Luctor Et Emergo

by cr8zymommy

Summary

I struggle and emerge-There's a secret in Spencer's past. A secret that no one on the team but Gideon knows. What's going to happen when Spencer's past comes back to haunt him? What is he going to do and how is he going to survive? When he's faced once again with the horror of his past, this time he's afraid he may not walk away. This time, his luck might finally have run out. AU past!
Dear Sparrow,

I like to believe that you would have been so proud of me the other day. Monday, I stood before a group of people and I was sworn in as an official agent of the FBI. I am now officially SA Dr. Spencer Reid of the BAU. Can you believe it? Who would’ve ever thought that I, little Spencer, would one day become a part of the FBI, let alone have the privilege to serve underneath one of the greatest minds in the BAU – Jason Gideon. As I wrote you before, this man has worked hard to help me get to where I am. Without him, I might still be wandering through college, adding yet another degree to my name but doing nothing with them. Now, I will do good with what I’ve learned.

The only damper to the day was my wish that you could have been here. It was too difficult for Mother to show and that I understand. I don’t condemn her for that. Where she is at is the best place for her and bringing her here would only have been an unneeded disruption to a routine that would only hurt her to deviate from. But as I looked out into the audience, I found myself wishing to see your face. To see that little smile of yours, or the way your eyes would be alight with pride. I know that, in spirit, you were with me. Yet I’m selfish enough to wish for more.

However, I am pragmatic enough to accept that which cannot be. You could not be here and that is the simple fact. So here I sit, writing this letter, telling you everything I wish you could have seen. You would have laughed at me when I walked up when my name was called. Would you believe I stumbled slightly over my own feet? Then again, maybe that’s not that surprising. I’m just lucky I didn’t manage to actually fall on my face.

After the ceremony, Gideon took me to his place for a celebratory dinner. We spent the night eating and talking and playing chess before he drove me back to my apartment. I’m glad that I made the decision to trust this man. You know how hard that was for me. Trust is an issue I struggle with daily. To join a team like this, where my life will occasionally be in the hands of others, is a big step for me. Gideon says I’m making great progress in my healing. Telling him the truth of my past, the unvarnished truth, was harder than I had thought it would be. It was strangely cathartic, however. So now there are two in the Bureau that know the truth – and both have agreed with me that it is my right to keep it that way. No one else need know.

I know you would shake your head at me over that if you were here. I don’t think that they need to know the truth. Who I was helped shape me into who I am, yes, but it does not define me. And when I tell people, when they find out, that is exactly what happens. The truth begins to define me in their minds so that they cannot look at me without seeing what they now know. Here in this job I start my adult life, my career, and I refuse to have it tainted by the past. I am who I have made myself, not who I was forced to be. I am what I have done, not what has been done to me.

Let me stop myself now. This letter was not meant to turn depressing. Let me draw us back to the topic at hand. Allow me to tell you about when I first met the other members of the team. I do believe I was not quite what they were expecting to gain to the team and my reputation was already preceding me. Youngest ever agent to be let into the FBI, with exceptions made to allow me in the field, barely able to make a shot, yet with one of the ‘brightest minds’—they label me this, I do not call myself that—to grace the Bureau. Quite an interesting way to start introductions, wouldn’t you say? Yet, I think there couldn’t have been a better way to be introduced. In a way, I sort of proved my worth. An initiation of sorts...

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Nerves ate away at Spencer’s insides. He really, really hated meeting new people. It was something he never did very well at. Yet it was something he was definitely going to have to get used to in this new job. But meeting these people was so much more important than meeting anyone else. These people were going to be working with him day in and day out. They were going to be a team and therefore, their opinions and reactions mattered so much more to Spencer than anyone else. Because of that, he couldn’t seem to hold still as he rode to the Bureau in the passenger’s seat of Jason Gideon’s car. The whole time he rode, he was clasping and unclasping his hands in his lap, a sort of nervous twitch.

“You know, it’s a normal sensation, to be afraid of meeting new people, most especially in a job setting.” Jason said conversationally. His voice was that steady, calm tone that he always seemed to maintain, no matter what topic they were discussing. “But you have to be careful not to let it deteriorate into a full social phobia.”

Spencer chewed on his lip and clasped his hands together in an effort to still them. “Anthropophobia, also known as social phobia or interpersonal relation phobia, is a pathological fear of people or human company.” He rattled off the facts as they jumped into his head, another habit of his when nervous. “I wouldn’t go so far as to classify my problems as a phobia. Though it is above and beyond the standard nerves one might experience in this situation, I do not believe my fears are quite unjustified.”

“I’d have to agree with you. It’s not quite a phobia. Not yet.” Turning the wheel, Jason pulled the car into a parking spot. He shut off the engine and turned his head to look at Spencer. “With awareness and willingness to work at it, I think that we can keep it from growing into a phobia. I simply wanted to make sure you were aware. I have every faith that this will go fine, Spencer. I brought you onto this team because I believe you’re going to be an asset to the team. Remember that, when you get nervous in there. All of this aside, I have faith in you.”

Strangely enough, that did help to settle the nerves in his stomach somewhat. There hadn’t been many times in his life that he could recall that someone had faith in him and actually sounded as if they meant it. “Thank you.”

The two were quiet when they made their way inside and as they rode the elevator up to the BAU. Spencer felt his nerves growing more and more the closer that they got. He reminded himself, over and over, that he was not alone here and things were going to be fine. Gideon is right here with you. He’s an intelligent man and a brilliant profiler. If he sees something in you that’s worthy of this job then obviously there is something there, whether you yourself see it or not. The rest of the team is going to realize that as well. This is going to be fine.

The bolstering words helped him carrying himself into the BAU and through the bullpen. Jason lifted a hand to indicate a conference room that sat above the bullpen. There was a group of people in there that appeared to be looking at something. “Everyone, I’d like you to meet Dr. Spencer Reid, our newest member.”

“Welcome to the team.” A woman said from nearby. She stuck her hand out in front of him; Spencer didn’t even see. He furrowed his brows as a pattern started to emerge in the numbers.
The room was watching him now as his focus was drawn to the set of numbers. “What are those?” Jason asked them, smothering a smile.

“We’re not entirely sure. There’s been a page with the numbers at each crime scene. So far, no one’s been able to make any sense of them.” Someone answered.

As he moved toward the board, Spencer spoke in an almost absent fashion. “There’s a pattern in the numbers.”

“A pattern?”

He didn’t even look to see who said that. He just nodded, walking right up to the board, looking from one sheet to the next. “Yes. A rather simplistic one, actually. The author used a substitution cipher.”

“And what’s a substitution cipher?” A man’s voice asked.

Spencer moved from one paper to the next, shifting himself so that he stood to better see. His eyes never moved from the pages as he answered. “In cryptography, a substitution cipher is a method of encryption by which units of plaintext are replaced with ciphertext, according to a regular system; the ‘units’ may be single letters, pairs of letters, triplets of letters. The receiver deciphers the text by performing an inverse substitution.”

This time he at least recognized the voice talking to him as belonging to Jason. “Can you decipher it, Spencer?”

He was already reaching for the pen and eraser at the bottom of the board. Without thought he erased the numbers people had written beside the printouts—their obvious attempt at figuring out what it was. Then he started to write. It only took him a moment to figure out the substitution that was used and then he was putting the translation on the board for them all to see. When he was done, he stepped back and looked it over one last time before nodding.

With the finish of his work, reality intruded once more for Spencer. He flushed slightly as he turned around and found everyone in the room staring at him. Jason was watching him with amusement while the others were watching him with various emotions playing over their faces. It was a pretty, blond-haired woman who broke the silence by smiling at him and saying “Welcome to the team, Dr. Reid.” She said in a teasing sort of way. “I’m JJ, the media liaison for the team. It’s a pleasure to have you here, Dr. Reid. I’ve heard great things about you already. It’s good to see they’re true.”

He made himself shake her hand, despite his discomfort at the gesture. The next person to move forward was a solidly built dark-skinned man who had a broad grin that almost instantly worked to set Spencer ease some. He shook his hand as well, telling him “I’m Morgan. Welcome aboard, kid.”

Kid? Spencer didn’t get a chance to comment on that before he was being introduced to the next person. This man was more serious looking and his handshake was firm. “I’m Aaron Hotchner. Welcome to the BAU. Hell of a way to start your first day but, as you see, we have a case.”

“So, our Unsub’s quoting poetry at us now?” Morgan asked with a gesture toward the board.

And just like that, Spencer found himself brought not only into the middle of the team, but into the middle of their work as well. Without any more qualms or fuss, he was brought to the table and started his job. Maybe it was that they were used to working with people they didn’t know, as they traveled to so many different places for their jobs. Or maybe it was just something about this group of people. But not a one of them made him feel like an outsider. They didn’t judge him, or try to profile
him too obviously. They took what he said at face value and attributed it the same respect they might have anyone else’s. Spencer found his nerves gone; forgotten, under the press of information and facts and statistics. At one point, as everyone sat and bounced ideas off one another, and someone brought coffee over to the table, setting cups in front of everyone, Spencer couldn’t help but smile to himself. It seemed like, for the first time, he’d found somewhere he fit in.

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…and just like that, they’ve brought me into their group. Can you believe it? Never have I been so easily accepted somewhere as I have been here. Oh, I don’t doubt that I have quite a ways to go before I prove myself to them. And the capability to work with one another is only one aspect of our job, albeit an important one. Trust will take time to build and I can both understand and respect that. I get the impression that it will be harder to earn with some than with others.

Aaron Hotchner—or Hotch, as I was told to call him—seems like a stern individual, yet he does know how to smile. He seems to be a natural at profiling, almost as if it has become second nature to him over the years. He’s got quite a reputation himself at the Bureau. I found him to be a little intimidating, yet friendly still.

Derek Morgan—talk about an interesting individual. Most definitely an alpha male and physical appearance suggests he was or is a jock of some sort. Honestly, he reminds of guys on the football team. Not a great thought to have, I know. However, he doesn’t act like them in any way. He’s friendly, good humored, pretty patient in explaining random things, and easy to get along with. He has this tendency to call me kid, more so now that he’s seen it fluster me. He likes to tease, I’ve noticed, with everyone. So the fact that he teases me indicates he’s willing to accept me into the team for the moment. I have a feeling he’ll work with me, but withhold full trust until I’ve proven myself to him. That’s fine. I really wouldn’t expect any less.

I’d continue on, but my eyes are starting to droop and I feel myself falling asleep as I sit here and write. Though this letter is shorter than most, I guarantee that the next will be longer.

Until next time, know that, as always, I love you and you are always in my thoughts.

Your brother,

Spencer
Chapter 2

My dear Sparrow,

I find myself having a hard time writing to you this time. My mind cannot seem to leave the case that the team just finished. Through this case, all I could think of was you. I think of you constantly; you are never far from my thoughts, and yet this was more. This time it was stronger, more insistent. The case is done and we are now flying home on the jet and all I can seem to do is think of you. Gideon seems to understand that without me even saying it and he's giving me the space I need to settle in and write this letter. I think telling you about this is the only way I'm going to be able to let it go.

We were working a kidnapping case. The girl's name was Trish Davenport. Her father, Evan Davenport, is a U.S. District Attorney, Executive Assistant in the Southern District of New York. He's a widower and a father of two, and, after multiple death threats in the past ten years, he has been assigned Marshals three times. His other child is named Cheryl.

It wasn’t the case itself that was so bad. In the end, we saved Trish. That’s the important part – we saved her. No, what got to me was one single element that was small and yet, to me, so huge.

Trish and Cheryl are twins.

I know that Gideon understood why I went so tense when I realized it. He understood instantly. What made this so hard was that, while he understood, the others did not. They didn’t even notice that I was reacting to it. If anything, they assumed I was reacting to the case itself, not to the fact that it happened to a set of twins. The fact that this man kidnapped one twin and tried to kidnap the other because he wanted the 'set'. That was when it really became hard for me. To hear that he wanted 'a matching pair'. I had to remove myself from the room at one point just to bring myself back under control. Morgan checked on me, citing a slight concern, but what could I tell him? None of them even know that I had a sibling, let alone a twin. To them, I’m Spencer Reid, an only child. Gideon’s the only one that knows I’m a twin. He’s the only one that knows about you.

Some days I manage to make it through okay. Some days, I think of you and I smile to myself. And others, I think of you and I feel that pain, that ache. Like an amputee that swears they can still feel their missing limb. I feel as if a part of me is missing. That a part of me died with you. Like I’m missing an arm, or a leg. Life goes on without it; you wake up each morning and you go about your day. There are times you don’t even think about it. At other times, it aches and you cannot help but notice the lack in you and long for what once was.

Every day, I miss you. Every day, I think of you. I will never stop missing you and I will never stop aching at the loss. A part of me will always be missing. Some days, it’s just more noticeable than others. Today is one of those days. I feel the ache as if it were fresh, like an open, bleeding wound. I feel as if I’m in the middle of a crowded room, screaming and bleeding, and there’s not a soul that can see me. They walk past me, footsteps marking in the blood, yet they notice nothing. They smile and laugh and go about their business, never seeing me there. I haven’t felt this way in years. I thought I was doing so well. I thought I was really starting to heal. Yet one case like this and it all comes back to the forefront and I wonder; will I ever heal? Will I ever again be whole? Or will there always be days like this that bring it all back to the forefront of my mind?

I don’t know the answers to these questions. And I hate not knowing.

There’s nothing more I can do or say to change this. All I can do is keep moving forward and hope that one day, maybe, things will start to make sense. That this wound will finally close over and build
enough scar tissue that maybe, just maybe, I will still throb but it will no longer bleed. That is all I can ever hope for.

For now, I bid you adieu, my sweet Sparrow. May your soul rest in peace in whatever afterlife exists and may you always know that I’m here, thinking of you.

Spencer

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A grunt and a sigh drew Spencer up from his writing. He looked up to see Morgan settling into the seat across from him, moving carefully. The Taser hit he’d taken was obviously bothering him; just as obvious, he was annoyed by it. Spencer knew better than to bring it up right now, though. Over the years, he’d become close enough with Morgan to know when to mention things and when to keep his mouth shut. At least, most of the time. He tried to respect his friend’s pride as best as possible. Right now, Morgan’s pride and ego were a little bruised. He’d take some time to process things inside of his head and he’d manage to move past it. Spencer curiously watched as Morgan adjusted before lifting his gaze up. The worry in that look told Spencer what was going on before Morgan even opened his mouth.

“Writing to your family?” Morgan asked him. The question was a conversation starter, Spencer knew. Still, he couldn’t stop himself from closing the little notebook at the same time as answering. “So to speak.” It was true, he was writing family, even if that family would never see it. He’d started these letters back in high school at his psychologist’s behest as a part of his therapy. It was a coping mechanism that had stuck with him since then. At first he’d written to her almost daily, telling her everything that he wasn’t able to tell anyone else. All the things that he couldn’t say to anyone. Then, as he hit college and started to get busy during his days, he wrote her every other day. By the time he joined the Bureau, it was usually once or twice a week. Since his start at the BAU, he had taken to writing her after every case, just to decompress from the case and vent his emotions.

Talented profiler that he was, Morgan sensed he’d touched a sensitive topic and discreetly backed off from it. Instead, he turned to the subject he obviously had come over here for. “Listen, kid, something’s been bothering you this whole case. Talk to me. What’s going on in that genius brain of yours?” Concern lit his voice and his gaze locked on Spencer, strong and steady, showing that he wasn’t asking because he had to. He was asking because he honestly cared about the answer. It was something Spencer still hadn’t managed to get used to.

Habit formed Spencer’s response without any thought to it at all. “I’m fine.” The words he’d said so many times, a lie he’d told more times than he could count, rolled instinctively off his tongue. He softened his statement with a shy smile. “I’ve just had some things on my mind, that’s all. It’s nothing to worry about.”

That was the crux of it, too. He knew that Morgan was worried about him. Even after being with the BAU for a while now, he still couldn’t seem to process that little fact. The people on this team had become his friends, good friends, and when something was wrong, they worried about him. For a kid who was used to taking care of himself, to being the one that worried for people instead of being the one worried over, the whole concept was foreign to him. Pleasant, but foreign.

Morgan stared at him for a long moment as if debating what to say or do. Finally he sighed once more and sat back in his seat. “All right, Reid.” He held up a finger and pointed it had him, giving Spencer a serious look. “But if you need to talk, you know where to find me. I’m always here to listen, man.”

Smiling, Spencer nodded. “I know. Thanks, Morgan.”
“That’s what friends are for.”

That statement stayed with Spencer through the rest of the flight and as Jason gave him a ride home. His mentor stayed quiet most of the drive, allowing Spencer solitude to sort his thoughts in. They had built a strong enough friendship that they were perfectly comfortable around one another with or without conversation. Halfway home, though, Spencer spoke, his eyes staying trained out the window. He needed to voice his thoughts out loud, but he didn’t think he could look at Jason as he did. Some things were easier said when you didn’t have to look at the person. “Sometimes it still stuns me, these friendships I’ve built here. I’m not quite sure how to act in them or how to react to the things they do.” Unable to resist, he peeked at his friend from the corner of his eye.

Jason nodded as if what Spencer said made total sense. “You’re more accustomed to one sided friendships. The type where you’re the one doing all the caring. It must be difficult to get used to knowing that we, the entire team, care about you and what you feel. I take it that Morgan stunned you when he finally spoke to you.”

“I can understand that Morgan noticed something was wrong with me during this case. He is a profiler.” Shrugging, Spencer looked down at his lap, his hands moving nervously. “But he…he actually cared about what was wrong. Not because I was disturbing the case, or because he wanted something from me, or any of the reasons I’m used to people having when they ask me if I’m okay. I think he genuinely was worried and wanted to make sure that I’d be all right.”

Quiet filled the car for the next few blocks while each man gathered their thoughts. Jason stopped at a light before taking the turn that brought him to Spencer’s street. “When you first explained your past to me, I understood your reasons for keeping it quiet.” The older man finally said carefully. “I still respect your choice. But have you ever thought of telling them? Any of them? I think they might pleasantly surprise you with their reactions.”

Horror widened Spencer’s eyes. “They don’t need to know.” he said quickly. Just the idea of it put that sick feeling low down in his stomach. “I’m not that person and I refuse to be defined by him. I’m building a life for myself here, with people and friends that like and respect me for who I am without it being tainted by who I was. If they knew the things I did, the things I let be done, you know it would change how they look at me. It always does.”

“The people you’ve told before weren’t FBI agents and profilers.” Jason pointed out calmly. He pulled the car into the parking lot outside of Spencer’s building. “We’ve all seen some of the worst of the worst. If there’s any group of people that would have the best chance of understanding, it would be the team. They won’t judge you for this, Spencer. They won’t blame you.”

“People always say that,” Spencer whispered. Pain echoed through every word. “Yet rarely ever does it prove to be true.”

Putting the car into park, Jason let it idle while he turned in his seat, one hand coming out to rest carefully on Spencer’s shoulder. “I’m not saying you have to tell them, Spencer. I was only suggesting that you think about it. Your story is yours to tell. Just know that, no matter what, I’ll be here to support you. You’re not alone in this.”

Spencer clung to those words like a lifeline. Closing his eyes, he drew strength from the man beside him, in his supportive presence. Yet, at the same time, he couldn’t help the small thought that drifted through his mind. You are alone in this. You’ll always be alone. Always. Deep down inside, he was afraid that the little thought was right.
Sparrow,

I don’t even know how to begin this letter. My thoughts are so jumbled, so mixed up, I have no idea how to make them straight once more. How do I put into words the emotions of the last few days? How can I even begin to describe what’s happened? I don’t know what to do, Sparrow. I don’t know what to say. Hell, I don’t know what to BE right now. Things I thought I knew have changed until they’re something else entirely and it’s left me sort of floating, drifting, wondering which way to go and what to do.

Is this what other people felt when I told them of my own past? Did they feel this lost sensation? This feeling of helplessness? Did they feel this ache deep down inside? There’s so much I want to say and yet I know that words are useless. They’re meaningless in situations like this. I realize I’m not making sense right now. I’ve ranted but I haven’t even stated what it is I’m ranting about. Part of me doesn’t want to write it. Part of me doesn’t want to do anything that makes me associate a person I so admire and respect with something so horrific. Yet my denial doesn’t change the fact. It doesn’t take away the things that Carl Buford did to a young Derek Morgan.

I am not typically a violent person. When in a situation, I am the type to look for a way out that has minimal damage. I’m more likely to talk my way out of something than attempt to fight my way out. I do not condone acts of violence except as a last resort. That said, I could easily walk into that police station and put a bullet directly between the bastard’s eyes. I could press that gun right against Carl Buford’s forehead and watch the fear build in his eyes as I start to pull that trigger.

Men like him sicken me. To take advantage of a child that way is one of the sickest crimes out there. To manipulate a kid who had lost his father and was desperate for some sort of father-figure—to take that and turn it into something sick and perverse and to leave the child feeling that this was the only way to bring himself up out of the gutter, it makes me sick. The bastard did this to other children as well. And he held no qualms about murder. He murdered a child because he knew that child would get his current victim to talk – and then he framed Morgan for it all. You know, if it wasn’t for that, we never would have found out the truth. Morgan’s secret would have remained his secret. Now – now it’s out for the whole team to know. His most private moment right there in the open. I don’t know how he can handle it. He is one of the strongest people I know. This, it doesn’t change that opinion for me. If anything, it affirms my opinion.

I couldn’t help but watch him as we prepare to leave. The team is going back without him. There are things he says he needs to do before he can come home, so Hotch is giving him a couple personal days to allow him to do what he needs to. I think Hotch is hurting over this whole thing. He never wanted to cause Morgan pain and he didn’t want to delve into his past this way. Yet the damage is done and he knows he can’t take it back. Though others may not see it, Hotch cares deeply for his team and he isn’t the emotionless robot some accuse him of being. Sometimes I think the man feels things even more deeply than the rest of us. The guilt over this is something that will sit with him for a while, I would bet.

How can I help him, Sparrow? What can I do? Nothing I say is going to make this better. Nothing I do will change the facts. I wish that you were here. You’d know what to say to him. You always knew how to talk to people and how to make them feel better about themselves. You were social enough for the both of us.

What can I do? Nothing seems right and yet, I can’t not try. You always told me I thought too hard about emotional things. That I needed to just ‘feel it’. I guess that’s all I can do now. Try to speak to
him and just, go with my heart. I have to help him somehow, Sparrow. I can’t let him hurt and not say something. Let me finish this letter when I get back. We’re leaving shortly and I want to do this before we leave. If I wait until he comes back to Virginia, I doubt I’ll ever say anything.

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The team had been finishing things inside of the station while Spencer was writing his letter. He’d had enough of being inside and had gone out to sit inside one of the SUV’s for a little peace and quiet and to wait. When he put his notebook in his bag and looked up, preparing to go and find Morgan, he was surprised to see that his friend was already outside. He was also alone. Before he could lose his courage and miss out on this opportunity, Spencer pushed the car door open and turned himself so that he sat on the edge of the seat, smiling at his friend when Morgan turned toward the sound. It only took a moment for Morgan to start walking toward him. The older man pasted on a fake smile. “Hey, kid. I thought everyone was inside.”

“I needed some air.” Spencer said with a shrug. Inside, he was cursing himself. He had no idea what to say here! Social situations were not something he was comfortable in or that he did well at. What the hell was he thinking? It’s not a typical social situation he reminded himself. This is Morgan and that makes it different. He’s a colleague. A friend. You can do this. Just say something to him, you idiot, before someone comes outside and your moment is lost. Just say something! He remembered words Morgan had once said to him and a little, shy smile curved his lips. He looked over at Morgan before looking off into the distance. “You know, if you ever need to talk, you know where to find me. I’m always here to listen.”

Out of the corner of his eye he saw the small smile that Morgan gave at hearing his own words given back to him. After a second, the smile wiped away. He gave a quiet little sigh that sounded so...tired. “It’s not exactly something I like to talk about, Reid. No offense or nothing, kid.” Underneath that, Spencer could easily hear the unspoken message. The tone to Morgan’s words that said ‘you wouldn’t understand anyways’.

That sick feeling in Spencer’s stomach grew for a moment before he pushed it back down. Memories swam to the surface, forcing him to open his eyes wide for fear that, if he closed them, he would see things he never wanted to see again. Things that still haunted his nightmares. Without thinking about what he was saying or the consequences of his words, Spencer started to talk. He didn’t overthink it; he simply let himself do what felt right in that moment. “All the cases we work, the things that we see, well...they give knowledge but they don’t really breed understanding. No one can truly understand until they’re faced with that choice or situation. Even a group of profilers can’t truly understand, though they do better than most. Still, they don’t know that feeling.”

Eyes dropping to his lap, Spencer deliberately avoided looking at Morgan though he could feel the man’s stare. He just let himself talk, not knowing what possessed him to say what he was saying and yet unable to deny the rightness of it. “They don’t understand about that feeling low down in your stomach that you get sometimes when you look in a mirror and see your reflection staring back at you. That quiver that still happens sometimes when you’re tired and your defenses are low and someone touches you unexpectedly. No one can understand those feelings, those sensations, until they’ve been there. Knowledge is one thing. Understanding is something else entirely.”

The doors to the station opened and the other profilers came out, making their way across the seat to where the two were at. Spencer dared to lift his gaze and look at a man he considered his best friend. He saw shock on Morgan’s face and knew that, despite having not come right out and said it, Morgan had understood the meaning behind his words. Just before the others got close, Spencer smiled a little and gave Morgan one last thing to think on. “There’s a saying that’s always helped me through my days. It’s something I remind myself of occasionally. ‘I am who I have made myself,
not who I was forced to be. I am what I have done, not what has been done to me.” For this, Spencer did something that was extremely difficult for him. He knew Morgan would recognize how hard it was and would understand that it made his words that much more important. Spencer looked right into Morgan’s eyes as he told him “Those things aren’t who you are. They might have been who you were, but they’re not who you are. Not anymore. You’re SSA Derek Morgan, a talented profiler on what’s considered the elite team in the BAU. You’re a kind, funny, all around good person and you are a caring and compassionate friend. And those are things he can never take from you.”

With the others so close, neither could really say much more. They both recognized that this was a conversation that needed to stay private. This wasn’t for everyone else to hear. Gratitude lit Morgan’s eyes and he quietly told his friend. “Thanks, Reid.”

With a smile, Spencer gave Morgan back words he’d said to Spencer many times. “That’s what friends are for.”

Moments later Spencer was buckled in to his seat, the SUV heading down the road, and his notebook back in his lap. He was smiling slightly as he went back to his letter.

CMCM

You would be so proud right in this moment. I can see your face in my mind, smiling so proudly at me. I did as you always told me to do. I stopped overthinking and I simply let myself feel. The words seemed to just flow from there. I don’t know if it really helped him in any way, to hear what I had to say. But I can hope. I hope that, just maybe, he feels a slight ease in his burden. Sometimes knowing that you’re not alone is enough to take away some of that tension.

I know that I didn’t actually come right out and say the words to him. I have a hard time even writing them sometimes. But there’s no doubt that Morgan understood me. The look on his face was testament to that. Amazing, that the idea of even writing the words here, to you, seems so hard. It’s ridiculous. Of all people, you are the one I should be able to say this to. Yet here I sit, writing all around the actual words, hinting at them and suggesting without ever saying it outright.

I was sexually assaulted as a child.

There. There it is, in plain English. No fancy words, no qualifiers, nothing like that. Just simple, blunt words for something that was so much more than what it seems. They give the generalization of what happened but give no hint to the true horror. They say nothing of how young I was when it started, or the years that it lasted, or even who did it. To tell that, I would have to tell so much more and that’s just not something I’m ready to do.

This was not about me, however. This was about a friend of mine who is very dear to me. I hope that the wounded part of him starts to heal now. I hope that, inside, he finds some form of peace. Maybe knowing that the man is now in jail, he will find himself some closure. I sincerely hope so.

I think I’ll close this letter on that positive note. We’re almost to the jet now. As ever and always, you have my love.

Your brother,

Spencer
Chapter 4

The jet was eerily quiet. Not because anyone was sleeping or working. No, Spencer knew what all of them were doing. He swore he could feel their eyes on him. They were watching him, waiting to see what he would do, how he would react. Whether he would shatter right there in front of them. They watched because they couldn’t help the fear that, if they looked away, he might vanish on them once more. The only thing that kept JJ from being glued to his side was that Jason had made her sit somewhere else. The senior profiler had made everyone sit somewhere else, actually. When it became obvious that Spencer wanted to speak to no one, he had made sure the young genius had one end of the jet all to himself where he could prop his aching foot up, lean his head back, close his eyes and try, just for a moment, to forget the horror.

Two days, he’d been held. Had it only been two days?

Two days to take the hard outer shell he’d worked so hard to build and send it all crashing down.

Two days in which he relieved the most traumatic experiences of his life.

Two days in which he’d been forced, yet again, to watch people die.

Now he was on his way home once more. Tired, sore, wounded in body and spirit, but alive. Once more, he had survived a situation most would not have walked away from. He had survived where others had not. They had died, families had died, Tobias had died, and yet Spencer walked away from it all. Somehow, it seemed wrong. Unfair, in a sense. What did he have that these others didn’t? What was it about him that put him, over and over, into these kinds of situations and that allowed him to always be the one to walk away? Sometimes he felt as if he were simply living on borrowed time.

The sound of something being set on the table brought Spencer out of his thoughts. He looked down, seeing the familiar notebook lying in front of him, and then up to Jason’s face. The man stood beside his set of seats with a look of compassion on his face. He leaned forward enough to set a pen down beside the notebook. Then, without a word, he walked away.

It took a long time for Spencer to do anything but stare at the notebook. He stopped paying attention to anything else around him and focused solely on that notebook. When he finally reached for the pen, he didn’t even notice the eyes that watched him. His hand shook when he picked the pen up and as he opened the notebook. He flipped the pages until he got to the end of his last letter and to the start of a fresh page. Closing his eyes, he took a deep breath. Then he opened them once more and wrote what was in his heart. There was no form to his letter. It couldn’t even be considered an actual letter. It was more a stream of consciousness; his heart in that moment, ripped out and laid bare on the page.

I can’t do this. I can’t think I can’t breathe I can’t feel I can’t do this. I don’t want to do this. I can’t be this person again. I can’t be strong again and I don’t want to be strong again. I want to be free. I want to wake up and finally be free and not have to hurt or feel or think or anything. I want to be free. I want to be free. I want to be free. I’m so tired of hurting, Sparrow. I’m so tired of it and I just don’t want to hurt anymore. I wish he had succeeded out there. I wish he had killed me and then I wouldn’t have to hurt this way anymore I wouldn’t have to feel to be to hurt to ache. I wouldn’t have to die a little more inside until there seems to be nothing left to me but the pain others inflict and I feel as if I’m turning into everything everyone has ever made me into. Who am I anymore? Who am I?
Weeks had gone by. Weeks and weeks since his kidnapping. Weeks since the trauma in Georgia. Weeks that he’d drowned in the bottom of a vial, the tip of a needle. In sweet, sweet oblivion. He couldn’t even accurately say how long it had been. Two weeks? Four? Six? Who knew? Who cared.

His injuries were healed, at least on his body. On the outside he was considered whole and fully capable of work. The psychological exam the Bureau had required him to take had come back clean—he was cleared to work. He’d gone to work, even, barely even making an effort to cover up his disinterest in what he was doing. The first case back had been hard, sure. It had ripped at his insides to see the crime scene photos. Enough so that Morgan had even noticed and called him out on it. Spencer had given him some speech about knowing how they feel. He couldn’t tell him the truth.

Spencer didn’t even know if he knew what that truth was anymore. He felt as if he were drifting, just floating from one place to the next without any real substance or purpose. The only constant in his life was the pain. Pain that only seemed to be drowned underneath the calming effect of the Dilaudid in his system. In that high he found the one thing he craved. He was free.

No pain, no memories, no heartache, no flashbacks. Just, free.

Everyone was starting to notice the differences in him. He could see it on their faces. See it in the way they looked at him or the things they said to him. The worst part was, he could see it too. He wasn’t blind to how he was acting. He just didn’t know if he had the strength to change it. How many times now had he hit rock bottom in life and crawled back up to his feet? How many times was he going to be expected to do it? How many times before it was just too much?

But he couldn’t keep going on like this. He knew that. There was no way he could keep going on this way. Not only was he hurting himself, but he was hurting other people. People that he cared about. That mattered to him. And that was something that was almost unbearable. That had him hating himself even more than he already was, which resulted in more self destructive behavior, which in turn hurt those around him again, creating a cycle he couldn’t seem to break.

How long could he go on like this before one time became one too many? How long before he gave in to that little voice in the back of his mind that told him if he just did a little more, just a little bit more, he’d drift off into a peaceful sleep from which he’d never wake. Pain would be gone. Fear would be gone. There would be nothing but that peaceful high and then he would simply…drift away. Then he would never again have to deal with the pain of the memories or the flashbacks or anything else life felt to throw at him. And maybe, if there really was some kind of afterlife, he might find his sweet sister, his Sparrow.

It scared him how often that ‘little thought’ seemed to come up anymore. And it scared him even more how appealing it was beginning to sound.

Standing in the bathroom of his apartment, Spencer stared at his reflection as he made one of the most important phone calls he’d ever had to make since he’d joined the BAU. He couldn’t back out from this now. This had to be done. This had to change. He stared at his image in the mirror and knew he was doing the right thing. So why was his brain telling him to throw the phone down and stop?

“Agent Hotchner.”
The voice on the phone drew him back to the present moment. Spencer cleared his throat, needing his voice to work right, hoping he could do this. “Hotch? It…it’s Reid.”

“Is everything ok, Reid? You don’t sound well.”

The concern of his boss was almost smothering. How many times lately had someone asked him if he was ok? If everything was all right? Part of him wanted to scream at the world. No, no! It wasn’t all right! He was NOT ok! But he couldn’t do that. Licking his dry lips, he tried to keep calm. “I uh, some personal things have come up. Things I need to…to take care of. I need to take some time off. I’ve accumulated plenty of vacation days as well as PTO, so it shouldn’t be a problem, but I understand if there’s a case or something that needs worked on…”

“Reid, Reid!” Aaron cut in. “Relax. You’re right; you have plenty of vacation days to take. How long do you need?”

“A week.” By his understanding, he should be ok by then. Just a week. So short, and yet so long. It seemed like eternity.

“All right, I’ll process the paperwork for you. Consider it effective immediately. Is there anything that I can do for you as a friend, not as your boss? Is there anything you need?”

Oh, how good it would be to have a friend. To have someone here to go through this with him. But Spencer knew he had to do this alone. He couldn’t have someone here, watching him be this way. Watching him hit rock bottom. None of them even openly admitted that they knew what he was doing. And it was too ingrained in him to do things on his own—to not let someone see him when he was so weak. “No, Sir. But thank you. I just, I need some time to take care of something important. If an emergency comes up and you need me, you can find me at my apartment.” There, that was the best he could do. He knew that Aaron knew about his problem, though they’d never discussed it. This was his way of telling his boss what he was doing.

There was a pregnant pause before Aaron spoke again, his voice softer. Supportive. “Take all the time you need.”

“Thank you, Sir.”

“And, Reid? I’m proud of you.” The phone clicked in his ear.

Letting the phone drop, Spencer gripped his hands to the edge of the sink and tried to calm his stomach. He could do this. He could do this!

Spencer knew this was going to be one of the hardest things he’d ever done. Admitting to himself that he was an addict had been the first hard step. He, Spencer Reid, was addicted to Dilaudid. It had been eight hours since he’d last shot up and that had even been a small dose, just barely a quarter of what he usually did. You’ve gone eight hours already and you know it’s going to get worse before it gets better. A sudden discontinued supply of opiates will often cause unbearable withdrawal symptoms including irritability, profuse sweating, abdominal cramping and diarrhea. Pleasant.

No, he didn’t need to think about that right now. If he thought like that, then it was going to be as simple as could be for him to slip. How many times had he already tried to wean himself off of this? Smaller doses, he’d tell himself. A gradual take down until it ended up being no longer needed. Then something would happen, a case would go wrong, a nightmare would wake him up and leave him gasping, hell—he’d see someone in the street that reminded him of Sparrow, and suddenly he’d be right back where he started.
Right now, the best thing he could do would be to go lie down. To try and get as much sleep as possible. Already his hands were starting to shake just a little bit; sweat was beading his brow. If he could just sleep through some of this, it would make it so much easier on him.

With that in mind, he forced himself out of the bathroom and to his bedroom. There he climbed into the middle of his bed, still wearing just his boxers, the same thing he’d been wearing when he’d climbed into bed last night. His eyes drifted to the clock, reading the time. Seven a.m. His last dose had been at eleven o’clock at night to help him sleep. You’ve made it through the first night. Max, this should take a week, based on your health and the amount you took on a regular basis. You’ve already made it eight hours—only one hundred and sixty more to go.

Somehow, that thought wasn’t comforting.

CMCM

Dear Sparrow,

Today I go back to work. I was up early this morning, unable to sleep in. Instead of staring at my clock, I decided to get up, make myself some coffee, and write to you. I haven’t written to you since that painful paragraph on the way home from Georgia. I can’t believe that it’s been so long. Not once since I started this writing in therapy have I gone that long without writing you a letter. I honestly believe that, if I had simply given in and made myself write to you about what happened, I might have healed earlier. Yet maybe there was a reason why I went through what I have. Why I went this route and ended up where I am now.

I’ve messed up, Sparrow. I’ve messed up badly and I’ve hurt people. People that I care about. People who have been nothing but kind and supportive to me. I’m ashamed to go to work today and face them after everything I’ve done. I don’t want to look them in the eye and see the hurt and distrust there—emotions I have earned with my behavior. I’ve been a horrible friend and a pathetic coworker lately. I’ve messed up so much.

But I’m going to fix this. No matter what it takes, I will fix things with them. I have to. They did nothing to me to deserve what I’ve put them through and they’ve all stood by me the entire time. I can’t believe that they’re still here, Sparrow. Despite what I’ve done, they still seem to care about me. It baffles me and yet, it lifts up my heart. I think that the knowledge of their caring and support is what gave me the strength to get clean. To stay home this week and detox my body from the poison I put inside of it. There were so many times this week I was tempted to go out and score. Anything, to take away the pain. Not just the physical but the mental as well. All pain. Any pain. My mind, my heart, my body, they all hurt.

I made it, though. Somehow I made it and here I sit, one week clean. One week on the dot, actually, as it just hit four a.m. I’ve made it through the worst part. Now, to stick with it.

If I want this to last, if I really want to start to heal, I know I need to do the one thing I haven’t been able to do so far. I need to talk about what happened. But I can’t talk to anyone about it without revealing things about my past that I just can’t reveal. Gideon would be able to listen, yet I can’t bring myself to tell my mentor all the ways that I messed up. He’s already called me on it, on the case in New Orleans. Oh, not out right. Still, it was enough to let me know that he knew what was going on. And that, there, was where I made my biggest decision.

I’m jumping ahead in my story. Let me start from the beginning.

When the team was on a case in Georgia, JJ and I went to speak with a man by the name of Tobias about a police report he’d made...
Sparrow,

It’s been a few days since I’ve written to you, I know. Things have been happening around here and I’m just not sure how to put it down into words. I’ve been trying to find a way to deal with things without coming off as, well, selfish. Right now things aren’t about me. They’re about Gideon. I wrote to you about Frank and I wrote to you about what he did to Gideon and I already told you about Gideon’s first case back. Things aren’t any better, Sparrow. They aren’t. If anything, they’re worse.

Gideon’s gone. There’s no way to beat around the bush with this. On our last case he didn’t show up and I worried about him. At the time, it was made worse by the fact that we almost lost Emily and Hotch too. We almost lost most of our team in one fell swoop. Add on that Strauss came with us on that case and, well, it was basically one big conglomeration of nerves that made it hard for me to focus. But I did. I focused and we got the case solved and, toward the end, Hotch and Emily both showed up and they’re here with us now. They’re staying. But Gideon never showed. So, after the case, I went to his cabin and I found a letter. A letter. It doesn’t seem like enough.

I’ve been so angry ever since then. Maybe that’s why I couldn’t write to you. I was just so angry and I can’t bring myself to be too angry to you. I needed to work through some of it on my own before my feelings even made enough sense to try and write out and work out with you. Still, it doesn’t feel all the way together, but it does feel better.

Actually, I have my friends to thank for that…

CMCM

Spencer sat at the back of the jet, staring out the window at the clouds. His mind was running on a loop, thinking of everything that had happened recently. Thinking of the letter that was sitting in his pocket; that he’d kept close on his person ever since he’d got it. When he’d talked with Emily, she had told him to think about it, about why Gideon chose to leave a letter to him and no one else. Why he’d only felt the need to explain himself to one person. Since then, he’d been thinking about it constantly in the back of his mind.

Without realizing it, he had his hand on the table, fiddling with an object. He didn’t even notice until people sat down with him and Emily’s voice was asking “What’s that?”

Spencer startled, eyes shooting up to see Morgan and Emily across from him. When had they joined him? Wow, he must’ve really been out of it if he hadn’t even noticed them coming up to him or sitting down. He looked down at where his hand was resting on the table and remembered Emily’s question. Oh. For a second he debated saying nothing; if he didn’t want to answer, he didn’t have to. They wouldn’t push him. Yet that just seemed silly. He turned his hand and opened it, letting them see the coin that sat there. “It’s a medal for St. Michael, the archangel.”

Surprise was written on both Emily and Morgan’s faces. “I didn’t peg you for the religious type, kid.” Morgan said, eyeing him over the table.

“I’m not.” Smiling a little, Spencer looked at the coin, moving it between two fingers to better look at it. His voice went soft with memory as he spoke. “When I was a kid, someone very special gave this to me. I’ve carried it with me everywhere since then.” He curled his fingers in and tucked it back in his palm, just holding it there. Sometimes that was all it took to ease his tension a little. Just holding
this little thing that had become almost a talisman for him.

Morgan and Emily both must have been able to see that the topic was closed for him. They didn’t even try to press it. They just looked at each other before Emily pulled out a deck of cards and leaned her arms onto the table. “So, how about a friendly game, Reid? Give us lesser folks a chance to earn some of our money back from you.”

It took a second but Spencer smiled at them. He pocketed his coin and nodded at them. “Sounds like fun to me.”

“Don’t know why we keep trying.” Morgan teased. “Sometimes I think the only reason we ever win is that you let us.”

Innocence was bright on Spencer’s face and in his suddenly wide eyes. “I have no idea what you’re talking about, Morgan.” Abruptly it melted away to a sly little smile that made his friends laugh. “And if I did, would I ever admit it to you? That would definitely ruin my plan.”

Their laughter echoed around the jet. Settling back in his seat, Spencer suddenly felt just a little bit better.

CMCM

I’m not used to this sensation. Even after all these years, I’m still not used to being able to so wholeheartedly rely on anyone else but myself. And this thing with Gideon, it was like a slap in the face, another reminder that people always leave. I’m ashamed to admit that I almost hid out in my apartment after this. Then I almost did something else stupid. I almost went and got high. It would have been so easy to do. It would have been absurdly easy to find my old dealer and buy myself some and just lose myself for a while. I could escape the pain that I feel at being abandoned once more. I could escape from everything.

But I couldn’t do it. There were quite a few reasons why and honestly, some of them surprised me when I sat and thought about it. The main reason didn’t surprise me: I couldn’t do something like that and disappoint you again. If there’s a heaven or afterlife and somehow you’re watching over me—and I like to think that you are—then I don’t want to disappoint you.

I also don’t want to disappoint the team. They don’t deserve that. They don’t deserve to have to deal with me like that again and they don’t deserve to have the trust they’ve put in me be betrayed. None of them deserve that. They’re such good people, Sparrow. I won’t let them down again.

But, at the same time, a small part of me doesn’t want to disappoint myself either. I’ve worked hard to be clean. I’ve worked very hard to keep myself clean and to not let this drag me down and ruin my life. I worked hard to survive once more. If they didn’t destroy me than I definitely am not going to let this break me. I will make it and I will beat this. I can do it.

For the first time, I’m not just fighting for you or for anyone else. I’m fighting for me, too. And it feels damn good, Sparrow.
Chapter 6

Never once had Spencer thought that something like this would happen. He hadn’t even considered it a possibility. The man was retired! Yet, the rumors were spreading like wildfire. David Rossi was returning to the BAU. Not just the BAU, but he was joining this team in Jason’s place.

When Spencer heard that from some passing agents, he almost fell over out of his chair. David Rossi? Here? Working with him? When no one was looking, Spencer made a mad dash to the bathroom to empty his stomach. He almost had to go home sick that day. It took almost ten minutes before he could get himself under control once more and head back out to the bullpen. Somehow, he managed to make it through that day without raising too much suspicion. It was ridiculously easy to let his friends assume that he just wasn’t feeling well.

The next day when he came in for work, he was calm, amused, in control of himself. He had a Halloween mask on and had a good laugh with his friends, even scaring Morgan with his mask. Then…then he looked up and saw Dave and Erin walking up to Aaron’s office and, though he’d appeared calm on the outside, his insides were trembling. The sound of Dave’s voice floated out of Aaron’s open door and Spencer couldn’t stop it. The flashback hit him with the force of a fist to the gut, taking all his air away.

Too much light, too much noise, too much everything. There were so many people rushing about everywhere. So many voices talking all at the same time and the things beside him were beeping and he couldn’t concentrate, couldn’t breathe, couldn’t think. His small body curled into a ball to try and shelter him from all the light and noise and chaos. And then, out of nowhere, blessed relief came. The lights were shut off and the blinds open so that the room was lit only by the faint light of the evening sun. The drone of voices faded away until the only sound heard was the beeping of the machines and the soft sound of someone’s breath. Light footsteps came close to the bed, stopping right beside it. Then there was the sound of material rustling as the person moved. When he opened his eyes, the first thing he saw was a pair of the kindest eyes he’d ever looked into. And for the first time in his life, he found himself able to look into the eyes of another without fear or pain or nausea. “Hello.” The man spoke in a quiet, gentle voice. “I’m David Rossi.”

“Here they come.” Emily’s voice sounded like it was coming from down a tunnel, but Spencer heard it and he used it like a lifeline, yanking himself back to the present moment. He tightened his hands in the mask he held and rose to his feet just like everyone else. Just play calm. Play it like you don’t know him. He’s not going to recognize you. You were a kid back then! Years and years have gone by. Just pretend—put on an act, you’re good at that.

So when introductions were made, Spencer played a part, acting as if he didn’t recognize the man in front of him. He’d rambled, as he was known to do, and it seemed to work. Dave looked at him and called him Doctor and gave no indication that he’d ever met him before. Spencer couldn’t help the hope that grew. Maybe he was going to get lucky with this. Of course Dave didn’t recognize him! He’d been nine when he’d met the man.

That confidence built as they worked through the case. Spencer treated the man like he didn’t know him and Dave treated him the same way. That ball of stress that he’d been carrying in his gut since he’d heard the news was now dissolving. By the time the case was over and they were finally back home, Spencer actually felt at ease. Enough so that he was able to honestly smile at the man when they finished turning in their reports and left for the day, going to the elevator at the same time.

“So, heading for home, Dr. Reid?” Dave asked in a friendly way as they stepped into the elevator.
Spencer looked at him and nodded. “Yes, Sir.”

“I thought I heard Agent Morgan mention you catching a bus. Why don’t you let me give you a ride home?” He saw Spencer start to protest and held up a hand. “It’s the least I can do for a coworker. It’d be my pleasure.”

Something wasn’t right about this. The tone was friendly, but the words seemed odd. Why was Dave offering to give him a ride home? Somehow Spencer doubted that it was anything as simple as one coworker to the other. Unsure why he felt that way, he nonetheless declined the offer. “That’s quite all right, but thank you. I don’t mind the bus that much. I imagine it would be out of your way anyways and I wouldn’t want to be a bother.”

Dave flashed him a smile as the elevator doors opened. “It’d be no trouble at all. You wouldn’t be a bother, Doctor. I’m the one making the offer.”

Okay, this was getting weirder and weirder. What the hell was going on here? “Really, Sir, it’s quite all right.” Spencer reassured him. The two made their way through security and Dave said nothing else on it, making Spencer relax slightly. Maybe he’d just been misreading Dave’s offer. Maybe the man really had just been trying to be friendly. People do that, you know. Act friendly. He could just be trying to get you comfortable around him since you two will be working together. He probably noticed your nerves on this case and wants to straighten it out. That would make sense. You were just reading too much into it and letting your imagination run away with you. That little pep talk had him feeling better. At least, it did until he was outside the Bureau and moving down the sidewalk and Dave once more stepped up beside him. What the man said next was enough to chill Spencer’s blood. “Really, I have to insist. My car’s right over this way. Let me give you a ride home, Leland.”

Every inch of Spencer’s body froze for a split second. Then he went on the defensive. He made his gaze as blank as possible, raising one eyebrow as he looked over at Dave. “Excuse me?”

“I looked into things, kiddo. Trust me, playing dumb won’t work.” Dave stuck his hands in his pockets, looking oh-so-casual. “Why don’t we go somewhere, get some coffee?”

Numb, Spencer could only nod. When Dave started to walk, Spencer followed him, amazed that he was managing to walk when he could barely feel his body. Yet he somehow made it to Dave’s car and even managed to get himself inside and buckled. Once in there, he couldn’t help how he wrapped his arms around his waist or the way that he curled in on himself. It was an instant defense against the pain inside. He closed his eyes, listening to the car start. For a few minutes the two of them rode in silence. Spencer eventually opened his eyes, looking at where they were. A quick read of the street names told him where he was and which way they needed to go. If they were going to do this, he wanted to do it somewhere comfortable. “Take a left at the next light.” He said softly.

For the next fifteen minutes, the only words between them were directions. Eventually they pulled into the parking lot of Spencer’s apartment complex. Spencer said nothing as he climbed from the car. He grabbed his messenger bag before shutting the car door and heading to the entrance. Dave followed quietly behind him.

When he finally stepped inside of his own apartment, Spencer felt himself relax just a little bit. There was something about being in his home with his things that helped to ground him in the here and now. It was like a physical reminder of who he was now. This, all of this, was Spencer Reid’s. Everything in here belonged to Spencer Reid. It was both a comfort and a reassurance. It gave him the strength necessary to shut the door behind Dave and to lead the man into the living room.

Once they were both seated, Spencer gathered what courage he could and made himself look up at the man who had changed his very life and one of the main reasons that he was working in the field
“How did you figure it out?” His question was soft, quiet. Curled up in his recliner, here in his environment, he felt safe enough to ask.

Dave shifted on the couch, getting more comfortable before he answered. “Honestly, I wasn’t sure at first. I thought I recognized you in some way, but then you acted like you didn’t know me and I didn’t realize right away that it was an act. Then I got a look at your eyes at one point. I don’t think I’ll ever forget your eyes.” A corner of Dave’s mouth quirked slightly. “Still, I wanted to be sure. So I made a few phone calls to some old friends, looked into you a little bit, and everything just kind of fell into place.”

“And what do you plan on doing with this knowledge?” This was one of the most important questions of all. He took a shuddering breath and tried to make himself stay strong. “The only person at the Bureau anymore that knows the truth is the Director.”

Dave’s look turned slightly rueful. “I gathered as much, with as hard as you were working to make sure no one knew that we knew one another. I understand not broadcasting it to the world, but don’t you think your team deserves to know? After working with them for years, don’t you trust them enough to tell them?”

“I’ve seen no reason to tell them.” Spencer said with a shake of his head.

One of Dave’s eyebrows rose. “Doesn’t your team have the right to know how you spent the first nine years of your life?”

Didn’t he understand? Couldn’t he see what telling them would do? Spencer chewed on his lip and looked down at his lap. “It would do no good to tell them, Sir. People’s reactions generally aren’t that…good.” That was putting it mildly. “I see no reason for them to know my past. That’s not who I am anymore. I’ve made a life as Spencer Reid. After... after everything, after the trial, Mom and Dad decided that it would be better for us elsewhere. Dad took care of things and we, we changed our names and we moved. I left Leland behind.”

“It was like you guys dropped off the face of the earth. I always wondered what happened to you, but nobody ever heard from you guys again.”

“We moved to Vegas and started over. Not just me, but them as well. We didn’t know how to be a family.” He lifted one hand, running it through his hair. When he saw how bad it was shaking he quickly dropped that hand back down. Memories were swamping his mind. “Until then, I’d never even met these people, and now all of a sudden we were a family. And not just a normal family, but one in the middle of a media circus. It was pure luck that the press never found out who Mom and Dad were. I have no idea how it was kept quiet.”

“The police and I worked hard on that.” Dave said. When Spencer looked to him with surprise, the older man shrugged. “We knew if they ever found out, your life would be even harder than it already was. That was the last thing we wanted to happen. We wanted to help you, kiddo, and that was one of the only ways we knew how to do it.”

The simple kindness in that had Spencer smiling. That was one of the things that Spencer remembered the most about the man; his kindness. Somehow, it seemed just a little easier to keep talking. “It did help, a lot. Because of that, we were able to move to Vegas and start trying to be a family without the pressure of being watched constantly. And when Dad left, it actually was easier to blend. They’d cut my hair and got me the glasses I needed and no one ever recognized me. And I, I threw myself into being Spencer Reid. I let Leland die and I made myself into someone else. Someone better.”
“There was nothing wrong with who you were. You were just a kid. A kid raised up in a horrible home with two horrible, horrible people. The things that happened to you there, they weren’t your fault. Leland wasn’t a bad kid.” Before Dave had even finished, Spencer was shaking his hand. The older man didn’t give him a chance to argue, though. He held his hand up in a bid for silence. “I’m not going to argue it with you. That’s my opinion and we’re each entitled to what we feel. Instead of debating the good or bad in the child you were, why don’t you tell me what you’ve been doing since then? Tell me about Spencer Reid. If I’m going to help you keep quiet about this, I want to at least know the kid you made yourself into.”

That was something he could do. More relaxed than he’d been in days, Spencer rose from his chair and smiled. “If we’re going to do that, would you like some of that coffee?”

“You kidding me, kiddo? I never turn down coffee.”
Chapter 7

*FYI – I made up the towns in here. They’re not real at all except in my head :/ *

Every time Spencer sat down at the round table and opened the file folder waiting for him, it was with the knowledge that something bad was going to be waiting inside for him. That was just part of the job that one had to learn to cope with. One learned skills on how to keep it from becoming overwhelming, yet that didn’t mean that it was easier to see. It just meant coping with what you saw became easier. This time when Spencer opened the file folder, his coping techniques almost weren’t enough to help him keep his composure.

Vaguely he heard the others around him. JJ’s voice was a low hum as she described what she had for them. “Curlin, Kansas needs us.” She was telling the team as she pressed a button on her remote. “The bodies of four boys, all under the age of ten, have been found in the woods on the outskirts of town. It looks like they’d been buried, but the recent rain caused a mudslide that revealed the graves.” She pressed another button and a photo of the gravesite popped on screen with four bodies clearly shown, each one male, each one looking from eight to ten, and each one severely beaten. “All four boys were tortured and the ME says there are definite signs of sexual assault.”

“They look like they’re in pairs. Two of them have definitely been in there longer while the other two look fresher.” Emily pointed out.

JJ nodded. “The ME puts the time of death roughly two days ago for those two. The others, he says about a week ago.”

“With the other two being dead for two days and if he follows the same schedule, that would leave us with five days until the next set of bodies.” Dave said with a grimace. “The report says it looks like they’re all held for about five days. That means that he’s picking up his next set as we speak.”

“Then let’s get going.” Aaron told them all as he closed his file. “Wheels up in thirty.”

Spencer closed his folder as calmly and carefully as possible. Then he held it tight as he stood up and tried to slip out of the room with everyone else. All he could think about was getting some air before getting on the jet. Just a minute to take a deep breath and calm himself. He didn’t make it, though. Before he’d even fully left the room, a hand was on his arm, pulling him lightly. Spencer didn’t even have to look to know who it was. He allowed himself to be discreetly steered into Dave’s office and guided toward a chair. Dave helped him sit down before going over and shutting his door. He turned off the overhead light and turned on the lamp on his desk, making the lights in the room much dimmer. “Sit here for a few minutes and take a few deep breaths.” The senior profiler told him softly. “When you’re ready, come to the jet. Just make sure you’re on time.”

“Thank you.” Spencer whispered. Here, where no one but Dave could see him, he indulged himself a little by resting his arms on his legs and bowing his head slightly. The blinds were closed so he knew no one could see him in here right now. He didn’t have to hold himself perfectly together. “It just gets me sometimes, that’s all.” His voice stayed low, like a whisper. “The similarities I see. I mean, there are differences, but there are enough similarities that it’s hard to look at their faces sometimes. But I’ll be fine. I’ve done it before.”

“I know, kiddo. But even the best of us need a moment to draw ourselves together.” Clapping a hand on his shoulder, Dave gave a reassuring squeeze before leaving his office and shutting the door behind him, giving Spencer the privacy to gather up his walls and mentally prepare himself for what was coming.
By the time he got on the jet, Spencer was able to breathe once more. He sat there with the team and discussed the type of Unsub they were after without batting an eye or letting any of them know how much this hurt on the inside. He didn’t flinch as they discussed the obvious sadism in the torture of these poor boys, or as they touched briefly on the sexual assault and discussed the profile for sadistic pedophiles. He even managed to give statistics and information on it, no matter how much his stomach churned as he did. Deep inside, though, all he wanted was for this case to get solved and done with. Why it was getting to him more than others, he didn’t know. There were others that had showed more similarities to things in his past. But something about this one was leaving him with a sick, cold feeling inside. All he wanted was to finish it and go home.

Finally they’d covered all that they could for now. Aaron sat back in his seat and started passing out assignments. “Dave, you and Prentiss go to the coroners, see what you can find there. JJ, you and I are going to go to the current crime scene. Morgan, you and Reid go straight to the school, speak with the principal and see about getting something set up to speak with the students about safety and find out if any of the boys shared a classroom or teachers. Also, if you can, speak with the teachers the boys did have.” Looking up from the file, Aaron gave them all a serious look. “Let’s stop this before the victims get to six.”

One hour later, Spencer and Morgan were standing inside of the elementary school in halls that were startlingly empty. School held both good and bad memories for Spencer. It was a time of trouble and yet it was the place where the world had been opened up for him in ways he hadn’t known was possible. There was something that made him nervous about school and yet, at the same time, something so soothing.

“There’s the Principal, right over there.” Morgan said in a low murmur, interrupting Spencer’s thoughts. “We’ll speak with him first and then we’ll see if he’ll pull the teachers we need.”

“Sounds good.” Lifting his head, Spencer looked forward as they started to make their way toward the office. One look was all it took. One look and everything in Spencer’s life felt as if it came crashing down.

His body locked down, freezing in place, eyes going wide. All he could see was the man standing in the front office of this elementary school, smiling at something one of the secretaries was saying to him. For an instant, Spencer didn’t see the office. He saw a different room entirely. The same face, only younger, and not smiling. Sneering. Smirking. His heart started to race. He saw the man turn, saw the scar that traced through his left eyebrow and up underneath his bangs, just barely visible for a moment as he brushed his hair back in an absent sort of way. Then his bangs hid it once more. That was all Spencer needed, though. The last little confirmation.

Without even realizing he was doing it at first, Spencer started to back away. One thought was coming in clear over all the others. He had to get out of here. He had to get the hell out of here. Someone took a step toward him, their voice almost muffled, and then something touched his arm. Spencer didn’t even stop to think. He stumbled back, jerking away from the touch, and then he turned and ran. As fast as his legs could carry him, he ran straight out of the school. The wind and rain hitting him jolted him, bringing him just enough under control that he knew to go to the black SUV. In his mind, the SUV equaled safety and right then all he could think of was being safe.

His hands slipped over the door handle as he frantically tried to open it. Why wouldn’t the damn thing open? Then a hand reached around him, making him jump back, but then there was a voice that he swore he knew. “Reid, Reid! Man, it’s me. It’s Morgan! It’s me, kid.”
Morgan? Morgan. Morgan! Wide eyes lifted to lock on Morgan’s face. Spencer ignored the rain that was steadily increasing around them, soaking them both. He looked at Morgan and he knew, he knew, this man was safe. Just barely he managed to get his voice to work, to croak out “Get me out of here.” It was all he could manage. No more words would come as the terror sealed his throat.

Bless the man, Morgan didn’t ask a single question. He yanked the door open and stepped back so that Spencer could scurry in. Then he shut the door behind him before rushing toward the driver’s door. Shaking, shivering, Spencer curled up in his seat, arms around his waist, knees to his chest. As the car started to move, he rested his forehead on his knees and fought back the tears.

Not once in the ten minute ride did Spencer look up. He didn’t even notice when Morgan sent out a quick text to the team, telling them to get to the hotel, ASAP. When they arrived, he barely heard Morgan’s voice telling him “Hey, kid, we’re at the hotel. Come on, let’s get you in there and out of those wet clothes. Come on, pretty boy.”

Spencer nodded at him and worked to unfold his body. Quickly, Morgan was out of the car and around to his side, opening the door for him. He reached to help Spencer out and the young genius couldn’t stop himself from jerking back with a whimper. Morgan froze and then slowly drew his hand back, wondering what the hell was going on. Right now he knew wasn’t the time to wonder. Right now he had to act. So he switched off the concerned friend and approached this as Agent Morgan. He didn’t try to touch Spencer again. Instead, he coaxed him from the SUV with soft, soothing words, using them to get him inside and upstairs into the hotel room, making sure to steer him away from people. The more people there were, the more Spencer seemed to shake and shiver.

For his part, Spencer was fighting for control, locked in a place between here and there. Then and now. Logically, he knew he was safe. He knew nothing could happen to him. But logic was pushed down underneath a terror he hadn’t known in such a long time. He prayed that getting into the hotel room and having some quiet, just a moment to gather himself, would help. But only moments after they got into the hotel room, there was a banging on their door and the sound triggered the terror even more. To Morgan’s shock, Spencer practically flew from where he’d been sitting on the bed, ending up on the ground in the corner, curled tightly into himself.

Morgan quickly yanked open the door to reveal Aaron, Emily, JJ and Dave all on the other side. “What’s going on? What’s so important?” Aaron demanded.

Stepping back, Morgan gestured with one hand to the corner of the room where Spencer was still huddled, his body obviously trembling. “That.” He told the shocked group of profilers. The sight of their friend said so much more than words. “He flipped out at the school and he’s been in a panic since then. You guys knocked and he almost flew to the corner and curled up like that.”

“What happened at the school?” Emily asked as she stepped inside.

“I don’t know.” Shutting the door, Morgan turned worried eyes toward his best friend, aching to help him and not even knowing what was going on. “One minute I was pointing out the principal and we were getting ready to go talk to him. Then Reid just sort of, froze. He had the deer-in-the-headlights look. I touched his arm and he almost fell over to get away from me and he ran outside like he was being chased. When I got out there, he was trying to open the car door and couldn’t get his hands to stop shaking long enough to do it. The only thing he’s said to me was to get him out of there. After that, he just curled up in the car.”

While the others were staring, obviously trying to figure out something, Dave’s gaze had snapped toward Morgan. “You said he saw someone? Someone at the school? That’s when this started?”

“Yeah. We were looking over at the principal.”
From his spot in the corner, Spencer heard the sound of footsteps as someone came close to him. He flinched back from it, pressing his hands to his ears, trying to shut off everything. If he could just make it all stop for a minute he might be able to breathe. If he could just get a second to try and fight back this terror. It was like he was watching from inside his body as someone else, someone he hadn’t been in so long, was taking over him. Muffled, he heard a voice say what sounded like “Shut the lights off and open the blinds. Let the natural light in. And everyone, keep as quiet as possible. Just trust me.”

The light in the room changed. The murky light from the stormy sky outside was the only light there now, taking the sharp edge away. And things were blessedly quiet. Once more, Spencer knew someone was coming toward him. They stopped a little distance away, though. Fighting, fighting hard to gain control, Spencer made himself uncurl just enough to look out. When he saw Dave sitting cross legged on the floor not even a foot away, some of his tension faded. Here was someone who knew. Here was someone who understood.

“Hey, kiddo.” Dave murmured in a low, warm voice. “Look at me, okay? There is no one here that is going to hurt you and absolutely no way that anyone is going to get into this room. Do you see the others here? Hotch is here, between you and the door, as is JJ. Emily’s right beside the door so she’ll see anyone who tries to come in. And Morgan’s right here by the beds, standing guard.” Without looking away from Spencer, Dave spoke to the rest of the room, his voice staying a low murmur. “Morgan, do me a favor and take me seriously. Pull your gun and clear the room. Make sure the room is secure so that Spencer can see.”

If the others thought this odd, they didn’t say anything. Morgan didn’t even question him. He pulled his service weapon and moved through the room, checking everything, even under the beds. When he came back out of the bathroom, he gave a low “Clear.” That had Spencer relaxing just a little more. The room was clear. His whole team was here and the room was clear and that meant he was safe. He was safe.

“Do you have your coin on you, Spencer?” Dave asked him.

The young genius startled, but he nodded and moved a shaking hand to his vest pocket. From there he pulled out the coin he never went anywhere without.

Dave smiled at him. “Good, good. Hold that tight in your palm. Do you remember what I told you when I gave that to you?”

Morgan and Emily both looked at Dave with those words. They’d been the ones with Spencer when he’d said someone special had given that coin to him as a child. Their eyes went back to Spencer as the young man nodded once more. Dave, still smiling, nodded back at him. “That’s right. Just hold it tight, kiddo. Hold it tight and watch us and remember that you’re safe here, all right? We will protect you with everything we have. Now, remember that while I ask you some questions. All you have to do is shake your head or nod, all right?”

After a moment of debate, Spencer nodded. “That’s good. That’s real good.” Dave encouraged him. “Now, Spencer, when you were at the elementary school, you saw something. Something that scared you.” He waited until Spencer nodded before asking “Was it a person?” Another nod. A tremble ran down him and his hand tightened around his coin. “We’re right here, Spencer. We’re right here with you and you’re safe. Keep reminding yourself of that. Now, was this person someone that you knew?” A nod. “Was it a male?” Another nod and another tremble. “Spencer, was it the principal?” This nod was even shakier than before and that shake was spreading.

Dave made a soft sound before murmuring “You did good, kiddo. You did real good. Go ahead and sit for a minute and let me talk to the others for a minute, okay? Is that okay with you?” He waited
for the nod before turning enough to look up at the others. “Does someone have a picture of the
principal for me to look at?”

“Dave, what’s going on here?” Aaron asked in a low voice. His eyes darted to Spencer and back to
Dave. “What is this?”

“Just humor me for a minute, please, Aaron.”

JJ pulled out her cell phone, saying “Just a second, I’ll get Garcia to send a picture over.” Then she
was speaking into her phone, keeping her voice quiet. After a second she hung up and pulled up
something on her phone. Then she handed it to Dave. “There, that’s the principal. Jonathon Yates.”

Taking the phone, Dave warned them “Stay back. This may not go well.” Then he turned toward
Spencer once more. “Kiddo, you’ve done really well so far. I just need you to help me with one
more thing. Can you look at this picture and tell me if this is the person that you saw that scared you
so bad?” Before Spencer could panic, he added on “Remember, we’re all right here and he can’t do
anything to hurt you. This is just a picture, okay?”

Spencer looked at the faces of those around him and he gathered as much strength and courage as he
possibly could. The man could not hurt him. He could not hurt him anymore. This reaction, it was
juvenile and it was ridiculous and he needed to straighten up. With sheer will made himself uncurl
and straighten up. Everything inside of him was pushed low and locked down as tight as he could
make it as he watched Dave turn the phone around. And there, in living color, was one of the people
who still haunted his dreams to this day. Spencer lifted a shaking hand and pointed to the man’s
eyebrow, just barely visible beyond his bangs. It took two tries and a few practiced, deep breaths, but
he managed a hoarse, broken whisper. “I sssaw…the s-scar. And t-those eyes.” He pulled his hand
back, shuddering. “I’ll n-n-never forget….th-those eyes…”

He saw realization on Dave’s face. Saw it in the way the man spun the phone around to look at it
before his wide eyes lifted to Spencer. “I’ll be damned. I can’t believe it.”

When Spencer lifted his eyes, he saw the whole room watching them, confusion evident. He saw his
friends, worried for him, while at the same time not understanding what was going on. With shaking
hands he managed to lean against the bed and raise himself up to sit on the soft surface. He couldn’t
stand, but it was better than sitting on the floor. The further down he pushed the fear, the more his
mind began to spin with the implications of this.

He lifted still wide eyes to lock onto Aaron. “You need t-t-to t…take me off th-the case.” He
stammered out.

“Why?” Aaron asked simply.

Here was the moment of truth. As he looked from one to the next, Spencer knew he was out of
options and out of time. Whether he wanted it to or not, the truth was going to come out. His secret
was going to be a secret no longer. His eyes closed briefly as he resigned himself to what was about
to happen. Then he opened them once more and looked around the room before settling back on
Aaron. “Because I have a c…connection to th-the case. That man, the principal, is Elijah Reese
McGuire. His f-f-father was Ezekiel Daniel McGuire.”

Only two people in the room seemed to have any understanding of what those names meant, aside
from him and Dave. Emily straightened at the second name and Aaron’s firm face showed a flash of
confusion and surprise. Looking only at his boss, Spencer dropped the last bombshell, his voice
finally evening out for these fateful words. They would change everything. “My name didn’t used to
be Spencer. My name was Leland Samuel McGuire. When I was just a few days old, my twin sister
and I were kidnapped from the hospital. Eventually I was sold to Ezekiel and his wife, Emmeline. We lived with them until we were nine years old, when they tried to kill us.”
….Oh, Sparrow, this was something I never wanted to have to do. This was not the way I wanted to tell them about this. Yet there was no choice. Not after seeing him. Not after seeing that monster standing in that building full of children. Children! How did a bastard like him get a job at a school? I think that, more than anything else, is what sickens me. How did someone like him manage to get a job around children? To think that he has free access to the very thing he should never be allowed to be around is enough to make what little dinner I’ve managed to get in my system come racing back up.

Let me push away from that for a moment. If I focus on that, I may curse and scream and rant and rave. I need to focus on something else. Let me finish telling you how my team reacted…

CMCM

“Your twin?” JJ was the first person to find her voice in the quiet of the room. The only sound aside from her question was the sound of Dave climbing up off the floor. He didn’t move away; instead, he took up post right by Spencer’s shoulder. A supportive presence there, helping him keep calm and reminding him that he wasn’t alone in this. Feeling him there, understanding that Dave had just sided with him, Spencer drew strength from it. He bit at his lip and nodded at JJ. “My twin sister.” He clenched his hand around the coin once more. “My Sparrow.” The raw emotion in his voice left the room quiet for a moment.

“You should have taken yourself off the case back in Quantico.” Aaron said abruptly. “As soon as you saw the similarities.”

Spencer lifted his free hand to wipe it over his mouth. He didn’t get the chance to defend himself, however. Dave stepped in to do that. “There are lots of cases that have similar MO’s to this, Aaron. You know that. There was no way he could know that this man was going to be here, connected to this. And look at him now. He’s told you to take him off as soon as he found out.”

“Rightfully, I should take you off too. You worked that case, if I remember.” Aaron said.

Morgan took a step forward, holding out his hands. “Now, wait a minute. Someone explain to me what case this is. Obviously you guys know what’s going on but the rest of us are in the dark.”

A shudder ran down Spencer’s body. He couldn’t just sit there anymore, with everyone staring at him. He couldn’t. So he rose to his feet and moved to the other side of the room, away from the bodies that seemed to be surrounding him. As safe as they made him feel they also brought on a sense of fear. Only when he was given a little space did he manage to find his voice again. Arms around his waist, he turned to look at them once more, his heart in his eyes. The look he wore, the pain in that expression, stunned the others. There was so much there that they had seen on victims before, yet they had never thought to see it on their youngest member.

Spencer’s eyes took on a faraway look as he drew back into his memories. “Until I was nine, I never knew any home but with the McGuire family.” He told them in a quiet, aching voice. “I didn’t even know any other people. Sparrow and I never left the ranch. Emmeline was a nurse, so if we ever needed any kind of medical attention, she provided it. To us, that was our life and it was normal.”

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His voice faltered for a second and he had to take another few deep breaths to make himself be able to keep talking. “Until we were three, we lived in the attic of the house. Her and I were given one bed to share and we were happy with it.” A trembling smile curved his lips. “We fell asleep curled around one another every night. It took me so long to learn how to sleep alone. But, when we were
five…” He paused to draw a breath, his smile fading away. “They moved us to a, a room, underneath the barn. There was a t-trapdoor in the barn office that led down to an underground bunker. That was our room until…until the end.”

“I worked the McGuire case. I was brought in to consult right before…before everything at the end.” Dave spoke up from where he still stood beside the bed. He could see that Spencer needed a moment and he knew the others needed to understand. Even more so because of the apparent connection between that case and this one. He hated that it had to be brought out like this. “By the time I came in, they’d been under investigation for a while. Right before they took Spencer and his sister, they’d been questioned in the suspicious deaths of three boys and two girls aged 6-10 found in the woods not far from their home. Though there’d been strong suspicions of their guilt, nothing had been proven. After the accusations, the family moved. And they were on their best behavior from then on, as far as anyone knew. They didn’t even get a speeding ticket. They were watched but no one ever saw them approach any children in any way that was wrong.”

“They had already found replacements.” Emily supplied softly. She’d heard about the case and, if the things she’d heard were true, she couldn’t believe that her young friend had lived through something like that.

Spencer nodded at her words. He tightened his arms and squeezed the coin in his hand until he swore he could feel it imprinting into his skin. “Exactly.”

“Reid, you don’t have to give us the information.” In a voice much softer than normal, Aaron tried to soothe him down. At the same time, he knew his words were going to hurt. “If that’s really Elijah…”

“You’ll need to examine the old case.” Spencer finished for him. His voice was flat and his expression blank. He’d already come to that conclusion. “I know, Hotch. You have to compare victimology to try and see if this is him. He’s just become your best possible suspect. There won’t be a lot about Elijah in those files, though. He was a minor at the time and his sentence was minimal because of that. Afterwards, his record was sealed. He had a good lawyer who pled that he would never be able to have a life if this was on his record and a doctor testified to say that he was raised and conditioned this way and that, with proper treatment, he could recover. So he was sent, not to jail, but to a hospital.” Lifting his chin, he tried to sound stronger than he felt inside. “If you want any information on him, your only real source is going to be myself.”

Dave raised a hand and waved at them. “And me, kiddo.” He looked to the others and gave them a reassuring smile. “Why don’t you guys go back to the station and get back to work? It’s late in the afternoon anyways. Reid and I will hang out here, relax a little, let him get his composure. After an hour or so we’ll come down to the station and we’ll settle down and do an informal interview. It’ll give everyone time to gather information and process what’s been heard.”

“I think it’s a good idea.” Aaron agreed.

While the others started to make their way out of the room, Morgan moved toward Spencer. He stopped right by his best friend and for once, Spencer couldn’t quite read the look on Morgan’s face. Nervously he stood there and waited for what would happen. Most likely Morgan was angry with him over this. Angry with him for the lies and the secrets and all of it and really, Spencer couldn’t blame him. He couldn’t. Morgan had every right to feel that way.

He was surprised from his thoughts when Morgan finally spoke. “I want you to know that, no matter what is said or what we find out about this, it doesn’t change a thing for me. Do you hear me, Spencer Reid? Know this right now. This does not change a single thing between us. I will always have your back, kid. You can count on that.”
Emotion clogged Spencer’s throat and he felt the burn in the back of his eyes. Smiling, he nodded at his best friend, feeling suddenly lighter inside. “Thank you.”

“It’s like we always say, pretty boy. That’s what friends are for.”

When the group was gone, Spencer couldn’t help but close his eyes and slump slightly. He heard Dave walk toward him and was prepared for the hand that touched his shoulder. “You did real well here, kiddo. I’m proud of you.”

“It isn’t over yet.” Opening his eyes, the young genius looked at his friend. “They’re going to see the case file, Rossi. They’ll see the photos. And this isn’t just telling the team. It’s part of the case, now. If he…if Elijah’s the one doing this, how long do you give it before the press picks the story up? How long before everything is dragged out in the open again? I won’t be just Spencer Reid anymore. I won’t be able to be just him ever again.”

There was nothing Dave could say to that. Quiet, he led the young man over to the bed, doing the only thing he could do. Try to take care of him for now and pray that the rest would be sorted out.

CMCM

In the conference room at the police station, four profilers sat around a table, a phone at the center, preparing to do something that none of them wanted to do. The door was closed to gain as much privacy as possible here at the station. All they had to do was make one phone call to start this process. One single phone call. Yet no one seemed able to do it. In fact, none of them had spoken the whole drive over, their minds busy trying to wrap around what they had just learned. Finally it was Aaron who reached out to the phone and dialed the number they needed. A second later Garcia’s voice echoed around the room. “Speak and be heard, my lovelies.”

“Garcia, I need you to pull up all the information you can on an old case for us.” Aaron told her. His voice was stiff, a sign of the emotion he was trying desperately to hold back. This was not something the Unit Chief wanted to do. What he remembered of that case was bad enough. He didn’t know how he was going to handle hearing all the details this way. Yet it had to be done. “I need the case file on Ezekiel McGuire. Everything you’ve got, email over to us here.”

“No problem, Sir. Just let me pull up a search and…whoa. Talk about nasty. Okay, there’s quite a bit on him, it looks like. All old stuff, though. Okay, just a second, let me just...there you go. I just emailed everything we’ve got. There’s quite a bit of nasty stuff in there, Sir. You think it’s connected to the current case?”

That was the question none of them had wanted her to ask. Ignoring it for now, Morgan spoke next and his voice wasn’t anywhere near as controlled as Aaron’s had been. “Baby girl, we also need information about the survivor from this case. A boy by the name of Leland. He had a sister too, apparently. We need all that sent over as well.”

“Let me see…got him. Nine year old Leland and his twin sister Lorelei.” Garcia paused and her voice turned sad. “Oh. Oh, how sad. It says Leland was the only survivor. According to newspaper articles, the two were found in the woods in Adamston, Colorado. Apparently the little boy was carrying the body of his sister. It says that Lorelei was already gone by the time Leland came across a road and flagged down a car. Paramedics were called and the little boy was rushed to the hospital where he was listed in critical condition. They apparently weren’t sure if the boy would survive.”

“Just send it over, Garcia.” JJ told her. Tears stood in the blonds eyes, but she kept them from falling down her cheeks.
There was the sound of clacking keys and then her voice came back “It’s all sent.” She told them quickly. “You’ll be able to pull it up and print it there. Now…is everything okay, guys?”

“Let me call you back in just a minute, mama.” Morgan said quickly. He reached out and hung up the phone in the table, rising to pull out his cell phone at the same time. His eyes lifted toward the unit chief. “I’ll handle Garcia while you guys get this printed up. Call me back in when you’re ready, please.” He waited for Aaron’s nod before walking toward the edge of the room and dialing Garcia’s number. It didn’t take her but a moment to answer. “Derek Morgan, you tell me what is going on right now.” She demanded instantly. “And don’t tell me nothing because I know better and I know it’s something and if you don’t tell me then…”

“Garcia, Garcia!” Morgan tried to cut in. “Penelope, I need you to calm down and breathe for me. Okay? Just take a deep breath and calm yourself down.”

There was the sound of her drawing in a breath and then slowly letting it out. “Okay, I’m calm. Tell me what’s going on.”

“Baby girl, I need you to hold on to that calm feeling.” Morgan moved over toward the window, his eyes drifting over the police station that sat outside this room. Behind him, he could hear the others moving and talking. JJ had gone to print up everything while Emily and Aaron were discussing the current facts they had on the case. Even with this new information, they wouldn’t waste time. They had to do their jobs. Morgan just currently had a job that none of them wanted. He had to tell Garcia what was going on. “Some new information just came to us and we’re trying to process it. That’s what all this old case stuff is for. Someone identified the principal at the elementary school here as Ezekiel’s son, Elijah. So we’re going to need you to dig into the principal’s background here. Can you do that for me?”

“Sure. If he’s hiding something, it could take a little time, but nothing hides from me for long. Now what else aren’t you telling me?”

Garcia may not have been a profiler, but she was sharp and she knew her friends well. Morgan closed his eyes and sighed out a breath. “The person who made the identification was Reid. He told us that, when he was younger, his name wasn’t Spencer. His name used to be Leland.”

Silence filled the line. After a short pause, Garcia spoke once more, her voice scared and scolding. “That’s not funny, Derek. That’s not funny at all. Why would you joke about something like that?”

“Baby girl…”

“No! It can’t be him. What I saw said he had a sister. A twin sister. Reid doesn’t have a sister! He’s an only child.”

“Garcia…”

“There’s no way our little Spencer lived through something like this! There’s just no way, Morgan. He would’ve told us! He wouldn’t keep something like this from us!”

“Yes, he would.” In contrast to her voice, which had been growing in pitch, Morgan’s was soft and aching. In his heart, he held no anger at Spencer for hiding something like this. How could he? Hell, he’d hidden his own past. What right would he have to judge someone for hiding theirs? “Things like this, they’re hard to tell people, Garcia. Part of it is being ashamed of what happened to you, no matter whether it was your fault or not. But the other part is just that you don’t want to have your past color how people look at you. After fighting to pull yourself up from it, the last thing you want is to tell people what happened to you and have it change how they look at you.”
“But we’re his family! He should’ve felt safe telling us this!”

“It’s not a matter of being safe to say it or not.” Morgan countered. He didn’t notice the three behind him that had paused their conversation to listen to his. “Look at it from his view. He made a name for himself as Spencer Reid, without his past dragging at him. Instead of being defined by who he was or what happened to him, he made a name for himself off his own actions. He knew that, when we looked at him, we didn’t see the boy he was. We all saw the man he made himself into. And that was more important to him than anything else. Can you see that? For someone as intensely private as Reid, can’t you see how important that would be to him?”

There was a soft sniffle from her end. “I guess. I just…Reid…”

Morgan sighed softly. “I know, I know. But right now, we need you to keep it together for us, Penelope. We need all the information you can get on the principal. For now, we need to focus on solving this case for these little boys. When this is over, we’ll take care of our own boy, okay?”

It only took another few minutes of soothing down before Morgan got off the phone and turned around to face the team. He saw them standing there, watching him, with stacks of papers on the table. No one commented on his conversation. However, what he’d said had helped them, whether he realized it or not. It had helped to soothe some of the hurt they’d been feeling at finding out that their youngest had been keeping a secret from them that was so large. Some of that hurt was still there and maybe it would take time to fade away but they had a little something now that helped them. A little bit of understanding. For now, they tried to push the emotional part away, though. They had work to do and an Unsub to find and they needed to follow all leads, including this one. That was how they had to think of this right now. The information in front of them was background information on a possible suspect. They would review it and see what connections could be made while Garcia worked her magic to dig into the principal’s background. And if there was enough, then tomorrow they would potentially bring him in for questioning, if it was deemed right, or they would put him under surveillance.

“Let’s get to this.” Aaron broke the silence.

Looking down at the case information, the four profilers took a deep breath and got to work.
Chapter 9

There was a sick feeling sitting in the bottom of Morgan’s stomach; hard, like a solid ball of lead. The more he read, the worse it became. With each new paper, some new horror was uncovered. He was beginning to realize just how bad his friend had had things and it broke his heart. “Jesus.” He swore as he set down another paper. “How the hell could two kids live through something like this?”

“How have you read the hospital reports?” JJ asked them. She held a paper out in front of her, red rimmed eyes locked on the page. “When Leland was brought to the hospital, they had to rush him straight to surgery. He was suffering from severe internal bleeding and multiple broken bones. He was severely malnourished, dehydrated, and showing signs of long term physical and sexual assault.” She set the paper down and looked up at them, eyes wide.

Though her voice shook slightly, Emily managed to keep herself controlled enough to stick to what needed to be done. “There are similarities between the abuse to Leland and Lorelei and the children we have now. There are differences too, though.”

“That would make sense. The other crimes were perpetrated by the parents back then and now the son’s the one doing it.” Aaron said.

“So…why did they take them?” The quiet question came from JJ. She had sat back in her chair and was staring blankly at the pile of paperwork that was scattered over the table. “What possessed the parents to take two children and raise them up like this? It’s obvious what they…what they preferred to do. In the reports here, it says the previous allegations involved children that had been beaten and sexually assaulted before being murdered and dumped. Both…both Leland and Lorelei had signs of prolonged physical and sexual abuse. If that was what they wanted them for, why start with babies? Why not get kids in the age range they wanted?”

Morgan tossed his papers down on the table. “Maybe with those others kids, that’s what they tried. Getting the age they wanted. And maybe something went wrong. They couldn’t control them the way they wanted, or the kids fought back.”

“But if they raised them up from babies, they’d have totally compliant kids on their hands, raised to obey completely.” Aaron said.

“Or they could’ve gotten spooked that last time.” Emily reasoned. She sat forward, resting her arms on the table. “Maybe they figured if they started them from babies, they could make it look like they’d adopted the kids or had new children. People wouldn’t question it if they came to the house and saw them or they were seen out in public.”

The door to the room opened quietly at the same time that Aaron said “But from what Reid said, they weren’t allowed off the property. Ever.”

“We weren’t.” Spencer said into the silence. Four sets of eyes snapped toward him. He stood there, Dave by his side, looking calmer than earlier, though definitely still pale. He wasn’t trembling anymore and his voice was steadier, more like it normally sounded. However, all one had to do was look at his wide eyes to see the pain inside. The usual shield he’d kept up over the years was gone at the moment. What he felt was written right there for everyone to see.

His legs were steady as he made his way into the room but his eyes were drawn to the papers and photos spread out on the table. When JJ reached out to start flipping them over, he held out a hand and shook his head. “It’s okay, JJ. Those images are in my mind all the time anyways. It’s not going
He stopped behind one of the chairs, hands going to the back of it to hold on, anchoring himself there. Those wide eyes moved toward Aaron. “I haven’t been able to stop thinking about this, Hotch. There were some similarities I noticed at first, but I pushed them aside because I always notice things that are similar between cases and myself. But I’ve been thinking about what was similar with this one. Victimology, obviously. Brown haired, brown eyed boys. But some of the things done to these boys…” He paused, eyes closing. “Some of them I remember. They weren’t things Ezekiel did to us. They were things Elijah did.”

A look passed between Aaron and Morgan, a silent question and answer, before Aaron looked back to Spencer. “Reid, I want you to go with Morgan. He’ll walk you through the interview and ask you the necessary questions. If you’re sure you’re up for it.”

“I am.” Spencer didn’t hesitate to answer. He opened his eyes to look at his boss. “I have to be.”

Dave walked over, pulling out a chair near Aaron. “I’ll stay in here with you guys and we’ll put together what we know and see how it changes our profile.” As he spoke, he sat down in the chair, getting comfortable. At the same time, Morgan rose and made his way over to Spencer, stopping at his side without touching him. “Come on, kid, let’s go somewhere quiet.” He said softly. Together, the two made their way from the room. Only when they were gone and the door was shut did Dave’s easy going demeanor drop and a hard look took over his face. “Tell me Garcia found something to prove this bastard is Elijah and that we can bring him in.”

“We haven’t heard back from her yet. If it was well done, his name change could take a little while to uncover.” Scowling down at the pages by him, Aaron gave up looking at them for a moment. He wasn’t sure he could stomach it. Not knowing who these things had been done to. He needed to focus their attention elsewhere. “While Morgan talks with Reid, the rest of us need to see what we’ve got for our current victims. Let’s go over everything we have with new eyes.”

CMCM

When the cup of coffee was set down in front of him, Spencer’s eyes jerked up to Morgan’s face before dropping back down once more. Gratefully he wrapped his hands around the warm cup. “Thanks.”

“Reid, I’m sorry. You know I wouldn’t do this to you unless I had to.” Morgan said carefully.

Spencer nodded. “I know.” He stopped and cleared his throat, strengthening his voice before he continued. “I know, Morgan. I’m the closest you can come to his earliest victim, if not one of his actual first. You need to establish what kind of pattern he had then so that you can compare that to what was done to the bodies of the children here and so Garcia can check the system for similar MO’s. I understand the necessity. It doesn’t make any of this any easier, though.”

“I know, kid.”

Because he knew that, to an extent, Morgan did understand, Spencer took a deep breath and tried to make himself get this started. On one hand, he was glad that Morgan of all people was the one doing this with him. Aside from Dave, the person he would be able to say this to the easiest would be Morgan. It would be too difficult to make himself say this to his boss and saying it to either of the ladies would be almost impossible for him. Plus, Morgan was the best friend he’d ever had in his life, aside from Sparrow. On the flip side, he’d never told anyone his story before that he’d been this close to. He’d told Ethan, once upon a time, but even then it wasn’t the same. He and Ethan had been good friends, true. But he could admit easily that it was nothing like the friendship he had with
the team.

He let go of his cup to lay down his coin on the coffee table. “I told you once that someone special gave that to me. I didn’t lie. Rossi gave that to me when I was still in the hospital. I, uh, I hadn’t spoken to anyone yet.” Biting his lip, Spencer made a soft scoffing sound. “Truth was, I hadn’t spoken to anyone but Sparrow, ever. They, they liked that about me. They didn’t worry about me tattling on them because I couldn’t talk at all. They didn’t know I whispered at night with Sparrow in our bed. Around them, my voice just dried up. Ezekiel…” Memory had Spencer shuddering. He could hear that voice all over again, ringing in his ears. That laughter. “…he liked to hurt her or me and tell me that, if I just spoke up, just said one word, he’d stop. All I had to do was say one word. But I couldn’t. I wasn’t able to speak when anyone else was around, until Rossi.”

Spencer closed his eyes as the memory washed over him once more.

CMCM

Too much light, too much noise, too much everything. There were so many people rushing about everywhere. So many voices talking all at the same time and the things beside him were beeping and he couldn’t concentrate, couldn’t breathe, couldn’t think. His small body curled into a ball to try and shelter him from all the light and noise and chaos. And then, out of nowhere, blessed relief came.

The lights were shut off and the blinds open so that the room was lit only by the faint light of the evening sun. The drone of voices faded away until the only sound heard was the beeping of the machines and the soft sound of someone’s breath. Light footsteps came close to the bed, stopping right beside it. Then there was the sound of material rustling as the person moved. When he opened his eyes, the first thing he saw was a pair of the kindest eyes he’d ever looked into. And for the first time in his life, he found himself able to look into the eyes of another without fear or pain or nausea. “Hello.” The man spoke in a quiet, gentle voice. “I’m David Rossi.”

The little boy looked at him but said nothing. He watched anxiously as David Rossi reached into his pocket and pulled something out. When he brought his hand back up, he didn’t move it toward him. Instead he held it up between the two of them, a medal between his fingers. “Do you know what this is?” He asked in that same gentle voice. “It’s called a St. Michael medal. St. Michael, the Archangel, is the patron saint of those in the military, police force, and things like that. It’s said his name was the war cry of the Angels. My mother gave me one of these medals when I joined the Marines. I keep that one at home now, but I have this one I picked up the last time I made a trip to Italy to visit family.”

He reached out and the boy couldn’t help but flinch backwards from the man’s hand. Dave acted as if he didn’t notice. He just set the medal down on the bed right in front of him. Then he pulled his hand back. “I always wondered why I picked it up, knowing that I already had one. One that had survived with me through quite a bit. I think maybe…maybe now I know why.” Folding his hands in his lap, Dave looked up at his face and smiled at him. “I’d like you to have it, Leland. I know St. Michael can’t protect you from what’s already happened to you, but maybe he can help you feel protected through what’s to come.”

For a long moment all he could do was stare down at that medal. Slowly, hesitantly, afraid the whole time that this was a trick and he was going to be punished for it, he reached a hand out until he could touch the medal. When he touched it and nothing happened, Dave didn’t move at all, he felt brave enough to close his hand over it. Holding that medal in his hand, the only gift he could ever remember being given from an adult, he seemed to find a small spark of courage inside of himself. Looking right into the man’s eyes, he spoke for the first time, a whisper so soft it could barely be heard “Spencer. My name is Spencer.”
Dave’s smile grew wider and his eyes seemed lit with an inner warmth. “It’s a pleasure to meet you, Spencer.”

“How did you get the name Spencer?” Morgan asked him when Spencer trailed off from his tale.

Drawn back in by the question, Spencer had to take a sip of his coffee to wet his throat enough to keep going. “When we’d lie in bed at night, Sparrow liked to tell stories. Made up stories. I’d hold her and she’d tell amazing stories of a little boy and girl, twins like us, who had grand adventures. She named the boy Spencer, like Spencer Tracey in the movies Emmeline loved to watch. And she named the girl Sparrow, because she loved to watch the sparrows fly. Every night, she’d tell stories of Spencer and Sparrow and all the things they got to do and the places they got to go. They had no family, no parents. It was just the two of them, doing the most amazing things.”

“She helped you two to escape for a while.”

“Yeah, she did. She had a way with words. A way of making it feel so real. Sometimes…sometimes when things got bad, I would close my eyes and hear her stories in my mind and it helped me get through it. Afterwards, I didn’t want anything to do with Leland. I didn’t want to be him. And it was almost like my way of holding on to her. Of honoring her, taking the name she chose for me.”

Spencer paused to take another drink of his coffee. He knew that he had stalled long enough. They needed facts, things to compare to the current victims to help them establish a pattern. They needed to discover what he still did and establish an MO so that they could search the system and gather evidence and lock this bastard away.

He felt his hands tremble and he set the cup down on the coffee table once more. He crossed his legs on the couch, arms resting on his knees, picking up his medal so that he could fiddle with it to keep his hands busy. In his chair to the side, Morgan sat still and said nothing, just waiting for Spencer to gather his thoughts and go on.

Eventually, Spencer made himself start this. He would do this; he had to. For the kids now that had died and the ones that Elijah might plan on doing this to in the future that they might be able to save.

“At first, Elijah didn’t, he didn’t do anything. I mean, all of them, they were all abusive from the get go. All three of them would yell at us, or hit us, or throw things. Sparrow and I learned early on that a beating could come for anything at any time. I don’t…I don’t remember a time living there that the fear of being hit wasn’t there. The,” he paused, swallowing the lump in his throat. “The sexual assault started when we were about four, I think. Just with Ezekiel. Just, just us p-performing on him. It didn’t progress to actual r-rape until we were five. But Elijah didn’t start with us until we were seven. That made him fifteen at the time.”

Morgan didn’t dare say anything. He watched Spencer’s face—the pain, shame and what Morgan thought was a flash of self-hatred or disgust—and he wanted to go out and kill this bastard, right now. He wanted to rip him apart limb from limb.

“In our, our room there were…s-shackles on the wall. Elijah made me go over there and he hooked me in so I couldn’t fight. Then he, he t…took Sparrow. He told us he was taking her f-f-first to, to prove himself a man. Have his first girl.” The sounds of her screams echoed in Spencer’s ears. His hands started to tremble and his breathing hitched. He swore he could see her lying there afterwards, red everywhere. He could smell the blood in the air. The scent made him nauseous.

The sound of Morgan’s voice pushed in at the edges of his panic. “Reid, Reid, come on, listen to me. Take a deep breath, man. Hold that coin tight and take a deep breath. You’re not there, kid. You’re here with Morgan and you’re safe, you hear me? They can’t hurt you anymore. They cannot hurt
you. Just focus on me and calm down.”

It took a moment, but Spencer managed to push it down enough that he could force his hands to work. He reached out and picked up the coffee cup, the warmth seeping into his skin and providing him with a physical distraction. A grounding point. Bringing it to his face allowed him to use the smell to wash away the scent of blood. After a few hesitant drinks, his hands were starting to steady and his breathing had evened out.

“Would you like to take a break?” Morgan offered him.

A break? No, no. He shook his head. He needed to get this done. It would be easier to get it all done at once. “I can do this.” He reassured him. Taking a deep breath, he continued on. “After that, he only hurt her that way twice more in the rest of our years. Otherwise, he showed an obvious preference for me. He was definitely an anger excitation offender. He had to be in complete control and the more pain he could inflict, the more excited he became. He, he liked the blood.” Spencer cleared his throat and looked down at his lap. “He liked to break open any lashes on my back so they could bleed.”

“So he’s a sadist. That matches with what we’ve seen on the current boys.”

The practicality in Morgan’s voice was something that Spencer held on to. Emotions were had to deal with; there was so much to them that sometimes he felt as if he were drowning in them. Facts and logic, statistics and probabilities, those were solid ground for him. He knew and understood those. Maybe if he combined those with what he was saying, he might get through this a little easier. He might manage this without breaking apart. Right then, he’d take any help he could get. It felt as if he were fraying at the edges. “He’s definitely a sadist. Pain and pleasure are twined together for him. He liked the control; the dominance. Things that showed his power. He loved the brand, just like his Dad. The both of them had to be able to see it while they, well, during.”

“Brand?”

All of a sudden Spencer realized what had just come out of his mouth. He blanched, eyes going wide and color draining from his face. If it hadn’t been for Morgan’s quick reflexes, the cup of coffee would have hit the floor. As it was, Morgan just barely caught it. He tried to reach for his friend to do something, anything, to try and help with whatever the hell was going on here. His movement seemed to jar Spencer back to the present moment. The young profiler almost shot up off the couch, already moving toward the door. He paid little attention to Morgan calling out his name. One thing was circling round and round in his mind. How could he have not thought of this earlier? How could it have slipped past his notice?

Without ceremony Spencer raced into the conference room where the others were. He didn’t pay any attention to them or what they were looking at or even who was in the room. He went straight to the board where the photos of their current victims were hanging. “Where are the ME’s reports?” he asked anyone who was listening while his eyes scanned the photos.

The tone to his voice had his teammates responding without questioning him at the moment. They all knew that look on his face and that tone to his voice—he’d figured something out. “Right here.” Emily told him, handing him a stack of papers. Spencer took it and scanned through for what he wanted. On three of the four boys there had been a notation made in the ME report of a burn. A scan of the last boys ME report showed him why it hadn’t been found on him. The bruising in that area had been too extensive for them to see anything underneath it except for a simple burn.

“What is it, Reid?” Aaron asked.
Spencer put the reports down and moved back to the pictures. “He brands them.” He told the room. A quick scan found him a picture he needed. Lifting one finger, he tapped the picture. “See? Right there. Do you see that mark underneath the bruising? The medical examiner said they looked like burn marks.”

Emily moved to stand beside him, leaning in to look at the picture. “Is that….an M?”

Already JJ was scanning the pictures of the other boys. “Look, there’s one here as well.” She pointed to another photo, this one of the second victim. “This looks like an M too.”

“So he’s compelled to mark them. To label them as his.” Morgan said with disgust.

Closing his eyes, Spencer drew in a breath and squeezed his coin. “I should have noticed it sooner. His…his father was the same way. Ezekiel said he was marking his property, like one does with cattle, so that everyone would know we were his. Elijah was always thrilled by it. He would….” He paused, swallowing down the bile in his throat. “He enjoyed telling us how he would have done it different. Better.”

“You’ve got a personal connection to our crimes?” Someone asked him in a stern, serious voice.

“Officially, Dr. Reid has been removed from the case.” Aaron stepped in smoothly and drew attention over toward him. “He’s not here to work the case, but to answer questions.”

Denning raised an eyebrow and looked around at them all. “Questions, huh? Looks like he’s working to me.” It was obvious his words weren’t meant to be rude, so to speak. He was simply a cop that wanted to catch his Unsub and he wasn’t willing to risk anything that could mess that up. Spencer couldn’t fault him for that. He took no offense to the man’s tone or words. However, he knew his friends probably would. But before anyone could speak, Denning looked straight to Spencer. “What’s your connection to this case? Our guy’s going after kids, not adults.”

It was going to come out eventually. Was there any point in keeping it quiet? Was there any reason to try and downplay this now? Eventually it would come up and it could seriously mess things up with the local PD if they found out that the FBI was keeping this a secret from them. Wouldn’t it just be better to be upfront about this right here and now before anything was said or done that could make it look worse than it really was? Spencer couldn’t just blurt this out, though. This wasn’t his case anymore and that meant that who was told what wasn’t a decision he helped make. So he looked to Aaron, silently asking him what he wanted to do. Just as silent, Aaron’s expression clearly told Spencer that this was up to him. The young genius nodded and turned back to the detective. “A potential suspect has been found. And I, well….” Just say it. Just get it out and say it. “…my sister and I were his first victims, years upon years ago. Matching my testimony to current events might be helpful in finding a way to stop him.”

“Who is it?”

That question was held off by Morgan’s phone ringing. He pulled it out and pressed a button before saying “You’re on speaker, baby girl. Tell me you’ve got something good for us.”
“If by good, you mean I’ve uncovered your principal’s nasty little past then yes, I’ve got good news. It was neatly hidden away but nothing is hidden good enough to stay hidden from little old me. Principal Jonathan Yates legally had his name changed at the age of nineteen. Before that, his name was Elijah McGuire. I also found all his sealed records and I’ve unsealed them and sent the information along to you right…now.”

“Thanks, mama.” Morgan said with a smile. He looked over to Aaron. “With this information and Reid’s statement, we’ve got enough to bring him in for questioning. You think it would be enough to get us a warrant?”

It was Dave who shook his head and sighed. “I don’t know. But we can’t just go barreling in. There’s no telling if he has anyone with him right now or not and if we bring him in and end up without anything to hold him, when he gets free he could go destroy all evidence and vanish and we’d lose him. We need to build a connection between them first. Find anything that can tie him to any of his victims. Garcia, can you do some digging and see if you can connect him to any of the victims outside of school?”

“Also any property he has in his name.” Emily chimed in. “He’s obviously holding these boys for at least a week before releasing them. That means he’s got to have a secure secondary location where he knows they’re not going to be found or be able to escape while he leaves.”

“Also, Garcia, I’m going to send you a few pictures.” The sound of Spencer’s voice startled a few of them. They hadn’t been paying attention to the quiet man. They all listened as he kept going in a voice that was much steadier than they’d expected. “If you can, see if you can match the scarring to any cases, going back ten—no, make it fifteen years, just to be safe.”

“You got it, guys. I shall ring when I have anything. Garcia out.” Her voice faded and Morgan closed his phone before putting it in his pocket.

Aaron looked at his team and he could see the signs of strain on all of them. “For now, all we can do is put him under surveillance. I’ll speak with the chief and see what I can set up. The rest of you, go on over to the hotel. There’s nothing else we can do until tomorrow.”

While the group gathered things and started to make their way from the conference room, Spencer shamelessly let himself be hidden amongst them, quickly getting him out of the room and out of the station. He’d seen the look on the detective’s face when the McGuire name had been mentioned. The man was old enough to have been in his early twenties at the time the case had hit the news. It was obvious by his expression that he remembered it. How long would he keep that knowledge quiet? That thought plagued Spencer as he climbed into the back of the SUV. He buckled his seatbelt and then put his elbows on his knees and rested his head in his hands. Today had just been too much. Just too much. He was trying so hard to hold himself together and it felt like he was just failing every which way. Just when he thought he was locking it back down, something else pulled at him, breaking his control.

“Spence…” JJ’s voice came from right beside him, so soft and full of concern. He knew she wanted to ask if he was okay but she knew he wasn’t and so the words didn’t come past her lips. A kind of quiet had settled over the SUV as Morgan pulled out of the parking lot. All of them had piled into the same SUV, leaving one for Aaron to drive back after he met with the chief. Everyone was quiet as he tried to gather his thoughts.

Without looking up, Spencer found himself speaking. “Detective Denning recognized the name. I doubt it’s something he’s going to keep quiet about. By this time tomorrow, at the latest, the area is going to be swarming with press. That jeopardizes our case. If Elijah sees this before we can gather what we need on him, he could cut his losses and bolt. Even if they don’t catch wind on his real
identity, if they only have mine, that could be enough to send him running. Kids could suffer because of this. Children could die.”

“Hotch probably already thought of that, Reid.” Emily tried to be reassuring. “I bet he’s telling the chief and the detective both that it’s imperative that they keep this as quiet as possible. They won’t want to risk the lives of kids.”

“I hope you’re right.” Spencer murmured. “I truly hope you’re right.”

CMCM

My sweet Sparrow,

It’s all coming pouring out now, Sparrow. All the filth and the secrets and the darkness. It’s all bubbling to the surface and pouring out of me whether I will it to or not. The only thing that’s kept me together this day is the support of my friends, the iron control I’ve built over my life, and the numbness that comes with a major shock like this. I came close to shattering so many times today. I can’t afford to do that. Yet how can I honestly make it stop? I’ve been lucky my strength hasn’t failed me.

The first shock, seeing Elijah. That was enough to throw me and throw me hard. Mostly because he was the last person I expected or wanted to see here. That sent me into a gibbering panic. Then, having to tell the team, another huge shock to my mind. Yes, they are reacting far better than I ever would have expected, at least so far. They haven’t seemed angry with me, at least. I’ve barely had a chance to really talk to them since this came up. Each of them keeps stepping back to give me privacy, or time to think, or time to relax or compose myself. None of them seem to realize that, right now, in this situation, I don’t want to hide the way I usually do. I need to know what they think. I need to know how they feel about this. Has it changed this? Do they look at me differently now? Are they angry with me? I need to know this. I need to. But Morgan’s the only one that’s given me that.

Then, after that, having to tell Morgan about some of Elijah’s preferences. That was beyond hard on me, mentally and emotionally. And finally, the brand. Realizing the connection of the brand. I never told anyone about that, Sparrow. I don’t know why, but I never told anyone. I didn’t want to talk to them about it and the medical professionals just assumed it was another scar—I have so many. Now I’ve had to see other boys branded like cattle and I’ve had to admit that I have one of my own. That, at one point, I really was no better than cattle.

I sent off pictures of the boys’ scars to Garcia to run, but I don’t know if those are clear enough. I’m sitting here in my hotel bed, debating with myself over what to do. I can hear the shower running—Morgan’s in there. I was paired up to be with him and I saw no reason to change that, even when the others offered to let me situate my room arrangements to my preference. I see no need to move away from my best friend. Why would I?

Maybe, when he’s out of the shower, I’ll ask Morgan to take a picture of my own brand. It will be much clearer for Garcia to try and find a match off of. There’s no bruising around it and the area was mostly scar free so that nothing would mar his ‘handiwork’. I know in my head that it’s the right thing to do. My heart, however, is so jumbled tonight. I wish you were here, Sparrow. I wish I could curl around you in this bed and hold you close while you tell me of another adventure of Spencer and Sparrow. I wish you were by my side as all of this is coming out. I think to myself that I could deal with it if you were here with me. If I didn’t feel so alone.

Right now I think I’m running mostly off of shock. Tomorrow, that shock won’t cushion me. After a night of sleep, if sleep comes at all, my brain won’t be able to hide from itself anymore. Reality is going to hit and I have no idea how it’s going to hit me. Right now I have this pain, yes, but I also
have a slight sense of numbness that’s protecting me. What’s going to happen when the numbness wears off? Will I stay strong, or will I break?

I’m terrified to find out.
No words were spoken at first between the two ladies as they stepped into their room. By mutual agreement, they didn’t speak to each other as they prepared for the night. Emily took first shower while JJ made her phone call home. She spoke with Henry and smiled and laughed and was everything a mother should be when talking to her son. To Will, she didn’t bother faking it, but she didn’t tell him yet what was going on. “Until the case is done, I can’t talk about it. But when we’re home I will. I’ll need to.”

“Of course. I’m always here for you when you need.”

They were just exchanging their “I love you” when Emily stepped out of the shower. After hanging up, JJ went in for her turn.

Thirty minutes later the two were dressed down to pajamas, each sitting on their own bed, neither ready to sleep but knowing that they needed to. They needed to get their sleep while they could. On a case there was no telling when a call could come in that they’d found a body—please, let there be no more bodies, please—or that they had some new evidence or so many other things. It was a learned skill, to sleep as you could. Yet neither woman could do it. Too much had happened today. Too many thoughts were racing through their minds. Pictures were there that neither could ignore nor push away.

JJ knew she couldn’t talk about it, though. The control she had right now was only there by a thin thread. If she started to talk about this, to actively think about the things that sweet Spencer had lived through, she knew that control would break. It would snap and break and she didn’t know if she would start to cry and scream or grab her gun and go hunt down this Elijah and put a bullet between his eyes. Neither option would help. The fact that she didn’t know which she would do was enough to scare her and let her know that she needed to keep her control right now.

Emily knew which option she would choose. There was no doubt in her mind what she would do if she let go of her control and gave in to the emotion that was filling her from head to toe. And she would do it without batting an eye and without a single ounce of regret. But she wouldn’t simply shoot to kill. Oh, no. Death was too simple for a bastard like him. She would make him suffer first so that maybe, just maybe, he could gain one single iota of understanding of what he’d put Spencer through. What his whole family had put him through. Elijah had been a kid, yes, but he’d been old enough to know better. He’d been old enough to get the two children help. Or to stick up for them. Something. Anything. Yet, not only had he watched as the kids had been treated this way, he’d eventually joined in. And now, if Spencer was right—and things were adding up to make it look like he was, like usual—then Elijah had grown up to be just as sick as his father. The man deserved the torture.

The sound of JJ clearing her throat broke Emily from her bloodthirsty thoughts. She looked up at the quiet blond who had become not just one of her best friends, but almost like a sister to her, and she waited to see what JJ was going to say. It took a few seconds for the other woman to find her voice enough to speak. “I know we need to sleep, but I don’t know if I…” JJ trailed off and looked at her lap before looking back up. “Would you mind climbing over here tonight? I don’t know if I can be alone.”

It wasn’t the first time either one of them had made the request. Frequently, to save money, they were put in the same room together. When either one of them had a nightmare, it wasn’t uncommon for one to climb in bed with the other. Just the comfort of having someone close, to know that you weren’t alone, could sometimes be enough to keep the nightmares at bay.
Emily didn’t speak her answer. She just rose to her feet and stepped over to JJ’s bed, where JJ was already scooting back and pulling the blankets down. The two settled underneath the covers, side by side. Neither reached to turn the lamp off. Even with the comfort of one another, they both had a feeling it would be one of those nights that no one was going to be sleeping with their light off.

In the dim light of the lamp, the two lay together, pushing everything aside as best they could before falling into a sleep they knew would be plagued with nightmares.

CMCM

The very first thing Dave did upon entering his hotel room was go straight to the mini bar and pour himself a glass of scotch. He’d finished half of it before he made it across the room to the bathroom. The second half was gone as he stood waiting for the water in his shower to adjust to the right temperature. Once it was ready, he set his empty glass on the counter, stripped down and climbed inside, letting the boiling hot water crash over him. His body went on autopilot for a bit, running through the mechanics of washing his hair and body without any input from his mind. Inside, he fought to relax his mind and try to erase the images, the memories, that were trying to come to the forefront.

By the time his shower was done, he’d managed to put himself back in enough control that he felt almost human once more. He brushed his hair out and put on clean clothes before grabbing his glass and going back to the mini bar and pouring himself more as well as filling a second glass. Instead of sitting down on the bed or reviewing the case files, Dave took a deep breath and set off from his room, knowing what he needed to do. The hallway was empty as he knocked on the door to Aaron’s room. He wasn’t sure if the man had made it back yet, but he had to try.

After a moment, the door opened, revealing a still fully suited up Aaron. He hadn’t even loosened his tie yet.

Dave gave him a half smile and held up his extra glass. “I thought we could both use a nightcap.”

“We’re really not supposed to drink on the job.” Aaron reminded him stiffly. Contrary to his words, he took the glass from Dave before stepping back to allow him in.

Chuckling, Dave went to the little table Aaron had in his room. A table that sat by, incidentally enough, a small patio. This was a small hotel, cheap too, but they had nice rooms. He took a seat in one of the chairs and looked back to Aaron. “Maybe we aren’t, but I figured if anyone deserves a drink today, it’d be us. And if a half glass of this cheap scotch affects you that much, you’re not the same guy you used to be.”

“You must be desperate if you’re drinking cheap hotel scotch.”

Aaron settled down in the chair across from Dave, leaning back and looking at his friend. Normally, Aaron would have reached up and loosened his tie. Tossed his jacket on the bed and kicked his shoes off. The fact that he didn’t told Dave that he’d been right in coming down here; Aaron was mad at him. With others, Dave might have worked up to asking, spending a little time relaxing the other person first. Years of working with and being friends with Aaron gave him some advantages, though. He knew the man well enough to know what the best route to go was. Tonight, it would be the direct one. Mentally preparing himself, Dave sat back in his chair as well and quirked an eyebrow at Aaron. “So, you going to get it out of your system before your head explodes, or are we going to dance around the topic all night?” He took a sip off the exceptionally bad scotch and tried not to grimace at the flavor. “We both know you’re pissed with me. Let it out, Aaron. I can take it.”

He definitely wasn’t disappointed. Aaron didn’t even try to argue the point. His face went hard and
his hand tightened around his glass as hot eyes locked on Dave. “You knew all of this, all this about Reid, and you kept it from us this whole time. You let us believe you two had never met before when, in reality, you knew more about him than any of us did.”

“I kept it quiet because that was how he wanted to play it.”

“You should’ve come and talked to me, Dave!” The glass in Aaron’s hand came close to spilling when he clanked it down on the table. “As Unit Chief, I have a right to know things like this that can jeopardize our cases!”

Dave took another drink, making a wry face. “What was I supposed to do? Just walk in your office and tell you that one of your agents that you’d been working with for years had been kidnapped as a baby and had spent the first nine years of his life being physically assaulted and, in the second half, sexually assaulted as well? That he and his twin had been beaten so badly at the end that she died and it was a miracle he survived at all?” The look on Dave’s face changed, growing slightly older, more serious. “That wasn’t my secret to tell and you know it, Aaron. You would’ve done the same thing in my shoes. A secret like that, it was his to tell, not mine. Now why don’t you admit to yourself that it’s not me or even Reid you’re mad at? You’re angry and you’re hurt after finding this out and going over the case files. Not because you didn’t know, but because Reid had to live like that.”

It was like the fight drained out of Aaron. Temper faded from his eyes and he seemed to age slightly right in that moment. He took a drink of the scotch, downing half his glass in one gulp. When he set it back down, he sighed, looking toward the patio. “How the hell did he live through that? The things it said this bastard did to him, to them…he didn’t just beat them, Dave. He tortured them. I read some of Reid’s testimony that he gave to you. He…he broke Reid’s arm when he caught him trying to read a book. A book!” That one part seemed to stick in Aaron’s mind. Why it was stuck there, he didn’t know. It wasn’t the worst thing he’d read, or seen. Not in Spencer’s file and not in other cases. But it was stuck with him nonetheless. Maybe it was because it was such a Spencer thing, to try and read a book even knowing it was forbidden to him. “What the hell are we going to do with this?”

“The only thing we can do.” Shaking his head, Dave looked down into his glass as if the amber liquid would provide him with answers. “We’re going to get him through this. We’re going to solve this case and then we’re going to go home and we’re going to work on healing together, as a family. Reid’s stronger than anyone else ever seems to realize. He survived through a hell none of us could ever even know. He’ll survive this.”

As they quietly drank, both men hoped that Dave was right.

CMCM

Though she knew it was time to go home, that there was nothing more she could do tonight, Garcia couldn’t seem to bring herself to move away from her screens. She sat in her chair and found her eyes drifting over the horrors there, over and over. So many things kept jumping out at her. Details that usually she tried to avoid looking at as much as possible were now vital to her. If anyone had asked she wouldn’t have been able to explain why. Why it was she felt compelled to learn every little detail in the files on Leland McGuire. But she did. Something in her needed to know every bit of it, down to the most sordid details.

She read the medical reports, all of them. The autopsy report on Lorelei that laid out her abuse in stark, clinical terms. The medical reports on Leland—Spencer. Even knowing he’d been Leland back then, she couldn’t think of him that way. She could only think Spencer. She read about how long he’d been unconscious upon arrival and the multiple surgeries he’d undergone just to keep him alive. Then, the surgeries afterwards to repair as much damage as possible, once his body was healed.
enough to handle the rigor of more surgery. She read the statements that Dave had taken from Spencer; the words that no one but Dave had been able to coax from him. She read everything there was on the trial.

What were worse were the pictures. Pictures of a little boy, so bandaged and tiny, looking more like he was maybe six or seven instead of nine. Even in photos there was no mistaking the bone deep terror that lurked in those wide, wide eyes. It was easy to see the way he was cringed into his bed as if the person snapping the picture had scared him. There were pictures confiscated from the house as well; pictures that she couldn’t bring herself to put on the screen, at least not in their entirety. Pictures of the twins in ways no child should ever be photographed. She viewed them because she had to and quickly moved on. One picture of Lorelei she kept up; a simple one of the girl in a plain dress sitting on the edge of the bed. Beside it she kept a picture of young Spencer. Then one more of the two of them, side by side, obviously at the start of that night’s horror. But in those photos, they were still clothed, and though the knowledge of what to come was in their eyes, she kept those pictures up because she needed to have them there with the illusion of safety and decency. It was the only picture she’d found of the two where they were the most decent. With those on one screen, she looked at the horror on her others.

With tears streaming down her cheeks, she looked at it all, weeping for the little boy and girl who had known more horror in nine years than anyone should know in a lifetime.

CMCM

Spencer was just finishing his letter to Sparrow when Morgan came out of the bathroom, dressed in sweats and a t-shirt, still slightly damp from his shower. He looked over as Spencer capped his pen and closed his notebook. “Writing your Mom?” he asked. He knew that Spencer wrote her every day if possible, even if the letters were only a page. He always made sure to write her.

First instinct was to lie; to let Morgan believe that that’s what he was doing. Then he remembered—he didn’t have to lie anymore. He didn’t have to hide anything. So, as he put his notebook inside his messenger bag, Spencer let himself answer honestly. “I was writing to Sparrow.” Despite himself, he found his cheeks heating a little and he suddenly felt slightly defensive. Quickly he rushed to add “I started it as part of my therapy when I was younger and I…it helps. She’s the only person who, who really could understand.”

“Makes sense to me.”

Those simple words had Spencer darting a look toward his friend. Nothing on Morgan’s face suggested he was lying or that he found this amusing. Closing his bag, Spencer shook his head. Of course Morgan wasn’t laughing at him. Sure, Morgan laughed at him over silly things, but never things that were important. When it came right down to it, on the serious things, Morgan always listened and helped and he never, ever laughed at Spencer then. Not at times he knew it would hurt his friend. Over and over he reminded himself of that as he sat up and folded his hands in his lap. He looked to where Morgan was laying out clothes for tomorrow, making sure nothing was wrinkled. It was now or never. He won’t laugh at you and he won’t freak out on you and he definitely, definitely won’t hurt you. Morgan has never hurt you. Never. Just buck up and ask him already. “Hey, Morgan?”

The other man paused and turned to look at him. “Yeah?”

“I uh, well I was wondering…” Without realizing it, Spencer started to clasp and unclasp his hands, a typical nervous gesture that drew Morgan’s attention even more fully to him. “I sent those pictures off to Garcia, but really, they aren’t exactly the clearest images. They’re all marred by other scars and by bruising and they’re still fresh enough to be blurred. She’s going to have a hard time matching...
them to anything in the form they’re in. So I was wondering if you might, um, if you’d, you know… take a picture of mine and send it along.” Those last words came out in a rush, almost blending together. He looked down at his lap, body tense. “She’ll probably be able to use mine better to find a match if there is one to be found.”

Because he was looking at his lap, Spencer missed both the surprise and the heartache that flashed quickly over Morgan’s face. When his friend answered him, his voice was calm, a deliberate move on Morgan’s part. He recognized how hard this was going to be for Spencer and he didn’t want to do anything that would make it harder for him. “Sure thing, Reid. Let me get out my phone.”

The room was silent as Spencer rose from the bed and Morgan moved to get his phone. The older man waited patiently once he was ready, knowing his friend and knowing that Spencer wasn’t fond of even changing his shirt in front of others. Now, Morgan knew why and it made him even more understanding. He wouldn’t press this. He’d just wait until Spencer felt ready and comfortable, even if it took all night.

In his mind, Spencer knew he wasn’t going to ever feel ready and comfortable. He had managed to avoid, in all his years at the Bureau, stripping down before any of his teammates in any way. There were too many scars, too many things he didn’t want seen. Part of it had been that he hadn’t wanted to have to explain it to them. The biggest part, the part that still ate at him right now, was the fear he always felt at being exposed in front of someone, anyone. Add on that he knew what he looked like and he knew it wasn’t a pretty sight—too many scars, too pale skin, and far, far too skinny.

This is important. You need to do this. This could save lives. Are you going to be that selfish that you’ll put your own fear above someone else’s life? This is Morgan, your best friend. If you’re safe with anyone, it would be with him. The only person that would be safer would be Rossi and you’re not going to go knocking on his door for this.

Then, in a whisper soft voice from his past, he heard the memory of Sparrow’s voice. “You can do it. I know you can. You’re so strong, just like Spencer. Just like in our stories. You can do it. I have faith in you.” Those were the words she’d told him that last night, as they’d tried to find help, wandering through the dark, dank forest. Quickly he pushed the memory back, but he held on to her voice, letting it play over and over in his mind as he took hold of the hem of the basic FBI shirt he wore to bed. Trembling, he drew it up and over his head, bundling it tightly in his hands. He forced his eyes to stay open; to look over to Morgan. He needed to remind himself that it was just Morgan in here with him.

Seeing Morgan’s gaze stay on his face, Spencer swallowed down the lump in his throat, eternally grateful to have such a great friend. One who was obviously making an effort to make this as easy as possible for him. Clearing his throat, he made himself get down to business. “The brand is on the, the back of my left shoulder.” Before his friend could move, Spencer made himself look at Morgan’s face, even if he couldn’t meet his eyes. “I, well, I’ll understand if you, you know…” He trailed off and grimaced. “I don’t exactly look the best back there. I’ll understand if it’s hard for you to see.”

Terrified out of his mind, shaking like a leaf, and the kid still tries to reassure me. Some things never change. Morgan thought to himself. He wanted to brush off Spencer’s worries and tell him that it would be fine but he knew that he couldn’t do that. Not just because he’d read the medical reports and he knew that Spencer’s back was pretty messed up, but because he wanted his friend to know that he took him seriously. “Okay. You ready for this?”

“Do it.”

He’d thought he’d been prepared. He’d thought he’d been braced. He should have known better. Nothing could have prepared him for what he saw on Spencer’s back. The first place Morgan’s eyes
went were to his left shoulder, seeing the brand that Spencer had spoken of. The large M permanently burnt into the skin had separated slightly with the years that Spencer had grown. It was still easily recognizable, though. Then the other scars, peppered over his back. Long ones, thin ones, thick ones. There were so many of them over Spencer’s lower back and some on his shoulder blades as well. From the case file, Morgan knew most of them came from a belt. He also knew they traveled further down, underneath the rest of Spencer’s clothes. On Spencer’s right shoulder, mostly on the back but wrapping slightly around toward the front, there was faint scarring from a burn. Then there were circular scars that made Morgan wince. Burn scars. He’d seen enough on victims and he’d read the medical reports and he knew what they were. Cigar burns.

What struck him, out of all of it, was so random and yet he couldn’t help it. He couldn’t stop from thinking how very skinny the young man was. Skinnier than he’d thought all these years. His shoulder blades protruded more than they should and Morgan swore he could see individual vertebrae in Spencer’s spine.

A tremble ran down Spencer’s body and it drew Morgan back to the present. He pulled his cell up and switched to camera, zooming in on the brand. He battled back nausea as he snapped a couple pictures of it. When he was done, he stepped off to the side. “Okay, kid, I got it.”

Spencer scrambled quickly back into his shirt. “Go ahead and send them along to Garcia. She’ll be able to work with them better than the others, I think.” He said quickly. There was obvious relief in his voice. With his shirt back on, Spencer felt much more relaxed. Much more comfortable. Now that the hard part was done, he relaxed a bit more as he sat back down on the bed, curling his legs up. He watched Morgan send the picture off and then his friend was putting the phone down and taking a seat on his own bed. He cast a look Spencer’s direction, a question obvious in his eyes, but he said nothing.

Oddly enough, Spencer felt a smile tug at his lips. Anyone else would have just blurted out what they wanted to say. Not Morgan. *He’s a far better friend than you deserve, you know* his brain taunted him. Spencer ignored the thought and, feeling safe enough and brave enough, he said “I can see your questions on your face. Ask. I won’t get mad at you for asking me something. The worst that’ll happen is I won’t answer you.”

“No, the worst that could happen is that I bring up things that hurt you.” Morgan said with obvious sincerity as he turned on his bed to face Spencer. “The last thing I want to do is hurt you, kid.”

This time Spencer let the smile come out. He crossed his legs and looked down at his lap. “The thoughts are never gone. They’re always there. You bringing them to the light won’t make them hurt any more than they already do. I know you have questions and I know that you all deserve some answers.” Pausing, Spencer looked away from his lap briefly, his eyes flickering over Morgan. “Here, in this moment, it feels kind of right. Ask, Morgan.”

Morgan tipped his head to the side, looking at Spencer for a long moment as if debating if he really wanted to do this or not. He must have decided that Spencer really meant it because he finally spoke up again. “I wasn’t thinking of questions, really. I was just thinking how, well, you’re skinnier than I ever thought you were. I need to start feeding you, pretty boy. You need to put on some weight.”

For a second Spencer could only stare at Morgan in surprise. *That* was what he was focused on? *That* was what he’d noticed? A surprised laugh slipped past Spencer’s lips. “You are most definitely unique, Morgan.” He said, smiling at him. “Of all the things I imagined you thinking of, that definitely was not one of them.”

“Well, I can’t help it. You look like you’re starving, Reid. It makes me want to take you home to Chicago with me and let my Mama fatten you up.”
That made Spencer laugh once more. “I do eat, I’ll have you know! Just not as frequently as everyone else does. Granted, my doctor does agree that I need to put on weight, but I’m never going to be able to ‘fatten up’, as you so eloquently put it.”

Morgan braced his elbows on his knees and leaned forward a little, smiling at him. “Oh yeah? Why not?”

Somehow, it didn’t seem as hard to say it right now. The moment was relaxed enough, comfortable enough, that Spencer didn’t even quiver as he answered. “In my growing years, I wasn’t properly fed, so my growth was stunted and my metabolism made to work at a different rate than the average child. Combine that with the spotty eating habits I had in my early teens until I was finally able to be on a regular diet once again and my body just doesn’t have the capability to maintain weight anymore. Physically, it really isn’t my fault. And, well, part of it is because of the SPD.”

“SPD?”

“Didn’t you see it in the case file?” Spencer raised an eyebrow and waited until Morgan shook his head before he continued his explanation. “It’s sensory processing disorder. Sensory integration disorders vary between individuals in their characteristics and intensity. Some people are so mildly afflicted, the disorder is barely noticeable, while others are so impaired they have trouble with daily functioning. Children can be born hypersensitive or hyposensitive to varying degrees and may have trouble in one sensory modality, a few, or all of them.”

Instead of being confused by his ramble, Morgan looked interested in it. “That would explain a few things about you, actually.” He admitted easily. “No offense or nothing, kid. But it explains some of your…quirks about touching and things like that. I mean, aside from the obvious.”

That had Spencer nodding. He took no offense at Morgan’s words. “I’m not as bad as I used to be, but the hypersensitivity is still present. Certain materials rubbing over my skin cause a sensation of pain. I’m bothered by casual, light touches. The light ones are the ones that bother me, really. In some other ways, though, my psychologist said that I also suffer from hyposensitivity, which could be a direct result of my childhood. I have a very high pain tolerance for most types of physical pain. All of this is why, when I was panicking, Rossi reacted the way he did. A quiet, subdued voice combined with slow, linear movements, and a change from artificial light to natural light are all things he recalls from what worked with the younger me. However, I do process better as an adult because I’ve gone through sensory integration therapy that definitely improved my condition though it doesn’t completely ‘cure’ it. There is no actual cure for SPD.”

“Now wait a second, back it up. We were talking about your weight. How does SPD mess with your weight?”

Caught up in the facts and information, Spencer was growing more animated, some of his stress melting away. He didn’t know that this was part of Morgan’s plan. That his friend had already figured out the answer to his own question, but he wanted to keep Spencer talking and relax him even more.

“There’s actually a direct correlation between the two.” Spencer said animadly. His hands were moving in his lap, gesturing as he spoke. “Food is experienced with more than one sense. People with sensory problems often find many foods disturbing because of their textures. Some people with SPD find themselves unable to tolerate particular textures while, at the same time, craving other textures. There’s also how the food smells and the taste as well that can make a difference. Like celery for example. It may sound strange to others, but I have problems with the stringy consistency of the food.” He paused for a second, just the thought of the food making him shudder a little. “I absolutely cannot eat it. The same with string cheese.” The end of Spencer’s speech was cut off.
when he found himself yawning. He quickly covered his mouth, slightly embarrassed by it.

The grin Morgan gave him held a teasing note to it. “Why don’t we tuck it in, man? It’s been a long day.”

“Sounds good.” Spencer said quietly. He adjusted in the bed, pulling the blankets back and climbing underneath them before pulling them up. When the lamp was shut off, a soft, familiar light still lit the room with a dim glow. Spencer unerringly found his gaze traveling over to the outlet where a small nightlight sat, plugged in just as it always was every single time he and Morgan shared a room. It had only taken one night, one nightmare, after he’d found out about Spencer’s fear of the dark, and Morgan had, without a word, started bringing the nightlight with him. The first time he’d plugged it in, Spencer had been both grateful and extremely embarrassed, so he’d said nothing and neither had Morgan. Since then, it had become normal. Looking at it, Spencer realized something he had never done. He looked toward Morgan’s bed, seeing the lump of his friend under the blankets. “Hey, Derek?” Very rarely did he use the man’s first name; it was a sign of how important this was to him.

Morgan rolled over and looked to him. “Yeah, kid?”

“Thanks.”

The quiet word brought a smile to Morgan’s lips. “Anytime…Spencer. Anytime.”

With a smile on his face, Spencer closed his eyes and settled in for what he hoped might be a peaceful night of sleep.
Sparrow,

The sun has barely begun to rise on this quiet, mostly grey morning. I sit here in the hotel’s coffee shop, a cup of coffee on the table in front of me, my back tucked into a corner, and with a perfect view of the windows, allowing me to watch outside as the rising sun peeks its greeting through the clouds.

My, that has an almost lyrical sound to it, doesn’t it? Not at all something typical for me to be writing. Maybe it has something to do with how I feel this morning. I don’t exactly know the words to describe my mood. Last night, I had a talk with Morgan and it helped me. Really, it did. I went to sleep feeling a little better than I had all day. And then I spent a night in nightmares. The bone-chilling, sweating, make your heart race kind of nightmares. The kind that transcend from nightmares to night terrors. The only thing that kept the whole floor from being alerted was the fact that I don’t react like a typical person to the night terrors. Instead of thrashing and screaming as I do with a regular nightmare, with my night terrors I always seem to wake up tightly curled and without my voice. This time I was grateful for that. It kept me from waking anyone else and worrying them further. I attempted to sleep more, but there was no way I was going to be able to. So, I got up and took a shower—Morgan never wakes up to that. He’s used to me doing that if a nightmare hits on a case. Eventually, I made my way down here, after leaving him a note to let him know where to find me.

Better I sit here and write to you than try to force myself to go back to sleep; a sleep that would most likely be plagued with more nightmares. Speaking of this, relieving it, seeing Elijah, it’s brought everything back up to the surface. The little box I’ve forced this inside of in my mind is breaking apart and there’s nothing I can do about it. I don’t know how to fix this, Sparrow. I think it’s been coming for years now, little by little. I’ve written before about thinking about telling the team. But not like this. Not this way. It would have been one thing to tell them on my terms, away from work. To have to tell them this way, not just with words, but with case files and photos and evidence? It makes it more—real. They aren’t just hearing me tell them. They’re seeing it. They’re reading graphic details. And then they’re hunting one of the people responsible for this.

I can’t help but worry. Are we going after this man because we sincerely believe that he’s done it, or because I want to hurt the man who hurt me? I mean, yes, there are the scars that we found. Those aren’t just a nasty coincidence. Coincidences don’t exist. But, can we all be positive that those scars really are M shaped, or are we seeing what we want to see? I would regret nothing that would put this bastard into jail. However, I would hate to put him away and leave another murderer running free. Am I ridiculous for thinking this way? Am I overthinking things once more? I can’t be sure. I have to trust to the team to do this.

What am I going to do? I can’t just sit here and watch them work this case without me. Yet I can’t help or I could ruin the entire case. A good lawyer would have everything tossed out because my presence would jeopardize the integrity of the case. I can’t just go home and wait for news, either. I have to be here. I have to know what happens. I can’t be here or there. Helping or not. I just don’t know how to be. And inside, I feel so much more mixed up. So ripped apart. Gideon would have told me to use my analytical mind and break down what I’m feeling and why. He always knew I dealt better in facts so he helped me make my emotions into facts for me to process. I guess it’s worth a try.

I am scared. No, terrified. That’s a much clearer description. I am utterly terrified. Why? Ezekiel
and Emmeline aren’t here. They can’t hurt me. Elijah doesn’t know that I’m here. He doesn’t know who I am. I’m safe. I’m surrounded by FBI agents and protected by an identity that he doesn’t know. So why am I so terrified? It’s not just old terror, of moments past. It’s fresh terror. No matter how much I tell myself that he doesn’t know me and can’t hurt me, the little boy in me still cowers at the thought of him. At the thought of making him angry.

In turn, I am angry because of this. Angry with him for making me feel this way. Angry with them for having ever done this to us. Angry with myself for letting him get to me and for letting him reduce me to a terrified little boy once more.

I’m scared I’m going to lose my friends over this. I’m scared I’ll lose the people who have come to matter the most to me. I’m scared that, after this case, nothing is ever going to be the same again.

But I am also determined. I’m determined to make sure that he pays for his crimes against these boys if we find proof that he’s the one to have done it. I’m determined to make sure that justice is served.

“You’re up and about early.”

The sound of Emily’s voice almost had Spencer leaving his seat. One hand instinctively dropped down to where his gun sat while his head tipped up toward the sound. When he saw it was just Emily, he settled back into his seat. Heat filled his cheeks. “Sorry.” He apologized quickly. “You uh, you startled me.”

“I’m sorry, Reid.” The sincerity was obvious in her words. “I thought you’d heard me when I was ordering the coffee. I wasn’t trying to sneak up on you or anything.” She smiled in her kind way to soften her words. With one hand she pulled a chair out before sitting down beside him. She looked at his coffee and at the notebook that he was already closing and then up to his face, which he knew would be showing signs of his lack of sleep. “Rough night?” she finally asked.

Was there any point in hiding it from a profiler? Chewing on his lip, Spencer shrugged one shoulder, not quite sure how to answer that. The last thing he wanted to do was to make them all worry about him even more. Or make them think he was any weaker than he already appeared. “Nothing I can’t handle.” He settled on saying. It seemed to be the safest answer.

He was beyond surprised when Emily leaned forward and rested one arm on the table, her other hand reaching out and wrapping around his. His team knew he wasn’t usually the type that was comfortable with casual touches and embraces; most likely now they understood part of why. He would have thought they would’ve avoided touching him even more now. But here she was, reaching out to him, holding his hand in a firm grip, and her gaze was steady and sincere, locked right on his face. The touch wasn’t unwelcome, either. Spencer let himself curl his fingers around hers, enjoying the comfort that it brought.

“Listen to me, Reid.” Emily’s voice was low, packed with emotion. “You have absolutely nothing to be ashamed or embarrassed about. Do you hear me? I’d be more worried if you slept like a baby last night. After having everything brought out in the open like that, without you choosing for it to happen, and being confronted with that man, it is perfectly logical and normal for you to be having a hard time with it. None of us are going to judge you for having nightmares because of this, or if you were unable to sleep, or anything like that. We’re not worried about what you can or can’t handle. There’s no one out there that knows better than this team exactly how strong you really are. Others may not see it when they look at you, but we do. Do you understand? We’re your family.”

The firm, serious look on her face reminded him of another conversation between them, on the flight back home after Benjamin Cyrus. She’d had that same look in her eyes then that she did now. It let
him know how important the words were that she was saying and how serious she was about them. Smiling ever so slightly, he nodded and squeezed her hand. “Thank you.”

“No problem.” With one last squeeze, she let go of his hand. “Morgan told me you’d be here. We’re gathering to go down to the station and Hotch says that, if you’re up for it, you can ride with us.”

“I can’t work the case, though. I’ll put too much at jeopardy if I do.”

“Hotch said you and Rossi can quietly set up in another room, away from us, and that, if you think of anything, to funnel it to him through Rossi.” Emily said with a mischievous twinkle in her eyes. “Technically, you won’t be working the case directly.”

That had Spencer’s eyebrows going up in surprise. Something like this wasn’t like Aaron. The man wasn’t the type to do something this, sneaky. It didn’t make sense for him to do something that could eventually come back and bite him in the ass. “That doesn’t make sense. It doesn’t sound like Hotch.” He told Emily quietly.

She smiled and nodded. “That’s what I thought. But he told me that both he and the Chief feel that you’ve earned the right to see the case through. So long as you’re not directly involved in anything and you’re kept only on the paperwork end of things, they want to keep you there. You’re going to be able to recognize certain things before the rest of us and you’ll be able to provide a type of insight the rest of us can’t, Reid. But the choice is entirely yours. You don’t have to do this.”

“Yes, I do.” He said without hesitation.

A voice called out “Prentiss!” and Emily looked up to see that her order was ready. Rising, she looked at Spencer and offered him another smile. “Then let’s get to work, Reid.”

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Spencer was able to admit to himself that it felt good to work. Though he and Dave were isolated from the others, Spencer was fine with that. He lost himself in facts and information, working on the current files they had and staying completely away from anything that dealt with his own past. Dave didn’t bring it up and neither did Spencer. They worked on trying to piece together any connection between these boys. That, in turn, would lead them to discovering how the Unsub might have selected them. Spencer had to force himself to be as unbiased as possible. They had no proof right now that Elijah was their suspect and, if he was, he was currently under surveillance anyways. That was all they could do until they had more facts.

As much as he wished they could bring the man in, he knew they couldn’t. They had no proof yet. Nothing to tie him to the murders except for the brand and Spencer’s testimony. A good lawyer could rip that apart in seconds. They could try to bring him in and formally question him and go for a confession, but that was a risk. If he didn’t confess and they were forced to set him free, well, they all knew what could happen then. He could vanish on them. They could try for a warrant and search his home, but if they found nothing there, again, he could vanish. And he was smart; he always had been. He would have a secondary location where all of this was done and where his mementos were kept. He wouldn’t keep it at the house like his Dad. No, he would have learned from his Dad’s mistake.

Knowing all those things, it was a surprise to him when Aaron came in late that afternoon to give them a heads up for what was going to happen. He shut the door behind him and looked straight to Spencer as he said “We’re bringing Jonathan Yates in for questioning this afternoon.” He told them without preamble. He kept going before either man could protest. “Not as a suspect. We’ve asked him to come in and answer a few questions for us about the boys. As far as he knows, he’s coming
in to help us. We want the chance to speak with him but we also are hoping this will allow him to relax slightly. We’re going to feed him some information while he’s here that’s geared to making him feel as if he’s safe as Jonathon Yates. We don’t want him suspecting we know he’s really Elijah McGuire.”

“If he feels safe, he’ll possibly make a mistake.” Dave said in agreement. “It’s a good plan. I’ll have to stay out of the way. He’d recognize me.” Turning, he looked toward Spencer, who was staring blankly at Aaron. “Reid and I will stay in here, out of the way. Who’s doing the questioning?”

“JJ and I. I doubt Morgan could keep his cool long enough to do it. I’m going to send him in here with the two of you.” Aaron gave a wry sort of grin. “Better to contain him in advance.”

“When is he coming in?” Spencer asked quietly. After yesterday’s reaction, he had no idea if he could handle seeing the man or not. The thought of it made his stomach churn. On the other hand, he didn’t think he could be anywhere else. He had to see him, even just to prove to himself that he could.

“He’ll be here in twenty minutes.”

Twenty minutes? That…that wasn’t long at all. That wasn’t near long enough to prepare himself. No, no. He needed more time. He couldn’t see this man in twenty minutes. No way, no how. No. But it wasn’t like he had a choice. They weren’t asking him. They were warning him, to give him a heads up so that he could prepare himself. But, oh God, he didn’t know if he could do this. Could he see him again without reacting the way he had at the school? Was he strong enough to handle seeing the man? He didn’t actually have to. He could stay in here with Dave and not look out the windows at all and just hide. He could if he wanted to. They would all understand. No one would judge him for it.

No, they might not, but he would. He would judge himself. Can you really stand here and be that much of a coward? He can’t hurt you. You’re not a child anymore. You’re not Leland anymore. You’ve made yourself into Spencer and Spencer is a grown man, an FBI agent, and he’s not powerless. You’re not powerless. So what if you’re afraid? Are you going to let the fear control you? IF you can’t even handle looking at the man through a window, then you’re just as pathetic as they used to tell you that you were. You can do this!

He felt his boss watching him and he made himself look up at Aaron’s face. Words wouldn’t come right then, so he settled for giving him a nod, silently letting him know that yes, he was okay and he would be okay with this. Aaron nodded back at him. As his boss left the room, Spencer swallowed the lump in his throat.

“Are you sure you’re okay with this, kiddo?” Dave said quietly beside him. “We can close the blinds, keep ourselves in here until he’s gone. You don’t have to see him, you know.”

“Yes I do.” Spencer croaked. He had to. Even if no one else understood, he had to do this. He had to at least see the man just to prove to himself that he could. To prove that he was stronger now and he would not live the rest of his life afraid.
Within fifteen minutes of Aaron’s coming to inform them of what was happening, the door to their room opened once more and not only Morgan came walking in, but Emily as well. She took one look at the raised eyebrow from Dave and shrugged back at him. “Better than working alone out there.” She told them as she shut the door behind her. Then her lips curved in an impish sort of grin. “Plus, better this than shooting him, right?”

Surprise had Spencer looking up, but Dave and Morgan both laughed. They could easily appreciate the sentiment. Morgan walked over to where Spencer stood by a board, looking at a map. He didn’t say anything to his friend, only put a supportive hand on his shoulder. Spencer’s first reaction was to flinch. His second was to sigh a little, some of his tension draining away. Without a word, with just a touch, Morgan was letting him know that he was there and that he wasn’t alone. It was good he didn’t speak to him, too, because in that moment, Spencer wasn’t sure if he could speak. There was that familiar, closed off feeling in his throat that only came with high anxiety and that told him that his voice wasn’t there. That feeling wouldn’t go away until he got himself totally under control.

Almost again his will, Spencer found his gaze drawn toward their little window over and over. Whether he wanted to or not, he couldn’t stop himself from watching for him, waiting for him. Why, he didn’t know. He was safe in this room, surrounded by friends. He was safe. Nothing would happen to him just by seeing the man. Yet his fear wasn’t ruled by logic. Emotions like fear never are. Because he was watching the window, he missed the silent conversation behind him. Emily gesturing toward the window and looking questioningly at Dave, silently asking him if she should shut the blinds. Dave, shaking his head no. He understood why Spencer needed this, at least as best as he could. All they could do was be there for him when it happened. Morgan just stayed where he was, silent and supportive, a physical reminder to Spencer that he wasn’t alone.

When Spencer looked over once more and finally, oh shit, finally saw the man he’d been waiting to see, his whole body locked down. The other three knew without even looking that Elijah had shown up. It was obvious in the way Spencer’s body went absolutely taunt. He was staring, wide eyed, through the window, watching the man walk into the station as if nothing were amiss. As if he were completely unafraid of what would happen to him in here. Spencer stared at the face that had haunted him for far too long. This time around he noticed things he hadn’t seen at the school. He saw the way that Elijah had filled out, growing slightly stockier than the teen he’d been. If anything, that made it worse. He looked more like his father now.

The terror was vibrating inside of Spencer. This time, however, he didn’t run. This time he was prepared and he kept his feet planted on the ground and his knees locked. Maybe the nausea churned in his stomach and maybe he wanted nothing more than to hide somewhere and curl up into a little ball. But he didn’t give in to either of those feelings. He stayed perfectly still, even as Aaron and JJ walked up to greet the man. Every instinct in Spencer came to life and demanded he go out there, that he grab his friends, grab JJ, and pull them away before Elijah could ever touch him. It went against everything in him to stand there while JJ shook that monster’s hand. Their hands touched and Spencer’s body quivered. In response, Morgan’s hand tightened reassuringly on his shoulder.

Then the three were moving and Spencer watched as they made their way to another conference room. Even after the door shut, Spencer still stared. He couldn’t stop himself. His arms came up, wrapping around his waist, holding himself together, and he stepped away from Morgan’s hand. He needed space. Needed a minute to breathe. He moved over to the window and leaned against the wall, unable to stop himself from standing there and watching. He needed to watch. He needed to be ready. For what, he didn’t know. But he had to be there.
The other three didn’t bother him. They let him stand there on his own the whole time. While he watched, they worked. Rightfully he knew he should be working with them. He should be helping. It didn’t matter, though. He could only stand there and stare.

However much time passed, Spencer didn’t know. His gaze was locked on the door when it finally opened and the three came walking out. JJ and Aaron said something and Elijah smiled, looking calm and relaxed, his body language easy going. Then he was walking away from them and Spencer’s eyes stayed locked to him. They stayed locked there as Elijah stopped by an officer and filled out a quick piece of paper.

What possessed Spencer to start speaking, he didn’t know. Words just came up to his lips and poured from him. “You know, he’s the reason she’s gone.” He spoke so suddenly and so quietly that he weren’t sure if anyone had even heard him.

Apparently they had. Aaron and JJ were coming in the room right as Spencer said that. Dave startled, looking to him. “You never told me that.” He said with surprise. There were reports of how Spencer had been found and speculation on what had happened at the end, but no one knew the actual story. At the time, even asking about that final day had been enough to send the young boy into a full blow panic attack. They never pressed it because they had plenty of evidence with everything else.

Spencer kept staring through the window, watching as Elijah spoke with a few people on his way across the station. He couldn’t take his eyes off of him. “He told Ezekiel that he’d heard her making plans to escape. That she was going to destroy everything. He and Ezekiel fought over it for a while, above our room. We could hear them, because they’d left the door open. We were terrified. She’d never said anything about running. Neither one of us did. We were too well trained.”

He watched Elijah smile at one man, slapping him on the back, the both of them laughing. He was so charming with these people. If only they knew the monster that lay underneath. If only they knew of the sickness inside of him.

“Ezekiel came storming down there and he grabbed Sparrow. He was shouting at her, telling her that he’d never let her leave. That he wouldn’t let her betray them. Then he yanked off his belt and he started to beat her as he shouted.” Spencer watched as Elijah finally made his way out of the station. Closing his eyes, the young genius fought back the pain and anger. Memories danced in his head. He’d never told this to anyone before; not even his psychologist. He’d never been able to bring himself to do it. Yet now, the words were tumbling from him with the inexorable force of an avalanche. There was no stopping them. “I was so stunned, I couldn’t move. I just…watched, as he was beating her. Can you believe that? I watched and I prayed that it would be over fast so I could tend her like I always did. But he wasn’t stopping. I could see he was lost in a fury. He wasn’t stopping and I knew, I just knew, he was going to kill her. And something in me snapped. I jumped forward and I threw myself over her to, to try and shield her.”

JJ brought a hand up to stifle the sob that wanted to slip free. Her eyes shone with the tears she fought not to shed. Beside her, Emily’s face was a hard mask, none of the inner agony she felt breaking out. The three men were just standing there, faces as blank as could be, trying to contain their emotions, instinctively sensing that the slightest thing would stop this and that was the last thing they wanted to do. They could see that Spencer needed to say this. He needed to let it out.

“He tried to make me move but I clung to her. I couldn’t say a word, couldn’t defend her, and she was in too much pain to talk. When Ezekiel couldn’t make me move, he started to use the belt on me, trying to force me to let go. The longer I stayed, the more enraged he became. He was screaming and swinging and everything seemed to go a little hazy on me. It was all just pain. I didn’t even realize at
first that he stopped. I could hear their voices above me, but I couldn’t really make anything out. Something about being stupid, about killing us. Then I, I passed out. When I woke up again, we were in the back of the truck…”

*Flashback*

The sound of Lorelei’s whimpers were the first thing Leland heard as he woke up. Everything was kind of floating around him. Something was vibrating under him, jarring his little body, bringing the pain on more and more. Then all of a sudden, all of it stopped. There were the sounds of what he thought were doors. The truck, he realized. They were in the truck.

The back of the truck opened and Leland held as still as possible. What was going on? Then suddenly he didn’t care. He was being moved, lifted out of the truck, and the pain was all he could think on. It hurt! Everything just hurt! He was moved and then he felt himself being dropped and he connected with the hard ground and it hurt so much. Make it stop make it stop oh God it hurts it hurts! Tears poured from his eyes. A scream ripped up, too weak to make any real sound. There was another thud and he felt something land beside him.

“There.” That horrid voice, the voice of the monster, was right above them. “Let the wolves have em.”

Leland felt Lorelei whimper beside him, followed by a sound he knew all too well. The sound of a kick followed by a gasp of pain. Then footsteps, moving away, and the truck roaring to life. When Leland finally opened his eyes, he saw the truck driving away, the lights getting further and further away from them. They were leaving them here? They were really leaving them here? He…he couldn’t believe it. They’d left them here. Leland wasn’t stupid; he knew they weren’t free. They were left here to die, just like the others they’d told them about. The others who had been stupid or made mistakes or messed up. Emmeline had told them over and over about the other kids, the bad kids, they’d had to ‘get rid of’. Now, now that was them.

Another whimper brought Leland’s attention to his sister. Though every part of him screamed in protest, he somehow made himself sit up on that forest floor. The only light around them was the light of the moon shining on the wet trees and leaves. Their clothes were damp, almost soaked. Whether from blood or the wetness of the ground he didn’t know. Now that he was sitting up he was focusing only on his sister. He couldn’t make his throat work yet; his voice wouldn’t come. Even alone with her, he rarely spoke words, relying instead on the silent language they had together. Using that, he brought trembling hands up, touching her cheeks, her hair. Tears poured down his cheeks as he looked at her. She was covered in red, like she’d been dipped in paint. It rolled off her, pooling around her, so much more than he’d ever seen before. Her face was swollen, already bruising, but brown eyes identical to his looked on him.

“It hurts.” Lorelei whimpered. “It hurts so much.”

I know, he thought. I know. But he just stroked his hand over her curls and tried to think what to do. They couldn’t just stay here. Hypothermia would set in and they would freeze to death, if the wolves didn’t come and get them first. She must’ve been thinking the same thing. “Help me up, please. Help me get up.”

Though it brought a new round of pain, Leland took hold of her as gently as he could, sitting her up. When he made to let go, she started to fall back down, only saved by his quick reflexes. Her cry echoed around them. Again they tried and again she started to fall, this time with a scream. “I can’t, I can’t.” she sobbed out. “Go. Go get help.”

No! He would not leave her here. So she couldn’t sit up on her own? Well, he’d just help her, then.
He’d get on his feet and he’d help her walk. He could do it. He would do it. Looking around, he thought fast, building a plan. Then he wasted no time putting it in action. He touched her face in a way that let her know he was going to help her. It was a warning that this would hurt. Then, aching with every move, he wrapped his arms around her and pulled, sliding her across the ground. She tried not to scream, he could see. She fought to keep the cries inside the same as he was. Tears were pouring from both their eyes. Inch by inch, he moved her to the nearby tree until he could finally lean her back against it.

He didn’t pause to take a breather, afraid that if he did, he might never start again. He braced his arms on the tree. When he put pressure on his right arm, a strangled scream came out. Still, he braced himself, putting his weight on his left arm. One foot moved, pressing into the cold ground. Good, good. There’s one. Now, the next. Up, up, and oh God it hurt, he couldn’t breathe around it. His body leaned against the tree and he fought to draw in air. It hurt so much.

No more waiting. No more stalling. They had to move, had to go. Moving would keep some kind of heat in their bodies. He put a hand on Lorelei’s head, then touched her face, letting her know it was coming, to brace herself. How he did it, he didn’t know. He had no idea where the strength came from. But he took hold of her and somehow, they got her to her feet. The forest bore witness to the agony it took to do so, absorbing the screams and blood that fell from the two.

Once they were up, he discovered that standing was just as hard as sitting up had been for her. The only way they were going to move was if he carried her. So, over her protests, Leland braced her against the tree and then turned, putting his back to her, and brought her arms over his shoulders. She was smaller than he was and this wasn’t the first time he’d carried her this way. Squatting down a little, he braced his shaking legs and then lifted up, pulling her onto his back piggy back style, almost stumbling under the added weight. The lashes on his back screamed with the contact and the weight. He grit his teeth, clasped tightly to her hands, and then his whole world focused on putting one foot in front of the other.

Over and over, that was all he thought of. One foot in front of the other. Just keep moving. He moved onto the dirt road the truck had driven on and then he set about following the tire tracks. One foot in front of the other, keep moving, keep walking, keep going, can’t stop. And in his ear, her soft voice, breathy and barely there, but whispering encouragement. “You can do it. I know you can. You’re so strong, just like Spencer. Just like in our stories. You can do it. I have faith in you.” Even when she stopped, even when her voice faded away, he still heard it, encouraging him on, filling him with a strength he hadn’t known he’d had. “I love you.” She whispered to him. And his voice was there enough that he could say the words back. Tell her “I love you too.”

Those were the last words they ever said to one another.

*End Flashback*

When his words died away, silence reigned in the room, broken only by the soft sobs coming from JJ. Because his eyes were closed, Spencer saw none of their reactions. He didn’t see the single tear that slid from Morgan, or how Emily and Aaron both had to turn away to try and pull in their composure, or how Dave’s eyes were red and wet, or even how JJ stood not even bothering to hide her crying.

The memories were too strong in that moment and Spencer knew he couldn’t stay in the room a minute longer. “I need some air.” He said hoarsely. Before anyone could say a word he was out the door and heading out of the station. JJ made to go after him, but Aaron put a hand on her arm, stopping her. “Give him space.” He advised her. There was an almost brittle quality to Aaron’s voice that showed just how close he was to losing his iron composure. “Give him a minute to find his
balance again. He won’t want anyone right now.”

From his pocket Dave pulled a handkerchief and unashamedly wiped at his cheeks before pocketing it again. “He never told us what happened that night.” His words were pitched low and they seemed to throb in the air. “Just asking could send him into a panic attack. Now I know why. I can’t believe he carried her that whole way with as injured as he was.”

“You can do amazing things when there’s no other choice.” Emily whispered.

“And when it’s for someone you love.” Morgan added.

The room fell quiet once more. No one knew quite what to say. All of them looked out to the main part of the station, their hearts going out to their friend.

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Outside, Spencer was trying his hardest to bring himself back under control. He’d headed straight outside without thinking about where he was going or what he was doing. All he knew was that he had to get free. He had to get away from here. Years spent locked in that damn bunker, that cell, made him seek fresh air and sunlight when his anxiety hit him. There was no sunlight now as evening started to settle over the town, but the fresh air was a calming slap to the face. He could breathe again out here. He could actually draw in air.

It felt like he was thinking clearer than he had for the past few hours. The cold bite to the air was enough to shock his body to wakefulness. He stuffed his hands in his pockets as he walked, pulling himself out of the panic of the memory little by little. It had been right to tell them that memory. It had been good. They were good people and it felt like he’d done the right thing in telling them. Out of everyone in his life, somehow it seemed right to have saved this story for them, now.

He shouldn’t take too long out here, he knew. If he did, they were liable to worry about him. Well, they were already worrying, he knew that. That was just who they were. But they would worry more if he took too long. It was actually a little surprising that no one had followed him out here. He stopped on the street corner and looked back toward the station, slightly surprised at how far he’d walked without even thinking about it. His long legs had eaten up the distance and taken him a few blocks down the road. The station was still easily visible in front of him.

Sucking in a breath and letting it calm him, he fought back the shiver from the cold air. Time to head back. Rushing out was foolish, as was walking off. That doesn’t make anything better. You can’t run from your problems. They don’t just go away because you run. You made it through seeing him, through telling them that memory. You can go back in there and make it through the rest of the evening. That pep talk was enough to get him moving once more.

Later, he would curse himself for his stupidity. Later, he would lecture himself on going away from safety and for not paying attention. At the moment, he was too lost in thought to notice anything off. He only heard the sound off to his side seconds before pain exploded through his head. Spencer was unconscious before he hit the ground.
Chapter 13

Morgan was the one to notice that Spencer was taking a while. He’d restrained himself from going after his friend from the start, but now that a little bit of time passed, he didn’t want to hold himself back anymore. Spencer needed to know that he wasn’t alone with this. That he didn’t have to deal with this alone. This time around he was an adult with friends beside him who would support him and help him. He wasn’t some lost little kid anymore. Resolve firm, Morgan caught Aaron’s eye and made a gesture toward the outside part of the station. He saw that Aaron understood. The older man looked at the clock before looking back at him and nodding.

Just as Morgan was leaving the conference room, the door to the station opened and a woman came running in, pink cheeked and out of breath, calling out “Someone, help, please!”

The agent in Morgan took precedence over the friend. He moved with other cops toward the distraught woman. Her hair was windblown and her face red as if she’d run to the station from wherever she’d been. The Chief was the first to reach her, putting a hand on her shoulder and calling her by name. In a town this size, it wasn’t surprising he knew her. “Melinda, what’s wrong? What happened?”

“Down the street…” she panted out, trying to catch her breath and speak all at the same time. “On Willard. A young man was…taken. This guy with a bat…he hit him…got him in his van before I could even scream. He drove way and I…ran fast…”

Officers were already moving out the door; Willard street was at the intersection only two and a half blocks down the road. The chief stayed with Melinda and Morgan moved toward them, hearing the team move out behind him. They’d heard the commotion and had come to see what was going on. Morgan didn’t care. He hurried toward the woman, battling back nausea.

A young man she’d said.

Yet it couldn’t be…no, there was no way. No way could it be. “Ma’am.” He called out. There was an urgent sound to his voice that had attention turning to him. “Ma’am, can you describe the man who was taken? Or the man who hit him?”

Melinda put a hand to her stomach, finally breathing a little steadier. Her eyes were wide, though, and as the color faded from her cheeks, she looked pale. “I didn’t see the man with the bat very well.” She admitted. “But the young man, he was kind of tall, skinny. Messy brown hair.”

Morgan made a pained sound. “Was he wearing a blue shirt and a black vest? Black slacks?”

She looked surprised. “Yes. How’d you know?”

He didn’t waste time answering. Fear exploded inside his system. Looking back, he saw the team standing near the door, all of them watching him curiously, not having heard what was going on. All it took was three words to impart the horror of this; to get them moving with him. “Reid’s been taken!” Those three words were enough to spur each of them into action. Morgan rushed from the station, heading to where the other officers had already gone, praying the whole time that they were wrong. That maybe, somehow, the woman had gotten this wrong. Dear God, please, let her be wrong!

CMCM

There was no evidence at the scene. Nothing to show that someone had even been taken, except for the testimony of one woman. And there was no sign of Spencer. All Melinda had seen of the car was a black van with the panel doors on the sides. No license plate, no real description of the driver.
Nothing. Calls to Spencer’s cellphone went straight to voicemail, telling them his phone was off. If it hadn’t been for the woman, it would have been like the young genius vanished into thin air.

Morgan stood at their crime scene, looking at the buildings around him, trying to think of anything to help. It was the back across the street that gave him the idea. Flipping out his phone, he dialed Garcia’s number, hoping that maybe he was right. Maybe this would help.

“About time you guys remembered I was here.” Garcia chimed over the line. “I was…”

“Garcia, I need you to do something for me.”

The seriousness of his voice cut through her usual humor and put her on alert. “What is it?”

Staring at the bank, Morgan rattled off the address to her. “Does that bank have outdoor cameras? Something to maybe get a view across the street?”

He heard her clacking on her keys and there was a pause before she said “Uh huh. There’s a camera over the ATM that looks directly across Willard Street at what looks like some shop and an alley.”

*Oh thank you.* “I need the video for the last half an hour at least. Someone was taken across the street and we need to see if maybe it was caught on film.”

“I’ll skim through and get it ready in a jiff.”

“Good. I’ll get you on the laptop in a bit.” Before she did this, he had to warn her, had to let her know, even as his stomach clenched at even saying it. A part of him still prayed they were all wrong. Let him have wandered off. Let it be someone else. Please, let him just be somewhere with his phone off.

He knew better than to think Spencer would wander around with his phone off, but it was a prayer he couldn’t help. “Penelope…the guy taken, we think it’s Reid.”

The line went silent before her voice came back, hard and firm. “Give me five minutes, tops.” And then she hung up.

Emily was nearby, looking at the scene with him, along with other officers. Morgan flagged her down. “There’s video from the ATM. Garcia’s gonna see if there’s anything and send it along.” He told her, moving toward the station. Emily fell into step beside him, her expression hard. She said nothing to him. There were no words that could be said right now. The two just hurried into the police station, seeking out Aaron, JJ and Dave. They found them back at the conference room. JJ was just waking in as well and her expression was furious. “He’s not answering his phone. They’re sending cops to his residence, but if this is him, it’s not likely he’s there.”

It didn’t take a genius to figure out who they were talking about. The very first person that had popped into all their minds the minute it became apparent that Spencer was missing. Elijah. He was the only one they could think of in these parts that would dare to take him just blocks from a police station! How the hell he’d managed that was absolutely amazing.

Morgan went straight to their laptop, flipping it open to prepare to get Garcia on the line. “Garcia might have something for us. She was checking cameras off the ATM at the bank. It’s right across the street.” He told the room.

Almost as soon as he had the laptop set up, the call from Garcia came in and her face appeared on the screen. One look told Morgan all he needed to know. He sat back in his chair, a ball of lead settling in his stomach. Fury and fear were painted in equal measure in Garcia’s expression. “It was caught on tape. I’m cleaning up the image now to get a plate, but this is what it shows.” She moved and a video popped up on screen.
Everyone crowded around the laptop. They all watched as Spencer walked down the street, hands stuffed in his pockets. They watched as he stopped, as he turned back toward the station. It was easy to see the debate he was having with himself. Then he started back in the direction of the station. The angle the camera was at, they had a perfect side view as Spencer crossed the opening of the alley and as someone stepped out behind him, swinging a baseball bat. There was a collective wince when it connected with Spencer’s head, dropping him straight to the ground. Before he hit, the man was on him, yanking him into the alley. As someone else came on screen—it looked like Melinda, running toward the alley—the van came tearing out, turning in the opposite direction of the station and taking off. That was it.

The video disappeared and Garcia came back. “I got just barely an image of his face. Its blurry because I zoomed it in and this isn’t the best quality video for distance, but this is who we’re dealing with.” The picture popped up on screen and they all knew, as they’d known even before they saw him. Elijah. Elijah had taken him. The one person in the world they all had wanted to protect him from and he was the one that had managed to take him right down the street from the police station.

“Goddamn it.” Morgan swore. He rubbed a hand over his face. “That son of a bitch.”

JJ had a hand pressed against her stomach like she was fighting nausea. “God, Spence. How is he going to survive something like this? Just looking at the guy terrified him. How on earth is he going to handle this? It’s going to tear him apart.”

They were all surprised by Dave’s soft voice. “You know, the first time I saw the kid, he was hooked up to so many tubes and machines and wrapped in so many bandages you could barely tell there was a kid under it all. He wasn’t even breathing on his own at the time.” As he spoke, Dave stared at the screen, the image of Elijah frozen there. He didn’t look at the group that was now staring at him. “I remember thinking, there’s no way this poor kid is gonna make it. No one could survive something like that. The doctors didn’t even think he’d make it. Each minute he was alive was a miracle in their books. Then one day passed. And another. And another. Each day, he stayed alive by the skin of his fingers. Even when he got an infection that could’ve easily killed him, he still managed to stay alive. I never saw anyone with so much strength. Until I met the adult version.” Now he did turn and look at them. “He’s stronger than anyone knows, even him. He’ll make it through this. And when he comes out the other side, we’ll be there to help him stay strong.”

Aaron looked back at the image before straightening his spine. He would do whatever it took to get their youngest back with them. Until then, he would pray that they wouldn’t be too late. “Everyone suit up.” He told them all. “We’re going to his house. If we want to figure out where he’s taken Reid, the answer’s going to be there. Let’s move.”

CMCM

“Wakey, wakey.”

The taunting voice was the first thing Spencer heard. It drew him up out of the blessed darkness and tossed him back into painful reality. He groaned, his head throbbing with pain. The sound of his groan brought a laugh from somewhere nearby. What the hell was going on? Where was he? He shifted, trying to bring his hands to cup his throbbing head, grimacing as his body fully woke, but his hands were stopped by something cold and hard. That was when he realized his hands were…above his head in a position that he knew was familiar, but couldn’t place beyond the pain right now. What the hell? Then that voice spoke again and the sound of it penetrated Spencer’s brain, working to bring him to alertness quicker than anything else had. “There you are! I was beginning to wonder if I hit you too hard. You’ve been out quite a while, you know.”

Oh God. Oh God. Oh God. No, please, no. But he knew. Oh, Lord, he knew. He knew why the feel
of his hands above his head was familiar and he knew who that voice was and he knew, he knew, what had happened. Walking to the station, the blow to the head, the pain before it went dark. He’d been blitz attacked. With fear raging like a wildfire, Spencer opened his eyes and came eye to eye with the demon of his worst nightmares. There was Elijah, large as life, grinning right in front of him. Terror like he hadn’t known in years grasped Spencer in its clutches.

Elijah wore a grin that Spencer remembered. One he had once known to mean trouble. It was the satisfied grin that promised so much pain would soon be coming. Just as it had then, it turned Spencer’s knees to jelly now. If it wasn’t for the manacles encircling his wrists, holding him up against the wall, he was sure he would have slid straight down to the ground.

“Hello again, Leland.” Elijah said in a sickly smooth voice. The sound of it had Spencer flinching, which made Elijah laugh. “It’s good to see you too! I was beginning to worry that I wouldn’t get you at all. You were rarely anywhere without a group. Awfully hard on me, you know.” His smile grew and he shook his head. “And that would’ve been a shame. All my hard work would’ve been wasted.”

All his hard work? What did he mean, wasted? Spencer opened his mouth to ask what he was talking about, but the words didn’t come. He tried to force himself to say something, anything, but the words wouldn’t come. The terror was too strong, the anxiety too high. It robbed him of his voice, just as it always had. Faced with the man who inspired such terror, Spencer was once again speechless, his voice gone.

Elijah watched all of this and laughed. He brought a hand up, tapping Spencer’s cheek once, laughing again when the young genius jerked hard to get away from him. “Still can’t talk to me, eh Leland? Makes this just like the good old days, doesn’t it! Let’s see if I can guess what you were going to say. You were probably going to ask what all the little boys have asked so far. ‘What’s going on’?” He mocked in a high pitched whine. “What’s happening? Where am I? Why are you doing this?”

Without warning Elijah drew back and slammed a fist straight into Spencer’s gut. He hadn’t been prepared for it and couldn’t stop the groan that came out as his body tried to curl in on itself, stopped by the manacles. He wheezed out air, coughing as his body tried to draw breath back in. He’d barely caught his breath when a hand hooked under his chin, over his neck, pinning him against the wall by his throat. His eyes went wide and he froze, trying to stay as still as possible. Elijah’s hand tightened for a second, not cutting of his air but threatening to. He leaned in, the mirth on his face gone, temper in its place. “For a supposed genius, you’re just as stupid as you always were.” Elijah hissed at him. “You think we didn’t know who you were? You think we didn’t know what you changed yourself into? This has been a long time in the making, Dr. Reid. I’ve been planning this for years.”

Planning this? Oh, God. Oh, shit. It was a setup. The whole thing was a setup. Spencer’s heart was racing as it hit him. This whole damn thing had been a set up from the start.

Elijah sneered at him. “That’s right.” He said when he saw the realization on Spencer’s face. His hand spasmed against Spencer’s throat. “I did all this just for you, Leland. I knew that, even if it didn’t draw your particular team, it would draw you in once the branding was found. I knew branding them would bring you in. But I thought maybe you’d realize how wrong it was. I always told you how I’d do it better. Didn’t you suspect anything when you saw that they were identical?”

He hadn’t. How could he have missed that? How could he not have noticed that? He’d even told them how Elijah had said he’d do it different; better.

“Did you really think you would get away from me?” Elijah tightened his hand, actually cutting Spencer’s air a little, making him scrabble against the wall. “You were supposed to be mine. When I
got old enough, you were to be mine. Well, you’re mine now. And I’m not letting you go.” Abruptly
the hand on his throat vanished. Spencer sucked in air as Elijah moved away from him. For the first
time, the young genius caught sight of the room around him and he felt his fear grow. Nausea boiled
to life. It looked exactly like the bunker he and Sparrow had shared. Exactly like it. Then his eyes
saw something else and he thought he might actually throw up this time. There was a child on the
bed. A young boy, no more than eight or nine, wearing just a dirty t-shirt, curled up in the corner at
the head of the bed, handcuffed to the headboard. He was watching Spencer with wide, terrified
eyes, and for one brief moment, Spencer swore it was his younger self sitting there.

His attention was jerked back toward Elijah when the man walked over. He saw where Spencer was
looking and he grinned at him once more. “Ah, yes, our other little guest. Meet Lucas. He’s my…
insurance.” He paused, smirking. “You always behaved better when that bitch was there to threaten.
I thought it’d work the same now. You behave, Leland, and I’ll leave him alone. Disobey me, fight
me, and I’ll take it out on him. Are we clear on that?”

The little boy gave a whimper and a quiver when Elijah took a step toward him. Frantic, Spencer
nodded, aching to shout out ‘yes, yes!’ but the words wouldn’t come.

Elijah stopped and then made his way back toward Spencer. “Good, good. Then, why don’t we go
ahead and get things started. Turn around and face the wall, Leland.” When Spencer hesitated, not
wanting to turn his back on the man, Elijah held up one hand. “Ah, ah. Going back on our deal
already?”

He was well and truly stuck here. There was no choice. Spencer forced his legs steady under him
and he turned his body, putting his face to the wall, the chains at his wrists having just enough slack
to allow him to turn this way. What’s he going to do? What is he going to do to me? His mind
screamed at him. At the same time, another voice chimed in, drowning out the other It doesn’t
matter. You can take it. You can take anything. Just keep the boy safe and alive. Anything he does,
you can take it. You’ve taken it before. This time, this isn’t going to last forever. The team will come
for you and they’ll find you and they’ll rescue you. There’s hope this time. Hold on to that hope and
keep that boy alive and you can take anything. You can do this!

There was movement and a slight clanging sound. Then Spencer’s shirt moved and something cold
was against his back, sliding upwards, making him shiver. A knife. Elijah was cutting his shirt away.
Spencer curved his hands, gripping the chains above his wrists. It gave him something to latch onto.

There was a sound then that Spencer didn’t know. He heard the boy, Lucas, whimper and move on
the bed and he started to turn his head. Elijah laughed, standing just out of his line of sight. The
sound stopped and Spencer held still, knowing something was coming but terrified to find out what it
was. There were footsteps behind him and Elijah was close, one hand sliding up Spencer’s back and
making him jerk in his bonds. “Let’s see if you still scream as pretty as you used to.” Elijah
whispered to him. “Try not to move, Leland. We want to get this right on the first try.”

At the first press of heated metal against his right shoulder blade, Spencer let out the first of many
screams to come.
Chapter 14

He didn’t remember passing out. He remembered the pain, the fire against his back, the smell of burning flesh around him. Then, nothing. When Spencer woke up again, it felt like he’d just closed his eyes and opened them, yet he could instantly tell he hadn’t. He had to have been unconscious because he was no longer against the wall like he had been. He was lying down instead of standing. Blinking carefully, he made his eyes open, needing to see. One look confirmed what he’d felt—he wasn’t against the wall; he was lying on the bed. His arms were still above his head, wrists throbbing from having borne his weight, and this time they were attached to the headboard of the bed on the outside, away from the wall. Curled up on his side, thankfully not on his back which was burning and aching, it gave him a full view of the room.

The next thing his eyes caught on to was the head that was peeking up over the edge of the bed almost right in front of him. The young boy—Luke? Lucas? Lucas! That was his name, Lucas—was curled up on the ground by the bed, his hands still cuffed only this time it was to the edge of the solid metal bedframe, so very close to his own hands. Spencer gave the room one last scan, seeing the chest at the far corner that had his stomach lurching—please, no anything but what’s in there. Let him not have recreated this room that much, let that not be what I think it is, please don’t let it be!—and nothing else but the stairs at the far end that led up to the exit, the same as he remembered. Could they really be back there? There’s no way he could have transported you all the way there without someone catching him along the way! And you couldn’t have been unconscious that long. Think clearly, Spencer. This has to be a recreation!

With that mental lecture, he gathered himself and looked back at the boy.

A quick try told Spencer that his voice still wasn’t working. Dammit. He cursed in his head, trying to force his voice to work even knowing that it wouldn’t. That wasn’t how this worked. Getting himself more anxious and more upset would only make this worse. You know that. You know you can’t force it to work! As a child, he’d only known that his voice didn’t work right. After everything, when he starting seeing the psychologist, was when he’d finally been given a label for it. They’d labeled it selective mutism and he’d finally had a name for that clenching sensation in his throat when the words wanted to come but wouldn’t. The facts instantly popped into his mind. Selective mutism is a psychiatric disorder in which a person who is normally capable of speech is unable to speak in given situations or to specific people. Some people with selective mutism may have sensory integration disorder. Once known as elective mutism, it was mistakenly thought that those who suffered from it chose not to talk. Now it is known that, though they may want to, they actually cannot speak in certain situations. He let those facts run through him, calmed by the rationality of it.

Lucas was watching him anxiously, his eyes wide and locked onto Spencer’s face. Since he couldn’t speak to reassure the boy, he tried to relax his expression and keep his fear and anxiety from showing. In a trick remembered from childhood, Spencer used the pain in his head and searing over his back as a physical anchor to draw himself away from the unwanted thoughts and emotions and to ground him in the present moment. There were times that pain was almost good. It kept him from panicking too hard. It kept him from becoming a screaming, sobbing mess.

Once he had himself in control, Spencer tried to smile at the boy. He shifted just slightly, easing some of the ache in his shoulders.

Lucas watched him for a long moment before he too shifted, sitting up a little more so that his whole face was visible over the edge of the bed. “Can…can you really not talk?” The boy asked suddenly.

Sighing at himself, Spencer shook his head. Real great federal agent you are here. You can’t even
speak to reassure a kid you should be protecting! How the hell are you going to get the two of you out of here? He pulled a deep breath in, holding it for a second before deliberately blowing it out. He made sure to swell his stomach and not his chest as he did so. It was called diaphragmatic breathing and it worked to stretch the diaphragmatic muscle and reflexively lower his heart rate, respiration and calm his body. If he could just get himself calm enough, he might be able to get his voice back ‘on’. He took a few more breaths that way, focusing entirely on his breathing, trying to keep himself in control.

Lucas stayed quiet the whole time, watching him intently albeit a little curiously. Whether he realized it or not, he started to match his breathing to Spencer’s as if instinctively seeking to calm himself as well. For a few moments the only sound in the room was the sound of their deliberate breaths. When Spencer felt his body ease with the last breath, he tried once more, holding on to the calm he’d created in himself. “Mmmmm…”

Surprise lit Lucas’s eyes and his mouth dropped open a little. Encouraged by the sound, Spencer took a few more breaths, focusing on the boy in front of him. He needed to be calm for the boy. He needed to do this for him. He tried again. “Aaammmm…” No, not quite. Another few breaths, another pause, try again. “I’mmmm…” Better. Oh, much better.

A smile was curling Lucas’s lips. “You can talk. You’re doing it.” He boy encouraged him.

It didn’t pass his notice, the humor in a child praising him, an adult, for managing a slurred sounding ‘I’m’. That flash of humor helped settle him even more, enough that he finally, finally, managed to make some sense. “I’m Ssssspen…cer.”

For a second Lucas furrowed his eyebrows. Then his face cleared a little. “Spencer? Is your name Spencer?”

“Yes.” Oh, man, he sounded like an idiot, there was no denying that. But he was speaking. His voice was working some. Now to try and ask what was important. First and foremost, “Are you hurt?”

Again a hesitation as Lucas obviously thought about what was being said. Then the boy bit his lip and looked down at his lap and Spencer had his answer. He saw it in the way Lucas wouldn’t look at him, the way he shifted suddenly. Everything in his body language gave it away. Damn. Spencer closed his eyes and worked to breathe once more, trying to keep himself under control. He needed to keep his cool. Right now he needed to focus on Lucas. “L…ucas.” Another deep breath, watching the boy who hesitantly peeked up at him through his hair but refused to full look up anymore. “I’m a c…op. FBI. My t-teamm will come fffff..for us.” Deep breath, in and hold it, back out again, stretching those muscles. His next words were much, much clearer. “When he c-comes, just stay quiet and out of the w-w-way. And don’t w-w-worry about me. Just close your eyes and don’t watch. I can take it.”

Off on the other side of the room they both heard the sound of a lock moving. Lucas cringed and slid back down to huddle up and Spencer felt his eyes go wide and his breathing hitch. Any effort he’d made at being calm was disappearing. Strong! He yelled at himself. You are so much stronger than this. You can do this. You survived through hell for nine years. You can survive him until your team gets here or you find a way free. You are stronger than this! Remember what Gideon said when you were with Tobias. You are stronger than him, he cannot break you.

Elijah came down the ladder, grinning at them the minute he hit the ground. “Look who’s awake! I’m so glad. It’s no fun when you pass out, you know. I much prefer you awake.” He moved straight to the bed without a single hint of hesitation, sitting on the edge by the footboard, that grin still in place. “How’re you feeling there, Leland? How does it feel to be back at home?” With one hand
Elijah gestured around him. “I made this all just for you, you know. Dad at least had this part right. No one can hear anything down here.”

*Keep talking* Spencer pleaded in his head. *Just keep talking. You always liked to talk, Elijah. Keep it up now. I can handle your talks better than I used to. Say whatever you want. Keep talking and stall for time. My team will find me. They’ll find me and they’ll end you.*

“You know, I’ve visited Dad a few times. We write now and again. We built this plan together, him and me.” Elijah’s hand came out, running up Spencer’s calf. The young genius jerked back from the touch and Elijah chuckled. “We even had a plan to get him out of jail, you know. And we were going to get you together. Just like old times, yeah?”

Terror was the first thing Spencer felt at that. The little boy in him wanted to wail and scream at the idea of being with both Elijah and Ezekiel. But the adult in him, the quick mind, latched on to something else. They were going to take him together? If they had this big plan, if they were going to get Ezekiel out of jail and take Spencer together, then why was he here now? Why had Elijah drawn him here and taken him on his own? It didn’t make sense. The profiler in him was already thinking. *There had to be something that changed. A stressor that changed his plans. But what? What could have provoked him to alter plans that, from the sounds of it, have been a long time in the making?*

Abruptly Spencer was snapped out of his thoughts when Elijah’s hand clamped on his ankle tightly—tight enough he couldn’t jerk his leg free. The grin changed, becoming sharper, more predatory, and there was a light to his eyes that Spencer recognized and knew meant trouble. “But enough of this chat, Leland. We’re wasting precious time here. And the last thing I want to do is waste a moment of my time with you.”

With one move, Elijah smoothly pulled something from his belt with his free hand that had Spencer going utterly still. A knife. It was a long, hunting knife. Spencer’s breath hitched and he went utterly still. Elijah put the knife underneath Spencer’s pant leg, stabbing it up through the material with a tearing sound that seemed so loud. The sound went on as Elijah drew the knife upwards, cutting straight up the outside of his pant leg. Spencer held perfectly still out of fear of being cut. Inside, he was shaking, terrified by what he knew was coming. *Please, no. Please, please, no.* It was useless pleading, he knew. There was nothing to stop this. And he couldn’t even fight back. If he did, he knew Elijah would make good on his promise of hurting Lucas and Spencer couldn’t let that happen. He couldn’t let a young boy be hurt because of him. He could take this. Lucas shouldn’t have to live with any more than he already did.

By the time Elijah finished cutting both pants legs—as well as his boxers—and was pulling the material away, Spencer’s body was quivering despite his best efforts to hold it still. The knife had nicked his thigh a couple times and Spencer could see the blood standing out against his pale skin, making Elijah’s eyes flash even more. He reached out, smoothing his hand over Spencer’s thigh, and Spencer jumped but forced himself not to jerk away. Though slit up the back, he still wore his shirt, covering his arms and chest. It was the only piece of material left on him. “Still so pretty.” Elijah murmured reverently. “Such beautiful skin. You always looked so pretty painted like this.” His fingers smeared the blood over Spencer’s skin, up toward his hip. Suddenly he grabbed Spencer’s hipbone, twisting so that Spencer was forced onto his stomach.

*Don’t scream, don’t scream, don’t scream.* The knife tip touched some of the old scars on his back and Spencer couldn’t stop the whimper in his throat. He clenched his eyes shut. *Don’t scream, you can take this. Don’t let him hurt Lucas. You can take this you can do it. Oh, God. Oh, God. Someone, please, someone come help me please I don’t want to be here I don’t want to do this again oh please, God, someone, anyone, please!* He clenched his eyes shut and let his face bury against the bed. Some people might have thought it was better to try to watch, to see what was coming, but he
knew it wasn’t. Seeing it coming didn’t make it any easier.

Air ripped out of his lungs when he felt the knife slide, tracing lines over his back, pressing into his skin. Each cut, each pull, had his hands clenching and he was burying his face against the bed to try and hold back the urge to scream. It hurt, it hurt, God it hurt! But they weren’t deep cuts and he knew he could take this.

Then came what he feared the most. The knife was gone and he felt Elijah’s hand smooth over his back, tracing through the blood. “On your knees.” The hoarse words were thick and commanding and Spencer couldn’t make himself move. His mind was rebelling at what he knew was to come. Please, no! Please! PLEASE! He silently screamed.

A real scream tore from him when Elijah’s hand curled into a claw and his nails dragged over all the fresh cuts. “On your knees or I swear to God I’ll take the boy instead of you, Leland. Don’t fucking test me.”

No, no! Spencer bit his lip so hard he bled to try to cut off his scream. His mind was protesting but his body was already moving. He couldn’t let Lucas be hurt. He had to protect him. Had to keep him safe. Shaking, shuddering, he got onto his knees, his face still buried against the bedding. Once more Elijah’s hand was smoothing over his back, slipping through the blood, keeping the pain alive. The sound of a zipper was startlingly loud in the small room. “So pretty.” Elijah murmured again. His hand left Spencer’s back for a moment before returning to grip his hip, holding him in place. Spencer felt something hard and moist press against him and he couldn’t help how his hands jerked at the chains and his body sought to move away. No, no! NO! NO! But there was no stopping him. Elijah gripped Spencer’s hips tightly to hold him in place as he inexorably pushed his way into the young man’s unprepared body.

There was no stopping the scream that came straight from Spencer’s gut as he felt a sensation he had prayed he’d never have to feel again, things inside of his body ripping and tearing and making way for the harsh intrusion. There was no time to adjust; no time to try to think beyond the pain as Elijah fully sank into him. His scream broke and his body tried to flinch away as the man withdrew and then the air was filled with screams that were like shrieks as he thrust violently in again. Tears poured from Spencer’s eyes to drench the bedding and his screams were only broken by sobs as Elijah tore into him over and over, hard and fast and he had his hand on Spencer’s back again, tracing through the blood, clawing at the cuts he’d made.

It seemed to go on and on, a never ending pain, and Spencer lost himself in it, the line between the boy he had been and the man he was blurring so that he couldn’t tell the difference between the two. His whole world became about the pain and he couldn’t think enough to even see the end in sight but then Elijah was thrusting harder, faster, moaning and panting and he bent, his teeth latching on to Spencer’s shoulder and he shoved hard one last time and Spencer felt the man finish, pressing deep in him and drawing one last scream from the agent.

The solid weight of Elijah’s body crushed him, pinning him firmly to the bed. The only sound in the room was Spencer’s broken sobs. He jumped when he felt Elijah’s tongue flick out over the bite mark he’d made. Blood was dripping from it, dripping everywhere from his body it seemed. “You’re just as fucking sweet as I remember, Leland. The best fuck I’ve ever had. You’re still so fucking tight.” The man drew back, his tongue trailing over Spencer’s back, and in that moment, the young genius felt something and he knew this wasn’t over. Holy shit, he’s still hard Spencer’s mind wailed.

The hands on his hips tightened once more and he felt Elijah straighten up. “Ready for round two?”

As the pain began once more, hazing Spencer’s mind, one sensation came in that startled him. A small hand closed over his. It stayed in his as the pain went on, and on, and on, and on….
“How could we have been so stupid?” Emily burst out suddenly.

Her furious words drew the eyes of Morgan and JJ both, making them turn to stare at her. The three agents were currently at Elijah’s house, standing in his bedroom, sifting through the mess there to try and find something, anything, that might tell them where their youngest agent had gone. The team had gone to Elijah’s house with the other police to search but so far, nothing had been found. No sign of Elijah or Spencer.

It was almost like Georgia, all over again. Once more the team was tearing apart a house, searching for clues that would lead them to the man who had Spencer. Something to give them some kind of sign as to where the man might have taken him. Garcia was even on her way, just as she’d come in Georgia. This time there wasn’t a mass set of computers to work with, but there was his personal computer here at the house as well as the one at the school. Aaron and Dave had gone to the school after the first hour here at the house revealed nothing. They were going to go through the man’s office in hopes that it would reveal something. Garcia promised to search as best she could via her laptop on her flight out to them so that time was wasted.

Neither JJ nor Morgan had to ask what Emily meant by her outburst. Both of them were thinking the same thing. All of them were. They had given no thought to Spencer wandering around outside by himself with Elijah having just been at the station. Granted, he should have been safe, so close to the police station. And nothing Elijah had done had indicated that he had known who Spencer really was or that he’d even seen the man, so it wasn’t like that had been a worry. But this was Spencer they were talking about and trouble seemed to be drawn to him. *Especially* when he was separated from the others.

JJ put down the book she’d been holding and she let out a shaky sounding sigh. “We’ll bring him home.” There was a ferocity to her voice that might have surprised some people. There were times people looked at the blond media liaison and saw only the sweet girl with the kind smile and the friendly demeanor. They didn’t know the tough woman that lived underneath the surface. The strength she carried that had managed to make her not only survive in this job, but thrive in it. “That’s what we have to focus on, Emily. We’ll bring him home. We can’t waste time second guessing and cursing ourselves.”

The trio lapsed into silence once more. Though what JJ said was right, Morgan was having a hard time making himself listen to it. His brain couldn’t stop from thinking of the stupid things he’d done. It taunted him, telling him that he should have followed Spencer outside. They didn’t have to talk, just walk together. Then his friend wouldn’t have been alone when this happened. Then he wouldn’t have been alone when ambushed, if he would’ve been ambushed at all.

Over and over he saw Spencer’s face in his mind; the way he’d looked as he’d stood with his shirt off, trembling from head to toe, terrified to let even his best friend see his body. So afraid to let anyone see even his chest that he’d kept his shirt bundled there to cover it. He remembered the horror in Spencer’s eyes as he’d told Morgan about the life he’d led there. About what Elijah had been like. He could hear Spencer’s voice as he told them about the brand. “*I should have noticed it sooner. His...his father was the same way. Ezekiel said he was marking his property, like one does with cattle, so that everyone would know we were his. Elijah was always thrilled by it. He would...*” He paused, swallowing down the bile in his throat. “*He enjoyed telling us how he would have done it different. Better.*”

Wait a second.
“He enjoyed telling us how he would have done it different. Better.”

Better. Elijah had told him that they would’ve been done different. Better. So…why did all the brands look like the one that Spencer had? Morgan yanked out his phone before he’d even finished that thought and he pressed the button for Aaron, habit making him put it on speakerphone. Emily and JJ turned when they heard Aaron’s voice saying “Did you find anything?” in lieu of a greeting.

“Hotch, I just thought of something. Something that doesn’t seem right.” Morgan said into his phone. He held it out in front of him, staring at it as his brain tried to run through this. “One of the things that led us to connect this to Elijah was the brands on the boys, right? They matched the one that Reid has.”

“That’s right. Reid told us how the father liked to brand and it was something that Elijah enjoyed as well.” Aaron agreed.

“But it doesn’t make sense. Do you remember what else Reid said? He told us that Elijah was thrilled by it. He liked to tell them how he would’ve done it different. Better. But these, they’re identical to Reid’s. I took the picture for Garcia of Reid’s brand. It looks exactly the same as the others.”

Surprise lit Emily’s eyes and JJ’s face had gone thoughtful. On the phone, Dave’s voice spoke. Apparently Aaron has his phone on speakerphone as well. “A lot of the things done to these boys are similar to what was done to Reid. It’s like a slightly changed copy, but still a copy.”

“Maybe when he got older he liked that connection.” JJ suggested. “The younger him wanted to be better than Dad, do things better, but as an adult maybe he sees what his Dad did and decided that he likes it that way.”

“Or maybe he wanted it to look the same.” Emily said slowly. Her voice changed a little as her brain obviously thought on something the rest of them hadn’t. “Think of it, guys. Something’s been bugging me ever since Reid was taken, and not just in the normal sense. It didn’t make sense to me either. The video doesn’t show Elijah following him, or a spur of the moment decision to attack. It shows that Elijah laid in wait. He probably saw Reid coming and set up in there. But, okay, Morgan, when you and Reid went to the school and he panicked…did Elijah see you guys at all? Did you actually get close to him before you left?”

Morgan thought for a second before shaking his head. “No.”

“And since then, Reid’s either been at the hotel or at the station. And when Elijah was there, Reid was back with us, out of the way. Now, the logical assumption is that Elijah jumped his hunting from children to an adult because he knows that Spencer was once Leland, right? But how?” She looked up at Morgan and JJ. “How does he know? If we’re assuming that this is why he took Reid, it doesn’t make sense. He never saw him enough to be able to figure out that it’s him.”

“Unless he knew before we ever arrived.” Dave finished slowly.

Silence settled around them for a moment as they all digested that bit of information. Morgan’s voice was thick when he said “If he knew before we got here…”

JJ was staring at him, wide eyed, as she finished his sentence. “Then the boys were all a ruse to get us here. To get him his real target. Reid.”

“But there’d be no guarantee that our team would be brought in.” Morgan argued. “Even turning it serial, there was no guarantee that our team is the one that would be sent.”
“No.” Aaron said slowly. “But he probably figured making it identical to what was done to Leland and Lorelei would be enough incentive to draw Reid out.”

“It’s still a risk. For all he knew, it could have sent Reid into hiding.” Dave said.

Dave was right. It didn’t seem extremely organized. Everything else Elijah had done so far seemed organized, meticulous. All well thought out. This seemed…rushed. “This isn’t organized like everything else he’s done. There has to be some kind of stressor.” Morgan finally said. “Something to set him off that would trigger him to jump into it like this. Everything seems so planned so far, with all the little details thought of, but this doesn’t. There were too many chances that Reid wouldn’t come for this or that he could run and hide and Elijah would lose his chance at him. Something set him off.”

“Rip the house apart.” Aaron ordered them firmly. “Garcia should be arriving in the next half hour. When she gets there, have her look for anything in his computer that might be a stressor. Meanwhile, you guys rip the house apart and see if you can find anything that might have set him off. If we can find what set him off we might be able to follow his thoughts and figure the rest of this out.”

Morgan snapped his phone shut and stuffed it in his pocket as soon as they were done. He looked at his friends and they were all filled with new purpose. A new goal to work toward that seemed a little more reachable suddenly. “I’ll take the office.” He told the girls. Emily nodded and looked around the bedroom. “I’ll stay in here.”

“I’ll take the living room.” JJ said.

Quick as a flash, the three split apart, each going to their places, hoping they would find something, anything, to help them. Something to tell them where their friend was. Morgan couldn’t help but pray as he moved to the office. But he didn’t say a normal prayer, beseeching God for help. He said a prayer to the one angel he thought would be watching over the young man right then. Watch over him, Sparrow. We’re coming. Keep him strong. Watch over him, please, and help him stay strong. We’ll find him and we’ll save him. Don’t let him give up hope.

CMCM

Every inch of Spencer’s body hurt. It was all he could do to simply lie there, breathing slowly through the pain, forcing himself not to flinch and make everything hurt more as he felt Elijah shift on the bed. He had passed out once already after the second round of rape. How long he was out for, he had no idea. When he’d woken back up it had been to the sound of Lucas whispering to him and the young boy’s hand gripping his. “Spencer, Spencer, wake up!” the little boy was saying urgently. “He’s back. He’s opening the door and he’s back!”

Now Elijah was sitting on the foot of the bed by Spencer’s feet, having stretched the young agent out so he was lying flat on his stomach. He was playing with the knife, twirling it in his fingers, occasionally tracing it on Spencer’s thigh.

Spencer was learning, very intimately, that what had been a fascination with watching people bleed as a child had grown into a full blow fetish as an adult. Elijah ran his tongue over Spencer’s ankle, lapping up the blood from the cut he’d just made. “You are so sweet, Leland.” He murmured before biting down on the fresh cut, making Spencer’s leg jerk. “Mm. Very, very sweet. We’ve missed out on so much time together, you and I. But that’s okay. We’ll make up for it now, right? I’ll make what time we have memorable.” A chuckle slipped out of the man as he suddenly rose from the bed.

What time we have? That didn’t sound right. It made it sound like there was a time limit on all of this. Did Elijah have a certain time schedule that he followed? Was there some specific plan that he
had to enact before, before killing him? But at the beginning, he had said he wasn’t going to let him go. Things weren’t adding up right! Something else was going on here, something he was missing, and he couldn’t help but feel that, if he just understood, if he could figure out what it was he was missing, then it would change so many things.

Through half opened eyes he watched Elijah grin down at him. Then, for no reason that Spencer could see, Elijah’s face suddenly transformed to rage. It sent adrenaline coursing through Spencer and snapped him to attention quicker than anything else could. Elijah on his own was dangerous. Elijah in a rage could be lethal.

“Who said you could touch him?” The furious hiss took Spencer a second to understand. Then he remembered Lucas slipping a hand into his, holding onto him for comfort for them both. Spencer flinched as he remembered one of the rules that Ezekiel had had for him and Sparrow. They were not allowed to hold hands or touch one another until after everything was done and the men were gone. They weren’t allowed the comfort of touching one another in front of them during their little ‘together time’. It was another way Ezekiel had shown his domination. Apparently Elijah was the same way.

Elijah furiously strode forward. Spencer quickly let go of Lucas’s hand, preparing to fling his body over the edge of the bed to shield the boy if he had to, but Elijah did something he hadn’t expected. With a furious growl, he lifted his booted foot and slammed the heel into Spencer’s hand, smashing it against the edge of the headboard. Spencer had thought he had no screams left in him, his throat raw and aching. He was wrong. The scream that tore from him ripped its way up his throat as sharp as a knife. Just barely he heard Elijah tell him “You know the rules, Leland! You know the rules! This was your fault!”

Spencer’s world was wrapped in pain, focused solely on his hand, yet one sound managed to slip in. Lucas was whimpering by him, pleading, and then there was the sound of an impact and Lucas’s whimper turned to a sharp cry. That was enough to yank Spencer out of himself. His eyes flew open and he saw Lucas cowering, trying to shelter his face as Elijah’s boot came swinging once more. Spencer reacted without thought. His cuffs rattled as he flung himself with all his strength off the edge of the bed, putting his body directly over Lucas, making Elijah’s boot connect with his thigh. The pain of moving was almost excruciating. His back, his backside, his hand, his legs, they were all screaming at him, protesting loudly to being moved. But he would not lie there while Lucas was hurt for offering him comfort. Too many times as a child he’d been forced to watch his Sparrow be hurt and he’d done nothing to stop it. Not until the end. Since then, he’d promised himself he would not let another child ever be beaten in front of him again.

“Move!” Elijah shouted furiously at him. “Get away from him!” He kicked out again, this blow connecting with Spencer’s hip, but the genius grit his teeth and stayed in place. He felt Lucas shaking under him and it firmed his resolve. He would take anything to stay here and protect this child. Anything. By some miracle, he kept from screaming, only grunting through the next few kicks. Then suddenly hands were on him, yanking him onto the bed and there was no way he could stop it with his hands cuffed. Nothing he could do but groan as his abused body bounced on the bedding. Then came a hissing sound, followed by a sharp snap, and Spencer knew what was coming. There was no way to brace for this. Nothing he could do to stop it. “This is your fault.” Elijah’s words were hard and cold. “If you’d just listened, I wouldn’t have to punish you.”

Spencer buried his face in the bedding and bit down on a hank of blanket in preparation of the first blow. He would not fight this. He’d done what he’d wanted and gotten Elijah’s attention off of Lucas. If this was the price, he’d pay it. He would not fight.

The sound of the belt whistling through the air was louder than Spencer remembered. The first blow
made his body jerk, but he held mostly still. Determination kept him quiet through the next few. It was on the fifth—or was it sixth?—that it made him jerk enough that his hands even jumped, bringing to life the pain in his broken—please, don’t let it be shattered, please, please!—hand. Darkness crept in on the edges of Spencer’s vision and everything in his world seemed rimmed in pain. It seemed to go on and on, a never ending torment. When the belt stopped, he almost sobbed in relief. Then he felt Elijah’s body fall on top of him and he knew it wasn’t over. It was only beginning.

CMCM

That was what they found on Elijah’s home computer. Nothing. How the hell was that possible? Garcia checked and checked again and…nothing. It was frustrating. It was beyond frustrating. This wasn’t just any case, this was about Spencer, and because of that, Garcia took this all very, very personal. There had to be something to find. There just had to be! Yet all the digging she’d done since she’d walked through the doors of this monster’s house had unearthed nothing. Not a single shred of, of anything, and she wanted nothing more than to scream. To rant and rave. There had to be something here! They had to find something, anything, that would lead them to Spencer. He’d already been with that monster for hours now. For this to take another minute, another second, was too long.

When officers showed up, Aaron and Dave in tow, with boxes of things from the monster’s office—and to Garcia, she could think of Elijah as nothing but a monster—and with his computer, Garcia practically leapt on it. In no time at all she had the computer hooked up and running and was getting ready to sift her way through it. Maybe there would be something here. Please, please, let there be something here.

She was barely inside the computer when she saw something that had her stopping. A name, a file, in his student records that he kept on here, that didn’t match with any of the others.

Leland McGuire.

What she found in there had her staring at her computer screen. Then, without looking away, she did the only thing she could think of. Nearby, she heard Aaron talking with Dave and another officer and Garcia didn’t hesitate to interrupt them. “Sir! Sir!” Her voice instantly drew their eyes. “Sir, you need to see this!”

CMCM

Things seemed just a little hazy, like he was floating on a cloud. Spencer knew that wasn’t a good thing. He needed to bring his brain back to an alert state. But there was no real way for him to fix it. You’ve lost too much blood. His mind told him. Instantly came the facts on blood loss and he was just too tired to stop them. A person can lose ten to fifteen percent of the total blood volume without serious medical difficulties. Class I Hemorrhage involves up to 15% of blood volume. There is typically no change in vital signs and fluid resuscitation is not usually necessary. Class II Hemorrhage involves 15-30% of total blood volume. A patient is often tachycardic with a narrowing of the difference between the systolic and diastolic blood pressures. The body attempts to compensate with peripheral vasoconstriction. Skin may start to look pale and be cool to the touch. The patient may exhibit slight changes in behavior. Class III Hemorrhage involves loss of 30-40% of circulating blood volume. The patient’s blood pressure drops, the heart rate increases, shock worsens. Class IV Hemorrhage involves loss of more than 40% of circulating blood volume. The limit of the body’s compensation is reached and aggressive resuscitation is required to prevent death.

Such positive thinking. There was no accurate way for him to gauge how much blood he’d lost. It
was a small consolation that it seemed to be slowing. Elijah had pressed blankets on his back for a while when he had finished, stemming the bleeding for now. Then he’d made Spencer drink some water before storming out of the room without a word. That had been a while ago. Down here, Spencer had no way of telling how much time had passed. He had no idea how long he’d even been here.

Since then, he’d simply laid here and tried to calm himself down as best as possible. Being in dim light and near silence helped to keep him calm and keep his sense from being overstimulated even more than they already had been. He thought that maybe, maybe, he might be able to manage to make himself speak now. He’d been watching Lucas quietly lying there, pretending to be asleep. Random glances through his bangs gave him away, though. The boy was awake.

“Llllllll.” Ugh. Okay, so he wasn’t quite there yet. The breathing tricks he usually did wouldn’t work well right now, not with the bruising he could feel on his stomach from Elijah’s kicking. It was all he could do to manage to breathe right at all. His breathing was slightly rapid and shallow, a sign he knew that meant he was going into shock. No great surprise there. Just work on keeping it steady, don’t think on the pain, and make sure the boy is okay! Okay, careful breath, then try again. “Lllluuu…” Careful, careful breath, in and out. Again. “Lllucassss.” Better! Much better! He watched the boy peek up at him but say nothing. This was going to be all on him then. “I kkk…now you’re awake.”

This time Lucas peeked up just a little more, his eyes more visible this time behind the screen of hair. Spencer gave him an encouraging smile. “Are you okay?”

He wasn’t sure if the kid would answer. How much could be expected of a child anyways? No child should ever have to live like this. Yet after a moment Lucas straightened a little and let his face tip up so he wasn’t as hidden by his bangs. “I’m okay.” He said softly. Spencer considered the words a small victory. It was best to keep him talking. When Lucas shut down and stopped talking, that was when things would be very dangerous.

“Aaa…are you sure?”

“Yeah. You protected me.” The last bit was said with a small amount of shame. His eyes lifted, flickering to Spencer’s hand and back to his face. Suddenly the words came rushing out. “I’m sorry! I didn’t mean to get you hurt! I’m so sorry, Spencer!”

Oh, you poor kid. Spencer’s heart constricted a little. “It wasn’t your fault.” His voice was steadying, growing just a little more solid and sure. “I will do everything I can to protect you.” I never protected Sparrow. But I’ll protect you with everything I have. I won’t let another child be hurt in front of me. I won’t let another child die on my watch. I’m sorry, Sparrow. I’m sorry I didn’t save you. But I’ll make you proud of me. I promise, I’ll do all I can to save this boy.

“But Spencer…you’re, you’re bleeding, like, a lot. I don’t want him to hurt you again. What if…what if…” Lucas’s voice grew tight and in that moment he sounded so very much like a little boy that it brought tears to Spencer’s eyes. The young agent tried to shift, to do what he wasn’t sure, when suddenly his leg brushed against something in the bed. Something sharp.

A knife.

A careful testing showed that it was a knife. Spencer twisted enough to look down and there it was, lying half hidden by the blankets. In his anger, Elijah hadn’t been as careful as before. He’d left his knife on the bed. Determination hit Spencer and filled him to the top. The mind he was famous for began racing, brought back to alertness by the adrenaline that seemed to fill him. Looking down at the knife, then up to his hands, at the broken bones that had changed the very shape of his
hand, a plan began to form in Spencer’s mind. He looked down at Lucas and a small smile curved his lips. “Just hang tight, Lucas.” He said slowly and carefully. “I’m going to do everything I can to get us out of here.”
Chapter 16

It was, frightening. That was a good word to describe it. The BAU team gathered around the computer with Garcia as she scrolled through everything for them, showing them what she had found inside of that folder. It was frightening to see everything that Elijah had collected and archived on his computer in that little file labeled Leland McGuire. “Jesus.” Morgan swore under his breath. Everything that was saved inside of that file was on one single topic—Dr. Spencer Reid.

It looked like Elijah had a copy of everything that Spencer had ever written, every article he’d ever been mentioned in, every photo he’d ever appeared in. Everything.

“He’s been keeping tabs on him for a long time.” Emily pointed out the obvious. “Look at that. He has a copy of Reid dissertation. A copy of his college transcripts.”

Aaron leaned forward, lifting a hand to point to a file. The title on it didn’t seem to make any sense. “What’s this one, Garcia?”

The tech analyst quickly clicked on it to open it and a box popped up, requesting a password. She typed in a few commands and was surprised when it didn’t open. “Oh, so that’s how it’s going to be, is it?” She murmured to the computer. “Well, let’s see how you like this.” Oblivious to the slightly amused looks over her head, Garcia set about bypassing the password protection. It took not even a minute before she was in. Then she was clicking on the files inside the folder, scanning through them. What she found made her sick to her stomach. “It…it looks like plans, Sir. And photos.” She pulled up one of the photos for them to look at.

The team placed it immediately. It was Dave who voiced what they were all thinking. “That’s the bunker that was under the barn. That’s where Reid and his sister stayed at.” His voice was just slightly hoarse. Out of them all, he knew the horrors of that room the clearest. He’d been inside of it. He’d stood there and stared at the little metal framed bed, at the shackles that had hung off the wall. He’d seen the contents of that ‘toy’ chest that sat against the far wall. And he’d felt the chill that seemed to sit in the air even just standing in there.

“It looks like he was trying to build up plans.” Garcia continued on as she kept looking. “He’s got lists here of materials. Photos from different angles and guesses at measurements. It, it looks like he was planning on building one of this.” And the impact of that was not lost on them. Horror seemed to grip the group in its clutches, rendering them all speechless for a long, aching pause. It had been hard enough before when thinking about Spencer being in Elijah’s hands. But to think that he was not only with this bastard, but forced into a recreation of his biggest nightmare, it made it all the more sickening.

Aaron was the first to recover. His voice was hard, emotion shoved down as far as he could go. “Garcia, see if there’s a materials list in there. Then I want you to check that against purchases made in those amounts in the past year and see if you come up with any hits, any locations where these might have been delivered to. If he’s bought these things, there’s going to be a record of it somewhere. He’ll had to have had some of this delivered. And where it’s delivered to could lead us straight to Reid.”

CMCM

After some careful planning, Spencer and Lucas were ready. Between them, they’d managed to get a good bit of blanket up near Spencer’s face. He needed a large wad to bite on; something to muffle any sound that he might make. There was no telling how far away Elijah was or how well he would
be able to hear any sound they made and the last thing Spencer wanted was to do anything that would alert him. And what he was about to do had a very, very high chance of making him scream. One last time Spencer checked to make sure everything was in place. Just in case something he did alerted Elijah, he wanted everything set up so that what he needed was in easy reach.

A look around the room showed that, at least as far as he could tell, there were no cameras in here. If there were, they were hidden. If they’re hidden and he’s watching you, he’s already going to be wondering what you’re doing. He could come rushing in at any minute and stop you and then you’ll be lucky if he doesn’t kill you for trying this. That was just a risk he was going to have to take. He needed to get out of here and he needed to get Lucas out of here. Soon. Looking to the little boy, he reminded him one last time “Remember, if he comes, get under the bed as best you can. And stay quiet. I know what I’m doing.” I hope he silently added on.

Well, no more wasting time. Who knew how long they were going to be alone in here? Spencer took one last look at his hand, running down what he needed to do to make sure he had it all right. Then he took as deep a breath as he could manage, blew it out, bit down hard on a mouthful of blanket and then sucked air back in again. With that second inhale, he tried to move the thumb on his broken hand at the same time that he turned his other hand and grasped the cuff. While his right hand pulled up, he tugged down on his left. It was excruciating. This was beyond pain. This was agony. Sheer agony. He bit harder on the blanket and shoved his face into the bed, almost smothering himself in the process, keeping the scream as silent as he could.

The pain grew and Spencer was terrified for one moment that he’d calculated this wrong. That the break in his hand wasn’t severe enough or that too much swelling had settled in or so many other factors that were hard to predict. Then he felt the grinding of the bones in his hand, telling him he’d made the breaks worse and then his hand popped free of the cuff and dropped to the bed. The blankets worked to muffle that final, hoarse scream. Sweat seemed to almost pour off of him from the effort his body had exerted and his chest was heaving with the effort to breathe.

There was no time to lie there and regain control. His mind was screaming at him—it hurts, oh, it hurts, please, make it stop, make it go away, oh please, please!—but he knew he had no time to stop. If there were hidden cameras, then Elijah would have just seen him get free. Spencer couldn’t waste any time at all. With one hand being free of the cuff, it allowed him to pull down his other one as well, the loose cuff now sliding around the pole of the headboard. Using that hand to brace, Spencer pushed himself up onto his knees, knowing better than to try sitting. Still, this was risky enough. His legs and his arm shook and he wasn’t sure they would support him.

Trembling on hand and knees, Spencer swore he felt something warm in him, a strength he didn’t know he had. A memory floated to the surface of another time he hadn’t been sure he could support his weight. A little boy, pressing trembling arms against a tree, putting one foot and then the other on the ground. He had done it then, he could do it now. With his good hand he gripped the headboard for support and then he slid one leg off the bed, his foot going to the ground right beside Lucas’s hip. It shook and he wasn’t sure it would hold but he locked his leg and dammit, he was not going to fall! Next leg, come on now, move that foot and get it on the ground. Move, move, hurry, before he comes! His other foot touched ground and he had to pause, had to breathe past the pain of it. But he had done it. He was on his feet.

His lips curved in an almost feral grin. He was going to do this. He was going to make it. When he was sure his legs would hold, he let go of the headboard, straightening up. The cuts on his back and legs were stretching with each move, the minimal scabs they’d built up breaking under the movement. He felt fresh blood on his back. It didn’t matter. He grabbed the knife off the bed, holding it tightly, suddenly feeling so much more secure now that he was armed. Next step was to move, go to the chest, see if he could walk well enough to get over there. If he could get there, then
maybe the keys to the cuffs would be in there, or maybe Spencer’s things would be in there and he could get his gun or call for help. He knew the chances of his stuff being in that chest were minimal but he hoped, oh how he hoped.

The first step was the hardest. He couldn’t stop himself from moaning. The second step was hard, but bearable. Slowly he moved, limping across the room. He was going to make it. He was moving!

He was just reaching for the chest when he heard the sound of the lock jangling on the door.

CMCM

“I’ve got it!”

Garcia’s excited cry echoed through the house and drew not just the team, but the local officers that were there as well. Everyone crowded around as Garcia pulled up a map on her computer screen. “This address right here is where there’ve been deliveries over the past six months that match the requirements you gave me, Sir. All of them went here.”

“What is it?” Emily asked as she leaned in.

“It’s a residence.” She got the satellite image up on the screen so they could all see the house in the middle of the picture, with a garage to the left. “There’s nothing on the property that looks like it could fit, though.”

“The garage, maybe?” Emily suggested.

Morgan was shaking his head, though. “It doesn’t look the right size. Baby girl, can you find out about the house and see if maybe it has a basement? That would be the perfect place on property like that to hide some of that size and it would make it easier for him to build without really being seen by any neighbors.”

It only took a minute before Garcia found what was needed. “It looks like it does. And…basement size is bigger than the estimates that Elijah had listed, so it’ll fit.”

There was no more time to waste. Aaron was already moving, snapping out orders as he went. “JJ, I want you to get a hold of SWAT, tell them to prepare to go. Officer Richmond, contact the chief, let him know…”

CMCM

For one single second that seemed to span for an eternity, Spencer swore he felt his brain actually stall. Every muscle in his body froze, his eyes went wide, his breath caught in his throat, and his brain just seemed to stall. Then he heard the sound of movement on the ladder into the room and it was like life was breathed back into him. Out of the corner of his eye he saw Lucas twisting, shifting to get under the bed as best as the cuffs would allow him to. Good. The boy was out of the way.

Once, Spencer had told Aaron “I find that I do some of my best work under intense terror.” In that moment, he hoped those words were right. The tension drained from him, his breathing evened out, and he shifted his stance just as Morgan had taught him to do. Every self-defense lesson he’d taken, every bit of hand to hand that Morgan had forced him to relearn over and over, all of it came flooding through his mind. His hand curled just a little tighter around the knife in preparation. This was not a ‘talk down the Unsub’ type of situation. This was beyond that. His fight or flight instincts took over and, with a child to protect in the room, the fight reflex was triggered. When he heard the man touch ground, turning and taking the first step toward the room, Spencer moved away from the shadowed corner and struck as hard and fast as he could.
Elijah reacted far quicker than Spencer had expected. He’d been aiming for the man’s stomach but Elijah jerked to the side in just enough time that the knife cut through his side but nothing more. Spencer wasted no time. His initial attack might not have worked but he had the shock factor on his side and in that second that Elijah was gaping at him, Spencer tried to move to strike again. This cut was partially blocked, the blade slicing over Elijah’s arm, laying the skin open. “You son of a bitch!” Elijah snarled out. Without any more warning, he didn’t attempt to disarm Spencer, instead launching forward and knocking full body into the genius, slamming them both into the wall.

Between the pain and the force of the blow, Spencer lost his grip on the knife, the weapon clattering to the ground. He had no time to lament that fact before Elijah was off of him, grabbing him and throwing him down to the ground. Spencer slid when he hit, his face bouncing off the ground with such force he was surprised his nose wasn’t broken. The taste of blood filled his mouth and his head spun dizzyingly. He tried to put his good hand on the ground to push up but a foot caught his stomach, knocking the air out of him. Another and another had him trying to curl up in a ball to try and protect his vital organs.

“You little fucker!” Elijah was shouting at him. “You thought you’d leave me? You’re mine! Mine! You fucking little bastard!”

Another blow connected on his ribs and Spencer let out a hoarse cry. Pain was taking over and he couldn’t even manage to uncurl his body. Dammit, it wasn’t supposed to be like this! He’d almost made it! Above him, Elijah was shouting again, his words like hammer blows to his ears. Through the haze over his eyes, Spencer saw something that drew his attention over all else in the room. Lucas, lying so still under the bed, eyes wide and tears streaming down his face. It was the terror there, the hint of resignation, acceptance of a fate he should never have to have, that spurred Spencer to move once more. Drawing on everything he had, Spencer braced his body and, heedless of any pain, launched himself off the floor and straight at Elijah’s legs. It sent the both of them crashing down. Spencer threw his first punch before Elijah had a chance to recover.

What happened next was slightly hazy for Spencer. He had no idea where the strength came from or how he managed to move at all. All he knew was that he wasn’t going to go down without a fight. He would not die down here and he would not let Elijah win. For Lucas’s sake, Spencer had to fight, and fight he did. He kicked and hit for all he was worth, absorbing and ignoring the blows that Elijah got in as the two of them rolled around the floor, wrestling in a fight that they both knew was life or death.

It was the feel of something cutting into his side that broke Spencer’s mad fighting. Something sharp slid over his hip when Elijah rolled them and Spencer didn’t pause to think. He dropped his hand down, opening himself up and taking the blow to the face, allowing him to close his hand over something cold and hard. With one last final burst of strength, Spencer tightened his hand and shoved it straight upwards, burying the knife in Elijah’s stomach straight to the hilt.

The body over his froze. Spencer blinked to clear moisture—was that blood or sweat or was it both? —from his eyes. He saw Elijah gaping down at him, eyes wide, mouth hanging open. The young genius felt no remorse. Gripping tighter to the hilt, he pushed, forcing the man off of him. In almost slow motion he watched as Elijah toppled to the side, hands going to his stomach to clutch at the knife that still sat there. In that moment, staring at the monster in front of him, seeing one of the demons that had haunted him for so long reduced to a quivering being on the floor, Spencer found the energy to roll to his side, lifting up on his good arm so that he could stare down into the man’s face. Elijah’s eyes were locked on him, lips moving but for once, it was the older man who was without a voice.

It took a moment for Spencer to make his throat work. Determination lit his eyes. For the very first
time in his life, he stared right into Elijah’s face and found his voice. He slurred and stammered, but the words were clear. “I’m nnnnot Leeee…land. I’m Sssspencer Reidd. And I’m nnnn…not yoursss.”

Turning, Spencer tried to make his way toward the bed. Toward Lucas. How he would get the boy free, he had no idea. He just knew they couldn’t stay here. It was a slow and painful process, all of his injuries coming to life. Spencer didn’t notice the blood he left behind on the ground as he inched his way toward the bed. Just shy of his goal, his limbs finally gave out on him and he crashed back down, unable to find the strength to lift himself. Everything around him was starting to go slightly hazy once more. He felt like he was drifting between here and there. Almost absently he noticed that there was a sound near him, like something was moving. He couldn’t gather enough energy to look, though. He was just going to rest for just a minute. Just a little rest before he started to move once more. In that little half daze, Spencer heard one word. Three letters that brought a soft smile to his lips.

“FBI!”
Chapter 17

Words could never begin to describe the emotions that raced through Derek Morgan as he watched his boss fling open the metal hatch to the basement and shout out “FBI!” A thousand different thoughts and feelings came and went in the space of a heartbeat before it all locked down underneath the shield he had to use to protect himself so that he could get through this.

Getting everything together after getting their location had seemed to take so long, as if every second was dragging by at a snail’s pace. Then, time slowed down even more, practically crawling as they drove out to the property, snapping their vests into place and preparing themselves, praying and praying that they would find their friend. Please, God, let us find him! Let us find him in time! And praying that they would be in time to save him.

Now that they were here, time suddenly seemed to speed back up and Morgan found himself climbing into the bunker after Aaron and he was faced with something that there was no way he could have prepared himself for. Elijah, lying in his own blood, a knife jutting from his stomach, and Aaron beside him checking for a pulse. There was blood…everywhere. The floor, walls, the bed. And at the center of it all, lying right beside the bed, the body of the one person that mattered most. Morgan barely registered his feet carrying him forward and then he was dropping beside Spencer, his trembling hand going to the young man’s neck to feel for a pulse—please, let there be a pulse! Let them not be too late!—at the same time that his eyes traveled over Spencer’s body. What he saw made him sick. If he’d thought the room was bloody, it was nothing in comparison to his young friend. Cuts marred almost Spencer’s entire backside from ankle to mid-back, placed randomly on the pale skin. And, worse of all it seemed, there was a new burn on Spencer’s back. A new brand.

Morgan’s attention was jerked from that as soon as he found a pulse. Uneven and shaky, but there. “I’ve got a pulse.” He called out to the room. “He needs medics, now!” Then he was lowering himself down, getting down by Spencer’s face, not even noticing the tears building in his eyes when he saw the young man’s slack face. “Kid, kid, can you hear me? Come on, man. It’s Morgan. Open those eyes for me, Reid. Come on.”

Medics were already coming into the room. They moved Morgan back, forcing him out of the way, and the dark skinned profiler almost shouted at them that they couldn’t make him leave; he wasn’t going to leave his best friend. The he heard something, something that drew his eyes off to the side. Emily was unhooking a pair of cuffs and helping a little boy out from underneath the bed. A child. Oh, God, there’d been a child in here! The horror of that just made everything so much worse. The boy was taken up the ladder first, helped up by Emily, and then the medics had to get Spencer up the ladder. Morgan could only be thankful that it looked like the young man was unconscious. HE was lifted onto the medic’s back, arms put around the medic’s neck so the man could grip them in the front, allowing him to bear Spencer’s weight on his back and shoulders. Then, braced and assisted by the other medic, they carefully made their way up the ladder and to the main floor where they got him onto the gurney. Morgan didn’t hesitate to race up after them and follow. There was no way he was letting his young friend out of his sight. None. And if they didn’t like it, well, tough shit. They could just deal with it.

CMCM

It was hours later that the team was gathered in the waiting room at the hospital. Morgan sat in his seat, head buried in his hands, unable to get the horrible images out of his mind. None of them could. But, more than just that room, more than what Spencer looked like, Morgan was haunted by one other image. Since he’d been riding in the back of the ambulance with his friend, he had been
witness to what had happened when Spencer had briefly regained consciousness. The memory of that still made him shudder.

Spencer had stayed unconscious as he’d been loaded onto the gurney and even as they’d put him in the ambulance. It had been when they’d been going down the road, sirens blaring, and the paramedic had tried to put an IV in that Spencer had suddenly come back to life. As much as Morgan hated to apply the words to Spencer, the genius had gone a little crazy. He’d started to scream, his body bucking up on the table, hands and feet flying. It took both paramedics plus Morgan to hold him still long enough that they could give him a shot. As they held him, Spencer fought even harder, his scream a hoarse sound in the endless moments it seemed before the sedative took effect. Morgan’s heart had ached from that. Dear God, what had been done to him? No, there was no need to ask that. They’d seen Elijah’s handiwork before. They knew what the man was capable of and it was pretty obvious what he’d done. Sighing again, Morgan rubbed at his eyes.

On the other side of the room, Emily moved to stare out the window in the waiting room, feeling almost completely numb. Though she knew there was nothing she could do right now, nothing any of them could do, she couldn’t stop herself from wishing there was something to be done. Anything that would keep her mind off of this waiting. Was there anything worse than waiting? Waiting on news of their youngest, the very heart of their group. Waiting on news even of the fucking bastard that was responsible for all this. Waiting on news of the little boy, Lucas. All they were doing was waiting.

She didn’t realize that she was tapping her foot as she stood there, or how hard she was picking at her finger, until she felt someone take a hold of her hand. The sudden contact almost had Emily jumping out of her skin. Looking over, she saw JJ standing there, not watching her, but holding her hand and showing her support. Seeing that same anxiousness, that same hatred for waiting and worry for what was coming, actually eased Emily’s just slightly. Knowing that she wasn’t alone, that she wasn’t the only one holding herself together by thin threads right now, made it just a tiny bit easier to bear.

Aaron and Dave sat together as well, not speaking, just silently waiting. Neither man was good at the waiting portion of things, both being men of actions. But they had done everything they possibly could. Aaron had even made sure when he arrived at the hospital to speak with the staff and make certain that they not only had Spencer Reid’s record, but the medical records for Leland McGuire as well so that they could have a full medical history to work with.

They’d been waiting for news on Spencer for what felt like hours when two people came into the room. It wasn’t the doctor; it was a man and woman. The two looked around once they stepped off the elevator and then they quickly made their way over toward the team. “Excuse me.” The gentleman called out. Aaron rose as the man got close, looking at him curiously. He didn’t get a chance to say anything before the man said “I’m Chance Mclean and this is my wife, Edna. Are you the agents that rescued our son, Lucas?”

That drew everyone’s attention. “Yes, Sir.” Aaron said with a nod.

“I don’t know how we can ever thank you.” Edna said tearfully. Her cheeks were already wet and her eyes were rimmed in red. “You saved our baby’s life.”

Chance tightened his arm around her and nodded at them. His own eyes were rimmed in red. “Would one of you know where we can find the other man that was there? Lucas, he keeps asking how Spencer’s doing. He’s almost frantic about it.”

Only those who knew him well would have been able to see the small shudder that ran down Aaron’s frame. “That would be SSA Dr. Spencer Reid. He’s still in surgery right now…” Aaron had
to pause, drawing in a breath to control himself. “Once we’re updated on his condition, I’ll send one of my agents to let you guys know.”

“Thank you.” Edna stepped away from her husband, startling Aaron by wrapping him in a hug. “Thank you so much for bringing my baby home to me. We’ll pray for your agent, Sir.”

When the young couple left, the waiting room fell silent once more, the momentary break gone. Yet again, the group was back to waiting.

CMCM

Delivering bad news to families was one of the hardest things that Dr. Carol Winnman hated to do; especially when the news was like this. There was good news in there and that was what she would remind the family of when she spoke with them, but sometimes that didn’t overshadow the bad news. Sometimes the bad news just, sucked. Yet there was no putting it off. These people had been waiting in the waiting room for hours now and she knew they’d practically be frantic with worry. After pulling off the dirty shirt, leaving her in a plain black tee and her scrubs pants, she made her way out toward the waiting room.

The instant she walked into the room, the group of agents was on their feet, almost all of them towering over the slight doctor. She put on her best work face and strode straight to them. “Agent Hotchner?”

“That would be me.” Aaron Hotchner stepped forward, reaching out to shake her hand.

Carol shook his head as she made the customary apology. “I’m Dr. Carol Winnman and I’m primary on Spencer Reid. I’m sorry it took us so long to get out to you. I understand you’ve all been waiting anxiously.” The woman sighed and pulled her hat off her head. “Do you guys mind if I have a seat? Dr. Reid has permission in his records for us to speak with the group of you and this could take a little bit to explain.”

At their nods of permission, Carol took a seat in one of the chairs, sighing just a little bit as her body relaxed. She’d been on her feet for most of the day, especially since they’d brought in Dr. Spencer Reid, and her body was exhausted. In her usual blunt manner, she addressed the group once they were seated. “How would you like this? Do you want the medical terms or do you want it simple? And would you like a short summary or a little more blunt?”

“Just give it to us straight, Doc.” Dave said.

She nodded. Good. “All right. First of all, between all the injuries, Dr. Reid lost a startling amount of blood. He’s been given transfusions and we’ve stopped any bleeding. He’s also being given plenty of fluids. That was our first major hurdle.” These people had asked for it straight; she was going to give it to them straight. A grimace crossed her face. “I worked trauma in Chicago for twelve years. I’ve seen my share of murder victims, assault victims, and victims from domestic or child abuse. I can honestly tell you that, based off my experience, the amount of torture on this young man was astounding, yet all of it was done in a way to try and keep him alive. From the bottom of his shoulder blades down to his ankles we found a total of thirty two different lacerations in varying sizes, some caused by a sharp blade would be my guess, and some I’d hesitantly guess came from a belt. Twenty of them required stitching. There was also a rather severe…brand, burned into his right shoulder blade.”

“Oh God.” Garcia brought a hand up, covering her mouth, her other hand clenching down on Morgan’s. It was the only sound from the group. The rest of them stared at the doctor, waiting for her to finish.
“He has a couple stitches in his bottom lip where it looks like it split on his teeth. I called in an oral surgeon who took a look at his mouth. Two teeth on the bottom right were knocked almost completely free and another two on that side were chipped. He had to pull them for him but he said that, once Dr. Reid heals some, all he’ll need is a partial plate to correct that problem.” She gave them a second, watching as they processed this. That wasn’t fun to hear, but it wasn’t anywhere near the worst this young man had suffered.

Once she was sure they were all focused on her again, she continued. “His wrists were damaged from the cuffs that restrained him. It appears he either struggled or was forced to support his weight on them. I had to stitch the skin on the right wrist. Now, here’s where things get harder, folks, so bear with me. I’ll lay it out as best as I can. If it’s too much, please, let me know.” She took a deep breath and leaned forward, resting her arms on her knees. “The damage to Dr. Reid’s left hand was extremely extensive. We’ve a surgeon on staff that specializes in orthopedics and he did the best that he could to repair the damage.” She held her left hand out and used her right to gesture with, pointing to her left. “Judging by the damage, I’d say that something hard slammed his hand right about here…” She pointed toward the palm. “Effectively, it almost crushed the bones there. Whatever it was crushed against had an edge, because his fingers were bent back and there were breaks right along here…” This time she gestured to the base of her fingers. “There was also some damage done to the carpal bones in the wrist.” Grimacing, she turned her hands, clasping them together. “While the damage has been repaired as best as possible, there was some definite nerve and muscle damage.”

A low, painful sound came from JJ’s direction. Her hand was so tight on Emily’s her knuckles were going white. The other woman didn’t seem to even notice. She was staring at the doctor with a hard expression on her face and heat in her eyes. Garcia turned toward Morgan and he tucked her under one arm, unable to even try to offer her any soft words of comfort. Aaron looked like he was made of stone, staring at the woman. It was Dave who cleared his throat and asked the questions. “What’s that going to mean for him in the long run? Will he regain full use of his hand?”

Carol grimaced. “I’m sorry. We did the best we could, but there was only so much we could do. He’ll need to see a specialist to fully assess the damage. Mostly what we’ve done is resetting and repairing dislocations and fractures and repairing nerves and tendons. A specialist will take a look at it and see what kind of reconstructive surgery can be done. After that, with physical therapy, he has a good chance of regaining some use of that hand but he’s never going to have full use of it again. Some of the bones were too fragile to begin with and took the damage too easily. His bones are slightly weaker than the average adults. I’ve had access to his records and I’d say that’s a result of the inadequate nutrition he received as a child. A specialist will be able to provide you with more information on that.”

After giving them a minute to digest that, Carol took another deep breath and prepared to finish this. She really, really hated this part of her job. She hated seeing victims like this and having to deal with their families afterwards. This was part of the reason why she’d left Chicago for a small town hospital. “I’m sorry, Agents, but there’s still more to cover.”

“There’s more?” JJ breathed out achingly. How much more could he have lived through?

“Yes, ma’am. Some are relatively minor in the scheme of this all. There’s bruising on his back, thighs, and left hip. None of those look deep enough to have caused any serious damage, but they will make him tender for a while. There was a fairly clean break in his right foot that we’ve casted. It should heal nicely, I believe. There’s swelling in his knee where it looks like his movements exacerbated an old injury. With some rest, that should heal well. Now, for the last few bits of bad news. We found two fractured ribs and three cracked ones. One of the fractured ribs managed to puncture his lung. We’ve got him on a ventilator and we’re watching to make sure there’s no buildup
of air around the area. Last of all…” Trailing off, Carol looked from face to face, absolutely hating what she had to say next. Hating the images that still sat in her mind. “I’m sorry to have to be the one to tell you, but we found obvious signs of trauma associated with repeated sexual assault. I’m so sorry, agents.”

That was what finally broke Garcia. She buried her face against Morgan and was quietly crying, her body shaking slightly. Tears stood in JJ’s eyes, but she suddenly looked just as furious and just as fierce as Emily was, the two of them practically vibrating with their anger. Surprisingly, Dave also looked ready to commit violence, his usual calm nonexistent. This time it was Aaron who spoke, Aaron who found his voice and kept control. “How soon can we see him?”

“We’ve got him under sedation in the ICU right now. For the moment, what his body needs more than anything is absolute rest and relaxation to give it a chance to start healing. We’re going to be watching him closely for a few days to keep an eye out for any infection. I can let you in to see him two at a time for a few minutes each, but right now he’s not going to know that any of you are there. But, I understand that you’ll want someone with him.” She added the last bit when she saw a few of them about to protest. “One of you can stay the night, but only one. There’s just no sense in the group of you staying in there when he’s going to be sedated. We’re going to keep him that way for at least the next twenty four hours. Tomorrow, we’ll switch him from a ventilator to an oxygen mask so long as his respiration is doing well.”

Rising to her feet, Carol looked at the group and honestly felt her heart go out to them. It was obvious that these people cared about the young man back there. She couldn’t help the way her voice and expression softened as she watched them gather themselves. “Your friend seems strong. He’s held on through all of this and he’s still holding on. We get him past the first twenty four hours, his chances at recovery improve greatly. He’s got good people helping him here for the physical. As for the rest, it looks like he’s got a good support system in place. He’s going to need each and every one of you to get through this when he wakes up. I’m happy to see that he won’t be alone. Now, who’s coming back first? I’ll take you to his room.”
The next forty eight hours were some of the hardest that the team had to go through. It surprised no one when Morgan was the one to insist on being the one person that was allowed to stay with Spencer. That left the others to alternate their visits. ICU rules state that visitors must be 18 years or older, were permitted 24 hours a day, and only one person at a time was allowed for five minutes every hour. With Aaron, Dave, JJ, Emily and Garcia all coming to take their turns, that allowed Morgan a twenty five minute break each time they came to visit, which he generally used to either have a bathroom break or grab some food or coffee. They made sure that Spencer was left alone at no point, despite the fact that he wasn’t awake to notice. It made them feel better to visit him, see him, or talk to him.

Seeing him lying in the bed was difficult. Though his back was covered in stitches, they couldn’t lay him on his stomach because of his damaged ribs and the potential for more damage to his lung, so they were protected from seeing the harsh cuts and bruises back there. But that left them free to see the bruising on his face. That was hard to look at, especially with the tube coming from his mouth. It made him seem so much frailer.

Halfway through the night, one of the nurses checking his back found swelling and inflammation over one of the larger cuts on his back. Fever set in, his temperature skyrocketing, and it became a terrifying battle to try and keep him stabilized as the antibiotics fought to do their job. Morgan lost count of the prayers he gave, curled into his chair at Spencer’s bedside, so desperate that he turned to a faith he had long ago abandoned.

By the time morning broke once more, so had Spencer’s fever. Dr. Carol waited until midday, watching to make sure that nothing more happened, and when she was sure the infection wasn’t rearing its head for another round, she had the nurses stop the sedation. They also removed the ventilator and switched him to a nasal cannula to continue to administer oxygen. When she did all this, she warned Morgan “When he wakes up, he’s going to be in a lot of pain. It’s in his file that he doesn’t take narcotics and we couldn’t use them right now anyways as there’s too much a risk at depressing respiration. We’re doing what we can to ensure his comfort, but he’s going to be hurting.”

After that began the hours of waiting. Morgan talked to him when there was no one else in there, trying to draw him out, wake him up. The team talked to him when they came in. Yet, Spencer showed no signs of waking, and with each passing hour the team grew more and more worried. Dr. Carol tried to assure them, telling them that it was to be expected that his body would sleep after the kind of trauma it had been through. Yet they knew they wouldn’t relax until he opened his eyes and looked at them. Until then, they would continue to wait.

It was Dave who brought up something Morgan hadn’t even thought of. While Garcia was taking her turn in visiting, Dave turned to Dr. Carol and said something that drew the eyes of the rest of the team. “I don’t know if it’s in his records or if he has an official diagnosis anywhere, but Reid has some things you should probably be aware of when he wakes up.”

“Oh?” Carol turned, one eyebrow raised up. Her demeanor instantly turned professional. “Such as?”

“For one, he most likely won’t be able to talk, at least not right away. He suffers from selective mutism and the higher his anxiety, the less likely he is to talk. And hospitals definitely make him anxious. There’s a strong chance he’ll also be sensitive to strong, artificial light and loud noises. Again, those seem worse when he’s anxious.”

Remembrance flashed in Morgan and he spoke up without thinking. “The SPD.” He said. When
eyes turned toward him, Morgan grimaced a little, realizing he’d blurted the words out. It felt almost like betraying something Spencer had told him, yet it was important. What little research Morgan had done since then—because there was no way he was going to be told his friend suffered from something and not look into it to find out what he could—told him that most likely this hospital visit was going to be very, very hard for Spencer to handle. With everyone watching him and waiting and with Dave nodding slightly, he hurried to explain. “He told me that he suffers from a sensory processing disorder. One of his biggest problems, he said, was hypersensitivity to touch, sensation, things like that. Some materials against his skin can cause him pain, or light touches. He says it’s not people’s touches that bother him for the most part, but sometimes it’s the light touch. I looked into it and read that some people with SPD need a firm pressure, like in touch or massage or a weighted blanket.”

“Exactly.” Dave said with a nod. “I know that his diet restrictions are in his medical file. Some of those aren’t just because of his body, but because there are certain foods he actually can’t eat because of this problem. I just wanted to warn you so you could speak with the staff that’ll be dealing with him. If they have to touch him, don’t let it be whisper soft, and make sure to speak in a low, subdued voice and keep your movements slow and direct. It’ll save you a lot of trouble.”

Garcia came out then, ending her fifteen minute visit, and the group went quiet as JJ took her place, heading into the room.

CMCM


Sound buzzed in Spencer’s ears. Something tickled at the edges of his mind, pulling on him, pulling him away from the blessed, comfortable darkness. Up away from the sweet relief of unconsciousness.


What on earth was that sound? That was nothing like what he’d heard lately. It pulled him from sleep, this repetitive noise right in his ears. It was like it was filling his head until there was no room for anything else.


Without thought, he tried to move his hands to cover his ears. Anything to make that sound stop. The blackness faded a little more and a little more. His hands felt heavy; too heavy to lift. Every bit of him felt heavy. What was going on? What had happened? Please, please, don’t let him have drugged me. Oh, please, not that. Anything but that. But he felt so heavy, like the weighted feeling that came as he woke from a high.


Again, Spencer tried to move his hands. This time the weight wasn’t as bad. His right hand twitched slightly, but nothing more. With that little movement, though, came a small amount of clarity. Spencer started to try to move the rest of him. He clenched his eyes slightly, working toward opening them, knowing that the light would blind him. What the hell was going on? This…this didn’t feel like the bed he’d been in. As he woke, the pain slipped in, making him aware of an ache through his whole body. Focusing on that ache brought a little more clarity…

Oh, please, something make that sound stop! He tried once more to lift his hand and got it up just a little before it dropped back down. That little twitch seemed to start a chain reaction around him. All of a sudden there was something much louder than the beeping. A voice, bouncing inside his skull like a jackhammer.

“Guys, he’s moving!”


“Reid?”


The sounds were blending together. He knew he should pay attention to that voice—it wasn’t *Him*—but the sound was getting more and more overwhelming. Keeping his eyes closed, he fought to get his hands to move. The sounds in his head were growing, like bees buzzing around and he couldn’t control them. Like the buzz of an alarm that he couldn’t manage to shut off.

“He looks like—” *BeepBeepBeep* “—he’s in pain.”

*BeepBeepBeepBeepBeep*—“Reid, honey…”—*BeepBeepBeep*.

*BeepBeepBeepBeepBeepBeepBeepBeepBeep*

All of a sudden, the beep vanished. He could still hear other sounds, the sound of someone moving and the sound of his own breathing, but the beep was gone. He kept his eyes closed, not caring what was waiting for him or who was there or what was going on right in that moment. The buzzing in his head was fading away a little and the relief was immense. He felt the air sigh out of his chest, bringing pain with it that should have bothered him but didn’t. The last of that weighted feeling started to leave him and he finally felt safe enough to open his eyes. What he saw wasn’t at all what he expected.

The light wasn’t extremely bright around him. Actually, it was dimmed a little. That was the first thing he saw. Next he noticed that he wasn’t in that room. He was—he was in a hospital, lying in a hospital bed. And around his bed were three people. Morgan, Dave, and…some woman he didn’t know. That woman was near the vitals machine and he could guess that she’d muted the beeping for him. Spencer closed his eyes briefly before opening them again. The three were still there, still smiling at him. They, they were real. They were really there. He closed his eyes and swore he felt tears gather in his eyes. Memories started to swim in now that his head was clear and he was more awake. Breaking free of the cuffs, getting the knife, attacking Elijah. Rolling around on the ground and fighting, fighting back, and then the knife—sinking that knife into his stomach. The memories hit Spencer like a ton of bricks right in his chest. He’d killed him. He’d killed him! And then the single, blessed word, just before he’d passed out. FBI! Oh, it hadn’t been a dream! It was real and they were here and he was here and he was safe. They’d found him. They’d found him.

He opened his eyes again, blinking back the moisture that built there, not wanting to cry. Spencer opened his mouth, wanting to say something, wanting to tell them thank you, thank you so much for finding me. I knew you’d come. But nothing came out. The words were there, right there, but they wouldn’t form. Agitated with himself, he tried to make the words coming even knowing that it
wasn’t how it worked. His hands started to try to curl in frustration. The instant his left hand moved, pain burst to life there, shrieking past the medication in his system and roaring to life. Instinctively his body tried to curl a little, that hand moving to cradle against his chest, but the act of moving brought to life other aches and pains and Spencer couldn’t control the gasp of pain that slipped out.

“Reid, Reid, hold still, kid.” Morgan’s voice was low and soothing, reaching in and giving Spencer something to hold on to, something to anchor on as he tried to freeze and control the pain. He was succeeding, too. That is, until a hand touched his arm.

The panic that flared to life inside of Spencer was instant and all consuming. The feel of that hand on his skin had him gagging, choking on his own air, making his chest ache and throb. He jerked away from the touch, a hoarse scream pulling free, thinking only of getting away. He didn’t even realize that he’d almost flung himself out of the bed. All of a sudden more hands were on him, holding him down, pinning him to the bed and he screamed once more. Not again! Please, not again! Please, please! I got free, I killed him! Please, let go of me! LET GO OF ME! PLEASE!

Someone was shouting, other voices were calling, calling his name. He could hear them but he couldn’t chase away that panic. They were touching him and he couldn’t, please, he couldn’t take it. Let go, let go, let go!

Something sharp stabbed Spencer’s hip suddenly and he shrieked painfully at the feel of the needle. Then suddenly warmth filled him, followed by heaviness. As the sedative took effect, Spencer stopped fighting, his body slowly growing limp. The three people carefully laid him down, Dr. Carol adjusting him as best as possible, checking for any damage as she did.

“Jesus.” Morgan murmured achingly. He looked down at Spencer’s now slack face, his ears still seeming to ring with the painful sound of Spencer’s shrieks. “Rossi…”

Dave sighed a little. “I know, kiddo.” His heart ached in his chest as he looked at Spencer. Though what he’d just seen had been horrible, he’d been expecting something of the like the instant Carol’s hand had touched Spencer’s arm. The kid’s eyes had been closed and there was no way he would’ve been able to tell who was touching him. “I think it’s safe to say that no one should touch him unless they have to. And if you do, make sure he sees you coming first.” The senior profiler told Carol. Turning, he looked at Morgan. “Stay with him. When he wakes up again, he’ll need a familiar face. I’ve got to go make some calls.”

“Calls? To who?”

“Someone who might be able to help.” I hope. Holding on to that hope, Dave set out from Spencer’s hospital room, praying that what he was about to do would be able to help his young friend. His body may be healing, but his mind sure has one hell of a long way to go. I think that’s going to be our hardest battle yet. Lord help us all, and help that boy in there. He’s already been through so much. Help him get through this too, please.
Chapter 19

The next time that Spencer woke up, the disorientation wasn’t there as it had been the last time. His mind was prepared for what he would find when he opened his eyes. He knew he was in the hospital and he knew how he’d got there. This time he also knew to hold as still as possible so as not to aggravate any of his injuries. His mind felt much clearer; clear enough to register embarrassment at what had happened before. That registered even before he opened his eyes. When he did open them, he instantly saw that there was only one person in the room with him this time and he was beyond grateful to see that it wasn’t a stranger—it was Morgan. The man was in a chair, legs stretched out in front of him and crossed at the ankles, slumped down so that his head rested on the slightly high back of the chair. Without thought, Spencer opened his mouth, surprising himself when his voice actually worked. It was slurry, but it worked. “You’re going to…hurt your n-neck like that.”

Morgan’s eyes shot open and almost instantly a smile spread over his face. “Well hey there, kid.” Happiness and relief both were present in his voice. He slid up in his chair, turning to angle toward Spencer but not moving any closer. Inside, Spencer was absurdly grateful. Just the thought of someone coming that close to his bed, even Morgan, was enough to make his heart pound just a little. If he noticed it, Morgan didn’t comment on it. Instead he kept smiling and rested his arms on his knees, leaning forward just slightly. “Glad to finally see those eyes open again. You had me worried for a bit.”

“How long…was I out?” It was a little painful to speak and something in his mouth felt...off…but he managed.

“They kept you under for the first day.” Morgan answered him. “Then it took you almost another full day to wake up on your own. Then…do you remember the last time you woke up?” He waited until Spencer nodded briefly before finishing. “That knocked you out for about a half a day. She said it wore off a while ago but that your body needed the rest.”

The next question rose immediately and he had to ask. He had to know before he knew anything else. “Lucas? Is he okay?”

Morgan was quick to reassure him. “He’s good, kid. His parents are here with him and he’s doing a lot better. They’re going to let him go home in the next day or so. He wants to come see you, first. Apparently he’s been driving his parents crazy, wanting to come make sure you were okay.”

Relief filled Spencer. He’d kept him safe. He’d kept Lucas safe. His eyes closed for a moment and he sighed a little. That sigh pushed against a slight tightness in his chest that was enough to grab his attention once more. Blinking his eyes open, he slowly turned his head to look at Morgan, wincing at the movement. “How bad is it?” Memories were pushing in at him, demanding to be seen, to be heard. He knew what kinds of injuries he’d have. He’d felt them all happening. But he needed to know how serious they were. How much damage had Elijah managed to do? He needed to focus on this, the here and now, or else his mind was going to drift back toward this all and he couldn’t stand the memories right now. He just, he couldn’t.

Pain flickered over Morgan’s face. There was a look to his eyes, a kind of inner agony that made Spencer’s heart ache. Morgan always took it so personally when something happened to Spencer, like he should’ve been able to single handedly protect the young man. This…this was something Morgan wouldn’t have been able to protect him from, though. This was Spencer’s own past, his own demons, coming back at him. Yet he knew trying to reassure the man would do nothing to take away that pain and guilt. Morgan would need time to work through it.
“I can get the doc for you, kid. She’ll be able to explain it all better than I can.” Morgan offered him.
“She’s a real nice lady.”

“Why thank you, Agent Morgan.” A woman’s voice said at the same time that Spencer registered the sound of the door to his room opening.

Almost instant panic hit Spencer in the chest. His eyes widened and his body locked down even as his breathing sped up. His gaze flickered over and locked on the source of the voice. Not just one woman was coming into the room, but a second one as well was right beside her. The first woman came to his bed, moving right to the foot of it and grabbing his chart, checking something on there. Then she hooked it back on his bed and lifted her head to smile at him. She was friendly looking, but Spencer couldn’t help but quiver as she stood there. She was too close. He didn’t want her that close.

“It’s very nice to see you awake, Dr. Reid.” The woman folded her hands in front of her and smiled up at him. “I’m Dr. Carol and I’ve been the one taking care of you during your stay here. How’re you feeling now? Are your pain levels comfortable?”

Once more, Spencer had that familiar sensation in his throat, the one that told him that no words would come. Still, he made himself try, knowing he had to. Yet the effort brought nothing. Not even a slurred sound slid past his lips. Just, silence. It was both frustrating and embarrassing. It had been so long since his problem had been this bad! Anymore it rarely, if ever, happened to him! Since this had come to light and this whole case had started, the selective mutism had seemed to come back with a vengeance, rising up when his anxiety levels were high, cutting off his words just a little. Then, then Elijah, and it was like suddenly he was back to where he started. Back to a time when he couldn’t speak to much of anyone. But he’d spoken to Morgan! He’d been talking with Morgan right before the doctor had come in!

_That’s because you trust him_ a soft little voice whispered in Spencer’s mind. His heart stuttered a little at the sound; that little voice sounded like his Sparrow. You talk to him because you trust him, like you talked to me because you trusted me. You don’t know this doctor and you don’t trust her, so your anxiety is up, and you’re in a hospital, which makes you even more anxious. Of course your voice is ‘turned off’. Don’t be ashamed of that.

Even as he felt the sweetness of hearing Sparrow’s voice reassuring him, Spencer stared at the woman in front of him and tried not to let himself be scared of her. He watched as she looked at him, obviously waiting for an answer that wasn’t coming. Her smile never faded and, after a short pause, she continued talking as if it were perfectly normal that he hadn’t answered her. “Well, if you start to hurt more, let us know and we’ll adjust things to make you comfortable. Now, did I walk in as you were asking about your injuries?” She turned to look to Morgan, who nodded, and then she was looking back at Spencer.

Off to the side, the other woman was standing discreetly near the door, not coming in but not leaving, either. Spencer paid her only enough attention to notice that she was there. Otherwise, he stayed focused on Carol.

Carol shifted her weight and lifted her hands, resting them on the foot of the bed as she prepared to talk. She froze when she saw his feet jerk slightly, moving away from the closeness of her hands. She said nothing about that, however. She simply started in on her explanation. Spencer listened avidly as she went down the list of injuries for him. Though she was explaining it in simple terms, his brain filled in the gaps automatically, supplying him with the fancier terms and the random knowledge he carried about each bit. And as he did, he felt his shame grow more and more.

There would be more scars to add to his collection. He’d been scarred before; now…now he was really going to look like a freak. Twenty lacerations that required stitching? Shit. Just…shit. Not to
mention the others that would lightly scar, or the…the brand. That made Spencer’s stomach roll. He now carried two brands on his back, one on each side. He was truly marked property. Marked by the monsters of his childhood and by a monster that had come back to haunt his adulthood. Elijah had made sure that Spencer would never forget him with this.

The stitches in his lip he had already felt. The strangeness in his mouth at least had an explanation now. Three teeth missing on the bottom right and one on the top right. Plus, damage to those around them that came with the recommendation to see a dentist once his body was healed enough to handle it. Damage to his ribs, a sensation he was more familiar with than this woman seemed to realize. A punctured lung. Bruising to go with the cuts on his back, thighs, his hips. As she spoke that part, Spencer could hear the belt whistling through the air again. He could remember burying his head in the bed and trying not to scream, not to scare Lucas any more than he already was. His breathing hitched but he forced it under control just barely. If he panicked, they would stop and he didn’t want her to stop. He needed to know how bad the damage was.

Then she told him about the break in his foot, the swelling in his knee that was already going down. Then…then she told him about his hand.

Pain and shame were slick in Spencer’s stomach, his throat, making him feel nauseous. He’d known, ever since Elijah had kicked his hand he’d known that the damage was bad. Then pulling it out of the cuff had only worsened it. That had been something he’d accepted when he’d done it. But to hear it laid out this way, to have it confirmed, was almost more than he could bear to hear. She tried to soften the blow, telling him that he could have reconstructive surgery done to help him regain some use of his hand, he tried to hold on to that, but it wasn’t much of a hope to hold on to. All he could think of were the repercussions from this. With as severe as his bones had been broken, some of them would never heal properly. He’d have to have the reconstructive surgery just to make sure that everything in his hand stayed attached to where it was supposed to be. Plus, they would repair any of the damage they could to nerves and muscles. Still, he would never get full use of his hand again. He would never be perfectly ‘okay’ anymore. No, he would be disabled. That’s what this would be considered. A disability. What kind of agent would he manage to be now? He wouldn’t even be able to properly shoot a gun now, would he? How could he with a damaged hand? They’d take him out of the field if they even let him keep his job at all. What use did the Bureau have with a damaged agent?

Horror gripped Spencer. Reality was slowly sinking in for him. Everything that he stood a chance at losing was suddenly becoming very clear to him and it was absolutely terrifying. He couldn’t lose his job out of this! He couldn’t! Some days, his job was the only thing that kept him going. It was the only thing in his life that felt good and right. Like it was what he was meant to be doing. A way to take the horror of his life and put it to good use. Knowing that he could use his mind, his experiences, his knowledge and use it to help others, to keep others from being hurt as he’d been hurt, it gave him a sense of strength and purpose. It was the one thing he had that was his, Spencer Reid’s. And now…now Elijah had taken that from him. First his father had taken away Spencer’s childhood. Now the son had taken away the rest of Spencer’s life.

He didn’t even realize the painful sounds he was making until Morgan’s voice cut into his inner monologue and snapped him back to reality. “Reid, kid, come on now, listen to me, okay? Listen to my voice.” Morgan was speaking in a low, even voice, his words warm and soft. “That’s it, man. Pay attention to my voice and to what I’m saying to you. It’s Morgan and I’m right here with you, okay? You’re here with me.” Of the people around him, Morgan was one of the few who had dealt with Spencer in a flashback before. He’d dealt with him when he’d had flashbacks after Georgia and he was using the same techniques now that he used then even though it wasn’t quite the same. It had the same effect, though. Spencer clung to Morgan’s voice and used the slow steadiness of it to match his breathing to until he’d managed to bring himself to some semblance of calm.
“I’m so sorry, Dr. Reid.” Carol said once he was calm again and Morgan had gone quiet. “But I assure you, we’ll do everything we can to help you get back into the best shape possible.”

The best shape possible? What the hell did she know? On a wave of pain, Spencer closed his eyes, letting his head rest back against the bed. The pain wasn’t purely physical; most if it was mental, emotional. How the hell was he supposed to do this? How was he supposed to live like this? How many times was he going to be knocked down to the ground? Not just knocked down, but have his face shoved into the dirt. How many times was he going to be expected to get back up and carry on? There was only so much one person could take. He’d taken being tortured for the first nine years of his life. He’d taken so much crap in school, in college, at the Bureau. He’d been kidnapped by an Unsub, shot in the leg, poisoned with anthrax. It was one pain after another after another after another, all culminating in this moment right here. In this final bit of hell. And the doctor spoke of putting him back into the best shape possible? It was too much. This was just too much.

“Listen.” Morgan’s voice said into the quiet room. “Why don’t you guys give us a few minutes? You just dumped quite a lot on him that he needs to process. Give us some space.”

“Of course.” Carol murmured.

Another voice spoke up, though. This one had Spencer’s eyes opening again and he was looking toward the woman that was still standing by the wall. “Actually,” she said “I’d like to talk to Dr. Reid for a moment, if you wouldn’t mind stepping out with Dr. Carol, Agent.”

Fear widened Spencer’s eyes and put a hitch in his breath. He didn’t have to try to communicate anything, though. Morgan knew him well and he was already shaking his head before the woman was done talking. “You can talk to him in a bit and you won’t be talking to him alone, not unless he says so. And right now, he’s not going to be able to talk to you anyways.” Rising, Morgan placed himself by Spencer’s bed—he was kind enough not to say anything about the almost full body twitch Spencer gave at their close proximity and he didn’t step back either—and he looked right at the woman with a firm gaze. “I’d assume you’re the resident psychologist. If and when Reid’s ready to talk and his voice works well enough to do it, we’ll let you know. For now, we’ve got him. Now, please, give us a few minutes.”

It was Carol who finally ushered the woman out the door. She’d been content to stay back and let the profiler and psychologist figure this out, knowing that this wasn’t her area of expertise, until she saw Spencer’s breathing get more labored and his heart rate rose. With his injuries, keeping him calm was one of her main priorities. “Now’s not a good time.” She told the other woman. “I’m sorry, but I can’t have you agitating my patient, not with his condition. This needs to be rescheduled for another time.” She was ushering the woman out as she was talking. Morgan gave her a grateful look right before the door shut. Then he turned his attention to his friend.

Once more Spencer had closed his eyes. While he may not react well to closeness, in his head he knew there was no danger from Morgan. He didn’t need to watch him to maintain safety. Morgan would never hurt him and he’d fight anyone who would try. But Spencer couldn’t bring himself to look at the man. Despite his protectiveness, Morgan had always insisted that Spencer was stronger than anyone gave him credit for. Now…now this was proof of Spencer’s weakness. He wasn’t strong and he wasn’t ever going to be strong. If he’d had his voice, he would’ve told Morgan to leave him alone. To go away.

It must’ve been written on his face. Somehow, Morgan knew what he was thinking, because he suddenly said “I’m not going anywhere, kid.”

Because it was Morgan, because he had to try, Spencer took a few careful breaths, opening his eyes to stare up at the ceiling as he practiced his breathing to slow his heart rate down. Morgan said
nothing, only taking to his chair, waiting Spencer out. Eventually the young genius felt controlled enough to force a single word out. “Ggggggo….go-o.”

If his strangled word worried Morgan, the man didn’t show it. He just calmly repeated “I’m not going anywhere.”

“Www…hy?” Spencer croaked out. The sound of his voice was almost painful. He took a shuddering breath and his eyes slid closed once more. “Useless.” He breathed out.

“You are not useless, Spencer.” Morgan argued. Oh, how he hated seeing this. Hated how broken Spencer looked right then, and not just physically. “You idiot. You’ll never be useless. You’re going to heal from this and things are going to end up fine.”

But Spencer gently shook his head. His mouth seemed to quiver before he firmed it back up. “C-crip…pled.”

“I wouldn’t care if you spent the rest of your life stuck in a wheelchair, do you hear me? You are never going to be useless. Never. Not to me and not to any of the rest of us.” The strength of the emotion in Morgan’s voice drew Spencer’s gaze to him. He looked over to see an intense kind of look like he’d seen only once before on the man, back when he’d confronted Spencer about his addiction. Spencer found he couldn’t look away as Morgan continued. “Things will work out. We’re going to take care of you, pretty boy. And even if it doesn’t seem like it right now, you are going to be okay, you hear me? Things may not seem like it but they are going to work out.”

In that moment, Spencer looked every inch his age; even younger. Morgan found himself thinking just how young his friend looked. He locked his eyes on Morgan and his mouth gave another little quiver. “You d-don’t know thhhhh…at.”

Morgan flashed him a cocky sort of grin. “Have I ever lied to you before? About anything?” He asked him plainly. “And don’t give me facts about the improbability of a person predicting the future. Just answer me honestly. Have I ever lied to you? Have I ever been wrong about something important like this before?”

“No.” Spencer whispered. The word was a little less shaky than his previous ones. Inside, he was aching, but oh, he wanted so badly to believe his friend. He wanted to believe him more than anything else in the world.

Smiling, Morgan nodded. “Then trust me now. Things will be okay. I know your big old brain and I know you’re probably already thinking about work, so I’m going to tell you to not borrow trouble before we get there. Maybe there will be adjustments, but do you really think Hotch is going to let them just dump you, kid? Don’t worry about that bridge until we get there. Now, I’m going to sneak into your bathroom so I don’t get caught and send out a quick message to let the others know you’re awake. For now, we’re going to focus on the things we can do, Spence. Not the things we can’t. One obstacle at a time, okay?”

“You don’t have to stay.”

With a shake of his head, Morgan rose from the bedside. “I’ve never once left you alone in a hospital when I’ve known you were in one. I’m not starting now.”

As his friend moved to the bathroom, Spencer felt just a tiny kernel of hope in his chest. Not much, but it was there. Maybe, just maybe, he’d find a way to heal from this. Because this time, he wasn’t alone. This time, he had a family he knew and loved and who knew and loved him to help him through this. Not that it would be easy. Oh, no. But that didn’t mean he had to give up before he’d
even started. In his mind, he heard Sparrow’s voice once more, warm and full of love. *You’re one of the strongest people I know. You can do it, you hear me? I know you can.*

**THE END**

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