Symbiosis

by oyhumbug

Summary

Elizabeth Webber is doing everything within her power to care for and protect her unborn child, but, with her soon-to-be ex-husband refusing to let go of her or her baby, she might just be in over her head. Meanwhile, Jason Morgan lives a dangerous life that's starting to catch up with him. Perhaps what these two lost souls need the most is each other.

Notes

Previously posted on fanfiction.net, LJ (oy_humbug2), my own site (Delicious Infatuation), and Liaison message boards.
Part One

Symbiosis
A Liason Friday Night Fic Series

Part One

FNF#47: The pursuit of happiness is a most ridiculous phrase; if you pursue happiness, you'll never find it. ~ C.P. Snow

She didn't have morning sickness.

Her breasts weren't tender, and they sure as hell weren't growing any either. Unfortunately.

She wasn't moody... at least, none of the male doctors had made any mumbled comments about that time of the month recently, and she definitely wasn't nesting... which was a good thing considering the fact that a cardboard box would have been more roomy than her apartment.

And her hips weren't widening, she didn't have any weird cravings – yet, and Elizabeth hadn't started to show.

But everyone knew that she was pregnant. They knew that she was pregnant, and getting a divorce, and that she still had not confessed the identity of her baby's father. And all of this they knew because she had an extremely sensitive nose now.

Slamming a patient's file onto the counter of the nurse's station, she demanded to know, “alright, who the hell had garlic for lunch today?” Whirling around on her small feet encased in white, utilitarian tennis shoes, Elizabeth, hands clenched on hips, exclaimed, “I don't know how many times I've asked you guys to refrain from eating that stuff around me or to at least brush your...” Swallowing roughly, she gulped, her sentence trailing off and her stance becoming meek with deference. “Oh, hi... Epiphany.”

With a dark expression, her boss returned, “and I don't know how many times I have to you, Nurse Webber, that you need to refer to me as Nurse Johnson. I don't care who your grandmother is or who your grandfather was, when you're on my shift, you're just another student nurse I have to watch like a hawk so I can fix all your mistakes. And, Nurse Webber,” her intimidating superior narrowed her eyes purposefully, “you make far too many mistakes.”

“I'm sorry, Nurse Johnson,” she replied timidly, her now unclenched hands falling to her sides and her head bowing in submission.

“Don't apologize,” Epiphany chastised, “and you certainly shouldn't be standing around here analyzing what I had for lunch today. There's far too much work to be done, and I don't have time to play your silly pregnancy games.” Before her boss could launch into a long, lengthy account of all the patients who needed checked on, bathed, and medicated, Elizabeth scurried out of the nurses' station, but she could still hear the older woman barking complaints as she fled down the hall. “Now, if only that nose of yours was as good at sniffing out injuries and diagnoses as it is food, you might actually graduate from nursing school yet, Miss Webber.”

Epiphany was right... about so many things. Her grades weren't the greatest, and, now, with the
added stress of a baby on the way and her impending divorce, she was distracted. She needed to pass, though; she needed to become a nurse, not only because her pregnancy was forcing her to grow up and let go of her youthful dreams of being an artist but also because she needed the health insurance, she needed the steady income to provide for her unborn child, and she needed all the help she could get in fighting against her asshole of a soon-to-be ex-husband. It didn't matter that she swore up and down that he wasn't the father of her baby – emotionally or biologically, he was promising to take her son or daughter away. Whether Elizabeth's child had been conceived on accident or not during a one night stand, she wanted her child, and she refused to allow her abusive, obsessively crazed spouse anywhere near her baby.

She would do anything for her child – to keep he or she healthy, happy, and safe.

But the one thing that Epiphany – Nurse Johnson – wasn't right about was her attitude towards her superiors. It wasn't that she was rude or believed herself to be entitled because, in a way, she was General Hospital royalty, thanks to her Grandpa Steve and Grams Audrey; it was just that she was used to calling people by their first name. After all, she had been working as a waitress at Kelly's for years – since high school, in fact, and customers appreciated a waitress who could call them by their first name, remember how they liked their coffee, and asked about their grandchildren or their sick pet cat Paws. Being personable had always gotten her further with her job in the past, but, now, being personable – personal – with her boss was going to get her dismissed from the nursing program.

And then what the hell would she do?

Despite the fact that she was still waiting tables at Kelly's, and despite the fact that Bobbie had already mentioned a raise and a promotion to manager, the truth of the matter was that she didn't want to serve chili for the rest of her life. She loved Bobbie, and she appreciated everything the redhead had done for her over the years, but she wanted something more – something better for herself, and nursing wasn't the Taj Mahal of careers – it wasn't painting, but it sure as hell beat long hours of providing the Port Charles masses with their precious greasy, fast food. Plus, she knew that Bobbie shouldn't have to invent new positions for her, and she knew that Kelly's just didn't have the funds in its budget to cover a salary and benefits for her and her unborn baby. So, even though Bobbie's offer had been tempting, she had turned her down and was simply waiting to receive her LPN license before she put in her two weeks' notice. Her nose couldn't wait.

He was used to pain. In fact, he kind of liked it. It made him forget everything else that was wrong in his life and provided him with the anger he needed to keep fighting. But even Jason could admit that the beating he had received that evening was worse than normal. That's what happened, though, when your opponent fought dirty.

At the very thought of the challenger he had faced in the ring earlier that night, the boxer grimaced, the movement of his mouth making a cut bleed some more. Spitting out the blood, he then risked swallowing as he leaned back against the cold, wooden bench. The taste of copper was strong as bile surged up his throat, and he had to quickly squash any instinct his body naturally had to throw up. At that point, his ribs couldn't take any further abuse.

It wasn't just his ribs, though. His face was a mess... as was common for fighters. Luckily, he would
heal quickly, though. He always did. But then there were his kidneys, too. Over and over, his opponent had punched him in his lower back until the point where Jason had started to fear internal damage. That's why he was sitting outside of General Hospital's emergency room. After he had been knocked out in the eighth round, his manager, fearful of getting any more involved than just an anonymous drop off outside of the medical facility's automatic doors, had literally propped him up on a bench. Or, at least, that's what Jason imaged the older man had done. Who knew, though. He might not even have gone that far out on a limb for his number one boxer. He might have simply told one of his flunkies to handle it. No one would have been stupid enough, however, to actually take him inside of the hospital. Not in their world.

Their world was illegal. Hush-hush. Forbidden. While Jason might have called himself a boxer, the sport of boxing didn't recognize him or his competitors. Rather, their matches were all underground. They weren't sponsored by any multi-billion dollar corporation and aired on pay-per-view television; instead, they were fought in top-secret locations with only a select group of men and women – but mostly men – invited to watch. They were tied to organized crime, and they were dangerous.

Initially, that – the danger – had been what attracted Jason. Fresh out of the hospital after waking up without a single memory of his past and angry because everyone was trying to tell him what to do, he had refused any help or money from the Quartermaines and struck out on his own. He found a job parking cars for Sonny Corinthos, rented a room above Jake's bar, and bought a motorcycle. But it hadn't been enough, and that's when Sonny had come to him, offering him something better than being a glorified valet.

However, Jason had been leery of actually working for the mobster. While he liked pushing his bike to its limits on the cliff road, and while he liked train surfing, it was a whole different story to commit himself to a life of crime. Perhaps he had been reckless, but he wasn't stupid, and he saw what the mob did to people. If they actually lived long enough to reap the benefits of their crimes, those people around them did not. They died and most of the time tragically. Although he was pretty much alone in life, he did have his grandmother, and he did have his sister Emily, and, at the time, Jason had been hopeful that maybe, someday, he'd have other people to care about as well. So, going to work for Sonny in his organization had been one risk even too big for him to take.

The compromise had been Corinthos' underground fighting ring. The booze sold and bets lost were how the kingpin made his money from the endeavors, and it didn't hurt matters that nearly all the fights were fixed. He would bring in a new guy, allow him to accumulate several impressive wins, and then, once the regulars trusted the new fighter enough to put up big money, Sonny'd tell him to throw the fight. Then, the process would start all over again. For compensation, Jason and all the other guys were paid well.

It was brutal, though – fights every other week, putting his body through that kind of constant torture, not to mention the training. There were some nights when he went into the ring with his ribs still broken from his last fight, but he couldn't show those weaknesses, and he couldn't tape his injuries, and forget about health insurance. After all, how could Sonny put his guys on his medical plan if there was no paper trail of them even working for him? All the fighters were paid under the table to keep the authorities off their trail, and, even though Corinthos kept a doctor on twenty-four hour call for his bodyguards, that luxury was not extended to his fighters.

Usually, such things didn't bother Jason. He wasn't someone to dwell on the things in life that he didn't have. Plus, he hated hospitals. Living in one for weeks on end as you were told that you were brain damaged tended to do that to a guy. And it didn't help matters either that Alan and Monica both worked at General Hospital, that Edward was on the place's Board of Directors. Going to GH meant running the risk that he would see someone from Jason Quartermaine's life, and that was something
Jason Morgan always tried to avoid doing.

But his injuries that evening even made him nervous. While he had lost fights in the past, never had he taken a beating as bad before. And there was also the fact that he wasn't as young as he used to be. Recently, Jason had started to notice that he wasn't healing as fast as he once had, that, when he got up in the morning, his body was stiff and sore where, years ago, it had always been full of energy and raring to get back in the ring, no matter how humiliating a loss he had suffered the night before. The truth of the matter was that, for a boxer, he was getting old. In fact, he probably should have retired at least a year before, but what the hell else was he supposed to do with his life? How else was he supposed to live?

“Jason,” a soft, tentative voice asked him from off to the side. With his face so swollen, though, he couldn't see out of his left eye, and it hurt too much to turn his neck in order to look at the woman who had called his name. Her voice did sound familiar, though, distantly.

He knew that he had stayed too long sitting outside of the hospital. He knew that, eventually, the mistake of being brought there, even if it was against his will, would catch up to him and bite him in the ass, but the truth of the matter was that he had simply been too exhausted to move. Now, though, he had the motivation he needed to run away.

Before he could finish pushing himself up into a standing position, using the arms of the bench to assist him in what felt like a nearly impossible endeavor, the voice moved until it was coming from right in front of him. “Oh my god, Jason! What happened to you? Here,” the woman offered, rushing forward to no doubt prop him up upon her diminutive frame. “Let me help you.”

But, before she could touch him, he flinched away from her, and he kept on moving as fast as he could, even though he could hear her calling his name and insisting that he allow her to take care of him. He ignored her, however, and, fighting through the pain, he finally got away from General Hospital.
Part Two

FNF#48: Immature love says: 'I love you, because I need you.' Mature love says: 'I need you, because I love you.' ~ Erich Fromm

She had always found the Quartermaine mansion intimidating. Oh, it wasn't decorated with gargoyles like Wyndemere or haunted by an unfulfilled promise of happiness like the Spencer home. But it was stately. And massive. And so effortlessly elegant that it made everyone feel like they just didn't measure up. Or, at least, that's how the estate made Elizabeth feel, and she had been visiting the impressive home for years. After all, her best friend was a Quartermaine.

It was late, though, so she wasn't approaching the house by its regal front door. There would be no ringing chimes to announce her arrival, and she wouldn't get to make small talk with Reggie, one of the only people who resided in the mansion who made her feel comfortable in their presence. Instead, Elizabeth was sneaking in through the den's always unlocked patio doors. Emily had showed her the covert access route when they were still teenagers. Though it was convenient when she wanted to visit her friend without having to see any of the other Q's, the fact that such a wealthy family felt so secure and untouchable that they left their home unlocked at night when they went to bed shocked her. It always had, and it probably always would. Those wily Q's were quirky, though. There was no doubt about that.

Because of the late hour, the house was dim but not dark. Apparently, when you were as rich as Edward Quartermaine, you also didn't worry about your electric bill. So, she didn't have to fear that she would fail to see where she was going and run into a priceless antique which housed other priceless artifacts and heirlooms. Quickly, Elizabeth made her way out of the family's luxurious den, into the impressive foyer, and up the sweeping stairs to the second floor where Emily's bedroom was located – where all the seemingly dozens upon dozens of bedrooms were located.

Even if the rest of the household was asleep, she was confident that her best friend would still be awake. Emily was a night owl. They both were, probably because of their ages and the fact that they had nothing yet in their lives which made going to bed early an attractive idea. But that was soon to change for Elizabeth, and, not for the first time, she found herself wondering how such alterations to her lifestyle would affect her relationships with her friends. Not only was there Emily, but she had the acquaintances she was making at the hospital – girls like crazy Kelly Lee and her sex-obsessed self – and the other waitresses at Kelly's that she liked to spend time with outside of work.

But those concerns would have to wait, Elizabeth chided herself as she stepped up to her best friend's door and knocked softly. Without waiting for a reply from Emily, she turned the soundless handle and pushed her way in just far enough to poke her head into the room and call out, “hey, Em? Are you still awake?”

And, just as she predicted, Emily was awake, though she was propped up in bed, her numerous medical school text books spread out around her. Without even questioning how Elizabeth had gotten up to her bedroom, the adopted Quatermaine daughter grinned widely. “Hey, you,” she greeted Elizabeth warmly, immediately setting her homework aside, patting the bed next to her in a wordless invitation for the expectant mother to take a seat, she asked, “what are you doing here so late? Not that I mind,” Emily was quick to reassure her. But then the humor and joy fled from her face, and her gaze quickly dropped towards Elizabeth's still flat abdomen. “Oh my gosh, nothing's
wrong with the baby, right?"

She loved her unborn son or daughter. She really did – so much so that it shocked even Elizabeth sometimes. However, she also hated the fact that, not even four months into her pregnancy, and the small ball of ever expanding cells had now trumped her. She wasn't just Elizabeth anymore, Emily's best friend; she was soon-to-be single mother Elizabeth, Emily's pregnant best friend. Though she would never admit her feelings out loud – partly because she was ashamed of them and partly because she would never want to hurt Emily's feelings, she resented the change in their relationship. However, that didn't mean that she wasn't above taking advantage of her best friend's concern.

“The baby's fine; we're fine,” she reassured soothingly. “It was just... a long night at the hospital, and I wanted to come and see you, hoping you'd help me forget about bed pans and bed sores for a while.”

“Ouch,” Emily sympathized. “That kind of shift, huh?”

Keeping the charade of her visit going, Elizabeth ran a hand through her messy, softly curled hair. Exhaling exasperatedly, she explained, “I just can't seem to do anything right, Em, at least not where Epiphany... I mean, Nurse Johnson is concerned.”

“Do you want me to talk to my mom or my dad for you?”

“What,” she exclaimed, eyes wide with bafflement. “Of course not! That would just make things ten times worse.” Tempering her response, Elizabeth added, “though I appreciate the offer, Nurse Johnson already thinks that the only reason I was allowed into her program is because of who my grandparents are.”

“That's ridiculous,” Emily instantaneously defended her. Even becoming somewhat self-righteous, she stood up and paced before the king sized bed. “No one in that nursing program has worked harder than you have.”

“Maybe... but I've been really distracted lately.”

“Well, I think you have a reason to be.”

Elizabeth shrugged, not arguing with her but also not agreeing either. “I need to find a way to keep my personal life out of my school work, though.”

Reclaiming the seat beside her, Emily said, “but it's not your fault that Ric shows up at the hospital or that you're pregnant.”

Chuckling softly, Elizabeth countered, “that's not quite true, Em, at least one the second claim. While I never intended to become pregnant, I obviously didn't do enough to prevent it from happening.”

“Yeah, well, that still doesn't mean that Ric should be allowed to harass you. Have you talked to your lawyer? What did they say?”

“He's,” Elizabeth stressed the pronoun to give the man some semblance of an identity, “is an overworked public defender who agreed to take my case because he knows Bobbie and she asked him to look into the matter for me.”

“Alright, so what does he have to say?”
She shrugged helplessly. Despite the fact that she had come to visit her friend as a ruse, Elizabeth found herself getting sucked into their conversation, her concerns about her impending divorce temporarily overshadowing her other worries and intentions. “The first step is to get the divorce finalized. Then, once Ric and I are legally separated, he loses some of his claim towards my child.”

“Only some,” Emily scoffed.

“Well, Ric's claiming that he's the father, and, since I was still married to him when the baby was conceived, the courts recognize his claim. Until I prove otherwise, legally he is the father. Even after I have a paternity test run, though,” she sighed, feeling unexpected though not surprising tears well in her eyes, “I'll probably still have to deal with him and his custody pursuits. While I now know that Ric is a liar, the rest of this town believes him to be the next best thing to sliced bread – a handsome, charming, intelligent lawyer with good breeding, amazing connections, and a smile that could seduce even my grandmother... and you know how judgmental my Grams can be towards the men I date.”

“You know that I'll do everything I can to help, right,” her best friend offered and not for the first time either. “I can't access my trust fund yet, but I think Mom would lend me the money if I asked her to, so we could pay for you to hire a good custody attorney. Hell, I could probably even wrangle the funds from Grandfather if I played the 'Grandmother loves Elizabeth like a granddaughter' card.”

Despite the somber mood of their discussion, Elizabeth giggled, leaning over to give the future doctor a tight hug. “Thanks, Em, and I'll definitely keep your offer in mind, but, for now, I'm going to try to do this on my own... if I can.” Pulling away, she grinned self-deprecatingly. “You see, I'm trying this new thing called being an adult. I figured, you know, I'm already knocked up. Maybe I should stop being a kid since I'm having one.”

So tenderly that the gesture shocked the tears back into her eyes, Emily lifted her left hand to softly stroke Elizabeth's hair behind her ear. “Sweetie, I think we both know that you grew up long before you were supposed to. What you're doing now isn't making you an adult; you've been an adult since Lucky found you in the park all those years ago. No, what you're doing now is giving up on all your dreams, and it breaks my heart.”

“Em, please,” she begged, biting her lip to keep the emotional moisture from escaping the confines of her wide, suddenly now burning eyes.

“I won't say anymore,” her best friend promised, “at least not tonight. You came here wanting me to cheer you up, and, instead, I'm just making you sadder. Sorry about that.”

“It's okay,” Elizabeth assured her, grinning through her misery. Finally seeing an opening, she pounced upon a way to get Emily to leave her alone for a few minutes. “However, all this talking about Ric and my past has made me a little nauseous. Do you think that maybe you could get me a cup of herbal tea to calm my stomach?”

Immediately, Emily was on her feet. “Of course. I can't believe I didn't ask if you needed anything when you first got here. Grandmother would be appalled...” The rest of the other woman's words faded away into incomprehensible mumbling as she made her way down the hall.

As soon as Elizabeth couldn't hear her friend any longer, she was up and on her feet, zeroing in upon the cramped and messy desk positioned by the room's one lone, large window. Rifling through Emily's various items of paperwork, correspondence, and junk mail, she searched desperately for the item which had inspired her late night visit to the Quartermaine mansion in the first place: Emily's
address book.

Though her best friend had an impeccable memory and sharp mind, she was also Lila's granddaughter. She'd scoff at the idea, but she was a society wife in training. Every single contact Emily had ever made in her entire life had an entry in her address book – even her family members. And it was this anal-retentive attention to detail that Elizabeth was depending on.

While Jason might have skipped off on her before she could help him earlier that night, she wasn't about to let the incredibly stubborn man suffer. Obviously, someone had believed his injuries severe enough to take him to GH. Despite the fact that she didn't know the rebellious Quartermaine grandson very well, over the years she had picked up on quite a bit of information from being friends with Emily. She knew that Jason hated hospitals, hated his family, and hated to ask others for help... and not necessarily in that order. Not only as a nurse in training had she taken an oath to do no harm, but she also couldn't allow Emily's brother's injuries to go untreated.

It would have been so much easier to just tattle on the stubborn man. All she would have had to do was go back inside the hospital and have one of the Doctors Quartermaine paged or use the hospital's phone to call the mansion and tell them that she had seen a hurt Jason limping away from GH. Between Alan, Monica, and Emily, somehow, someway, Jason would have gotten the medical treatment that he needed... or, at least, he would have if he was anyone else besides Jason Morgan. The truth of the matter was that, despite their training, she wasn't sure if Emily's brother would have allowed his estranged family to help him. She meant nothing to him. He probably didn't even know of her connection to his sister, but, still, he had run away from her. Even if he didn't want her help, though, she knew she wouldn't be able to sleep that night unless she saw for herself that Jason was going to make it, that he was going to be alright.

Finding his address in Emily's address book, she read over it several times, committing it to memory. In fact, she had barely closed the leather bound notebook and returned to her place on her best friend's bed before Emily swept in with a freshly brewed cup of tea. She had only been gone a few minutes – more proof that it paid to have a full-time, live-in cook. “Here you go,” Emily announced, graciously handing Elizabeth her tea.

“Thank you so much, Em.”

Dutifully, she took several sips, burning her tongue slightly in her haste. Once the mug was half empty, she sighed in mock appreciation. After all, she hadn't actually been nauseous but had used her pregnant status to distract her best friend and get Emily out of her own room. Then, setting the cup onto the bedside table, she stood and yawned. “Oh, excuse me,” she feigned behind a small, pale hand. “You have no idea how much a tiny fetus takes out of you.” Emily laughed, just as she had intended. “Sorry about skipping out on you like this – I mean, I just got here, but I'm exhausted, Em. I think I just want to go home and crawl into bed.”

“Sure, sweetie,” her best friend was quick to agree. “I understand.” After giving her a hug goodbye, she added, “but call me tomorrow, okay?”

“Will do,” Elizabeth promised, leaving the beautifully decorated bedroom as quietly as she arrived.

Retracing her steps, she went down the sweeping stairs, back through the impressive foyer, and exited by the still unlocked patio doors found in the family’s luxurious den, without a single Q, besides Emily, of course, being any the wiser towards her uninvited and unannounced presence. But Elizabeth couldn't focus on her Alias-esque movements. Rather, all she could think about was how she had just lied to perhaps her staunchest remaining supporter... and about her beloved brother of all
things, too.

She was the worst best friend in the world. Ever.
Part Three

FNF#48: I don't care enough to hate you.... The opposite of love isn't hate; it's indifference.

Jason groaned as he stood up from the bed, rolling more than anything, his hands automatically going to his side as if he could actually brace himself against the jaw-clenching pain he was in. Of course, it didn't work, and the person on the other side of his door kept knocking. The last thing he wanted to do in that moment was deal with some visitor... not that he ever really had that many in the first place. In fact, just a few people knew where he lived – his trainer, some of the guys he worked with, Sonny, and his sister Emily, but that was it.

None of the guys would be showing up on his doorstep late at night... even if they were worried about him and his injuries. He knew that, as far as they were concerned, their honor towards him had been fulfilled by dropping him outside of GH's emergency room doors, and Sonny, if he was even aware of the severity of the beating Jason had taken that night, would have just called if he was worried... not that he ever had been in the past. As far as Emily went, the only reason she would be there was if the pretty brunette from the hospital spilled the beans, and, if that was the case, he was going to be pissed. At least a few minutes of momentary anger would be better than the weight of discomfort he was currently suffering under.

If only the rooms above Jakes contained a peephole...

Practically ripping the door off of its hinges, Jason whipped open the entrance to his room above the shady, dockside bar, a growl of impatience and dismissal already brewing upon his lips. “Look, Emily, I'm...”

And that's as far as his sentence went. Because the woman before him, though petite and brunette just like his sister, certainly was not Emily. Nope. They had no family connection at all. “If you were about to say that you're fine, I guess that means I also need to worry about a head injury as well.”

Narrowing his cold, blue eyes in accusation, Jason demanded to know, “what the hell are you doing here?”

“I'm selling Girl Scout Cookies,” the woman returned flippantly, meeting his steely gaze with an equally turbulent one of her own. “What the hell do you think I'm doing here? I'm making sure that my best friend's stupid, stubborn brother doesn't die tonight, because, frankly, I don't want to have that hanging over my conscience for the rest of my life.”

Already turning his back on her, he walked away – slowly. “Yeah, well, consider me none of your concern.”

Quietly, all fight leaving her voice, she replied, “I can't do that.”

“What? Why not?”

“Because you're obviously in pain – a lot of it, too, judging by the way you wince with every single step. Because I'm training to be a nurse, and this is what a nurse does – they help people... even those who are too proud to ask for help. And because Emily loves you, and she would be devastated if
anything were to happen to you. As her best friend, I have to protect her.” Shrugging her shoulders helplessly and tossing her hands up in the air, she continued, “so, face it, you're stuck with me, buddy.”

He snorted but didn't have the energy to fight her further. Just as he went to slide back into bed, the brunette was there, her arms wrapping around him, guiding him, helping him to lower himself so that he was, once more, in a reclining position. Settled and, if not comfortable then at least not as miserable, Jason knew that he should have thanked her, but he didn't, and, surprisingly enough, the woman didn't seem to expect him to say anything. In fact, she was already digging through an oversized purse he had failed to notice slung over her shoulder when she first arrived, her plush, plump bottom lip snagged between her teeth and her brows furrowed with concentration.

“So, after you ran off from me at the hospital, I went back in and... procured some supplies. I'm afraid, though, now that I've gotten a closer look at you, that I didn't get everything that we'll need.” He found it interesting that she said 'we'll' instead of 'you'll,' but, again, he kept his mouth shut. Glancing up at him, she asked, “you don't happen to have a first aid kit, do you?”

“He found it interesting that she said 'we'll' instead of 'you'll,' but, again, he kept his mouth shut. Glancing up at him, she asked, “you don't happen to have a first aid kit, do you?”

“Check under the sink in the bathroom,” he told her. And she did, exclaiming in triumph when she located what she sought. Despite himself, Jason was curious as to why someone who really didn't know him beyond hearing about him through her connection with his sister would go so far out of her way to check up on and take care of him. Though he tried to tell himself that such interest was merely practical – after all, he had to make sure that the Quartermaine's didn't know about his injuries, the truth of the matter was that his world was filled with such little selfless kindness, he couldn't help but be intrigued by the stranger. “So, uh, how did you find out where I lived?”

His question finished just as she came back into his room, Jason watched as the beautiful young woman blushed profusely. “Yeah, about that... I kind of peeked into Emily’s address book after lying and playing on her emerging auntie gene.”

“Huh?”

Rolling her eyes, she further explained while, without asking for permission, reaching for a pair of fabric scissors from his first aid kit and cutting his t-shirt off of his body. “Em’s like super attentive and paranoid when it comes to the baby, so I told her that I was feeling a little queasy, and she immediately rushed to make me a cup of herbal tea. While she was gone, I did a little snooping, and, voila, twenty minutes later, here I am.” Without pausing, she added, “I can’t believe you live on above a bar. That's like... very bohemian of you, and I never pictured you as the bohemian type.”

There was so much to think about, so much to analyze, so much to question about her statement, but he found himself focusing on just a single part of it. “You've... pictured me before?”

“Duh. I'm an artist... or, at least, I was an artist. Before.”

“Before...,” he prompted.

“Before I had a one night stand and got knocked up. Before my soon-to-be ex-husband started playing mind-games and came after me and my unborn baby. Before I decided it was time to put on some big-girl panties and face the fact that I wasn't going to be the next Georgia O'Keeffe and enrolled in nursing school.”

For someone as young as the brunette looked, she sure as hell seemed to live a very complicated life. “And you're Emily’s best friend, right, so you must be her age?”
“Yep.”

“Wow. All of that by the age of twenty-one,” Jason remarked, shocking himself that he was actually showing an interest in someone else's life and, furthermore, that he was actually expressing that interest.

“Yeah, like you're one to talk, Mr. I-Got-My-Head-Rammed-Into-A-Tree-And-Suffered-Permanent-Memory-Loss-At-The-Age-Of-Twenty-One.” As soon as she mentioned his accident, he started to shut down. He cast his gaze towards the far corner of the room, his body went rigid, and he was about to tell her to leave when the woman continued, “god, I sometimes wish that could happen to me, too – to get the chance to start completely over. I mean, your mistakes wouldn't be erased, but at least you wouldn't have to remember them day in and day out, and you'd have a legitimate excuse to push people out of your life. You see, I can't do that. I'm too much of a softie, I guess. I just keep letting people walk all over me. You'd think I'd eventually learn my lesson, right, but, oh no, not Lizzie Webber!”

Putting aside the issue that, for the first time in his life, someone was actually jealous of the fact that he was, technically, brain damaged and they were not, Jason disbelievingly questioned, “your name's Lizzie?”

She chuckled. “No, it's Elizabeth. Lizzie's just what I call myself when I do something really particularly stupid... which is practically all the time.” Since she had the tape and gauze ready to wrap his ribs, she coaxed, “sit up a little for me, would you, please?”

As he complied, he also accused, “you mean like coming to a bad part of town on your own during the middle of the night with stolen hospital supplies while pregnant to treat a man you didn't know who had obviously been beat up that evening?”

The brunette didn't pause even once in her work as she responded, “well, when you put it like that, I do sound like an idiot, but I knew I'd be safe with you.”

“What? Why?”

Of all the things she could have said, that surprised the hell out of him. Finishing with his ribs, Elizabeth looked up from her work, met his unwavering, probing gaze, and unblinking said, “maybe you don't know me, Jason, but I know you. True, we've never met before, but Em's told me so much about you. It's like I've known you my entire life. Nothing she's ever said about you made me feel uncomfortable, or nervous, or scared, and, considering my past, that says a whole hell of a lot.”

He wanted to ask her what the hell that meant, but he couldn't bring himself to pry. If the woman wanted to confide in him, then she would. Otherwise, it was none of his business. Just as she wasn't pressing him for information about his injuries, he would respect her silence on the matter of her history. The fact that he wanted to know in the first place was astounding enough. What the hell was it about this girl?

It was just like she said, though. While he might have been going on even less information than she was, because, despite apparently talking quite a bit about him to her best friend, Emily had never once mentioned Elizabeth to him, Jason didn't feel uncomfortable or nervous with her. Maybe because she obviously loved his sister so much, he trusted her, but he knew it was more than that, too. Elizabeth was just... open and completely honest, maybe even to a fault. She held practically nothing back but, without qualms, accepted it when he did. Even though they had only spent a
handful of minutes together, he could tell that she was unlike any other woman he had ever met before. She wasn't like the chicks he picked up downstairs in the bar; she wasn't like Monica, or Tracy, or all of the Quartermaine's socialite friends; and she wasn't even like his sister. Elizabeth Webber was the first woman he had ever met that Jason believed he could be friend's with.

Rousing him from his ruminations, she teased, “besides, I'm not the one who was walking around town with several broken ribs, some badly bruised kidneys, and a face that resembles a battered apple more than it does a human countenance at this point.” Before he could respond, she pressed on, “okay, so I get that you don't get along with your family... or Jason Quartermaine's family – whatever, but GH isn't the only hospital in town. There's Mercy.”

“I didn't choose to go to General Hospital. Someone dropped me off there while I was unconscious.” Though he noticed her finely shaped brow perk in pointed recognition of his comment, Elizabeth remained silent as he proceeded to explain, “as for Mercy, yeah, there's no Q's there, but I'd still need insurance if I didn't want to get strapped with a hefty hospital bill.”

“Ugh, I know,” she sympathized. “We should just move to France.” This time, it was his turn to quirk a brow. “I don't mean together,” the feisty brunette mumbled, grumbling. However, she never missed a step in taking care of him, continuing to apply medicated ointment to all the various cuts and scrapes on his face. He also thought she was using something to help with the swelling as well, but he wasn't sure what. “I just meant... hello, universal health care.”

“You don't have health insurance either?”

“I didn't. And I was okay with that. I mean, what was the worst thing that was going to happen to me – a splinter from stretching canvases? But then I got pregnant, which meant that I had to get practical. So, I enrolled in GH's nursing program. Say what you will about the ugly, white shoes, and the shapeless scrubs, and bedpans, but the insurance kicks ass.”

Ever the practical one, Jason inquired, “how do you already have access to supplies if you just started in the nursing program when you found out you were pregnant? You're evidently not that far along, because you're not showing.”

She waved off his question, answering easily. “Oh, I had all these general ed courses already from college, especially since my high school grades were nothing to brag about so my advisor made me take all these math and science courses, so I transferred them and went straight to the practical stuff.”

Taunting her, he repeated, “practical stuff, huh?”

“Oh, who asked you,” Elizabeth returned. She wound up her fist without thought, moving to teasingly punch him in the shoulder but rethought her reaction at the last minute and smirked before dropping her hand back into her lap. “I don't see you complaining about the treatment I've been giving you.” Standing up, she quickly tossed away the garbage, put his first aid kit back, and then rummaged through her purse some more, pulling out some sample medications. “I got you pills for both the pain and to fight off any possible infections. You're a big boy. Read the recommended dosages and take them accordingly.”

“I don't like drugs,” Jason countered.

“Too bad. Don't be a baby, and take the meds.” Rolling her eyes at him, Elizabeth continued, “I'll be back tomorrow night to check on you. In the meantime, take it easy, and don't do anything stupid like... wrestle a bear or something, alright?”
“There's no reason for you to come back. I'm fine.”

Pushing her bag up onto her shoulder, she chastised him, “god, can't you just accept help for once in your life? I won't tell anyone. Your secret – that you're actually human and not a machine – will be safe with me. I promise. So, just... shut up.”

“You're bossy.”

“And don't you forget it,” Elizabeth warned him, shutting the door behind her as she left.

Only listening to half of her directions, Jason relinquished his stance on medicine enough to take the antibiotics, but he refused to bend and take the pain killers. They made his head fuzzy, and he had a feeling that was the last thing he needed if he was expected to go another round – a mental one – with Elizabeth Webber. No, he would need all his wits about him the next evening when she showed up to check on her unwilling patient, and show up he had no doubt that she would. And the woman accused him of being stubborn! She was like a dog with a new bone... which, apparently... made him her new chew toy.

On second thought, maybe he should have had his head examined...
Part Four

FNF#50: The true mystery of the world is the visible, not the invisible. ~ Oscar Wilde

Blinking slowly, swallowing thickly, Elizabeth tried to stem off yet another telling yawn, but the effort was for naught and the task impossible. She just couldn't stifle her exhaustion any more than she could stop being short or stop drinking hot chocolate.

“Long night,” Kelly Lee asked coquettishly, winking playfully in Elizabeth's direction. It didn't matter that she was in the OB-GYN’s office that morning as a patient rather than a friend. Kelly still treated her monthly check-up like a catch-up gossip session between the girls.

Honestly, she answered, “you have no idea.”

“Oh, please, honey, there isn't anything that you've done that I haven't mastered yet.”

Though Elizabeth laughed to humor the sex-crazed doctor, there was no sincerity behind the amusement. “Kelly, I didn't have sex last night.”

“Why not?”

“Are you kidding me,” she questioned rhetorically. “Right now, I wouldn't even want to have sex with myself.”

“Hey, you're in your second trimester... the one they call the lucky trimester for more than just the fact that you're past the high risk portion of your pregnancy. And you're hot, babe.”

“No, I'm gaunt. I don't have that pregnancy glow. I don't have pregnancy boobs. And I think I've lost more weight since I found out I was expecting than I've gained.” Relenting somewhat, knowing that her friend was just trying to cheer her up, Elizabeth conceded, “but I love you for thinking that someone would want to sleep with me right now.”

“Well, we'll talk about the weight gain issue in a minute,” Kelly warned her, “but, seriously, none of that is your fault. It's that prick of an ex-husband of yours who is causing all of this, I just know it.”

“Don't count those chickens too soon,” Elizabeth corrected her. “We're not divorced yet, though it can't happen fast enough for me.”

“Is he still fighting you?”

“Of course I'm fighting my wife on this ridiculous idea of hers that we need to separate,” a third voice – a very unwelcome and unwanted but not altogether unexpected voice answered for Elizabeth as he stepped uninvited into the examination room. “Two people who love each other and conceived a child together should not be getting a divorce.”

Frustrated, Elizabeth just groaned, falling backwards and landing loudly on top of the table upon which she sat. Now lying down, her eyes closed in an effort to will Ric's presence away, she heard her friend snicker and then say, “considering the fact that I have it on very good authority that you
and your wife have not slept together in more than six months, there's either something very wrong with this pregnancy, or you have bionic sperm, Mr. Lansing.”

“Kelly,” she groaned. “First of all, please don't put such thoughts about my baby out there, and, secondly, DO NOT give him any ideas.” Sitting up, she needlessly fussed and straightened her thin hospital gown before glaring at her estranged spouse. “You are not welcome here. I did not ask you to accompany me to my appointment, nor did I inform you for when it was scheduled. So, the question becomes, Ric, how did you even find out I'd be here today?”

Confidently, he replied, “I have my sources, Elizabeth.”

“And I have the right to get a restraining order against you. Now, I'm trying to keep this civil, so I'm asking you to leave. If you won't go on your own, though, I'll have Dr. Lee call for hospital security.”

“That won't be necessary,” he reassured her... or, more precisely, he reassured Kelly, turning his greasy, mega-watt smile onto the OB-GYN and, just as always, putting on his Ric, the slick-dick, act that had, for years, won over juries and judges alike. It made her perfectly sea-worthy stomach queasy. “All I ask,” he continued, laying it on thick if she did say so herself, “is that you reassure me that my wife is taking excellent care of our son, that my little boy is healthy.”

Smiling sweetly, the polite charm masking the bitch just underneath the surface waiting to be unleashed by Kelly, Elizabeth's doctor said, “I'm afraid I can't discuss my patient's health or the health of her child with you, Mr. Lansing.” Opening the door to emphasize the fact that he needed to leave, all three of them noticed Alan Quartermaine standing before the previously closed entrance, his hand poised to knock. “Why, if it isn't the chief of staff,” her friend exclaimed as though Alan's presence there was a surprise and not something she had arranged with a quick text to her boss. “Mr. Lansing here was just leaving, weren't you,” Kelly basically told him pointedly.

However, as was always the case with the man she couldn't wait to divorce, Ric just had to get the last word in. “This isn't over, Elizabeth. I'm going to petition the courts for access to your records.”

Before she could respond, as someone with only Doctor Quartermaine's stature could do, the older man, voice deep and low with threat, bellowed, “stop harassing my hospital's patient, and stop trying to intimidate my daughter's best friend. You've overstayed your welcome, Mr. Lansing. Next time, be warned that General Hospital's security team will be told not to allow you into the building.”

Ignoring the chief of staff, Ric breezed out of the room – shoulders rolled back arrogantly, chin tilted up pompously. He had the air of the untouchable, the attitude of the unbeatable, and Elizabeth couldn't wait to knock the overly cocky SOB down a few pegs when she finally, once and for all, had him permanently out of both her life and, more importantly, out of her unborn child's.

She was still imagining the sweet taste of court victory when Alan cleared his throat, his tone imminently softer and gentler when he addressed the two women. “Thank you for texting me, Dr. Lee, and, Elizabeth, Monica wanted me to extend to you an invitation to stay at the house if Ric keeps bothering you. Between the gated entry, Reginald, myself, and our security system, we would be much better equipped to keep you safe.”

“Thanks, Mr. Q,” she replied gratefully, though she'd never allow her weasel of a soon-to-be ex to chase her out of her own home... even if her apartment wasn't anything to brag about. Still, though, she wanted to show the older man that she appreciated his wife's offer, so she said, “I'll think about it and let Emily know.”
Nodding and smiling in their direction, he then, without another word said between them, closed the door and allowed the two women to get back to their appointment together. Immediately, Kelly queried, “so, are you moving uptown on me, Liz?”

“Are you crazy, of course not,” Elizabeth answered, chuckling softly. “Epiph... I mean, Nurse Johnson already thinks I’m a silver-spoon brat who's in her program only because I'm a Hardy. If I moved in with the chief of staff, his cardiologist surgeon of a wife, his star med student daughter, and his father – the biggest benefactor this hospital has, she'd probably filet me with her gaze alone.”

“She does have a wicked evil eye,” her friend agreed. And there was no humor or joking behind the comment. Epiphany Johnson hadn't become a legend at General Hospital and someone to fear by going about her intimidation tactics half assed. Just as seriously delivered, Kelly's next remark made the young, expectant mother squirm. “Now, about this weight issue... Elizabeth, what's going on?”

“I just... I'm not hungry.” When her OB-GYN glared at her, she continued, “and I'm constantly stressed, and tired, and busy. Don't get me wrong. I'm eating. Three meals a day. Apples. Bananas. Carrots. Whole wheat bread. Cheese. I'm even drinking milk,” she confessed, shuddering even at the thought of the disgusting beverage. “However, it's perfunctory. I'm eating because I know that I have to, not because I actually have an appetite.”

“And because of the fact that you get up in the morning, work a shift at Kelly's, and then come here for the rest of your day means you're burning off everything you eat plus more,” the Asian doctor filled in for her, nodding in saddened understanding. “Is there any possible way you could... I don't know, cut back on your hours at the diner some?”

“Not while I'm pregnant, not while I need to buy all these things that a baby requires, and definitely not while I'm in the middle of a messy, complicated divorce and custody battle.”

Sighing, the outward display of frustration causing her friend's bangs to puff up into the air before falling gracefully back against her face once more, Kelly plopped down onto her wheeled stool. As she reached for the ultrasound equipment, the medical professional mumbled, “you need a man.”

“What? Kelly! No,” Elizabeth disagreed vehemently. “A man, two rather, is what got me into this mess in the first place. One was a psycho who treated me like a welcome mat, and the other spent one night with me before taking off out of town... not that I really wanted to spend the rest of my life with him or anything but still. No,” she emphasized her previous response. “I most certainly do not need a man.”

“A guy would solve all your problems,” the OB-GYN persisted as she started to spread out the cold ultrasound jelly upon the nurse's still flat tummy. “You could find a better place to live, because the two of you could split the rent. When your back starts to hurt, and your feet start to swell, he'd be there to massage them for you. And, best of all, nothing sparks an appetite like great, mind-blowing, orgasmic....”


“Well, if nothing else, a big, burly, manly man hanging around you would, at least, keep Tricky-Dicky from getting too close to you.” Before Elizabeth could respond, Kelly rapidly changed the subject, the animosity leaving her voice as her words went from cool and argumentative to warm and friendly once more. “And there’s your baby, mommy. Now, it's still a little too early to find out if you're having a boy or a girl, but I wanted to perform a quick ultrasound today just to check up on
things inside of there, what with all your stress and the fact that you’re having trouble gaining weight. But your son or daughter seems to be doing great, Elizabeth. Just try, I mean really try, to get more rest, to eat more, and to take a few minutes for yourself and enjoy this – enjoy being pregnant. You and your child deserve that, babe.”

Awe struck, Elizabeth could say nothing in reply, but Kelly didn't seem offended or even too shocked by her silence. Rather, the doctor just chuckled to herself, took a screen shot to capture the image of the baby, and quietly murmured, “I'm going to leave the two of you alone for a minute.” And, soundlessly, her friend slipped out of the room, no doubt going to have the ultrasound picture printed for her.

Once she was alone, Elizabeth's mind swirled into action. Kelly was right about so many things. Oh, not the sex and the massages, though both sounded really good at the moment... not that she'd ever mention that to her OB-GYN. But her baby did deserve for Elizabeth to be happy, and, more importantly, her baby deserved to be safe.

She had promised herself that she would do everything and anything in her power to keep her child protected from Ric, and that meant keeping her estranged husband as far away from her unborn baby as possible. If that meant moving in the Quartermaine estate, then so be it. If that meant going even further into debt and borrowing money from Emily to pay for an expensive family court lawyer, then that's exactly what she would do. And, if that meant finding some guy to act as a veritable bouncer, then she'd just have to start looking into private security. It didn't matter how much the thought of asking a man to help keep her safe made Elizabeth bristle, the truth of the matter was that the health of her child was far more important than her pride.

Slowly, as she stood up from the exam table, using a few tissues to wipe her stomach clean, a plan started to form in Elizabeth's mind. It was one thing to ask a favor of another person, but, if she could somehow figure out a way to make such a request symbiotic – she'd scratch their back if they'd watch out for and protect hers, then going to a man for help wouldn't be nearly as big of a pill to swallow. Slipping off her paper-thin hospital gown and putting her scrubs back on – after all, she had to report in with her supervisor in a few minutes, she felt a small, tentative, yet hopeful smile turn up the corners of her lips.

Dressed and determined, Elizabeth knew that she could do what Kelly had suggested, even if the advice had been offered part tongue in cheek. She'd move in with a man. She'd keep Ric away from her child with the use of a guy who could kick her soon-to-be ex's pampered, rich-boy ass. Best of all, she'd do all this by helping someone else out at the same time. And she had just the right man in mind for the job.

Now, she just had to convince him of that fact, too.
Part Five

FNF#71: “Love is a temporary madness. It erupts like an earthquake and then subsides. And, when it subsides, you have to make a decision. You have to work out whether your roots have become so entwined together that it is inconceivable that you should ever part. Because this is what love is. Love is not breathlessness, it is not excitement, it is not the promulgation of promises of eternal passion. That is just being “in love,” which any of us can convince ourselves we are.

“Love itself is what is left over when being in love has burned away, and this is both an art and a fortunate accident. Your mother and I had it, we had roots that grew towards each other underground, and, when all the pretty blossom had fallen from our branches, we found that we were one tree and not two.” ~ Captain Corelli’s Mandolin

He wasn't having an allergic reaction; he didn't have a rash, but that did not stop Jason from feeling like his body was itching to shed its own skin.

It had been less than twenty-four hours since Elizabeth Webber had ordered him to remain in bed which meant not leaving his room, and, already, he felt as though he was about to climb the walls. The lack of action, the lack of distraction was driving him insane. While Jason wasn't a man to appreciate unnecessary noise – especially chatter, sometimes, when he was alone, his life was just too damn quiet, and the quiet did nothing but make him think about things that were better off forgotten.

Oh, who was he kidding?

Elizabeth Webber herself – and not her command of bed rest – had caused his introspective mood. It had nothing to do with the antibiotics he was grudgingly taking, nor his downtime, nor the fact that the only noises he had heard all day were those from outside of his room and those from below in the bar. No, rather, it was the way that his sister's best friend made him feel which caused Jason to recall the last time he had been willing to listen to a woman talk, the last time he thought he could be friends with a girl. Needless to say, that hadn't turned out so well.

First in his life, after he woke up from the coma, there had been Robin. She had been patient and compassionate. She had been his friend... or, at least, she would have been eventually if his decisions and life choices hadn't scared her away. Robin had just not been able to accept the idea of him fighting for a living. The violence had frightened her, and, soon after they met, she had left him – and Port Charles – behind for Paris. Looking back, knowing what type of life she was now living, Jason knew that she had made the right decision... for the both of them, so she wasn't the one who, in the face of meeting Elizabeth, taunted him from the back of his mind.

No, that honor went to Carly.

The blonde should have just been another one of his random, nameless hookups, but Carly had been unwilling to let it be just mindless sex. It wasn't so much that she wanted to settle down and become the picture-perfect family with him, but she was possessive and a social climber, and, as soon as she learned of his former connections to the Quartermaine family and his ties to Sonny Corinthos, she hadn't been willing to allow any other woman to get close to him. Because the sex had been decent,
and Carly proved to be a pretty good distraction, Jason had allowed a sort of friendship to develop between them, though, even at the time, he had known the relationship to be heavily one sided.

Carly messed up, and then he helped her out. In a way, it had made him feel useful, needed. Even if he would have claimed he didn't want such connections to another person, at the time it had felt good. Now, years later, Jason was able to recognize the fact that his enjoyment of Carly's dependency upon him came from a direct reaction to the Quartermaine's absolute dismissal of him as Jason Morgan. While his so-called family had only wanted Jason Q, Carly had only wanted and needed Jason Morgan. At the time, that had been a very heady feeling for him. It was only after he was in too deep that he had realized just how unhealthy his connection to the blonde really was.

Eventually, the sex between them had stopped. Instead, when Carly came to him, it was for help... and only for help. And then she became pregnant. He could remember how scared she had been when she confessed her secret, how desperate, and, immediately, he had wanted to do something to make the situation better for her... but not the way Carly had in mind. However, just like always, she slowly wore him down, and he had agreed to pretend to be her father's child. Though he had warned her that he wouldn't lie – after dealing with the Quartermaines and Sonny, he hated liars more than he hated anything else, Jason had agreed not to freely admit the truth either. After Michael was born, though, he would have done anything for the little boy.

The first year of Michael's life had been wonderful. Not only did he relish the feelings that came with taking care of someone so innocent and untouched by the world, but the way he felt for Michael (and he liked to think the way Michael felt about him) was the first – and only - taste of unconditional love Jason had ever experienced. It had been unbelievably addicting. Plus, it was then that his so-called career had reached its peak, and Sonny was allowing him to fight to win rather than to lay down and take a beating in order to build up some other fighter's reputation. He had moved out of Jake's, rented a small cottage in the woods, and he had even wanted to be a family with Carly – platonic, of course – when she returned after recovering from her postpartum depression.

But that hadn't been enough for Carly. No, she had wanted everything. She had demanded that he quit fighting and really go to work for Sonny. She hated the cottage and only wanted to live somewhere where she would have a twenty-four hour doorman and an elevator. Most of all, she had wanted him to marry her... really and truly marry her, not just in name. When he had refused, believing Carly to be unselfish enough to accept his decisions and move on – a bonehead move on his part Jason could now admit in retrospect, she had gone looking for someone who would give her all those things she had wanted; she had gone to his biological brother – Michael's real father, confessed her lies, and sunk her hooks into the Quartermaine heir and everything that came with such an advantageous marriage. Immediately stripped of his rights to Michael, Jason had gone back to the man he had been right after he had been released from the hospital.

For a while it had been touch and go. More reckless than ever, he had gone back to doing all the dangerous things he had once attempted for the rush of adrenaline, but, after Michael, he had taken the risks just to feel anything at all. When it didn't work, he just moved back into Jake's, started sleeping around again, and poured all of his time and energy into his fights. At least, he had been smart enough not to do anything drastic and stupid like take his own life; at least, he hadn't been that pathetic. But, now, after spending just twenty minutes in Elizabeth Webber's company, he had once again realized just how lonely he was, how empty his life had become since Michael had been ripped away from him. And that was terrifying.

So, he paced. Ignoring the ache in his back from his severely bruised kidneys, shrugging off the pain from his broken, abused ribs, and forgetting about the stinging that accompanied the lacerations dotting the bruised flesh of his face, Jason riotously roamed his small room, moving from one side to
the other, from one wall to the next, eagerly anticipating the moment that the petite nurse would show up and, at the same time, desperately wishing that she would break her word and not come to him that evening. It didn't matter that she was absolutely nothing like Carly... which is probably what made him trust her in the first place. The fact that, for the first time in years, he felt as though he could forgo sleeping with a woman and actually be her friend was enough to scare him sightless.

Oh, it wasn't that Elizabeth wasn't attractive enough. In fact, she was hot as hell – all soft curves, and gentle, feminine features, and a mouth that should have been illegal... for more than one reason, but she was also smart, and obviously loyal, and she refused to take his crap. Most impressive of all, even in so much pain that he was relenting enough to allow her to take care of him while he laid supine in his bed, she made him laugh. While he had laughed at Carly and her antics enough back when they would hang out, never had the two of them really laughed together. But he had enjoyed Elizabeth's company, not because of great sex (which it would have been between the two of them) or because she needed him but because they had simply fit well together; they had seemed to understand one another. That was dangerous... and so was the fact that she was pregnant and scared.

Narrowing his already piercing gaze and scowling at himself, at his room, at the thought of his life in general, Jason glowered. For a brief second while she had been talking about her situation, he had felt the inane urge to ride to her rescue. He wasn't naïve. He knew he possessed some infuriating, inconvenient white-knight gene. In all likelihood, it, too, found its roots in his estranged family's rejection of his new personality following his emergence from his coma. Whatever the cause of his savior complex, after everything that happened with Michael and Carly, Jason knew better than to give into those compulsions. Elizabeth Webber would just have to figure out her problems on her own.

If she wanted to talk to him about them, he would listen. Hell, he'd even offer her advice... if he could think of anything which would be of help. But he wasn't going to interfere. He wasn't going to go to his sister. He wasn't going to check out her creep of a soon-to-be ex-husband or strong arm him into signing their divorce papers. And, most of all, he sure as hell was not going to offer to pretend to be her baby's father. Maybe his head had been rammed into a tree years before, and maybe he was stubborn at times, but he wasn't stupid, and he damn well would never make the same mistake twice. Especially not that mistake.

But, then, why was he so antsy for the brunette's arrival? Why had she been on his mind all day and drudging up memories best left forgotten or, at least, ignored? Why was he worried that something had happened to her, and why was he tempted to go out and track her down? Why was he wondering if she had remembered to eat all three meals that day, and why was he concerned with whether or not those three meals had been healthy? Why had his extensive collection of travel guides not been able to distract him from thinking about the young woman? Why was he pacing when he should have been resting in bed, why was he fighting back the urge to yell at Elizabeth when she arrived for being late... though she had never once mentioned a designated arrival time, and why the hell was he asking himself so many goddamned questions?

Jason tried to explain his current mood with the fact that he had been trapped alone in his room all day. He excused his concern because Elizabeth was Emily's friend, so Emily cared about her, and he, of course, cared about his sister and wouldn't want her to be hurt if her friend was hurt. But Jason knew the truth. He knew that there was something about the feisty brunette which made him hyper aware of her presence... or lack thereof. After knowing her for just a few minutes, she had somehow managed to worm herself under his skin, and that's why he felt as though he were about to climb the walls, why... his neck had suddenly prickled, and why his body suddenly felt as tight and as alert as a tuning fork.
Instantaneously, he knew that she was there, even before she could lift a small, gloved hand – after all, it was cold that November night and was, in fact, snowing softly – and knock upon his door. As he roughly pulled the door open, he could see that his alertness threw her off guard, but she recovered quickly – another thing for him to admire about her, smiled, and announced, “I come bearing gifts.” The numerous bags in her hands were testament of that. “But, really, Jason you shouldn’t be out of bed.”

Before he could argue, before he could scream at her, chastise her, demand to know where she had been, ask about her day, or even tell her to come in, she was already barreling towards him, unloading her arms by placing her bags upon his dresser and offering him instructions. “Don’t lay back down yet, though, because I have something important to ask you.”

He widened his stance, went to cross his arms over his chest before he realized just how painful such a positioning would be, and then allowed his arms to fall back to his sides as he waited for her to shut the door and get to her question. Even though he thought he was prepared for anything and everything that could possibly come out of her mouth, Elizabeth Webber's words, her inquiry, shocked the living hell out of him.

“Jason Morgan,” she asked. And he grunted in reply, in acknowledgement. She grinned then – impishly so. “Would you marry me?”

If he would have been a girl, he probably would have fainted.
Part Six

FNF#52: “Never Regret. If it's good, it's wonderful. If it's bad, it's experience.” ~ Victoria Holt

Five minutes ago, he hadn't been able to sit still. Now, he wouldn't have been able to move even if someone paid him to. It didn't matter, though. His already worn carpet certainly wasn't receiving its well-deserved break, because Elizabeth Webber had picked up his pacing right where he had left off. From all her fidgeting – biting her already reddened and bruised bottom lip, wringing her hands, and occasionally reaching down to reassuringly rub circles against her still flat stomach, he could tell that she was nervous. But what the hell else did she expect?

She had come to his room, a place that she had never been to until less than twenty-four hours before, and asked him – a practical stranger – to marry her. And the damnedest thing was that he hadn't turned her down yet, though he had every intention of doing so... just as soon as he got his mind and mouth working again. No, his silence was definitely not born from his need to think her offer through. After all, he had just finished lecturing himself on all the various reasons why he would not help the pretty brunette. He was just... stunned speechless for the very first time in his relatively, compared to other people his age, short life. Not that he was a particularly loquacious man on the best of days, but this was a new level of quiet even for him.

Apparently reaching the threshold of her patience, Elizabeth turned towards him, ran her shaking fingers through her hair, and sniped, “would you just say something already!”

The first thing that popped into his head was the very last thing that Jason wanted to say to her, but he said it anyway and watched as the accusation met its mark, and the expecting mother flinched in reaction. “You're not even divorced yet.” It was a low blow... and completely not a dismissal of her proposal like he intended to provide her with, but, before he could apologize or even tell her no, Elizabeth was already rushing to explain herself.

“I know, and, trust me, if I could do anything to speed up the process, I would. You have no idea how much I want to be free of my... of Ric, but there's nothing I can do.” There was something he could do, though. Bruised and beaten or not, Jason could still pound the little piss-ant into signing the divorce papers, but at least he kept that idea to himself and didn't offer to physically threaten her spouse into cooperating. She didn't seem to notice his wandering thoughts, though, as she continued, “plus, this'll give us time to find a place to live and hopefully convince everyone that we're not doing this with the intentions to commit insurance fraud.”

Now, he certainly hadn't expected her to say that. Insurance fraud? The statement was so incongruous that it shocked him enough to ask, “huh? What the hell are you talking about?”

“She suggested that she would in fact propose to him, not just to suggest how much she wanted him to sign the divorce papers, but to make sure that he didn't physically threaten her. She didn't seem to notice his wandering thoughts, though, as she continued, “plus, this'll give us time to find a place to live and hopefully convince everyone that we're not doing this with the intentions to commit insurance fraud.”

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“Jason, why do you think I proposed to you,” she answered his question with one of her own, one that he sure as hell wasn't about to respond to. Allowing her to reply to her own inquiry, he listened as she said, “I'm doing this so that you can have medical insurance. If you're going to insist upon putting your body through the spin cycle on a nightly basis, you at least need a safety net underneath you in case you get hurt again.” Leaning forward and towards him as though those few inches would provide her with greater insight into his thoughts, she hesitantly asked, “you didn't think... I mean, we just officially met last night. You didn't believe that I... Oh my god,” Elizabeth exclaimed, starting to laugh. She giggled so hard that he watched as she grabbed her sides in pleasant pain.
“Of course not,” he refuted, standing up to walk as far away from her and her meaningless, decidedly inaccurate accusations.

“Then why did you think I...”

“Forget it,” he interrupted her, his harsh tone immediately dissolving any amusement she had previously been experiencing.

Slowly, she stepped towards him, obviously concerned. “Jason?”

Violently, he glared at her. “What the hell is in this for you, Elizabeth?”

“I, um...,” she blushed, glanced away. Biting her lip once more and refusing to look anywhere near him, she confessed, “I'd have a man to live with.”

Her response was unexpected. Though he hadn't known her for long, he prided himself on being what he considered a good judge of character, and Elizabeth Webber didn't strike him as the wilting violet type of girl. In fact, she seemed fairly independent and certainly not embarrassed or scared of being a single mother. So, why the hell would she now, all of a sudden, want a guy there by her side to hold her hand unless...

As if sensing his thoughts, she rushed to explain, “I know. I thought it was dumb at first, too, when my friend, Kelly – she's my OB-GYN as well – mentioned it.” Why the hell he needed to know who her lady doctor was, Jason had no idea. “Anyway, she started talking about all the benefits that came with living with a guy – shared rent, a protective presence in case my estranged husband decided to come and throw his weight around. And it's more than that, too... if we were to get married. It's so much easier to cook for two then it is for one, and, seeing as how I'm going to be a mom in five months, it's probably time that I learn to make more than just brownies. Though, if you're wondering, my brownies are really good... if I do say so myself.”

Apparently, Elizabeth Webber liked to ramble when she was nervous.

Remaining steadfastly silent, Jason merely raised a brow as he urged her to continue talking. He had a feeling he wouldn't be able to say no to her offer until she had completely exhausted herself and every argument she had in her arsenal. “Plus, there's the fact that two people living together means only half of the house work. You could clean the bathroom, while I handled the kitchen, though come to think about it, with my sensitive nose, you might have to handle both until after I give birth, but I can do all the vacuuming and mopping, all the laundry. I'm not a slouch, and I'm certainly not a messy roommate. Best of all,” she announced, nodding her head in emphasis, “are the kickass tax credits married couples get. We'd be saving tons of money.”

Not that he even paid taxes, but he figured he'd keep that little fact to himself for the time being. “So, let me get this straight,” he prefaced his next statement. “You want to get married so that I can have health insurance and so that you can check the non-single box when filling out paperwork?”

Elizabeth huffed in frustration. “Ugh, you're such a freaking guy!”

“Isn't that the reason you proposed to me,” he returned, smirking despite the situation and the earlier panic it had instilled in him. “Besides, I think there's a little more to marriage than just shared household responsibilities.”
“Hey, between the two of us, buddy, I'm the only one here who's been married before, and, trust me, I gave you the highlights.”

“Oh no, Elizabeth,” he teased her. Even though he knew it was wrong, even though he was not interested in a sexual relationship with the woman standing across from him, Jason couldn't help but run his gaze up and down her petite frame and taunt, “I think you forgot the best perk.”

She flushed prettily in mortification, and, distractedly, he found himself wondering just how far down her body a blush would suffuse, but, soon afterwards, the expectant mother regained her composure. “Not when you're married to Ric Lansing.”

He chuckled, appreciating her wit and spice. “You've been saving that zinger for a while, haven't you?”

“Along with others.”

“Well, make sure you deliver them someday so that they can hit their mark.”

“Oh, don't worry,” she assured him. “I definitely intend to.”

Speaking without thought, he blurted out, “what the hell did that bastard do to you,” and, immediately, Jason regretted the question, not because he didn't want to know but because such a query showed her that he cared, and, if he was going to get out of their current situation without hurting her but also managing to turn her proposal down, then he couldn't show any weakness, and admitting curiosity and concern towards her disaster of a marriage did just that.

“Trust me, that's too long of a story for tonight. Ask me again some other time.” He nodded, accepting the out she had provided him with. “But, as for your question, no. Asking you to marry me has nothing to do with household chores. I just... I'm scared,” Elizabeth confessed, losing much of her previous, false bravado. “Ric has threatened to do whatever it takes to get custody of my baby. He even showed up at my doctor's appointment today, and Alan had to have him thrown out of the hospital.” While he and his biological father did not get along, he at least had to give the Quartermaine the credit he deserved for protecting the woman before him.

“I wouldn't put it past Ric to up his attack, to start showing up at my apartment. While I don't fear him being able to wear me down and convince me to go back to him – trust me, I am completely and entirely through with that slime-ball, I am afraid that the stress of worrying about what he might do next will negatively impact my pregnancy, and I'm sick and tired of being afraid, Jason. There are things about me, about my past, that you don't know about, but, needless to say, I don't trust easily. But, for some reason – probably because of how much Emily loves you, I trust you, and I believe that you would keep me and my baby safe, not because I'm offering you free health insurance if you marry me but because you're a good guy. I just threw in the health insurance because you should get something out of this arrangement, too.”

Collapsing down to sit upon the edge of his bed, Jason found himself sighing in relief... not that he was going to say yes to the brunette's proposal; he still had every intention of turning her down. “So, you don't want me to lie and claim to be the father of your baby?”

“Oh, Jason,” she murmured, her eyes clouding over with tears. Evidently, he didn't have to explain the Michael-Carly situation to her. Emily was good for that, though – sticking up for him and disparaging against her former sister-in-law, and it didn't surprise him that she had confided the
events of his past to her best friend. After all, because of how complicated the entire thing had become, Emily had been stuck in the middle, put into an impossible place between her two brothers.

Recapturing his attention, Elizabeth swore darkly, “shit!” That reaction puzzled him, but he remained still and silent as he listened to her rant to herself. She was off in the corner of his room, her back turned towards him as she paced and berated herself, though he was perfectly capable of hearing every word she said. “I'm such a freaking idiot. Way to go, there. Lizzie Webber strikes again. Of course he'd connect your offer to what happened with Michael. No wonder he looked like a stupid deer caught in a pair of high beams when you asked him to marry you. When will you ever learn, Elizabeth? Someday, you'll stop to think before you put your foot in your huge mouth. It's probably because its so big that you haven't choked yet. Now, he's never going to say yes, and you're going to have to...”

At least, she was right about that. Interrupting her self-indictment, Jason stood up, advancing towards the pacing woman until he could carefully grab hold of her shoulders and turn her to face him. “Would you stop talking about me like I'm not still in the room? I can hear everything you're saying.” She held up a protesting finger, raised her brows, but he kept talking before she could interject. “And cut yourself a break already. I get it, okay? You're not asking me to be your baby's father.”

“I'd never ask you to lie for me, Jason... not about that. It wouldn't be fair to you, and it wouldn't be fair to my child either.” Further proof – not that he needed any more – that she was absolutely nothing like Carly. Before he could finally put a stop to their farce of a discussion, she pressed on, “what I'm asking you for is to be my friend... to be my more than friend, I guess. I know this whole plan is crazy, and Emily will probably kill me for it once she finds out, but I...” Glancing up at him, meeting his gaze, she implored, tears glistening in her wide, terrified, blue eyes. “I just don't know what else to do.”

Aw, hell.

He was still going to turn her down, still say no, but then Jason Morgan heard the last words he ever thought he'd say tumbling forth from his own lips... and he wasn't drunk, or being coerced, and there wasn't a gun held up to his head. “Yes, Elizabeth,” he promised her. “I'll marry you.”

Then she fell into his arms, hugged him tightly, and cried. In relief.

And he pulled her in even closer, never once feeling the pain of his broken and bruised body.
Part Seven

Part Seven

FNF#53: I too pass from the night, I stay a while away o night, but I return to you again and love you. ~ Walt Whitman

It was amazing how much... stuff one accumulated. Although Elizabeth could have termed it junk, because, quite frankly, in another person's eyes it probably was, she refused to call her possessions by such an unsavory term. After all, she didn't have much in the world – just her mind, her unborn baby, and everything she had somehow managed to squeeze into her shoebox of an apartment, and, for some reason, she had always been a person who equated belonging somewhere with the amount of crap one possessed.

If the sheer volume of packed and still unpacked boxes littering her living space was proof of whether or not she belonged in Port Charles, a stranger would have assumed she had been a lifelong resident.

So far, she and Emily had managed to completely pack up her kitchen and part of her living room. Whether she wanted to learn how to cook for her child or not, that feat had not been accomplished yet, and she really wanted to wait and save her efforts until she had someone to try her creations out on. Poor Jason. Not that Emily knew that she was even acquainted with the other woman's brother, let alone technically engaged to him. Yet. That was the main reason why she was so intent upon her packing, so focused upon thinking about all her photo albums, all her dozens of afghans, and all the magazines that she insisted be kept just in case she wanted to reread them again someday.

And the worst thing was that Emily humored her every whim. Oh, Elizabeth knew her best friend's agreeable nature had less to do with her sweet personality that evening and more to do with her desire to appease Elizabeth and her hormones and with wheedling her resolve down and getting Elizabeth to spill the identity of her secret new roommate. Because Emily knew that Elizabeth was moving in with someone – with a man, and the medical student knew that Elizabeth had plans to get married once more; Emily just didn't know the identity of the groom, and, frankly, Elizabeth was afraid to tell her.

Had she mentioned recently that she was a terrible, awful, slimy weasel of a best friend?

Apparently, her short marriage to Ric had resulted in more than just an abhorrence of dark haired, charming men who wore suits and and charged an expensive attorney fee. Apparently, her soon-to-be ex's less than stellar personalities had rubbed off on Elizabeth, a visual she shuddered against and tried to suppress. How she had ever managed to go there, she now could not even...

“I swear to all things holy, Elizabeth Imogene Webber... including the very first cocoa bean ever harvested, if you do not tell me who the hell this new guy of yours is, I'm going to... I'm going to... well, I'm going to do nothing. I'll stop packing, and you'll never be ready to move in time.”

“You know, Em, you're not my only friend,” Elizabeth teased, unwilling to just give in. Besides, it wasn't Emily's first outburst of the evening, and it certainly wouldn't be the last, but she had managed to either avoid the demands for answers or distract the other woman so far. Surely, her magic... and what she would like to consider at least a small amount of skill... would hold out for a little while longer, and, for as long as it did, she was going to take advantage of the situation.
“Fine,” the someday doctor relented, already returning to her packing efforts. However, Elizabeth noticed a sneaky smirk upon Emily's face and knew that she wasn't out of the hot water yet. “If you won't tell me outright, then it looks like I have no other option but to guess.”

She exhaled, relieved. There was no way in hell Emily would ever suspect Elizabeth's fiance – technically – was her own wayward brother. Playing along, though, she warned, “just don't stop working, Quartermaine.”

Emily paused long enough to study Elizabeth, pursing her lips and tilting her head to the side in thought. After several awkward moments where she felt as though her best friend were perusing her like she would a new designer bag, trying to decide if she had anything in her wardrobe which would compliment the accessory, Emily finally suggested, “Lucky Spencer.”

And Elizabeth was shocked – gulp at her best friend, throw a pillow, and eventually laugh maniacally shocked. “Em, I love you, but are you back on drugs or something?”

“What,” the other brunette defended herself, shrugging. “The two of you dated once. Why would it be so much of a stretch to think that you... reconnected?”

“Because we dated when we were teenagers. Because a lot has happened since then. Because you know damn well that I'm not attracted to him anymore. And, oh, maybe because, when I believed he died, I moved on, only to have him returned with his brains scrambled – a completely different person. It took me years to get out from underneath the entire town's expectations that I be with Lucky simply because of our past, forget the fact that he had no recollection of it. And let's not forget the fact that, if I married Lucky, I'd be going from one psycho to an entire psycho family. No thank you.”

“Well, he is a cop, and you said that this relationship has more to do with protection and mutual respect than actual attraction and certainly not love, so I just thought...”

Cutting her friend off, Elizabeth said, “Em, Lucky's a cop for the PCPD. They can't even protect their favorite donut shop from being harassed by the local bicycle gang. I'd be safer with you guarding me.”

“Damn straight,” Emily responded passionately. “I don't know why you turned my Dad's offer down to move in with us. I'd never let Ric get to you.”

“I know that, sweetie,” she agreed, dropping the DVD’s she was packing softly onto the couch and crossing the tiny room to clasp her best friend's hands. Smiling gratefully, Elizabeth continued, “and I appreciate the offer. I really do. But, with my way, I get to help someone else out as well, not just accept help.”

“So you've said...”

As the two women went back to their work, a peaceful silence enveloped the otherwise quiet room – Elizabeth pensive and nervous for when Emily would stumble upon or actually have to be told the truth about her upcoming marriage, and Emily lost in her contemplations. Despite her anxiety, the stillness was nice, and it afforded her a chance to finally take a deep, cleansing, relaxing breath. Though Elizabeth knew the moment wouldn't last for long, she took advantage of it.

And then Emily exploded again with another outrageous suggestion. “Nikolas!”
“His family’s even crazier than Lucky's, Em.”

“Well, he used to have that crush on you years ago...”

“Ugh,” Elizabeth groaned in remembrance, making her best friend giggle. “Don’t remind me. That was just... creepy.”

As if they both seemingly decided to take a break at the same time, the two girls collapsed onto the couch, Elizabeth in an exhausted sprawl, while Emily curled up her legs and perched expectantly. “What about that Gavin guy who delivers for Kelly's?”

She looked at the beloved Quartermaine daughter askance, brows creased with disbelief. “Have you ever even met Gavin, Em?” At her best friend’s negative nod, the expectant mother continued. “He's still in high school, he maybe weighs 115 pounds soaking wet, and he drives a scooter. I’d have to ask his mommy for permission to even talk to him on the phone. Forget marriage. I'm having a child, not marrying one.”

“How the hell would I know,” Emily huffed, grumbling. “It's not like you've given me anything to go by here, and, really, Liz, I'm just now realizing how very few men are actually in your life. You never talk about any of the guys you go to school with, and I know on my own that the hospital's under-ancient group leaves much to be desired.”

Deciding to take pity upon the other woman, Elizabeth said, “I don't work with him at Kelly's, Em, I didn't meet him at school, and he has nothing to do with the hospital.”

“But I know him?”

“You do,” she answered, standing up. Unconsciously, her hands went to her back, supporting it while she stretched out her sore and tired body. Heavily pregnant or not, Elizabeth was exhausted after a normal day of waitressing and then nursing school work. Adding packing to everything else she had to do was just draining her, though she certainly wasn't about to complain. She couldn't wait to move out of her tiny apartment, and, though not the Quartermaine estate, she adored the little house she and Jason had found and decided to rent together.

As Emily stood as well, she asked, “and the two of you are friends?”

“Yes,” she responded, grinning softly at the realization that she and Jason actually were friends. Facing the other brunette, Elizabeth expounded, “we are, though we haven't officially known each other for that long.” Kneading her fists into the small of her back, she pushed out her stomach and stretched one last time, sighing in relief when she heard her vertebra crack. “It was just one of those things, you know – where you meet someone and you're immediately comfortable around...” Her words sputtered to stop when she noticed her best friend's expression. “Em, why are you staring at me that way?”

Squealing, Emily nearly catapulted herself across the room, immediately enfolding Elizabeth into a tight hug. “You're showing! You're finally showing. When you stretched like that, I saw this teeny-tiny, adorable baby bump, and I'm sorry but everything else you were saying just flew out of my head.”

She had already noticed the slight extension of her formerly flat tummy, but, still, Elizabeth couldn't resist in that moment looking down at her abdomen anyway. Both her own hands and Emily's found
the slight pooch, and the two girls shared a warm, excited grin with each other. “I can't believe it,” Em murmured, amazed. “I've known that you were pregnant for months now, but it finally feels real, you know.”

“Another one of those seeing is believing moments, huh,” Elizabeth quipped.

Ignoring her, though, Emily continued to gush, “I wasn't going to say anything because I didn't want to worry you further, but you kind of had me scared, sweetie. I mean, you're really petite, and you were already in your second trimester and not showing.”

“You're just happy that I'm finally getting fat.”

Surprising her, the medical student said harshly, “don't. I'm being serious right now.”

Relenting, Elizabeth stopped teasing her friend and admitted, “I think it's because I finally feel safe – you know, Em, so my body was finally ready to proclaim to the world that it's changing, that I'm having a baby.”

“I don't know who this mystery guy of yours is, but, if he can make you feel so secure, then he has my vote of confidence. I just really wish you would tell me already who he...”

Interrupting her, the door to Elizabeth's apartment opened. Though not done in a way that was startling or rude, because the person did not knock or announce their arrival, it caught the two women off guard, and they both turned towards the small apartment's entrance. What they found was a very confused, worried looking Jason Morgan, his gaze locked upon Elizabeth's stomach where their four hands were still resting.

“What's wrong,” he immediately demanded to know, marching across the room, his large, purposeful strides quickly eating up the slight space between them. “Did something happen to the...”

Before he could finish his question, however, Emily let go of Elizabeth, fist ed her hands upon her hips, and glared at both her best friend and her brother. Elizabeth cringed in preparation of the words that were no doubt about to erupt from the other brunette's mouth. “I can't believe this,” Emily complained, her wrath focusing upon the expectant mother. “Of all the men in this town, you're going to marry Sonny Corinthos?!?”

Simultaneously, Elizabeth and Jason responded, “what,” confusion and disbelief wrapping around their single word exclamations.
Part Eight

FNF#54: It's better this way, I said, Haven't seen this place before. Where everything we say and do, hurts us all the more. It's just that we stayed too long in the same old sickly scheme, and I'm pulled down by the undertow, I never thought I could feel so low, and, oh, darkness, I feel like letting go.

If all of the strength and all of the courage come and lift me from this place, I know I can love you much better than this: Full of grace, full of grace. ~ Sarah McLaughlin

“Em,” Elizabeth reassured her best friend emphatically, hands clenched sincerely across her heart. “I am not marrying Sonny Corinthis.”

“Oh thank god,” Emily sighed, sitting down bonelessly upon the couch behind her. “I mean, first of all, I didn't even know that he and Carly were on the outs again. Not that I would put it past Sonny to commit bigamy, what considering he's probably broken every other single law out there, but, still, I never thought you would stoop so low. Plus, there's the fact that he's Ric's half brother, and that's just... ew! – being with two men that are so closely related. Granted, Carly did it, but you're so far out of her lowly league, and you can do so much better than the Latin Lothario of Port Charles – no offense, Jason, since technically, I know, you work for him somehow, but I can't tell you how relieved I am to hear that you're not...”

“Okay, Em,” Elizabeth told her, interrupting the rambling brunette. “It's time to take a breath.”

Before she could say anything more, Jason was asking, “your ex is Sonny's brother? I didn't know Sonny even had a brother.”

“Most people don't.” she quickly explained, waving off his astonishment. “While Ric's obsessed with Sonny, he also keeps the news pretty quiet, partly because of his career and partly because I think he believes it gives him an edge in all the mind games he plays with his brother... not that Sonny knows about half the stuff Ric does. Anyway, that's not important right now.”

“No, you're right,” he agreed with her. Lowing his voice, he accused, “I can't believe you haven't told her yet.”

Piping up, Emily questioned, “told whom? Me? And what?” Becoming petulant, the medical student demanded, “would someone like to tell me what the hell is going on around here? If you're not marrying Sonny, Elizabeth, then why is Jason here? And, for that matter, why does he even know where you live?” Horrified, Emily gasped, and it was apparent that her mind had just conjured up another horrifying scenario to explain her brother's presence. “What's wrong? Who's hurt?” Standing up, she insisted, “tell me what happened, Jason.”

Instead, though, he glared at Elizabeth. “I thought we agreed you'd handle this.”

“Maybe I had second thoughts,” she defended. “After all, she's your sister.”

“And she's your best friend,” he retorted.
Avoiding Jason's piercing, accusing blue eyes, Elizabeth glanced upon her best friend whose own gaze was ricocheting between the engaged couple... not that Emily knew that she was going to be marrying Jason... and not that they were actually a couple in the traditional sense. She just meant that they were two people together... but not together, and, traditionally, two things paired together... not that they were a pair... were considered a couple.

While her mind was running in circles, Emily's, apparently, was rapidly zeroing in on the truth. “Wait a second,” the Quartermaine daughter mumbled quietly to herself. Louder, she remarked, “the two of you are in on this together... whatever it may be.” Accusingly, she turned towards Elizabeth, “why does my brother know who you are marrying when I don't? And, for that matter,” she swung her nosy, insistent gaze back to Jason, “how do you even know each other?”

Elizabeth watched as Jason pinched the bridge of his nose, and she pounced upon the man's unintentionally displayed moment of weakness. “Ha! You're stalling, Jason,” she pointed out, smirking when he glared at her. “You only pinch your nose when you're nervous and don't know what to say, because the show of exasperation buys you a few seconds of time. Quit putting off the inevitable, and answer your sister's questions.”

“Bossy,” he taunted out of the corner of his mouth in her direction before lifting his gaze to face Emily.

But it was too late. Mouth agape, eyes wide in sudden knowledge, and speechless – a rare feat in and of itself, Emily sputtered, “you... the both of you... but how... when... oh my god.” And she collapsed onto the couch once more.

It was in that moment that Elizabeth, for the first time, truly felt the weight of responsibility at becoming a parent upon her shoulders. Despite the fact that she and her best friend were the same age, it was unavoidably apparent to her that she was now supposed to be the more mature one of the two of them, simply because she would be a mom in a few short months' time. As Emily gazed up at them, her wide, shocked brown eyes imploring Jason and Elizabeth to explain the astounding situation to her, Elizabeth felt like a parent; she felt like Emily's parent – she the other brunette's mother and Jason her father – as they sat their daughter down for a heavy, important discussion. It was a completely terrifying experience... and hilarious at the same time.

Biting her lip to stifle her amusement, Elizabeth listened as Jason admitted, “Emily, Elizabeth and I are... we're getting married.”

“Yeah, no shit, Captain Obvious. I figured that one out already. What I want to know is how? The two of you don't even really know each other, do you? I mean, you can't... right?”

“Em, it's complicated,” she hedged.

“No, it's not,” her best friend snapped back. “People only say that when they don't want to explain themselves.”

Sharing a quick, conspiratorial glance with her fiance, Elizabeth nodded in understanding. From that one look, she knew exactly how he wanted to handle their present situation. While Jason didn't want to lie to his baby sister, he also didn't want her to worry about him. Elizabeth knew that, while Emily was aware that Jason somehow worked for Sonny and that his job wasn't your typical, everyday career choice, the other woman also had no idea that he fought for a living. So, with all this in mind, she finally said, “a few weeks ago, Jason and I... we ran into each other.”
“Literally or are you speaking figuratively here,” Emily demanded to know.

Okay. So, evidently, a few cliches and half truths weren't going to get them out of this. “Figuratively.” Nodding her head once as though to prepare herself, Elizabeth smoothed out her shirt in what she knew could only be construed as a nervous gesture and then took a seat beside her best friend. “I was on my way home from the hospital one night when I saw him sitting on a bench. I approached him, recognizing him from the pictures you have and the various things you've said about your brother over the years, and said hi.”

“And, now, suddenly, you're engaged,” the medical student responded harshly, glowering. Jumping to her feet, she rounded on her sibling, “Jason, if you don't tell me what's going on...”

But he didn't allow her to finish her threat. Elizabeth watched as he calmly clasped his little sister by the shoulders and gently pushed her back down onto the sofa. “She's trying to explain to you, Emily. Just... relax and listen.” To further pacify the adopted Quartermaine, Jason bent down, his knees creaking in the process.

“He had been hurt at the time – some... miscommunication which led to a bad situation at work,” she continued once her best friend was ready to listen.

Before Emily could ask, Jason reassured her, “I'm fine now, Em... because of Elizabeth. She found where I lived, and she took care of me.”

Realization dawning, the other woman murmured, “that's why you showed up at the house a few weeks ago. You were snooping around for Jason's address.”

“Speaking of which,” the man being discussed groused, “I really wish you wouldn't have that just sitting around where anyone could find it. The last thing I need is for Edward to come storming into Jakes, ranting about how I'm a disappointment and a degenerate, and...”

Smiling sweetly at him before looking around the partially packed up apartment, Emily interrupted, “it's not like you're going to be living there much longer anyway, Jas, and, as soon as word gets out that you and Elizabeth are getting married, Mom, Dad, and Grandfather are all going to find out where you live. Elizabeth is employed by the hospital through their nursing program. Her information is all on record for insurance purposes... and that's it,” the other woman realized. “You're marrying Elizabeth to keep her safe from Ric, and, in the process, you get health insurance.”

The expectant mother watched as her best friend tentatively turned towards her, reaching out to clasp Elizabeth's hands. “While I appreciate the fact that you took care of my brother and that you want to help him further, I can't support the idea of...” The emotional brunette's words faded away, tears formed in her eyes, and she lowered her voice. “Liz, I told you about what happened between my family and Carly all those years ago. I confided in you about how hurt Jason was afterwards. I can't believe you would ask him to put himself in that type of position again, not after everything he's already suffered.”

Softly, Jason addressed his sister's concerns. “She's not, Em.”

Flustered, Emily twisted to look at her still kneeling brother. “What do you mean?”

“I'm not going to lie and claim that Elizabeth's baby is mine. I'm just going to be around to help her with her... with Ric, and we're going to split the household chores and pull our incomes in order to both have someplace nicer to live.” When it was obvious to all of them that Emily was about to
protest some more, Jason continued, “and you already know that the house is three bedrooms. I'll have one, Elizabeth will have one, and the baby will have one. We're friends. Hell, maybe we're even more than friends. I don't know what to call someone who risked her own safety to help me just because I'm your brother and was hurt, but we're not involved... not like that.”

“Yeah, don't worry, Em, you're brother's reputation is still safe. Now, mine on the other hand...,” Elizabeth joked, rolling her eyes. “Let's see. What's the score now? I'm still married to one man, engaged to another, while I'm knocked up with a third man's child, one whose identity I refuse to reveal.”

“Don't remind me,” her friend grumbled. “And don't say that about yourself – knocked up,” Emily clarified. “You make everything sound so... sordid.”

“But isn't it,” she questioned, laughing.

“There's nothing sordid about your baby,” the other woman answered definitively, pointedly ending that particular discussion. After several still moments, moments in which Elizabeth spent the time fidgeting with her slightly swollen hands – damn those emerging pregnancy symptoms, for she was starting to swell up faster than an old woman with a serious salt addition and water retention problems, Emily finally admitted, “so, the two of you... you've really thought this thing through, huh?”

“Sure,” Jason answered, shrugging.

At the same time, she murmured, “I guess,” also shrugging and not failing to notice her best friend's curious gaze at their seemingly matching reactions. Why such things would matter to Emily, though, Elizabeth had no clue.

“What if you get caught, though,” the med student wanted to know.

“How will we,” she returned in response. “You're the closest person to both of us, and even you didn't know that we knew each other,” Elizabeth pointed out. “Granted, no one's seen us with each other before, but it's not like we're getting married tomorrow. We're getting a house together, we're friends, so our friends and family will start noticing that we're... in each other's lives soon. Plus, we're both private people, so no one will know that our relationship begins and ends with this arrangement, with our friendship. As far as the rest of the world is concerned, we'll just be a couple who hates public displays of affection and save our... canoodling for when we're at home together behind closed doors and curtains.”

“But what if the hospital...?”

“Jason might not get along with your parents, but they like me, Em, and Alan and Monica are both aware of my situation. Besides, estranged or not, I don't think they'd deny Jason medical insurance by turning us in even if they did figure out that our marriage was nothing more than a sham to keep me and my baby safe and to make sure that Jason has a means of affordably getting medical treatment if he were ever to be hurt again. So stop worrying,” she implored her best friend. “Everything's going to be okay. I promise.”

And, despite the situation, Elizabeth firmly believed everything that she had said. After all, she had no reason not to.
Part Nine

FNF#56: We all begin out with good intent when love is raw and young. We believe that we can change ourselves, the past can be undone, but we carry on our back the burdens time always reveals. In the lonely light of morning, in the wound that would not heal, it's the bitter taste of losing everything I've held so dear. ~ Sarah McLaughlin

There were only three places where Jason felt at home: on the back of his bike, at Jake's, and at the gym. Even with everything that was falling down around him when it came to his career, the gym still offered him a peaceful solace. When he went there, he knew his purpose. When he went there, he was comfortable around the other guys. And, when he went there, he wasn't the Quartermaine golden boy who got his head rammed into a tree and forgot his life; he was just another boxer, totally anonymous amongst his peers.

The gym was perhaps the best part about working for Sonny Corinthos. Free of charge, all his employees – even the ones who weren't his fighters – got to use the facilities as a part of their compensation for doing their job. His guards came to lift weights, his gophers, fittingly, came to run on the treadmills, and, of course, Jason and all of his fellow fighters used the place to train. The gym's focal point was the center ring; everything else fed off of and surrounded the roped off, elevated square.

The place wasn't classy, and it certainly didn't reek of pompous vanity like the other workout facilities he had ever been in. For a time, Sonny had tried to separate his men, keeping the fighters to the gym while encouraging his guards to use the facilities housed in Harbor View Towers – the don's own personal highrise, luxury apartment building. But the men who worked for Sonny didn't go for soft towels and saunas; they weren't interested in the niceties of life. Rather, they went to work for him for a variety of other reasons: they had no other options left, they were bored, they craved danger – none of which resulted in a desire for a trendy workout facility. Very quickly, the push by the mob boss had failed, and the guards had slowly trickled back to the Elm Street Gym.

Really, the place was a dump. Outside, the walls were covered in graffiti, and, inside, no matter what they did, it always smelled like old sweat. It was dim, because half of the overhead, florescent lights were burned out, and it was always freezing during the winter and way too damn hot during the summer, but nobody complained. No matter where a man stood in Sonny Corinths' pecking order, they wore the less pleasant aspects of the gym like a badge of honor. Over the years, it had become somewhat an issue of pride between them, a unifying bond. Though Jason wasn't usually a guy who craved friendship and companionship, he enjoyed spending time at the gym with the other men. No one ever said too much, and he appreciated that, but even he wasn't a stone wall.

He talked cars and bikes with Max. Sonny's oldest guard – Francis, a wizened, grisly, soft spoken man, had trained him to fight all those years before when he had first started boxing. And then there was Johnny O'Brien. Jason's total opposite, the Irishman was loud and boisterous. He always had a dirty joke on his lips and a smile for everyone. But, man, could Johnny O'Brien tell a story. At first, Jason had been hesitant around the young guard, but there was something too compelling to ignore in Johnny. Best of all, O'Brien didn't care if Jason didn't say a word and just listened. In fact, Jason was pretty sure that's why they got along so well – he left the spotlight, a place where Johnny felt extremely comfortable, alone for the other man to claim and fill.
Usually, at least one of the three men were at the gym when Jason went in to work out. That was another thing Sonny's guys had in common: they all sucked at socializing, so, if they weren't working, the chances were good that they were lifting weights, or running on the treadmill, or taking their turn in the center ring. Few of them dated, even fewer of them ever married. Instead, they had uncomplicated, emotionless one night stands. It wasn't that they didn't desire women or were too wild to pin down; rather, they feared the closeness of a relationship, recognizing how dangerous their lives, their jobs were, and, even if they were comfortable with risking their own lives, most of the men didn't want to risk the life of someone they cared for.

On that particular night, Jason was late getting to the gym. Usually, he would train for a few hours in the morning, leave, and then come back in the evening to work out some more. If he didn't show up, it was because he had fought the night before, and the outcome had not been to his advantage. He was predictable in his regularity, steadfast in his dedication. Whether boxing was his career or not, he truly enjoyed the physical exertion, craved it in fact. It was just one more way for him to blow off some steam, and, though he was no longer train surfing, Jason certainly wasn't someone to sit at home and crochet either.

“Yo, Morgan,” Johnny O'Brien called out to him in greeting as soon as he stepped inside of the Elm Street Gym. Already looping towards him, a dopey grin on his friendly face, the Irishman continued, “where the hell have you been? I've been cooling my heels for twenty minutes, waiting for your ass to finally show up.”

Blandly, obliquely, he stated, “I had some things to take care of.” Johnny might have been the closest thing he had to a true friend, but that didn't mean Jason was going to tell him about Elizabeth. Or her child. Or their engagement.

“Yeah, your mom,” the guard mocked, snickering.

Before he could reply, another man yelled out – he thought it was Ritchie by the sound of his voice, though he didn't spot the actual taunter, “no, more like your mom, O'Brien.”

“Dude, I walked into that one.”

Ignoring him and the joking around, Jason said, “just let me go and change. I'll meet you in the ring in five.”

Looping off to the only locker room in the gym – since they didn't have any female clients, the ladies locker room had long since been made into storage. What was kept in there, Jason didn't know. And he didn't care. Rather, after spending the better part of his evening with his sister and his, as odd as the word was to use, fiancee, all he wanted to do was forget everything else and beat the hell out of something. If that something happened to be Johnny O'Brien's face, then so be it.

It wasn't so much that he found either Emily or Elizabeth annoying or frustrating. In fact, he got along well with both of them. It was just everything – his last fight, his flagging career, his concern for the woman he had agreed to marry despite the fact that he had promised himself that he wouldn't get emotionally involved – was starting to become too much. He could feel the pressure building and building inside of him, and, if he didn't find a release for it soon, Jason knew that he was going to explode.

And that wouldn't be good for anyone.

Without thought, his actions pure rote instinct at that point, he changed out of his jeans, t-shirt, and
work boots, shoved his street clothes into his locker, and tossed on a pair of boxing shorts. His
movements were so trained, so practiced, that it took him what felt like mere seconds to lace up his
rubber soled shoes and tape his hands. By the time he got back to the ring, Johnny had already shed
his tank top and was dancing around the mat, his own adrenaline nearly short fuzzing. If Jason was
edgy, Johnny was juiced, and it surprised Jason had he hadn't noticed the guard's agitation earlier
when he had first arrived. If it had not been for his own distraction and for O'Brien's obvious talent at
covering up his feelings with ribald humor and goofy smiles, he would have been able to sense the
other man's strange mood. Johnny was practically sparking with undirected energy.

Suddenly, Jason wasn't sure if facing off with O'Brien in the ring was such a good idea. It had only
been a few weeks since his disastrous fight, his body was still sore, and, if he got hurt again, he had a
feeling Elizabeth would nurse him into insanity. The woman was sweet, and he certainly wasn't
going to complain about having her beside him in his bed – their interaction platonic or not, but Jason
was not someone who appreciated being coddled, and Elizabeth Webber was a coddler.

“You alright,” he asked, bending over to duck below the ropes and step into the ring.

“Since when do you like to talk,” Johnny shot back in return, still hopping around like a popping
kernel of corn. “Put your gloves where your mouth is, Morgan, and shut the hell up.”

Though he eyed the other man warily, Jason did just that. Despite the fact that Sonny's fighters did
wear gloves – probably because the mafioso did not want the men to ruin their hands in case they
eventually decided to come work for his other business ventures someday in the future, they didn't
wear protective padding, and mouth guards were optional. Usually, Jason used one, but, taking
swings with Johnny, he knew that the guard wouldn't deliver any cheap shots – agitated or not, so he
wasn't worried about his teeth getting knocked out. Basically, the two of them would dance around
each other, working more on avoidance and defense rather than going for blood. While they'd take a
shot or two at each other, they'd keep it below the neck and above the waist.

After several minutes, it was Jason who broke the silence between them. “Hey, I need a favor.”

Brow furrowed – for Jason had never once asked anybody for anything, Johnny quizzed, “what, you
need me to get some penicillin for you from the doc?” As a formal member of Corinthos'
organization, the Irishman had access to the on-call medical professional Sonny kept on salary.

“No.” Now equally puzzled, he was caught off guard when Johnny landed a soft blow to his left
side, just under his rib cage. The shot certainly wasn't pleasant, but at least it missed his sensitive
bones. “Why would I need medicine? I'm not sick.”

“Man, I've seen some of the women who hang out at Jake's. Hell, I've taken several of them home
with me. Anyone who goes there should probably take a precautionary dose of penicillin every
couple of months just to be on the safe side.”

Distracting his friend with a strong cross shot to the abdomen which O'Brien avoided only to be
catched unaware with a swift, stealth upper cut to the gut, Jason replied, “it's nothing like that.”

“Then shoot, Morgan. Whatever you need, man.”

“You drive an SUV, right, and the seats can be removed for hauling stuff around?”

Though Jason was more of an inside fighter, Johnny liked to tango. Smaller in stature and lighter of
his feet, he maneuvered them around the ring – the Irishman leading; Jason following. “Yeah.
Dodging a jab to the right kidney, he answered, “I’m moving.”

“No shit?” Astonished by the news, the guard chuckled. “Dude, you realize you can’t take Jake’s furniture with you, right? What the hell do you have to move?”

“It’s not for me; it’s for my roommate.”

That stopped Johnny O’Brien cold in his tracks. “You have to be shitting me. You – you are going to have a roommate?” Before Jason could reply, the other man demanded to know, “is she hot?”

Dropping his hands, he challenged, “look, are you going to help me out or not?”

“Yeah, sure, man, whatever. You can use my SUV.”

“Thanks.”

“No sweat.”

“Now, do you want to go back to boxing, or do you just want to tell me what the hell crawled up your ass today? You're not focused, and one of us is going to end up hurt if you don't relax a little bit.”

Hesitantly, Johnny glanced around them, noticing that none of the other guys were paying attention. Satisfied that their little girl talk moment had not been noticed, he nodded his head towards the back door, Jason following after him silently. They passed out into the night, both of them stripping off their gloves as soon as they cleared the doorway of the facility. Tossing his gloves aside onto a long-forgotten, rusted bench, Jason crossed his arms over his chest and watched as his friend walked back and forth before him, his movements jerky and spastic with nervous agitation. He had already prodded him enough, though. If the Irishman was going to talk, he'd have to take the initiative Jason had presented him with. He wasn't going to beg, cajole, or harass him into confessing whatever it was that was eating him up inside.

Finally, Johnny exploded, “everything's so fucked up right now, man.”

Narrowing his gaze to focus on the guard, he asked, “what do you mean?”

“Sonny, the organization, the other guys, it's a mess. The boss is losing it again, Carly's left him, and we have this new lawyer. Something’s not right about him. I don't trust him. He's too slick, too smooth, but Sonny just turns a blind eye. It's like this guy has something on him... or he knows all of Corinthos' weaknesses, I don't know. Shipments are being lost. Drugs are coming into the territory, but Sonny's not willing to do anything about it, and the cops have been sniffing around even more than usual.”

As he ranted, he paced, and, as Johnny paced, he ran his hands first through his hair and then rubbed them harshly across his satin covered thighs. Wading his way through everything O'Brien had said and getting down to the heart of the matter, Jason asked, “what are you going to do?”

“I don't know,” his friend whispered. “I just don't know.”
Part Ten

Prompt #58: It's September 24th, I'm Liz Parker, and five days ago I died. But then the really amazing thing happened. I came to life.” ~ Liz Parker, Roswell (1.01)

“I think Kelly for a girl has a nice ring to it, Lee for a boy.”

Since her appointment had started, Elizabeth had been stuck on the facts she had read that morning in the waiting room – facts from her favorite baby book, facts about her child's latest developments. Hiccuping. Yawning. Taste buds. And she wondered if the emergence of her cravings was due to the fact that her little girl or boy could now distinguish between sweet and salty, spicy and bland. It was all so... fascinating.

As a nursing student, she was aware of the basic facts, but everything was so much more... real now. Bold. And sometimes it all just caught up with her, took her breath away. She'd get so distracted by the wonder of being pregnant that she would lose track of time and place... that was until something equally as startling captured her attention.

“Huh?”

Doctor Lee laughed at Elizabeth's cluelessness, humorizing her with a roll of the eyes as she motioned for the expectant mother to step down from the scale. “I was just making some baby name suggestions. After all, I think I should take a lot of credit for this.”

Elizabeth still had no idea what the OB-GYN was getting at. “For what?”

“This,” Kelly motioned towards Elizabeth's now obvious pregnancy, the scale behind her. “You. The baby. The fact that, for the first time since you discovered you were pregnant, your weight is now on track.” Further explaining, she added, “you gained another four pounds, bringing your total up to nine so far. Congratulations, mom.”

“Thanks... I guess.” Although she wasn't one of those women who fussed about her appearance, who worried about what having a child would do to her figure, it was still strange to accept a compliment about gaining weight. “But, seeing as how I'm the one who has been eating for two, just how exactly does that translate into your achievement?”

They entered the exam room together, Elizabeth immediately heading towards the table and taking a seat while Kelly sat at the desk and made some notations on her chart. “You're gaining weight, because your appetite is back. Your appetite is back, because you feel safe once again. You feel safe once again, because you're engaged to that smoking hot bad boy Jason Morgan. Those eyes, that chest, that ass...,” the doctor finished her listing with a lusty sigh.

And, for just a minute, Elizabeth found herself picturing each and every body part her friend had mentioned... and others. They were officially living together now – out in a cute house in the suburbs of all places. It had a yard, a couple fireplaces. It even had a claw foot tub in her bathroom. That also meant, though, that the entire town was now aware of their relationship... including her grandmother who was unhappy about the engagement to say the least, something Elizabeth would no doubt hear about later that week when they had lunch together. However, what was odd was that, of all the
people she had heard from concerning her plans to marry Jason, Ric had not been one of them. Everything had been radio-silent on her soon-to-be ex-husband's front. While she certainly didn't miss his presence in her life, the quiet unnerved her, made her anxious.

“And then we can't forget about those arms either.” Kelly moaned in feigned pleasure, and the fact that Elizabeth had on more than one occasion found her own eyes straying to that particular portion of Jason's anatomy had her cheeks flaming in embarrassment. She told herself that it was only natural. Jason was an attractive man, and she was five months pregnant, not dead. But, when Doctor Lee made such blatantly sexual comments about the man Elizabeth now found herself living with, it made her just that much more aware. Of everything. “He's a fighter, right?” Kelly's question brought Elizabeth back to the conversation. “Yeah, just the thought of working that out for the rest of my life makes me reconsider my stance on monogamy.”

“Okay...?” Really, though. How the hell was she supposed to respond to that?

“Just don't go too wild and crazy on me now,” the OB-GYN cautioned. “You're finally gaining weight... thanks to yours truly for encouraging you to get back on that saddle, but that doesn't mean that I want you having sex so much that you burn off all the calories you consume.”

Sex. With Jason. Even implied... Heat flared in Elizabeth's belly, her hands clenched into fists, and she had to force her gaze away from her friend's as she tried to reign in her hormones. “That, uh, that won't be a problem,” she responded brokenly, biting her bottom lip.

Kelly chuckled. “Yeah. Okay. Whatever you say, Liz. It's not like you're already halfway to orgasm right here, right now just thinking about what that incredibly sexy and big fiance of yours can to do you with his...”

“Alright, okay,” she interrupted Doctor Lee, flinching when she realized how high pitched and raspy her voice sounded. “I get it. You've made your point.”

“Good.”

“But you don't have to worry. Jason... he... well, he keeps me safe. He protects me.”

And he did. After all, that was the point of their future marriage... or half of it at least. She wasn't lying to Kelly when she reassured her friend. So, then, why did it suddenly feel like she was lying to herself?

! & !

She didn't recognize her own body.

Between work both at Kelly's and at the hospital, moving into the new house, and studying, Elizabeth hadn't taken the time to really look at herself in weeks. Oh, she caught the cursory glances in the mirror when she brushed her teeth in the morning or washed her face at night before bed, but those glimpses were born from habit. They were rote. They had nothing to do with actually looking at herself, studying the changes which were rapidly sweeping over her form due to her advancing pregnancy. But, on that particular day, she just couldn't... not look.
Naked, she stood before the full-length mirror which graced the back of her bathroom door. She had just stepped out of the shower... or, at least, she had several minutes ago. Her body was still moist, soft, and flushed from the hot water, but everything else about her appearance was foreign. Two months ago, the only sign of the baby she carried inside of her had been her increased sense of smell, but, now, all that had changed. Swollen ankles, cravings, and back pain had set in. Her hips were widening, her breasts were filling out, and her stomach looked like it used to when she was a little girl and playing imaginary house, when she would suck in a large, deep breath and push her belly out to its fullest capacity, trying to pretend that she was the mommy who was having a baby. It was odd, and bewildering, and utterly... beautiful how accurate those childish games had become for her.

But all of those changes were on the surface; they were physical. What really amazed Elizabeth were the changes she saw when she looked into her own eyes. While it had been years since her innocence had been brutally ripped away from her on one cold, cruel night in the park, just because she had been forced to grow up long before she should have, that experience had not automatically made her an adult, a woman. Instead, for years, it had felt like she had been awkwardly trapped between what she was supposed to be and what she was supposed to become – no longer a child, yet unable to let her past go either. And maturity, she now knew, could not be marked by age or by milestones.

Loving Lucky, losing Lucky, moving out of her grandmother's home, getting Lucky back only to realize that he wasn't her Lucky anymore, having sex for the first time, meeting Ric, getting married, getting divorced – none of those things had put the look of self-awareness and contentment in her eyes that she now found herself staring at, unabashedly transfixed. No, that sense of peace came from, for the first time in her life, knowing what it was like to love something, someone unconditionally, from knowing that she was responsible for another life and finally, after five months of worry, feeling safe in that knowledge. No matter what happened, no matter what obstacles she'd have to face and overcome in the future, Elizabeth had faith that she would be able to do just that; she had faith in herself, and part of that confidence was thanks to...

“Elizabeth!”

The sudden intrusion of her grandmother's voice left her scrambling to return to the present.

“Are you ready, dear? Our reservation for lunch is in twenty minutes. I thought you said to pick you up at noon...?”

And it was now ten after she realized after glancing at a clock she kept positioned on her bathroom counter for just this precise reason. Without bothering to pick up a towel – after all, who knows how long she had been standing there, naked in self-contemplation, so she was already dry thanks to just the warm air coming up through the radiator, Elizabeth quickly threw open the door and moved into her bedroom, hastily attempting to find something to wear as she called down to her grandmother.

“What, Elizabeth,” Audrey called upstairs, a note of worry entering her voice. “Is something wrong?”

“No, it's fine,” she returned, lowering he voice to mutter to herself. “Everything is just... dandy,” before tossing the only pair of jeans she owned that still fit her aside. Well, scratch that. They had been the only pair of jeans which still fit her. Now, she couldn't even start to zip them, let alone button them. When did that happen?
Sighing in frustration – the movement blowing fallen strands of hair off of her forehead, Elizabeth took in the sight before her: her closet. It was filled with pants she could no longer wear, long skirts which presented the same problem, fitted t-shirts which left the bulge of her stomach exposed, and scrubs. Lots and lots and lots of scrubs. And nothing else.

“Shit,” she swore again, before slowly closing the door and turning around to face her bed... a bed which was piled high with clean yet unfolded laundry, a combination of her clothes and Jason's. “Screw it,” she announced to herself, moving across the room to grab what she needed to finish getting dressed. Her grams wasn't going to like it, Elizabeth was going to look like an idiot, but it couldn't be helped. She was hungry, she didn't feel like trying to cook, and she was pregnant. Didn't that give her a license to be crazy or something?

Shoving her feet into her favorite pair of tennis shoes, she ran out of her room, down the hall, and only slowed down once she reached the stairs, because she was still adjusting to her ever-fluctuating weight and certainly did not need to take a header down the wooden risers. “Let's go,” she announced once she reached the ground floor, quickly snatching her purse off the sideboard by the front door, only... Audrey didn't follow her when Elizabeth went to leave. In fact, she didn't even move.

“Elizabeth, dear, what in the world are you wearing?”

Blushing, she pushed her messy, wet, and still unbrushed – she was going to do that in the car – hair behind her ears, but still her chin lifted in a stubborn thrust. “They're Jason's,” she said referring to the sweat pants that were rolled up at her ankles and the long sleeved t-shirt she had on. “None of my clothes fit me.”

Her grandmother's eyes quickly jumped to the man in question who was ignoring them as he sat on the couch, newspapers and drop cloths spread around him while he worked on some part to his motorcycle. As if sensing Audrey's eyes upon him, he shrugged his shoulders, never once looking up from his task. “We're out of milk.”

Elizabeth laughed, her grams sputtered, and, for the first time, she felt her baby move inside of her.
Part Eleven

Prompt #61. "Don't talk, don't say a thing, 'cause your eyes, they tell me more than your words. Don't go, don't leave me now, 'cause they say the best way out is through." Ungodly Hour, The Fray

For the first time in his life, the repetitive motion of working out with a heavy bag wasn't doing its job; it wasn't clearing Jason's mind. Usually, routine calmed him, grounded him. Bob and weave, bob and weave. Hell, usually he didn't need to worry about anything, because he purposely kept his life simple. He worked out, he rode his bike, he fought, he played pool, and sometimes he'd take a girl upstairs to his room at Jake's. But all that had changed.

On the surface, his preoccupation would appear to be all Elizabeth Webber's fault, but it wasn't fair of Jason to shift the blame onto her small shoulders. Yes, he was worried about the situation with her ex, but he couldn't do anything about Ric Lansing until Elizabeth's slime-ball of an ex made a move, and Ric had been quiet as of late. Too quiet. He could tell that the lawyer's silence was making his roommate nervous... not that Elizabeth actually said anything to that effect to him. No, instead, she seemed to purposefully avoid him – going out of her way to make him comfortable in the house they now shared but doing so discreetly. She did his laundry but somehow managed to wash, dry, and fold the clothes when he wasn't around, so he never actually saw her in the laundry room or placing the neatly stacked piles of clean clothes on the end of his bed. And that's how she went about all of the chores she was responsible for.

It was strange, really, because she had shoved her way into his life and then seemed to almost disappear into the background. And it was a recent change, too. In fact, her sudden shyness seemed to stem from the day she had been forced to wear his clothes out to lunch with her grandmother. Jason didn't know why. He didn't mind that she had borrowed the sweats and long sleeved t-shirt, but, since that day, Elizabeth had been almost... awkward around him. The only thing he could assume was that it was something her grandmother had said to her, the judgmental shrew. Oh, Audrey Hardy had been polite enough while she waited for Elizabeth to join her that day, but the upward tilt of her chin and nose and her narrowed gaze when she lowered her standards enough to actually look at him told Jason everything he needed to know about the old lady: she didn't like him, didn't approve of him, and she certainly didn't want her granddaughter anywhere near him.

Well, that was Audrey Hardy's problem, not his; it just bothered Jason that something was obviously bothering Elizabeth... and then it bothered him even more that he was concerned in the first place. So, yeah, he had that on his mind – Elizabeth's odd behavior, her reticence, and the constant threat of her ex hanging over them, but those things were not the reasons why he couldn't sleep at night; they weren't what was distracting him from his workout, screwing with his form, and messing with his head. No, that honor was reserved for Jason's bigger problems.

As his fist crashed once more into the heavy bag – his still tender and healing ribs twinging with every swing of his arm, Jason gritted his teeth in concentration, in frustration. It pissed him off that, more than a month since his last fight, and he was still sore, still struggling with his recovery, and it made something glaringly obvious: he was finished. Oh, sure, he could probably keep fighting for another couple of years, but, in doing so, he'd risk not just his long-term health but probably his life. It was a hard pill to swallow – admitting that he wasn't young enough, strong enough, good enough anymore, but what was even more alarming was the fact that, once he was done fighting, what the
hell else could he do?

His approach to life had always been seeing to the immediate concerns and really ignoring the rest, and, since his accident, such an attitude had worked for Jason. Perhaps it was being around Elizabeth – watching her make plans for her life, for her child's life, or maybe it was the oppressive, choking sense of approaching change which was forcing Jason to take a good, hard look at his life. What he found was... disturbing. He had nothing and no one. Sure, Emily loved him, and he loved his sister, and he could even admit now that, in their own sick and twisted way, the Quartermaines cared as well, but he had no real family of his own. Hell, even his friends dumped him on a bench outside of GH when they were worried about him. That was their kind of compassion. And forget about job security.

Once Sonny told him he could no longer fight... and that day was quickly approaching, Jason had no real job experience or even skills. He knew that he wasn't dumb. He knew that, if given even just a few minutes, he could learn just about anything, but that did not a resume make. And his concern had nothing to do with his arrangement with Elizabeth. He wasn't worried about providing for her and her child, but, at the same time, the fact that she could very easily become responsible for him in the near future if they were still living together bothered Jason more than he wanted to admit. It had nothing to do with the fact that she was a woman, though, and everything to do with the idea of not being self-sufficient, of needing to depend upon anyone... for anything. But what was he supposed to do, especially when it wasn't just his body failing him? The entire world Jason had immersed himself in years before when he first agreed to work for Sonny Corinthos was, if Johnny was to be believed... and Jason believed him, crumbling down around them all.

“Are you Jason Morgan?”

Despite the fact that he had not been expecting the sudden intrusion, Jason didn't react to the person now standing behind him, the person who so obviously had been attempting to startle him into intimidation. Instead of jerking in surprise or whirling around to face the man, Jason took his time. He reached out, grabbed the heavy bag, and brought it to a gentle stop. Then, he slowly stripped off his gloves before casually tossing them aside. It was nearly a minute later when he finally turned around, arms already folding across his bare, sweat dampened chest.

When he didn't respond, when he didn't either confirm or deny the man's inquiry, the suit before him – and that was the best way Jason could describe the other guy: a suit – started to fidget. He cleared his throat, unbuttoned his jacket, and then ran a hand down his obviously expensive, silk tie. But Jason wasn't impressed. No, instead, he was annoyed... and not just a little astonished that Elizabeth had fallen for the creep's slick, overly greased ways. She seemed smarter than that, more confident, but that also told him that, whatever games the SOB had played with her, they must have been dirty. Just the thought of the arrogant attorney taking advantage of his roommate made Jason silently grit his teeth, his jaw clenching with barely restrained fury.

“Lansing.”

The lawyer had the audacity to grin. “I see my reputation precedes me. You're aware, then, that I now represent Mr. Corinthos and that I'll be taking a more... hands on approach to his various business venture and enterprises.” When Jason didn't respond, the other man raised his brows and quirked his head to the side in frustrated observation. “Yes, well...”

“What do you want,” he interrupted.

Instead of answering, though, Lansing's face became thoughtful, almost introspective. “You know,
we actually have someone in common: Elizabeth Webber. It's actually kind of amusing, really,” Ric remarked, chuckling to himself. “You see, I've heard that you're engaged to my wife.”

Instead of saying anything, Jason just took a step forward, bringing the two of them within an arm's length of each other. Because he was taller than the other man, Lansing had to look up slightly when he spoke again.

“That also means that you're a part of my son's life... and you're going to be the reason why, when the time comes, I'm going to win sole custody of my son, and Elizabeth is going to have to come crawling back to me on her hands and knees – begging – if she ever wants to see my little boy again.”

It took every ounce of his self-restraint not to grab the pompous ass before him by the throat, pick him up off the ground in a choke hold, and squeeze the last vestiges of life from his body. “Your point?”

And the idiot had the nerve to smile at him – a wide, overly-confident, smug grin that, someday soon, Jason was going to enjoy wiping off his pretty-boy face. “Oh, I just wanted to stop by and personally inform you, Mr. Morgan, that you now have a fight scheduled for this Friday. It was a last minute arrangement. I hope it doesn't inconvenience you.”

He wasn't ready to fight. His ribs still weren't healed, his kidneys were still tender, and it was going to be suicide for Jason to step into the ring again already, but he refused to show weakness in front of Lansing. Besides, he had a feeling that, even if he did voice his concerns, they'd fall on deaf ears. Everybody knew about his injuries; they knew that he was still nursing them. So, if Sonny had scheduled him for a fight, it was precisely because he was injured... or maybe it was because Lansing knew he was injured. The prick wasn't man enough to fight Jason on his own, but he'd send him into the ring unprepared and at a disadvantage, allowing someone else to get their hands dirty and do his work for him.

“Give the details to my trainer,” Jason responded, already turning his back towards the attorney and walking away.

For the moment, Lansing had the upper hand, but he had also made a fatal mistake by making things personal between the two of them, by dragging his fight with Elizabeth into the gym, into the ring. Suddenly, Jason knew exactly what his next move was. Maybe he didn't have his future all mapped out, and Port Charles was still a powder keg of instability waiting to erupt, but he at least had a target for his anger, resentment, and anxiety: Richard Lansing.

Oh, he'd fight. On Friday night, he'd go into the ring, and, if he was lucky, he'd walk away with injuries no worse than those from his last match, but Jason was also knew that it would be his final bout as well.

He had a plan.
Prompt #63. Better never to have met you in my dream than to wake and reach for hands that are not there. ~ *Otomo No Yakamochi*

Never before had Elizabeth Webber known the pleasure of a comfortable couch. While she wouldn't want to sleep on it every night, there was just something about curling up on its buttery soft, welcoming leather expanse and taking a nap after dinner. Belly full and with a colorful afghan tossed over her legs and another tucked into her fists and under her chin, it didn't take long for the expectant mother to doze off, and Jason didn't seem to mind when she fell asleep on him... even if it was mid-sentence. He'd just continue reading. It was starting to become their nightly routine.

Growing up, her parents’ couches had always been too formal – picked to impress and not for relaxation. Besides, Jeff and Caroline Webber had been strict with their kids. If they had time to lounge about in the living room, then they weren't working enough, weren't studying hard enough, weren't filling their schedules with enough extracurricular activities. While her Grams hadn't been as much of a slave driver scholastically, Audrey also had that annoying old lady habit of covering her furniture with plastic. Even without it, though, her grandmother's sofa had been too... up and down, too perpendicular. It was like Audrey was afraid to buy anything too comfortable, too plush, because what if she couldn't get back up?

Then there was the first couch Elizabeth had purchased on her own – an old, worn torture trap of a sofa from a secondhand store. Though she loved it because it had been hers, because it represented her independence, it had been lumpy and also faintly smelled like spoiled milk... which wasn't the best combination in the world. And that brought her to the couch she had shared with her soon-to-be ex-husband. Unlike Elizabeth, when the two of them had gone shopping, Ric had elected for the sofa which was the most expensive... much like her parents. That should have been her first clue that her marriage was doomed from the start. By the time she moved out, she had been flat broke and desperate enough to lug her studio's old couch from the docks to her apartment...

She had put up with the lying, with the games, with the tricks, and even with her husband secretly feeding her birth control so that she wouldn't get pregnant, but Elizabeth drew the line at cheating. As she stepped into Jake's – her fury and pain making her far bolder than she had been in years, Elizabeth started to question just when exactly she had turned into everyone's favorite doormat. There had been a time in her life when she wouldn't have taken anyone's disrespect, let alone the pile of crap Ric had dumped at her feet. Yet, despite this, here she was – married to a dishonest criminal, wondering why the hell Ric had married her in the first place.

He certainly couldn't be in love with her. After everything she had learned about her husband that evening, Elizabeth was pretty sure that Ric was incapable of love. Oh, he was certainly emotional in his own cold, calculating way – fueled on by his jealousy towards his half brother... a brother she had just learned the existence of... and his need to both please and hurt that same said brother. It was because of this sick, twisted obsession that, according to Ric, he had cheated on her. His actions – jumping into bed with Faith Roscoe, having an affair with Carly Corinthos... his sister-in-law – had been a means to an end, he had told her – weapons in his arsenal to bring down Sonny Corinthos. And that's also why he couldn't allow her to become pregnant – because, after Sonny took Ric's
mother from him, Ric wanted to take Sonny's wife and child from him... the child Sonny should have had with Carly but, instead, if Ric's plan would have worked out, he would have been the father.

The whole entire, disgusting plot made her sick to her stomach... or that could have been a side-effect from the poisoning she had suffered at the hands of her twisted spouse. So, that's why she was there – at Jake's, a seedy dive bar on the docks where a woman could usually find just one thing: trouble. She was angry, she was hurt, and she was lost – had no idea who she was anymore. The Elizabeth she had believed herself to be would never have fallen for Ric's lies and manipulations, but mere months after marrying her husband, their marriage was a colossal failure. Despite the fact that Ric had done so many horrible things to her, Elizabeth knew that she had no one to blame but herself. Somewhere along the lines... and maybe it went all the way back to her rape, she didn't know, she had lost herself in her fear and loneliness.

Well, no freaking more!

Yes, she was at Jake's to get a little revenge. She wanted to hurt Ric the way he had hurt her, but Elizabeth wasn't even sure if such a thing was possible, and, more than revenge, she just wanted to... forget. Escape. Lose herself in a few drinks, some flirting, and maybe even make out with a hot guy. Or hell. Why not make it two hot guys? This wasn't her usual behavior. She wasn't a party girl, ad she definitely wasn't used to picking up strangers in a dive bar, but Lizzie Webber still lurked beneath Elizabeth's good girl surface, and she had no qualms about letting her out to play for a night. Tomorrow, she'd go back to being responsible. She'd break the news of her impending divorce to her grandmother, she'd pack up the few possessions she had gone into her marriage with and move back into her studio, and she would start the very slow process of putting her life back together sans Ric Lansing, but, first, she was going to have a little fun.

It didn't take her long to find her target. He was the complete opposite of her soon-to-be ex-husband. Whereas Ric was dark and polished, the guy Elizabeth had set her sights on was blonde and rugged. His closet wasn't full of expensive three piece suits and designer dress shoes; rather, the man before her wore jeans and a t-shirt, a leather jacket and motorcycle boots. While he might have been just as powerful as Ric, it wasn't because of his fancy degrees or trust fund. No, Elizabeth's prey was a force to be reckoned with because he wasn't afraid to get his hands dirty. He was physically strong, and she had no doubt from the scowl upon his face that he was emotionally and mentally strong as well. There was this entire don't-ask-don't-tell-don't-even-approach vibe to the stranger, and, suddenly, all Elizabeth could think about was breaking through the man's icy walls.

When she approached him, she didn't say anything. Instead, she just picked up a pool cue and hoped that she could fake enough confidence to make the stranger believe she knew how to play. He ignored her, finished his game, and then racked a new one, looking up only to ask her if she wanted to break or not. “That's alright,” Elizabeth answered, never once taking her own gaze off of the man's arms. “I think I'd rather watch you.”

And that's how it started. Five minutes later, he had her pressed up against a cracked plaster wall, one hand inside her shirt and roughly palming her breast while the other fumbled blindly with the lock to the upstairs room they would eventually stumble into. The fact that his mouth was too relentless to even allow Elizabeth the chance to catch her breath... let alone glance over at the key he held in his hand... made unlocking the door a rather difficult task. But she wasn't going to complain. At that point, she couldn’t think past the stranger's knee which had shifted itself between her own, past the corded, jean-clad thigh she found herself shamelessly riding out in the hallway where anyone could stumble upon them and see. It was all just... too much.
She had only been with two men... well she had only willingly been with two men... in her entire life, and neither Lucky nor Ric had ever been able to make her feel as good as the man before her had been able to in the span of a few minutes. If it meant they had sex out in the middle of Jake's second floor, then so be it, and, to emphasize her point... even if only made silently in her mind... Elizabeth slipped her hands underneath the stranger's shirt, trailed them lightly up to his shoulders, and then dug her nails into the muscles of his back, scouring his flesh downward until she met the top of his low-slung jeans.

“Fuck,” he swore, but it wasn't in pain, only pleasure – heady, dangerous, erotic pleasure. To know that she could do that to him...

“Yeah. That's the point of this, isn't it,” Elizabeth challenged, amazed that she was still capable of forming a coherent sentence – let alone flirting and sounding so wonton and seductive. “To fuck?”

Her words, her behavior, they were totally brazen, totally out of character, but, when she finally heard the click of the key unlocking the door beside them and the grunt of agreement from the man she was currently riding, Elizabeth just couldn't find it in herself to care. And that was before the stranger stripped off her shirt, her pants, her bra, and then literally ripped her panties from her body. The next thing she knew she was naked and on her back, the bed underneath her still bouncing slightly from the force she had been pushed onto it with. But then he was with her once again – kissing her, touching her, seducing her. It was only when he pushed his way completely inside of her with a single thrust that Elizabeth realized that he, too, was naked – finally, gloriously, sinfully naked.

Sighing in contentment and bucking her hips in pleasure, Elizabeth urged the stranger on as her body seemed to melt into his. “Yes,” she moaned – the sound erotically low and utterly foreign to her ears, yet there was no doubt that the sound had emanated from her own bruised, swollen lips. And then she sighed once more. “Yes... Jason.”

Ricocheting up into a sitting position on the couch, Elizabeth found herself breathing hard and fast, her body alive with arousal and sweaty from the vivid recollection. Only... it wasn't a recollection, because she had never slept with Jason Morgan. Everything else about her dream had been accurate – what Ric had done to her, going to Jake's, picking up a random stranger while he played pool and sleeping with him in one of the rooms upstairs at the bar, but Elizabeth's experience that night had not been nearly as passionate and pleasurable as the way she had just recalled it, and the father of her unborn baby was definitely not her fiance, definitely not...

Realizing that she had called his name out loud, Elizabeth panicked for a moment until she realized that Jason was no longer in the living room with her. His absence gave her a distraction, a reason to not think about why she was having erotic fantasies about her best friend's brother, her soon-to-be spouse of convenience. Tossing her blankets aside, Elizabeth stood up, taking just a moment to make sure that she had her balance. After not gaining weight for so long, now that she was, her body sometimes had a difficult time adjusting to the changes, and Elizabeth found herself front-heavy and unsteady. She could only imagine what she would be like at nine months pregnant. They'd probably have to install baby bumpers on all the corners – not for her child but for her.

Snorting in amusement and rolling her eyes, Elizabeth stretched her arms over her head and then ambled her way towards the kitchen. While she had no idea where Jason had gotten off to, she was hungry. Again. Walking towards where she would find the food – she either wanted some peanut butter ice cream or chocolate chip waffles with whipped cream and strawberries, no syrup...
wasn’t sure yet, Elizabeth told herself that her sudden cravings had nothing to do with the workout she had just experienced in her dream and everything to do with her unborn child’s emerging taste buds. Apparently, like mother, like child, the baby already had one wicked sweet...

“I’m telling you, the boss had nothing to do with this fight of yours, Jason. He’s been... well, he gets in these bad places – dark places sometimes, and he just locks himself away from everybody. He doesn’t eat, he doesn’t sleep, and he sure as hell doesn’t get any work done. He just... drinks. And breaks things. But, anyway, when he gets like this, we all sort of have to... pick up the slack, so to speak – you know, keep things running the best we can without him. Only, this time, that new lawyer of his I was telling you about, he won’t let us do anything. He’s acting like he's in charge now, like he's running things. So, if anyone set this fight up, my money would be on him.”

Even through the kitchen door as she eavesdropped, Elizabeth could hear Jason sigh harshly. “That's what I thought.” For a moment, she was taken aback by the hostility she heard in her roommate’s tone. Even beat up and bleeding on a park bench, Jason had been cool, calm, and collected – never once seeming angry about his injuries or pissed off towards the person who had given them to him. So, the fact that some attorney had the power to ruffle his feathers so much made Elizabeth pause. Not that she didn’t understand the particular kind of frustration that came from dealing with a smug bastard of a lawyer...

“It doesn’t matter who scheduled my fight, though,” Jason continued. “The boss or not, I either do what I’m told, or I’m out. I'm not ready to leave, not yet.”

“So, then, I’ll see you on Friday,” the second male voice – one that Elizabeth didn’t recognize – said. “Give ‘em hell, Morgan.”

Quietly backing away from the door, Elizabeth returned to the couch and sat down. Jason wasn’t healed yet, he wasn’t ready to get back in the ring. She might only be a student nurse, but she knew that much. But he was going to fight anyway. And she was going to be there with him – maybe not at his side, but she’d be there... just in case he needed her, and, even if he didn't, she had a feeling she needed to support him.
This fight wasn't fixed. At least, it wasn't supposed to be... as far as Jason knew, but his opponent seemed to know everything about him as a boxer. Jason was an inside fighter. A bigger man, he wasn't as fast on his feet as some boxers, but he knew how to take a hit, and his strength came from getting close to his opponents and hitting them with powerful hooks and uppercuts. His style was to overwhelm his opponent... only the guy across from him wouldn't allow Jason to get close. It was like he knew exactly what Jason was thinking even before he himself did.

That wasn't unheard of. Good fighters would watch tape, study their opponents... only the guy Jason was fighting that evening was new – new in town, new to Sonny's set-up, and new to boxing in general. Though an obvious fighter – scrappy and tenacious, his opponent lacked the finesse of a trained boxer. Instead, he fought with a raw power. He was a brawler. But it was more than that. He almost fought with a... desperation, and there was a glint in the other man's eyes which told Jason he was unstable.

Rumor had it his opponent – Cody – was a recently returned war vet. In fact, he had even heard rumblings that the man was suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder, and, if that was case, Jason's opponent had no business being in the ring. More than that, though, he had no business being in the ring with him, but nothing about their fight that evening had been what it should have been. It had been rushed... on purpose, set up by Ric Lansing, Sonny's half-brother and latest attorney... who just so happened to be Jason's fiancee's soon-to-be ex-husband. Granted, he and Elizabeth weren't getting married for the traditional reasons, but Lansing didn't know that, and the longer his match went on, the further Jason was convinced that he was in trouble. Not only was his opponent capable of anticipating Jason's every move, but it was quickly becoming obvious that he was aware of Jason's still tender injuries from his last bout.

Cody was targeting Jason's weaknesses – his healing ribs and his bruised kidneys, but Jason was also pretty sure that his opponent was attempting to injure him further. And it was more than just the usual competitive zeal. Their fight felt personal. Cody fought after the bell, he fought dirty, and the ref either didn't notice or didn't care. Jason's money was on the latter. If Ric Lansing was willing to go out and find a guy who was mentally unbalanced and pit him against Jason in the ring, then he sure as hell was capable of telling a ref to throw a boxing match.

As the bell sounded to signal the end of the fourth round, Jason prepared to step back only for Cody to lunge and deliver a stinging hook to the left side of his face. For a second, he stumbled before regaining his balance, only to immediately realize that something was really wrong when he blinked and his vision wouldn't clear. Instead, it looked like it was snowing... only the flakes were flashing lights. He tried to shake off the sensation, but that just seemed to make it worse. And then he felt the blood.

Collapsing onto his stool, he opened his mouth for a drink while his trainer set to work on the cut which had resulted from Cody's last punch as well. It was a bleeder, so the older man filled the laceration with some petroleum jelly. But Jason wasn't concerned about the scratch. Instead, he was
frustrated that, yet again, the ref had allowed his opponent to knock him with a cheap shot after the bell. And he was sore, too. Luckily, the pain worked to thoroughly piss him off. Otherwise, he wasn't sure if he would have been able to keep fighting.

“What the hell is going on tonight,” Jason growled as he stood back up. Though he spoke to his trainer, he kept his eye on the other side of the ring, on his opponent. It was then that he noticed a smug Ric Lansing standing ringside, his arms crossed confidently against his chest, a cocky upturn of his lips taunting Jason. “I get that fighters talk, that there are tapes of all my bouts out there, but this guy knows too much about me, and the ref is allowing him to get away with anything he wants. This isn’t a fight; it's a massacre.”

“It's a disgrace, that's what it is. If Sonny were here...,” the trainer started only for Jason to interrupt him.

“But Sonny's not here.”

“Yeah... Look, if you want to forfeit...”

And that's when Jason realized that, while his trainer was saying everything right, the older man refused to make eye contact with him. He was in on it, too. That's where Lansing – and, by extension, Jason's opponent – had gotten their information. “No. I'll fight.” He wanted to tell his trainer hat he was fired, to go and find him either Johnny or Francis to stand in his corner for him, but somehow Jason just knew that, in doing so, he'd not only be putting himself at even more risk, but he'd also be putting bullseyes on his friends' backs. So, instead, he said nothing, the bell sounded, and he went swinging into the fifth round.

It seemed to be going better for a few minutes. The thing with brawlers was that, though they possessed raw power, they lacked mobility, meaning that they had difficulty pursuing their opponents. While Jason was usually an inside fighter, he was also trained well enough that he could adapt. So, he started to dance more, started to keep a distance between him and his opponent, relying more on long-range punches such as weaker jabs and straights versus his usual hooks and uppercuts. Maybe he wasn't quick on his feet, but Cody was even slower, and the other man's inability to use combination punches left him open to counterpunching. Jason took full advantage of it, too.

He also started to use a little Peek-a-Boo action, keeping his hands up in front of his face when he wasn't punching his opponent, hoping to keep Cody from further injuring his eye, and using more side-to-side movement and bobbing and weaving to evade his fellow fighter. It wasn't his usual fighting style, though, so his movements were slightly rusty. They weren't always effective. Worse still, while the different styles helped Jason to protect himself further, he wasn't going to be able to knock Cody out with the lighter hits either. Instead, if he wanted to win their bout, he was going to have to rely on points, meaning they would have to go a full twelve rounds, and he wasn't sure if he had the stamina to last that long – not will all his injuries. They were just getting to the end of he fifth round, and he was already exhausted.

Just like the last time, when the bell sounded, Jason stopped fighting, but his opponent didn't – this time, getting one last vicious uppercut to Jason's left side in. The blow nearly doubled him over. While he managed to stay on his feet and make it back to his corner, the crowd started to show their displeasure with the ref and Cody, but it wouldn't matter how loudly they complained; the course of the bout had been set long before Jason and his opponent ever set foot into the ring and shook hands.

By the time he sat down on the stool, Jason was starting to feel nauseous which was never a good sign for a fighter. Unfortunately, a queasy stomach – for a boxer – had nothing to do with nerves and
everything to do with internal bleeding. While he had been lucky in the past to never suffer an injury that bad before, he had been a fighter for long enough to see the frightening results the sport was capable of. What burned worse, though, than the bile in the back of his throat was the knowledge that his opponent appeared nearly unscathed. Even though Jason knew that he had managed to land several good blows that evening, it was almost like Cody couldn't feel them, like he was immune to pain. And then realized why: his opponent was high.

Standing back up, Jason ignored his trainer and turned his back to the ring, needing just a moment to regroup. Everything about that night made him hate Ric Lansing all the more – the fact that he had scheduled this fight in the first place, the fact that he had gotten Jason's trainer to betray him, and the fact that Ric was capable of and willing to use a sick man in order to avoid fighting his own battles. But Jason always wouldn't be crippled by the rules of a boxing match, and somehow, someway, he'd find a way to pay Ric Lansing back for every blow he suffered that evening – for himself, for Elizabeth...

She was there. The bell to signal the start of the sixth round sounded, and Jason had to turn away from her, but as he moved towards the center of the ring, he couldn't shake the image of Elizabeth's face from his mind. Automatically, he fought. Dance, jab, shuffle to the side, straight punch, straight punch, his body worked by memory alone. Suddenly, his mind was too filled with an awareness of one pretty, petite woman to really think about the fight he was currently engaged in. During that brief second when their eyes had met, he had seen so much in Elizabeth's gaze: concern, interest, sympathy, fury, but more than anything else he recognized and recalled the attraction which had been directed back at him, and the realization sent him reeling.

Unlike the previous five rounds, the sixth went quickly, and, before he knew it, he heard the bell once more. He braced himself for Cody's latest illegal hit, but, instead, the other fighter grabbed Jason and pulled him close, leaning down slightly to menacingly whisper, “the girl or the fight.”

Confused and caught off guard, he said the first thing that came to mind. “What?”

“Give her up, and the fight's yours; don't give her up, and let's just say that you're risking more than just a loss tonight.”

The message was clear. If Jason didn't roll over and hand Elizabeth off to her soon-to-be ex-husband to do with as he pleased, then Cody had the order to kill him or, at least, attempt to. The smart thing would have been to tell his opponent what he wanted to hear and then deal with the repercussions and Ric Lansing later, but Jason couldn't do that – not to himself and certainly not to Elizabeth. It had never been his style to back away from a fight, and he sure as hell wasn't going to start now, especially not for some coward who stood on the outside of the ring in his expensive three piece suit, afraid to break a nail or wrinkle his shirt.

Jason spit out his mouth piece, smirked, and then told Cody exactly what he thought of his offer. “Fuck. You. And tell Lansing he can go and...”

That's as far as he got before Cody, with a wild growl, launched himself at Jason. With an illegal headbutt, the other man delivered the knockout blow. After that, Jason didn't have to worry about seeing shining spots. Rather, all he saw was the inky blackness of unconsciousness.
Part Fourteen

Prompt # 67. A man has only one escape from his old self: to see a different self-in the mirror of some woman's eyes. ~ author unknown

If Elizabeth wasn't so angry – with Jason's opponent, with the ref, with Jason's trainer, his friends, with Sonny Corinthos and every man who worked for him, and even Jason himself for being a boxer in the first place, then she would have been scared. The last thing Jason needed, though, was her fear, so she held onto her fury, nursed it. After the night they had just experienced, doing so was not a difficult task.

What she should have been doing was sleeping. Elizabeth was dead on her feet – a poor choice of words but still accurate. Not only had she worked the early breakfast shift at Kelly's that morning, but she had also put in a full day at the hospital, only to conclude her evening by watching Jason nearly get beaten to death and then accompanying him to the hospital. Now, hours later, she realized that he would probably be annoyed when he eventually woke up, because, in her worried distraction, she hadn't remembered to request Mercy, and, apparently, Sonny's seedy, abandoned, dockside warehouse had been closer to GH. It was only after Jason had been wheeled into the OR that she even realized where they were. He would just have to deal with it, and she would do her best to keep his family away from him.

Sighing, Elizabeth shifted awkwardly in the chair she occupied, uncomfortable. No one enjoyed spending the night in a lumpy recliner – especially one that smelled like a hospital, but Elizabeth was quickly discovering that being pregnant only made the experience just that much worse. Curling her legs up beneath her, she sought a more relaxed position, only to give up seconds later, allowing her weary head to fall onto a closed fist. Jason's doctors had assured her that he would be out for the night – a combination of the anesthesia administered to him before his surgery and his concussion – and that, while she could, she should try to get some rest, too. That was easier said than done, however.

For a brief moment, Elizabeth allowed her lids to droop closed, but the sight that greeted her had the expectant mother immediately reopening her eyes to check upon her sleeping fiance. If she started to relax at all, she wound up right back where the horrifying night had started: at the fight, and, once more, she found herself helplessly standing by as Jason's opponent nearly killed him.

It had all happened so fast. Though she knew nothing about boxing, even Elizabeth had been able to tell that the bout had not been going in Jason's favor, and she had heard the crowd rumbling around her, complaining about the ref allowing Jason's opponent to keep throwing punches even after the bell. But then somehow, someway Jason's gaze had found her own, and, afterwards, he had seemed rejuvenated – practically a new fighter. Despite telling herself that she was acting like a schoolgirl with her first crush, that hopeful, silly, romantic part of Elizabeth deep inside that Ric had been unable to find and destroy wondered if, perhaps, Jason was suddenly fighting better because she was there, because he knew that she was there. For a few minutes, she got to savor that fantasy, but then all hell had broken loose.

The round ended, but Jason and his opponent didn't back away from each other. Instead, it had looked like they were arguing about something. Then, the next thing Elizabeth knew, the other guy had headbutted Jason who then lost consciousness, and she started to push her way towards the ring,
unmindful of who she was elbowing to get there or what she was going to do once she got to where she was headed. Even once he was down, though, Jason's opponent kept attacking him, and nobody did anything. She shoved, and shoved, and shoved her way forward, but it felt like she was stuck in place. The crowd around her at first roared in absolute fury towards the other boxer, but eventually they turned silent, stunned by what they were witnessing, by what was being allowed to happen before them. By the time Elizabeth finally made it to the ring, several other men had pushed their way forward and had managed to pull Jason's opponent off of him – one of them a man whose voice she recognized from a few nights before in the kitchen she shared with Jason.

There had been no time to think about Jason's friend, to wonder if the night's events were a result of what the two men had been discussing several evenings prior, or to make the stranger's acquaintance. Instead, she demanded help getting into the ring and was surprised when it was immediately granted. No one seemed to question her. Instead, they did exactly what she said, and, five minutes later, she was climbing into the ring with Jason as an ambulance rushed him to the hospital. Now, five hours, four trips to the bathroom, three cups of hot chocolate, two near crying jags, and one surgery later, Elizabeth knew that Jason Morgan was one very lucky man. He wouldn't feel that way when he woke up, but she knew exactly what he had managed to survive that evening.

He had a concussion – a grade four concussion. He had a broken nose, a broken hand from his opponent stepping on it after he was already down, and five broken ribs – four of which were all on his left side. Because so many of his ribs had been broken, Jason had flail chest, and Elizabeth wasn't sure if she'd ever be able to get the image of his chest sinking in rather than expanding when he took a breath out of her head. The broken ribs had also pierced his lung and caused it to collapse. His spleen had been removed because of a splenic rupture, and his surgeon had also had to repair several tears to his kidneys to stop Jason's internal bleeding. Then, of course, there were all the countless cuts and bruises to his face, chest, and abdomen, and the doctors were worried about his left eye but wouldn't know more until he woke up.

“How could you?”

Unprepared for the intrusion, Elizabeth startled, her hand automatically reaching up to steady her chest as she fought to catch her breath. “Emily,” she gasped, eyes wide with both relief that it was her best friend and residue anxiousness over being caught unaware. “It's late. What are you doing here?” Realizing exactly why Emily was at the hospital, Elizabeth never gave the other woman a chance to respond before she asked another question. “I mean, how did you even...?”

“What, find out that my brother was brought into the ER and just had emergency life-saving surgery,” Emily interrupted and filled in for Elizabeth... not that she was actually going to put it in precisely those terms. “One of Jason's doctors called me, because, apparently, you either couldn't be bothered or didn't think that I deserved to know.”

Concerned, she stood up, allowing the blanket one of the nurses had given her to fall forgotten onto the floor. Instinctively, Elizabeth cupped her growing belly as she talked. “Emily, I swear, it wasn't like that. I just... everything happened so fast. One minute, Jason's fine, and, then the next, he's down on the mat, and I'm screaming at anyone who would listen to call 9-1-1. By the time we got to the hospital, there were all these forms to sign, and then Jason was in surgery, and, by the time I even thought about calling you, it was really late, so I just thought I'd wait until morning. After all, there was nothing you could do, and the doctors had already assured me that Jason would make a full recovery.” Taking a step towards her friend, she held out a comforting hand and waited for the other woman to grasp it. “He's going to be fine, Em. I promise.”

But Emily never acknowledged or returned her gesture. “So, let me get this straight. You were at the
fight which meant that you knew what Jason did for a living, and you never told me?”

“It wasn't my place.” Emily scoffed, threw her hands up in frustration, and whirled around in her heeled boots to face the opposite direction. Frowning, Elizabeth continued, “And, besides, you had to have some idea about what Jason did for a living. I mean, he was always getting hurt, right, and part of the reason we decided to get married was so that he could have health insurance.”

“Yes, but Jason also lives... lived above a rowdy bar, has a habit of riding his bike at breakneck speeds, and at one point used to train surf.”

“Oh.”

When Emily turned back around to face her, Elizabeth took an involuntary step backwards. “You see, this is exactly why I should have been here, and you should have been at home. I'm Jason's sister. I know my brother. You're just... a convenience. He needs his family – his mother, his father, and his sister – with him, not some knocked up waitress looking to practice her mothering skills on him.”

While some of the things Emily had said might have been true, Elizabeth also knew that the last thing she felt for Jason Morgan was motherly. Instead of focusing upon that, though, she went on the attack, choosing to distract herself and her thoughts with a little self-righteous indignation. “I may be pregnant, and I may be a waitress... for now, but I'm also Jason's fiancee, and, as of Monday after my divorce his granted, I will be his wife. Whatever the reason for our engagement, that means that I'm going to be here by his side whether you or any of the other Quartermaines like it or not. And, right here, right now, I'm going to tell you something else, Emily: I've already informed the doctors and nurses that your parents are banned from Jason's hospital room. Do not make me ban you, too.”

Emily didn't respond. Instead, she glared in Elizabeth's directions for several seconds before walking briskly, angrily away. Before Elizabeth could relax and sit back down, however, another voice confronted her, one that she wasn't supposed to hear yet for another couple of hours. “Elizabeth...?” Jason's tone was deeper, scratchier than normal, a result of his injuries, his surgery, and the oxygen tube hooked up to his nose. She also detected a decided note of fear, something which made the hair on the back Elizabeth's neck stand up. Jason Morgan was never afraid of anything. “I... uh, what's going on? Why is it so dark in here? Why can't I see?”
Part Fifteen

Prompt #68 "The tender word forgotten, The letter you did not write, The flower you might have sent, dear, Are your haunting ghosts tonight" ~ Margaret Elizabeth Sangster

“Sorry I couldn't go with you today.”

In response to his sincere apology, the last thing Jason expected was for Elizabeth Webber to laugh. But giggle she did. “Jason, you just had major surgery – two surgeries in fact. The last place you should have been was at the courthouse, holding my hand... figuratively speaking, of course... while I finalized my divorce.”

He didn't want to think about the why's behind their situation, because, if he did, he would just become angry, and, for now, there was nothing Jason could do about Ric Lansing. While he wasn't usually one to listen to doctors, he did listen to his body, and there was no way he could get his revenge, let alone actually get out of bed... not with the way he currently felt. Besides, it'd be a little challenging to find Elizabeth's weasel of an ex-husband when he was recovering from an eye operation. Retinal detachment, the optometrist had said, and it was just another reason why Lansing had to pay.

Instead, Jason focused on the second half of what Elizabeth said, and, in doing so, he frowned. What did she mean by figuratively hold her hand? They were getting closer. Maybe neither of them had been brave enough so far to actually voice their attraction for the other, but it was there. He didn't need 20/20 vision to see that. And Elizabeth had been great since he had been in the hospital – keeping the Quartermaines away from him, sneaking him in real food from Kelly's, and he had to practically guilt her into going home at night. Otherwise, she would have been sleeping beside his bed, too. Hell, Jason was pretty sure that, on more than one occasion, he had woken to the feel of Elizabeth's hand clutched around one of his own. So, then, why was she suddenly acting so... shy?

Before he had a chance to dig into the issue, though, Elizabeth was already moving on to another topic. “Besides, Ric wasn't even there.”

“What?”

“I know,” she stated emphatically, nodding her head and tossing her hands up in bewildered agreement. “After months of him harassing me, fighting me on the divorce every step of the way, he just... gave up – sent another attorney to the hearing to represent him and granted me an uncontested dissolution to our marriage. Not that I'm complaining or anything, but...”

“... but it doesn't make sense,” he finished for her.

“Plus, it makes me really nervous, too. The only reason Ric would roll over on the divorce was if he had something else planned – something really big planned – for the custody trial.”

It was on the tip of his tongue to tell her everything he knew about her now ex-husband – about Ric's threats towards him, his warnings, the fact that he was behind his disastrous fight, but, before Jason could find the words, the door to his hospital room was pushed open, and a squabbling Johnny and Francis distracted Elizabeth and prevented him from saying anything. But maybe it was better that
way. After all, the less Elizabeth knew, the safer she was. Right? But, for some reason, the secrets just didn't sit well with Jason.

“... used your SUV to haul their crap, and you've been to their house, so it's like you've practically met the woman already. It only makes sense, O'Brien, for you to stand up with... wait, what's the girl's name again?”

“Elizabeth,” Johnny supplied.

“Right,” Francis agreed with him. “See what I mean? You can be her maid-of-honor.”

“Yeah, but you're more sensitive than I am, and you know more about all this romantic bullshit than I do. Hell, you were the one who told me not to buy her carnations – said that they're drugstore flowers.”

The two men only stopped bickering when Elizabeth cleared her throat, a finely shaped eyebrow raised pointedly in their direction.

“Oh,” Johnny O'Brien said ineptly, blushing before thrusting a bouquet of flowers in her direction. “Here. These are for you.”

Calmly accepting the blossoms, Elizabeth lifted them to her face and inhaled their fragrance. “Amaryllis, Kaffir lilies, and primroses – winter blooms, all of them,” she named the various blossoms she now held in her hands. To Jason, they all pretty much looked the same – a lot of reds and oranges. “My Grams is a gardener. When I still lived with her, I would help sometimes. Someone, apparently, knows their flowers. Thank you.”

Johnny elbowed the older, quieter man beside him. “I told you that you'd make a better chick than I would.”

Before the thread of the debate could be picked up once again, Elizabeth continued, “however, it's not that type of ceremony. Jason's not having a best man, just like I'm not having a maid-of-honor. The two of you will just be our witnesses.”

Already shuffling his feet, Francis tugged on his right earlobe. “Uh... yeah, you're welcome... you know, for the flowers,” he mumbled.

With the two men still standing just inside of the door and Jason all the way across the room in his bed, he could barely hear the guard speak. And then the entire room fell silent. Francis refused to meet Elizabeth's gaze, Johnny rocked on his feet while shoving his hands in his pockets and making a show of checking out the industrial print hanging beside him on the wall, and Elizabeth just looked confused. As she watched the two men, her features went from pleasure (apparently, about receiving the flowers), to curiosity, and then finally landed on sadness. He didn't like that look upon her face, and, in response, Jason himself frowned.

“Did I... did I say... or do... something wrong?”

“It's not you,” he was quick to reassure her and was pleased when, as soon as Elizabeth turned to look at him, she smiled softly in his direction. A beat later, Jason glared at his friends. “These two are just idiots.”

“Hey,” Johnny protested, but Jason cut him off.
“They want to talk to me,” he informed Elizabeth, “but they won't do so in front of you.”

“Ah, I see. It's a 'Boy's Only' club,” she remarked, though there was no sarcasm or animosity in her voice. Just humor. As she moved towards them, Elizabeth teased, “all you had to do was ask, and I would have left you alone with him. Besides, I wanted to freshen up a little bit before the judge got here anyway.” She moved into his attached bathroom then, only pausing to glance over her shoulder right before she closed the door. “This time, I can be the one hiding in the other room, right Johnny.”

The bathroom door shut behind her, and then a paranoid Johnny swung his eyes up to lock with Jason’s. “She knows about that?”

He shrugged, the movement costing him when it pulled on his ribs and incisions. “Apparently.”

“You're not the quietest person alive, Johnny,” Francis quipped, earning himself a glower from the guard standing next to him. Without allowing a retort, he moved across the room, folded his arms over his chest, and narrowed his eyes towards Jason in observation. “It's good to see you awake and aware again.”

“It's good to be awake and aware again.”

“The surgeries, they went okay,” Johnny asked, also moving forward to stand closer.

“I'll live,” was the only response he offered. Then, Jason changed the subject. “What happened to the other fighter – Cody?”

“Skipped town,” Johnny informed him.

“Rumor has it, Lansing paid him off,” Francis added.

“But everything is a mess,” Johnny picked up their report once again. “You know that just about everyone who works for Sonny – legitimate or not – comes to the matches. The boxers are all refusing to go into the ring, afraid that what happened to you will happen to them. They don't realize that it was personal between you and Lansing. The dock and warehouse workers are all in a panic, because they think Sonny's out and Lansing's in, and they want nothing to do with some Ivy-league, Hampton's pretty-boy lawyer. And don't even get me started on the runners, guards, and lieutenants. Men are jumping ship, leaving town. Shipments have been lost, seized, sent back, sunk. The whole goddamn operation has stalled.”

“Another two weeks like this, and we'll have a turf war on our hands,” Francis concluded. “And the worst thing is, according to the men who work Sonny's door, the boss has no clue. Lansing has him locked up tight and seeing freaking rainbows and ponies... that is when he isn't seeing ghosts and tossing the place.”

For several minutes, Jason contemplated everything he had been told. The fact that his friends were willing to reveal so much to him despite the fact that he wasn't even involved in Sonny's other business endeavors told him just how nervous they were – both for themselves and for him. Obviously, they recognized Lansing's instability and the fact that he was gunning for Jason and Elizabeth. Despite the beating – and warning – he had received three nights prior, Jason was still intent upon taking Elizabeth's ex down, and the news which had just been relayed to him only made things easier, his plan that much clearer.
“Sit tight for a few days. I think I know someone who can help.”

Before either of the guards could ask for more information, though – not that Jason was ready to tell them anything, there was a knock at the door, Elizabeth exited the bathroom, and she moved to admit a fifth person to his room. Just as he expected, it was the judge. The week before, Jason and Elizabeth had filed their marriage license and made an appointment to have a civil ceremony performed. While their original plan was to just leave her divorce hearing and head to the judges’ office, the plan had been reworked after he was admitted to the hospital. Surprisingly, the officer of the court had been perfectly accepting of the changes, never once voicing shock or questioning their rush. Evidently, he wasn't new to Port Charles.

As Elizabeth came to stand at his side – the flowers Johnny and Francis had brought clutched carefully in her hands, Jason marveled at the realization that he wasn't nervous. For a man who, just a month before, had been single and living on top of a bar, marrying Elizabeth didn't make him feel trapped or claustrophobic. The simple truth of the matter was that he liked his fiancee and soon-to-be wife. He respected her, she made him laugh, and they understood one another. Then there was also the fact that, even from the very first night when she barged into his room to take care of him, he had found her attractive – temptingly so, and, now that he knew that she was attracted to him, too... Well, it was safe to say that he was starting to consider Elizabeth Webber as more than just a friend, more than just someone who was in his life as a matter of convenience... as his sister had cruelly accused her.

“... you may now kiss your bride.”

Elizabeth bent towards him, and he could tell by both the flame of intent in her midnight eyes – *bedroom eyes* – and in the determined set of her shoulders that she was going to do exactly that: kiss him – probably some perfunctory, passionless peck on the lips to satisfy the parameters of convention. But Jason had something else in mind. As soon as her lips were within inches of his own, he slid his face to the side, making sure that her mouth only touched his cheek. Before she could pull away, though, and hide the tinge of hurt he saw radiating from her lovely features, he started to whisper.

“When I kiss you for the first time, Elizabeth, we won't be in a hospital room. We'll be alone, and it won't be because some ceremony told us to; it'll be because you want me to kiss you... just as much as I want to kiss you.”

Before she could respond, he pulled away and turned to the judge, the feeling of Elizabeth's unblinking gaze burning through him, singeing Jason's nerves and making his hands clench in restrained attraction. “Now, we're also going to need a restraining order.”
Part Sixteen

Prompt #70."You know, you're very sensitive for a cold blooded killer" – Samantha Barzel, The Mexican

It was official.

She was a horrible wife, and she was going to be a horrible mother, too.

Since the day she and Jason had met outside of GH, he had never asked her for anything. It was always Elizabeth either foisting herself upon him – like showing up at his room to treat his wounds uninvited – or Elizabeth needing favors from him because of her condition. Jason, could you please change the lightbulb in my room, so I don't have to stand on a step stool, fall, and have a miscarriage? Jason, would you clean off my car for me before I leave for work, so I don't slip on the ice, fall, and have a miscarriage? Jason, would you...; Jason, would you...; Jason, would you...? And he did it all without complaint, seemingly without notice of how quickly she was coming to depend upon him being in her life for the little things.

So, when Jason finally asked her for something, she latched onto the favor with both hands. Sure, he could have some friends over. Suddenly, it didn't matter that it was his first night home from the hospital, and she had really been looking forward to resuming their seemingly innocuous yet still important evening rituals of having dinner together and then sitting quietly in the living room with one another before retiring hours later to their respective rooms. So what if, contrary to Jason's promise after their quickie wedding ceremony, he had yet to kiss her; so what if, in fact, he had been more introspective, more distant than ever before in their relationship. If Jason wanted to have company over at their house, then she would do everything within her power to make him and his friends feel comfortable and welcome.

And that was why Elizabeth Webber – no, Elizabeth Morgan currently found herself in the middle of the disaster zone otherwise known as her kitchen. She should have known better than to attempt something from scratch for her first foray into cooking, especially when they were having guests that evening. It was just... well, not only were they having guests over, but it was Jason's first night home from the hospital, and what said concern and care better than homemade chicken noodle soup? And, really, when she had first looked at the recipe... okay, the pictures that went along with the recipe, the whole thing had seemed relatively easy. Make some long worms out of what looked to be pale Play-dough, cook some chicken, cut up some vegetables, make some broth, toss everything together into a big kettle, and voila... only voila turned into 'uh... I don't think that's supposed to happen,' and 'uh... I don't think that's supposed to happen' turned into 'oh, shit.' And then she had a panic attack.

There was flour... everywhere – on the floor, on her, even on the ceiling. How she had managed that one, Elizabeth still wasn't sure. The chicken looked like it was cooked over a landmine and not her stove's gas flame, she had spilled the broth... which had just tasted like water... all over the floor, and, in the confusion of everything else going to hell, Elizabeth had even burned her brownies – the one thing she was actually capable of making. Usually. To top it all off, she had cut herself while trying to chop carrots. With a dishtowel wrapped around her left hand, she knew she looked a mess – probably like a lunatic ghost, but she just couldn't scrounge up the gumption to stand up, dust herself off, and try again.
Like she said, she was a failure.

While Elizabeth was planning on just hiding out in the kitchen for the rest of the evening – pouting and stewing over her ruined... well, stew, Jason, apparently, had other plans, because, before she could pick herself up off the floor – really, why she thought it was a good idea to sit on the floor when she was nearly six months pregnant, Elizabeth had no idea – he was there. In the kitchen. Standing beside her. Scowling.

“Elizabeth?”

And then she started to cry.

Without waiting for an explanation and ignoring the doctor’s orders to not bend down and certainly not to lift anything heavy... and, for a woman who two months prior had not even been showing yet, she was certainly porking on the weight, Jason helped her to her feet. Immediately, he started to fuss about her, his actions proving out of character enough to shock Elizabeth out of her crying jag.

“I'm sorry,” she said miserably while, at the same time, luxuriating under his touch.

“For what,” Jason murmured, sounding distracted by the attention he was paying her. He was using his thumbs to dry her tear tracks, running his knuckles over her cheeks to wipe away the traces of flour which resided there, and using his long, capable fingers to smooth her hair back. And, while he worked, Elizabeth realized that his eyes were locked upon her mouth, a mouth that she suddenly noticed had gone dry with nervous anticipation.

“I, uh, I ruined your dinner,” she explained, nibbling on her bottom lip before anxiously swiping her tongue over the tortured flesh to soothe the sting. “Your party.”

“My what?” In his confusion, for the first time since entering the kitchen, Jason met her searching gaze.

“You know, your welcome home party... the one you asked me if I minded you have?” When he still continued to stare at her in confusion, Elizabeth rolled her eyes despite the slight smidgeon of doubt which entered her mind. He had asked her if he could have some people over, hadn't he? Maybe he had said parrots instead... only Jason didn't seem like the pet bird kind of guy, and didn't birds carry a lot of diseases?

The slight touch of Jason's hand upon her chin and the way he said her name, “Elizabeth?,” like he was asking her for more than just clarification brought her back to the moment, and she shook her head slightly to clear it of the unnecessary clutter of her rambling thoughts.

“A few days ago... in the hospital, you asked me if you could have some people over tonight?” Before he could respond, she rushed to add, “and, Jason, just so you know, you don't have to ask me about things like that. This is your house, too.”

“Yeah, well, you never have people over, and Johnny and Francis aren't... they're not the type of guys you usually spend time with.”

“I've had my Grams over a few times.”

“Elizabeth,” Jason tipped his head down and looked at her purposefully. “Audrey's your grandmother.”
She continued to protest. “And how do you know what kind of men I spend time with, huh?” When his eyes narrowed, she verbally started to backtrack. “I mean, I know they work for Sonny Corinthos... and not as boxers, but they're your friends, and they've always been nice to me. They brought me flowers.”

“I know.” The two words were gritted out through Jason's teeth like they pained him to even think about, let alone say out loud and admit. For a moment, Elizabeth found herself wondering what that was all about, but then Jason was talking once again, and her curiosity fluttered away as she focused upon their conversation. “My point is that I didn't want you to feel uncomfortable. And it's not a party.”

“But you still have to eat.” He grumbled dismissively under his breath. “Jason, you just got out of the hospital. You're recovering from major surgery. The only reason the doctors allowed you leave this early is because I'm training to be a nurse, and you have to be the most unpleasant, uncooperative, surly man in the history of bad patients. Whether you like it or not, I'm going to make sure that you eat – and healthy, too, and I'm sure it wouldn't hurt either Johnny or Francis to have a home cooked meal once in a while. They probably eat fast food or junk – cookies, chips, candy bars – when they actually have a chance to grab something, and nobody – certainly not two active uh... security personnel such they are can survive on garbage for that long. More importantly, though, they're coming to our home, and I refuse to be a bad...”

The last of her words were consumed by Jason's mouth. With only a desperate growl to warn her of his intentions, he dropped one of his arms to wrap around her waist and pulled her close, while the other molded itself to her jaw, tilting her face upwards to meet his seeking lips. And meet them did she ever! Gratefully, Elizabeth returned his embrace, and greedily she encouraged it, unmindful of those injuries she had just been lecturing Jason about. Without conscious thought, her mouth blossomed open under his, and she welcomed Jason's tongue with a faint flick of her own, her arms eventually lifting to wrap around his neck to both move them into more intimate contact and to help keep herself and her now shaky knees steady. All Elizabeth could think about was more. She wanted him closer. Faster. Harder.

And then the doorbell rang.

This time, when Jason made a sound in the back of his throat, it was a groan of protest, but, still, he pulled away from her. Breathing heavily, he whispered, “I don't expect you to cook for me or my friends, but, when you do cook, it better be for me and only me and because you want to.”

In that moment, for the first time in her life, Elizabeth realized what it would be like to be possessed by another person – not because they took her but because she gladly would give herself to them. It was a pleasant feeling, one that made her smile, made her heart beat faster and expand within her chest, and made her stomach feel like it was a butterfly garden.

“Come on,” Jason told her, slipping one of her small, much daintier hands inside of one of his own. As he steered them out of the kitchen and into the living room, she blushed at the knowledge that her hand was swallowed by Jason's embrace. He was just so... big. “There are two people I want you to meet.”

The next few minutes were a whirlwind. Jason went to the door and let in their guests, all four of them talking at once as they entered while depositing boxes of pizza and six packs of various kinds of beer onto the dining room table. Johnny and Francis greeted her casually, and she returned the sentiments, though only half-heartedly. Most of her attention was focused upon Jason – her husband.
– and the two people in the room she didn't know: a man and a woman a few years older than she was and obviously a couple who had been together for quite some time. They just seemed so... natural with each other, and she found herself wanting to experience that kind of connection with someone someday and wondering if perhaps – just maybe – she and Jason could be like that, too.

As they all sat down at the table – paper plates quickly being filled with pizza, Jason started introductions. “Elizabeth, you already know Francis and Johnny.”

She tipped her head towards the two guards, acknowledging them with a slight smirk and a cheeky, “Mr. Donovan; my maid-of-honor,” respectively. Johnny playfully narrowed his eyes at her; Francis chuckled, sliding a bottle of non-alcoholic beer in her direction... almost as if it were her reward for picking on his friend.

“And this,” Jason continued, gesturing towards the new additions to their small group, “is FBI Special Agent Jagger and Doctor Karen Cates.”

“Thank you for welcoming us into your home,” Doctor Karen Cates said to Elizabeth with a small but genuine smile. “I also hear that you’re newlyweds, so congratulations. So, as a little present from us to you...” With that, the older woman handed Elizabeth a piece of folded paper, quickly determined to be a restraining order against her ex once she unfolded it. “Did I forget to mention that I’m also the District Attorney, Scott Baldwin’s, daughter?” With a wicked twinkle in her eye, Karen added, “my bad.”

And Elizabeth sat back in her chair, speechless.
Part Seventeen

Prompt #72: "To know the road ahead, ask those coming back. ~ Chinese Proverb

For two weeks, he had done nothing. Been idle. And it had slowly been driving Jason crazy.

Oddly enough, it wasn't the inactivity so much that bothered him; it was the guilt. While Johnny, Francis, and Jagger worked together to start the process of taking down Sonny, Jason rested. While the guys carefully made their way through the organization, determining which men were loyal to Sonny to a fault and which could be reasoned with to jump ship, Jason ate soup. And, while the guys planted things and in general set Ric Lansing up, Jason read travel guides. Even if he had been able to get his hands dirty – which, given the fact that he wasn't involved in the business side of Sonny's operations, he couldn't, Jason also knew that Elizabeth would have protested – not because she was controlling but because she cared. For two weeks, when she wasn't working or studying, she was taking care of him, and, despite the fact that he wasn't one to allow others to fuss over him, he didn't mind Elizabeth's fussing. It was... nice in a way, and he sure as hell wasn't going to argue with anything that allowed him to feel her touch.

Since the night when they had shared their kiss, their physical relationship had not progressed any further. Occasionally, he could catch her off guard and steal another embrace, but she was very aware of and hyper-vigilant about his injuries and, on more than one occasion, had voiced her concerns that, if she got too close, she would hurt him. The idea was laughable – like tiny Elizabeth Morgan... even seven months pregnant... could ever hurt him, and, even if she did, Jason knew that he would enjoy the sweet torture. And that's exactly what spending so much time with her near but not close enough was: torture. The way she'd trail her impossibly soft, warm fingers against his healing incisions when she changed his bandages, the way she hovered over him as she tended to his wounds, the way she would focus all of her attention upon him and bite her lip in concentration as she...

“Hey, Jason!”

Caught unaware, he moved quickly to turn and face the man behind him, mentally giving himself a silent lecture for becoming so easily distracted. But Elizabeth just had that effect upon him...

“It's great to see you again,” the other man continued, seemingly unaware that he had startled Jason. “After, well... you know what happened... I just, it's really good to see you up and about, moving around so easily. You doing okay?”

Folding his arms over his chest, he responded blandly, “I'm healing.”

“Uh... right,” Max Giambetti returned. “That's good.” By the other man's tell-tale signs of discomfort – he was shuffling his feet, fidgeting, and looking anywhere but in Jason's direction, Jason knew that Max was unnerved by his presence there in the gym, probably because he felt a degree of guilt over what had happened. “So, uh, I heard that you're done fighting.”

“Yeah.”

“So, then... uh, what are you doing here?”
“I'm just here to clean out my locker,” Jason said. And that much was true. He was going to clean out his locker. After all, he didn't like to lie. But his presence in the gym on that particular day – a day that Max and Ric Lansing were both there – wasn't coincidental.

“Yeah, sure,” the guard replied, smiling and nodding in agreement. “That sounds good, Jason, and, you know, good luck... with everything.”

“Thanks, Max.” Just as the other man turned around to walk away, though, Jason called out to him. “Actually, Max, there's something that I wanted to talk to you about.”

The two of them moved to a more discreet corner of the gym to stand in the shadows away from the other men working out. “What's going on, man? Is there something you need? You know, after what happened, I'm sure Mr. Corinthos would be more than happy to...”

In a low yet confident tone, Jason interrupted, asking, “have you ever heard of Jagger Cates before?”

“That name sounds familiar,” Max started, only to brighten as he added, “wait, Cates...? Isn't that the name of the kid Sonny was friends with who died of AIDS?”

“Yeah, Stone. Jagger's his brother.”

“Alright, but what does this have to do with...?”

“He's back in town.” When Max just stood there, staring blankly at him, Jason continued, “he's also a Fed – an FBI Special Agent, and his wife... well, let's just say that there's some bad blood between Jagger and Sonny.”

The guard narrowed his eyes in close observation. “Why are you telling me this?”

“Look, I won't deny that Jagger and I are friends. Even though he's been in California for years, after my accident, he reached out to me, offered me a place to stay if I ever wanted to get out of Port Charles. But Sonny's been good to me, too. Yeah, I'm done fighting, but I'm hoping that Sonny will... look kindly upon me coming to you with this and remember my... cooperation in the future.”

And that's all it took before Max's bravado crumbled. Forlornly, the other man asked, “you think he's here to come after Mr. C.?” Before Jason could respond, Max sighed and admitted, “it makes sense. In fact, it's the perfect time for the Feds to come after us. Sonny... well, he hasn't been feeling well lately. Someone's bringing drugs into the territory, shipments are getting hijacked, men are deserting left and right – at least a couple everyday. If ever we were ripe for an investigation, it'd be now. I thought it was all this new player's doing – Alcazar, but that kind of distraction just makes it even easier for the FBI to plant a mole in the organization.” Shaking his head, Max seemed to come back from his thoughts, lifting his eyes to meet Jason's as he asked, “I hate to put you in this type of position, but has your friend... this Jagger Cates... said anything to you about whether or not he has an inside man?”

“All I know is that he only came into town a few weeks ago, so, if someone's dirty, then they're probably a new hire, and, if Jagger was willing to not only pick up and move his career but also relocate with his wife back to Port Charles for this case, then it's probably someone near or at the top.” And none of that was a lie... not really, because, whether Ric Lansing was a snitch or not, he sure as hell was dirty.
“Thanks, Jason,” a very distracted and nervous Max told him, already turning away and making a call.

One man down, one to go.

Quickly making his way into the locker room, Jason watched to make sure that no one followed him. If everything had gone according to plan, then Johnny would be waiting for him by his locker – seemingly changing for a workout, and the two of them would simply have a casual conversation, making small talk about Jason's new life... only there would be nothing casual about the information he would share. Each word had been carefully considered beforehand for maximum effectiveness.

Soon after Jason's last fight, Ric had started to come into the gym every evening. The man didn't do much actual exercising, but he usually stayed for about an hour anyway. Whether the effort was in an attempt to ingratiate himself with the other guys or simply to further blend into the organization, Johnny and Francis weren't sure, but, whatever the reason, it worked to their advantage. Because Jason had been MIA from the gym for a month, and because Ric had no idea that he was friends with many of Sonny's men, Elizabeth's ex-husband had no reason to suspect that he was being set up. But that's exactly what was going down that evening, exactly why Jason had rushed over to the gym on that particular night to pack up his locker: because both Ric and Max were there at the same time, and he needed to share some information with both of them.

“Hey, Morgan, long time no see,” Johnny O'Brien greeted him casually as he walked into the locker room. “I see they didn't fix that ugly mug of yours when you were under the knife. Your poor wife must be sorely disappointed.”

Despite the situation, Jason couldn't help but offer a genuine grin at the thought of Elizabeth. Such gestures were becoming much more common upon his face. Any other man would have returned Johnny's ribbing with a ribald comment, but that wasn't Jason's style, and just because they were trying to fool Ric, that did not mean that he would play those typical male games. “Elizabeth's doing good – busy but good. I'll tell her you asked about her.”

“And the baby?”

“Growing,” Jason stated emphatically. “In fact, we have a doctor's appointment next week. Seventh month check-up. With my injuries, we didn't get to have the ultrasound last month, so the doctor's going to perform it this time. If we want to, we'll be able to find out the sex of the baby.”

As Jason threw his old workout equipment – gloves, shorts, and shoes... nothing fancy for him – into the duffle bag he had brought with him, Johnny asked, “and are you going to?”

“Don't know,” Jason answered, shrugging. “It's up to Elizabeth.”

And that was it. Short and sweet and to the point. Elizabeth did have a doctor's appointment the next week, and he was going to it with her. As far as Ric was concerned, the other man had made no qualms about the fact that he wanted a son, an heir, and, in his obsession with Elizabeth and her unborn child, he had somehow convinced himself that her baby would be that heir. So, despite the fact that Jason wanted Ric nowhere near Elizabeth or her child, and despite the fact that there was a restraining order against the man, preventing him from coming within 100 yards of Elizabeth, Jason knew that the lure of finding out the baby's sex would be too great for Ric to ignore. The trap had been set.

“See you around, O'Brien,” he tossed over his shoulder.
Johnny offered up some kind of farewell, too, but Jason wasn't paying attention. Instead, he was focused upon getting the hell away from the gym and back home as fast as he could. For years, the old, worn building had been his second home, but now he didn't feel safe there. Instead, it felt like he had a target on his back. While he knew that he could hold his own in any fair fight, there was nothing fair about Sonny's businesses – legal or otherwise – now. Plus, he liked the thought of going home to Elizabeth, home to her quiet support, her gentle touch, her secret smile that he would swear she only offered to...

“Morgan.”

This time, he was prepared for the unexpected interruption of his thoughts. Without breaking stride, Jason approached his motorcycle, dumped his duffle into the saddle bag. Once it was secured, he turned around, quirked a brow. “Ritchie.”

The guard took several steps forward out of the shadows, coming to stand beside Jason so that they could talk without being overheard by those others coming and going from the gym. Ritchie was one of the men who had elected to join their efforts to take down Sonny, so his presence didn't unnerve Jason, though it did pique his curiosity. True, they had always gotten along... on a cursory level, but they had never been good friends, and a long, drawn out, private conversation between the two of them would raise some eyebrows.

“I don't think this is a good idea,” Jason told the other man. “If you have something to report, or if you have a question or a concern, you should talk to Johnny. He's inside. Or Francis, though I'm not sure where he's...”


“Why what?”

“Why are you doing this,” the bodyguard asked. “What's in it for you? I know why I'm working with Cates, why Johnny and Francis are, but you... This has nothing to do with you, Jason. You're not a part of the business, so why put yourself in the middle of it? Why take that risk?”

For several seconds, Jason debated his response, but then he just settled upon the truth. “Did you know that I recently got married, Ritchie, that my wife is expecting a child?”

“No?”

He could hear the uncertainty in the other man's voice, the questions. “I'm doing this for them – for their security. I'm also washed up. After that last fight, I can't box anymore, and, when this place goes to auction after the Feds seize it, I plan on buying it cheap and fixing it up. Maybe I can't box anymore, but fighting's all I know. But most of all,” he concluded, taking a step further so that he and the guard were only a few inches apart. Meeting Ritchie's gaze, Jason steeled his own. “I'm doing this because I want Ric Lansing dead.”

Turning around, he climbed onto his bike, not waiting for the other man's reaction. He'd either trust him or he wouldn't. Jason gave him the truth, and that's all he could do. Everything else, that was up to Ritchie.

“We're going to need more.” Turning to face the guard, Jason frowned in concentration, in inquiry. “Taking down Sonny and taking out Ric, that's only going to cause a power vacuum. Like you said,
we want the Feds to seize all of Sonny's holdings and accounts. For that to happen, we need more.”

As Jason started his bike, he silently acknowledged that Ritchie was right.
Part Eighteen

Prompt #74: "Fever"

“No. Stop. Don’t tell me, because I don’t want to know. With you, it’s always worse than I can ever imagine, so, just this once, leave me with my less illegal suspicions.”

“Ma, come on! I did it for you, I swear! Consider it a belated Christmas present.”

Elizabeth had been minding her own business, honest! – going about her duties and responsibilities without delay or protest in her never ending quest of trying to prove to her boss that she was serious about wanting to be a nurse and that she had been accepted into GH’s nursing program for more than just her pedigree. But sometimes a girl stumbled upon a conversation she just could not ignore. Sometimes a girl just encountered a situation too delicate to smoothly extricate herself from without notice. And sometimes, no matter how wrong Elizabeth knew it was, a girl just had to eavesdrop... especially when the angry mother just so happened to be one hard to please, impossible to impress Epiphany Johnson.

“Don't give me that – that you broke the law for me, Stanford! You hack, and you defraud, and you mess with people because you're good at it, and you like it.”

“Okay, okay, so maybe that's not untrue, but it's not like hacking into the PC tax records was actually a challenge for me. And, besides, you're always complaining about how the government takes so much of your money when the rich receive tax breaks or just shuffle their money into off-shore accounts. I thought you'd appreciate me helping you out.”

“It's one thing to complain about an injustice, but it's another thing to be a hypocrite and break the law in order to avoid that injustice. What you did, son, makes you no better than the crooks and thieves that I've despised my entire life, and I guess that's my fault, because, obviously, somehow, I failed you as a mother. Now, I'm at work... which I understand is a foreign concept to you, but, still, I would appreciate it if you would leave. The last thing I need is for someone to get wind of what you've...”

Epiphany’s words faded, but Elizabeth didn't need to hear more. She knew exactly what she was going to do with the information that had just fallen into her lap. Waiting a few minutes to make sure that the coast was clear, she then exited the hospital room she had been at first working in and then lurking in, immediately making a beeline for the break room. She needed to gather her things, make up some excuse to Epiphany about why she needed to go home early, and then she had to share their stroke of luck with Jason. Although she knew that she would take flack from her boss for skipping out of her shift, it was a price Elizabeth was willing to pay.

Despite Johnny and Francis' reluctance to talk freely in front of her, after they were married, Jason had been very forthright about his plan to take down Sonny Corinthos and, in connection, her ex-husband, partly because Jason simply didn't lie and especially not to someone he cared about... which was something she could boast about, for she was now lucky enough to be included in such limited company. But it was more than that. She had a feeling Jason had also told her his plan to make sure that she was fully aware of who she had married.
Despite the fact that she had seen him nearly beat to death and had never once questioned sticking by his side, Jason seemed to have a deep-seeded vein of self-doubt and recrimination. It was like he didn't believe himself good enough for her. By sharing with her his plan, he had been attempting to push her away while, at the same time, almost testing her – not because he didn't trust her but she believed because he didn't trust that someone could care about him the way he wanted her to. For that, she blamed the Quartermaines and how they had treated Jason after his accident. Emily had told her enough about that time in Jason's life for Elizabeth to have a pretty clear picture of the wounds Jason's family had inflicted upon him.

She had just pushed the door to the break room open when a voice behind her announced, “you're up to something.”

Spinning around on her heels, hands clutched to her suddenly rapidly beating chest, Elizabeth gasped in startlement. “Don't,” she warned; she begged, “do that. Do you want me to go into early labor?”

“Well, if there was ever a place for that to happen...” When Elizabeth didn't laugh, Karen sobered. “I'm sorry, I thought for sure you would have heard me. Wow, you were really distracted, weren't you?”

“Just call me 'one track mind, Webber... er, Morgan. And, also, damn our stupid, silent hospital shoes.”

Her friend chuckled, then stepped out of the room's entranceway, allowing the door to close quietly behind her. Lowering her voice, she asked pointedly, “is something wrong?”

“Actually, no. Something's right – really, really right, but I can't risk calling Jason and talking to him about it over the phone, and, as you know, everything about our lives right now is extremely time sensitive. I need to get out of here.”

Without question, Karen offered, “want some help? I'm sure an excuse coming from me would placate Attila the Hun more than it would coming from you.”

Surprised, Elizabeth asked, “you'd be willing to do that – to lie for me?”

“Eh, I see it as being for the greater good, and isn't that what being a doctor is all about?” Not waiting for a response, Karen clapped her hands together in an efficient manner. “Okay, you grab your stuff, I'll run interference with Epiphany, and then I'll meet you in the parking garage. Do you have your car today, or did Jason give you a ride to work?”

“I have my car.” Laughing, she rubbed her baby bump and added, “Karen, Jason drives a motorcycle. I don't think that'd work too well for me these days.”

The older woman laughed. “Alright, so we'll take your car, I'll call Jagger on my way to your house, and then we can just run me back later to pick up my car. Sound good?”

“I'll see you in ten.”

And she did. Ten minutes later, she and Karen were on the road. Elizabeth debated whether or not she wanted to tell her new friend about her idea, for she was fairly bursting with excitement... or that might have also been her need to use the bathroom, she wasn't sure, but, in the end, Elizabeth elected just to wait. It'd be much easier to only have to share her story once, and Karen seemed to understand that without even asking, for she never once pressed Elizabeth for even a clue. By the time they
pulled into her driveway, Elizabeth was relieved to see Jason's bike parked off to the side. He was home.

“I, uh, yeah,” she stammered as she quickly unhooked her seatbelt, already pushing her door open. “Just let yourself in,” Elizabeth called over her shoulder.

The last thing she heard when she opened her front door was Karen's amused chuckle floating from somewhere behind her. Whereas Elizabeth had never appreciated being surrounded by medical professionals as a child, now that she was pregnant, having a doctor as a friend was a real convenience. She never had to explain her moods, her cravings, or the odd behaviors being pregnant sometimes made necessary. And, in fact, Karen seemed to find her pregnancy antics amusing.

After having used the bathroom, Elizabeth carefully moved back down the stairs, talking while she did so. Eyes trained on her feet, for she had an unshakable fear of falling down steps and losing her baby, she never noticed the third person standing in the living room she shared with Jason. “So, you know what Ritchie said, and you know how we've all been struggling to figure out a way to quickly set up...”

“Who's Ritchie?” At the sound of Emily Quartermaine's question – her tone demanding and belligerent, Elizabeth came to a standstill on the stairs, several risers from the bottom. When she didn't answer, Emily pressed further. “And what the hell is going on around here? All of a sudden, you and Jagger Cates' wife of all people...”

“I have a name, you know,” the woman in question interrupted. “It's Karen: five letters, two syllables, really not that hard to say or spell for that matter.”

Emily ignored Karen, though. In fact, she talked over her. “... are inseparable. I see the two of you walking through the halls of GH together, whispering, and then today she lied for you. I heard her tell Epiphany that you were sick – had a fever, in fact, and that she thought it best for you and the baby if you were to leave your shift early. And then she comes home with you?”

“Oh, cut the crap,” Emily yelled, barely sparing Karen a glance before turning her gaze – eyes laced with hurt and anger – back on Elizabeth. “She's not your OB-GYN, and you and I both know that you're not sick, Elizabeth. But this lie is just par for the course these days for you. That's all you seem to be doing: lying to me or, if you're not lying to me, then you're keeping things from me.”

“This isn't about you,” Elizabeth informed her. “Sometimes, there will be things in my life that don't concern you, that are bigger than you – even bigger than our friendship, and this is one of them. Besides, I think we said everything we needed to say to each other a few weeks ago in Jason's hospital room. For the time being, it'd probably be a good idea if we just... stayed away from each other. As for my friendship with Karen, that's none of your business, Emily... just as my marriage is none of your business. I'm allowed to have friends other than you, you know.”

But Emily, apparently, wasn't ready to back down. “Ah, yes, your marriage. Thanks for bringing that up, because I have to tell you, Liz, I've been wondering about that recently.” Accusingly, she ranted, “you promised me that whatever was going on between you and my brother was platonic – that you were just friends, that you were getting married to help each other out.” As Emily continued to yell, Jason crossed the room, came to Elizabeth's side, and helped her down the rest of the stairs. Even
once she was standing beside their dining room table, he remained next to her. In fact, he shocked Elizabeth by lacing one of his hands with one of hers. “Well, from where I’m standing, the two of you look anything but platonic. After everything I’ve confided in you about my brother and what happened with Carly, he’s claiming your baby, isn’t he?”

For the first time, Jason spoke up. “I would appreciate it, Emily, if you wouldn’t talk about me like I wasn’t standing right here. If you want to know something about me, then you ask me. You need to stop harassing Elizabeth. She doesn’t make my decisions for me. She doesn’t tell me what to do; she doesn’t tell me how I feel.”

Suddenly deflated, Emily sighed. “I guess that just about says it all, doesn’t it? Somehow, she’s wormed her way under your skin. You’re in love with her, aren’t you Jase?”

He neither confirmed nor denied his sister’s accusations, but his silence didn’t hurt Elizabeth. What they were to each other was no one’s business but their own, and, when she and Jason admitted their feelings... whatever they may be, the last thing she wanted was an audience or for the sentiments to be forced by someone else demanding answers to questions they had no right to ask in the first place. Instead, in a calm voice, Jason simply said, “I think you need to leave now, Emily.”

Before his sister could do just that, though, the front door opened and, in their typically loud and boisterous way – how those two ever managed to be quiet enough to work in the mob, Elizabeth would never know, Johnny and Francis barreled into the room, talking without first becoming aware of who was in their surroundings.

“It's colder than a witch's tit out there,” Johnny complained, rubbing his gloveless hands together and blowing on the obviously chilled digits. “But we're here anyway... with bells on. Cates called and told us Karen told him Elizabeth called a meeting of the minds.” Finally, the guard looked up, noticed Emily and the awkwardness which filled the room. “Oh.”

“Don't mind me,” Emily bit out acerbically, pushing her way around first Johnny and then Francis who attempted to open the door for her only to be elbowed aside. “I was just leaving.” Before she shut the door behind her, though, she turned back around and leveled a hostile glare in Elizabeth’s direction. “I don’t know what the hell you’ve gotten my brother involved in, but I know this is your fault, and, whatever it is, if anything happens to him, I’m going to hold you personally responsible.”

Before she could protest, before she could defend herself, before she could even formulate a response, Jason squeezed her hand and quietly said, “goodbye, Emily.”

For some reason, the statement felt more profound than a simple salutation.
Part Nineteen

Prompt #76. "I promise that this will be the last time you'll see me. I won't come back. I won't put you through anything like this again. You can go on with your life without any more interference from me. It will be as if I'd never existed." ~ Edward Cullen, New Moon

Kelly Lee was weird. Oh, Jason had no doubt that she was a qualified doctor. No matter what he felt about GH, he knew that it was a reputable hospital, that Elizabeth – medically speaking – was in good hands, but that didn't mean that he needed to be in those hands as well, and that brought him straight back to the frisky, flirtatious Dr. Lee.

Since the moment they had arrived, she had been giddy with innuendo, making tongue-in-cheek comments about his marriage to Elizabeth, and Jason was pretty sure that she had pinched his butt. Twice. Elizabeth had been too distracted by her nerves to notice her OB-GYN’s inappropriate behavior, knowing that, because of their plan, Ric would undoubtedly be showing up sometime during her appointment. And Jason had been hesitant to say anything, not wanting to make his wife uncomfortable around her physician and him on top of everything else.

But that was the rub of it. His wife. Elizabeth was his wife, and the more time Jason spent around her, the more he was reminded of the fact. Maybe he wasn't your typical guy, and none of his friends from the gym were married, but he knew enough about marriage to know that most couples did not sleep in separate bedrooms, that most couples got more from their commitment than a roommate and clean laundry. And he wanted more.

Sitting beside her in the exam room – a flimsy hospital gown the only thing shielding her body from his piercing gaze, Jason easily admitted to himself that his attraction towards his wife had nothing to do with Elizabeth's pregnancy. Given his past, he knew that people would jump to that conclusion, that they would assume that Jason was transferring feelings onto Elizabeth and her unborn baby because of his former attachment to another child. He wasn't an idiot, though – brain damaged maybe but not an idiot.

When he looked at Elizabeth, he didn't see Carly. When he thought about his wife's pregnancy, he didn't think about Michael. Jason knew that one child could not replace another, and he would never want to do that to a child anyway... even if it was possible. No, when he looked at Elizabeth, he saw... her – someone with the biggest heart he knew, someone who would do anything for her child except use or hurt him or her, someone who was capable of looking beyond what he did for a living and all the rumors that flew around town about him, someone who had taken care of him just because she loved his sister, someone who now took care of him simply because she wanted to. And physically...

Well, physically, the last thing Jason saw when he looked at his wife was her pregnancy.

Despite Elizabeth's protests to the contrary, she was still quite small and petite, her baby bump easily disguised by the maternity clothes she had been forced to break down and buy or the t-shirts she frequently snagged from his room. Rather, when he looked at her, he saw her mouth – those full, lush lips of hers either spread wide in all the various smiles she had, pursed to talk, or plumped and
wrapped around a straw, or a pen, or the end of a paintbrush. He saw her hair which he still wasn’t sure how to describe, because its shade seemed to constantly shift depending upon the light surrounding her; he saw her wide, fathomless blue eyes which never failed to tell him exactly how she felt... if only he could interpret the emotions; he saw her stubborn chin – tilted haughtily in the air when she felt passionate about something or tucked demurely against her chest as she napped upon their couch. He saw and felt her hands – tiny hands, busy hands, soft and loving hands, the ghost of their touch from when she took care of his injuries keeping sleep at bay every night as Jason reclined in bed, listening for the tiniest of sounds from her bedroom down the hall from his. And then there was her body, her breasts...

“Everything looks textbook perfect, Elizabeth,” Dr. Kelly Lee announced, still glancing at her patient's chart. Because the OB-GYN was for once busy doing her job instead of asking questions about Jason and his wife getting busy, and because Elizabeth’s attention was equally split between mauling her bottom lip with her teeth and listening to what her physician had to say, neither of them had noticed his previous preoccupation, something Jason was sincerely grateful for. The last thing he needed to do was have to explain where his thoughts had been wandering to, especially not in front of the randy Dr. Lee. Besides, the last thing Elizabeth would want to hear was how, just when they were on the cusp of finally making her life safe for her and her unborn baby, he was reconsidering the terms of their marriage of convenience. Sure, every time he kissed her, Elizabeth responded readily and greedily to his touch, but a kiss was a far cry from a real marriage. After all, she had just gotten out of one disastrous union; he couldn't expect her to want to tie herself down to someone else so quickly. And none of that even took into account the fact that she was going to be a mother in just a couple of months' time. If their marriage did become real, then what? Elizabeth certainly wouldn’t want Jason to play a role in her child's life... would she?

“Your blood pressure is right where we want it to be, the baby's heart rate is in tip-top shape, and you're right at your ideal weight as well. As far as pregnancies go, you two are definitely in the running for my star couple,” Kelly Lee complimented, standing up from her stool and tossing aside Elizabeth's folder. Crossing her arms over her chest, the OB-GYN continued, “considering where we started when you first came in to see me, Elizabeth, you've made excellent progress, and I like to think that I can take a little credit for that. After all, if it wasn't for me and my suggestions, you never would have gone out and found yourself a... Jason.”

Despite his best intentions, Jason felt his brow twist in confusion. He by no means wanted to encourage the other woman, but he had no idea what the hell he was being praised for. A quick glance at Elizabeth told him that his wife was embarrassed. She was blushing from her hairline to the collar of her hospital gown. Instinctively, Jason's gaze then dropped to Elizabeth's chest... as if his eyes were capable of seeing through the material of her gown. What he wouldn't give to know just how far down her body Elizabeth's blush continued. Before he could even interpret what her embarrassment meant – knowing that, whatever Kelly Lee was referring to, it was inappropriate, the doctor was already talking again, pulling up Elizabeth's hospital gown to reveal her swollen abdomen and panties – blue, lacy, and unbelievably tiny... yet definitely not small enough for Jason's tastes – as she readied the ultrasound machine and drizzled cold gel onto Elizabeth's baby bump.

“You know, I'll never understand why pregnancy and sex is such a taboo combination. You always hear the experience equated to a journey. Well, in any vehicle I've ever traveled in – be it a car, a bus, a train, or a plane, you need fuel to get the vehicle started, but you also need fuel for the entire trip. You stop using your fuel half way there, and you're going to stall out, and no one enjoys running out of gas. You have to keep the motor running. Churning. Burning.”

“Okay,” Elizabeth interrupted, her voice just a few decibels shy of being a shout. Her eyes were wide, her skin was flushed, and, if he looked closely, Jason would swear that her skin was dewy
with perspiration. She looked exactly how he felt: painfully, deliciously...

“We get it, Kelly,” his wife continued, lowering her voice and laying back down on the exam table. “Could we just... the ultrasound?”

“Now, you weren't going to start that without me, were you, Beautiful?”

In Jason's... distraction, he had almost forgotten why he was there with Elizabeth at her appointment in the first place. They needed Ric to break his restraining order, so that Jagger would have a legal excuse to track the man down in a very public place and speak with him so that Sonny would see them together. That was why Jason made sure that, when he went to collect his things from the gym, Ric was there, why he talked so openly about Elizabeth's seventh month check up. And, now, he was there to make sure that the slick attorney could not hurt Elizabeth or her child.

Despite the plan, he could still feel Elizabeth tense beside him. Instinctively, Jason reached for the closer of her two hands, sliding one of his into it as he maneuvered his body to block Elizabeth from Ric's sight to the best of his ability. While he kept his grip upon her fingers soft and loose, everything else about his form became hard and tense. He steeled his shoulders, stiffened his spine so that it was ramrod straight despite the ache in his healing ribs, and knew that his eyes had become glazed over like a sheet of cold ice. “Get out.”

Instead of listening, Ric swaggered forward, a cocky grin upon his thin lips. “Oh, you mean how you had to get out of the ring because you couldn't hack it anymore, Jason?” The attorney shook his head as if offering sympathy. “You know, I was there that night. What happened to you was a damn shame. I mean, it was almost as if your opponent knew everything about you – your weaknesses, your strengths, your fighting style, your past injuries, but, of course, that's ridiculous. Impossible, even. Apparently, you just can't hack it anymore. As for my right to be here, well...” Ric rocked pompously back and forth on his shiny loafers. “I'm the baby's father, whereas you're just a liability for Elizabeth at this point. You're an unemployed, brain-damaged retard who used to earn a living with his fists but can't even do that anymore. I mean, really, Jason? How's that going to look in family court?”

He ignored the barbs, he ignored the overwhelming urge to show his wife's ex-husband just how not washed up his fighting skills really were, and Jason even ignored the gentle pressure of Elizabeth squeezing his hand. While he appreciated her silent support, he couldn't allow himself to feel anything other than his hatred towards the pig standing before him. “You're not supposed to be here.”

Ric laughed – a fake, put-upon guffaw which made Jason's free hand curl into a tight, lethal fist. “That's rich – coming from you, but it's just another example of why, when after my little boy is born and Elizabeth and I go to court, she's going to lose all rights to my son. She's an unfit mother. She married you, she associates with criminals, attends underground fights – and, yes, I have documented proof that she was at your last disaster of a match, and she...”

“Alright, that's enough, Mr. Lansing,” two hospital security personnel interrupted Ric's rant, each of them roughly grabbing one of his arms to yank him out of the room. “You're coming with us. You've already been warned about this, you know – harassing Miss Webber...” Kelly cleared her throat, interrupting the man who was speaking. His name tag said Tom. “I mean... Mrs. Morgan. You were told to stay away from her.”

For the first time since her ex had pushed his way into her appointment, Elizabeth spoke up. “I also have a restraining order against him. By being her, he broke it.”
“Well, isn't that interesting,” Tom mused, tugging on Ric's arm yet again. “I happen to personally know, too, that Mac Scorpio hates entitled little rich boys who think they're above the law. A call from me, and the commissioner will personally handle your case.”

The security guard continued to rant and threaten over Ric's protests as he and his associate drug the lawyer down the hallway, but the words were cut off when Dr. Lee shut the door and turned back to her patient. “So, where were we,” she asked rhetorically, already moving back to Elizabeth's side to start the ultrasound.

It took Jason several minutes to calm back down, to relax. Slowly, the tension in his body drained away until the point where he realized that he was still holding Elizabeth's hand... or, more accurately, that she was still holding his hand. Kelly was pointing out various things on the screen of the ultrasound machine – arms, legs, fingers, toes, all things that he couldn't see very clearly for himself, but, as he returned to the present, he could hear Elizabeth's slightly elevated breathing, feel her fingers sporadically clench around his in excitement. He also knew that seven months was late for the second ultrasound, but a broken machine and then a rushed sixth month appointment had dictated the unconventional circumstances surrounding that day's check-up.

“Despite his raging case of conceit, Ric's vanity towards the sex of your baby really isn't a full-proof gauge of the sex,” Kelly quipped. “Would the two of you like to know if you're having a boy or a girl?”

Jason ignored the question, knowing that, despite being there with Elizabeth, he really had no role in her unborn child's life, so, when he felt his wife squeeze his hand, he looked up in surprise to see her staring back at him, a small, demure smile turning up the corners of that mouth he found himself thinking about way too much. Without looking at her OB-GYN, Elizabeth said, “I want Jason to know if it's a boy or a girl. Physically, I'm connected with the baby, but I know that, because of the accident, he or she is just a... a concept to you.” Somewhere along the line, Elizabeth seemed to forget that there was anyone else in the room besides the two of them. As his chest constricted and his heart clenched with feelings utterly foreign yet, at the same time, unbelievably familiar to him, he could understand her distraction. “You can't really see the image on the screen right now, you can't feel the baby moving around inside of me, and, more often than not, I even hide my belly beneath your baggy t-shirts. You're a part of my baby's life, though, Jason – an important part, and I would like for him or her to be a part of yours as well.”

“Yes,” he shook his head in agreement, blinking rapidly several times to clear the moisture which had gathered in his eyes. “Okay.” Turning to Dr. Kelly Lee, he reiterated, “we want to know.”

If he wasn't mistaken, he saw tears in the physician's eyes as well, but Jason didn't spare the OB-GYN a second glance. Instead, his attention was split equally between the screen before him that he suddenly found so riveting and Elizabeth's beautiful face. While he still couldn't see what she could see, knowing how Elizabeth felt gave him the courage to ask her to explain the picture to him... after they got home, of course.

“Well, folks, I have two words for you,” Kelly said cheekily. “Think pink.”
Part Twenty

Prompt #78: "Don't try to explain your mind; I know what's happening here; One minute it's love; And suddenly it's like a battlefield.

One word turns into a war; Why is it the smallest things that tear us down?; My world's nothing when you don't; I'm not here without a shield; Can't go back now.

Both hands, tied behind my back with nothing; Oh no, these times when we climb so fast to fall again; Why we gotta fall for it now?

I never meant to start a war; You know I never wanna hurt you; Don't even know what we're fighting for." ~ “Battlefield” by Jordan Sparks

“Sonny's... not the man he shows to the rest of the world.”

Elizabeth was silent, attentively listening but silent. Since coming home and finding Jason sitting quietly on the edge of his bed, his copy of the ultrasound picture clutched in his hands, she had known that, whatever was on her husband's mind, it was important. Usually, she always seemed to ramble around Jason, especially now that she was fully aware of her feelings for and attraction to him. Though they needed to discuss what was happening between them, Elizabeth knew that their talk would have to wait. Whatever was bothering Jason, whatever was weighing so heavily upon his mind that it was making his shoulders droop and his eyes constantly skitter away from her own, that had to come first.

So, she sat beside him – so close that their thighs brushed together, for she was hoping that he would find her physical proximity reassuring. After all, Jason's presence near her always had that effect. Otherwise, though, Elizabeth didn't touch the man beside her, using the pain of digging her fingernails into the palms of her clenched hands to keep from reaching out and doing so. Jason seemed too skittish for that – like he would clam up and make some excuse to leave if she broke through the wall he had erected between them with his emotional distance.

“Publicly, he's this... celebrity – confident, cocky, untouchable, and he and his men take great pains to make sure that no one realizes the truth.” Jason lost some of the distance to his voice, his tone hardening when he resumed his speech. “In reality, he's unstable. He's claustrophobic – hates small spaces and flips out if he's locked up or trapped. If the police knew this...” His words trailed off, and Elizabeth was surprised to see her husband smirk slightly. But then the ghost of a grin was gone, and he was talking once more.

“He's also extremely temperamental. Anything can set him off. He loses his cool, acts emotionally, and that's terrible for business. It leaves him open and vulnerable to emotional manipulation, and his enemies have taken advantage of it on more than one occasion in the past. Like when Lily – his wife – was killed,” Jason offered as an example. Elizabeth couldn't remember the details of the woman's death – after all, she had been quite young and self-centered then, she did recall that it had been violent, and had Sonny's wife been pregnant at the time...? “Sonny lost it. He fell into this extremely dark place, locking himself away from the rest of the world, ignoring the business, trashing his home, himself. There were rumors that he saw things, too – Lily's ghost.”
Startling Elizabeth, Jason stood up then and started pacing. As he walked, he briskly rubbed his hands across his cheeks and jawline. “I shouldn't know any of this. Part of the reason Sonny pays his men so well is for their silence, but, when Sonny starts acting irrationally, the guys get nervous, and, when they get nervous, they talk – not openly, of course, but...” Elizabeth could fill in her husband's trailing sentence. But Jason was good at blending into the shadows, into the background. He was quiet, and unobtrusive, and she had no doubt that Sonny's men would forget that he was even there, allowing Jason to hear tons of things their boss would not want someone who was a mere boxer and not actually involved in his organization to know.

“Sonny's also paranoid,” Jason continued several moments later, bringing Elizabeth out of her thoughts. “He demands loyalty, but he doesn't know how to trust. When things start to go wrong, everyone's a suspect. Combine this with the fact that he is extremely emotional and easily distracted from business by his personal life, and, really, it's amazing that Sonny has lasted this long without either being taken out by a rival or convicted and sentenced to life in prison.”

When Jason fell silent once more, Elizabeth spoke for the first time. “I don't understand why you're telling me all of this,” and she emphasized her words with a confused shrug of her scrub-encased shoulders.

“Don't you see,” he questioned her rhetorically. “I knew all of this, and I used it against Sonny; I used it to set Ric up.”

“Ric...? What does he...”

Interrupting her question, Jason answered, “you know that Ric is Sonny's half brother, right?”

“Yes...?”

“Well, long story short, there's a lot of baggage between them – between Sonny and Ric.”

“But Ric's working for Sonny now,” Elizabeth supplied, still not seeing Jason's point. “ Isn't that why you brought Jagger into town – to bust them on racketeering charges?”

“Kind of.” Expanding upon his oblique statement, her husband explained, “Jagger's not here on official FBI business; he's not formally investigating Sonny, but, if the right circumstances were to present themselves... Right now, he's serving as a liaison to the PCPD. The FBI doesn't have a field office here in Port Charles – why, with all the mob activity, I'm not sure, but that's partly why this town is so popular with organized crime rings. Anyway, yes, Jagger is here to take down Sonny's organization, but I don't trust the Feds when it comes to your ex-husband. He's too... slippery for prison. He'd find some legal loophole and worm himself out of jail after a couple of years, and that's a risk you and your child... your little girl don't need.”

Chewing on her bottom lip, Elizabeth looked up at Jason. “So, then, what do you have planned for Ric?”

“Sonny's going to kill him.”

Despite her best intentions, Elizabeth gasped. “But... how do you... I mean, you can't be...”

“But I can,” Jason said definitively. Arms folded across his chest and eyes hardened against the world, against her so that no one could see anything lurking behind those aqua depths, he looked
ferocious, yet he didn't scare her. “Sonny's in a darker place right now than he's ever been before. While he's trying to accept his mother's other son, he's jealous that he's not her only child and territorial over her memory. Add to this the fact that he now knows that Ric is here to take him down not help him, that Ric blames Sonny for their mother's death, and that we've set it up so that Ric looks like the mole in Sonny's organization... Well, let's just say that Sonny won't be able to look past Ric's transgressions, his betrayals – especially not after Sonny essentially made him his second. He'll kill him, and, when he does, Jagger's going to be right there to witness everything.”

This time when she gasped, it wasn't in shock but in recognition. “The restraining order,” Elizabeth whispered.

Jason didn't respond, though. Instead, he surprised her when he fell to his knees before her, reached for her hands, and opened himself and his eyes to her so that she could see everything that he was feeling. “I need you to understand, Elizabeth. I shouldn't have told you any of this; I should have kept you in the dark and safe, but you needed to know the truth about me. We... there's something between us.” Although she didn't say anything, she squeezed his hands to recognize and agree with his admission. “I want to be with you, I want to stay married to you, and I want to help you raise your daughter, but, after tonight, you won't need me to keep you safe any longer. More than that, you deserved to know what kind of man I am. I... I'm not...”

“Ssh,” she murmured, scooting forward on the bed so that she could more completely wrap her legs around his torso. Releasing one of her hands from his grip, Elizabeth brushed her index finger across Jason's lips, her touch doing more to silence him than anything else. Even once he fell quiet, though, she didn't remove her finger from his mouth. Instead, she traced his lips with the pad of her thin, small digit, her gaze locked on where she was touching him. “Jason, I know exactly what kind of man I'm in love with.”

! & !

He should have felt guilty. As an officer of the law, he was supposed to uphold the rules that governed society, but Ric Lansing was slime, and Jagger didn't doubt Jason's prediction of what would happen if the attorney went to prison alongside his equally corrupt half brother. He'd serve some time – six months, a year, perhaps even two, but, eventually, the man would be released on some technicality, and he'd immediately start gunning for his ex-wife and her child again. And, just like Corinthos, he was a sick man who mistreated women.

Sonny was chauvinistic and controlling, whereas Ric believed that he owned the women in his life – not because he was a man but because he thought of himself as smarter and better than everybody else. At first, Jagger had considered standing by and allowing Sonny to be murdered as well... just like he was going to do with Ric, but, after learning of the mob boss' fear of small, enclosed spaces and his behavior that screamed of bipolar schizophrenia, he had gladly reconsidered. Death would be too merciful for Sonny Corinthos, especially after the hell he had put his wife through when she was a teenager.

Just as Francis had let it slip that Ric would be “meeting” his FBI contact that evening so as to alert Sonny to the set-up, Marco had called Jagger fifteen minutes before to inform him that Ric was on his way down to the warehouse to personally oversee the latest shipment... probably because it was suspected that Ric was smuggling in drugs through his brother's shipping lanes. Dressed in regulation combat wear, Jagger moved swiftly across the docks. If things went south fast and off plan, he was prepared with a bullet proof vest on underneath his dress shirt and suit jacket, and it was well known that, despite being one of the most influential crime lords in the country, Sonny Corinthos had a horrible shot and always aimed for the chest and not the head in fear that he would miss entirely.
Just before Ric disappeared into the shadows of the Corinthos Imports and Exports Warehouse, Jagger made his move, calling out to the lawyer. “Lansing!” Though he knew that Ric didn't recognize his voice, he had infused enough force and authority into his tone that no self-aggrandizing man would be able to ignore the challenge. As the other guy turned around, Jagger added, “you and I, we need to talk.”

Elizabeth giggled around her husband's mouth – her husband’s, teasing him, “I thought you wanted to talk?”

He grunted in frustration, moving his lips away from her own and settling his face in the crook of her neck so that he could kiss her there instead. “Talking's overrated,” he mumbled, making her laugh even more.

Plus, it didn't hurt matters that she kind of suspected that Jason preferred to express what he wanted to say without words. He lived by his actions instead... which, at the moment, she could definitely appreciate. Somehow, they had ended up fully sprawled out across Jason's bed. One minute, she was breathlessly confessing that she was in love with him, and the next thing Elizabeth knew, Jason's hands were gripping her underneather her arms and tossing her back so that her head landed against his pillows. Then he had pushed her legs open with his own body, her limbs falling wantonly to the side in order to further encourage him to settle himself between her thighs. When he rocked into her for the first time – already fully aroused and hitting just the right spot, everything else faded away... except her need to make him smile, to tease him, to make him see himself the way she saw him.

Jason was rigidly holding his upper body away from her own, his arms fully extended from where they were pressed into the bed on either side of her shoulders. While Elizabeth found his concern for her and the baby sweet – even endearing, the last thing she wanted between them was distance. So, she used her hands to tug against elbows, then his waist, finally settling her grip upon his shoulder blades in an attempt to pull him down on top of her. “You don’t have to be afraid, Jason. You're not going to hurt us.”

Instead of answering, instead of relenting, he rolled off of her and onto his side, astonishing Elizabeth with how quickly he could move... and move her, for he rolled her body as well, repositioning them so that they were molded together from head to toe – her back to his front, his head once again positioned in the crook of her shoulder. As his lips skimmed, and his teeth nipped, and his tongue laved the sensitive flesh of her throat, all Elizabeth could do in response was moan in pleasure, her toes curling in ecstasy.

“You're not going to get another chance to hurt them – Elizabeth Morgan and her daughter.”

“I'm sorry,” Ric apologized, though the gesture was just as empty as his crooked smile. “Who exactly are you, Mr...?”

“You can call me Jagger,” he said instead of providing his last name. After all, it would be more convincing if Sonny were to stumble upon them and they were using each other's first names. “Do you mind if I call you Ric?”

“You can call me whatever you want, because I'm leaving. If you'll excuse me, I have business to attend to.”
Before Lansing could turn his back on him, Jagger taunted, “you sound just like him, you know – smooth, arrogant, professional, though we both know that you're no Sonny Corinthos.”

Just like he had planned, mentioning Sonny captured Ric's attention even more so than Elizabeth and her unborn child. It proved that their suspicions were right. While Ric enjoyed the game of terrorizing his ex-wife, and while he wanted a son, the latter was because it would allow him to one-up his brother, and, after all, nothing and no one was more important to Ric Lansing than Sonny Corinthos. “You know my brother?”

“Oh, Sonny and I go way back. You could say that... our families are associated.”

That piqued the lawyer's interest even more. “Well, that's funny, because I've never heard Sonny mention you before, Jagger.”

He smirked. “Likewise, Ric.”

The other man bristled under the obvious dig but quickly recovered as he prepared to walk away again. “Obviously, you're nothing but a small time player, because, otherwise, we would have already met. In case you weren't aware, I now attend all of Sonny's meetings for him, and your name has never once been brought up.”

“That's probably because I just relocated... from the West Coast.”

Controlling territories on both coasts was every mobsters wet dream. Jagger knew it, and so did Ric. The bait was set, and all he needed to do was reel in his prey. As Lansing quickly strutted across the docks, coming closer so that they could talk without others overhearing them, Jagger smirked. It was all just so easy, and it made him realize how lucky he was that Jason had never decided to take Sonny up on all his multiple offers to join the business. If he had...

“So, where exactly on the West Coast were you located, Jagger – Seattle, Portland...?”

He crossed his arms over his chest, raised an inquiring brow. “And why exactly, Ric, should I tell you anything; why in the hell should I trust you?”

“That's a good question,” a third voice, a familiar voice, and an unhinged voice said from above where Jagger stood with Ric Lansing. Twisting his head around, he met the empty gaze of a man he hadn't seen in years... and the barrel of his shaking gun. “Especially since you can't trust a word out of this lying traitor of a bastard's mouth.”

“Now, wait a minute, Sonny,” Ric immediately started to step away from Jagger, backpedaling figuratively as he tried to soothe the incensed mobster before him. “You need to calm down.”

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“Hey, hey, easy now. Calm down,” Jason murmured into Elizabeth's ear. Though she loved the deep, rich timber of his voice – the sound vibrating against her skin and echoing back to her through her raging blood, if her husband thought that she was capable of calming down in that moment, let alone that she would actually want to...

They were naked. Lying together in Jason’s bed – skin to skin, heartbeat to heartbeat, she was consumed by him, her every thought, feeling, and impulse wrapped tightly around her husband’s
little finger... the same one he was using to stimulate the tiny pearl of pleasure between her thighs, the rest of his fingers spread out wide and softly caressing low against her abdomen. His other hand was clenched possessively in her long locks, the hair tie which had been holding the thick layers back disappearing somewhere along with all of their clothing.

“Stay with me,” Jason coached her, bringing Elizabeth back to the moment – to the delicious, sensual moment. But then he thrust his hips and surged slowly back into her, his hard length burning inside of her and scorching a path through her body that Elizabeth instinctively knew only Jason could soothe, one that she knew only Jason would ever be able to soothe. Their love making was so tender, yet, at the same time, it was the most erotic sexual moment of Elizabeth's life. Since their first embrace, Jason had not kissed her on the mouth, instead focusing all of his attention upon her shoulders, her back, the dip of her waist, and her bottom, while his long, lean fingers pleased the front of her body – caressing and petting her to distraction before he had finally joined them together from where he still remained behind her and on his side. And, with his hand tangled in her hair, she couldn't even turn her face around to see him as he brought her to the cusp of orgasm over and over again before slowing their bodies down and starting to build their pace back up once more.

But something felt different about their movements now. Jason's breaths against her ear were coming faster and faster, his heartbeat hammering against her left shoulder blade. The hand in her hair was spasming – releasing and then clenching, releasing and clenching once again with the same rhythm of his thrusts into her welcoming, eager body, and the hand against her belly was quivering, shaking with his need. Though she could do nothing but bite her bottom lip and clench her husband's forearm in a desperate grip of anticipation, Elizabeth said the three words which she hoped would have the power to send Jason spiraling over the edge.

“I love you,” she screamed.

As he orgasmed, Jason returned in a choked whisper, “I love you, too,” his release triggering her own.

! & !

“I loved you,” Sonny bellowed, shaking his gun menacingly towards his brother. While he ranted, Jagger repositioned himself, slowly skirting the edge of the docks and moving towards the stairs so he could circle back around and approach the mobster from behind. “I loved you, I took you in, and I trusted you despite everything, and this is how you repay me?” Practically spitting with disgust, he added, “you betray me to the Feds?”

“To the Feds,” Ric questioned, his gaze momentarily flickering off the semi-automatic and towards where Jagger had previously been standing. “Sonny, what are you talking about? I haven't done anything but be there for you.” Narrowing his eyes, the attorney accused, “you stopped taking that medication I got for you, didn't you, Sonny? I thought we talked about this? You need to trust that I know what I'm...”

“Enough,” Sonny roared. “I've had enough of you and your lies, of your manipulations. This ends tonight.”


“You.” And, with that, Corinthos pulled the trigger.
Epilogue

Prompt #80: "A smile is nearly always inspired by another smile." ~ Anonymous

She was an aunt – not because Elizabeth, her one time best friend, now had a daughter, and not because Jason was acting as the baby's father, but because Jason, Elizabeth, and their little girl were a family, and no matter what happened between them, Emily knew that the couple would always consider her a part of their family. Right or wrong, estrangement or no estrangement, she was a part of them...just as they would always be a part of her. It didn't matter that the three of them had not shared a word with one another since their fight all those months before. Emily knew, if she really needed either her brother or his wife, Jason and Elizabeth would both be there for her. Now, she just needed to find a way to be there for them.

She wasn't angry anymore, and Emily realized that her anger had actually come from a place of hurt. For so long, she had been Elizabeth's best friend, her confidant, and her biggest source of support. With Jason, Emily had been the one family member besides their grandmother that he loved and trusted. In a way, she had been the most important person in both Elizabeth's and Jason's lives, and then, suddenly, she had been replaced, pushed aside as they started to fill that role for each other. They kept things from her and shared things that a mere best friend and sister could not even attempt to compete with. It had made Emily feel insignificant, and, in response, she had lashed out. While Emily knew her insecurities were the direct result of losing her mother at such a young age, it didn't excuse her actions, nor did it make her feelings of abandonment any less real or potent.

But she missed Elizabeth, she missed her brother, and she wanted to be a part of her niece's life. Calla – that's what Jason and Elizabeth had named their little girl. When Emily had heard the name whispered around the hospital corridors four months prior after Elizabeth had given birth, she had been surprised. Although she and her best friend had never shared their favorite baby names with each other, Calla was just so...soft, so pure for the daughter of two survivors, two fighters. Now, though, as Emily looked upon the little girl for the first time, she realized that the name fit baby girl Morgan. And that's exactly who Elizabeth's daughter was: a Morgan. Jason had been by Elizabeth's side for every single minute of the child's birth, his name was on the little girl's birth certificate, and he was her father – DNA be damned. Six months ago, that thought had frightened Emily, but now it just seemed right.

Even while she had been freaking out, Emily had known that Elizabeth would never do to Jason what Carly had done to him, but her reaction had been knee jerk – meant to protect her brother but never hurt her best friend. Too bad she had failed to do either. And, now, here she was on the outside looking in – watching as Jason and Elizabeth embraced in a shadowed corner of the gym, while Elizabeth's new best friend, Karen, doted upon their little girl, and she was just thankful that she had received an invitation to the party being held that evening, whereas, if it hadn't been for her fears, she would have been the one holding Calla and teasing the happily married couple; she would have been the one to throw the party for the Morgans instead.

Seemingly her replacement in their lives or not, Emily didn't harbor any animosity towards Karen. Elizabeth had been the first person to welcome her to Port Charles upon the doctor's return, Jagger and Jason were friends, and Karen understood both Jason and Elizabeth well. Just looking around at the simple congratulatory, grand opening celebration going on around her told Emily that. There were no decorations, no loud music or annoying entertainment that did anything but, and the food
and drinks being offered were simple and straightforward, nothing fancy like what would be found at a Quartermaine party. The atmosphere in the renovated gym was relaxed and welcoming as evidenced by the fact that everyone there was enjoying themselves. And that was no easy feat due to the reopened gym's clientele.

Though Jason's old boxing buddies and those of Sonny's men who had escaped from both the clutches of the business and evaded a jail sentence still used the facility to work out, so, too, did many of the doctors and nurses from General Hospital thanks to Karen and Elizabeth's influence, and, because of Jagger, cops were flocking to the gym left and right as well. Everyone seemed to appreciate the family atmosphere of the place and the fact that the gym was just that and not a glorified day spa. Now that Elizabeth was back at work after her maternity leave, Jason would bring Calla with him to work, and Elizabeth had even painted a large mural that stretched around the entire building and covered all four of the main room's walls.

Just down the street, Ritchie – one of Jason's friends who used to work for Sonny – had opened up a coffee/juice bar to compliment the gym, serving products made from the newly renamed Corelli and O'Brien Coffee Trades. Plus, because the FBI had seized all of Sonny's properties and holdings, slowly selling them off to those they trusted to keep the businesses mob-free, the area surrounding the gym was suddenly far less suspect. Now, the streets were well lit, buildings were being renovated, and there was a resurgence of small business growth in downtown Port Charles centering around the waterfront. It was amazing what six months' time could do for a city. Then again, time was only relative when in a single night a lone gunshot had been able to take down the biggest crime ring on the east coast.

It had been all over the press. For weeks, all the local newspapers, television news reports, and blogs had reported on nothing else. In a fit of paranoid rage, Sonny Corinthos had gunned down his half brother and lawyer on the docks in full view of Special Agent Jagger Cates who had gone down to the waterfront to speak with Mr. Lansing about violating the restraining order his ex-wife had filed against him. The shot had been true, striking Lansing in the heart and killing him almost instantly, and Agent Cates had immediately read the mobster his rights, arresting him.

After that, it was like a domino effect. Evidence of tax evasion and racketeering surfaced, and Sonny's associates started to flee or jump ship. A week later, what was left of the once proud empire was seized by the FBI, and thanks to a new task force headed by the promoted Agent Cates, the mob had yet to gain a new foothold in Port Charles. It was the goal of the FBI to keep it that way. Ric Lansing was dead, the Corinthians crime ring had been destroyed, and the night before Sonny's trial was to start, expedited by the federal prosecutor who was brought in so that the city's district attorney couldn't blow yet another case against Corinthians, the mob boss hung himself with his bed sheet in his cell.

“You're not alone. I catch myself watching them all the time,” Karen said softly as she came to stand beside Emily. Though the younger woman had not heard her approach, she wasn't surprised by Karen's sudden appearance. “They're just... beautiful together.”

And Karen was right. Jason and Elizabeth just... belonged together. Why Emily had not seen it long before her brother and best friend met one snowy night outside of General Hospital, she wasn't sure, but it didn't matter now, because Jason and Elizabeth were together and married; they were a family, and it was clear to anyone who looked at them how happy they made each other. While her thoughts had previously been distracted by recent memories, she now took a moment to observe the couple standing wrapped around one another across the gym from her before she responded to Karen's statement. Jason was standing behind Elizabeth, his arms laced around her waist, his chin deposited contently upon her shoulder. While he didn't say much, merely listening as his wife seemingly
rambled on about something Emily couldn't hear, his eyes – open, and warm, and actually smiling –
told his sister all she needed to know.

When Emily did finally talk, even she was astonished by what came out of her mouth. “How do... do you know why they chose the name Calla?” At the sound of her name, the baby girl still wrapped up tightly in Karen's arms turned her head slightly to observe Emily. Her eyes were wide... as if she could understand every single thing happening around her, every single word being spoken. While the infant's eyes were the color of her mother's, she had Jason's stillness and perceptiveness. Nature versus nurture... as a doctor, Emily found it intriguing; as an aunt, she found it to be powerful and awe-inspiring.

“Elizabeth was a week past her due date – uncomfortable, miserable, and on bed rest, and your brother was frantic to do whatever he could to make her as content as he possibly could. They ended up spending a lot of time in bed together, Elizabeth looking through her old art textbooks longingly because she missed painting.” Karen paused momentarily in her story, her face scrunching up in a frown of uncertainty. “I'm not sure why, but, as Elizabeth explains it, she was telling the paintings to your brother like one does a story.”

A corner of Emily's mouth quirked up in a bittersweet grin. Elizabeth would do that for her brother. “After Jason's accident, he couldn't really see images like drawings and paintings anymore. Photographs are okay, but...” Her words trailed off, and Karen resumed her narrative.

“Anyway, Elizabeth spent a lot of time telling him about her favorite artist...”

“Georgia O'Keefe,” Emily supplied with a grin. This time her smile was wide, and a chuckle escaped past her spread lips. If she had a dollar for every time she had heard her best friend talk about the famous American artist... well, it'd be safe to say she would never need to use her trust fund.

“...and, as they talked, she seemed to keep coming back to a set of paintings. They were of calla lilies. I guess you could say, as it often happens for artists, inspiration struck.”

As she had observed for herself earlier, Emily said with a gentle shrug of her shoulders, “it fits her.”

“I think you should tell her why,” Karen suddenly announced, catching Emily off guard when she transferred baby Calla into Emily's slightly awkward and unsure arms.

“Wait. What are you...? I mean, you can't... Jason and Elizabeth...?”

“Jason and Elizabeth would want Calla to get to know her aunt,” Karen whispered in understanding, placing a soothingly hand upon one of Emily's arms. Then, her face transformed into one of cheeky mischief. “And, in the meantime, I'm going to hunt down my husband. I think it's way passed time for us to make a Calla of our own.”

Before Emily could do anything – laugh, protest, or even react, the doctor was gone, and she was left standing alone with her brother's daughter, her best friend's daughter, her niece. “So, it's just you and me now, huh, kid?” Smirking, she confided, “oh, the stories I could tell you about your parents...”

And for the first time since Calla was born, Emily finally believed that she just might have the chance to do so.
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