Father Knows Best

by Cat2000

Summary

We don't own anything from Marvel: Agents of SHIELD or The Avengers and we're not making any money from this fic.

Set after the season one finale. Fourteenth in the Redeeming Grant series. Coulson is right. Coulson is ALWAYS right.

Notes

Warning(s): Spoilers up to the season one finale and for the Avengers movie; spanking; some potentially triggering material

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Ward turned the wheel of the jeep to head up the old fire road from the ranger station. "So, one mile up this road and then we'll have to walk another two miles in because there is no road access?" He repeated the ranger's directions to his father, wanting to make certain he had it right.

Coulson nodded. "That's right," he confirmed. "The evidence shouldn't be too far in, so I imagine we won't need to walk very far into the cave." Though he'd still made certain to bring plenty of water
with them and even some food. They couldn't be too careful, after all.

"Well...we've gone a mile, then." He pulled the jeep over and parked it. "Trail's right over there..." He pointed, even though he was almost positive Coulson had spotted the trail even before he had. The older man was constantly surprising him with these skills that he'd kept hidden before.

Coulson nodded, starting along the trail, though he walked fairly close to his son, enough that his arm was brushing gently against Grant's. "Let me know if you spot anything before we get there." Though Coulson would be keeping an eye out as well, it probably helped to have both of them keeping watch.

"Yes, sir," Grant answered and began keeping a look out as well, even as they moved forward on the trail. He didn't even realize how close his father was to him until the other man shifted to step over a log that was too big to walk over normally and he bumped him. "Sorry..." He blinked, realizing that his father was in his personal 'bubble' and he hadn't even registered the fact. He snorted. "Well, I guess that answers that question..." he muttered in amusement.

Coulson looked at Grant, raising his eyebrows. "What question would that be?" he asked mildly, automatically squeezing Grant's shoulder gently. They might be on an op, but Grant was still his son. Unless they were actually involved in fighting, Coulson didn't think the subconscious squeezing or patting his shoulder would ever stop.

Grant grinned. "My therapist the other day asked how I was handling being 'with' people. If I still got nervous when someone got very close to me and I hadn't been the one to initiate the being close part. Because I'd admitted that it kind of did make me nervous...when people were right next to me and I hadn't been the one to move closer first, like I was waiting for an attack or something...I dunno."

He blushed, because he hadn't actually ever told his father this. "I said I was still that way with strangers, but I hadn't been paying enough attention to know if I felt that way with the team or you, because I'd pretty much told myself to ignore it when I started feeling uncomfortable." He shrugged. "But here you are, right next to me, and not only did I not notice how close you were, I wasn't uncomfortable about it in the least, so that question was just answered. I'm handling it just fine...at least as far as you are concerned. Still have to figure out about the others...."

Moving his hand to the nape of Grant's neck, Coulson squeezed there gently. "I think, on a subconscious level, you automatically trust me. Then again, I'm your father... in every way that counts. And when you have a father who cares about you, trust tends to come automatically... at least in my experience." With his own father and also with noticing Clint after he'd adopted Grant's brother.
Grant smiled again, leaning toward his father and brushing shoulders with him affectionately. He didn't feel the need to say 'you're right'. The man pretty much always was. Instead, he swallowed and said softly, "Thanks again...for Copper..." He glanced over his shoulder back the way he'd come. "Kinda wish we could have brought him with us, but until he gets used to me, I guess it wouldn't be fair to drag him out into an unknown situation...."

Coulson smiled, brushing a gentle kiss against Grant's forehead. "For now, it's better to leave him where it's definitely safe... but there'll be other places we can take him. I'm just glad you've both taken so well to each other."

Grant smiled back. He was relaxed and happy and in no big hurry to finish this assignment. He liked being able to spend time with Phil, one on one, without the chance of interruption. Looking for these artifacts and evidence that some hikers had mentioned to the Ranger who had called them was just the thing to be able to do that. Speaking of...

He stopped at the rather small entrance to what was a cave. "Makes you wonder how they found anything...why would a hiker have wanted to crawl into this cave in the first place? The entrance isn't terribly welcoming." His voice was curious.

"Curiosity?" Coulson suggested. "Someone sees a cave they hadn't explored before... it's not big enough to have an animal that might be dangerous inside." He stepped forward. "I'll go in first," he offered.

"I don't mind going first..." Grant protested. He felt the need to go in ahead of his father in case there was something there that was dangerous; he was the specialist on the team, after all and it was his job to protect the others. Then again, what if there was something dangerous outside that was waiting for them to be split up in the short amount of time it would take one of them to crawl into the cave? Damn. Now he was second guessing himself....

Coulson squeezed the nape of his neck gently. "Grant. It'll be all right. If you feel better going first, you can. It's unlikely anything will be waiting for us inside, since the hiker got in and out without problems."

Ward felt himself calm down at his father's words and then blushed darkly, feeling very foolish. "Right...the hiker..." He gave Coulson a crooked smile. "I'll follow you in, Dad. I've got your back."

"I know." Coulson squeezed Ward's shoulder gently, brushing a light kiss against his forehead, and then crouched down to crawl into the cave.
Ward waited until he was sure his father was clear and in the cave before crawling in after him. He really hated tight spaces. Taking a deep breath, he forced himself to continue going forward until he finally reached a point where he could stand again.

Knowing how much his son hated these kind of tight spaces, Coulson moved as quickly as he could, glancing around and then focusing on Grant with concern as he came into the larger area. "How are you doing, son?" he asked softly.

Ward took a deep breath, then nodded at his father. "I'll manage..." he finally answered. Being out of the tight tunnel leading into the cave had been difficult, but they were in the open area of the cave now and could stand. It wasn't ideal- it was still closed in, after all- but he could stand and he could reach in either direction without actually touching anything and would have to walk in various directions to do so, so it wasn't that bad.

"Good." Coulson squeezed his shoulder gently. "Let me know if you need to get out of here and into the open air again. It won't be a problem."

Ward blinked at his father having noted his dislike of tight areas- they'd never talked about that before- but he realized he shouldn't be surprised the older man had noticed anyway. It was one of the things about Phil that made Grant feel safe and loved; the fact that the man noticed what his son needed or was going through without it having to be mentioned directly. Nine times out of ten, if there was something to notice and his father was around to notice it, it got noticed. He smiled at the older man. "I will, sir..." He stepped further into the cave, turned on his flashlight and looked around. "Looks like the artifacts are over here..." He started walking to an area that had been slightly disturbed.

Coulson nodded and headed after Ward after turning his own flashlight on. Noticing the glint of metal, he crouched down to inspect them more closely. "These definitely seem to have origins other than Earth..." He cut himself off as there was the sound of falling rocks.

Ward straightened quickly at the sound and glanced toward the cave opening. "Dad...I think we might want to get out of here..." His voice was soft, as if he was trying to keep it from carrying to anyone but Phil. He was mentally kicking himself, however. Just because they hadn't seen anyone near the cave didn't mean it wasn't a set-up. Unfortunately, the falling rocks didn't occur soon enough for the warning to be of help. The next thing he knew, the front of the cave was shaking and rock and dirt was falling from the ceiling.

Even though this was a bad situation, Coulson kept himself calm, quickly backing Ward away, putting himself between his son and the falling debris. One rock landed crushingly on his leg and
Coulson dropped with a sharp cry as there was the sound of breaking bone.

Ward hadn't fought when Coulson put himself between him and the falling debris, mainly because he had his hand on his father's arm and was leading him away from the falling debris as he looked behind them for a safe place to take shelter. When his father dropped to the ground and he heard the cry and the sound of breaking bone, his attention went straight back to Coulson, zeroing in on the man's leg. He was pretty sure Coulson would be giving him a look regarding all the foul curse words he was using, but he didn't care. All he could care about was getting his father to safety.

He quickly grabbed the large boulder that had fallen on his father and lifted it off and tossed it to the side. Then, wrapping his father's arm over his shoulder, he picked Coulson up as carefully as possible and carried him to the back of the cave. He wasn't happy about having to do such; he knew it put more stress on the injured limb and if he'd had an option, he would have left him where he was until he could splint the injury, but debris was still falling and there was no guarantee that something larger wouldn't fall and crush the older man if he wasn't moved. So Grant did what was necessary.

Even though his ankle was clearly broken, Coulson did his best to help Grant along, careful not to put weight on his foot. He was conscious and gritting his teeth against the pain, trying to focus his thoughts on how they were going to get out of here.

"I'm sorry, dad..." Grant muttered as they went over a particularly rough patch of ground. Finally, he'd reached a tiny alcove that seemed far enough away from the entrance that the falling debris wasn't a concern, but close enough that if someone came looking, they'd be able to find Coulson. Settling his father down and helping him to stretch the injured limb out in front of him, he began to look around the cave to see if there was anything at all that could be used as a make-shift splint.

Coulson stretched his leg out in front of him with a wince as he glanced around, guessing what Grant was looking for. He pointed out some twigs that were scattered nearby and then tore some strips of material from his shirt.

Grant nodded briskly, quickly going over and finding the sturdiest, straightest of the twigs and branches he could. Then he walked back to his father and kneeled down by his leg, taking the knife he always carried under his pant leg out of its sheath. "Do you need something to bite on?" he asked softly, concern in his voice, as he gently began to cut the threads of Coulson's inseam from the hem up to just above his knee.

Coulson held himself still as he shook his head. "It's all right." He winced, but still tried to focus on planning what to do next.
Taking a deep breath to make certain his own hands were steady, Grant gripped his father's leg just below the break and quickly pulled and shifted it so that it was realigned correctly. He then braced the leg with several of the sticks he’d gathered, before finally taking the strips of material Coulson had torn off and tying them in place. Not entirely happy with the security of the makeshift splint, he took off his outer shirt and cut it into strips, using those to wrap around the leg and tying them off securely. Hopefully, it would hold the injury still until they could get his father to the hospital to put on a proper cast. He finally sat back on his heels and looked up into his father's face. "When would the others begin to look for us?" he asked quietly, trying to formulate a plan to get his dad out of the cave safely.

"They'll expect us to make contact soon after we discovered the artifacts," Coulson replied. "And the Ranger will be expecting us to return fairly quickly... when we don't come back, he'll use the tag on Copper to get in contact with the team." Reaching out, Coulson squeezed his son's shoulder. "They'll find us."

Grant nodded, relieved that they wouldn't be stuck here for too long before people started to look. Even though the break was a clean one and hadn't broken through skin, there were still enough abrasions and cuts from the rock landing on his father that the risk of infection was still high. Normally, he would carry a first-aid kit with him, but this op wasn't meant to be dangerous. "Next time I'm bringing it anyway..." he muttered under his breath, frustrated at the situation. Maybe if he could find another way out...He looked around, noting that the cave went further back than they had gone and there was a slight breeze. Maybe there was another exit. "I think I'll head down that path." He pointed to where the tunnel continued. "I feel a slight breeze...maybe there is another way out."

Coulson shook his head. "We shouldn't split up. I can't walk, which means I can't come with you for backup. And if there is another known exit from here, there's no guarantee that won't be cut off as well."

Grant frowned. "But if there is another exit, then I can quickly leave and go get the ranger before too much time passes. If we wait for them, it may be several hours before the ranger contacts them and comes looking." He didn't like the idea of Coulson being helpless for that long. At least on the Bus, the rest of the team could help him protect the man; plus, he'd get the medical attention he needed. "And I have my weapon and I will be careful. It isn't like I haven't gone on special ops by myself before. I can just treat this like that...."

"Grant..." Coulson leaned forward slightly. "I know you want to go and get help. I know you're good at what you do. But there's no guarantee that there is another exit there. Or that there won't be tunnels. This isn't fighting an enemy, or getting information, or rescuing someone. This is a place we don't know. If I could come with you, it would be different. But we can't risk getting separated if there isn't another way out. It's best to wait as close to this area as possible."

"Yes, sir..." Grant answered, almost sullenly, not liking that he couldn't at least attempt to get his
father out faster. He understood the other man's concerns; fighting an enemy, or getting information, or rescuing someone was something he was good at. He was good at thinking on his feet. But when you were going against mother-nature and the elements...you couldn't predict what would happen. But he was positive that there was another exit and that it was close. Why else would he feel the breeze? He knew his father worried about him, but he honestly thought he could do this. He didn't argue any further, though. His father was wounded. He didn't need the extra stress of an argument.

Coulson could tell that Grant was unhappy about the situation and he reached out to gently squeeze the nape of his son's neck. "Although I didn't think something like this would happen, I did bring a few bottles of water because I knew it could get hot. I also have some food. There's not a lot, but it should be enough to last us." He used his other hand to switch off his flashlight. There was no sense in using up the batteries in both.

"Ok, dad," Grant said softly, trying to keep his irritation out of his voice. "Do you need anything?" He did let his worry come through in his tone.

Coulson shook his head. "I'm sure we could talk," he commented mildly. "You mentioned one of the things you talked to your therapist about... is there anything else you'd like to tell me?" He phrased it like that because he didn't want his son to feel like he had to discuss anything he didn't want to.

Grant looked down and shrugged slightly. "She did ask me about John and me...she didn't exactly say it, but I think she thought..." He shrugged again and bit his lip. "John did a lot of vile things and I'm able to admit now that he didn't treat me well...was abusive...but he never..." He winced, not wanting to actually voice the words. "Anyway...that was part of the conversation. I think she wondered because I had been making excuses for..." He swallowed and stopped talking.

Coulson wrapped his arm around Grant's shoulders and squeezed gently. "What happened with Lorelei?" he finished softly. He didn't ask what the therapist had asked about with Garrett. He could guess and was just relieved Grant didn't have that to deal with on top of everything else.

"Yeah." Ward swallowed again. "She says I shouldn't hold myself responsible for not being able to...stop her... Anyway...that's some of what we talk about. Sometimes I talk about when I was growing up...sometimes I talk about what I did to the team and how I feel about it now..." He shrugged slightly, leaning against his father.

Coulson tightened his embrace a bit. "If there's anything that's brought up with the therapist that you want to talk to me about, you know you always can, right? It's exactly what I've said before about being able to lean on me." He stroked Grant's hair gently. "You didn't get the support you should have done after what happened with Lorelei. I'm sorry about that." At that time, he hadn't realised just how truly damaged Grant was. Even so, he should have acted differently... they all should have done.
"It wasn't your fault..." Grant said in a whisper. "I didn't want to believe what had happened was what happened either. At the time, I felt like I deserved whatever I got because I was too weak to fight her off. Later, when John came on board the Bus... before he made his move and everyone thought he was still loyal to SHIELD... I'd mentioned it to him and he patted me on the back and congratulated me for 'doing' the super hot alien- in much cruder words. I didn't say anything to anyone after that, because I thought maybe there was something wrong with me for not having wanted it to happen...."

"There wasn't anything wrong with you, son," Coulson said seriously, still gently stroking Grant's hair. "I'm glad you've been talking about it to the therapist." He pressed a gentle kiss to the top of his son's head. "Even so, you should have got the support. I promise that there'll never be a time in the future you don't have my support."

Ward didn't say anything to the promise, instead wrapping his own arms around his father and hugging him gently; afraid of causing the other man more pain. The way they were sitting was awkward... Coulson leaning against the cave wall, his broken leg stretched out and Grant sitting beside him, half lying on the floor so that he could fit against his father's side without jostling him or laying on top of him and still put his head against the other man's chest. He kept telling himself it was because he was checking Coulson's heart rate, to make certain there wasn't anything happening that either of them couldn't see... but the truth was, he just enjoyed the affection his father gave him whenever he 'snuggled' up to him.

Coulson held Grant close, beginning to feel just how much his ankle was hurting now that he was more or less relaxed. The gentle stroking of his son's hair slowed and then stopped as the pain became more overwhelming and Coulson's head fell gently back against the wall as he temporarily blacked out.

Ward felt the change immediately and, carefully extracting himself, kneeled beside his father, checking his breathing and pulse. "Dad?" he asked hesitantly, his worry rising ten notches as the other man didn't respond. His father was seemingly okay- it was likely only pain that had caused him to pass out- but could he really take the chance that it wasn't something worse? Everything he knew about first-aid (and, sadly, he knew a lot about first-aid with his profession) indicated there was really nothing to worry about. But this was his dad and Ward found he couldn't listen to what he knew. He needed to find another way out. He knew Phil would object the minute he was awake, so he'd just have to go do it while the man was unconscious. Having made his decision- without too much thought- he brought all the bags and set them within reach of Coulson, so if the man woke while he was gone, he wouldn't have to get up to get anything he might need, then he draped his jacket over the older man to make certain he didn't get too cold while he was unconscious. Satisfied that his father was as safe as it was possible for him to be under the circumstances, Ward grabbed his knife, flashlight and one bottle of water; then, kissing his father on the top of the head, he turned and started his trek further into the cave, following the slight breeze he'd felt.
Ward had been walking steadily for about ten minutes when it happened. No...the tunnel didn't branch off and make him choose which way to go. The fairly level terrain suddenly sloped downward and even though Ward held a flashlight, it had still been dark enough not to notice. And the cave floor, as they were wont to do, was wet and slippery; so of course, Grant went skiing down the cave floor. It wouldn't have been a problem if Ward hadn't discovered the opening that allowed the fresh breeze.

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Coulson hadn't passed out for very long, but when he came to, the first thing he realised was that the weight of Grant was gone from where his son had been leaning against his chest. The second thing was that it was nearly pitch black.

Fighting down the panic that made calling Grant's name tempting, Coulson felt along the cave floor until he found his flashlight. He turned it on and shone it round, only to confirm what he'd already guessed.

Grant was gone.

Coulson couldn't get up to find his son. Even if he thought about trying for a split second, the pain in his leg made that nearly impossible. All he could do was sit there and hope that he was wrong... that there wouldn't be danger further along in the cave.

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Grant only had seconds to see the hole at the top of the tunnel shining down into another rather large hole in the floor of the tunnel. It was as if the path he traveled on disappeared into an abyss. Not knowing how deep the hole went and how far he'd fall if he went over the ledge, Grant did the only thing he could. He threw himself onto the path and began trying to dig his feet and hands into the ground and grab whatever purchase he could. He dropped the flashlight and it rolled over the ledge; he didn't hear it land. Just as he felt his toes go over the ledge, he managed to grab one of the stalagmites he'd gone hurtling past. It cut his hand up, but it did stop him.

Gulping in deep breaths, Grant finally heard the flashlight land. Of course his father was right.

Resigned to the fact that not only would he not be able to find another way out to rescue his father, but now he would have to go back and face the man after blatantly disobeying him...Grant carefully
crawled back up the slope. It was slow going without a flashlight, but he finally reached level
ground. When he was far enough away from the slope to not have to fear falling again, he stood up
and very slowly made his way back to his father.

Twenty minutes later, he was stepping back into the cave, a subdued and ashamed set to his
shoulders. He kept his eyes to the ground as he carefully walked back to his father's side. He didn't
attempt to hide the shape he was in.

Coulson didn't relax until he heard the footsteps approaching and saw his son. And then, he was
worrying again, seeing the blood on Grant's hand as he shone the flashlight over his son. Reaching
for his bag with the bottles of water in, Coulson took one out. "Let me see," he directed, indicating
his son's hand. For now, he didn't scold Grant, but the look he gave his son was half
disappointment... and half relief that he hadn't been hurt worse.

Grant didn't know whether to laugh at the fact that he was covered- head to foot- with cave mud and
the first thing his father noticed was his hand...or cry that the first thing his father noticed was his
hand. It said something to the other man's level of caring that he could zero in on wounds like that
immediately. His shoulders slumped even further when he noted the look of disappointment and
relief in his father's gaze. Worrying the other man was the last thing he had wanted to do and he
never liked disappointing him. He didn't say anything, though. Instead, he kneeled down by his
father's side and quietly held out his injured hand.

With his gaze still aimed toward the ground and with the whole front of his body covered either in
mud or tiny scratches from where he'd gone over small rocks in his slide toward the edge, Grant
looked much much younger than he really was. Especially since he'd rubbed at his face on the walk
back and had streaks of mud on his cheek and nose. Finally unable to keep silent any longer, but not
wanting to try and justify his actions, he said, "You were right...."

Coulson took the cap off the water bottle and carefully poured it over Grant's hand, keeping it still
with his other hand. "I don't tell you not to do something without good reason," he said, as he
carefully made sure any mud or chips of rock were clear of the wound. Recapping the bottle, he put
it down and removed his son's coat carefully so he could tear more strips from his shirt, which was
looking very ragged by now. He used the strips to bind the wound, careful not to hurt his son.

"I know, sir..." Grant answered softly, shame settling in on him as he suddenly realized that his father
must have woken up soon after he'd taken off and the man hadn't had a clue what was happening to
him. No wonder he had been able to see the worry in the other man's eyes. Coulson was pretty good
at keeping himself controlled, so for the emotion to bleed through along with the disappointment, he
had to have been very worried. Grant swallowed hard as he looked at the makeshift bandage. Even
when he was headstrong and disobedient, his father still took care of him. He wasn't sure if he should
tell his father exactly what happened or not.
"What happened?" Coulson asked directly, his hand shifting to his son's shoulder, squeezing gently. He was still very disappointed, but seeing that Grant was safe meant that he couldn't get angry about it. He knew that his son deserved to be punished, but the only question was whether he should do it now... or wait until after they'd been rescued.

Grant closed his eyes, not wanting to face his father as he admitted what all had gone wrong. He knew he wouldn't lie or omit anything, though. Quietly, he began his story. "When you passed out, I convinced myself that it would be better if I found a way out that was quicker, even though you'd told me it was too dangerous to split up and we'd be found soon so there was no reason for me to go off." He continued on, telling about how the trail never branched off, so he'd got a bit careless in watching what was around him, beyond stepping over rocks and such. When he got to the part where he slipped on the sudden slope because he hadn't realized it was there, his voice dropped slightly. By the time he got to the part of the story where he'd dropped his flashlight and had to literally throw himself to his stomach in a bid to stop his plummet toward what could have been his death, his voice was even quieter. He clenched his eyes tightly after explaining how he'd finally stopped his descent (and how he'd cut his hand), not wanting to see what he was sure was disappointment and worry on his father's face. "Once I was stopped, I was able to crawl back up the incline and then make my way back here. Luckily, since there hadn't been any branches off the tunnel, I knew that I would come straight back here and wouldn't get lost- since I didn't have the flashlight anymore." He finished his story in a near whisper.

Coulson sighed, but his hand never moved from his son's shoulder. He listened to the explanation in silence and then spoke quietly. "When I woke up and realised you were gone, I was worried and scared. I knew you hadn't been taken... but that was only a small consolation. I couldn't come after you and I had no way of contacting you. It was only through sheer luck that you weren't hurt worse." Coulson shifted his hand to the nape of Grant's neck, squeezing there gently, using that gesture to help indicate that his feelings for his son hadn't changed. "There was no good reason for you to disobey me, son."

Ward finally opened his eyes and looked at his father. "I know, daddy..." he finally admitted in a small voice. "I knew it when I was doing it. I didn't mean to worry or scare you, though."

Coulson certainly hadn't missed the amount of mud Grant had managed to cover himself in, but he still pressed an affectionate kiss to his son's forehead. As he did so, he made his decision and looked into Grant's eyes. "I'm not going to wait until we're back on the Bus to punish you. I don't think that would be easy on either of us and there isn't any reason not to take care of things here."

Grant's eyes widened almost comically as the words registered. "But...how will...I mean if..." He bit his lip and glanced at Coulson's broken leg. If Coulson put him over his lap like normal, wouldn't it hurt the injury further?
"The break's further down my leg," Coulson said gently. "If you lay across my thighs, you should be high enough up that it won't aggravate the injury."

Grant winced, then nodded. Swallowing hard, he scooted closer to his father, then undid his jeans and shoved them and his underwear down, not wanting his father to have to strain himself any more than necessary. Then, he awkwardly lay himself over his father's thighs. It felt...odd.... Usually his father was sitting on a chair, not the ground, so Grant would be more draped over his lap than lying flat. Somehow, this position was worse, since it reminded him that his father was injured and he'd gone and made the man's life even more difficult.

Although he'd decided that this spanking had to be that much more severe, Coulson still took the time to gently rub his son's back before he lifted his hand, bringing it down hard. He didn't hesitate in swatting Grant again and then repeating the swats just below the first.

Grant hissed as the first smack landed. He should have known that this punishment would be more severe than others he'd received; after all, he'd deliberately gone against a direct order from his father for a reason that was flimsy at best. His father had already given perfectly good reasons for telling him no. Even so, the strength behind the swat was a bit shocking to him, as his father normally didn't spank him this hard. He grunted softly and tried to hold still, not wanting to make things even more difficult for his father, but by the fourth swat, he was tensing up and shifting. By the sixth, his eyes were watering. Still, he tried to hold still.

Coulson continued the hard swats down to Grant's thighs and as he started over from the top, he began speaking. "I know you thought you were doing the right thing, but going off without backup was dangerous. I had good reasons for telling you no. You scared me and you worried me. I could have lost you."

Grant clenched his hands tightly before hiding his face against one of his arms. Normally by this point, he would have been holding onto his father's leg as tightly as he could, but the injury made that impossible. His father's words washed over him, causing his shame to increase and he began to truly regret his actions. What made it worse was he hadn't thought he was doing the right thing. Not really. If he had thought that, he would have waited for his father to wake up again and then presented his case for going, even if his father didn't want him to.

Instead, he'd snuck away. He felt more and more like he'd behaved like a child instead of a seasoned agent. When his father started the spanking over again from the top, he couldn't help but kick his feet slightly in an attempt to ease the pain. Of course, it didn't help and despite his best intentions, he found himself throwing his hand back in an effort to 'protect' his bottom, a soft whine sliding through his lips against his will.

Coulson paused to move Grant's hand out of the way, holding it against his back before he continued
spanking. "I love you, Grant. I don't tell you no just for the sake of it. And if you'd had a good reason for going, this wouldn't be happening. But sneaking away while I was passed out was not a good reason."

"No...no, sir..." Grant lifted his head long enough to choke out before dropping it back onto his arm. He grasped at his father's hand with his one hand that was being held behind his back. As much as he knew he deserved this spanking- and as much as he knew he deserved it to be harsh because his reasons for disobeying hadn't been good and he'd almost died from them- it didn't change the fact that he felt a bit unnerved by the differences in this spanking as compared to all the others he'd received. There was a small bit of comfort in having things be consistent and Coulson always attempted to be consistent...but even though he had kept things as close to normal in this case, there were just enough differences that Grant couldn't help but feel a bit overwhelmed.

He whimpered as the spanking continued, unable to keep from squirming. Unfortunately for Grant, the only thing squirming netted him was that it pushed his bottom into position so that his sit spots were more accessible.

Coulson held tightly to Grant's hand, hoping to offer his son some comfort. He knew that this was different to the previous spankings and he paused briefly in the spanking to gently rub Grant's back once more before resuming, including his son's sit spots in the hard swats. "I take your safety very seriously, son," he said. "I'd rather not risk losing you at all... and certainly not for something easily avoidable."

"Yes....yes, sir..." Grant's words came out in a sob as he finally lost the ability not to cry. He went limp over his father's lap, accepting the punishment; knowing he deserved every swat...but also knowing that his father still loved him and had him and it would be okay in the end. He cried quietly, only jerking slightly when a smack landed, no longer able or willing to try and squirm away. "I'm sorry, daddy..." he finally sobbed out contritely, fully repentant.

Coulson finished with two final swats before he gently pulled and tugged Grant up into his arms. Even though his leg was injured, he managed to situate his son so he could cuddle him tightly, even if the position was more awkward than he would have liked.

Grant may have been lost in the emotional drain of being punished, but he was still aware enough to help move himself when his father began to tug him into position. By the time he was in place, he was sitting sideways on his hip, tightly against his father's side and under his arm, his own arms wrapped around the older man's waist and his face pressed against his father's chest. He'd managed to stop sobbing fairly soon after the spanking ended, but he couldn't seem to stop crying, shivering every so often and sniffing before letting out short, quivery breaths as he attempted to calm down. After one such shiver, he pressed his face closer to his father and whispered, "I'm sorry I worried you. I love you, daddy..."
Coulson kissed Grant's head as he cuddled him tightly. "I love you, son, very much. I don't want to ever risk losing you. I don't want anything to happen to you." He stroked Grant's hair softly as he continued, "You are so important to me..."

Grant nuzzled into his father's chest, soaking up the affection, weariness from the near-death experience and all the emotion he'd felt due to his punishment catching up with him. He shivered slightly and reluctantly pulled away from his father long enough to pull his clothing back into place. He couldn't help the hiss and then whimper of pain when the material rubbed against his thoroughly punished backside. "I don't want anything to happen to you either, sir..." he admitted softly, glancing downward. "I don't know what I'd do if I didn't have you anymore..." he admitted. Wincing again as he accidentally sat on his sore bottom, he finally gave up sitting and lay down on his stomach, putting his head on Coulson's lap, staring at the makeshift cast as he fought sleep.

Coulson gently stroked Grant's hair. "I can't promise nothing will happen, but I can promise I will do everything within my power to stay with you," he promised. "I don't take chances because I know you need me." He bent his head to gently kiss Grant's head once more. "Sleep, son. I have you."

Grant closed his eyes obediently when his dad told him to sleep. It was within a matter of minutes that the gentle stroking of his hair, and the feeling of safety he had because his father did have him, helped lull him to sleep.

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Fitz had fallen asleep with his head on his folded arms at the lab table he'd been working at. It wasn't unusual for that to happen, but he'd thought his feelings of worry would be too strong to allow him to sleep.

But when he slept, he dreamed... He saw Coulson and Grant coming up to a cave entrance. And he saw them crawling inside... and then he saw some figures emerge from the surrounding area to create a cave in over the entrance.

Fitz's head jerked up as the dream ended and he winced at the crick in his neck.

Simmons glanced at Fitz curiously as she noticed him jerk. "You ok, over there?" she asked in a sleepy voice. If it wasn't unusual for Fitz to fall asleep wherever he had been working, it was equally uneventful to find Simmons working while half asleep. She hadn't wanted to leave him in the lab alone, especially knowing that he'd been having bad dreams, so she'd forced herself to continue
working and not go to bed. She was glad of the fact when he'd jerked awake so suddenly.

"I... had a weird dream..." Fitz admitted. "Not really a nightmare, it... I dreamed about Coulson and Ward. That they got trapped in a cave."

Simmons frowned. "Maybe you just dreamed that because they called us to let us know they were investigating a report of something found in a cave..." she said softly, forgetting that he hadn't been anywhere in the room when May had received the missive.

Fitz gave Simmons a confused look. "When did they call that in?" he asked.

Simmon's mouth fell open slightly as he asked his question. "You weren't in the room when... it was several hours ago! They'd just picked up the dog and Coulson called and said he'd been given a report about a hiker finding something in a cave and he and Ward were going to check it out...." Her eyes widened slightly. "If you weren't there when we got the message, how did you know it was a cave...?"

"The effects from the alien residue are still wearing off," Fitz said slowly. "Maybe nightmares aren't the only result of it? It might be worth checking out, at least..."

"I'll get May and Trip," Simmons answered immediately. Fitz was right. If for some reason the alien residue was allowing him to see what was happening to people he cared about.... She quickly left to inform the two specialists.

As Simmons left, Fitz quickly grabbed a piece of paper and a pen to write down as much as he could remember about the dream... the location and what the other people who had been there; not that there was much he'd seen about them, but he still included all of the details he could think about.

May came in not more than ten minutes later, followed closely by Trip and Simmons. "Simmons says you're having dreams about Coulson and Ward that are remarkably close in location to where they told us they'd be going, even though you didn't know they were going anywhere..." May started off without preamble. "I just attempted to make contact with Coulson to find out what their status was, since he had said it wouldn't take them long to take care of this investigation and it's already been over three hours, only I wasn't able to make a connection to him. Something is wrong." She glanced at what he was writing. "What about your dream do you remember?"

"This is everything." Fitz indicated what he'd written down. "Everything about where they were..."
the people who caused the cave-in..." He finished off and handed the paper to May. "Do you know
where they were going? Is there someone nearby you can contact to find out more details?"

"There was a park ranger. They were going to leave the dog with him while they investigated..."
May murmured. "We'll call him and see if they checked back in and retrieved the dog. If they did,
then they went missing somewhere between there and the Bus. If they didn't, then there is a very
good possibility that your dream may not be a dream at all." She glanced at Trip, nodding her head,
before heading out the door. "I'll call the ranger. You all prepare for a rescue if I don't hear good
news."

Trip immediately went to their armory and began gathering weapons, as well as tools to dig.

Simmons began working on getting medical supplies together. "You may have saved their lives, you
know..." she said in an aside to Fitz. As scary as his dreams and the fact that he had been affected by
alien technology was, if it saved the life of the director...of their family...she couldn't help but feel it
was a blessing in disguise.

Fitz gave a hesitant smile. "The dreams might not be all bad, then, if so..." He began sorting through
what he needed, knowing it was a strong possibility that at least one of their team members could be
injured.

It hadn't taken May long to find out that the ranger hadn't heard from the two men. He promised to
meet them at the ranger station and lead them to the cave where the two men had been going. Soon,
May was behind the wheel of the SUV, preparing to drive to the ranger station, the other members of
her team joining her. She only hoped they got there soon enough.

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The ranger had met the team when they arrived at the centre and took them to the cave, showing
where the entrance had been. There was no sign of whoever had caused the cave in as the team plus
the ranger began digging their way in, calling out periodically to warn Coulson and Ward to stay
back in case they could hear.

Fitz let out a relieved breath as their two remaining team members were quickly relieved, though that
relief turned to concern as he saw Coulson's leg stretched out in front of him, bound in a makeshift
splint.
As soon as their rescuers had broken through the rubble covering the cave entrance, Ward had stood and grabbed all their bags. "He broke his leg," he called out to the others. "Do you have a stretcher? I splinted it as best as I could, but he isn't going to be able to crawl back through that entrance...."

Fitz quickly moved over to the supplies that they'd brought, knowing a stretcher had been included... just in case. He brought it over and glanced at May and Trip, figuring they'd be the best ones to take Coulson on the stretcher.

May nodded, taking the stretcher from him. "We've got it," she called in to Ward, moving quickly to get inside the cave with Trip. Carefully, they loaded the older man onto the stretcher, then slowly, they crawled back through the tunnel that was the opening of the cave, sliding and pulling Coulson along as if he was on a travois. As soon as they were able to stand, they did so and picked the stretcher up so they could carry it back to the jeep...giving Simmons just enough time to make certain the splint was still in place and to give him some pain medication.

Ward followed behind quietly, careful of his wounded hand and limping slightly, the bruising from his rapid descent down the slope finally making itself known. He was grateful, in a way, that he had the bruising to blame his stiffness on. He really didn't want to have to explain that his backside was tender because he'd been an idiot.

Since Simmons was with Coulson, Fitz approached Ward, noticing his hand and the stiff way he was walking, as well as the mud that completely covered him. "Are you all right? Do you need treatment?" he asked, worried.

Coulson kept his attention on his son, making sure Grant got out safely before he allowed himself to relax... though he was quick to voice a reminder about picking up the dog from the centre.

Ward gave Fitz a crooked smile. "I'm alright...although I'm sure dad will want to have me checked out when we get back to the Bus. I kind of did something stupid and ended up taking a wild ride toward a deep hole..." he admitted sheepishly, the guilt he felt at causing his father worry and the fact he'd disobeyed seeping through a tiny bit.

Fitz looked even more worried. "You're not badly injured, though?" He quickly looked over Ward, adding, "I'm sure Coulson is more relieved you're safe than annoyed about the doing something stupid situation..."

Ward blinked, then smiled more openly at Fitz. "I cut my hand and have some scrapes and bruises. Dad took care of the cut, but he'll probably want to make certain the scrapes and bruising aren't worse than we think. And I know he's relieved. Any annoyance he felt about my doing something
stupid has already been taken care of..." He didn't elaborate, but figured Fitz would be able to figure it out without any further information.

Fitz nodded. "I guess Coulson would have made sure the cut's cleaned... but since you didn't have medical supplies, I'm guessing, it might need to be properly cleaned in case of infection." He glanced over to the SUV. "I think we're going via the centre to get your dog back, but maybe you should ride in back with Coulson? Just so you both know each other are all right." He knew how much Coulson tended to worry about Ward when something happened.

Ward nodded gratefully. Even though he knew his father was in good hands, he didn't want to let him out of his sight. He wasn't sure why, but he'd decided not to fight it. "Thanks, Leo, I appreciate that..." he said quietly. "Did you get to see Copper when you came in?" He changed the subject.

Fitz nodded. "Only briefly... but I can see why he's got that name." He smiled. "He's really well-behaved, too. I think he'll be a good addition to the team."

Ward grinned. "I think so," he said proudly. They'd reached the SUV by that point, so they separated to get into the vehicle. Ward settled next to Coulson, letting the man lean against him while he propped his leg up on the seat. "Almost home, dad..." he muttered softly under his breath.

Coulson squeezed Ward's unhurt hand gently. "We'll pick up Copper... and then, when we get back to the Bus, your injuries can be properly checked," he said softly.

Grant winced. Even though he'd expected as much, he still wasn't looking forward to it. It wasn't that the team hadn't seen him in various stages of undress- his illness had pretty much killed any chance he'd had at maintaining any secrets when it came to his body- but the injuries he'd gotten today were embarrassing, simply because they hadn't needed to happen. He would really have rather not had any of the other team seeing what he'd done to himself because he'd been a disobedient child.

"My hand was the worse injury and you took care of that..." he said quietly. "If I let Jemma take a look and make sure it's clean and maybe put antiseptic on it, I should be fine..." He bit his lip, hoping that his father would agree to that, but not overly hopeful.

Coulson took a few moments to reply, the painkillers making him sleepy. His voice was still firm as he spoke, holding his son's hand. "I want to be sure those scrapes and bruises are properly treated and aren't any worse. You probably got a lot of mud in your cuts and I don't want you getting any worse."
Grant bit his lip and glanced out the window of the SUV before turning his eyes back to Phil. "Ok," he said softly. He didn't elaborate. He didn't argue. It was a simple agreement. He may not want to be examined, but he would be because his father wanted it to happen and - at least for today - he was through defying his father's wishes. The man deserved better than that.

May had stopped the SUV at the Ranger's Station, but motioned everyone else to stay in the car as Trip ran into the building to retrieve the last member of their rag-tag little family. Soon, joyful barking could be heard and the next thing Grant knew, Copper was in the car, curled up on the floor on top of his feet.

The rest of the trip back to the Bus, every so often, the dog would look up, whine softly, then lick his and Coulson's joined hands.

Coulson smiled and squeezed his son's hand gently again. "Thank you," he said softly to Grant. "I'm very glad I have you here safe." His voice trailed off as the pain meds finally took hold and he slipped into unconsciousness.

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They had got back to the bus without further incident and Ward and Coulson both had undergone examination by the combined efforts of Trip and Simmons. Coulson, groggy from the pain medication and the fact that the day had been very trying for him, had been taken back to his bunk to rest.

Ward had been a bit embarrassed at how thorough the examination was, but Simmons and Trip both said that if he'd got a cut when he slid down that tunnel that had bat feces or any other unknown element in it, he could be in serious trouble, so they made him shower and then went over his skin inch by inch until they had catalogued every scrape and bump. They'd then either put anti-septic on the scrapes and cuts themselves, or made him do it. He'd also been prescribed a series of antibiotics. He wasn't happy about that - medication tended to make him sleepy - but he knew it was necessary and if he didn't willingly agree to it, they'd go to his father and his father didn't need the extra stress.

Finally, he was able to leave the lab. Going back to his own bunk, he'd changed into his sleep clothes and lay down. He couldn't sleep. He kept imagining what could have happened had his father not been far enough back when the collapse occurred. That rock could have landed on his head instead of his leg and then what would have been the result? It made him sick to think about it and for the first time that day his worry and fear for his father took over. He wasn't going to be able to sleep until he knew for sure that Coulson was alright.
Getting Copper's attention, he gathered his pillow and blanket and padded down the hallway to his father's bunk. Gently opening the door and slipping inside—letting the dog in before he closed the door just as gently—he looked at his father sleeping peacefully and finally began to calm down. Spreading his cover onto the ground, then dropping his pillow down, he gingerly got down onto the floor, Copper curling up next to him, and fell asleep listening to his father breathe.

**The End**

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