Triple Trouble
by KeJae

Summary

This is a series of one-shots depicting the triplets James/Junior, Neal/Danny, and Bryce. It is inspired by Quinis and her stories.

Notes

See the end of the work for notes.
Despite Elizabeth heading out of town, the weekend had its appealing qualities for Peter. Neal had legal plans to keep him occupied and out of trouble, there weren't any pressing cases, and he was free to enjoy the game with whatever food sounded appealing to him.

"Are you sure you have everything you need?" She checked with him one last time before her afternoon flight was scheduled to take off.

Kissing her at the door, Peter reassured her. "I am a grown man you know, and you will be back the day after tomorrow. It would be better if you could be here with us, but Satch and I will be fine."

Agreeing, she was still reluctant to leave the comforts of home and those she loved.

With a little coaxing, he reminded her how important it was to the business and how she needed to be going if she was going to make her flight.

"I'll see you on Sunday." She gave him one last kiss before going to her taxi.

Trying to ignore her absence, Peter went about getting ready for his evening. They had already eaten an early meal, so he was only going to be snacking while he watched the game.

Clapping his hands with some enthusiasm, he turned on the channel for the game to listen to the pregame show. Popping some popcorn and grabbing a cold drink from the fridge, he spread his case files out on the dining room table where there was more room.

Settling down to enjoy his evening, he got lost in the puzzles with the background noise of the baseball game. It was the perfect way to spend his alone time doing what he loved.

After a while, he felt a draft hit his back and glanced around to see what the cause of it was. Getting up, he did a walk through the house to ensure the doors and windows were shut. With nothing seemingly out of place, he settled back down and returned to his activities.

"Huh. And here I thought you were supposed to be so good with your gut instinct and FBI training." Came a mocking voice from behind.

He heard the familiar tones he expected from Neal when he was trying to get a rise out of him. Refusing to rise to the bait of his jab, or his obvious break-in, he continued with his work like he didn't even hear him. If Neal wasn't going to be nice, then he wasn't going to acknowledge him.

"Isn't it childish to use silent treatment?" The voice continued.
Grabbing a fist full of popcorn, Peter ate the snack before washing it down with a drink.

"You aren't deaf, so this is obviously you being stubborn." The taunting continued.

While he continued to ignore Neal, he felt another draft of air hitting his back. Assuming the young man had given up on whatever game he was dared to play, he continued to focus on his pursuits.

"What are you doing? Are you an idiot? The guy is an FBI agent; you don't just go breaking into his home and then stand behind him taunting him?" Neal seemed to be having a conversation with himself.

Puzzled, Peter couldn't think of a viable reason for his behavior, but he chose to continue his effort to ignore Neal. If he kept it up, either Neal would put on a more elaborate show, or he would give up and behave more appropriately. Curious, Peter was interested to see if he would get entertaining or continue to be mean.

"I'm testing him. You know what kind of power he has over Neal. So far, he is playing a childish game of ignoring me. That doesn't make him a good kind of influence." The first voice repeated in a colder tone than the second, but the second was rather serious to help differentiate which character was saying what.

More insulted than entertained, Peter didn't know how long he was going to listen before he turned around and told Neal off.

"When you put it that way, I don't like him having such an influence either." There was a concern in the serious tone. Then the voice seemed to turn to Peter and question. "He hasn't turned around even with me joining you as a second voice? Does he think this is some kind of show? What makes him so interesting?"

Feeling the third draft hit his back, Peter had to admit that Neal had a point. What FBI agent in his right mind would let an intruder insult him without even turning around to confront them?

A third voice joined the conversation. "What. Are. You. Two. Doing?" It defined each word individually to express his anger and concern. This voice was more like he imagined Neal's to be should he discover an intruder in Peter's house. Maybe it was going to get more interesting after all?

"How can you look up to such an FBI agent? He hasn't even turned around or acknowledged our presence in his house beyond one brief check to find the cause of the draft. Even then he settled back in without confirming the cause." The serious voice said in disbelief.

"Why haven't you ever tested him? We know you don't trust people easily and tend to shy away from letting people get too close, but yet you work with this guy?" The cold voice said.

"I tested him, and he is the best FBI agent I know. Lately, he has been trying to find new ways to deal with me annoying him. He is probably guessing that I am playing some kind of game with him and he doesn't see me as a threat." The Neal like voice defended him.

Having had enough, Peter turned around and choked on the popcorn in his mouth. Some of it went down the wrong way when he gasped while some of it sprayed across the floor as he coughed violently to dispel the bits.

There were three, count them, three, Neal Caffreys standing in his kitchen between him and the back door.
One moved to pound him on the back, he assumed the 'real' Neal Caffrey and tried to help him clear his system to regain his breath. "Sorry for the shock, Peter. My brothers are in town for the first time since our agreement… they decided to pay you a visit. I came as quickly as I could, but they made sure I was otherwise occupied until they had the chance to make some initial observations themselves."

With his system cleared of the popcorn and his color returning to normal as he breathed, Peter was relieved to know Neal wasn't behind the plan to invade his home, but he was also pleased to learn more about his friend. "So… breaking and entering runs in the family I see." He croaked.

"They're agents, so they have official training in such things," Neal said with a glare at his brothers.

Looking up to watch the three, Peter noticed that a silent conversation appeared to be passing between the brothers. "Why do I get the feeling that you are talking by some method of twins communication?"

"Because we are." Neal was helpful, but not detailed.

"You weren't supposed to tell him about us." The cold voice accused.

Not intimidated, Neal continued to glare. "And you two weren't supposed to mess with him or reveal that there were three of us. So, I think we're even."

"Can I say something?" Peter piped up.

"NO." Three voices answered.

Ignoring them, he joined the conversation anyway. "I think you all wanted me to know about there being three of you. Otherwise, you wouldn't have all walked into my house, and you would have had your silent 'twins thing' conversation while spying on me from a distance."

Two of them turned towards him while the third smirked at them.

"Okay… maybe he isn't such a bad choice, but I still don't entirely understand your fascination with the man." The cold voice softened to a serious tone. Great, how was he supposed to tell two serious voices apart when he couldn't look at both of them at the same time?

"Have you looked at his records to vet him?" Neal asked.

"Some…" One of the serious voices said. "Mostly to see if he was violent or likely to hurt Junior here for his stupid act of breaking and entering. There wasn't much time to look too closely after he was already in." The man shrugged.

Going quiet, all three seemed to be rather focused. Peter assumed Neal was doing some kind of 'twins thing' to share his records and let them know why he was so trusted. Too bad that wasn't being shared out loud. "Words, how about you share them, instead of talking about me right in front of me."

"You know your records, now they know something of them too," Neal said. "Oh, since they know more about you, I should introduce you to them. The eldest standing over towards the door is my brother, James 'Junior' Carson of the NSA. Then my younger brother is the one by the island and he is Bryce Larkin of the CIA. As you know, I am Neal Caffrey, of the FBI."

Looking them over, Peter sought ways to tell them apart. James was definitely from a military background, his stance screamed army. "Army Ranger?"
Putting his fingers up like a salute, the man seemed impressed. "Nice guess."

"Not a guess. And the other one is some kind of engineer. I've never seen a watch like that before." Peter noted.

Neal laughed at his brothers' expressions. Bryce seemed rather startled by his observance while the other brother, James, stared wordlessly.

"Why don't you tell me more about yourselves?" Peter invited them to join him at the table. When they moved toward accepting, he collected the files and put them away in the other room. "Would you like anything to drink?"

Playing the gracious host, he collected drinks and popped more popcorn. Neal suggested ordering a pizza since the brothers hadn't eaten and called in their favorite kind.

Settled in with food, drinks, and conversation, Peter got comfortable with Neal beside him and the other brothers across the table. "So..." He left his sentence hanging in the hopes of learning more of their stories.

"You've been dying to know more about me pre-eighteen, now here are two parts of that sitting across the table from you. I guess I should start..." Neal volunteered. "My brothers and I have always been close. We are able to know what each other is thinking as if we said everything out loud, and we know what is going on around each other as if we are always together. Still, we are able to... close? The connection between us should we wish to avoid distracting each other or keep a secret. It's hard to shut each other out, but it's also necessary at times."

"He's the best at it," Bryce said.

"Got well practiced early. In fact, it's because of his tendency to shut us out that we learned it was possible." Junior stated. He was obviously upset by that.

"That explains how they didn't know much about me." Peter surmised. "Why do you shut them out so much?"

Casting a glance around the table, Neal didn't want to answer. "I'm sworn not to tell." He shifted uncomfortably, but his body language showed a stubbornness that wouldn't be easily persuaded.

Letting the topic drop, Peter encouraged him to return to telling his story.

"At eighteen, I learned that my plans for my life weren't going to come to fruition. So I took a walk. The next thing I knew, I was hopping a bus to clear my head, then I was walking again, before catching another bus. Soon enough, it was easy to pick a pocket for a meal or another bus ticket, and I kept getting further and further away from home. After a few years, I had learned a few basic cons to afford my needs and shown a talent for them. Entering New York City, I met Mozzie in the park as you know and we became partners. You know the basics from there." Neal had shared enough, he wasn't to go any further into his past.

Taking the conversation, Bryce seemed determined to irritate Neal. "My brothers and I are rather different, despite being identical triplets. James prefers being athletic and active so he is never still for long, Neal is the artist, and I'm the resident nerd who excels in computers. Growing up, our mother... wasn't the most attentive. When we faced a problem, James would come up with a master plan, Neal would work around the obstacles, and I would find how to execute it with precision. There was nothing we couldn't accomplish together. Then at eighteen he had a private conversation with our foster mom and left. We didn't see him again for years." He paused to glare...
at his brother.

"We've already had that conversation, and I'm not filling in those gaps at this time." Neal waved for him to get on with his story.

"Fine." Bryce obviously still held some anger against his older brother. "I went to college, got degrees in computer engineering and accounting. My Junior year I was recruited to the agency, and my best friend is my counterpart in the field. A few years ago we found Neal eluding the FBI before he dropped off the radar again. Something we recently learned was because he was in prison."

Wondering what secrets Neal was keeping, even more, Peter sensed that there was something to them. Neal was never one for keeping simple things, so the effort he was putting into the secrets entailed something truly horrible. Throwing a concerned glance at Neal, he wasn't encouraged by the expression his CI was wearing, it was that stubborn determination again.

Clearing his throat, Junior decided he should take the conversation in another direction. He knew Neal wasn't going to talk, and he didn't want a fight breaking out again. "Growing up, I was the eldest. It was my responsibility to ensure we were taken care of, had what we needed. I spent a lot of time working with our foster mom to ensure we had bus tickets, lunch money, and the many other things we needed. If we didn't, then Neal was perfectly willing to forge or pool shark to fill in the gaps, but we only resorted to his skills when absolutely necessary. After Neal left, Bryce and I didn't know what to do. We were completely shut out. So, when he went to college, I joined the army. After a few years, I managed to work my way up through the ranks and drew the attention of the government for other work. The agency recruited me and that is where I am now."

"You didn't mention sending your best friend to keep an eye on me since his cover role is as a shadow man in the criminal underground," Neal added between bites of pizza.

Turning his sharp eyes on Neal, Peter questioned. "He sent his best friend to watch over you, as an undercover shadow man? You're talking about Mozzie?"

Tipping his drink in his direction, Neal indicated that he was correct. "They actually caught up with me when I entered New York City, so Mozzie was sent to watch over me, and I was… enlisted to help him with the Adler job." He shrugged.

"I thought he was your best friend." Peter found himself questioning. If Bryce's best friend came from his field, and Junior's best friend was Mozzie watching over Neal, then who did Neal have?

"You're my best friend," Neal answered. "I trust you to have my back, and I know I can tell you anything… if I choose to."

For some reason, Peter found that surprising. He knew they were close, but he had always perceived himself as the second best friend.

"That surprises you?" Bryce noted which caused Neal to look at him more closely.

"I always thought…" He didn't want to admit it.

"You were second best. Peter, don't sell yourself short." Neal finished for him anyway.

Embarrassed, Peter didn't want to continue talking about himself. "How about sharing what brought everyone to town?" Seeing the expressions from the brothers, he had a feeling clearance wasn't going to allow that conversation. "Okay, or maybe Neal can share what he was doing before chasing you two here?"
Having finished eating their pizza, and putting Peter through the awkward conversation of meeting them, two of the brothers appeared ready to leave. Getting up from the table, they each pulled a card and tossed it in front of the agent.

"That is how you can reach out to me if my brother does anything stupid," Bryce said before slipping out the back door.

"Don't be stingy with it. We know our brother has a knack for finding trouble." Junior added before he too slipped out the back.

Breathing out in relief, Peter was glad to be alone with Neal. He was more comfortable that way. "Apparently they aren't ones for hanging out, are they?"

"No, they usually drop in and complete their task before leaving again. They see me as being too weak for their work, and are still angry with me for things from our childhood." Neal explained sadly. It hurt him the way his brothers treated him, but he knew the reasons for his actions.

"Why do you shut them out?" Peter couldn't help but ask with the other two brothers gone.

"For their safety. They still have no idea what else was going on around them..." Neal alluded to something. "I should go too. We were never supposed to tell you so much, and I think I need a while to think through everything. Besides, I'm sure you would like to get back to the game while adding to your box about me." There was a hint of a smile, but something more suppressed.

Worried, Peter didn't want to hurt him. "Neal..."

"I'm fine, Peter. This just... stirred up a lot I thought I had left behind. They don't usually jab like that, but telling you about our past brought it up again." Seeing Peter's guilt start to show, he reassured him. "It isn't your fault, it was bound to happen again at some point, but at least you now know more about me." There was something of a peaceful smile.

Remembering that he was Neal's best friend, Peter could understand Neal's relief. They were closer for the experience. "Call if you need to. Lunch, tomorrow?" He managed to ask. It would allow him to check on Neal without hovering.

Nodding as he ducked out, Neal agreed to return the next day. He was glad Peter would be willing to help provide a distraction, but also nervous as to the inquisition he might face.

********

Passing Neal in the office on Monday, Peter threw him a smile as he directed him to follow him up to the conference room. Slapping the folders down on the table with Neal standing beside him, it felt good to announce the key to the case.

They had spent the rest of their weekend focused on the case and trying to act like Friday night hadn't happened. Although he didn't talk about it, Peter was happy to know that Neal returned his friendship just as strongly as he felt it, and he was pleased that his friend had finally shared more of himself by letting him into his family circle. Their friendship was stronger for the reveal and Peter looked forward to what the future would bring.
Waking up, the last thing Neal could remember was a man wearing a white suit leaning over him with a large needle. It was full of a mysterious concoction that was injected into his arm. Feeling his head ache from the spinning, his stomach lurched and he had to fight to keep the contents down. Battling through nausea with deep breaths, he managed to calm the worst of the effects, but he still didn't feel right.

Trying to move, he was still restrained in the chair. No matter, a little work and he had his hands free which made it almost simple to release his feet from the straps. Almost simple because leaning over brought the symptoms back.

Taking a break for a few moments, he breathed until his system had settled the world into a stationary position again. Then it was time to escape the next level of his trouble.

Looking around, he noticed the lab through the window, likely were they created their concoction, and a solid door on the other side indicating an exit.

Standing up, he had to fall back into the seat when his legs gave out on him.

Listening, there were sounds of something going on in the hall. He needed to move before his captors returned. Trying again, he made it a few feet before it was overwhelming.

As the noises got louder, he saw the floor rushing up at him while the world turned to darkness.

Leading the rescue team into what was supposed to be an abandoned warehouse, Peter was surprised to see what appeared to be billets for personnel to sleep. Searching the premises, it wasn't hard to find the well-worn path to the secret entrance, take the stairs down to a sterile hallway, and then follow it to the door.

There was a scuffle with the guards at the end of the hallway, their security had obviously alerted them to the intrusion, but the SWAT team managed to take them down easily enough. It was unfortunate they had to resort to shooting, but the guards started the confrontation.

With the path cleared, Peter opened the door with Jones and Diana flanking him. Taking in the surroundings, he felt a tension caused by the creepy environment. There was nothing like a secret underground lab to start the mind wondering into conspiracy theories. He had been around Mozzie too much so he shook his head to dispel the ideas inspired by the little man's stories.

Moving through the side door into the next portion of the room, he was dismayed to see Neal lying prostrate on the floor where he had collapsed.

Hurrying to his friend's side, he felt for a pulse. It was too rapid to be good for the kid, but at least it was present. Gently turning Neal over, Peter began checking him over for damages. He wasn't okay, but he didn't seem to be physically injured beyond a few bruises resulting from his capture.

"Get a medic in here. They gave him something and he isn't waking up." He shouted for the support staff.

"The medic is coming down, and an ambulance is waiting upstairs," Diana reported.

Having cleared the rest of the room, the two agents stepped forward and crouched next to their boss.

"What do you think they gave him?" Jones wondered.

"Nothing more than a strong sedative, I hope." Peter worried at the way Neal seemed to be burning up. His temperature was rising and his breathing seemed to be more of a quick pant than was natural. Something was definitely wrong, but whether it was a reaction to the sedative or a result of
something more sinister was yet to be determined. Arriving on the scene, the medic had the agents step aside while he gave Neal a general check-up. "Nothing seems to be too wrong with him, except his temp is up, he is panting, and unconscious. It might be a reaction to a strong sedative, but we'll have to run some tests to be sure." Radioing for assistance, he requested a stretcher be brought down so they could transport him to the hospital. "I'll ride with him," Peter stated. "We've got the scene," Jones reassured. Looking grateful at his agents as they moved to process the bust, Peter assisted in maneuvering Neal through the awkward environment until they were back on the surface. The ride to the hospital was uneventful and then Neal was moved into the Emergency Room while Peter was relegated to the waiting area. Taking his seat, he dialed his wife to let her know what was going on. She was out of town visiting her sister, but she could at least help talk him through his initial worries while he was forced to sit and wait. "It's probably just a reaction like the medic said. You've been around Mozzie too long if you think they're some kind of experimental scientist who started the process of turning Neal into a monster." She shared the outrageous to make the mundane appear more acceptable. Laughing, Peter did feel better for her comment. "I have been around Mozzie a lot, but not that long. Perhaps you ought to take a vacation from the little man? After all, you are the one who suggested that as a possibility in the first place." "True, but it's more humorous than your theories; less worrisome too." Being called away, she had to end the call, but at least she was aware of the circumstances and had been able to lighten his mood. "Thanks, hon." Peter was grateful for their conversation. It helped his perspective from fearing poisons, and unknown experiments to being glad it wasn't some kind of monster potion... because that was impossible, wasn't it? Trying to rein his imagination in, Peter focused on his phone calls with the team and tracking every medical personnel to walk through the doorway leading back to the examination rooms. Finally, a doctor walked out and asked for him. Getting up, he wasn't comforted when he was led to the doctor's private office instead of the room where Neal was being held. "I would like to discuss the results of the tests with you in private." Was the only explanation he could get until they were behind closed doors. Seated in front of the large wood desk, Peter knew the news wasn't going to be good. "We have run several tests on the concoction that was given to your consultant. So far, we have no idea what it is. The mixture mostly contains various forms of plant and mineral matter, but we haven't been able to identify half of it. Mr. Caffrey appears to be suffering a mild reaction similar to an allergy, so we have given him antihistamines and mild Tylenol to help reduce his fever. We have taken extra samples to send in for further testing, but there is nothing more we can do for him at the moment. My advice is to send him home, ensure he is supervised, and call us if anything else appears." The man gave a card with several contact numbers for all hours of the day. "When can I see him?" "Follow me, he is awake and asking for you, but we wanted to talk with you in private considering how uncomfortable it seemed to make him when we had this discussion the first time." The doctor explained as they walked down the hallway. Entering a small examination room, they found Neal staring at a poster on the wall. Peter assumed he was focused on reassuring his brothers, but the doctor didn't need to know about the triplets 'twins thing' communication. It still seemed odd to Peter if he thought about it, and that was even after having witnessed it. "Mr. Caffrey." The doctor got his attention. "Nurse Williams will be here in a few minutes with your discharge papers. Relax, and don't do anything too strenuous until the effects of the concoction have left your system." With a few last recommendations, the doctor left them to wait for the nurse.
Standing awkwardly, Peter wasn't sure what to say. "My brothers are worried too. They are aware of my abduction and concerned about the unknown contents I was injected with. You have the same expression I'm getting from them." The kid observed calmly. "I figured you were reassuring them," Peter stated. Changing the subject, he asked if they could be around to watch over him. "No, they're both on missions right now," Neal suggested Mozzie or figured June could drop in and check on him from time to time. Shaking his head, Peter wasn't hearing it. "No. Elizabeth is out of town, and you aren't supposed to exert yourself. You're staying with me and no excuses." His tone was firm to reinforce his words. Sighing, Neal recognized the expression. Peter was in a protective mode to ease his concern, and he didn't have Elizabeth home to distract him. "I take it you are bored without Elizabeth there to distract you?" Not willing to admit it, Peter came up with other reasons. "You are my consultant and responsibility both to the bureau and your brothers. If anything happens to you, I will have a pile of paperwork and two furious agents on my hands."

Laughing, Neal could sense his real motive. "You're just scared of my brothers." "The paperwork actually, but your brothers do provide extra incentive." Peter smiled. It was a roundabout way of saying he was more concerned for the kid himself than scared of his brothers. Entering in a timely manner, the nurse went through the discharge paperwork with Neal and got him ready to go. Stepping back to the side, Peter allowed the nurse to do her job while observing Neal for himself.

When it was time to go, he assisted Neal from the wheelchair into the passenger seat of his car. Diana and Jones had worked together to ensure his car was available for the drive to Neal's for clothes, and then back to the Burkes for the weekend.

Walking Neal into his home, the kid was able to stand on his own and looked more like himself which was reassuring to Peter.

"I still don't feel right, but at least whatever was wrong seems to be going away," Neal reassured him as they entered the Burke's.

"Good, but I still don't want to relax until you have the all clear." Peter was trying not to hover, so he continued to observe the kid to ease his concern.

Leaving him to shower and settle his things upstairs, Peter took Satchmo for his evening walk and ordered a pizza. Then returning to the house, he took a quick shower and also changed into a comfortable tee shirt and sweats.

When the pizza arrived, they got their food and settled in to eat. Peter had already done the basics towards locking the house up for the night and all that was left was to relax and eat before going to bed. It had been a long and stressful day, so they were enjoying the simple atmosphere.

When they had finished, Neal insisted on helping with the cleanup process. Dropping the pizza box, Neal froze at the entrance to the kitchen. Something was wrong, he didn't feel right.

Turning around, Peter noticed that Neal was staring blankly off into space. Although he had no idea what, he knew something was wrong. Kicking the box to the floor next to the trash can, he grabbed Neal's arms. "What's wrong?"

"I don't feel right." He suddenly leaned into Peter's shoulder and grabbed a fist full of his shirt. Crying, groaning, and shaking in pain, he appeared to be in agony before sinking down toward the floor as he shrunk.

Stunned, Peter stared and the little boy in sweats and a tee shirt standing before him with big eyes gazing back at him.

"Neal?" He reached forward hesitantly, uncertain of the sight before him. "Don't hit me!" The kid exclaimed and turned like he was going to bolt. Peter automatically reached out and grabbed the little kid before he could run away. He didn't even think about the effects the move could have, he only thought to prevent the scared little boy from
running away from him. Fighting in terror, the kid appeared to believe he was going to hurt him. Lifting him up despite the mindless kicks to his stomach and the little fist pelting and pushing at his chest in desperation, Peter wrapped him up in a blanket and settled down onto the couch. Holding the boy firmly in his arms and safely in the cocoon, he hoped to calm him down. "Whoa, Neal. You're alright, I'm not going to hurt you, but I need you to calm down." Sobbing, the little boy didn't seem to hear him. Resorting to more physical contact, Peter tried to reassure him that he wasn't going to hurt him by the gentle strokes through his hair and down his back. Those were supposed to be comforting, right? Talking quietly to ease Neal as if he were his own little son, Peter found himself falling into father mode rather easily, despite his lack of experience. "It's alright, Neal. We'll figure this out. You're safe." He crooned various phrases until the boy ran out of fight. As Neal began to hiccups from the force of his sobs, he seemed to hear more of what Peter was saying to him. Instead of relaxing though, he still held a stiff posture and seemed to twitch every time Peter moved. "Why do you think I would hit you?" Peter questioned softly. "Be...cause, because the men always do." Neal managed to get out. "What men? Peter's tone took an emotionless edge to it. He was trying not to scare Neal, but the implication he was hinting at didn't paint a very good picture. "Mom's boyfriends. They always hit me." Neal admitted. Closing his eyes in horror for a second, Peter realized what Neal had meant by protecting his brothers. "And they didn't hit your brothers, did they?" He already knew the answer. "Uh-uh." Neal shook his head obediently. "I did my best to make sure my brothers weren't left alone with them, and that they took whatever we did wrong out on me." Certain his brothers were getting an earful from their end, Peter tried to get Neal to keep talking. They all needed to know what he had gone through to ensure that the people responsible had faced the penalties for their actions. It would also help them to better understand him and hopefully help him move beyond whatever had been done to him. "Did they hurt you a lot?" Peter needed to know if he had any sensitivity beyond the perspective of a little boy. It could be serious if he reacted wrong in the field. "Some, others would just occasionally hit me when they had a bad day. The cop… trigger…” He shuddered and tried to make his escape again. Holding tighter, Peter wasn't letting him go. For one, he didn't need to be worrying about a missing child, and for two, Neal was safer in his arms than the big world out there. "No, Neal. You can't run away anymore. You're safe, and I won't let them hurt you ever again. But I need to know who hurt you to keep them away, and what they did to you if I'm going to be of any help." Shaking, Neal began to babble. He told Peter of the abuse he had endured, and the crime he had witnessed. "When he learned I had seen him, he…he shot me and put me in a dumpster overnight. It was morning before they found me." Neal seemed to be reliving something of the trauma. "Please, Neal. Tell me these men paid for what they did to you, that they went to jail?" Peter begged. "I told, Ellen, and she told the Marshals. They were all arrested." Neal seemed to be traumatized. "Please, don't hurt me." He pleaded again. "I told you everything you asked of me." Horrified, Peter hadn't realized his need for answers was coming off as threatening. "No, no, no. Neal, I would never hurt you, even if you hadn't told me." Peter hugged the kid into his chest and bowed his head over his. As the tears flowed, he wasn't sure if he was crying for Neal's childhood, the adult Neal who was being deaged to relive this misery, or his inability to handle it correctly and thereby making it worse for the kid. "I'm sorry, Neal. I'm so sorry." He cried. Looking out away from the confusing situation, Neal could see a reflection of Peter cradling him against his chest and his pained expression. Peter really did care about him, and he wasn't playing a role because someone was watching. Slowly, he eased his posture and relaxed his defenses. Maybe
he had truly found an adult male he could look up to without fearing the repercussions? With his walls down, he found himself crying too as the emotions escaped. He wasn't fighting them, and it wasn't a panicked rush, more a release of pressure his body had needed for a very long time. As he and Peter clung to each other, he could feel his brothers collapsed in their respective safe houses as they each learned what he had protected them from. They were astounded by what he had endured, given the extra imagery of his memories, and horrified that they had missed it. Each promising to visit after they finished their operations, they felt the need for physical reassurance that he was okay. Despite their connection, such childhood horrors mixed with the mind-boggling perspective of a deaged child was too much to process from a distance. Drifting off to sleep as his tired little body gave in to the exhaustion; Neal felt the safest he had in a long time as he was secure in the blanket with Peter's strong arms around him. Once he got past the fear of him being an adult male, he was relieved that Peter was willing to comfort him so personally. 

Feeling the little body in his lap get heavier and more relaxed, Peter realized that Neal was actually falling asleep. Shifting the two of them so they were more comfortable, he settled in for the long haul himself. There was no way he was going to leave Neal alone after that reveal, especially since he was in the form of a small child which would make him feel more vulnerable and exposed. Wrapping the blanket more securely around the sleeping boy, he kissed the top of his head. It seemed right to do for the terrified little boy, and it provided a sense of comfort to him as well. Neal was like a little brother to him most days, and a wayward son at times. Now holding him in his arms like a small child, Peter felt that paternal protection more than ever.

"I promise, I'll look them up and ensure they are nowhere near you and not hurting anyone else. Then I'll keep an eye on them just in case." He hugged the sleeping boy closer as the scenes of what Neal described ran through his mind again. "There is no way I'm going to risk you going through that again."

Cuddling the boy for his own comfort, he was glad he had already closed up for the night because taking care of Neal was too important. Falling into slumber himself, Peter was focused on the repetitive motion as his hand gently moved up and down Neal's little back. The more his mind drifted, the slower the motion got until his hand was stilled and he was asleep.

******

Waking up in the morning, Neal realized it wasn't just a dream, but reality as he was stretched out on Peter's chest lying on the couch. Hearing the annoying rumbles as the agent snored, he understood what had woke him up. Trying to move, he was slightly disappointed when Peter's arms tighten around him and held him in place. "No. Not going to let you hurt him."

Startled, he hadn't expected Peter to be dreaming about what he had said. Apparently, it was still strong on his mind… which meant no getting away from it. Sighing, he tried another means of escape, only to be thwarted by Peter again. Unable to help it, he was amused by how thorough the agent was at protecting him, even in his sleep. Giving up for the moment, he was somewhat embarrassed, but also comforted to have Peter taking care of him so. He was a grown man so cuddling on the couch wasn't really something to relish, but the feeling of his best friend watching out for him and ensuring his safety was nice. Closing his eyes and focusing on his brothers, he decided he might as well see how they were doing.

Not surprisingly, they had been kept up by his dreams of the repressed memories from the horrifying events of their childhood. Suddenly, after years of him shutting them out, they finally learned the secrets he had been keeping. It changed their entire perspective of him. They were too sleepy to be conversationalists, after spending their nights working on cases and
trying to process his reveals as they were pelted by childlike nightmares. Still, their general thoughts as they rested were enough for him to understand their perspectives. Now if only he could have a telepathic connection with Peter... but then again, that might not be a good thing. Peter would only need to think his speeches instead of putting forth the energy to say them, and that might encourage him to reiterate them more often. Then there was also his other secret, something even his brothers didn't fully know about. Shutting that thought down before it could get started, he didn't want to share the rest of it in case they were alert enough to remember it.

It was odd, how he had been so good at closing them out when they were children, protecting them from the horrors he had witnessed. But here he was, a full grown adult, and the shock of being deaged had taken down all of his barriers. Feeling Peter shift beneath him, he was certain the agent would be waking up soon. Closing his eyes to pretend he was asleep, he didn't want to face Peter's concern or inquisition just yet. It was awkward enough already.

Changing his breathing and shifting more as he woke up, it only took a few minutes for Peter to breath deeper indicating that he was awake and remembering what had happened. "I know you're awake, so you can stop faking it, Neal." The agent ruffled his hair playfully.

Opening his eyes wide, Neal hadn't been expecting that reaction. "Like I said last night, I'm sorry Neal. I shouldn't have gone into interrogation mode on you, but... that wasn't a reveal I was expecting, and with a background in law enforcement, it is something we are trained to take seriously. You're personal, so the rest of the training kind of went out of my head in the heat of the moment. I'm also sorry I scared you, I would never hurt you." Peter had sat up and made sure Neal was looking him in the eyes as he stated what was obviously weighing strongly on his mind.

Accepting the apology, Neal was again surprised when Peter pulled him into a hug. Releasing the kid after a moment, Peter lifted him to the floor and got up himself. Then looking down at the little boy, he couldn't help but smile. "How about breakfast, half-pint?"

"Half-pint?" Neal questioned. "Would you rather shorty?" Peter teased. "Maybe kiddo, or kid? Hmmm, what about..." "Alright already, I get your point." Neal lightly glared up at him before rolling his eyes. "It's not every day there is so much distance here," Peter emphasized his point by raising and lowering his hand to denote the height difference between the two men. Relaxing some, Neal felt better with Peter's gentle teasing. It was more normal in their relationship. "Maybe I should call you the jolly green giant." He leaned his head back to see all the way up to Peter's smile. "Half-pint flows easier, so I think I have the better end of the deal." Peter didn't complain. It wasn't like this was going to be permanent; at least he hoped it wasn't. Sure, it could be fun to spend some time with his friend miniaturized, but he preferred a full sized version who could go into the field and was the age representation he was supposed to be.

Moving to the kitchen, the two prepared breakfast with Peter happily doing the heavy lifting while Neal helped. Taking their meal in to sit at the table, Peter brought up another troubling subject. "Jones said he and Diana were going to be stopping by after breakfast to see how you were doing and to update us on the case."

Neal didn't remember that, so he asked when that was. "This morning, while you were really still asleep," Peter admitted. It meant he had woken up, answered the phone call, and then watched Neal sleep before settling back himself. "That's how you knew I was faking it." Neal acknowledged. "Did you tell them about me being small?"

"Sort of... I told them it had an effect on you, but that they weren't going to believe me if I told them. They are supposed to let themselves in when they arrive." Glad he had finished his food before learning of his colleagues impending arrival, Neal settled back.
into the seat.
Quietly finishing his food while Neal absorbed the situation, Peter noticed the way Satchmo perked up his ears and looked towards the door. The agents had arrived and were going to be entering his home in the next few seconds. "Neal…"
Something in his tone alerted Neal to the circumstances and he stiffened his posture defensively. Moving to crouch in front of Neal, Peter promised. "It's just Jones and Diana. We aren't going to spread this through the office, and you aren't going to be treated like a science experiment. Okay? I promise."
When Peter stood up to greet Jones and Diana, he felt Neal slip off of his seat and hide behind him. The kid had a fist full of his sweatpants for security while he peaked around his leg at their friends. Putting a hand on the kids head, he tried to comfort him.
"Why is he scared of us?" Diana asked.
Crouching down in front of him, Jones greeted him like he normally would. Sensing Neal's impending terror, Peter didn't want him to go into a panic attack again. Glancing for Jones to back up, he picked Neal up and held him securely in his arms again to remind him he was safe. "Let's just say, Neal didn't have a good environment as far as adult men are concerned when he was little. He was terrified of me last night."
With their eyes going wide, the other two got the implication of what it meant, but they had no idea how bad it truly was. Shaking his head at them, Peter indicated he wasn't going to be detailing it for them either.
"I got another phone call this morning with all of the names associated. They won't be a problem for Neal anymore." Peter meant he was going to be watching them, but he also meant he wasn't going to let them hurt his friend.
Stunned, Neal hadn't expected his brothers to work with Peter to protect him. Something must have been said that they heard and he didn't.
Giving a basic update on the case, Jones and Diana tried not to stare at Neal, but their eyes kept glancing towards him. He was their friend so they were concerned, but it was also odd to see him so small. When they had finished, they both promised to be a phone call away and left.
Feeling Neal melt into his shoulder, Peter reached up to hug the kid closer to him. "It's only temporary, and you should be back to normal by Monday. As much as I like this experience for a onetime thing, I don't want it to be permanent."
Relieved and feeling tired, Neal nodded his head in agreement.
"What do you say to a baseball game?" Peter was enthusiastic. It was his favorite past time, and Neal wasn't up to his usual activities. Shrugging, Neal wasn't too concerned. He might just go to sleep anyway.
Walking over to the couch, Peter turned on the TV and grabbed his puzzle book for something extra to do. He could tell by the way Neal was leaning into him that the kid would sleep, but he also knew the world was still scary for him in his child-sized body. Getting comfortable, he settled Neal in beside him so that it was more acceptable to the adult, but cuddled to comfort the child perspective. It was the best compromise he could offer and Neal seemed to accept it as he fell asleep.
Holding Neal with one arm wrapped around him, Peter knew he would be researching those names on Monday to ensure Neal's safety, but until then, he was still enjoying the comforts of having his friend safely by his side.
After a while, Neal woke up and was feeling more energetic again. Deciding on what to do, Peter pulled some case files out and laid them across the coffee table. There he could work on some familiar tasks with the kid, but not overwhelm him as he seemed to tire more easily from all of the stress.
Passing the time, they moved into the afternoon before getting a late lunch, or early dinner as the case could be.
With the evening coming, Peter insisted on taking care of Satchmo before choosing a movie as it
was more relaxing. This time Neal followed Peter on the cleanup work more because he felt safe near to Peter than for a wish of helping.

Putting on another movie, Peter figured Neal wouldn't last until the end of it as his body was once again showing signs of fatigue.

Holding Neal into his side, Peter wondered if he would change back as painfully as he had shrunk, or if it would be worse for his body to stretch instead of compress.

Letting the kid sleep, he did his best to comfort him when he trembled and shook, put a cooling rag on his head when his temperature rose, and in general did his best to help him through the night. Eventually, Peter was too exhausted to stay awake any longer, and he had faithfully seen Neal through the painful transformation back to adulthood. This time Neal hadn't been as aware of the slow progression through various stages as he returned to his normal size.

Waking up in the morning, Neal was surprised to see the world from its normal perspective. He wasn't a child anymore, but back to his usual adult self.

Leaving Peter to sleep, the agent looked exhausted from watching over him through the night. Slipping away, this time Peter couldn't restrain him which caused a smile, Neal settled Peter into a more comfortable position before tucking him in. Then with his hand resting on Peter's head, he quietly thanked the agent for everything he had done for him.

Heading upstairs, it was time for a shower and change of clothes.

Coming back downstairs, Neal noticed Peter waking up on the couch in a panic. Moving to his friend's side, it was his turn to crouch in concern while providing comfort. "Whoa, Peter. I'm back to my usual size, and I'm fine. Relax, no one grabbed me while you were sleeping." He smiled as Peter became more coherent.

Rubbing his eyes, and running a hand over his face to wipe the sleep away, the tired agent yawned. "I know you're back to normal. You spent most of the night going through the process slow enough you seemed to sleep through it."

"I take it you watched over me every step of the way?" There was no need to question. "Of course, I wasn't going to let you go through that alone, although, I seem to be the only one aware of what you went through. Based on your expression, it didn't register in your exhausted mind, at least not in a way that lasted." Peter noted.

"My brothers are traumatized apparently, so I'm sure I'll get the picture later when they have finished the last little bit of their assignment," Neal promised.

"Don't..." Peter didn't want him to go through that, but then it wasn't as bad as his childhood, and it wouldn't hurt for him to know in case the concoction had any after effects. "You do know I will be restricting you to desk duty for a month?"

Frowning, Neal didn't like that. Bickering back with Peter, he tried to persuade him to reduce his sentence.

"Not a chance, half-pint."

Chapter End Notes

Thank you, everyone, for reading, following, choosing to favorite, leaving kudos, and reviewing/commenting :D.
Standing in the middle of the office, Neal held his phone gingerly in his hand as he stared at it. He had just finished a phone call with someone official and there hadn't been much said on his part. Attempting some reconnaissance, Diana decided to be abrupt with the con man. "So, who was that? It sounded important."

"Trigger is dead." Neal didn't explain, simply stated the core fact behind his conversation.

"Who is Trigger? Sounds like a dog?" Jones tried to make him laugh.

Turning to walk away, Neal gave them a little more information. "He's the cop that shot me when I was a kid." Heading for Peter's office, he didn't make it two steps before Jones and Diana were in his way again.

"Hey, you can't drop something like that and then walk away." Jones stopped him.

"Yeah, why did a cop shoot you?" Diana was concerned.

"Because I was a witness who could prove he was corrupt and he didn't want to risk it. The guy went to prison for attempted murder, child abuse, and his other crimes on top of it all." Shaking Jones' grip off, he paused just past them. "Don't research into what I just told you. He wasn't the only corrupt cop who was out to kill me growing up, and I don't want a billboard pointing to where I am."

This time no one tried to stop him, but the two agents were left silently staring after him from the middle of the floor.

Knocking on Peter's door, Neal let himself in. "Trigger's dead."

Dropping his pen, Peter wondered what the cause was.

"Remember, he was a cop. When the case about his crimes went public, his cases were transferred to other officers and every action he had ever done was investigated. It caused a stir and got attention from the criminal element, so when one of the people he had arrested was inadvertently transferred to the same prison, the man exposed him for his crimes in revenge. The former officer didn't last long after that." Neal slumped down in the seat. Being reminded of what the man had done to him wasn't as bad after a weekend spent with Peter, but it still wasn't pleasant to think about.

"So..." Peter stopped like he didn't want to say what had crossed his mind.

" Spit it out, Peter. You were wondering if my brothers did something now that they know. The answer is no, they didn't have to do anything." Seeing something flash across Peter's eyes, Neal rolled his. "And no one else did anything on purpose either. It's been decades and there was a simple mistake in transferring his information years ago. Nothing you, my brothers, myself, or anyone I know did."
"Okay." Peter tried to calm the irritation he could see in Neal's eyes. "Do you want to talk about it?"

"Yes… No… I don't know. What is there to talk about anyway? It's not like you don't know the basics of what he did, and it all happened a long time ago." Neal shifted uncomfortably in his seat. The memories were still painful, but the cause was no longer an issue.

"That is why you still shift every time it's mentioned, your eyes flinch away from the pain, and there is a distance to your expression like you're trying to avoid dealing with what happened. It still hurts you, so there are still things you need to work through. If you need…" Peter analyzed his friend as he sat across from him.

"Don't mention shrink, therapist, or anything relating to such a profession. I was forced to talk to them as a kid, to work through what was done to me time and time again. It never helped, and one of them used it against me." Neal admitted to more trouble from his childhood.

With his eyes growing wide, Peter was concerned.

Before he could ask, Neal answered. "He... he tried to scare me into being a compliant little patient. Threatened to tell people if I didn't at least pretend to be improving through is work. His job was on the line, so he was desperate to retain his profitable position."

"Neal..." Peter hated these conversations. Ever since Neal had shown his trust in him, he had learned of more horrors in the man's past than he had ever imagined. It wasn't the bonding or even the pain Neal shared that bothered him, it was the fact that it existed in the first place. These things shouldn't happen to anyone, let alone his caring best friend who took it all to protect his brothers.

Breathing to try and regain his composure, Neal didn't like discussing these topics. The more he shared with Peter, the more his brothers learned of the secrets he had been hiding from them. It also didn't help to see Peter's pained expression as he learned of another terror Neal had faced almost if not completely alone as a child.

Distracted, he caught the essence of what his brothers were up to and suddenly realized they were not only on their way back home to the states but they were about to land in a helicopter at the edge of the city. "We need to go."

"What? Why?" Peter was caught off guard by his abrupt change of demeanor. One moment he was trying to shake the painful memories of his childhood, and the next he was tense announcing their need to leave.

"My brothers... they just landed at the edge of the city, so unless you want them putting on a show over everything in the office, it's best we meet them elsewhere," Neal explained with a distant look to his expression as he tried to find a good place to direct everyone. "They're hungry, so maybe a coffee shop?"

"There is one close to my house. Then if the situation escalates, we have a more private location to move to." Peter agreed. "Take care of your stuff, I'm going to update Hughes." He instructed as he ducked to the office next door.

Neal took a moment to collect his expression into his normal cheerful demeanor before descending to the office below. Jones and Diana were particularly watching him, but several other teammates recognized that something was up and were also observing him.

Approaching their friend, the agents asked if he was alright.
"As much as I can be, all things considered," Neal muttered distractedly.

"Then what's the rush?" Diana wondered.

"My brothers are in town and coming to 'talk' about everything they just learned about. We are trying to prevent a massive scene from going down here in the office and meeting them elsewhere." Neal gave a few more details.

"Brothers?" Diana exclaimed in question. "I didn't know you had any siblings."

"They're black ops agents and we try not to associate with each other when it comes to our work. My brothers have always seen me as the weakest of us and endeavor to protect me from their enemies."

"Weaker? I thought you were the one getting shot by a dirty cop as a kid? What is weak about that?" Jones couldn't believe it.

"I kept all of it secret from them. My brothers just knew that I seemed to get hurt a lot, and showed what they perceived as cowardice when it came to adult men. Now they know it was from extensive abuse and violence from our mother's boyfriends. Needless to say, they aren't happy with me for not telling them." Neal powered down his computer having saved and closed all of his active work. It was likely to be a long afternoon.

"Why didn't you tell your brothers?" Jones wondered. He had a brother, and they shared a lot with each other. Granted, not everything, but a lot.

"Because then they would have had to fear the penalties of whatever misbehavior we were perceived to have done. My younger brother… he was always an easy going gamer, and my older brother already had a lot to deal with in his efforts to try and make sure we had what we needed. I did what I could to fill the gap in the middle." With a shrug, he finished piling the physical papers to the side of his desk.

"Does Peter know?" Diana asked softly. It was assumed he did, based on Neal's retreat to his office and the comments he made when Neal was deaged at his place, but they didn't know how much he knew.

"Most of the basics… which is enough nightmare material. I don't want him to have the thoughts running through his head that I do." Neal looked up to the half floor above where Peter was moving from Hughes office back to his own. Pausing briefly, Peter stopped and caught Neal's glance. Recognizing the protective look, Peter knew Neal was trying to keep the worst of what had happened from him. He had already known it, but that expression was confirmation. Sending back a look of his own, he wanted to convey strength and capability. Neal needed to know he could rely on him to have his back, to help him deal with the demons from his past. As hard as it was, he needed his best friend to feel free to talk to him when he needed to without reservations caused by the urge to protect him. Seeing Neal nod back, the message was received. Whether or not it was accepted was yet to be determined. Returning to his office, he had his own work to put away for the afternoon.

Below, Neal was still trying to redirect Jones and Diana who were continuing to curiously pry into the situation. In an effort to reach more cheerful topics, they asked him about his brothers and teased him about middle child syndrome.
Making his escape when Peter came down the stairs, Neal successfully evaded the questions into his brothers and retreated from the comments on his position with his siblings.

Missing the glances exchanged behind them, Peter and Neal were more focused on meeting with his brothers. The other triplets were bound to be overbearing and anxiously concerned.

Driving through the city, Peter kept silent and allowed Neal to work through the situation in silence. He had his own thoughts to consider. After all, it had been a while since he had faced all three brothers at the same time, and then the others' scorn had been directed at him. This would be the first time their anger would be directed at someone else where he would be considered an ally instead of the foe.

Pondering, he wondered if he would like the other brothers, or if they would simply be tolerated as Neal's brothers. It was an interesting point. They were agents, but very different from the nonviolent con he considered his closest friend. Perhaps he would get along with the younger as an accountant, or the older as an athlete? There were points of commonality that they could get along though, but whether that would stand against their differences was yet to be determined.

Pulling into a parking space, Peter turned to Neal. "Ready?"

"Not even close. Let's go." Neal seemed to be building up his courage for the encounter they were heading to. It wasn't some criminal meeting he could con his way through. It was his brothers, a meeting where he was exposed for himself, and unable to draw up enough masks to hide behind.

"That's the spirit." Peter praised while doing his own version of the same thing.

Climbing out, they again missed the car pulling into a parking spot five places down. Jones and Diana knew their teammates would recognize them and their car, so they had kept their distance relying on Neal's tracking data instead.

Following the others toward the coffee shop, they walked past with others in between them to avoid being noticed. Crossing the street, they found a table at the neighboring café and ordered light food and drink. It wouldn't take long to prepare, and they could nurse their drinks for some time while discussing what they were observing in the shop across the street.

Choking on their drinks, they were both surprised to see three Caffreys meeting at a table. Likely more startled than they were by the sudden presence of Peter helping them breathe.

"I choked on popcorn the first time I saw them together." He smirked to see them jump at his presence. "Care to explain why you're spying?"

Looking abashed, Diana decided it wasn't a good idea to be caught spying on the boss. Still, she didn't look too repentant. "Neal told us he had brothers. We wanted to see them."

Agreeing with her, Jones defended them. "He wasn't going to bring them into the office, so we decided to follow you two."

"Neal's tracking anklet." Peter suspected.

Nodding, they confirmed his deduction.

"Go back to the office. We'll talk about this later." Peter was sending them away from the fallout.

"Why not let them join the fun?"
All three were startled by the three Caffrey voices sounding in sync behind them.

"That is creepy," Jones noted as he turned around to see three identical men looking alike, but dressed very differently. One was in army attire, a second was wearing a more casual black like he was ready for a theft, and the third wore a familiar rat pack.

"No, I'm saving them from your interrogation and bickering," Peter stated. "Something I wish I could do for myself." was muttered as an aside.

"You mentioned having an older and a younger brother, but I never thought that was because you were triplets, let alone identical!" Diana stated.

Shrugging, Neal was used to their reactions. He had heard them his entire childhood. "You wouldn't have believed me if I told you."

Extending their hands, the other brothers introduced themselves.

"James Jr. Carson."

"Bryce Larkin."

"Why different names?" Diana pried. She was the least reserved about interrogating the brothers.

"Because we prefer to use our real first name with last names of our choosing. Danny here probably picked a different name to hide his crimes." James teased momentarily forgetting not to use his brother's Wit-sec name.

Glaring at his brother, Neal didn't appreciate that name being revealed. It didn't include the last name, but the first was the beginning towards the archeologist finding his secret. Based on Peter's inquisitive look, he had caught it. "Neal is my real name, and Caffrey is a family name. It's as close as I dare go to my full real name."

Seeing Neal's distress, Peter chose to keep his interrogation for another time. He had a name to look for, so it was only a matter of time before he discovered the secret that Neal was still hiding, even from his brother's by the look of it.

Letting the conversation digress into basic topics, Peter understood that the brothers didn't want to get personal with an audience. Sending Jones and Diana back to the office, they had met the brothers, so it was time to return to work.

"How about my place, we are in the neighborhood, and El had a meeting to attend," Peter suggested.

Taking the offer, the brothers divided between vehicles with Neal relieved to be alone with Peter again for a few minutes respite.

"Are they giving you a hard time?" He asked his consultant. Whether he was referring to their teammates or his brothers was left unsaid.

"No. Jones and Diana are just overly curious, but I can assume they will be asking about my brothers or teasing me in the future. That doesn't bother me, as long as they don't advertise the secret." Neal stared out the window for a moment. "My brothers… they haven't gotten started yet. We were in public before."

Then he turned to Peter. "Are you sure you want to do this? They are probably going to be loud
when they let loose. Your neighbors might be calling in about the disruption of the peace."

Going stern, Peter threw a glance at his CI while navigating traffic. "They had better not take it that far. As for an argument in general, I'd rather be there to help you deal with it if I can. Your brothers may have viewed you as weak for all of these years, but I don't want them going too far in the opposite direction. Somewhere in the middle would be good."

"So, you don't think I'm overly strong to handle my brothers' wrath?" Neal felt insulted.

"I think you can handle it just fine, but that doesn't mean you should. You're the strongest person I know, Neal. Don't sell yourself short." Peter encouraged Neal. He knew the kid had been degraded a lot over the years, so he wanted to help build him better perceptions of himself.

Feeling better for the compliment, Neal was grateful for his friend's presence.

Pulling up to his home, Peter wasn't surprised to see the other car already parked a few spots down. The other triplets already knew where he lived.

Unlocking the door to lead the boys in, Peter was surprised to find Elizabeth working at the dining room table. "Hon?"

"Oh, Hon?" She looked up in surprise. "My meeting was canceled. What are you up to?"

Following Peter in, Neal looked sulky.

"What did Neal do now?" Elizabeth suspected he had something to do with the off hours meet at their home.

"His brothers are in town, and they want to talk to him, but we're trying to avoid causing a scene in the office," Peter explained. "Neal didn't do anything… recently."

Raising his shoulders at Neal's glare, he silently said he did keep the secret in the first place. Cocking his head, Neal accepted the truth of the matter.

Observing the silent conversation, Elizabeth understood that there was something being kept from her. "Are your brothers coming?"

"They're waiting outside. Meeting Jones and Diana are apparently enough to meet and greets for one day." Neal shrugged.

Kissing his wife in belated greeting, Peter explained. "Neal mentioned his brothers in the office, so Jones and Diana traced his anklet to spy on us. They were curious to see them, ended up meeting them, and have made their retreat back to the office."

"Retreat, huh. I supposed I could find something to do upstairs while the boys have their conversation down here. Are you going to join me?"

"Perhaps… unless I'm needed as a mediator down here." Peter wasn't sure.

Neal was staring off into the distance, likely having a conversation with his brothers through their connection.

Determined to at least listen to the conversation in part, Elizabeth figured she could get something of their voices. Kissing her husband again, she retreated upstairs and settled on their bed with her laptop. It wasn't the most conventional workspace, but at least it had the comfort of home and her
things spread across the covers.

Listening, she heard two more voices join the conversation downstairs. They were rather quiet, so she didn't get the words, but she caught hints of the tones. It sounded like stressed Neal conversing with serious Neal and angry Neal. Perhaps their voices were so similar because they were brothers?

After a while, it was quiet so she considered sneaking downstairs for a peak. Reaching the landing above the stairs, she found Peter looking up at her from the bottom. "You can come down… the other two left."

Walking down the stairs, she noticed how Peter kept running his hands over his face. He was obviously stressed by whatever had gone on. "How did it go?"

Trying to breathe deeply, Peter was glad to receive comfort by leaning into his wife as she sat on the stair above him. "Neal… he had been keeping the full details about what he went through as a child secret. He didn't want to cause nightmares or undue worry… his brothers didn't share that opinion and aired more details than he was willing to share." The agent buried his face into his wife's sweater.

Holding his head in her lap, El tried to offer what comfort she could as she felt him tremble with tears dampening her clothing. Whatever Neal had been keeping secret, it was far worse than Peter had imagined it. Curling down to rest over the back of Peter's head, she sheltered him with her body while crooning to him softly.

After a few minutes, Peter started to pull himself together. He needed the release, but he also wanted to be composed when Neal returned to avoid setting him off. The kid was already upset enough to be pacing around the backyard.

"It was that bad…" Elizabeth knew she would be comforting her husband from nightmares in the future.

"Probably worse for them, but yeah, it was that bad." Peter shuddered again.

"Worse for them?"

"Did I not tell you? The triplets have a twin connection, something like telepathy. They can see, hear, and feel what each other is experiencing. When Neal was suddenly deaged, the walls he had built to protect his brothers from this weren't able to hold it all in, and they got the full effect of his memories. It was like seeing, hearing, and feeling it for the first time… with all of the terror and perspective of a child's view. Neal had to relive it all again too, while he was small again so as to feel helpless to defend himself." Peter still had visions of what he had witnessed of Neal's terror mixed with his imagined views of what had happened dancing through his mind in a horrifying parade.

Stroking her husband's head, Elizabeth ran her fingers through his hair to try and comfort him. "But he had you this time, so it wasn't as bad for him, was it?"

"No. Peter was a lot of help going through that." Neal answered.

Startled, Elizabeth hadn't heard him approach.

Peter took a moment to even notice, and when he did, he saw the pained expression cross Neal's face in response to his own misery. "Don't. I'm glad I know so that I can help you, but it is a lot to take in."
Searching for a way to distract Peter, Neal decided to reveal his last secret. "Perhaps you should research Brooks when we get back to the office, Danny Brooks."

"Why?" Peter's curiosity was rising, but he wasn't past the initial shock of the earlier reveal yet.

"Because it was the name I grew up under… and it still carries a few secrets with it yet today." Neal teased. He knew his brothers would also be researching it, but it was worth it to give them all a happier distraction, to reveal the man it had caused him to be.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you, everyone, for reading, choosing to favorite, reviewing/commenting, leaving kudos, and following :D

Next week will be the last completed chapter for this collection so I will be taking votes for what to post next based on my fanfiction.net profile page completed stories list (under the same name). Please let me know what you'd like to see :)
Returning to the office, Peter was double finger flagged up to Hughes' office to meet with the Police Chief.

Stopping at his desk below, Neal was relieved to have a distraction to look forward to. As much as he wanted to cheer Peter up, he wasn't looking forward to another interview or confrontation for the day. He was about to ignore the shadow waiting in Hughes' office, but curiosity and self-preservation wouldn't allow it. Staring for a few moments, he recognized an old ally, a police officer he had commonly worked with growing up. The same man who had arrested many of his abusers.

Curious, he continued to pay attention to what transpired upstairs while still making slow progress on his work. Considering the day he was having, no one would blame him for not being overly focused.

Eventually, he got the double finger point from Peter to join the meeting.

Climbing the stairs, Neal was more intrigued than nervous, but his nerves were making it a close competition. Why was the chief there, and what did it have to do with him?

"Hello, Chief Davidson." He greeted first.

Startled, the man hadn't expected Neal to be an old friend. "You're Neal Caffrey?"

"Yes, have been off and on for a while now." He wasn't mentioning the reason for the change.

"I heard you had run away, but thought you chose another direction." The man had introduced Neal to his future but hadn't known where that action had led.

"Life leads in interesting directions, doesn't it? You believe you're taking one path, and the next thing you know you're on another. I took the suggestion you gave me, but it's a long story how I got here." Neal hinted.

Nodding, the man understood there was more to the situation than appeared, but he didn't question it in front of their present company. "I see. You'll have to tell me something about it someday."

While Neal and the man shared a silent conversation, Peter began to formulation suspicions and possible theories, so Hughes was left to redirect the conversation back to their present topic.

"Is there going to be a problem here? We have a case to work." The agent sat seriously watching the group in front of him. It was odd that the NYCPD Chief would have something of a common history with their world renown consulting criminal.

"No, no problem at all. In fact, this just confirms the belief that he is our man for the job." The chief was delighted.

Smiling, Neal was looking forward to what the case entailed. "What are we talking about? Stolen
paintings, an elusive con man, or perhaps something more intriguing?" He smirked at the reaction his comments got from Peter and Hughes.

"Nothing as exciting as all of that" Davidson smiled. "We are simply trying to catch an elusive burglar who continues to evade all of our efforts at capture. Since we don't appear to have the resources necessary, we thought perhaps our Federal counterparts might."

"Sounds like fun. What is the average take of the thefts?" Neal began pushing for details.

"Between several thousand and a million. The criminal has managed to pull off their crimes six times in the last six months. We are becoming the laughing stock of the local underground, so we need to catch whoever is responsible before they become even more brazen." Davidson explained.

"Hmm… it sounds like they're toying with you. Something bigger is coming, or else they would have simply made a much larger profit before leaving town." Neal started to pace while he thought of the situation. "What has been targeted at each heist?"

"Valuable paintings. Each one is then replaced with a fake." Davidson shot the answer back.

"Where do the fakes go once they have been discovered?" Neal continued to prod.

"The evidence warehouse," Davidson explained.

"Not the same one you put your regular evidence at?" Neal paused in his pacing.

"No, these are considered more valuable due to what they have copied after. We put them in the other warehouse, where we keep our more valuable evidence."

"That's it! There is something in that warehouse the thief is after. Have the paintings been checked over for tracking devices or radioactive paint? My brothers know of several ways to trace an item without their markers being identified." Warming up to his theory, Neal was certain he had caught the gist of the scheme. "It is probably a hired job, but not by just anybody. We're talking about some high-class skill but from a different field. Those forms of tracking are more espionage style than White Collar… The contractor probably hired them to steal the paintings, replace them with traceable fakes to find the likely location of their target, and then the final heist will be to steal from the evidence warehouse. Your original paintings could be sold on the black market for side profit, or kept as payment for the job."

"It sounds like you have a running theory already?" Hughes rejoined the conversation.

"Yes, and I think I know just who can help us solve this."

Peter sighed knowing he was about to be facing all three Caffrey brothers again, but this time officially in the office. "Your brothers."

"They're in town, specialize in espionage, and are willing to help so we can work through this quickly," Neal explained.

"I haven't seen your brothers since after you left. They weren't happy, but they seemed to have found their directions. It sounds like they ended up in government work too." Davidson commented.

Taking note of the 'government work too' part, Peter added to his research.

"Do they know?" Davidson hinted at his childhood secrets.
"Recent circumstances brought it out… in fact, they confronted me on it earlier today. We just got back from that discussion." Neal answered.

"We?" Davidson questioned.

"He was at my house when the past… came up again. I know what happened, and that Trigger died today too." Peter answered for himself, although paling at the recollection.

Sighing, Davidson wasn't sure how to feel. "He was a good officer… or so it seemed until the truth of his actions were aired. That was a difficult day in the precinct."

"You are from the same precinct?" Peter was beginning to realize where Neal knew him from.

"Yes. I was the one who reported him. Since I arrested most of her boyfriends at some point in time or another, I learned to keep an eye on whoever she was involved with. She had poor tastes in men, yet for some reason, managed to produce three of the best boys I've ever known." The Chief glanced proudly over at Neal. "This kid has helped me solve cases since he was in school. Closed ten by the time he was ready to graduate high school."

Hughes and Peter were both surprised by that.

"He was helping you in the field, as a minor?" Hughes wasn't pleased at all.

"No… more like, he was a valuable witness who had a tendency to draw bad crowds. His mothers' boyfriends taught him a distaste for certain behaviors, so he tended to point out when he saw other things going on around him. He had the sharpest eyes in his school." Davidson explained.

Elaborating a little, Neal shared some of the case descriptions. "The drug dealer on campus, illegal forger who was helping other kids… get into life-threatening trouble, a gang that was trying to move into the school territory, and so on. Basic things I observed on the grounds and on my walk home."

"Didn't you have friends walking with you, or your brothers?" Peter wondered. Why didn't anyone else help with these cases?

"Not usually. I was rather skittish as a result of the abuse, so I didn't have many friends. My brothers usually had several and were often off hanging out with them." Neal shrugged.

"Anyway, he would see suspicious activity, observe long enough to understanding something of what was going on, and then he would report it to me careful to avoid being caught. We didn't want him to be perceived as a snitch to his peers, or a noted witness to the more dangerous suspects. Still, his observation and bravery helped us protect the other kids and closed some good cases."

With the new perspective of Neal, Hughes gave his permission for them to work together before sending Peter and Neal out with Chief Davidson.

Leaving the office, Davidson directed them to the evidence warehouse in question and gave them entrance when they arrived.

Walking through, Neal seemed to be focused on the evidence with the assistance of his brothers through their connection. After a while, he stopped at one and examined it more thoroughly. "This is it. See the frame here; that is a microchip. It's being used to transport data of some sort, and the people it was taken from want it recovered."

With a little help from his brothers, a replacement chip was sent over to bait the trap while the
police made the necessary arrangement to catch the thief.

Having completed their initial portion of the work, Neal and Peter returned to the office while the other agencies sent representatives to help with the final takedown when the time came.

Hearing of the commotion before it even reached their floor, Peter wasn't surprised to see that the chosen representatives were none other than the Caffrey triplets. Jones and Diana had been the only ones privy to their existence, so the rest of the office was shocked.

Entering the White Collar division, the two brothers stopped at Neal's desk giving the entire office an eyeful of three identical persons. While some snapped pictures or gossiped, they endeavored to ignore the attention while focusing on strategizing for the case.

"Alright, already," Neal called to team. "Stand together you two, we might as well let everybody who wants one take a picture with us posed."

Posing for a few moments, the brothers allowed the team to take pictures for their amusement.

"That's enough, back to work everybody." Peter barked as he entered the conversation. He knew the team needed to get it out of their system, but that didn't mean taking all afternoon.

Rejoining the group, Chief Davidson greeted the triplets. "Hello boys, it's been a long time."

"Chief Davidson." Junior greeted happily. Having learned what the officer had done for their family, he was thrilled to see him again. "I didn't know what you did before, but thank you for protecting us and looking out for this trouble magnet." He ruffled Neal's hair.

"Hey, watch the hair. I have an image to upkeep." Neal complained as he repaired the damage.

"Boo hoo. Everyone is laughing so I don't think anyone cares besides you." Junior had no sympathy.

"I want to thank you too. We didn't know what Neal was taking for us..." Bryce also shook Davidson's hand.

Understanding that it was an emotional topic, Davidson didn't dwell on it. "You boys were like my nephews. It was a pleasure to help where I could."

Directing the conversation up to the conference room, Peter introduced the case, Davidson shared the steps that had been taken, and the triplets added their ideas as to how the case should be finished. When they were done, the group returned to the field and made sure everything was in place.

Then it was time to wait.

Returning to the office, Peter retreated up to his own space to research the name Neal had given him while the triplets enjoyed reminiscing in the conference room with Davidson. They had the work done and were waiting for something to happen in the field. Since the pattern indicated they wouldn't have to wait long, they hung around the Bureau.

Knocking on the door to join the conversation, Peter had a copy of the records he had discovered. "Do you want to share with everybody?" He asked Neal.

"Why not? Davidson helped me on this path, and my brothers have been pestering me with questions." Neal grinned at Peter. "So, what did you find under Danny Brooks?"
"Don't you mean Agent Danny Brooks, legendary agent of the FBI White Collar based out of DC and on a need to know assignment in New York? You've been an agent all along and are only playing a criminal." He was surprised, mostly happy, and a little upset. "Why did I waste company resources and years researching to catch you?"

"Undercover work, Peter. It had to look real and the bosses figured it was better to have an agent we could trust at my back chasing than someone who would put a bullet in it if they figured out the truth. Since you have one of the most solid reputations for honesty in the FBI, you were one of my top choices. The rest of who you are put it over the top and you were chosen."

"Has there ever been any intention to bring me in, or am I to be the puppet in all this?" He was still frustrated with the news.

"If necessary, and definitely should I be allowed to eventually transfer here to work with you as a fellow agent. For now, though, the bosses have felt it was still on a need to know basis and advised against telling you."

"Advised against, didn't forbid. Why haven't you told me before?" Peter continued to push.

"There wasn't a reason, it gave more realism if you didn't know, and it never felt right. I told you now because you were so upset about my past that I figured it wouldn't hurt you to know I'm more capable of defending myself than an untrained consultant is. Besides, it also provides a distraction because you now have a whole new collection of questions and things to deal with than my messed up childhood."

Nodding, Peter had to consent to his reasoning. There really hadn't been a good time to reveal his secret, and waiting until now meant he had something to distract him from the horrifying reveal they had earlier. "I'm still not thrilled, but I am glad to know you're actually an agent." It would take some time before he completely adjusted to his new perspective of the kid. He had learned a lot for a single day.

Taking a seat, Peter was done working. He had completed as many official tasks as possible, there had been multiple reveals, and they still anticipated the possibility of their case progressing with another theft attempt before dawn.

Davison reacted next since he had already known the idea of it. "So, my recommendation did get you into the Bureau."

"Yeah, I went to Columbia and got several degrees in art, did my stint at Quantico, and was placed undercover at twenty-four. The whole criminal history for Neal is a back story or sham. Sure, some of them were real crimes my name was thrown into under suspicion, but I didn't do the majority of things my character is accredited for. I got some cooperation with Interpol for some of my cases, helping me create an element of an international criminal, but those were official or vacation to put me on the map." He grinned and shrugged over at Peter, who frowned in return.

"Did you ever get the blame for our activity?" Junior wondered.

"Some, but most of your work is rather subtle, or didn't hit the same radars to be associated with my character. You and Bryce both work more military, espionage, and black ops style operations than my White Collar and Art Crimes work."

"Ohh… so that's why the Marconi brothers tracked me across Italy once… you stole one of their stolen paintings, didn't you?" Bryce suddenly realized he had been blamed for one of Neal's cases.
Laughing, Neal was amused. "Yeah, that was a recovery job from the States with Interpol and the local Italian government's assistance. It was fun pulling a legal theft."

"How did they know it was you?" Junior was curious.

"Caffrey has a reputation, they have pull with the underground who reported my presence, and from there they drew the obvious conclusion. Interpol arrested them for the original crime as soon they could catch them." Neal was enjoying being open on this one. With Peter and his brothers knowing the truth, the people closest to him could stop treating him like the criminal he wasn't.

Having been sitting to the side listening, Davidson decided to rejoin the conversation. "How about we go grab some dinner? The MO means we probably have until midnight, so we might as well get some food and be ready for a stakeout."

Agreeing to his suggestion, the group chose a nearby diner to grab an easy meal before retiring to their stations for the night.

Sitting in the car with Peter, Neal kept quiet and used his connection to talk to his brothers. The day had opened a whole new series of topics for them to discuss. Peter was reflecting on what he had learned and coming to terms with the reveals.

Somewhere in the middle of the night, the trap was sprung and the arrest was made. The agents involved headed into the office for the interrogation and were ready to head home with the sunrise.

Catching the triplets and Davidson, Peter invited everyone to a quick breakfast at his place before they all headed home to their beds.

Taking him up on his offer, everyone piled into their cars and made the drive out to Brooklyn.

Picking up some food on the way, Peter and Neal were the last to arrive, but Elizabeth had let the others in after receiving Peter's call.

Settling in around the dining room table, Peter greeted his wife while Neal set the food out.

"So, this is what you meant by them looking alike. I thought you meant like brothers, not identical triplets." She teased Peter. He hadn't talked about the brothers much, and this was her first time meeting them.

"You probably wouldn't have believed me. I know I would have questioned if you told me you had met identical triplets." Peter was too tired to really joke.

Not giving him a hard time, Elizabeth joined the group for breakfast and enjoyed a shorter version of their previous conversations.

Being the first to take his leave, Davidson headed home after he ate. "I'll leave you all to get caught up or acquainted. And boys, don't forget to look me up once in a while when you're passing through." With a smile and a wave, he headed home to get some sleep for the day.

Left alone, the group felt both more relaxed and awkward.

"Why don't you boys take the guest bedroom upstairs and Neal can have the couch? You all look like you're about to fall asleep in your food." Elizabeth noted how tired everyone looked, especially Junior and Bryce. They had been on some kind of international operation before spending their day in reveals and getting another case that took all night.
Giving in due to their fatigue, the boys took her up on the offer and were soon crashed in the guest room. Neal was a little more awake, so he helped clean up the meal.

"Thanks for welcoming my brothers. They don't trust people much and aren't able to be too open with the people they do." He explained why the still kept their distance.

Patting his shoulder as she moved passed him, Elizabeth reassured her tired friend. "I have learned that agents don't open up much about their work, and the more dangerous the work the more closed off they seem to be. Although Peter is in White Collar now, he used to work Violent Crimes."

"Black ops is even worse." Neal yawned.

"Go to sleep you two. You've helped me get the worst of the mess and I can finish." She shooed them off to sleep.

Peter kissed her good day/night and made sure Neal had what he needed for sleeping on the couch. Neal hugged her and thanked her again for welcoming his brothers in like family and accepting him for his own reveal before making the couch up. Both were asleep as soon as their heads hit their pillows.

Left alone to think in the kitchen, Elizabeth continued to methodically wash the dishes. It was an easy task and allowed her time to think about what she had learned over breakfast.

First discovering that the brothers were identical had caught her breath. It wasn't every day you saw two people who look alike, so it was more surprising to see three. She tried to find differences, but with their fatigue, the best she could do was go by clothes.

Then learning something of the horrors they had endured growing up wasn't a pleasant topic. She used the back of her wrist to wipe away a few tears for the abuse Neal had taken, the efforts Junior had put in to look out for his brothers, and the support Bryce had tried to provide for his older brothers. With Neal's secrets in the open, they seemed to be rekindling a close bond that had grown distant over the years.

Finally, it was interesting to learn that Neal was actually an agent. Like Peter, she wasn't thrilled about the time wasted in search of an undercover agent, but she did like the perspective of knowing. With Peter aware of the situation he could better handle things with Neal and spend less time worrying about him getting into trouble.

Overall, it had been a good meal with new friends and a stronger relationship with an old one.

With the clutter put away and the food eaten, Elizabeth quietly gave Satchmo a pet before letting herself out the door. The men might be sleeping for the day, but she had work to get to.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you, everyone, for reading, reviewing, following my stories and me, choosing to favorite, and leaving kudos :D

As for the votes, we have two for "Affairs of the Heart" and another for "Persuassioned." Since this was a tie until a few hours ago, I have finished writing
another chapter for this collection (not the mini-series within) so I will be posting that next week. Then we will begin "Affairs of the Heart" per readers request :D
Why did Neal always have to put him through this?

It all started when the New York City FBI White Collar division had a case that crossed over into NSA territory. An agent was sent over to help collaborate and ensure everything processed smoothly.

You can imagine the team's surprise when another Neal walked off the elevator wearing a G-man suit, sidearm with a visible badge, and a serious expression. A mass double take before verifying Neal was also present was called for.

Rubbing his neck at the memory, Peter still remembered how often he'd glanced back and forth between the twins as he got the story of how Neal had run away so his older brother James Carson, or Junior as he often went by, had ended up in the army and eventually the NSA. The case went smoothly, but when it was over, Peter got a business card and instructions to call if needed. However, there was no qualification as to what required a call versus what didn't.

Standing by as a paramedic gave Neal a check over, Peter wondered if attacked while undercover and mildly injured qualified a call or not. He didn't want to rub the NSA the wrong way, but he also knew the man should know in case he wanted to visit.

As it was recommended for Neal to see a doctor, but Peter was reassured that nothing was too wrong with him, Peter found his out. Take the kid to the doctor and then have him call his brother on the way home. Easily said and done.

With shaking hands, Peter pulled out his phone and keyed a special speed dial. He always hated doing this, but sometimes it was necessary.

When the line was answered, he gave a short summary. "Someone has Neal. We have a ransom note saying the NSA Agent will be turned over in exchange for someone called, the mole? Any idea what we're up against?"

A terse growl, affirmative yes, and orders to stand down were all he received before the line went dead.

Unable to step back entirely, Peter worked with Hughes and his contacts to keep tabs on the operation. He trusted Junior to take care of his brother, but that didn't mean he didn't care for himself and could walk away... He did, and he couldn't.

It took forty-eight hours before the word came through. Neal was safe in a hospital while the perpetrators were all in custody.

Later, Peter learned that Neal had been rescued within twelve hours, but that wasn't released even in the NSA at large until the rest of the operation had been completed and an additional mole lured out.
Standing above the bed, Peter didn't like the bruises that covered Neal's body or the hoarse way his voice cracked from the treatment he'd endured. However, the peaceful ease that the brothers evoked when they were together and safe was something to look forward to.

"I'm glad you're going to be okay." Peter held Neal's hand for a moment in greeting before giving it a gentle squeeze and letting him lower his arm already fatigued by that small gesture.

Smiling softly, Neal swallowed before glancing over at his brother. "I have you and my brother to thank for it."

Looking over at the man who seemed to be constantly by Neal's side, Peter thought the agent would have more work to handle, but perhaps his agency had other people on that. "Your brother did all the work. I just made the phone call."

"Still, you also hounded the NSA through Hughes protecting me from the FBI side as best you could. Don't sell your actions short." Neal admonished as his eyes grew heavier.

Bidding farewell, Peter briefly chatted with Junior confirming that the paperwork was being handled by another while he was on guard duty to ensure no one else attacked Neal during his recovery. Leaving the hospital room, Peter knew he'd made the right call by bringing Junior in.

When the CIA sent a representative to help handle a case, the team teased Neal about his brother being sent. No one expected it to actually happen though!

Once again, the team watched as another Neal strode into the office wearing a G-man ensemble and all eyes turned to Neal.

Clearing his throat, Neal gestured to the man. "Meet my younger brother, agent Bryce Larkin."

"Seriously, identical triplets? You three aren't hiding another one, are you?" Peter seriously doubted it, what were the odds? But, as they always defied the norm anyway, it didn't hurt to ask.

Snorting, Bryce showed a more humorous side similar to Neal. "Not that we know of. Unless, if you counted aliases, then there's a lot more than one more." His smirk showed a mischievous side that had many putting hands over wallets and other defenses that were commonly taken when Neal had that look.

Frowning at his brother, Neal explained. "With both of my brothers being agents, aliases abound in my family."

"Not to mention your former profession." Jones slipped a fake cough and jab in as an aside but Neal ignored him.

"To warn you, Bryce is also the most mischievous and trouble-prone of us. I blame it on him being the youngest. Working for the CIA hasn't helped though." Neal described his brother while the man appeared to take it in stride as a general introduction like they'd done this before and it was expected.

Hughes broke up the conversation by calling everyone to order so they could proceed with business as there was a case to solve.

Walking up to the conference room with the two triplets, Peter asked Neal why all three used different last names.
"You remember what happened when I was confused for Junior?" Peter's shudder was answer enough. "Multiply the danger by three when you compile all of our enemies with some being worse than others.

Now does it make sense that we try not to make ourselves easily associated with the same faces and the same names?" Neal asked.

Paling, Peter clearly understood the reasoning. To distract himself, he asked, "Is there an importance to your first names?"

"They're real." Bryce shrugged as he pulled ahead to meet Hughes.

Pondering that, Peter had another question for Neal before they entered the conference room, "Why did you pick Caffrey?"

"Caffrey was the family name in a different generation." It was all Neal would say on the matter, but it was more than Peter had ever learned before.

Working together, the case went fairly smoothly, but when one of the perpetrators was stupid enough to point a gun at Neal, Bryce shot him through the hand forcing him to drop the gun.

Noticing how easily Neal handled the situation by only complaining about having someone else's blood on him, Peter wondered if the brothers really ran into trouble and got each other out often enough to be so used to it.

Considering how Bryce had handed Peter his business card with the directive to call if needed, Peter figured it was likely the brothers were used to protecting each other often enough to expect the necessity.

********

He had no idea who's enemy had interrupted their operation, but Peter didn't appreciate psychos locking themselves into a room with his consultant. Obviously, the original case had been a lure so Neal was the target, but was it for himself or was he being mistaken for one of the other triplets again?

Unable to tell for certain, Peter focused more on getting eyes into the room to gain more information. The challenge was that the room had been prepared for this so they weren't able to gain entry by a person or through their usual means of observation.

Calling the first number that came to mind, Peter asked Mozzie if he had some Russian surplus that could get around this guy's barriers. He was ready for the modern stuff, so maybe something unexpected would do the trick?

It wasn't long before the little guy showed up with a taxi full of supplies.

Going low tech, Mozzie set Peter up to look like a mole person who just happened upon the situation while exploring the tunnels of the city.

Coming up through the floor, Peter used the escape avenue to trap the man while Mozzie helped the agents breakthrough from the outside. Between them, Peter stopped the torture, the agents apprehended the perpetrator, and Mozzie helped Peter to untie Neal before they lowered him to the floor.

While an ambulance took Neal to the hospital, Peter followed with Mozzie in their separate
vehicles. Then upon arrival, they settled in to wait together for the verdict.

Neal was going to be okay, but he needed to remain under observation for a few days.

Resting in his room once Neal was settled, Peter leaned forward to cover his face with his hands. It had been a long day and he was tired.

Waking up later in the night, Peter realized he wasn't alone in his vigil. Two additional sets of feet were on the floor with his in the middle. They were standard government types, just like his. What made them more interesting was that they didn't belong to his team, and they were identical.

"Sorry, I forgot to call in the heat of things." He apologized to the brothers knowing they'd both be aware he'd woken up. "Neal' gonna be alright though, they're just keeping him for a few days to ensure no infection sets in."

"We know." The one to his right said. He had a tired but sterner tone so it was Junior which meant Bryce was on his left.

"Our sources filled us in on the way. It's always easier to let us know what's going on so we don't get as worried as we do when we're left in the dark." Bryce explained in greater detail.

"Head home, we've got him." Junior directed the tired agent to rest.

Leaving Neal in capable hands, Peter bid them goodnight and headed home.

Terrified, Peter realized he had no one to call. All three triplets were missing and no agency had a clue where they were.

The last word they had on any of them, the three were meeting for dinner. But, that was two days ago.

Since then, they never made the restaurant, Neal hadn't returned to the loft, his anklet was neither broadcasting his location nor had the alerts gone off to send the Marshals, and he hadn't shown up for work. None of the brothers were answering their phones or other contact methods, and no alerts had picked up sightings through any agency search.

Pacing the length of his office, Peter wondered yet again what he should or could be doing. He had nothing to work with and could only wait for something to happen...and pray it wasn't three identical bodies being found somewhere.

Hearing a disturbance below, he turned and watched as a short redheaded woman marched across the office floor, up the stairs, and opened his door. "Come, Agent Burke." Then without another word she turned and moved on to Hughes' office.

Curious, Peter figured it was gathering information if nothing else. Following the directive, he passed the guards who had taken their places to each side of the door before entering Hughes' office and joining the woman with his boss next door.

"Any news?" Peter was curious who this strange person was, but also afraid her presence didn't bode well for his friend and his brothers.

"Peter, this is Director General Diane Beckman. She commands both James and Bryce through their task force operations." Hughes carried the introductions one way as the general obviously
knew who Peter was.

Barely acknowledging Peter, the general jumped into the news she'd traveled there to share. "We're receiving signals indicating the triplets are in trouble and some of our agents have intercepted rumors that someone went after them in a bad way."

Trying not to let his nausea show, she was confirming some of Peter's worst fears. "Are they alive?" He needed to know before he could handle anything else.

"Not only are they alive, they seem to be fighting back as the rumors indicate problems carrying out some plan their attackers had attempted to accomplish." The general almost smirked, like she expected nothing less from her boys and their brother.

Slightly relieved, Peter could share her sentiment. Leave Neal to get kidnapped and become his abductors worst nightmare. If he couldn't be trouble, then he'd be annoying and distract them from his brothers' activities.

"Is there anything we can do to help?" Hughes barely beat Peter to the question.

"Our agencies need to team up if we're going to get all of our people back safely. I need a representative from your team who knows Caffrey to help us interpret if the signals are coming from him." The general gave the reason for her visit. "We aren't going to trust just anyone to this operation so I came personally to ensure this is handled with the utmost care."

Stepping forwards, Peter glanced at his boss for permission while simultaneously volunteering. "I have about the highest clearance on the team and as Neal's handler and friend I'm the closest to him."

"Peter is my best agent and the only one who's ever been able to keep up with Caffrey." Hughes voiced for him.

Accepting him to the team, Beckman stated that his connection to Neal had already gotten him thoroughly checked out by his brothers. "I trust my agents' judgments."

Completing the arrangements, Peter was soon directed to close his office down for the day and to pack any files he might need before he followed the general out with her guards closely in tow.

Riding in the car, Peter felt a little out of place. He had worked with the bosses in the FBI and other government officials, but there usually wasn't this much attention and security to contend with.

Reaching a government building, the car pulled into a garage and the entourage made their way into a conference room. It was arranged as a form of a war room with a screen up to show when an alert came through indicating the mysterious signals going off again. There was a large table strewn with computers and papers while a team of people buzzed about trying to learn something of the boys.

"This is Agent Burke, he's here representing the team with the FBI. Agent Burke, these are team Carmichael, our CIA and NSA task force." The general gave the barest introduction before commanding them to work together. Then she left to work from another conference room nearby where she could handle her part without being interrupted.

Left in a room of strangers, Peter had no idea what to do and wished he'd been allowed to bring his agents Jones and Berrigan along with him.
"I assume the screen is for the signals the triplets are putting out and you're trying to trace them when they do appear, and either predict or understand them in between?" Peter asked to clarify what was going on around him.

Grunting a sneer, the big guy wasn't impressed and turned to retrieve something from another room.

Standing up from behind his computer, a curly haired fellow reached his hand out to shake as he introduced himself. "I'm Charles Carmichael, but you can call me Chuck. That's exactly what we're doing. We were brought in to help look for three missing agents and have found the signals but we don't know much else." He then pointed out his wife, agent Sarah Walker Carmichael, their teammate Morgan, and the Colonel John Casey who had left the room.

"Three agents?" Did he say what he thought he'd said? Peter wondered if maybe Neal had more explaining to do than just what had happened to take him and his brothers off the grid.

"Yes, three, but we weren't given names. You mentioned triplets. Do you know who we're looking for?" Chuck questioned back as he paused in his work.

"A set of identical triplets. My consultant, Neal Caffrey, who will have some explaining to do if he's an agent, his eldest brother James Carson or Junior as he also goes by, and the youngest Bryce Larkin." Peter explained the basics but was surprised to see every head in the room jerk his way when he mentioned Bryce.

"Bryce, Bryce Larkin? Is he dark haired, blue eyed, and good with computers?" Chuck squeaked in uncertain surprise.

"That's him." Peter agreed while flipping a picture of three identical men out of his wallet for the man to see.

Taking the picture, Chuck leaned back as he fingered the image. "Bryce died right in front of me... They drug his corpse away. How?"

Gently taking his picture back after a few moments as Chuck lowered it, Peter knew this needed to be handled delicately. "Probably, his brothers came to the rescue. They frequently seem to be pulling each other out of some scrape or another. The only reasons I know about them are a few joint task force cases where Junior or Bryce was assigned to work with us. Otherwise, they don't tell anyone about each other and they use different names in an effort to avoid multiplying their enemies. Clearly, it doesn't always work."

Slowly, the group seemed to adjust and come to terms with the secret identities revealed and the reminiscence of what it meant to each of them.

Getting them back on target, Peter pointed at the screen. "Is that a signal?" There was a point blipping on the digital map while jibberish streamed across a box before repeating.

"Yep, they're reaching out to us again." Chuck started typing away on his computer as he started pulling details together. "This isn't Klingon, so it isn't likely to be Bryce. Either that, or he doesn't expect me to be on the receiving end." Burrying himself into the work, Chuck seemed to forget Peter's presence as he barked the occasional direction to his team.

Stepping up when everyone else was otherwise occupied, Peter played errand runner to Chuck and easily moved to help him with his work.

Glancing up once at the unfamiliar hand passing him papers, Chuck met Peter's glance and knew
the man was willing to do anything to bring his friend and his brothers home. Knowing they were equally invested, the two men settled in and worked together seamlessly.

"Eureka!" Chuck crowed as he cracked the code with Peter's help. "We found them!"

"It's Neal contacting us, he's using one of his codes from back when I was chasing him," Peter explained through his eagerness for action. With the code decrypted, they knew something of what was happening.

Following Chuck, as he raced for the general, the team went along to see what was happening.

Barging into the other conference room, Chuck ignored the decorum and formalities of approaching one in the general's position. Happily slapping the information down on the table, he beamed at her.

"Neal is the one sending the messages and Peter was able to break his code. They're contending with a common enemy, someone particularly after Junior and Bryce, but one who was aware of Neal's existence so they used their visit as an opportunity to capture all three. We are uncertain of their condition, but they are here." He pointed to their location before stepping back as the general began to mount a rescue operation.

Whirling through the motions, the team was easily distracted by the work which helped to alleviate their tensions as they worried about the triplets.

Moving into position next to Chuck, Peter was ready to go in for his friend and happily accompanied the other man into the facility.

Taking down the targets, the agents made their way through until they had cleared the building with no sign of the hostages.

"Where are they?!" Peter exclaimed in concern. They were here, they had to be.

"Did you miss us?" Neal stepped out from a hidden place before hauling his unconscious brothers out one by one.

Relieved, Peter moved to give him a firm hug while the others checked the remaining triplets over to ensure they would be alright.

Clapping Peter on the back tiredly, Neal smiled satisfactorily with a vicious gleam to his eyes. "I'm the one they call when my brothers are in trouble."

"I'm sure you are, Agent Brooks." Peter enjoyed the slight flash of surprise he saw cross Neal's eyes, but it was instantly replaced with a knowing expression.

Neal appreciated Peter being in on his secret."I should have known you'd figure it out eventually. You are the archeologist after all."

Keeping his arm across his friend's shoulders, Peter guided him along with the medical staff and team Carmichael as they escorted the injured to the hospital. Clearing the scene was left to the task force at large.

At the hospital, the brothers were placed in a room together with Junior and Bryce being kept for observation while Neal watched over their recovery.

When Bryce cracked his eyes open, he expected to see his brother and perhaps Neal's friends, but
he was surprised to see Chuck sitting patiently by his side. A glance around the room showed the team sitting about and Junior in his own bed sleeping across the way. In the remaining chairs, Neal lean with his head lolled against Peter's shoulder in slumber while Peter was leaning against Neal in return as he dozed so the friends were supporting each other in their rest.

Smiling softly, Bryce was glad to see Neal finally resting. His older brother had worked tirelessly to keep them alive and hidden after the initial beatings. It was challenging for him to move both brothers about to evade discovery within the large facility, hinder their foes in their plan, and send encrypted signals for help. Anyone who thought his brother was only the con artist he portrayed was a fool.

"Hey, how are you feeling?" Chuck's soft words drew his attention back to the man.

Observing his friend, Bryce hadn't seen his friend in some time, and then he had a similar expression of concern as he watched him die. "Better than last time" he croaked through the dryness.

Grabbing a bottle and giving Bryce the straw, Chuck helped him wet his mouth before resting his hand on his arm. "Anything is better than dying. We have a lot to talk about, but you need your rest. I'll be here when you're feeling better."

"Give them your cards, or I will." Peter lightly threatened from where he'd woken up.

Amused, Bryce knew Peter would make good on his threat. "I'm sure you would." He smiled softly as he drifted off to sleep again.

Remaining in his position knowing Neal needed the rest, Peter was loath to wake him or remove him from his brothers so soon after their captivity. "They both gave me cards to call when Neal gets into trouble. Sometimes it's more trouble determining if I should call or not."

Smiling, the rest of the room could easily understand that based on their knowledge of Bryce and accepted that they would soon face the same dilemma, to call or not to call, that was the question.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you, everyone for reading, reviewing/commenting, following, and leaving kudos :D
Next week we'll start Affairs of the Heart per readers' votes :D

End Notes

Thank you, everyone, for reading, choosing to favorite, following, commenting/reviewing, and leaving kudos :D
This chapter starts with 1A because it's the first chapter of a mini-series within this series. The only chapters I've completed for this collection thus far are all A through D of series 1. Down the road, there will be single stories or other mini-series divided by numbers and
letters to signify mini-series and order. (So any additions to this would be 1E while a new series would start with 2A. Otherwise, the stories will just be posted with their titles if they're one-shots.)

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!