The Love Of A Father

by Horsetamer5

Summary

Total A/U: Aaron Hotchner has just lost his wife Haley; now he must adapt to life as a single father to his two sons Jack and Spencer, deal with the trauma inflicted on their family, and continue his work as a BAU profiler.

Notes

A/N: In my Au, Spencer is the adopted son of Aaron and Haley. He is high functioning autistic in this fic, allowing him to work at the BAU but still requiring him to live at home. The italicized text is dialogue that I modified from the episode.
Chapter 1

Aaron Hotchner hazed somberly at his reflection in the mirror. Just three days ago, his whole world had been turned upside down. His wife, Haley, was murdered while protecting their two boys from a brutal criminal who sought revenge on Hotch for putting him in jail over ten years ago. Now, he was left alone to deal with his grief and that of his two sons; four-year-old Jack and 20-year-old Spencer. Jack seemed to be coping with the tragedy, his age allowing him a sense of obliviousness to the entire situation. Spencer was a whole different story; the young man's IQ was off the charts, allowing him to get a job working under his father at the FBI's Behavioral Analysis Unit. However, Spencer had suffered years of abuse as a child before being adopted by Haley and Aaron; coupling that with his Autism meant that the 20-year old's emotional maturity was stunted. While he could understand and interpret the facts of what happened to his mother, Spencer was having great difficulty dealing with the barrage of emotions that he was feeling. As a result, the young profiler had gone completely non-verbal after his mother's death. Right now, he was relying on an Augmented and Alternative Communication (AAC) tablet to communicate his needs and wants.

Aaron was jolted out of his thoughts by a loud crash and an agitated growl. Concerned, he walked across the hall to find the items on his office desk scattered on the floor with Spencer standing in the middle of it all, breathing heavily. He was mostly dressed in a formal suit, but Aaron could see that the tie had been violently ripped off. "Hey buddy," Aaron greeted quietly walking over and placing a hand on his oldest son's arm. "Are you feeling a bit overwhelmed right now?" he asked Spencer nodded. "Okay, what can I do to help you calm down?" Hotch asked. "Can you use your IPad to tell me?" Spencer grabbed the device, quickly scrolling through the preset phrases and actions; humming as he found the ones that he wanted. 'Quiet. Headphones. Dad,' the robotic voice dictated from the device. "You wanna come into my room and listen to your headphones before we leave?" Hotch asked. "It's quiet in there." Spencer just whimpered and nodded before taking his father's offered hand and allowing himself to be led into the other room.

Aaron squeezed both of his sons in a hug before handing Jack over to Prentiss and Spencer over to Gideon. He stood up to begin his speech, periodically glancing at his eldest out of the corner of his eye. Spencer was rocking on his heels, his right hand tapping at his side as he let out small, agitated, keens.

"W.S. Gilbert wrote, "it's love that makes the world go 'round. And if that's true, then the world spun a little faster with Haley in it. Haley was my best friend since we were in high school. We certainly had our struggles, but if there's one thing we agreed on unconditionally, It was our love and commitment to our two sons Jack and Spencer. Haley's love for our boys was joyous And fierce. That fierceness is why she isn't here today. A mother's love is an unrivaled force of nature. And we can all learn much from the way Haley lived her life. Haley's death causes each of us to stop And take stock of our lives. To measure who we are And what we've become. I don't have all those answers for myself, But I know who Haley was. She was the woman who died protecting the children we brought up together. And I will make sure that our boys always remember who their mother was and how she loved and protected them. And how much I loved her. If Haley were with us today, She would ask us not to mourn her death But to celebrate her life. She would tell us to love our families unconditionally And to hold them close Because, in the end, they are all that matter."

At that point, Spencer appeared to lose all self-control and broke out of Gideon's hold before bolting over to his father and throwing his arms around Aaron's neck. "Shh, shh," Hotch murmured as he
The rest of the service was a blur for Hotch, and before long, they were heading back to the car. Aaron got Jack settled first in his car seat before getting Spencer settled in the front seat. It was difficult considering that his eldest was rocking from side to side and flapping his hands. He attempted to get the safety harness around Spencer's chest, but the young man went completely rigid before letting out a low whine. "Shh, shh, bud," Hotch soothed, pressing a hand against his eldest's son's chest. "You're alright. Do you want your blanket?" Spencer nodded. "Alright, it's in the trunk, and I can get it for you. Can you settle down for a second and let me get your seatbelt on?" Spencer hesitated before complying. "Thanks, kiddo," Aaron murmured as he pressed a kiss to the 20-year-old's forehead before grabbing a weighted blanket from the trunk of the car and placing it on Spencer's lap. He moved to the driver's side and started the car; putting on some of Spencer's favorite music to drown out the devastating silence.
"Okay, Jack, listen, I want you to figure out where you want to put all your toys, okay?" Hotch said, as he pulled various items out of moving boxes and put them in the kitchen. Out of the corner of his eye, he watched as Spencer walked throughout their new apartment; the 20-year-old was running his hands over the walls and inspecting all aspects of their new place. "Okay, daddy," Jack responded. "Spence, why don't you pick out your room and put all of your gear where you want it," Aaron suggested. "You can finish casing the joint later, okay?" "'Kay," Spencer responded.

A knock sounded on the door causing Spencer to jump and grip his father's arm. "It's alright," Hotch soothed as he unlocked the door. "It's just Chief Strauss; I asked her to come by." "Chief Strauss, I appreciate your coming to me," Hotch greeted.

"Oh, of course," Strauss assured. "This isn't a time For you to be away from your sons. Hello, Spencer," the BAU chief greeted. "Hello ma'am," the young profiler responded without making eye contact.

"Please come in," Aaron invited as he settled Spencer on the couch before covering him with his weighted blanket, placing his headphones on, and setting up a video on his tablet. "Jack, can you say hello to Chief Strauss?" Hotch asked. "Hi, Jack," Strauss greeted. "Hi," the four-year-old said before he climbed up onto the couch and settled under the blanket with his head resting against his older brother's side.

"Have a seat," Hotch invited

"So, how are you holding up?" Strauss asked. "I'm okay," Aaron responded.

"And how are Jack and Spencer?" Strauss asked.

"They're coping," Aaron sighed. "They were both there when she was murdered; Spencer hid with Jack in the crawlspace. Jack doesn't fully comprehend what happened and on a deeper level, I don't believe Spencer does either."

"My god, Aaron, I had no idea," Strauss apologized.

Hotch only nodded in response.

"You said that there was something You wanted to discuss with me?" he queried.

"Yes, I do," the Unit Chief responded. "I've talked with the director. Given the circumstances, there's no reason you or Spencer should have to return to the bureau. We can offer you both a full pension and benefits. You will also be able to keep all the same medical services for Spencer," Strauss offered.

"Are saying that you want me and Spencer to leave the BAU?" Hotch asked in surprise.

"Well, obviously that's your choice as well as Spencer's, but I'm offering you both a way out. Agent Morgan's promotion was temporary. But he's exceeded our expectations, And I'm confident that I could make it permanent If you decide to step down. The rest of the team would still be together, and you could be with your sons," Strauss continued.

"And when would you like a decision?" Aaron asked.
"I thought I would be leaving with one," the BAU chief responded looking a bit taken aback. "What's your hesitation?" She asked.

"I would like to weigh all of my options as well as the impact that leaving the team permanently would have on Spencer. He doesn't adjust to change well. All of these major life changes have him dysregulated; I don't want to stack another one on if I don't have to."

"Please, however long you need," Strauss responded as she stood up.

That night, Aaron was woken out of his first real sleep in days by an ear-splitting scream. He jumped out of bed and ran across the hall to Spencer's room to find his eldest thrashing violently in his sleep.

"No! No, don't shoot!" Spencer wailed. "Don't shoot my mom! Mom! Dad! Jack!"

"Spencer, wake up," Hotch murmured as he firmly gripped his thrashing son's shoulders. "It's alright. Dad's here; you're safe. It's just a dream." Spencer jolted awake with a scream so loud that it echoed through the apartment before promptly collapsing in his father's arms in a fit of tears.

"My fault," the young man sobbed. "Mom gone. All my fault. Spencer bad! Mom gone, Spencer bad!" With extraordinary strength, Spencer wrenched himself out of his father's arms before taking his own hand in his mouth and biting down. Hard.

"No, no, no," Aaron scolded, ducking out of the way of Spencer's other hand as it came up to hit the side of his head before reaching up to pry the young man's hand out of his mouth. "We're not doing that. C' mon kiddo, I need you to calm down." Maintaining his grip on Spencer's wrists, Aaron shifted sit behind his son and crossed Spencer's arms across his chest in a restraint hold. He rocked them both slightly, periodically increasing the pressure of his grip to help Spencer regulate.

Eventually, Spencer calmed down and lay with his head resting over his father's heart. Aaron shifted them both so that they were laying down on the bed, he carded a hand through the 20-year-old's hair and shushed him in an effort to get Spencer to rest. Once he was sure that his eldest was asleep, Hotch closed his own eyes to get some rest of his own. The 38-year-old was almost asleep when he heard the sound of tiny footsteps entering the room. Smiling to himself, he kept his eyes closed and allowed his youngest to crawl up next to him. The strategy appeared to work, and soon Jack was fast asleep; Hotch pressed a kiss to the top of each of his son's heads before he closed his own eyes and fell into his own deep sleep.
It started out as a relaxing afternoon; Aaron, Spencer, and Jack were spending a week with Jason Gideon, Hotch's best friend, and the boys' surrogate uncle. They were staying at Jason's cabin, and the boys had spent most of the afternoon playing in the swimming pool while the two older profilers caught up. All seemed to be going well until Aaron and Jason heard a scream coming from the pool area. They looked over, and they both felt their hearts stop at the sight of Jack trying to grab at his older brother who was unconscious and had slipped below the water.

Aaron bolted over and leaped into the pool, hooking his arms under Spencer's before hauling his eldest to the side of the pool where Gideon helped to pull him out of the water. "Dear God, he's not breathing," Gideon announced. "Aaron, take Jack inside and call 911," he instructed as he began CPR on the young man. As Hotch ran inside, Gideon continued the CPR until he felt his nephew take a rattling breath. That breath soon turned into a violent cough and soon, Spencer was coughing up water. "Okay, there we go," he murmured as he turned the young agent onto his side. "Just get it out now, good boy, get it out." "No! No!" Spencer cried as he violently jolted back to awareness and began to struggle in Jason's arms.

"Hey, hey, it's alright. You're alright, Spencer. You just had a scare in the pool," Gideon soothed as he stroked his nephew's hair. "You're breathin' son; you're breathin'. It alright, your dad will be right back, he's just calling the medics." "U-uncle Jason, h-hel-help me," Spencer sobbed. "I-c-ca-can't breathe!" "Yes, you can," Gideon assured. "You're breathing right now, son." "D-dad. I w-wa-want dad," Spencer demanded softly as he attempted to push himself up. "He's coming right now," Jason said as he hooked an arm around Spencer's chest and helped him into a sitting position. "See? He's coming right now with your brother."

"Hey bud," Aaron murmured as he took Spencer from Jason's arms. The latter taking Jack into his arms, allowing the boy to see his father and brother while also allowing Aaron to have a moment with his eldest. "You gave us all quite a scare there, Spence," Hotch said as he kissed the top of his eldest son's head. "I bet you really scared yourself, huh?" Spencer didn't answer; he only blinked at the three people around him. The trauma of the past 45 minutes had caused him to go non-verbal.

"Well, this'll be an interesting ride to the hospital," Aaron thought to himself as he saw the paramedics running across the lawn towards them. He reached an arm out to embrace Jack as Gideon stood up and greeted the medics. "My nephew hit his head on the side of the pool and slipped under the water," the retired profiler explained. "By the time we got him, he'd ingested a significant amount of water and wasn't breathing when we pulled him out. I managed to revive him. However, I need to warn you that he is autistic and currently non-verbal." "Thank you, sir; we'll make sure to take the disorder into account" a young EMT with curly blonde hair responded as he knelt down in front of the small family. "SSA Aaron Hotchner," Aaron greeted, shaking hands with the medic. "My sons, Spencer and Jack. Spencer had a pretty nasty scare in the pool." "Michael Ethans," the paramedic introduced with a kind smile before turning his attention to Spencer.

"Hey Spencer," Michael greeted in a soft voice. "Your dad and uncle told me that you had a pretty bad scare in the pool and that you're not feelin' up to talking right now. Is it okay if I look you over and ask your dad any questions that I have?" 'Yes,' Spencer signed. "Sir, you said that your son is on the Autism spectrum?" Michael asked Hotch. "Yes," Hotch answered. "Spencer is classified as high functioning. He is on a strict regimen of medications to help with his behavioral and sleep issues. He has also been diagnosed with Epilepsy." "I see," the paramedic responded as he took Spencer's
vitals. "Can you give me a rundown of his medications?" he asked. "Yes," Hotch responded. "Risperidone injections as needed for aggression and agitation issues; Ativan for the seizures, Topamax for the fugue states and mood regulation, as well as Melatonin for sleep." "Thank you," Michael said as he listened to Spencer's chest and lungs. "Well, your lungs sound clear, but I'm not liking the look of that cut on the back of your head, I'd like to get you to the hospital just to be sure nothing else is wrong," Michael explained to the young agent. "Your dad can ride with you," he assured as Spencer whimpered and tangled his hand in Hotch's shirt. "You're going to be just fine, Spence," Aaron promised. "We're gonna be with you the whole time. No one's gonna leave you."

Jason Gideon took his eldest nephew's hand in his. It had been an exhausting few hours at the Emergency Room. Spencer had a panic attack, which then resulted in a seizure when the nurses came to take him in for a CT scan. On top of nearly drowning, the poor kid's body just had to go and give out on him again. The only saving grace of the entire situation was that there was no head trauma or residual fluid in Spencer's lungs. This meant that all they had to do now was wait for the hospital discharge papers to go through. Spencer had fallen asleep about 15 minutes ago, and Aaron had taken the chance to take Jack to get some air; he promised to be back soon.

A small whimper drew Gideon out of his thoughts, and he looked over to see Spencer blinking his eyes open, his fists opening and clenching as he tried to ground himself in his surroundings. Jason caught his nephew's gaze and gave him a comforting smile, gently rubbing the top of Spencer's hand to distract the kid from the IV catheter. "U-uncle Jason?" Spencer asked. "Right here, son," Gideon assured. "You're gonna be alright. We're just waiting for the rest of your discharge papers to go through, and then we'll head back to the cabin," "Where are Dad and Jack?" Spencer asked. "We're right here," Hotch answered from the doorway, placing Jack on the floor so that the five-year-old could climb up on the bed next to his elder brother. "All of the paperwork went through so we can head out as soon you're ready." Half an hour later, Aaron was backing the car out of the hospital parking lot, Jason was in the passenger seat, and the two were chatting quietly. As they pulled onto the main highway, their conversation died down; Aaron glanced in the rearview mirror and smiled at the sight of his two boys, fast asleep in the backseat. He turned his attention back to the highway and sighed at the sense of peace that had settled over their small family.
Chapter 5

The case was a success; they had apprehended the unsub and rescued one of the potential victims with minimal casualties. Now, the whole team was on their way home to Quantico and Aaron was working on some paperwork to tie up loose ends of the case so that he and Spencer could actually enjoy their next two days off.

Hotch smiled to himself as Spencer murmured in his sleep and shifted to rest his head on his father’s shoulder. The 21-year-old had been the one to single-handedly decipher the clues to the unsub’s location. Spencer was able to remain calm and collected despite the chaos of the whole situation, and Aaron couldn’t be prouder of his eldest. So far only one meltdown had occurred during their three day trip to Denver; due to a blizzard just hours before take-off, they were forced to wait for over an hour for the wings of the jet to be de-iced. Spencer had not taken kindly to the layover, opting to walk up and down the aisle of the plane while muttering different statistical platitudes to himself.

Hotch finally managed to calm his son down by setting him up to play a game of online scrabble with Garcia. Eventually, the jet took off, and Spencer drifted off to sleep in the middle of the game; Hotch texted a message to Garcia thanking her for keeping their resident genius calm before returning to his paperwork.

Aaron leaned over and kissed the top of the young agent’s head; pulling the blanket up and tucking it around Spencer’s shoulders before putting a last signature on the paperwork and putting in his briefcase. Once that task was done, Hotch leaned back in his seat and wrapped an arm around his son’s shoulders before closing his own eyes for the remainder of the journey home.

“No, no, I don’t wanna go. Please don’t make me go. I wanna sleep,” Spencer sobbed as he slammed his head against the window of the plane.

“Spencer, I need you to stop doing that,” Aaron requested his tone firm but also full of compassion, as he hooked an arm around his eldest son to keep him still. “You’re gonna give yourself a concussion if you keep doing that.”

“Leave me alone,” the young genius whined, “I jus’ wanna go back to sleep.”

“Kid, we know how tired you are,” Derek Morgan chimed in from his place across from the young profiler. “Believe me, all of us feel that way, but we need you to stay awake just long enough to get off of the jet and then you can sleep for as long as you want.”

“Son, you can go back to sleep in the car,” Aaron promised, tightening his grip as Spencer attempted to slam his head again. “But to do that relax and come with me off the plane. We’re going home, and we’ll both have two days to catch up on sleep. What do you say, can you come down to the car so we can head home?”

Spencer nodded, letting out a shuddering breath before allowing Hotch and Morgan to help him stand and lead him off the plane.
The feeling of another presence entering the room caused Aaron Hotchner to blink his eyes open and glance over at the clock at his bedside. It read 1:00 am. So he had only slept for about three hours.

A small whimper jolted Aaron out of his thoughts, and he looked over to see Spencer standing in the doorway, his hands tucked under his armpits as he rocked from side to side.

“Spence, what’s wrong bud?” Hotch asked, propping himself up on his elbow to get a good look at his son.

“I-uh-heard noises downstairs,” Spencer admitted, biting his lip. “I thought that somebody broke in. The light in my room went out, and it was really dark.”

“Oh Spence,” Aaron murmured, knowing how sensitive his eldest son had become to the dark and strange noises since his mother’s murder over a year ago. “It’s just you, me, and Jack. Besides, someone would have to be a complete idiot to break into a house with two armed FBI agents.”

Spencer just whined, his rocking becoming frantic.

“Do you wanna sleep in here tonight? Would that make you feel better?” Hotch asked.

Spencer nodded.

“Well c’ mon over here then,” the elder agent said, patting the empty side of the bed as an invitation.

Spencer rushed over and hopped on the bed, settling down so that he was tucked under Hotch’s arm, his head resting against his father’s ribcage.

“Shh, shh,” Hotch murmured, the sound of his voice creating a veil of white noise for Spencer to ground himself with. The tactic appeared to be successful as Spencer let out a shuddering breath; followed by another, and another until the pattern of his breathing evened out, signaling that he was asleep.

Aaron stayed awake for another half hour just to be sure that Spencer was asleep before he following his son’s example and drifting off.

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