalton get some quiet time together, we get to check in with Preach and the team start to put plans in motion to find Dalton's sisters and help Dani with her problem.

Speaking of Dani, If you aren't reading Call Me Joseph you might be a bit confused. I would say maybe jump over and read the last few chapters there (I try to keep these as stand-alones, but that's proven almost impossible) if you don't want to do that here's the cliffnotes version. Dani is a childhood friend of McG's who is dealing with a violent ex. The team is working to eliminate the threat she and her daughter Evie are under from him.

Anyway, this one is safe for work in case you are wondering...

Dalton and Jaz rarely got to spend a lot of time lounging around in bed together. The fact was they often had work to do, or there were tons of people milling about in close proximity.

Dalton woke with the sun, but he carefully climbed from the bed and pulled the curtain across the big picture window when he realized that Jaz was still sound asleep. The loft was always a little colder than the main house since it was so open so he tried to add a log to the fireplace in the bedroom quietly.

Jaz shifted, and opened her eyes as she snuggled into the big down comforter before saying, "Come back to bed."

Dalton was all too happy to do as she asked.

He pulled off the long sleeve shirt he'd slept in the night before knowing that the fire and Jaz would offer plenty of warmth and crawled back into bed with her. When Adam cuddled up to her back, she tangled her bare legs with his rubbing her foot against his soft flannel sleep pants.
She sighed with contentment ready to fall back to sleep with him rubbing his fingers against her stomach just beneath the hem of her tank top.

"Do you think that they're together?" Adam asked quietly.

"Hmmm?"

"Emi and Allie." He stated.

"I hope so." Jaz offered.

"Do you think they know I'm looking for them? I hope they don't think that I just forgot about the two of them." Dalton said with sadness in his voice.

"I don't know, Adam. But, we're going to find them, and when we do, we'll make sure that they know you never stopped looking." Jaz said as she turned in his arms and stroked her fingers through his beard.

Dalton closed his eyes as Jaz rubbed her thumb over his lower lip and continued to rub her fingers through his beard. It made his skin prickle with goosebumps as he relaxed into her touch.

There was something about cool mountain air, a crackling fire, a big warm bed and this woman that had him sighing in pure satisfaction.

"I'm sorry I didn't tell you before." He whispered as he pressed his forehead to hers.

"About your sisters?" She asked.

"I lost hope so long ago, and I thought talking about them just kept that wound open and festering, so I buried it. But I know now that was only making harder. Keeping things from the team...from you, it makes things heavier." He told her.

"You need to let us help you. You need to let me help you." Jaz said as she kissed him softly.

"I know. I'm trying to get better at leaning on you, all of you, but I've been alone for so long that it's a work in progress." Dalton offered.

"You're not alone anymore," Jaz whispered as she pressed a kiss to his shoulder and pulled him into her, so his head was resting over her heart.

Dalton took a deep breath and listened to the slow rhythm of her heartbeat until they both fell back to sleep wrapped in each other's arms.

It was a little after nine that his phone was vibrating off the nightstand.

"Hello?" Dalton asked in a sleep-roughened voice.

"Sorry Top, I didn't think I'd be waking you." Preach said.

"No. It's no big deal. We just decided to take advantage of a morning with nothing on the schedule." He said.

"I feel you. If anyone deserves to check out and forget the world for a bit, it's you. Glad you're getting the opportunity to do that."

"How are you feeling? You get to start therapy yet?" Dalton asked.
"Yes, it feels good to be moving around on my own and regaining some of my independence again."

"I bet and you're feeling good?"

Preach laughed, "Well, I wouldn't quite say good yet, but I feel like I'm making progress, so I'm going to call that a win. Speaking of progress, I found a chat room where people go to try and locate loved ones lost in war zones. I spotted one of Hoffman's aliases interacting with a woman looking for a soldier. She was looking for you. I haven't been able to track her down using the handle because the account was deleted after the contact was made."

"Did Hoffman give her anything?" Dalton asked.

"Yes, he told her he could meet her in New York. I'm not sure if he ever did though. All contact stopped abruptly, and both of their accounts on the site were deleted from there. So I think they must have moved their contact to a more direct method. Email, or maybe even cell phone."

"That's scary. I don't like the idea of Hoffman having direct contact with my sisters. Could you find out where she was when she signed on to the chat room?" Dalton asked.

"No, but it sounded like she was in or near New York since he agreed to meet near there. She didn't mention having to travel to meet him. Amir should be able to get more when he gets back to DC, now that we have a general idea of where they might be maybe he'll be able to pinpoint a number on one of the phones we collected, or an email address from one of his accounts."

"Ughhh. Just enough to give hope but never enough to get answers." Dalton grumbled.

"It's something. More than we had yesterday anyway." Preach told him trying to stay positive. "Top, we are going to find them. They're out there, and they're looking for you. We will find them."

"Thanks Preach. I'm glad you're on the mend, and I really appreciate you taking the time to help us look for clues."

"Me, too, and I'm always happy to help you out. You're family."

"You're family to me, too," Dalton told him. "Oh, speaking of...Amir is going to reach out to you today probably. Seems we might have another little side gig for you to work on. Joseph's friend Dani has herself a little bit of a situation with some jack-off getting into her credit card accounts and re-routing paychecks. We're guessing he does it electronically. Not sure if there's anything you can do, but we're going to try and help her out."

"Have Amir get me her info, and I'll see what I can do. McG could have called me with that though, what gives?" Preach wondered.

"Abbie has been trying to hook Amir up with Dani. I'm not sure how he feels about Dani, but he sure has taken a liking to her daughter. Cute kid looks like a tiny little clone of her mom."

"Huh. Another one bites the dust? I bet that's gonna be like watching a slow-motion train wreck." Preach offered with a laugh.

"Yep. I'm not sure whether either one of them is ready to see what Abbie clearly thinks she sees, but Dani's little girl Evie sure has Amir wrapped around her little finger. He was standing in the creek behind McGuire's house last night with her on his shoulders for over a half hour, and I'm sure you can guess how cold that water must have been." Dalton shared.

Preach gave a boisterous laugh in response before he said, "I wish I could have been there to see
"Yeah, I wish you could be here period. We miss you. But, I'm really glad to hear you're doing better. Think you'll be ready when we re-deploy?" Dalton asked as Jaz finally started to wake up.

She stretched and yawned as she asked, "Preach?"

Dalton smiled and nodded.

"I'm not sure yet, Top. But you'll know as soon as I do."

"Sounds good. Don't rush it. I don't want you to come back until you're ready."

"I'll keep that in mind, my friend. I'll keep that in mind." Preach said.

Jaz waved at him to give her the phone.

"Hold on, Jaz wants to say hi," Dalton told him before handing the phone off.

"Hey Preach! How's the sun and the sand treating you?" Jaz asked.

"Can't complain. I've got the sun on my face right now and the ocean stretching out in front of me. Best medicine around." Preach told her.

"That and your family," Jaz said with a smile.

"Don't get me wrong, I love my family, but there is nothing relaxing about a house full of girls." Preach joked.

Jaz laughed and smiled as she said, "I bet."

"Listen, I'm going to let you go. It's time for my torture session with the physical therapist, but you enjoy your downtime." Preach told her.

"We will. Good to talk to you Preach."

"You too Jazzy. Tell Amir to call me."

"I'll pass on that message," Jaz told him as she hung up.

"He sounds good doesn't he?" Dalton asked.

"Yeah, he sounds like he's on the right track," Jaz said as she leaned into Dalton for a good morning kiss.

Dalton hummed in pleasure as he threaded his fingers through her hair and deepened the kiss turning her into his body anchoring her to him with a leg over hers. He knew he would never get tired of the quiet moments with Jaz.

After a few long minutes of languid kisses Dalton pulled back with a pained groan, "Mmmm, I want to stay right here for two more hours, but I'm pretty sure everyone is already waiting on us."

"Yeah, you're probably right. Think we have time for a shower?" Jaz said with a wink.

Dalton smiled at her as he stood and walked to the bathroom. She waited until she heard the click of the glass door before she joined him, a few more minutes wouldn't kill anyone.
When they finally walked into the kitchen, they found McG and Hannah having a quiet breakfast. It wasn't quite the scene they'd been expecting.

"Where is everyone else?" Jaz asked as she glanced around.

"Amir and Evie went to take breakfast to Dani a while ago, and Abbie just went to go check on them. Though I think that was code for getting Evie and leaving Amir and Dani alone." Hannah said with a laugh.

"Your mom is something else," Jaz said.

"Yeah, she is. She has this innate need to take care of everyone, and she's got it in her head that Amir is just the guy to put Dani's heart back together." McGuire told them.

"Well, that wouldn't be so bad for either of them, but something tells me she's not ready for that." Dalton offered.

"No, but someday she will be." Hannah shared.

Hannah knew where Dani's headspace was, she'd been there herself. There was no timeline when you were getting over abuse, for Hannah time stood still for months on end, and looking back she realized something significant, "I wasn't even close to ready to let another person in until I got closure. I'm not saying Morrissey has to die like Urzua, but he needs to be out of her life if she's going to start looking towards the future with Amir, or anyone else."

McG put an arm around her as he kissed her temple, he'd never really considered what had put her on the path towards him after 18 months of pushing men away, but it all started to make sense. They'd facilitated Urzua's death when they planted that bag of cash in his house for Ranier Boothe to find.

That was her closure.

McG couldn't help thinking that if they had gotten on that plane and let the chips fall without intervening when Boothe's man planned to kill Sofia after he'd pegged her as an informant that Hannah may not have been ready to move on from her experience. Sofia would have died, and Hannah might still be stuck in neutral afraid to let anyone close enough to see what Urzua had left behind.

It was funny how things worked sometimes.

For Dani, Dr. Morrissey was still a threat, and her daughter was going to be her only concern as long as there was someone out there that wanted to hurt her.

The good news was, Morrissey was no Urzua. He was essentially a coward who preyed on women and children, but he was about to learn how real men operated.

"We talked to Preach this morning," Dalton said.

"Yeah, how's he doing?" McGuire asked.

"He sounds good. He was sitting on his patio enjoying the sunrise and listening to the ocean, but I think he's itching for something else to think about." Dalton offered.
"I bet he's going crazy. Did he find anything on your sisters?" McG wondered.

"Yes and no. He found a chat room where families went looking for missing soldiers. He thinks he found an interaction with one of my sisters and Hoffman. Or at least someone using one of his known aliases." Dalton shared.

"Anything concrete?" Hannah asked.

"No. Unfortunately, it looks like the account was deleted after they made contact, but Hoffman tried to set up a meeting in New York, so they're probably in or around New York. And we know they're looking for me, that has to help somehow, right?" Dalton said.

"Hopefully that narrows the scope of the search then," McGuire said. "Did you happen to mention Dani's situation at all?"

"I did. Told him that Amir would probably be calling him to chase down some electronic breadcrumbs." Dalton offered.

Just then Abbie walked in the front door holding Evie and an empty tray. Evie was chattering away, but she looked like she'd been crying.

"Everything okay?" McGuire asked.

"I think so," Abbie said as she set Evie down in front of the TV and took the tray to the kitchen as she turned to Dalton and Jaz. "Did you two get breakfast?"

"Not yet, we were just catching up on everything," Jaz said.

"Well, there's pancakes and coffee." Abbie offered pulling the plate of pancakes warming in the oven.

"You didn't have to make breakfast," Dalton told her.

"Oh I didn't, I watched Amir make breakfast," Abbie said with a laugh.

Jaz and Dalton both laughed as they filled plates and mugs before settling down at the table across from Hannah and McG. They'd all figured out months ago that when Amir cooked you enjoyed it because the rest of them were pretty hopeless in the kitchen.

Abbie was actually a great cook. Unfortunately, that trait hadn't been passed on to her son.

"So, does anyone have an idea of how we can find this Morrissey character?" Dalton asked once he'd finished his breakfast.

"Nope, he supposedly took a job at a hospital in Seattle, but I'm not sure that's accurate." Abbie shared as she glanced towards Evie who was fully engrossed in an episode of Sesame Street. "I saw a bruise on Dani's wrist that she quickly covered and she looked a little shaken this morning."

"You think something happened recently?" Jaz asked.

"I do. The bruise was no more than a day or two old." Abbie answered.

"Sh...Shoot." Dalton said as he remembered the tiny ears within hearing distance.

"I'll make some calls this morning and see if I can't figure out what's going on in Seattle. Do you know which hospital?" McG asked.
"Seattle Pres I think, but I'll double check," Abbie said.

"When is Dani’s next shift?" Jaz Asked.

"Tomorrow, but I'm on at the same time, so I can take her. Or if you guys want an extra car, we can work that out too." Abbie offered.

"We'll figure that out. Let's just try and keep Dani from being alone in a situation where Morrissey can get to her until we figure out where this guy is." Dalton said.

A moment later the front door opened and Dani walked in with her head down looking like she'd rather be anywhere else until Amir stepped to her side and took her hand in his.

"We should talk," Amir said to the group.

"Hey, Evie, why don't we go down to the barn and feed the horses." Abbie offered.

"Mama s'okay?" The little girl asked.

"It's okay, go ahead," Dani told her.

Chapter End Notes

Next up we'll jump back over to CMJ where the team will be getting the whole story on Dani's problem and Amir catches up with Preach. :)

Work has been a little chaotic, but I'm going to try and get that chapter up by Wednesday at the latest if I can!
So, this was totally not my plan. I was working on a chapter to wrap up Amir's current storyline with Dani in Call Me Joseph, but then the show got canceled and it threw me for a bit of a loop. Now, I'm feeling a little nostalgic for the relationship as I hope that we still get to see more.

If you aren't screaming from the rooftops of your social media accounts to #ReDeployTheBrave etc I forgive you, now get to work!!! We need every voice. Hit up netflix, hulu, amazon studios, bbc america, TNT, AMC, Paramount network, USA, NBC, Fox, CW, and any other channel you can think of! Please

Anyway, here is what resulted from my emotional state over the shows cancellation. I hope that you enjoy it. I'm not done yet, but I'm not sure where I'm going yet either. But, I do have big plans for Amir and Dani (Call Me Joseph's next chapter), and of course Bora Bora (TLAS next chapter) and we'll get back to McG and Hannah as well.

Hope everyone is doing well and that we will get a season 2!!

XOXO

See the end of the chapter for more notes

If I close my eyes
Force to fake the smile
Will you promise?
Will you promise?

Stay with me through it all
Wish had more than years,
You know how to heal me
Stay with me through it all

Heal Me - Arctic Lake

Dani was home. Amir was finally starting to let go of some of the guilt and fear he'd been letting take over, and little Evie's relief was evident. Everyone had been concerned when Dani disappeared, but it hadn't really settled over Jaz or Dalton until they were alone in the loft.

Adam watched her as she moved into the kitchen with her shoulders hunched forward and her head hanging low with exhaustion. He followed her as she pulled a bottle of white wine from the fridge and started to fill two glasses waiting for her to turn around.

She'd only managed to fill one when she felt his presence hovering behind her and turned around. Jaz's expressive eyes looked haunted, and he knew that her focus was on what might have been. Jaz
still lived in a world of what if's and he knew that better than anyone.

"Hey, Dani's home and safe. Evie has her mom back, and everything is going to be alright." Adam whispered as he let his fingers slip beneath the curtain of her hair to curve around her neck pressing his lips to her forehead.

"But," Jaz started.

"Uh-uh. No. I'm not letting you delve into that scenario any further. Dani's safe. Morrissey is dead." Adam said as he pulled her into his arms.

"I know, but it's hard not to think..."

"That's where you're making a mistake. Stop thinking." He told her.

"I can't stop myself."

"I can," Dalton whispered as he carefully leaned in and gently slid his lips against hers.

He took a sip of her wine before he returned for another sip of her lips.

"Mmmm, I'll never get tired of the softness of your lips under mine." He hummed.

He could feel her lips curving into a smile beneath his as he pulled her a little closer.

"Come with me," Adam said as he pulled her to the overstuffed leather couch in front of the fire.

He sat down and carefully arranged Jaz in his lap so that he could continue kissing her fears away.

"I love you Jaz," He hummed as he pressed his lips to the thrumming pulse beneath her ear.

"Mmmmm," Jaz purred as she scraped her fingers through his beard that was scratching deliciously over her sensitized flesh. "I love the way your beard feels against my skin."

"I love looking at the pink tinge of your skin the next morning knowing how it came to be that pretty color." He answered as a smile formed against her soft skin.

Jaz turned so that she was facing him as she straddled him and pressed herself more firmly to him. His fingers immediately sought out that strip of skin between her pants and her sweater. It was warm and soft, and the tension she was still carrying was vibrating beneath the surface.

Jaz groaned as Adam's fingers sank into her lower back daring her muscles to relax. They obeyed as she sank further into him humming her approval and pressing her lips to his coaxing him into a languid kiss.

Dalton's hands slipped further under her sweater as he chased the tension all the way up beneath her shoulder blades. It was as far as he could reach without removing her sweater and bra, but this wasn't about sex.

It was about comfort.

Of course, sex wasn't far from either of their minds anytime Jaz swung a leg over his hips and settled in, but for now, this was what he needed. It was what she needed too.

Adam angled his head to deepen the kiss, but he stilled the second he tasted the salt of her tears and sat back to look at her.
His hands abandoned their original task as he swept the tears from her cheeks with his fingers and pressed his lips gently to her eyelids before he asked, "Jazzy, what's wrong?"

Jaz just shook her head as another tear spilled down her cheek. She wouldn't look at him, and he didn't like it one bit.

"Please look at me." Adam implored.

When she did, his heart wrenched in his chest. He could see the dark shadows of shame he thought they'd beaten months ago.

"She's going to have reminders of all of this for the rest of her life," Jaz mumbled as she stared at her hands which were resting on his stomach.

Adam knew where her head was going. He'd become very familiar with the look she wore currently.

"Scars are proof of life. None of us get through life without them, and they can be ugly reminders, but I happen to love your scars. And Evie isn't going to care about scars as long as her mama is here to tuck her in and give her a kiss goodnight." Adam shared. "But, if I could erase your scars, I would, but only because they cause you pain. To me, they are a beautiful reminder of how hard you fought to get back to me. To us."

Jaz looked up at him with watery eyes. She thought she'd gotten past this, but after seeing Dani all bruised and battered, Tehran came flooding back. She'd managed to tamp it down, but for some reason when the door to the loft closed and it was just Adam, the shame and fear just rolled over her like a strong tide.

"My heart knows that you don't see my failures in the marks that line my skin, but my head still hasn't caught up to that I guess," Jaz whispered.

"Jaz, I don't see failures at all. Never did. You fought, you survived, and you came home. We got the guy who went after a beach full of innocent children and our fellow servicemen. We got Jarif because of you. Only you. That. Is. Not. A. Failure."

"But I could've gotten you all..." Jaz started, but Adam's thumb against her lips stopped her from finishing her train of thought.

"No buts. We made a choice. We knew the risks, and we are all still breathing." Dalton told her.

"Hossein," Jaz said as a fresh wave of tears threatened clinging to her lashes.

"Whatever guilt you have is misplaced. Hossein took those risks willingly, and while he was looking to save you, he had a mission of his own, and you helped him accomplish that. He avenged his daughter's death, and he saved you from her fate. Hossein was my friend, and I saw him through that atrocity, I know he would have gladly chosen to give his life to spare you that again, even if he'd known it would end in his death. Besides, I have to believe that Hossein found peace and that he is reunited with his beloved daughter now because that is what he believed."

Jaz nodded, but he could see the pain shimmering in the mirrored pools of tears that still clung to her lashes.

"You still don't see it, but every day people are still breathing because of what you did. Young girls are spared torture they might have faced at Jarif's hands. Families are sitting at the dinner table enjoying each other's company because Jarif's reign of terror was cut short. No one else will suffer or die by his order because of you Jaz."
She stared at him as if he'd just translated some unknown text so that she could understand it for the first time and she finally let the tears fall. Only this time she didn't shatter, she felt a wave of relief.

Jaz kissed him like he was her salvation, and he was. This man was the air in her lungs, the blood in her veins, and the one that kept her tethered to her humanity. She knew that she did the same for him.

"I love you." Jaz hummed as she pressed her lips to his in a whisper of a kiss. "I never planned to love anyone, because everyone I've ever loved has broken me, but you put me back together."

"Who knew two broken people could make one whole," Adam said as he stood with her in his arms and made his way up to the bedroom.

Jaz could feel the warmth of his love spread over her as he dragged her sweater up her body and over her head. His eyes lingered on her torso as his fingers carefully traced each scar and whispered, "these scars were inflicted because you didn't give them what they wanted, but they bought us the time we needed to get to you. Every one of them translates into a moment we wouldn't have had were it not for your strength."

He pressed his lips to one of the scars just below her collarbone and said, "This one allowed you to be here for Dani."

Adam traced a scar over the top of her left breast with his knuckles and said, "This one allowed you to take that shot in Columbia."

He let his tongue trace another mark just above her belly button, "This one saved Verina."

Adam popped the button on her jeans and let his tongue caress one of the deeper scars, "This one, this one saved me."

Jaz looked down at him with a question in her eyes, and he didn't hesitate with an answer.

"Every one of these scars added up to the time we needed to get to you. You weren't there with us, so you couldn't see what McG did, or Preach, or Amir. I would have died that day if we'd been too late. I would have spent my last breath avenging your death. I would have burned Tehran to the ground with vengeance. My life is permanently linked to yours; I think it was from the moment I first met you. I didn't know what it was, but I knew I needed to know who you were. You were fierce, lethal and angry when we met, and you were prepared to hate me."

"I didn't hate you. I didn't think you'd be any different than any other CO I'd had, but I didn't hate you. I didn't think you would ever see me as anything other than a pretty girl with a gun. My whole career I'd been treated like sniper Barbie, so I tempered my expectations. It hurt less when people proved me right."

"Did I?"

"What?"

"Prove you right."

"No, you and this team are the exceptions. I've never once felt like anything less than an integral part of this team. And that's on you. You are all good men, but I've learned more often than not it's the example set from the top. I was wrong about you; you gave me every chance to prove myself."

"And you did." Adam finished as he pulled her jeans free and pressed a kiss to a scar just above her knee before crawling over her and pressing his lips to hers.
Adam made a motion with his hand for her to turn on her stomach, which she followed as he stood and pulled his shirt off before he was back on the bed with a knee on either side of her hips.

His fingers pinched her bra clasp open before he swept it to either side of her ribcage. Jaz sat up just enough to remove it and drop it to the floor before lying back down and resting her head on her arms. She hummed as Adam's warm callous roughened hands laid against her back before his thumbs pressed into her flesh and went to work unraveling the knots that had formed.

He started at her neck easing the tension that she held there before skimming his fingers over her shoulders and down to her shoulder blades. When he got to the pair of tiny dimples at her lower back, Jaz was boneless, and she'd finally released her fears and insecurities once again.

There was no doubt they'd pop up periodically, but Adam was happy to watch them fade for the moment, and he was prepared to chase them away again any time she needed him to.

"So beautiful," He said as traced his fingers up and down her back in whisper-soft strokes eliciting a shiver of pleasure from Jaz.

Her skin was soft and warm beneath his hands, and he could see a glimmer of pink rising as she turned beneath him and smiled as she reached up and ran her fingers over his beard before pulling him in for a kiss.

They made love as they both put some of their guilt and burdens to rest knowing that they were safe in each other's arms and that they could weather any storms yet to come their way.

The next morning, Adam pulled a card from his wallet and made a phone call to that jeweler in DC. He had known for a long time that Jaz was the woman he would marry and have a family with.

Their careers had been one of the reasons he hadn't put a ring on her finger, but after the last few days he realized that life was full of risk, theirs especially, and he wasn't about to waste one more minute worrying about what this relationship will mean for his career. He had options, and maybe that meant a big change, but there was only one change Adam was unwilling to make. That was his relationship with Jaz.

After he hung up the phone, he made a pot of coffee and headed out to the small patio off the loft facing the early morning sun. He set a mug on the table for Jaz beside the thermal coffee pot knowing she'd find him once she woke up.

Adam had been catching up on the news for about an hour when he felt Jaz wrap her arms around his neck.

"Good morning." She whispered as she kissed his cheek.

"Morning beautiful." He responded.

"Is that for me?" Jaz asked as she pointed towards the empty mug.

"Mmm-hmm," Adam hummed as he poured her a cup handing it to her as he pulled her into his lap.

"Mmmmm. Thank you." She said as she took her first sip.
Adam just smiled and watched her for a moment before he said, "I think I'd like to marry you. What do you think about that?"

Jaz swallowed hard and fanned her mouth after abruptly gulping down a mouthful of the hot liquid.

"I...Ummm. Are you asking me to marry you?" She asked.

"I am. I wanted to get you a beautiful ring, but then I decided that I couldn't wait. If we've learned nothing from Tehran, Hoffman, and even Dani’s situation it's that life is too short to put anything above how we feel about each other. As far as our careers go, we will find a way, or we will make a new way."

Jaz stared at him with a look of wonder before she finally responded, "We will, because I love you."

"But, will you marry me?" He asked again.

He'd never really thought about the possibility of her saying no, but given the relationship she'd witnessed between her parents, maybe she wouldn't want to get married.

"Nothing would make me happier." She whispered as she kissed him softly.

Adam smiled, and his heart leapt in his chest. He couldn't remember a time when he'd been happier in his life.

"I love you." He whispered as he pressed her hand over his heart and kissed her.

"I think I've been in love with you for almost three years." She said with a beautiful smile.

They enjoyed the moment and talked about their plans. Adam had already arranged a trip to Bora Bora, but he'd moved up their flights back to DC for the following day so that he could finally pick up the ring he'd been talking to the designer about since he'd visited with McG a few weeks back. He intended to do this the right way.

Sure, he'd already asked the question, but he had something else in mind, and he couldn't wait to get her alone.

For all the time they'd spent together, they were rarely, if ever truly alone.

That was all about to change.

Chapter End Notes

Hope you enjoyed the chapter. I'll be posting to CMJ next, then we'll head to the sun, sand and a little time alone for Jaz and Dalton.
Never Enough

Chapter Notes

Forty chapters! Freaking FORTY!!! And I thought this would be about 15, 17 tops. Now it is 40 chapters, (plus a spin off with another 19 chapters and over 200,000 words total). THIS IS CRAZY!

Anyway, This is kind of a fun chapter for me, because I threw in a bunch of easter eggs from bits and pieces of old chapters that I love.

The constellations from Seville chapter, Jaz's goodbye letter and a few others...can you find them all?

Also, do be sure to venture over to my Pinterest page...there are lots of goodies for this chapter in a section titled Bora Bora.


Enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Wanna drive in the night to the end of the end
And go over the edge
Wanna wake up with you and say baby let's do it all over again

Lips so good I forget my name
I swear I could give you everything

I don't need my love
You can take it, you can take it, take it
I don't need my heart
You can break it, you can break it, break it
I just can't get too much of you, baby
It's never, it's never enough, never enough
It's never enough, never enough

Never Enough - One Direction

Jaz and Dalton were sitting on a boat in the middle of the Pacific Ocean. The sun was shining as the warm salty air kissed their skin.

They'd stopped in DC for a couple of days and Jaz spent a lot of that time at Hannah's playing with her kittens and doing laundry while Dalton spent a lot of time at the DIA doing paperwork.
Though Jaz had her suspicions that something else was going on because he was being overly secretive and he vehemently protested her going with him saying he wanted her to forget about work for a while. Either way, they had ten days of sun, sand, and privacy ahead. So, she was more than happy to forget about everything else.

They'd spent a night in Tahiti after arriving from the states and woke up to have a leisurely breakfast before they set out to get ferried over to the island resort Adam had booked for the duration of the stay.

He'd been secretive about that as well.

Jaz had no idea what kind of place they'd be staying at. For all she knew, it could be a hut on a remote beach. Though the high-end resort wear the other guests on the boat were wearing seemed to contradict that theory.

"Are you going to tell me anything?" Jaz asked as he pressed her back against the railing and kissed her somewhat chastely given their audience.

"Nah. I want it to be a surprise which is why I need you to close your eyes," Dalton said as the resort came into view behind her.

"Oh come on, you're killing me," Jaz said as she closed her eyes.

Dalton smiled as they landed at the dock where he hefted her into his arms and stepped onto the walkway.

"Can I open them?" She asked.

"Not yet," Adam told her as he took the keys from an attendant who he'd spoken to that morning to arrange everything.

Adam carried her as he followed the man with their bags all the way to the end of the long walkway to a private villa suspended over the water. The man placed their luggage inside, and Adam gave him a generous tip before he walked over to the rail and set Jaz on her feet facing him.

"Now can I look?" She asked.

Adam laughed and said, "Yes."

She opened her eyes to his smiling face before he turned her toward the view behind her.

The water was crystal clear turquoise with gentle waves ebbing below their feet. She closed her eyes and imagined the sounds lulling them to sleep at night as the warm sea air surrounded them.

"It's beautiful." She hummed as she turned back to Adam.

"Sure is," He said as he stared at her.

Jaz coiled her arms around his neck and pressed her lips to his in a scorching kiss. The view was a sight to behold, but she would be happy if he were the only thing she saw this whole trip.

"Is this what you were being so secretive about?" Jaz asked.
"Maybe." Adam hedged.

It wasn't, but she didn't need to know that just yet. In fact, Adam had two things up his sleeve that Jaz didn't know a thing about. The first, he'd planned to take care of soon, the second would have to wait until the rest of the team was in the same place. Including Preach.

"Can we look around?" Jaz asked as she peeked over his shoulder.

"Sure, I'll follow you," Adam said as she ventured towards the little villa whose shade they'd been borrowing.

Jaz walked into the central living area with a big comfy looking couch and a TV off to the corner. There were fresh flowers everywhere and a fruit basket on the coffee table along with a bottle of champagne chilling.

"Would you like a glass?" Adam asked as he pulled the bottle from the ice.

"Mmmm, please." She hummed as she plucked a strawberry from the basket and took a bite.

He popped the cork carefully and poured her a glass before he kissed the strawberry juice from her lips and took a sip from his own glass.

"Mmmm is right." He stated as he watched her walk toward the bedroom with big vaulted ceilings, rich wood floors, massive sliders that opened to unobstructed ocean views and a king sized bed that he was dying to get her into.

Later.

Jaz had wandered into the bathroom to find a huge open shower with a rainwater faucet and a soaking tub for two. Adam intended to put those to good use as well.

On the other side of the villa, there was a small infinity pool that was shared between three villas. The hotel staff had informed him that none of the other villas were occupied until the end of their stay since their busy season had just ended.

Jaz wanted to go check out the main lobby and pool area, so they closed up and headed back down the walkway to the bustling main building. There they found a big pool beside a casual little lounge, a fitness center, and a spa.

Inside the main building, there were a couple of different types of restaurants, a gift shop and a desk where they could arrange day trips, or rent scuba gear and the like.

Of course, they were both sure they'd find plenty to do without even leaving the privacy of their little corner of paradise. Though he had made plans to enjoy some of the amenities with Jaz.

When they arrived back at their villa, there were two massage tables set up side by side and two older women waiting beside them.

"If you please," one of the women said with a heavy accent as she handed each of them robes.

They each disappeared into the villa to change and returned holding hands.
The women had stepped away to offer them privacy so they could get situated, and Adam stole a quick kiss while he helped Jaz get rid of her robe before settling the sheet over her then getting himself in order as well.

Jaz watched Adam for a while as any visible thread of tension seemed to drift away on the soft breeze, but eventually, she fell into her own state of bliss. Her eyes didn't open again until she felt a pair of strong hands moving more intimately than was appropriate for a resort employee.

The hands were also much more masculine, and familiar.

"Mmmm, I'm not sure my boyfriend would approve." Jaz teased.

"Oh, he approves," Adam said as his thumbs pressed into the little seam where her pert little ass met her thighs and laid a kiss right at the base of her spine.

The ladies were long gone, and so was the modesty towel. Jaz had no complaints about either of these developments. When she turned her head back toward him, it was clear that he had no complaints either.

"Do you know how badly I've wanted to have you all to myself?" Adam asked.

"I have an idea," Jaz answered as she took in the privacy of their little villa.

The sun was starting to settle against the water, so they wandered over to the infinity pool with the rest of the champagne from earlier. It was a bit flat now, but neither of them could be bothered to care.

The water was cool against their warm skin as they rested their arms against the infinity edge and watched the sun collide with the ocean side by side.

"This is perfect, thank you," Jaz said as she laid her head on his shoulder.

"Perfect," Adam reiterated as he turned and kissed the top of her head, only he wasn't talking about the sunset or the resort; he was talking about the gorgeous woman lounging beside him.

After the sun settled Jaz and Dalton headed into the villa for a quick shower, they'd decided to venture down to the little Italian restaurant in the main building.

Adam turned on the shower and waited for the steam to billow around the room before he led Jaz under the open air spray.

"Did I mention that there's not a single soul in any of the surrounding villas?" He asked her.

"No, but I figured we had to be fairly isolated since you didn't object to watching the sunset in that pool naked." She said with a laugh.

"True, I'm open to a lot of things, but voyeurism probably isn't one of them." Adam joked as he let his hands slide down her back until he could lift her into his arms.
Jaz gave up a shivering little sigh as her body came into contact with his and she wrapped her legs around his perfectly toned ass.

"God, I will never get tired of that view," she said as she caught a glimpse of it in the mirror behind him.

"Mmmhmm," he hummed as he focused on her. "I might need a little something to take the edge off before dinner."

Jaz reached a hand between them and squeezed, "Little isn't what this brings to mind."

"Uhhh," Adam groaned as she squeezed again and he leaned back against the one wall the shower had to keep from falling.

They'd been avoiding sex since they'd left Montana. It wasn't so much a planned thing as scheduling had gotten in the way. In DC, they'd had dinner with Patricia, and caught up with Noah, and Dalton had to do a little groveling to the higher-ups to explain the situation they'd gotten into in Bozeman with Dani.

He'd also spent quite a few hours on a particular project.

"Damn, I don't know whether to taste you or fuck the shit out of you," Adam growled as she ground her pelvis against him.

"Mmmm, do I get a vote?"

"Always."

"Then fuck me. I need it fast and hard." She moaned as he quickly flipped their position and slammed into her the second her back touched the tile.

"Oh, yeah." He groaned as he felt her pulsing around him already.

Jaz dragged her nails up from his lower back leaving marks in their wake as she met him thrust for thrust, "Fuck, harder! I want to feel every inch of you."

"Oh, oh fuck. You feel so good wrapped around my cock baby. You know what's even better?" He asked.

"What?" She hummed as she grazed her teeth over the cords of his neck.

"There's not a soul around to hear us, and if they do, we'll never see them again."

Jaz leaned back so she could look at him as she bit her lip, "Oh yes, I like the sound of that."

"I like every sound you make. The louder...The better." He said as he punctuated his words with his hips.

Jaz let her head fall back on a deep guttural groan as he ground his cock deep inside of her. She loved it when he did that, it made her legs shake and caused the warm rise of goosebumps to break over her skin.
"Yes, just like that. Mmmm." She cried as he did it again.

Adam knew her body so well that he played her like a fine instrument, he could make her come in minutes with minimal effort, but he always gave her his all.

"I want to feel you clamp down on my cock when I make you come, and I want to hear you scream my name." He growled as he slipped two fingers over her clit and started to rub in tight circles.

"Ohhhhh, Fuck yessss!" Jaz cried as she tilted her pelvis toward him allowing him to slip even deeper. "Yes, right.....mmmmm....ohhh, fuck....ADAM!"

"That's it. Come for me." He bellowed as he slammed home hard and felt her shatter.

He was right behind her as he came so hard his knees buckled and they slid to the floor.

Jaz laughed as the water splashed against their skin, "Fuck that was so good."

"With you, it's always good." Adam declared as he turned and gave her a stunningly hot kiss.

It was so scorching, she thought they might be headed for round two, but he stood and shut off the water instead.

"If we don't get going, we're going to miss our reservation, and I can't have that."

"I bet I could incentivize room service." Jaz hummed as she let her fingers creep up his inner thigh.

"I'm positive you could, but I've got big plans for you later, and you're going to need a little sustenance. If we stay here, that'll never happen." He laughed.

Jaz knew he was right about the food, and she was sure whatever he had up his sleeve would be well worth the wait.

Adam dressed in the bedroom while Jaz got ready in the bathroom. When she came out he whistled low, she looked absolutely gorgeous with her dark hair pinned up, smoky eyes and red lipstick that made him want to change his mind about room service. But, it was the skintight red dress and strappy sandals dangling from her fingers that made him want to show her off.

Damn, she looked hot.

"You might be a little overdressed Jazzy."

"I'm not dressing for the resort, I have an audience of one," She said as she spun around to give him the whole view.

"Well, my head won't be the only one turning, only you could look so incredibly sexy while being entirely covered up."

"You look pretty handsome yourself soldier."
And he was, Dalton was wearing a pair of sharply creased navy blue dress pants and a crisp white shirt with several buttons open and that big stainless steel watch that she loved for whatever reason. He looked absolutely beautiful while still looking like the guy she loved with his well-trimmed beard and Ray-Bans at the ready.

"I get to take this home tonight," Jaz said as she walked around him while running her fingers over his shoulders, and down his arm before grazing her finger over the waistband of his pants.

"Listen red, you're about two minutes away from that pretty dress in a pile on the floor." He joked as she gave him a pout.

"Alright, I suppose you should wine me and dine me before I give up what I have on underneath," Jaz said as she sauntered down the walkway still carrying her heels in her hand.

They spent the night listening to old Italian love songs, sipping on wine, enjoying fresh lobster and asparagus risotto. Jaz wanted to share a dessert, but Adam made it known that it was not a part of the plan even though she'd been eyeing the tiramisu from the table beside them.

"I've already got dessert taken care of." He laughed.

Jaz made a face, but all was forgiven when he stood and held a hand out to her.

Once they'd made it outside the restaurant, she reached for her heels, but Adam stooped down and took care of them for her. When he stood up, he took her hand, and they walked back slowly with her heels dangling from his fingers the entire way.

"You see that woman over there?" Jaz asked as she twisted her arm through his and threaded their fingers back together.

"Mmmhmm," Adam hummed as he rubbed his thumb over her knuckles.

"I think her ovaries exploded when you stooped down and removed my shoes like my very own personal prince charming."

"Well, I hope she's got someone to take care of that because I'm only interested in making one woman explode." He answered as he squeezed her fingers.

"Damn, I wish we didn't have an audience right now," Jaz stated as she glanced around.

"And what would you do if we didn't?" Adam asked.

Jaz kept walking until all eyes were off in the distance before she hopped up onto the rail and pulled him in between her legs, "Kiss you like I wanted to consume you...just like this..."

With that Jaz slanted her lips over his and tangled her fingers in his hair. She sipped at his lips until he gave her his tongue, from there it didn't take long before he had his hands anchored at her hips while he rocked against her center. If anyone was within earshot, there was no question where this was going to lead.
"Mmmmmm, God I need you more than I need air," Adam whispered as he pulled away. "But, I still have something else up my sleeve."

"Adam, I don't need all of this. I just need you," Jaz hummed as she tried to pull him in again.

"And I promise, you will have me. Just let me finish what I started."

"If you must," Jaz said as she hopped down and wrapped her arm through his once more.

When they got back to the villa, there were strings of twinkling lights all across the patio with a single balloon tied to the railing down at the far end over a little two top table set with a compact little arrangement of anemones and that tiramisu Jaz had been eyeing.

"You know what?" She asked.

"Hmm," Adam responded.

"I don't think love is a strong enough word for the way I feel about you," Jaz told him.

"I'm on the same page with you there Jazzy," Adam said as he pulled her to his side and released the balloon.

A moment later, fireworks burst into the air. They weren't the bright and colorful ones, only the swirly little white ones that cracked and whistled as they fell to the shimmering surface of the water. It was in that moment that Jaz knew they were for her alone and not some part of a nightly ritual.

"Did you?" She asked as she turned toward him, only he wasn't there. He was down on one knee with a shiny red box in his hand and a stunning, but nervous smile on his beautiful face.

"I already said yes," Jaz exclaimed as she dropped to her knees in front of him with tears in her eyes.

"I know, but you deserve every bit of the ceremony," Adam said as he kissed her before popping open the lid to reveal a simple ring with four graduated diamonds set into the band.

It wasn't big, or flashy at first glance, but it was unique and absolutely stunning.

"I will do anything to be your everything for as many days as I draw breath. Marry me?" He asked.

"Yes! Of course, yes!" Jaz said as she threw her arms around him and crushed her mouth to his.

"I think I'm the luckiest man on this island tonight," Adam said as he slipped the ring onto her finger.

"Mmmm, I don't know that couple by the pool looked like they were about to have some sexy times."

"Jazzy, I think you and I have cornered the market on sexy times, and I bet they don't even come close to our stamina."

"Let them have their sprint, I'll take a marathon with you any time." Jaz cooed as she sucked his lower lip between hers.
Adam picked up the box with the tiramisu and carried it into the villa setting it in the mini fridge. He'd promised his girl dessert, and she'd damn well have it.

Later.

Jaz was standing stock still staring at the crisp white linens with one envelope sitting in the middle of the bed with her name scrawled in his handwriting.

She dragged a finger over it before she picked it up and said, "What's this?"

"It's a letter I wrote to you in Tehran. Right after I read yours." He said around a knot that formed in his throat anytime he thought about that experience.

"I...I don't want to read this now." Jaz said sounding equally choked up.

"You don't have to, but I think you should," Adam told her as he pressed the most gentle kiss to her temple.

Jaz rubbed her thumb over the flap several times before she finally slipped it free, Adam's heart was racing as he remembered putting pen to paper. When he wrote it, he thought she might never hear him say the words. That their future had been snuffed out like a candle in a rainstorm.

Jaz took a deep breath as she pulled the pages from the envelope. Adam paced for a second before he finally said, "I need you to read this, but I'm not sure I can stand here while you do. Could you come find me when you're finished?" He was as he swiped at a tear that slipped through his last defenses.

Jaz squeezed his hand and nodded. She could see then how much he'd feared losing her, and all her trepidation fluttered away. But they were together, so this letter wasn't about pain, it was about celebrating the love that saved them both.

---

Jaz,

I will never accept losing you, the words simply don't translate. My world does not turn without you in it.

I don't think it ever really did.

I didn't have nice things growing up, nor did I have many people that cared whether I lived or died (at least none that I could find), so I never wrote one of these letters. I never had anyone worth saying goodbye to, and now...I just plain refuse to say goodbye to you.

The day I met you, it was like pulling the curtains on the most beautiful sunrise.

I didn't know that you would be the single great love of my life, but I knew my life
would be better with you in it. I guess maybe that means I did judge you like everyone else the first time I met you, but I promise it never overshadowed the skills that have made you such a vital part of this team.

In our world, there are only two options for anyone that finds themselves in the field of battle with you, fear you or fight beside you. I will always fight beside you.

Always.

I fell in love with a woman that is courageous, yet soft. Smart, but not too serious. Most of all you are a woman who refused to take my shit, or anyone else's for that matter, and I have no doubt in this line of work there were a lot of men who have treated you like a second, hell maybe even a third class citizen.

You could've complained about them, but you never did. Not to me, nor anyone else. You just stepped up and did your job even while standing on ground that wasn't level.

I knew that the ground that you stood on was never going to be level, and maybe that's why it took me a while to admit that you were far more than just a soldier, or a teammate to me. But, the first time I heard that sexy, throaty laugh, my skin warmed, and I knew I would do anything to hear it again.

Today it is all I can think about.

I refuse to believe I've heard it for the last time, because the woman I know never quits, and I know you won't quit on me now.

As long as we are under the same stars, breathing the same air, I won't give up. Like Vega and Altair, not even a river of stars could keep me from you.

There is only one road I plan to travel, with the one great love of my life. My days off will be spent by your side, and any children in my future will have your big expressive brown eyes, and that smile that can light up a cloudy day.

Maybe they'll even be little ninjas like their mom.

I will love you to the ends of this earth and with every last breath of air in my lungs. You are the goal post, the finish line, and the only way this ends is when we are both old and gray with your hand wrapped in mine as we take our last breath.

I will not write you a goodbye letter, but someday I will stand before God and anyone who will listen and promise to love you and cherish you through any storm. I will give you anything (a home, children, my last name, a lifetime of pleasure, and a reason to laugh often) and you will always be my everything.

But, I will never say goodbye, only I love you, and I will see you soon.

Adam
Jaz knew he would see the tears that had tracked her skin, but she didn't care as she quietly made her way out under the moonlight to wrap her arms around the only man that ever made her feel whole. She could remember vividly the events of that day when he would have read the letter, and the one thing she held onto that whole time was him. And now she knew with certainty that he'd held onto her in much the same way.

"I'd marry you tomorrow if I could," Jaz whispered as she kissed him under the stars.

"Well, I'd marry you tomorrow too, but I'm not ready to give up this alone time just yet." Adam responded. "Besides, Preach isn't really allowed to travel until next week."

Chapter End Notes

Bet you thought McG and Hannah would be the first to get married didn't you...

Also, the ring and her dress can be found on my pinterest page.

I hope you enjoyed this chapter and all the call backs to earlier chapters.

XOXO
There's Nothing Holding Me Back

Chapter Notes

N.S.F.W.

You've been warned.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

I wanna follow where she goes
I think about her, and she knows it
I wanna let her take control
'Cause every time that she gets close, yeah

She pulls me in enough to keep me guessing
And maybe I should stop and start confessing
Confessing, yeah

Oh, I've been shaking
I love it when you go crazy
You take all my inhibitions
Baby, there's nothing holding me back
You take me places that tear up my reputation
Manipulate my decisions
Baby, there's nothing holding me back

There's Nothing Holding Me Back - Shawn Mendes

Dalton and Jaz curled up on the hammock suspended over the gently rocking tide below as they kissed and shared a bit of the emotion they'd held back after Tehran. The letter brought it all tumbling to the surface.

Their fingers and legs tangled as they stared into each other's souls, for the first time all the barriers they'd spent a lifetime building up had crumbled to dust.

"When I read your letter, I couldn't breath. My heart felt like it had stopped in my chest and all of the air around me felt polluted, toxic." Adam told her.

"That's how I felt when I saw you in that garage. I could feel the pain and the guilt radiating off of you even from that distance, and all I could think was that there was nothing they could have done to me that would measure up to the pain of watching that distance grow and wondering if I'd ever see you again." Jaz shared. "Nothing could have ever hurt me more than that."

"After." Adam started getting choked up again. "After I read it, I just stared at the wall in front of me for what felt like hours. In reality, it had been minutes maybe, but it felt like an eternity. That's when I sat down and wrote the letter. I had no idea if you'd ever hold it in your hands, but I had to believe
you would. I knew if I gave myself one second to think you were lost to me that I'd never get you back. So, I made you a promise, and I put it in writing."

"And it was beautiful," Jaz said as she leaned into him for a kiss.

"I almost gave it to you in the hospital, but I was afraid it would stir up dust on memories you weren't ready to explore. Then, I thought I'd waited too long. But, since that night when you crawled into bed with me in the hospital, I've read both of those letters over and over again. You probably noticed the edges were well worn and more than a few tears have been shed on that page." Adam said with just a hint of a laugh.

"I did. And I'm sure that I added a few tears of my own." Jaz offered.

"I noticed."

"Maybe it's morbid, but those letters are two of my most cherished possessions." 

"And now they are ours, but what about me?" Jaz said as she smiled at him.

"I don't want to possess you; I just want to love you."

Jaz just stared at him. Adam really was perfection in her eyes.

He was open and honest with her, and he worked hard to understand her even when they didn't agree, which was often. But most of all he loved her, and he was no longer afraid to let anyone see. That was going to pose a problem when they had to get back to work, but for now, she planned to enjoy the freedom Bora Bora had given them to share and explore their feelings without an audience.

And there was no denying he looked gorgeous with the soft glow of the lights under the water's surface. He always looked gorgeous, but there was something about a relaxed and happy Adam Dalton that just did things to her.

Delicious things.

"So, we had the wine, and a fabulous dinner...and you, well you are full of surprises, but I believe you have a little something to unwrap too," Jaz said as she turned so that he could ease her zipper down.

"Mmmmmhmmm, and I've been dying to see what's underneath this pretty dress all night." He said as the fabric parted revealing Jaz's baby soft skin.

When the zipper could go no further, Adam swept the fabric over her shoulders to find that Jaz had been seated across from him the entire night covered up with this stunning red dress that left so much to the imagination all while knowing she didn't have a stitch of clothing underneath.

If he'd known that, they would never have left their room in the first place.

Adam's shirt was already on the deck beside the hammock, and while the hammock certainly didn't make removing her dress a simple task, they'd managed to do so without either of them landing in the ocean below.

Once her dress had been discarded beside his shirt, Adam settled her between his legs so she could
steal some of his warmth. Her breathing was slow and relaxed as Adam let his fingers trail up and down her back before he finally released her hair. He loved the way it felt like cool silk against his skin as her head rested over his heart.

Jaz was practically purring as she listened to the steady cadence of the beats beneath her ear. But Adam had other ideas.

"Kiss me," He whispered as he pulled her up into his embrace.

Jaz obliged expecting a sweet little peck that led to something more explosive, but what she got was entirely unexpected.

Adam fluttered soft little kisses to her lips that had no urgency to them; it was as if he'd intended to spend hours memorizing the feel of her lips, the little noises she made, her taste.

He held her face gently as his fingers mapped out the softness of her skin. They feathered lightly over her eyelids as her lashes brushed her cheeks, and finally, they threaded into her hair so they could rub soothing circles against her scalp that had her skin warming even as a cool breeze floated in off the water.

The kisses were unhurried, languid, and thorough. Jaz could feel each one down to her toes as Adam used his chin to coax her mouth open and took over.

Jaz wanted more, but this still felt like everything. Her senses were flooded with Adam, his smell, the feel of his calloused hands and the roughness of his beard, the softness of his lips and the way he tastes on her lips. She felt like one of the fireworks bursting in the sky with all the joy and wonder that they brought as the crackled and whistled their way down to crystal blue waters below.

Jaz felt like she could melt into the water herself.

She and Adam had shared a lot of kisses in the past few months. First kisses, angry kisses, hot kisses, healing kisses, but this was all of those and so much more.

Her skin was alive as her nerves sizzled beneath the surface like electrical currents reaching out to complete a circuit, Adam was the other half of that circuit.

And finally, Finally, he gave in. The moment Adam's tongue met hers, there was no controlling the fire between them. It consumed everything in its wake demanding all of the oxygen between them.

Jaz scraped her fingers through his beard as they deepened the kiss absorbing Adam's deep pleasured groan and letting it fuel her as she pulled him over her. The Hammock swung gently as they repositioned, but it was well anchored to the deck, so it remained stable.

Adam settled into the cradle of her hips, but his belt caused Jaz to yelp as the cold metal buckle touched her skin.

"Maybe we should take this inside," Adam suggested.

Jaz blinked up at him through the haze of lust and love and nodded her agreement. Words had left her the moment his lips pressed against hers.

They carefully made their way back onto the deck where Adam swept Jaz into his arms and carried
her to their bed. He left her for a moment to light a few candles while she listened to the ebb and retreat of the tide as it whispered in the darkness beneath their villa.

When Adam returned, he slipped the belt from the loops on his pants, then he released the button and slid the zipper down as her eyes were transfixed by every move. He smiled when her eyes landed back on his, and her heart fluttered wildly just like it did the first time Adam looked at her like that.

Like he wanted to drown in the depths of her soul.

It was right before the very first time he'd kissed her. Only this time, there was no hesitation. There were no questions, just pure, unbridled passion swirling in his ocean blue eyes and it was focused solely on her.

"Come to bed," She whispered as she pulled the covers back.

Adam shifted his pants and boxers to the floor and crawled in after her like a jungle cat stalking prey stopping as his fingers slid carelessly up her thighs landing on her hips. Adam raised her up as though she were weightless watching her eyes the whole time and said, "I told you dessert was on the menu."

A moment later his lips closed over her inner thigh and worked a lazy path towards her center as he let his teeth and tongue ramp up her need. By the time he pressed his tongue to her clit, she was shaking with desire, but again Adam seemed to be in no hurry.

He was revving the engine, but he had yet to take it out of neutral. It was both incredible and frustrating at the same time.

Jaz made a pained whimper that sounded somewhere between pleasure and frustration.

"Tell me what you want beautiful" Adam whispered his breath caressed her hipbone.

"I...I want...need...anything...everything." Jaz mumbled as she tried her hardest to get the contact she needed.

Adam smiled against her flesh as he slid two fingers inside and pressed hard against her g-spot but continued to move in agonizingly slow strokes.

"Damn it, Top," Jaz grumbled, but he could see the amusement in her eyes and the fact that she'd used his nickname was telling as well.

He was teasing her within an inch of her life, and she loved it regardless of what she said. She knew no matter how long he made her wait, Adam would take care of her.

"I will never get tired of watching that pink rise on your skin the closer you get to coming apart. It's like watching watercolors spill on the most beautiful canvas." Adam said before dragged his teeth over that cord at the top of her inner thigh that made her hum in approval.

Jaz closed her eyes and bit her lip as she shifted under him still trying to force him to move a little faster.

"I'm so close, please," Jaz whined.
She actually whined.

"I know baby. Hold on just a little bit longer. I promise it'll be worth it." He said as he pressed a little harder.

He could feel her legs shake against his cheek with every circle of his fingers, every drag of his teeth, every swipe of his tongue, so he added a third finger and started to work her a little faster as he finally sucked her clit into his mouth with just enough force to make her breathing stutter.

He could have made her come twenty minutes ago, but he wanted her dripping with desire and ready to shatter beneath him. Adam didn't want easy tonight; he wanted to give her everything he had.

Then he wanted to do it all over again buried deep inside her.

He loved the dreamy look Jaz had right before he pushed her over the edge. He didn't get to see it that often because more often than not they were in a hurry, or under cover of darkness due to their general close proximity to the team. In fact, the last time he had the chance to take his time and enjoy all the little sighs, and shudders was their first time in Seville.

Only then, he didn't know what to watch for; now he knew her body as well as he knew his own.

"Can I make you come now?" He asked with a laugh.

"Can you....wha...YES! God, yes." Jaz shouted.

He didn't even let her finish that thought before he gave her the full force of his tongue, lips and even his beard. Jaz was screaming his name in seconds as she clamped down like a vice on his fingers.

"God, I love how sweet you taste when you come." Adam hummed as he made sure he didn't miss a drop.

Jaz shuddered as he gently brought her down.

After a few minutes, Jaz took a deep breath and let it out before saying, "You know, you were not my first, or my only lover but I am so damn lucky that you'll be my last."

"Why's that?" Adam asked.

"Because there's not a chance in hell anyone would ever outrank you in the bedroom Adam," Jaz informed him.

"I aim to please."

"Well, your aim is true Top."

Adam smiled, he loved it when she called him Top, though it was sometimes a bit inconvenient in the field since it was never a good thing to be thinking about sex under the hail of gunfire.

Once Jaz's breathing returned to normal, he knew she'd be looking to return the favor, but he was already walking a razor thin line and watching those pretty red lips wrap around his cock was a sure fire way to put an end to their celebration quickly.
Adam wasn't sure he'd fare much better with what he had in mind, but at least he wouldn't have the visual of those lips on him and those big brown eyes staring up at him. At least his way he could take her with him one more time.

"Come here baby," Adam said as he turned to his side and pulled her thigh over his hip sliding all the way inside with a sigh of contentment.

Her walls were still fluttering from her orgasm making his skin prickle intensely as he tried to tamp down his own need that was quickly starting to take over.

"Oh Adam, so good," She hummed as he started to move his hips in a slow easy rhythm.

He let his hands travel up and down her thigh as the other eased into her hair while he settled in for a deep searing kiss. Jaz's fingers were anchored at the nape of his neck controlling the kiss before long as she purred contentedly. She was no longer racing to the finish, but Adam knew that would only last for so long.

About eight minutes give or take.

That's how long it took for Jaz to push Adam to his back and settle over him with a glint of mischief in her eyes.

"I'm all for slow and seductive, but I think it's my turn to take care of you now," Jaz growled as she rotated her hips before grinding down on his cock.

Adam's eyes fell shut on a moan as Jaz repeated the motion, but he couldn't keep his eyes off of her for long.

"Fuck you look so good," He said as he cradled her hips in his hands and helped her move over him in a slow rotation that had a cool sheen of sweat breaking over his skin.

Jaz scraped her nails over his abs as she worked her way up until her hands rested against his chest. She could feel his heart pounding in his chest, but it was the look of complete adoration in his beautiful blue eyes that had her chasing her next breath.

"When you look at me like that, mmmm, it makes it hard to breathe."

"Like you are the most beautiful thing I've ever seen?" He asked.

"Yes."

"Jazzy, you are. Not just right now. Always. Even when you have dirt in your hair, and blood on your cheek, you are stunning."

Jaz sighed at his admission as she swept her hair back over her shoulders letting her hands glide back down over her body seductively. Adam followed them all the way as her left hand covered his at her hip, and the right found it's way to her clit.

"Fuck baby, I need you to touch yourself." He growled as he started to drive his hips up into her.

"I'm right there with you babe, get there, and I'll follow you," She whispered as she rubbed tight little circles against her clit.
"Yeah, just like that," He groaned as he drove up to her as hard as their position would allow.

Jaz leaned forward to give him a little more leverage as she ran her free hand up to his bicep to support her weight, "Fuck yes, ohhhh, I'm almost there."

Adam could feel her nails dig into his arm as she tried her hardest to wait him out, and it worked until he leaned up and closed his lips around her nipple sucking hard.

"Ohhhhhhh, ohhh fuck Adam." She wailed as she gave up the fight.

Adam managed to hold off until she'd ridden out her orgasm before he spilled inside of her as her walls continued to flutter around him. Nothing had ever felt better.

"Uhhhhh, fuck," he moaned as he fell back against the pillows pulling her with him.

Jaz kissed him softly as she curled into his side and whispered, "Mine."

He smiled and whispered, "Yours," as the sounds of a gentle tide and a warm breeze carried them off to sleep.

Chapter End Notes

Time to catch up with Hannah and McG. They've had to put their lives on the back burner for a bit so they're in need of a little time to reconnect don't you think?

Call Me Joseph is up next.
What A Wonderful World

Chapter Notes

So, I mentioned that this chapter was big in the notes on Call Me Joe and it required getting the timelines in sync again.

You're about to find out why.

I hope that you enjoy this one!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

I see skies of blue and clouds of white
The bright blessed day, the dark sacred night
And I think to myself what a wonderful world

The colors of the rainbow so pretty in the sky
Are also on the faces of people going by
I see friends shaking hands saying how do you do
They're really saying I love you

What A Wonderful World - Louis Armstrong

Jaz woke up to a cup of coffee and an orchid on the pillow beside her. Dalton had been gone each of the last three mornings when she’d woken up.

Something was going on. He’d been evasive all week about what he was up to, and she knew he was up to something. She figured it had to do with his plans for the team and he just wasn’t ready to tell her that he was going to have to walk away. Though she wasn’t sure what the big deal was.

She hated the idea of going back to Turkey without him, and she hated even more thinking about him on a different team without all of them to watch his six, but she knew he was struggling with how to deal with their relationship and that he would do literally anything to make sure it didn’t impact her career.

Jaz loved him even a little bit more for that.

Still she wished he’d talk to her about it.
Dalton was hoping to be back before Jaz woke up, but when he got back to their bungalow he heard her splashing around in the water below their deck. It was crystal clear and he could see a school of fish fluttering this way and that below the surface, but the sight that had him mesmerized was that of the most beautiful girl swirling around like a mermaid while staring back at him with the sun kissing her skin.

“You look all sweaty, I think you should come down and swim with me.” Jaz said as she spread her arms behind her and floated on the surface.

Adam stripped off his shirt and kicked off his shoes with the intention of doing just that.

He swam to her side and dug his toes into the sand beneath him in the shallow water as he pulled her into his side and swooped in for a kiss that made it impossible to mistake how much he missed her.

“I was planning to crawl back into bed with you when I got back, but this will do.” He hummed as he pressed a gentle kiss to her breastbone.

“Where did you run off to?” Jaz wondered.

“I couldn’t sleep, so I decided to take a run around the island.”

“With your phone?”

“Yeah, I was listening to music.”

Jaz smiled. She knew that wasn’t true because she’d had his earbuds in her ears not twenty minutes ago when she was sunbathing on the deck, but she let it slide. She knew he’d tell her what was going on when he was ready, and that he’d never make an important career decision that impacted her without talking to her first. She trusted in that completely.

“Any plans for the day?” She wondered.

“Well, that’s kind of what I’ve been getting up to actually. I do have plans…we do. Tonight.”

“Mmmm, do tell.” She said with her most seductive smile.

Jaz could see the flush painting his skin, “I was kind of hoping that you’d have dinner with me on the beach tonight.”

“Oh course I will.” Jaz laughed, she wasn’t sure why he was so nervous, but then she considered that he might be ready to talk about the team.

Maybe he was finally ready to talk about it.

That made her nervous, but she knew that no matter what the decision wound up being they would face it together.

After they lounged around in the ocean for a few hours the two of them made their way back out onto the deck. Dalton sprawled out in the sun and Jaz kept going, “I’m gonna go in and rinse all this salt water out of my hair. You coming?”
“Not yet. I’m going to make a phone call.” Adam said with a smile.

Dalton watched her go enjoying the view.

When Jaz walked into the bathroom, she noticed a gauzy gray dress hanging in the doorway of the closet with a note.

_For the prettiest woman on the island, the prettiest dress. Meet me at the beach at 7pm._

_Love, Adam_

Sitting on the chair beside the door was a little blue box and a single white peony.

“No.” Jaz said as she picked up the box.

Her hands shook as she lifted the lid to reveal a pair of drop pearl earrings.

“Whoa.” Jaz said as she set it back down and smiled.

Her heart was going about a thousand miles a minute after that.

Jaz decided to slip into a warm bath instead of the shower which turned out to be a wise decision as she heard the sliding door open and close followed by Adam’s footsteps as he neared the bathroom.

“God I love the way everything smells like you when you take a bath.” Dalton shared.

“Come on over, I can help with that.” She said with a smile as she leaned over the edge of the tub and held her hand out to him.

Adam slipped out of his swim trunks and into the bath behind her with a contented sigh, “Thought you’d never ask.”

Jaz closed her eyes as she laid back against his chest. She loved how easy their relationship had become. It was still feverishly hot, but there was also this level of comfort that made her so incredibly happy.

In all of her life, she’d never really had that, and she’d never really thought she’d needed it until Adam came along.

Jaz yawned as she relaxed against him, but it quickly turned into some form of purr as his hands started to work a lather into her hair.

“Mmmm, feels good.” She murmured.

Adam rinsed the suds from her hair using the wand on the side of the tub before massaging a generous amount of conditioner into her hair and letting it sit while he rubbed her shoulders.

“Wow. You’ve got the magic today Top.”

Any time you need me, I’ve got you Jazzy.” Adam said as he pressed a kiss to her pulse point and went about rinsing her hair.

It was almost six by the time they’d rinsed off and Adam quickly got dressed in a pair of white chino’s and a crisp button down that matched his eyes perfectly.
“Don’t you look nice.” Jaz hummed as she gave him the once over.

“You know what, we don’t get to do this often enough, I wanted tonight to be special.” He whispered as he pulled her into a kiss. “But, I’m going to head down and make sure everything’s all set, because if I stay here the only thing on the menu will be you.”

Jaz smiled as she let her robe fall from her shoulder, “I don’t think you’d hear me complain.”

“Oh, I wouldn’t complain either, but we’ve only got three more nights here, and dinner on the beach with you is on my to do list.” Top said. “And you’ll be next on my to do list after that, ok?”

“Fine,” Jaz said as she watched him walk away. “I’ll see you in an hour.”

Jaz dried her hair and loosely twisted it into a braided knot before sticking the peony into it and slipped on the gorgeous dress Adam left for her. He had really gone all out and Jaz had to admit she loved it.

Jaz didn’t wear much makeup, and the sun kissed glow she was currently rocking meant she didn’t need much, so she swept on a little navy blue pencil, some mascara and nude lip gloss and set out for the beach. When she arrived, she could feel her heart in her throat as she saw a line of paper lanterns lighting the way and Adam standing surrounded by the soft glow as she got closer she noticed he had a small stained glass ornament in his hands.

“What’s all this?” She said as she reached towards him.

“This is a promise Jaz.” He said as he got down on one knee.

“I don’t understand?” she whispered as her hands shook.

“I promise that you will make me the happiest man in the world if you marry me.” Adam said as he stared up at her with his blue eyes shining.


“If you’ll have me.” He said.

“But, what about…” She started.

“I kind of thought you might want a few people here,” Adam started as one by one candles lit on the beach behind him.

First, McG, then Hannah, Amir, Dani and Evie, Abbie, Noah, Patricia, and Preach and Arlene. Everyone she loved was standing before her, even Andrew and his husband Marco had made the trip.

“You…Is this what you…my family!” Jaz said as a few tears escaped.

“You can thank McG and Hannah. I called in a favor and they made sure it happened.” Adam said as he raised the ornament towards her until she saw the most stunning ring.

It was simple with three graduated diamonds set into a platinum band. It wasn’t big, or flashy it was just perfect for her.

“Please stand up.” Jaz said as she tried to stem the flow of tears.

She led him over to their friends before she looked at him and said the words that he’d been waiting
for, “Adam Dalton, there is no other man on this earth that makes me happier than you do, of course I’ll marry you.”

As soon as the words left her mouth a slew of lights came up revealing a tight circle of chairs under a billowing canopy.

“I was hoping you’d say that.” Adam said as utter joy rained over him.

The rest of the affair was a whirlwind as they stood before their friends and a cool ocean breeze to make their vows.

“Jazzy, I didn’t plan for this. I had no intention of falling in love, I swore to myself that I wouldn’t in fact, but then you came into my life and man did I blow it. I forgot all my rules. And that’s when I knew it must be love, because you are still the only person I know that is worth breaking the rules for. Every. Last. One.” Adam said with a shaky voice.

He smiled through a chorus of “awes” before he leaned closer and said, “I promise their will be plenty of obstacles in our path, but there isn’t a soul on this earth I’d rather face them with.”

Jaz smiled as Adam swiped a tear that dropped to her cheek and said, “Adam, from the first day that I met you, I knew you were different. You saw me as an equal in a world where I have always been less than, and even though I had no plan to fall in love with my CO, I knew that was going to be a near impossible task with those sparkling blue eyes and your giant heart.”

She smiled again as she reached out and brushed her fingers through his beard, “You were a complication a woman looking to succeed in the military didn’t need, and I would have transferred had it been anyone else, but I was already half in love with you before I even knew how much trouble I was in...sorry Patricia. We’ve already seen so many obstacles, but we’ve overcome all of them the same way we will face what comes in the future. Together.”

With that the minister asked them to exchange rings and pronounced them husband and wife. Much to the delight of their friends.

From there, they all shared a toast, a buffet of fresh seafood and the most gorgeous cake. Adam hadn’t missed a single detail and Jaz was simply in awe.

“You are something else.” She whispered as she surveyed everything from the comfort of his arms.

“Nope, I’m just the man that’s lucky enough to wake up next to you for the rest of our lives.” He said as he turned the ring on her finger and pressed a kiss to her lips.

“I don’t know how you managed to pull all of this together so fast, but thank you…it was everything!” Jaz told him.

“You are my everything, and I wanted it to be the most special day, but I did have a lot of help. Hannah and McG got all of the flights arranged, Amir made sure to get Andrew and Marco here, and I arranged everything here, which is really hard to do when you’ve got a little ninja to keep in the dark.” Adam said with a laugh.

“I was starting to get concerned, but then I decided you must have been working through what your options were in terms of how the team looks going forward. And I trust you. But, I never in a million years thought you’d be planning this!” Jaz exclaimed.

“Well, I hope that we can talk to McG and Patricia in a few days about that, but right now that’s the
farthest thing from my mind. Tonight, I want to dance with my wife, toast with our friends, and then spend the next 24 hours or so making you scream so loud we piss off the neighbors.” Adam said as he let his hand caress the patch of skin left exposed at her back.

“He means us.” McG stated as he and Andrew came over to deliver fresh flutes of champagne.

“Oh no. We don’t have that whole end of the beach to ourselves anymore?” Jaz said.

“Afraid not.” Dalton said as he glanced at their friends unapologetically and said, “I hope that you brought earplugs.”

They laughed, but McG glanced at Andrew and said, “He’s not kidding. But at least we don’t have shared walls.”

“Oh honey, it’s Bora Bora…who needs earplugs when we can just drown it out.” Andrew overshared.

McG tried to look disgusted by all of them, but he was carefully considering mounting his own defense with Hannah in his head.

The night was a blur of well wishes, champagne, and reminiscing and it was nearly two in the morning by the time Adam carried his bride down the catwalk to their bungalow and across the threshold.

When he set her down, Adam swept the loose tendrils of windswept curls away from her face and whispered, “There isn’t a prettier site on this whole island than my beautiful bride.”

“I love you.” Jaz said in answer before she twisted her hands into the open collar of his shirt and pulled him in for a searing kiss. “Now, if you wouldn’t mind, I’d like to unwrap my present.”

With that Jaz started working on the buttons of his shirt. She had two free before she simply looked at Adam and asked, “You aren’t particularly fond of this shirt are you?”

Adam laughed and shook his head a second before Jaz yanked the shirt open sending tiny buttons ricocheting around the room.

“I’m yours baby, take whatever you want.” He said in answer before yanking open his belt and making quick work of his pants.

Jaz smiled as she backed him towards the bed which had been turned down and surrounded by flickering tea lights no doubt by the hotel staff.

“I hope that you didn’t make any big plans for the morning, because I don’t intend on leaving this room until at least dinner time.” Jaz said.

“Nope, I’ve got breakfast and lunch covered and a scuba diving trip to keep all the distractions from knocking on our door. You are all mine until then.” Adam told her as he slipped the strap from her dress down while simultaneously unfastening the zipper at the side.

It fell to the ground in a billowy heap leaving Jaz standing in front of him with not a stitch on, “Mmmm, seems like I was going to get dessert anyway…”
“Yep, but I didn’t want to tell you that you didn’t have to go to all this trouble, because I’m a sure thing for you and those pretty blue eyes.” Jaz joked.

“Wait, I could have had you with dinner? Damn it.” Adam said with a smirk that died the second she pushed him back on the bed and crawled over him.

“Top, you could have had me for a soft pretzel at a roadside stand, I’m all in. I think I always have been.”

“I love you so much.” He said as he let his fingers follow the notches of her spine until he reached her hips.

A second later, Jaz felt a whoosh of air before she was surrounded by a cloud of plush down, “Now, I think it would be a good time to remind you of the perks of this marriage.”

“Mmmm, there are perks?” Jaz asked as Adam pressed his lips to her hipbone.

There was a joke in their somewhere, but it was lost somewhere between her hipbone and her inner thigh as Adam rounded the turn on her first orgasm of the night.

By the fourth one, they were both sweaty and exhausted, and a bit too tired to make the effort to shower. But that would be a good way to get the day started.

Just as sleep was ready to claim them Adam let go of the tiniest little chuckle.

“What’s so funny?” Jaz asked as she turned into his arms and stared into his shining blue eyes.

“Thank god you didn’t say no.”

“There was literally zero chance of that happening.” Jaz said as she placed a kiss over the languid beats of his heart.

“I joined the army to escape a childhood without love, who would’ve thought that decision would lead me to the greatest love of my life.” Dalton shared as he drifted off to sleep with Jaz pulled in close to his side.

Sleep came easy as they were both blissfully sated and stupidly happy.

Chapter End Notes

Also, don’t forget to visit my Pinterest page for pictures of everything!

https://www.pinterest.com/kelo7777/
Sorry, it's taken me a bit to get this chapter up. The truth is it's been mostly finished for a while, but I've gone back to work and it's taken a lot of my energy as I try to figure out how to adapt. Hopefully, I will adjust, but right now this is my reality. It's like having a timer on the amount of energy you have for the day and it always runs out before you accomplish everything you thought you would...

At any rate, this chapter is a big one...and I am leaving you on a BIG, FAT CLIFFY. Sorry, also not sorry :)

Did you really think I was going to just tie this up with a pretty little bow...no, you didn't. Did you?

Anyway, let's see where this goes, shall we? Then, as usual, feel free to hit me in the comments after (please not literally :)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

You love, who you love
Who you love

My girl, she isn't the one
I saw coming
And sometimes I don't know which way to go
And I tried to run before
But I'm not running anymore
Because I've fought against it hard enough to know

You love, who you love
Who you love

Who You Love - John Mayer and Katy Perry

Jaz woke up to the warm press of Adam’s lips to her shoulder and the slight scratch of his beard.

“Good morning.” She hummed as she leaned back into him so she could get those lips on hers.

“Mmm. The best morning.” Adam shared as he turned her in his arms so that the warmth of her body was pressed flush against him.

“We got married.” Jaz said between kisses.

Dalton just smiled as he let his lips travel down to that sensitive little patch of skin at the base of her neck that always made her shiver with pleasure, and he had no intention of stopping there.
“I love how sweet your skin tastes when you’re all sleep warmed and pliant,” Adam mumbled as he traversed the soft planes of her body on his way to his ultimate destination.

Jaz was going to argue that she was not pliant, but the words died when she felt his beard abrade her hip bone before moving inward.

Her fingers latched onto the sheets as her back bowed when his lips sealed over her clit.

Adam worked the little bundle of nerves until her legs started to shake before finally adding two fingers to the mix knowing she was on the ledge and it would take mere seconds to push her off of it.

“Oh…Oh, yeah. Adam,” Jaz mumbled as she writhed against him.

Adam added a third finger and Jaz came apart almost instantly.

He didn’t even give her a second to breathe before he crawled up her body and stole the last moan from her lips letting her taste herself on his lips.

“Ahhh, Adam!” Jaz moaned as he slid home and settled into the cradle of her hips.

He didn’t move, he simply reveled in her warmth and pressed kisses to her neck, earlobes and finally back to her lips before he lifted up onto his elbows so he could stare into her eyes.

“I never thought I could be this happy.” Adam shared as he stared down into her eyes.

“Me neither. I didn’t have a loving family as an example growing up, and neither did you, and I’ll be honest I sort of figured that part of me was broken. Then, I met you and you saw a woman I didn’t even know existed. You saw the soft vulnerable side of me that I thought died along with my mom.”

“You were never broken. Jaz, you are the strongest person I know, not just the strongest woman. No one has the power to break you. Not even me.” Adam told her as he rested his forehead to hers.

“I believe you.” Jaz smiled as she rubbed her nose against his.

Jaz had spent most of her life believing she had to be tougher and stronger and that there was no room for vulnerability, but Adam Dalton had given her the security to let herself want more out of this life.

“I’m glad,” Adam whispered as he slipped his hand down over the smooth skin of her thigh and brought it up over his hip reminding her that they were still very much in the middle of something.

Jaz laughed as she canted her hips and hummed in appreciation.

“Jazzy what do you want? Soft and slow, or…”

“Yes…” She answered as she let her hands slide down his back and over the perfection that is her husband’s ass.

Adam shuddered when her fingernails traced over his skin as he pulled himself up onto his knees with her legs braced over them and slid his hands under her shoulder blades allowing him to find every sweet spot that made her tremble and hum in approval. It also gave him unfettered access to her nipples which he took full advantage of leaving what he knew would be rosy little reminders she would be feeling long after they finished.

They’d spent what felt like an eternity in this beautiful push and pull before Adam could feel the bite of Jaz’s fingernails and see the perfect pink flush starting to rise on her skin. He knew her tells well
by now and her body was telling him she needed more.

Adam slipped his hands down to her hips raising her up to meet his as he knelt on the bed.

Her eyes flew open the moment she felt his hips snap forward as his hands pulled her towards him and she knew this was going to be explosive. He was hitting that spot that made the edges of her vision blur and made her breath catch in her throat with every stroke.

Within seconds she could hear the fluid sounds of her pleasure mixed in with the sounds of Adam’s labored breath and the delicious slap of their skin with each thrust.

“Jazzy, I need you to come for me.” Adam gasped as he picked up the pace.

She could feel a single drop of sweat burning a cold path over her belly as it dropped from his beard and she could see the clench of his jaw and the tension emanating from every muscle so beautifully taut as Adam tried to hold back what they both knew was inevitable.

“Mmm, just a little…” Jaz mumbled as she pressed her toes into his calves and raised her hips just the tiniest bit further.

It was like the perfect amount of pressure on the trigger.

Adam slammed home twice before Jaz clamped down soaking his thighs, and that was all it took.

He watched as goosebumps erupted on her skin and her back bowed almost unnaturally as pleasure bloomed across her skin with her hair spread in a halo against the crisp white linens and he couldn’t stop the current of electricity that shot down his spine as he unleashed what could only be described as a primal roar.

It was the most intense feeling he’d ever felt and they’d had some practice.

Jaz pulled him into her arms as they both worked to find their breath. She was still in the throes of aftershocks and each time one rippled through her it elicited an almost violent shudder from Adam. Every inch of his skin was so sensitive it was almost on the verge of being painful…almost.

Jaz gently raked her fingernails across his back in a soothing manner making his skin prickle and keeping that current alive as he rocked his hips forward just enough to reach her lips with his.

“I don’t think I’ll ever get enough of you.” He whispered against her lips.

“I hope not.” She hummed as she hooked her ankles around the inside of his thighs pulling him deeper making him almost vibrate with a much more subdued type of need.

This time, it wasn’t a race to the finish, they knew the fireworks had already painted the sky…this was about the connection they felt. An invisible tether that bound them together.

It was slow and sensual as Adam let his hands travel over her skin, and pressed open-mouthed kisses to her collarbones while Jaz reveled in everything he gave with her fingernails raising goosebumps as they carded through his hair.

“I love you, Adam Dalton.”

“I love you, too. Jaz…” Adam started before realizing they hadn’t even discussed her taking his name.

“Dalton.” She whispered into his ear.
Pure joy melted over Adam at her words. He would have been fine with her keeping her own name, but it made him happy that she wanted his name.

“You know that’s going to cause some problems, don’t you?” Adam said though he couldn’t help the smile that spread over his lips.

“I know.”

“Well, I think maybe we should talk about how we are going to deal with that then.” Adam offered knowing he had something in mind already.

They decided to shower after the marathon their morning had turned into, so Adam pulled on a pair of swim trunks and headed out to the deck while Jaz got dressed.

They’d been hearing people milling about waiting on the couple to gather for brunch for nearly an hour already and he knew it was only a matter of time before someone came looking for them.

Adam was blissfully happy, but he now carried a shade of unease after a serious discussion he’d had with Jaz. She hadn’t been thrilled with his plan, but neither one of them had been able to come up with an alternative solution and they knew that things were going to have to change.

But all of that was forgotten when Jaz came out a few minutes later in a dazzling navy blue halter bikini with a loose-knit wrap tied around her hips that had Adam almost choking on his tongue. They’d spent hours making love over the last 12 hours and one look had him wishing he could chase everyone away and carry her back inside.

Adam started to move toward her but Andrew stepped in front of him with a hand out in protest, “Nope. Just no. We are having brunch as a family and she is not on the menu.”

Laughter surrounded them as Adam continued to let his eyes roam over his new wife, but he knew Andrew wasn’t going to let it go.

So, he sighed in disappointment but smiled at their friend, “Lead the way.”

Once the group started to move towards the larger deck between their bungalow and the one that McG, Hannah, Andrew, and Marco were sharing he hefted Jaz into his arms and she squealed in delight.

Andrew turned and gave them a disapproving look but it was all for show as he winked at the pair and continued forward.

After brunch, Dalton sat on one of the loungers with Jaz perched beside him and Patricia seated across from them.

“Listen, I know that we ended on a bit of a rough note and that this week has put you in a bit of a bind because this is a bell we certainly can’t unring. We didn’t exactly plan for this, but in our line of work I know that it’s insanity to look the other way when this kind of happiness is within reach.” Dalton said as he looked lovingly at Jaz before he handed Patricia a piece of paper.
She unfolded it and carefully read each line as she occasionally glanced between them, then she just as carefully refolded the letter and set it on the table beside her.

“You aren’t looking to be re-assigned?” She asked.

“Nope. I’m out. I can’t lead this team with Jaz on it, the brass would never allow that, and I can’t put her on a team where I don’t know who is watching her back either.”

“So, you lead another team,” Patricia said as she glared at him.

“Maybe I will, but that’s not in my plans right now besides.”

“And what is in your plans exactly?” Patricia asked.

“I want to unravel Hoffman’s network. I think we can all agree I don’t need someone looking over my shoulder at every turn because there’s no telling how that could turn back on you, or the rest of us.” Dalton shared knowing just what was at stake.

“Well then, this is going to get awkward. I’m on leave officially until they can find my replacement, but they asked me to resign after all the interviews were said and done. They needed someone to take the fall and it was either going to be me, or you.” Patricia said.

Dalton shook his head knowing she’d taken a hit that he just as easily could’ve taken.

“So, what will you do?” Jaz asked.

“I have an offer to work with a private security firm and I was planning to tell all of you before I left, but I guess now is as good a time as any.” Patricia offered with a sardonic laugh.

“I’d say what’s so funny, but that didn’t sound like a haha kind of a laugh,” McG said as he ambled over and sat down on the deck. “What’s going on over here?”

“I resigned.” Adam and Patricia said in unison.

McG just stared between them for a moment before raising his hand up in the air and waving the rest of the team over.

“OK, say that again…One at a time if you don’t mind.” McG said as both parties started to explain.

Adam nodded for Patricia to start.

“After everything with Hoffman, I have had to re-evaluate my position within the DIA, which is to say either I resign quietly or they make an example out of me. Given the potential for ramifications landing on this team, resigning was the far better option. And they were all too happy to accept my resignation since I could just as easily blow the lid off of the careers of the men letting me take the fall given that they were just as culpable in the mishandling of Hoffman back when he was my asset. I mean, I broke the rules, but there are an awful lot of skeletons in that closet and we all have our own shelves. So, none of them really wanted to back me into a corner by seeing me hung out to dry.” Patricia explained.

“And you?” McG said with a raised eyebrow pointed directly at Top.

“I resigned. I can’t lead this team without pushing Jaz to another team, and apart from hating the idea of not knowing who is watching her back, there would be certain implications to that kind of move. No one would say it, but speculation would be there that her place wasn’t earned. I won’t have that.”
Dalton offered.

“So, you go lead another team.” Preach said.

“I’m not going to do that. Not yet. I want to start digging into Hoffman’s network. There had to be others he trusted. Others who might come looking for us. There is nothing in his playbook that leads me to believe it ends with him.” Dalton said.

“About that,” McG said as he glanced over at Hannah. “We were talking about what we might do when all of this was over. And I was going to talk to you about it when you stopped glowing, like in a month or ten.”

McG stalled as he made a theatrical show of gagging.

“It must be catching,” Dalton said as he pointed between McG and the girl that had caught his attention as she laughed out loud. “Anyway, spit it out.”

“I think that we should put down roots. Between all of us we have the funds and experience to run a private security firm, we may not be as well versed working with local law enforcement, but there’s certainly a need.” McG finished.

Patricia appeared to mull it over before she gave her opinion on the idea.

“Listen, Dalton, there are people out there that would reach out to you immediately and you wouldn’t be as constrained as you are right now,” Patricia added. “You could choose where you go, and how your time is spent. Certainly, you have enough contacts to be effective in all sorts of situations and all over the world. And that doesn’t even include all of the contacts Amir has cultivated over the years. All of you bring something to the table.”

“And I wasn’t going to say anything, but I could use a little more time.” Preach offered with a smile. “My family isn’t ready to see me heading back into a hot zone just yet.”

“McG and I were talking about it on the plane, and Dalton I’m with you. Hoffman had to have had at least a dozen or more people that were on his payroll. I’m guessing none of them were fully read in because that isn’t how a man like him operates, but we need to start knocking down the pawns if we want to get the answers we are looking for.” Amir shared.

“And to make sure that none of them go rogue and decide to carry the torch,” Patricia added with concern laced across her brow.

“Patricia, would you consider another offer?” Dalton asked as he mulled over McG’s idea.

“That depends, do I have to live in some sand covered hell hole?” She joked.

“No, but Jaz and I have been seriously considering building a life in Montana near McG. And if you follow Amir’s line of sight to that cute little blonde and her mama, I think he won’t be far either.” Dalton offered.

“But, I think we could figure out how to get everyone in the right place when needed. Obviously, Preach has roots in California.” Jaz added.

“Then yes, I very well might entertain another offer.”

“Wait, so are we doing this?” McG said excitedly.
“If you’re serious, all of you, I think that it might be worth a long look. I don’t know how long it would take us to extricate ourselves from the DIA, or how long it would take to get set up and find a way through all of the governmental red tape that we would have to undoubtedly get through, but I’m willing to find out.” Dalton offered as Jaz squeezed his hand in support.

“I’m in,” McG said.

“Wee, too,” Hannah announced.

Amir simply nodded as he glanced back at Dani who was watching Andrew paddle Evie around the pool on a foam board as she squealed and splashed.

“It’s not even a question, this team is as much my family as my wife and daughters. I’ll follow wherever you lead.” Preach said.

“Well, it looks like we have some work to do then,” Patricia said. “Let me make some calls, but you two should enjoy your honeymoon, this will all be waiting for you when you get back to DC. And then some.”

With the heaviness off the table, the group was able to shed their concerns for the future for a time and enjoy the sun, sand, and great company.

Amir Joined Dani and Abbie at the side of the pool as Evie and Andrew cruised by and doused them with water. McG and Hannah wandered down to the ocean just off the deck, Patricia found herself discussing the life of a hotelier with Marco as Noah listened with interest, and Jaz and Dalton simply basked in their perfect happy bubble.

They had no idea that back in Washington there was an envelope on a desk and it was about to become the pin that made a big sloppy mess of that bubble.

Chapter End Notes

I'd run away, but I promise there is a pay off coming. I think it will be worth it.
Hopefully, you do too.

Also, I realize there is a lot of red tape involved in the discussion they had and that it's not as simple as saying I quit. So, let's table that thought...it will be dealt with eventually. Just wanted to put that out there.

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