(Eventually canon relationships, but it will take time) – I used to be a normal twenty-year-old guy. Now, thanks to the G-Man, I’m in the Castle Universe with a fake identity, making a living defusing bombs, foiling evil plans and moonlighting as an informant for the NYPD to keep Team Caskett safe, and all this in my pre-growth-spurt fifteen-year-old body. Who am I? I’m Jonny Gerthson, interdimensional traveler extraordinaire and part-time Batman with a knack for getting into trouble.

After the events that followed my appearance in this reality, I started sharing my loft with my aunt and uncle.

They’re not really my aunt and uncle.

My “aunt” is an agent for the G-Man’s alien company’s Internal Affairs division. My “uncle” used to be my butler in this universe, sent to ease me into my new life. I ended up killing him with a sword in a duel. Don’t ask. He came back.

Now, after a year in this reality, a new menace presents itself and I must don my superspy alter ego yet again. To stand a fighting chance, I have to work with unexpected allies. Like, really unexpected, as in “What the heck are you doing in this universe?” unexpected.

Just my luck, eh?

Alexis/OC
Welcome to the second installment of "Close Encounters Of the Fourth Kind"! I'm glad you found your way here :) 

If you didn't read CE4, I don't blame you. It was certainly not everyone's cup of coffee. And more than a little on the crackfic side. But it was a fun ride, if I may say so. You should definitely go read it. It's only just a bit over 30,000 words long (according to FFnet *cough*) :D

For those of you who have read it but whose memories are a bit sketchy on the details, I'll let Jonny do a little refresher ;)

This will be a crossover with the tv shows "Chuck" and "Eureka". Considering the nature of these shows (two amazing shows who are perfect for binge watching), you can imagine this story will dive into the depths of science fiction and AUs ;)
Old Friends

Oh man... what a trip. Jonny Gerthson, world's savior extraordinaire...

Oh, hey there! Didn't see you until now. Hah, you wouldn't believe what I lived through if I told you... actually, that idea isn't half bad, now that I think of. It's worth a shot, anyway. Couldn't hurt, right?

Some of you may know me already, but I'd like to take a minute to introduce myself properly before I tell you my story.

My name is Jonny Gerthson, and I'm twenty one years old. Wait, actually I'm sixteen... or was it the other way around? Never mind, I always confuse those two. I'll get to me having two ages later. Not much about me makes sense these days, anyway. It has been well over a year since I went from four semesters of IT to spy business in about half a week. I shrunk an inch. I exchanged my happy family for two supervisors who hate each other's guts.

Want to know how my life went FUBAR?...

Too bad, I'll tell you anyway.

Over a year ago, I met an alien presence I had believed to be fictional until that fateful night. Which alien presence, you may ask? If you have played the Half-Life series, you may know him as the G-Man. He's a bit of a bore, and his speech cadence may grate on your nerves... but honestly? He just has a shitty personality.

According to astronomer and UFO researcher J. Allen Hynek, such "close encounters" can be classified into three levels, which are arranged according to increasing proximity.

A CE1 is a simple UFO sighting within five hundred feet; nothing spectacular yet. A CE2 means the aliens have a physical effect. Car engines dying, animals panicking, that sort of thing. A CE3 is where you actually see the alien and not just his UFO. Remember that movie, "Close Encounters Of The Third Kind"? Yeah. Guess where its name comes from.

However, there are more levels to it than are originally included in Hynek's scale. My abduction by the G-Man would be considered a Close Encounter Of The Fourth Kind.

But it didn't suffice that he just abducted me, which is really bad on its own already, no... he saw it fit to dump me into another reality with some abstruse mission I still have no idea what it's about.

Also, I'm back in my pre-growth-spurt, fifteen year old, five feet seven tall body. Which sucks.

But to give credit where credit is due, the G-Man has actually made an effort to make our "arrangement" more "agreeable". It boils down to bribery, really.

For starters, I landed in the Castle Universe, which is pretty awesome in my books. Then I got an Intersect, a supercomputer imprinted directly into my brain via coded images, filled to the brim with information and skills (even dancing). I mean, how cool is that? Well, aside from the fear of possible side effects like paranoia, schizophrenia and potential brain cooking, but still. Then I was made a secret agent. Without government ties, so to the untrained eye, I may seem like a criminal... which, FYI, I am not. I just happen to stumble into bad situations where violence is unavoidable, okay. How is that my fault?
Oh-kay, that sounded better in my head. Moving on. Oh yeah, I'm stupid rich, by the way. Another perk of working for a secret alien organization. Sadly, the snarky butler ("Barrymore" - who calls himself that nowadays?) who likes calling me 'moron' is also part of the package.

Now that I'm done bragging about how awesome my fake life in a different reality is, I should tell you what has happened in the meantime.

I was only a few days in this new reality when I had to stop a terrorist from blowing up Castle's book release party (where I made friends with Alexis Castle, coincidentally).

After I caught the guy, my butler butchered the job, quite literally, by accidentally blowing up the terrorist instead of leaving him for the FBI to find.

Of course, everything went spiraling downwards after that. The case became political, the DA wanted me behind bars for a murder I didn't commit, and Kate Beckett saw me as a criminal. I lied through my teeth and pretended to have an information network and swindled my way to a position as informant (and unofficial guardian angel for Beckett, courtesy of Captain Montgomery), with my first point on the agenda being "bring down your own butler" - an action sanctioned by my alien bosses.

Remind me not to get cross with them.

After a ridiculous hunt through New York City with Beckett and company, and an unfriendly video sent to the police claiming responsibility, it all ended in a seedy warehouse rigged to blow with a shootout between Team Caskett (consisting of Beckett, Castle, Esposito, Ryan, and yours truly) and a brainwashed SWAT team, followed by a duel (with real swords) between Barry and me.

I won.

Then everything calmed down a little, and I even fancied the thought that I can finally settle into my new life at peace.

Ah, youthful greenness.

Barry pulled a Coulson and came back from the dead. He returned to my side, even after having received his punishment at my hands (read: my sword in his chest), posing as my uncle - now under the name Andrew.

Talk about karma.

However, he's not alone. Thankfully. The uncle needs the aunt, doesn't he? Therefore, a lovely gal from the secret alien organization's Internal Affairs division named Cassandra has been assigned to me, too. She was the one who interrogated me when they looked into why the terrorist mission went south - and the one who put me in the hospital back then. Here's hoping she will keep Barry in check.

After helping Alexis with a "small problem" of hers on her prom night, and her father with a "related problem" afterwards, he invited me to one of his charity galas as a thank you gift. Of course I said yes.

And now you're up to speed! Perfect! Now, let's start with my newest adventure, shall we?

The day of the charity gala, 1403 hours, Casa Gerthson / McRiosca
The training room is still mostly dark. What little light comes through the windows is just enough to let me see where the next metal rung is, but barely anything else. Although, with the darker than normal shade the bulletproof glass always has and the bad storm outside, it's no wonder the room isn't exactly well lit, even at two in the afternoon.

"Would you please stop showing off, Jonny? I can't even look at you doing all those salmon chin-ups."

Hanging from the long bar, I twist my head to look at the voice came from, only to see Andy standing in the door frame. "Why's that, old man? Just because your body can't hold up with that?" I ask with a grin.

My surrogate uncle lets out a disgusted noise while i climb down from the salmon ladder. "No, moron. Because you're going to a charity gala this evening and you have to get ready soon."

I raise my eyebrow at that. "It's 2 PM, Andy. I have, like, five hours before the thing starts. I think I can manage a little workout."

Of course, he's not so sure of that and crosses his arms. "Really? Tux, limo, shower, everything planned? Knowing you, I seriously doubt that."

I grab a towel from the stack and wipe up the sweat. "No, not exactly. But hey, this is important, too, right? What if I have to stop a target and I am out of breath because I didn't work out?"

Andy only snorts at that as he turns to leave. "Right, this has absolutely nothing to do with Castle's cute daughter. Speaking of which, what if you had to save the day this evening and you couldn't because you were too tired from your little workout? What would Alexis think?"

"That's so not fair to bring her into that! I only took her to Laser-Tag as a friend!" I yell after him. At least he doesn't see my face grow red, I don't need to give him further ammunition.

I hear him snickering in the corridor. "Sure, lad, whatever you say. Now shower, you need it!"

A short, cold shower and a change of clothes later I step into the kitchen to the view of Cassandra... eh, I mean, Zoe, cooking.

"Well, I don't think I'll ever get used to seeing you in the kitchen," I tell her.

She throws a mock glare over her shoulder. "This is actually for your cover, kid."

I snicker as I pull a dish out of the drawer. "Sure. Your secret's safe with me."

"By the way, Andy will drive you."

I stop in my tracks, and the dish clatters onto the counter top. "Are you saying that to scare me? Because if so, good job, nice use of terror. Considering what has happened the last time he drove me to a party of Castle's, you'll understand that I'm really hesitant about that. Call me superstitious."

She waves me away and doesn't even turn around. "You're superstitious. You have nothing to worry about, everything will be fine."

Of course, that's exactly when a smurf-blue lightning decides to hit outside the window, the thunder.
reverberating from the kitchen walls.

Slackjawed, I stare out of the window and point outside rather dumbly. "That's... a rather vivid warning not to tempt fate like that."

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**The day of the charity gala, 1754 hours, at the charity gala**

*The limo comes to a halt at the red carpet, and I can see Andy spotting a bemused smile as I struggle to put the finishing touches to my fly.*

"So... before I go, any last tranquilizers to safely stow away? Because I really don't want a rerun of last time," I quip from the backseat.

Andy gives me a dark look through the back mirror. "No, not really," he tells me casually, "but a variation of what I used on that SWAT team a while ago... You want some?"

It takes me about four seconds before I stand outside the car. "Nope, thank you. I'm good," I press through a forced smile I put up for the photographers, just in case one of them gets the idea to take notice of the young boy who's standing on the red carpet. It wouldn't do to scowl on page six, now would it?

Dodging two nosy reporters who remotely look like they could be interested in talking to me, I make my way to the bouncers who check my invitation to their list and then wave me through.

I'm a little bit early, but the ball room is already well filled, despite it being the biggest room I've ever been in. It could probably host that famous waltz gala in Vienna. If it were in Vienna, that is. I think it's a theater or something? It must be, it even has those fancy loges at the sides.

Sometimes, not being tall has its advantages in certain situations. For example, if you want to blend in with the masses, or when people shoot at you. Looking for someone in a crowd, however, is **not** one of those situations.

I'm standing on my toes to look for Castle, but I can't find him. Considering that he's the host of the evening, however, it's probably not a bad guess that he would be at the center of the attention. Said and done, I force myself through the thickest knots of people I can find, muttering excuses left and right.

At least I don't knock over any champagne flutes.

After I probably have incurred the wrath of half of New York's High Society, I hear Castle's trademark laugh, and moments later, a familiar shock of hair stands out.

"Glad you could make it, Jonny," Castle greets me with a smile as I push through the last group of people.

I grin back at the author. "Wouldn't miss it for the world. So, are all your charity events that crowded?"

That elicits a chuckle from him. "Yes, I'm afraid so."

I look around, but something's missing... "Where's Alexis? I thought she'd be here, too."

Castle's chuckle dies in his throat. "She's in the restrooms, but she should be here again soon. Say, what's up with you and Alexis?"
I'd say we're good friends, at least since the disaster known as Owen's prom... but I don't think it's wise to tell a father that you're 'good friends' with his daughter. It often turns out to be... unhealthy.

"We're... friends. Don't worry, my intention's aren't any less noble than yours with Beckett," I quip and let a smirk show on my face. Probably not the best time to joke, but when did that ever stop me?

"That's what I'm afraid of," he mutters, just loud enough for me to hear, although I don't think it was intentional.

"No need to go all 'Papa Bear' on him, dad," a voice laughs from behind his back. "If I recall correctly, him being a friend for me and being there for me was what made you invite him in the first place, right?"

Alexis makes a sidestep and emerges from behind her dad. Then she pulls me into a hug.

Huh. That's a switch. I'm definitely not used to being hugged. It's not too bad, though.

"I'm glad you came tonight. It's the least we could do to thank you," she says with a smile.

I wave her away while I feel my cheeks heat up, and for once, it's not because of an innuendo.

"You know that's not true. I only did what a friend would do."

She gives me a disapproving look, but stays silent on the topic for now. Instead, her dad pipes up. "I thought you'd bring your aunt and uncle with you. I was looking forward to finally meet them."

I snort at that. "Yeah, well, they're a tad too paranoid for that. Open rooms and big crowds, that's a 'safety-conscious citizen's nightmare'. But I'm sure we can invite the three of you over for dinner sometime. I'd even make my infamous onion tart, and my uncle should be able to get his hands on a few bottles of 'Federweisser'."

Alexis raises an eyebrow at that. "I didn't know you can cook."

I smirk. "Technically, it's baking, but yes, I've been doing it for a while now."

However, before she can retort, a shot is fired into the ceiling, and I pull both Castle and Alexis down to the floor in a knee-jerk reaction.

I turn my head to scan the room for the source. Thankfully, we're not the only ones who had the idea to get on the floor, so I can actually see stuff. I count sixteen guys, dressed in black and with black ski masks on, standing in the entrance.

"Good evening, ladies and gentlemen," the one in the front yells, "today's entertainment is brought to you by random acts of violence! In the spirit of the cause of this evening's get-together, we kindly ask you to 'donate' your wallets, jewelries and other valuables. Much obliged, you're all very generous!"

I slowly push us further away from them, towards the wall. Once we're finally there, I start softly banging my head against the cool marble.

"Damn you, Zoe! Why did you have to tempt fate? One party, that's all I want. A single frakkin' party without guns or bombs, is that too much to ask for?"
Well, well, what have we here?

The robbers work quick and efficiently. There are countless hostages in here, and they have robbed most of us in less than ten minutes of any cash we had and all the jewelry.

Everything about this screams bad news. Well, an armed robbery slash hostage situation is always bad news, but this...

Alexis is wrapped in her father's arms. He tries to soothe her, but she's still silently sobbing into his dress shirt.

"Who are these guys?" Castle whispers to me.

I glare darkly at the masked men patrolling the hostages, but they either don't notice me or don't see me as a threat because I'm a teenager.

"I don't know who they are, but this isn't a mere robbery," I whisper back.

Alexis stares at me with wide eyes. "What do you mean, this isn't a robbery?"

"If these guys were only after money and jewelry, they could have left already. Neither have they killed anyone, nor have they rounded up a special group of people. Yet they stay. They have to be after something different."

A familiar almost-sneeze announces the arrival of a flash as one of the robbers walks by, showing images of weapons designs stamped top secret, still in development. "They have to have some very influential friends," I explain in a low voice and nod in their direction. "These MP they are wielding are military-grade. Not available for civilians, and most likely not even on the black market."

Castle's knuckles get white, and he swallows hard. "Then what can we do?"

"We? nothing," I tell him with a forced smile. "You stay here. I go rough them up a bit and find out what they're after."

"I can't let you go alone, Jonny," he pleads, but I just shake my head.

"I appreciate the sentiment, but... you have a daughter to take care of. You've seen me in action, Castle; You know what I am capable of. We have a better chance at getting out of here alive if I don't have to worry about you or Alexis catching a bullet."

He concedes defeat wordlessly, the imminent danger to his daughter probably has made him see reason. He nods me towards the corridor that's about ten feet away and clutches Alexis to his chest even tighter, whispering soothing words into her hair. I slowly slide back, inch by inch, my eyes trained on the bad guy who's patrolling in our section. Thankfully, there's a commotion on the other side of the room at the loges, so our baddie turns around to see what's going on.

Once he turns back around again, I'm long gone and hidden behind a pillar in the corridor, with no fear, no weapon, and no plan.

Meh. Most plans don't survive first contact anyway.

I peek around the pillar, and just my luck, there's another guy with a ski mask and a gun. At least he has his back to me, so I'm not completely screwed. Then he turns around and I pull my head back
behind the pillar. Thankfully, he doesn't give a damn about making noise - and why should he, really? - so I can make a rather accurate guesstimate how far away he is. Five feet... four feet...

Now!

I round the pillar and sprint the three feet that separate us. The guy is understandably surprised that anyone has the gall to actually fight back, and more so, not in the main room (which would be suicide), but out here.

The nerve of some people, right?

He tries to get his MP up, but he isn't fast enough. Also, he's even more surprised that I don't run at him directly but aim slightly to the side of him. His curiosity is sated when I clothesline him. That doesn't work so well if you run at someone head on. I go to the ground with him to keep him down. He struggles, even though the wind is knocked out of him, but that's expected. I keep up the pressure at his throat to make him stop fidgeting around. I'm not keen on killing him, but I also don't want him getting up again soon and shooting me in the back. That'd be... suboptimal.

I wonder if Barry/Andrew knew what I would get into, or if he just assumed I had a knack for getting into bad situations? We've been training for about a year now, and it's been a sobering experience to train with Barry. Andrew. Whatever. It was hard and taxing, even with the help of the Intersect, but right now, I'm considering sending him a fruit basket as a thank you gift.

Should I feel bad about what I'm about to do to him? Probably. Do I feel bad? Nah. Perhaps if he didn't try to wave a gun in my face, I'd think differently, but right now, I've got bigger problems than reflecting about whether or not it is adequate to break both his index fingers.

Little fun fact that you'll see at least once a year in a TV show: Never break the thumbs of your enemy. That way, they can escape handcuffs, although it does hurt pretty bad. Thus, I'll break his index fingers. At least he won't be able to shoot anything without his usual trigger finger.

I ram my elbow into his temple to knock him out. He'll feel the pain soon enough, he doesn't have to be conscious for when it's inflicted.

I make short work of his phalanges, and with two wet snaps, his index fingers are hanging around loosely. I wince at the sound. This could take a while to heal.

Then I take stock of the few belongings he has on his body. One ski mask, sweaty. One walkie-talkie, mostly intact. One silenced machine pistol, full magazine. No ID. Figures.

I doubt he will wake up before this is all over anyway, but taking precautions is really engrained into my brain. Thanks to Andrew, who else? Now what can I use for that?... Ah, this curtain certainly doesn't need the thick rope that ties it together.

Instead, only a couple moments later, it adorns my unconscious f(r)iend's hands, festively tied up, even though it's not even December.

I have no use for the radio, and wearing a sweaty ski mask hasn't made it on my bucket list for a good reason. The gun, however... well, let's just say the Intersect can help me put it to good use.

I smash the radio under my heel (wouldn't want him to call his friends, now would we?) and leave it with everything else but the gun with the guy. Closing my eyes, I try to remember the layout of the building. Sadly, blueprints are not implemented in the Intersect. Yet. Note to self: talk with the G-Man about that. They would surely come in handy sometime.
The details are a bit sketchy, but if I recall correctly, there's a walkway with a balustrade from where I would be able to overlook the whole hall. If I really am to have a chance at taking these guys out, I need information, desperately. Or backup, but who would risk their hide among the upper ten thousand in a hostage situation, unarmed at that? Since that is out of the window, I make my way to the stairs. and silently thank the architects that they didn't build usual staircases. The stairs are fully integrated in the building design, and more importantly, clad with thick, dark red carpet. Which means, I may be able to move silently. Ever tried walking silent on marble? Good luck with that.

I stay on the carpet as I climb the last stairs. I turn around the corner, and with a loud thwack, a guy with gun and ski mask bumps into me. We stare at each other dumbly for a second. Then he looks down on me and sees the gun. One of their guns, at that. Then he looks me in the face again. His eyes widen, then narrow. All of that has taken about half a second, at most.

He tries to bring up the gun to line up for a shot, but I know that's not the best idea in close quarters. With all the high tech he has, it does him no good: I drop the MP to pull him down to my height, and what looks like the first moments of a violent, explosive kiss turns out to be a headbutt. A solid one, if I may say so.

I get him square in the nose, and it starts gushing blood. Quite messy. Don't know if he's dead, but considering the force I've brought his head down on mine (it does hurt a little), death isn't as far-fetched as I would've liked.

I may have little to no qualms to hurt people in self-defense, but I wouldn't kill just for the thrill of it. It's the truth, even though it rhymed. I don't think I'm a sociopath, but the 'rigorous training' Andy makes me do regularly does tend to leave such tendencies behind.

Don't get me wrong, despite all the shit he's been giving me, Andy has turned out to be quite helpful. Without his training, I'd be probably dead by now. And I like living, thank you very much.

But I could do without having to think about the quickest way to kill all the people in a room the moment I enter it. Compulsory threat assessment is a real pain in my behind. Guess you can't argue with the results, though.

Speaking of which, my spy senses are tingling right now...

Crack!

The second I jump to the side, a shot goes off. It's silenced, so it's more like a wet cough instead of a loud noise, but I must say, I can't recommend being shot, anyway. Not being shot at, either. But mainly being shot.

As in, my stomach's protesting quite loudly at the sudden impact.

As in, I'm shot.

Shit.

My vision's slightly blurred, but that's not so bad; it's not worse than not wearing my glasses or my contacts. Can't really tell if that's because my sudden movement made my lenses pop out or my eyes are brimming with tears.

I opt for the former, because that'd be less embarrassing. Not that I'd care. I look at the other side of the walkway to where the shot came from, but the guy who shot me goes down himself. I risk a sideways glance to where my freshly acquired gun is lying. Huh. Wasn't me, apparently.
Looking back up, three figures come down the walkway, and they don't wear ski masks. Also, they shot the guy who shot me. I really hope they're the good guys.

Now that others are here, my job is done here. A nap sounds great right now; I'll close my eyes, just for a minute.

An appreciative grunt, slightly amused, tears me away from sweet slumber. "Huh. Didn't think one of the moneybags downstairs had the guts to stand up to these buggers. Too bad he caught a bullet for his efforts."

I slowly open my left eye, because I don't trust my ears: That grunt sounds familiar. A stony face greets me. Strong jaw. Neat, brown hair. Nose previously broken. I know this man.

Gaze to the left. Blonde bombshell. Hair held together in a ponytail. Piercing blue eyes. More than a pretty face, apparently. Cute frown. I know this woman.

Gaze to the right. Lanky guy. Dark brown, unruly hair. Chocolate eyes. Slightly panicked expression. I know this nerd.

Great. Now I have three top spies from the Chuck Universe here. I'm... something bad that rhymes with "shrewd".

Relaxing a bit, I open the right eye, too. "Not quite gone yet," I mumble and start coughing. Labored breath. Not good. Not as bad as "Chuck" in the Castle Universe, but... pretty bad.

"Well, will you look at that. Tougher than he looks. Also, not as pudgy as the rest. Though that doesn't have to mean much, heh, Bartowski?" 'tough guy' snorts.

"I'm working out, okay? It's hereditary, Casey."

"Will you two shut up already? You're talking as if he isn't here! He needs medical attention," miss Walker says.

Now that I'm not alone anymore, I take the time to look down my chest and open up my tux jacket. Bullet hasn't penetrated farther than the dress shirt, which is odd. Can't remember wearing a bulletproof vest under it. Wouldn't have been a bad idea, though. A closer look at the entry point makes me wanna sneeze (read: flash). I close my eyes to hide it, no need to tell the original Intersect host and the secret agents who are tasked with protecting him that I have an Intersect on my own. That could prove to be... unhealthy.

What my flash told me is everything but unhealthy though. Apparently Andy and Zoe didn't trust me not to get into trouble, because the dress shirt is made of spider silk. Anything that can, if scaled up accordingly, stop a jumbo jet in mid-flight is good enough for a bulletproof vest. Just saying.

"So you're the relief force? It was about damn time, Chuck," I mumble sleepily. "Also, does anyone have a paracetamol or something? My chest is killing me," I groan.

All three start staring at me. One panicked, one furious, one ice cold.

I stare back with a questioning look on my face. "What? Is it forbidden to take a painkiller, all of a sudden?"

Before I know it, Sarah Walker has me backed against the wall and presses a knife at my throat. "How do you know that name?" she hisses.
My Adam's apple draws a little trickle of blood as it bobs nervously. Time for some well-placed half truths. "How hard do you think it would be to find out about Carmichael's true identity?" I ask back; my voice is hoarse, but should hold a while longer. I wonder what evil organization they're after at the moment, but unfortunately, the Intersect didn't anticipate the Chuck Universe "bleeding through", "colliding", whatever... thankfully, I watched the show diligently, so I should be up to snuff anyway.

"And before anyone of you wonder, no, I'm not part of 'the Ring', and I don't intend to ever sell him out." I hope I got the right one. "I'm merely a semi-retired information broker that continued the work of his predecessor on Team Bartowski. I didn't even get to see any confidential material and I found out, by deduction alone. Now, I'd really love to play twenty questions with you guys, but I got friends down there, and if you hadn't noticed yet, there are still bad guys around. I'll happily place myself in your custody and help you stuff that hole after we finished these bastards off."

I raise my eyebrows at the three and try my best not to draw anymore blood. "So, how about we make an alliance for the time being? We take the bad guys out together, I can make sure my friends are okay, and I accompany you peacefully and voluntarily."

A grunt from Colonel Casey gives me hope that they'll actually buy it. If you don't know John Casey, you might think all his grunts are the same. But alas, that is not the case.


Anyway, he has a surprisingly broad range of grunts and growls that can convey a large variety of moods, emotions and reactions. This one consists of part anger, part grudging respect and a pinch of surprise. I think. There is no "English - Casey, Casey - English" dictionary.

A silent conversation goes on between the three for a short while, and to my surprise, they take me up on my offer.

Well, looks like I'm going hunting with Team Bartowski.

And a bruised rib.
Tread Lightly, Fool

We retreat back into the corridor Team Bartowski came from. I still can't wrap my head around them being here. Quite frankly, they shouldn't exist in this Universe. If I recall correctly, G-Man specifically mentioned that the Intersect glasses had been created in another universe.

Andy and Zoe will have a field day when they find out.

Until then, I'll try to stay alive for the time being and enjoy the time I have left.

Casey wordlessly opens his backpack and throws me a pack of paracetamol, the strong ones. I pop one right in and take a swig from the water bottle he hands me to wash it down.

"Thanks, Colonel... oh, come on, how could you think your military rank would stay a secret after I found out about the very existence of your team?" I add with an eye roll when I'm met with a surprised glare.

I'm cockier than advisable. Especially injured. "Anyway, that's a discussion for another occasion. I've taken two out on my side, and fifteen of those masked freaks in total came in through the front entrance; can't tell how many are hidden among the guests. How many have you got?" I ask Casey.

Chuck may be the original Intersect and Sarah surely is a brilliant agent, but in cases of violent emergencies of this sort, you do good to go to the former NSA BlackOps member.

My decision to defer to Casey as 'team leader' is met with a satisfied grunt. "We've taken down six, including their inside man; which leaves us with eight bogeys still on the loose."

Chuck taps me on the shoulder and spots an unsure smile when I turn around to face him. "Not to interrupt, but... are you okay? You just got shot."

I smile a little, although the pain dulls it a bit. "Thank you for your concern, but don't worry. I've had worse." That those worse bits involved interdimensional travel and led to longer hospitalizations is a tidbit I deliberately keep quiet about. "Besides, the dress shirt took the brunt of the impact. It's amazing what spider silk can do."

Now both Sarah and Casey perk up at that. Should've known. Bulletproof vests made of spider silk were not even ready for prototyping (let alone shrinking such sophisticated technology to dress shirt format) back in my reality. Which is still four years in the future compared to here, mind you.

Four years... all the films I was excited for I know already... such a shame.

"We'll talk about that later," says Sarah and effectively ends the discussion. "You ready to go,..." she fades out the ending, apparently expecting me to fill in. Guess with me knowing them already, introductions were cut a little short. Gun shot might have done its part, but still. I was raised better than this.

"Gerthson," I fill in, "but you can call me Jonny. Everyone does."

"Great, now that we don't have to call you midget anymore, can we finally move on? My trigger finger's getting itchy," Casey grumbles.

"I'm not a midget, Colonel; but yeah, we can move on," I concede, after taking in the stare he gives me.
Trust me, we don't want Casey's trigger finger to be itchy.

After twenty long minutes, with the last masked man fallen victim to Casey's trigger finger, I finally allow myself to take a breath.

The hostages are not yet aware that their captors are not a threat anymore. Soon this will be a mass panic, when people are just trying to get out, away from the trauma they've just experienced.

"Where do you think you're going? You're coming with us," Sarah hisses when I turn to go see Castle.

I turn around and fix her with a stare, which she gives back in kind. She and Beckett should found a stare club. It's unnerving how easily those two women can make me almost piss my pants. What can I say, my strong bladder is presumably one of the few reasons I don't go through a dozen pants a year.

I hope that doesn't shine through when I break the stare contest after a few seconds by speaking up. "Listen, Agent Walker. If I don't check in with Mr. Castle, he will get worried. He will ask around and stuff his nose in things you don't want him to stuff his nose into. And trust me, he can get annoying pretty fast. He still has CIA contacts from his earlier books, believe it or not. Or, I could go talk to him, tell him I'm okay so he's not worried anymore. Then I call in the cavalry for clean up, and by that I mean the cavalry who is actually allowed to operate on U.S. soil, as in the police that is no doubt already waiting outside. That's where my contacts come in."

Three skeptic looks land on me, but I only roll my eyes. "Oh, come on, seriously? After I just help you tear through over a dozen hostiles? I may be only sixteen, but even I can be useful, from time to time. I use the information network that I've inherited to work as an informant for the NYPD. I know a few people, and if that isn't enough, they know even more people. I've got it covered."

Casey cannot hide the surprised look on his face fast enough (not like me and my smug grin I'd like to sport right now). "You're sixteen? Seriously? I thought you were in your mid-twenties."

I snort and cough slightly. No one likes to be told that you look old, not even 'teenagers'. "Yeah, I get that often, despite my unimpressive height. Guess I just have an old soul."

"Now, if you'd excuse me, I have got a black op to cover up," I quip with a laugh and make my way over to Castle fast to cover up my wince. I don't think I should laugh so much; my ribs are still hurting, despite the pain killers I've thrown in. Maybe even more than at the beginning.

Castle looks haggard. Understandable; who wouldn't, he just lived through a hostage drama with his teenage daughter.

I sneak up to him through the path I took when we parted ways.

"Castle," I hiss, only to be hit by an ear-splittingly high squeak that fortunately wasn't very loud.

It wasn't Alexis'.

Well, at least he didn't alert the other former hostages.

"Jonny, thank god you're back... Is everything alright?" he asks immediately, with a concerned look on his face. Stupid author, he just has to notice everything, doesn't he?
"Meh, bruised a rib or two. Should be just fine in a short while," I grunt, and ignore Alexis' shocked look. I could do with another paracetamol, to be honest. Here's hoping that Casey still has some in their base.

"Also, the bad guys are out of commission. I'm gonna call Beckett, so the SWAT team or the HRT or whoever is waiting outside can come in and save the day."

Alexis stares at me with wide eyes and then frowns. I don't know how, but it looks adorable on her. Or it would, if it weren't for her puffy red eyes - now it makes me sad. "But... you did all this, why the SWAT team?"

I give both of them an amused smile. "Because I don't need to be recognized. For the rest of the world, I'm just another rich kid. And I have no intentions to do something about that. Information broker, remember?" I ask with a cheeky grin (still hurts. Ow). No sense adding to their distress at this point.

"Now, I'll leave you two alone, I still have to call Beckett. You are safe, nothing can happen to you anymore, okay?" I try to soothe them, but I don't think I'm doing a good job. Shite, I should really do something about my social skills. From IT engineer to spy, there's not much room left for that.

I pull out my phone and punch in Beckett's number.

"Gerthson, where are you?" Oh, it's back to Gerthson now. She has to be really pissed off if she resorts to calling me by my last name.

I should know better, but I still do my best to sound disinterested and bored. I have a reputation to uphold. "Inside. By the lack of pleasantries I assume you're outside. If so, send in the HRT, we're done here. This party sucks. Not enough food, too many unpleasant acquaintances."

"We haven't heard from the hostage takers, what's going on in there? Why aren't you whispering?" she asks.

"I'm afraid that could prove to be quite difficult for most of them, unless you have a reliable medium at hand. I've taken all of them out. I've kept them alive when I could, but unfortunately most of them thought it was a good idea to open fire on me once they had seen they were up against a teenager. Thank god they were kind enough to use silenced weapons, this way the hostages didn't panic when shots were fired. No hostages wounded, thankfully, or at least from what I've gathered. Didn't stick around for most of it."

"Alright, then. Sit tight, we're coming in."

"Thanks. I just have one request: let them make a show of it. Just... do it, okay? Please, I'll explain later. You'll think of something. You always do. Okay, bye!"

I cut off the line and close my eyes. Here's hoping.

I silently take my place with Castle again and watch the spectacle. A squad of helmeted men storm into the building, weapons at the ready, clad in black bulletproof vests. They fan out and search the perimeter; I can even hear a few shots being fired into the walls, or maybe even into the dead bodies. It's unlikely they will be examined by an ME who looks further than „yep, bullet hole, dead as they can be, next one". There are over a dozen corpses strewn about, if I recall correctly, and with the importance of the hostages (and the accompanying pressure to get results soon, preferably results that
lead to a clean and shiny opened-and-closed case), we might just luck out.

I'm glad Beckett got through though. Already thought I'd look like an arse after my display for Team Bartowski. Still may be, but the odds are more in my favor right now. God knows I could use more better odds. Stupid ribs. Ow.

Speaking of the devil, a quite pissed detective enters through the front entrance. I feel my Adam's apple bob nervously when it only takes her eyes a few seconds to find our little group. She strides through the chaos to us, and to my surprise, she smiles when she gets in hearing range.

„Castle, Alexis, thank god you're okay," she says and hugs both briefly. The little shipper in me is silently squealing, but I think I manage to keep it from showing on my face. Then she turns to me with an irritated glare that softens after a moment. „And you... thank you for saving them,” she concedes. It feels like a small victory to hear her say that, but also a pyrrhic one. I know there's more to it than that.

„May I speak with you for a moment, alone?" she asks, with a very subtle hint of „You are going to regret making me do this'. Oh, dear.

Beckett takes me to the little corridor where the paramedics are currently tending to the guy with the broken index fingers. I still wince just thinking about it; but hey, he lived, right?

She pushes me against the wall, maybe not exactly violent, but still with enough force to deny any objections. Then she jabs a sharp finger into my chest. Thankfully further up the ribs and not directly in the bruise.

„You better have one hell of an explanation why I just embarrassed myself in front of the assembled Hostage Rescue Team for you," she hisses. „Their team leader looked at me as if I lost my head when I told them to play make believe for the hostages. 'We're not actors, detective,' he said. 'Why don't you worry about doing your job while I do mine,' he said."

Ouch. I wince, and not because I'm in pain, for a change. While I really am happy that she helped me cover this up, I'm less happy with what happened out there.

„I had to call his boss and invoke all the favors I had with him and threaten to go over his head, too... And all this with the feeble excuse of 'I have to uphold my informant's cover!"

„Beckett... I had no idea... I'm sorry," I mumble and avert my gaze, but she is having none of that. She takes my face in her hand and turns it back to her; I can see the angry flames flickering behind her pupils.

„You don't get to just say sorry after a stunt like this. I want a full explanation, now."

I take a moment to collect my thoughts, and 'prepare my defense'. If there's one thing right now I need more than I have, it's confidence. „Imagine for a moment that the hostage rescue team does not pretend to take out the bad guys, but simply strolls in, which they could, because the hostage situation is over already. The hostages are still in shock, of course, but they can't fail to notice that the HRT would act differently if there were any real danger. Now, combine that with the hyena personality of most reporters that are waiting outside, and it would be a matter of minutes after the first interview that people start asking questions. Questions like, if the HRT didn't take them out, who did? The conspiracy theorists would jump on the Alphabet train and suspect NSA and CIA. The more reasonable ones will suspect that a guest is responsible for tearing up the bogeys. If they share this with the media, people will ask other, more detailed questions, and eventually, they'll connect the dots and come to me. And guess what? My anonymity is what kept me alive this past year. You
making a fool out of yourself has literally saved my life."

Long monologue over, awaiting reaction.

The fire in Beckett's eyes has somewhat dimmed over the course of my explanation, but I can feel that I'm not completely off the hook yet, even though her face remains stoic.

"Tell me one good reason why I should keep you around as an informant," she growls.

Nope. Definitely not off the hook.

"Because... I deliver good intel?" I ask cautiously.

"I don't need that as badly as my dignity. Next try," she deadpans.

Shit. "Because... your boss tells you to?" If she wants me gone, I might as well go out with a bang.

The detective's eyes narrow dangerously, and I know she's trying to tell if I'm bluffing or not. Then her face lightens up a little and a smile is playing around her lips.

"You know what? That's a theory I'd like to put to the test."

Guess she's looking forward to see me wiggle my way out of that one. How fortunate that I have an ace up my sleeve that she doesn't know of.

Beckett's calling Captain Montgomery's number right now, and I take this moment of distraction to take a deep breath.

"Yes, sir. Beckett here... Yes, sir, the situation is defused. There is just a minor detail concerning the solution, it's about my informant, mister..."

I rip the phone out of her hands, which earns me a murderous glare by one pissed off detective. Before she can start her rant (or worse), I fix her with a glare myself and cover the cell's microphone with my hand.

"What the hell do you think you're doing? This is an unsecured line, detective. Never use my real name over the phone in relation to work. Call me... Brother Nightingale, if you must." I snicker inwardly at the Dragon Age reference, but I don't think it shows. It would be most awkward if I did. The first game's not even out here.

She snatches her phone back from my hand and puts it to her ear again with an eye roll. "Yes, Captain. This is Beckett. It's about my informant... 'brother Nightingale'. Yes, Captain. You know him, who else would give himself such a ridiculous name... I understand; of course, sir."

She offers me her phone, with a raised eyebrow. "Here. He wants to speak with you." I can hear her mumble a soft "This should be interesting..." before I bring the phone to my ear.

"Captain?"

A loud sigh comes from the other end. "Gotten yourself in trouble again, huh, kid? Why do you always have to antagonize my top detective?"

"I don't," I start to protest, "at least not intentionally... It's complicated, Sir."

That elicits a soft chuckle from Beckett's boss. "You can say that again, kid. Now, what's that I hear about a squabble with HRT?"
Now it's my turn to sigh. "I asked Beckett to let them make a show of storming the building so nobody would think to look for the one who disposed of the bad guys among the guests, and she's pissed because the HRT thinks she's crazy. Sir. You still remember the first time we met? I can't work my angle if people know who I am. Especially dangerous people."

The line is silent for a long moment. "Give me detective Beckett again, please."

I wordlessly stretch my arm out and Beckett grabs her phone with a suspicious look. "Yes, Sir?... Understood; I'll go talk to him immediately, Sir."

Am I off the hook?

She gives me an irritated look. "Montgomery told me to let you go; he will make a few phone calls to back me up with HRT."

Yep, I'm off the hook.

Then Beckett narrows her eyes again. "I don't know what kind of deal you have with the Captain, but we will talk about this later. Now go, I still have to talk with the HRT leader."

For now.

Now let's get ourselves arrested by the NSA and CIA, shall we?
Intimate Theater

When I walk out of the building, I'm met by a barrage of blinding, blinking lights, courtesy of a whole bunch of ambulances. I consider getting myself checked, but I turn away abruptly when I spot doctor Davidson among them. I have no idea what he of all people is doing here, but I am not in the mood for another lecture. Team Bartowski should be waiting around here somewhere anyway...

Ah. There's a taxi parking down the street, with its off-duty lamps on. And now it's flashing its lights. I suppose that is rather distinct.

Once I'm near, Casey growls from the driver's seat, through the open window. "Get in, moron." Huh, didn't know I missed being called that.

I refrain from commenting on his liberal use of the word and get into the car. Chuck is sitting on the passenger seat and Sarah is sitting by my side.

Bartowski turns around with an apologetic smile. "I'm sorry to bother you, but it's procedure."

"What is procedure?" I ask and turn to Sarah, but her face is completely blank. I wonder why, until I spot a gun in her hand. I feel a small prick in the side of my neck, and when my hand shoots up there, it pulls out a little dart with red feathers. Oh. Oh.

"Oh, come on, you can't be serious," I manage to groan out before everything turns black. I hate tranquilizers.

Oh, god... I will never drink that much again... How much did I have at the party? Meh, doesn't matter anyway, I will probably never drink anything alcoholic ever again.


Wait... I'm sixteen here, I can't be that drunk. Then why am I hung over?

One eye open... nope. Not my room. Definitely not my room. Better close it again.

I remember bits and pieces of the party... oh. The robbery. I remember getting shot... yep, now that I think of it, the pain in my ribs is definitely real.

Other eye open... yep. Team Bartowski is still real, too. Casey and Sarah are sitting at the table, across from me, two manila folders in front of them on the table. My hands are cuffed to a solid ring in the equally solid metal table, and I'd guess the table is bolted to the floor.

Better not leave them waiting then, right? I open the closed eye again, too and rub the heels of my hands against my eyes to get the worst remnants of the twilight dart out (fancy name for horse tranquilizer, if you ask me), or at least as good as I can with my cuffed hands.

I take in the room I'm sitting in, but that doesn't take long. Not necessarily because I have a keen perception, but because there's not much in it. It's almost two times as big as the holding cell I spent a night in a year ago. The gray walls are empty, safe for a door behind me (probably locked, anyway) and a two-way mirror behind Casey and Sarah (probably with Chuck behind it). A naked light bulb illuminates the room, but the corners are still coated in darkness.

"Coated in darkness", that's awfully poetic for a guy handcuffed to a table in an undisclosed site
who's about to be interrogated by two of America's deadliest spies alive, and tries to lie to them because he has a computer in his head that's supposed to be super secret and the only known human host is protected by those two.

If I put it like that... what rhymes with "I'm screwed"?

Me, apparently.

Well, not really, but you get the idea.

"Let's start with the easy things. Who are you?" Sarah asks.

Do I really want to play the smart ass with those two? They could easily kill me and leave me in a ditch face down... Argh, I really hate my imagination sometimes. Now I'm mad. And when I'm mad, I make bad decisions. As in, I'll play the smart ass. I'm tired of assuming the worst; besides, maybe my youthful adorableness will save me, should it really come to blows.

Having decided on the cocky approach, I raise my eyebrows and smile slightly. "That's an awfully loaded question, don't you think?... But I think I get what you mean; my name is Jonny Gerthson, and despite what you might think, that's actually my real name." That in turn elicits raised eyebrows from both Sarah and Casey. Which of course means they don't believe me. Great.

But since I'm already in a talkative mood, I might as well go on about me. It's one of my favorite subjects, anyway. "To the untrained eye, I might seem like a real life Bruce Wayne. I'm ridiculously rich, I have... had a butler, my parents are dead, and I have a crime fighting alter ego. But thank god without the costume, but sadly also without the gadgets." Casey grunts (I assume in annoyance at the comic book reference) and Sarah, who has spent enough time around Chuck, lets out a small smile that she surely wishes she would have held in.

I choose to stay silent about that little slip up for once and continue with my story. "About a little more than a year ago, I came into possession of what turned out to be an information network. Or a spy network, if you want. It was some weird succession thing, with inheritance and all that stuff. Apparently, my predecessor was not as noble-minded as I aspired to be, so I stopped selling information to the highest bidder. Then one fateful day, I visited a party that changed my life. You might have already guessed, the host was yours truly Richard Castle."

As expected, the proverbial light bulbs go on over their head when they make the connection. No one ever said they were stupid.

"The next day, I get a visit by the police to interrogate me about the murder of a known terrorist who also visited the party; as it turned out, he was killed by my very own butler. Then I was accused of being involved in this murder, as well as another murder my network had brought me info on. I cut a deal, and work as an informant for the NYPD ever since, starting by bringing my butler to justice. Which ended with me having to kill my butler in a sword fight after tranquilizing a whole SWAT team he had drugged and then sicked on us."

Sarah Walker seems surprisingly amused, and Casey looks like he just barely holds himself back from talking shop. I suppose the image of the well informed kid with too much money on his hands is quickly falling apart.

"Now, about a year after that, I go to my next party, it's hosted by Castle again, and surprise, surprise, robbers pop up. Not to forget you folks... while we're at it... why were you at the party? It's of course totally a coincidence that you showed up at the party where these wannabe robbers show up," I snark and try to cross my arms, only to be painfully reminded that I'm still handcuffed to the
"I don't know, they seemed like pretty normal robbers to me; probably coincidence," Casey says with a fake, toothy smile.

I roll my eyes. They can do better. Of course they'd want me to give up my hand before letting anything slip themselves, if at all. "Oh, come on, seriously? How stupid do you think I am?... Wait, don't answer that, it would probably involve the word moron. Fine, if you want to know what I know, here you go. These robbers weren't normal robbers. They could've left with jewelry and stuff mere minutes after entering the place."

I pause to gather my stray thoughts. I went through most of this already with Castle, but I don't want to look like an idiot, so I better be on my A game. "Yet, they stayed. What did they want instead, you may wonder. They didn't seek to get out ransom demands, so they couldn't be there for the ransom money, either. They seemed to patrol the hostages, as if they were looking for someone, but they would've either left with the hostage they were looking for or killed the hostage on the spot, depending on what they had in mind. They had more than enough time to sift through all the hostages, but they didn't find him or her. How am I doing so far?" I ask with raised eyebrows.

Sarah seems happy to leave the main discussion to Casey; she probably wants to size me up and analyze the threat I pose. Knowing of the team's existence has probably brought me into the orange zone already.

Casey however is enjoying this way too much for my liking. Either he has taken a liking to me, which I seriously doubt, or something's bound to be happen that either involves guns or torture. Or both.

He gives me a small smile, this time a little more genuine than last time. "Not half bad, kid. Care to go on?" he asks.

"The fact that they didn't find who they were looking for means they thought they knew for sure he or she would be there... not much sense in staging a robbery on a hunch, right? Is there a guest list, maybe?" I ask.

Sarah and Casey share a look, but I'm not too sure what to make of it. It doesn't look too bad, though.

This time, it's Sarah who opts to answer. "Yes, indeed. We already compared the guest list with video footage of the entrance. There are only a few guests on that list who didn't show up at the party, but one stood out."

She shoves the first folder over the table that I open, finding said guest list. A few names are marked with an X at the side, but only one is highlighted in yellow.

Kate Beckett, NYPD

Oh. Shit. That's... bad.

My expression seems to convey what I think, because Casey digs right into the wound. "Seems you know a few people who might want to see her dead."

I shake my head out of the stupor I'm in and tear my gaze from the list. "Yeah... I mean, of course she has the usual criminals who want revenge for their arrest, but none of them would go to these lengths, even if they had the means to do so. I have a suspicion, but I have to go back in time a little for that. The reason why Kate Beckett became a cop instead of a lawyer like her parents is her mom's
murder. She was killed when Beckett was nineteen years old. Cops said it was random gang violence. Of course that wasn't true. Johanna Beckett's murder has accompanied Kate for years. She was obsessed with it, determined to find her mother's killer."

I pause to let it sink in. "She really went into a rabbit hole with that case. Eventually, her captain sent her to a shrink, and only then did she realize that it would destroy her if she continued to pursue her mother's case, so she let it go. Recently, however, there has been development in the case; Castle connected three other murders around the time with Johanna Beckett's case. The MO is always the same; the first strike is a low-angle thrust to the kidney, twisting the knife before pulling it out again. The victim's body goes into immediate shock. Then the killer stabs the victim a dozen times all over the body to cover up that lethal first blow. All this can only mean that it was a professional hit."

Casey lets out a dangerous growl, and his face twists into an angered snarl. "Single thrust to the kidney. I know this method. It's primarily used by Special Forces, and rarely somewhere else. Usually because it's hard to pull off. You have to be very precise to hit the kidney like that. The guy's a pro. And to think he once wore the uniform..."

Sarah gives him a sideways glance and shrugs her shoulders. "Doesn't have to be a guy. I could pull that off, too."

Casey huffs a laugh, and I knock softly on the table to gain their attention again. "As terrifying and somehow also cool that is, you didn't have me recount her story just for show, did you? For you NSA, CIA guys, this is pretty much public knowledge... Okay, now you're just having me on. I know of your team, I know Casey's rank, what in the world made you think I wouldn't know what alphabet agency you're working for? Okay, Bartowski I don't know, but you two couldn't be more obvious. Seriously."

I'm met with silence. And glares. "Anyway. Said contract killer had to be hired by someone. Considering that Johanna Beckett was a lawyer, it's practically a given that her death is in relation to her work. As you probably know From what I know of her last case, the person behind all this had to be related to law enforcement back then and has to be a political bigwig up in D.C. by now. Now, I gave you what you wanted, willingly. Now how about you tell me why you were at the party, for real?"

Again they share a look, but they are significantly harder to read than Beckett and Esposito. Damn spy training. I used to watch that one show that basically revolved around identifying emotions (and in logical conclusion, lies) with the help of micro expressions. Surprisingly enough, the science behind it is real; I even read a book about it.

The best thing about it? You can't control these micro expressions. Even spies have them, although with spies (and especially good ones like the two across the table) it's hard to read them. When you see embarrassment on a normal person's face while they tell you something, it's a good guess they are lying to you. A notorious liar however may not show embarrassment anymore. That's what makes it so hard to read spies. They are basically trained to be notorious liars.

The second manila folder gets shoved over the tabletop. I open it up and stare into the familiar face of Senator Bracken. I search their faces for any clues, but there's nothing to be read. I have to wait for Casey to speak up, telling me a story I mostly know by heart by now.

What I didn't anticipate is that his name said out loud triggers a flash, telling me what Casey is about to in... well, a flash. Temporally spoken. I try to hide it, and to my pleasant surprise, neither Casey nor Sarah seem to have noticed anything.

"Our analysts in Langley came to the same conclusion. There aren't many people in powerful
positions that fit that profile. Senator William Bracken is who they came up with."

I'm totally off the roll here. What is going on? That's information of the "gets you killed for knowing it" category.

"If I may ask a question... why are you telling me all this?"

Another look is exchanged. Sarah speaks up. "After seeing you in action, and trusting Agent Carmichael's assessment of your character, we have chosen to recruit you for our cause." What?! I think my brain needs a reboot. I think I just heard they want me on their team? I have a hard time keeping my jaw from falling on the table, but I think my eyes must be starting to glaze over, because Sarah chuckles softly before continuing.

"Operatives have been dispatched to clear the necessary paperwork with your legal guardians." And no doubt getting a high level security check done.

"Oh, and the information we gave you?" Casey pitches in with a smirk. "That's just a little insurance for us. Betray us, and we can put you in Leavenworth for treason. Heard it's really cozy in Supermax."

Great. What's next, electronic ankle bracelet?

The door gets ripped open and Chuck storms in with wide eyes and a laptop under his arm.

"I didn't know for sure, but the cameras caught it. It's just a split second, but I know what to look for," he rattles down breathlessly.

Don't say it, don't say it...

"What's going on, Chuck? I thought we told you to stay in the other room," Sarah says, tensing up.

Don't you dare say it.

"He has an Intersect."

Within a second I'm staring in two guns that are trained on my head, and I try to raise my hands as far as I can with handcuffs on, sporting a somewhat sheepish smile.

Well... shit.
I Hate Tranquilizers

"Give me one good reason why I shouldn't put a bullet in your head right now," Casey growls.

"Because you want to know how I got an Intersect, what it can do, and why it is better than what he has in his head?" I ask and point at Chuck with my chin.

Can anyone tell me how I'm not freaking out right now? Well, to the outside at least. I totally forgot they have an Intersect on their own behind the two-way mirror, and apparently equipped with cameras so he caught my flash on Senator Bracken. I'm out of expletives strong enough for this situation.

"What are you talking about?! Okay, guys, and girl, that's enough. We can talk about that when we all cooled our tempers," Chuck says and steps forward to lower their weapons. Sarah's gun stays down, but Casey doesn't think of it, brings his back up and just growls out his anger while he throws Bartowski a sideways glare.

The blonde spy rolls her eyes. "Ugh, just don't kill him, okay?" Casey grunts, obviously disappointed, but finally lowers his gun, too, after a few very long seconds in which my bladder is put to a very tough test.

He stows it at his side, only to quickly pull another from behind his back and fire at me in one fluid motion.

"Glad she didn't say anything about shooting you," he quips with a crooked smirk and a wink. "See you tomorrow, Sleeping Beauty."

I don't even get to pull out the twilight dart this time around, and to add insult to injury, my glare I try to give him falls short as my face muscles suddenly relax, thanks to the second dose of horse tranquilizer in, like, five minutes awake time. Did I mention that I hate tranquilizers?

Ugh...


Where am I? Open one eye after another, I realize I'm not at the party anymore... Neither am I in that shabby interrogation room, although I'm still in shackles. Instead I'm in an six by eight cell with a glass front instead of normal steel bars. Huh. Didn't think every CIA/NSA safe house was equipped with those high tech 'detainment units'.

To my surprise, I find Chuck sitting in front of the glass.

"Hey there. Good to see you're awake. Those twilight darts pack a punch, right?" he asks with a small smile on his lips.

"Tell me something I don't know," I groan and press my forehead against the glass, enjoying the short reprieve of my headache the sudden coolness of the glass grants me.

"I wouldn't know what to tell you, since you know more than you let on," he quips lightly, but the strain in his voice tells me he's borderline freaking out. Not that I could hold it against him. After years of being the only Intersect host, finding out a sixteen-year-old has one, too... Well, suffice to say, I don't think I would even be able to look so calm and collected.
"Do Walker and Casey know you're talking to me? Things must be looking bad for me."

Chuck snorts a laugh. "That's the understatement of the year. They already briefed our boss, and they contemplate leaving you here, throwing away the key to this place, and then level it with an air strike."

"That would be indeed an unfortunate turn of events," I quip. "Although, I think they'd make a grave mistake doing that." Heh, 'grave'. Pun not intended, though. "Not just because I very much enjoy living, but considering I managed to build an Intersect on my own, I could bring invaluable know-how to the Intersect Project."

If he opens his eyes a little bit wider, they'd be threatening to fall out. "On your own? At sixteen?"

"Well, not entirely," I admit with a shrug. Time to let out the inner nerd. "My... 'predecessor', if you will, obtained a very early design for the Intersect, back from the nineties. However, I brought it up to modern standards, or at least as best as I could. While I do consider myself well-connected, I don't have government resources, after all. And by that I also mean sensitive material to feed into the Intersect, just for clarification. All my changes were in the software part. In addition to the design itself, the 'package' contained a black box compiler, to convert C code into Intersect-compatible data. The data is encoded in movie snippets where certain pixels are faulty. They build an intricate pattern, but your brain must be able to see more pictures per second than most humans are able. Flies for example would have no problem seeing the data, but their brain would still be cooked in a matter of seconds. Now that I think of it, that's a very devious and awesomely overkill method to purge a room of flies."

Nothing of what I just told him was true. Well, maybe except for the part with the flies.

May I present to you: Jonny Gerthson, M. Sci. in bullshittery.

"Anyway, before this talk gets too technical, you certainly came here for answers, right?" Chuck only nods, still a little... flashed... by what he just heard. My, but I really am on a roll here.

"Mr. Bartowski..." I start, only to be absent-mindedly interrupted. "It's Chuck... if you call me Mr. Bartowski, I want to turn around and look for my father," he says with a wry smile.

"Chuck," I start again, "let's get the obvious questions out of the way, so that I may focus on averting the air strike sooner. The reason why I was able to discover your team's existence is that my Intersect has an advanced problem solution algorithm that uses the brain's already existing neuronal pathways to make meta-connections. Not quite like new synapses, but close enough. I triangulated your position from missions you were rumored to have taken part in. That gave me the general area." He seems a little skeptical at that; I don't fault him, it's a lie after all. Damn, I really do tell a lot of these lately, don't I? Well, better than to be burnt at the stake or getting experimented on.

"Then I looked through energy consumption records, because a base needs electricity, right? Then I compared that to the plat of the area, and sifted through the anomalies. Once I knew where to look, it was a child's play to find out where your base was. As the base was beneath a shopping complex, not a residential area, it was actually easier to find you. Instead of a place where you could live anonymously, paying your landlord in cash and be done with it, all I had to do was to hacking into the employee records of the businesses around the plaza, and boom, hello there, Stanford graduate working at the Nerd Herd," I quip with a smirk, although I don't really feel like it. Pending air strike and all.

Chuck gives me an musing smile and a raised eyebrow. "That's quite the impressive feat." He pauses to look down on his watch. "However, our little talk is coming to an end, unfortunately. Or rather,
mostly monologue, come to think of it; nonetheless, it has proven to be very enlightening. Casey will be here any minute to pick you up, you are to be presented to our boss. I think she knows what she's going to do with you."

I gulp loudly and start slowly waving my hand like a jedi. "This is not the Intersect you're looking for?" I try meekly.

That actually gets a genuine grin and a short laugh out of Chuck. "Nice try, pal. See you in a few!"

Casey manhandles me through the door and plops me down in a seat.

"How nice of you to finally join us, Mr. Gerthson." The face of General Diane Beckman stares down at me from the big screen at the wall. This redhead's disapproving look can break anyone. Even such a hardass like Casey.

I shrug. "Sorry for being late, I was inconvenienced earlier, and the taxi service is not the best, either."

The generals send me a scathing glare, and Casey slaps me on the back of the head.

"Ow! Fine, sorry," I grumble, "being a wise-ass is a coping mechanism for me, no need for further head-slaps."

"Your honesty is appreciated. Now, after conferring with my analysts and advisers, we've come to a decision regarding your... special circumstances. While we do not believe you to be a threat to national security by yourself, your extensive knowledge of the Intersect program might very well prove to be dangerous to you, and in extension Mr. Bartowski and his team, should anyone ever find out about you." Beckman lets out a heavy sigh. "Therefore, you are to remain in protective custody until further notice."

I glance around the room, but they all avert their eyes. "What does that mean, exactly: 'protective custody'?"

"It means you get a nice, cozy bunker, kid," Casey grunts from behind.

"I'm afraid Colonel Casey is correct, Mr. Gerthson. There is just no alternative at the moment; I'm sorry."

"I... I understand, General," I bring out. Damn it, damn it, damn it... Beckett's gonna be pissed... most women I know in this universe are either easy to piss off, scary when pissed off, or most frequently both.

"General, if I may..." Chuck says and raises his hand.

Beckman gives him a curious look. "Yes, Chuck?"

"There might be an alternative, I believe. How many people know of him, General?"

"Everything? Just the people in this briefing. We can't be too cautious with the Ring. Everyone else was consulted on a hypothetical basis, disguised as a simulation game. Why?" she asks.

"What if we add him to the team? He has invaluable knowledge about the Intersect's design, and he has an Intersect himself. Don't get me wrong, I would never want to replace Sarah or Casey on the team, they're my friends and save my life on a daily basis, and I will be forever grateful for that, and I
also know that I can talk to them. But Jonny here? He knows what it's like to have a giant computer force-fed to his brain. I could use someone I could talk to who understands me."

What the heck are you doing, Chuck?... I mean, please go on.

He gives me an unsure look over his shoulder, as if he has heard me thinking before continuing. "Not to mention that we all saw him in action at the charity event in New York. He took the initiative and went after over a dozen heavily armed men while being unarmed himself when nobody else did, got shot, then teamed up with us, got the job done, and fabricated a cover story officially sanctioned by the NYPD without giving away our involvement. He also informed us on a potential security issue when he told us how he found out about our team. He doesn't deserve to rot in some bunker to be kept safe. His potential is being used best out in the field, with us, should we need the assistance. If for nothing else, see it as a personal favor."

The general's eyes drill into Chuck, probably to find out where the sudden swing came from, but obviously doesn't come to a satisfying answer. Then her gaze shifts to the blonde superspy next to Chuck.

"Agent Walker, do you share this sentiment?"

She stays silent for a few seconds before finally opening her mouth. "His combat ability and sharp mind are beyond reproach." Why, thank you so much, Ms Walker. That's very nice of you to say.

She turns around to give me a short icy stare as she says that. "Although his loyalty is still questionable, I defer to Chuck's judgment in this matter. If he thinks Gerthson can be trusted, then I support his decision."

Another heavy (and probably exasperated) sigh from the General. "Very well, Chuck. Nonetheless, be warned. Should he go rogue, he becomes your problem. Jonny Gerthson, I hereby offer you a place on Team Bartowski."

I turn to the side to look at Casey with open mouth. I honestly didn't expect that. "Hey, Casey; mind pinching me? I can't tell if I'm dreaming or not...very well, shutting up." I say and turn back around to face General Beckman when I see his all too eager grin. That would not have been healthy for my arm, probably. "I accept your offer, General," I say with a short, polite bow.

"Of course you'll have to undergo a rigorous background screening and other security checks to ensure you really are who you seem to be. In the meantime, our technicians will be setting up your secure communication equipment in your apartment in New York."

I raise an eyebrow. "Wow; I knew you guys were efficient, but I didn't know you'd be that good."

Beckman's mouth thins to a line, but one side goes slightly up. I guess that's supposed to be a smile? "You'd be surprised what the NSA can achieve in a few hours."

"A few hours?" I ask and furrow my brow. Now I'm confused. "The traffic is bad in New York, but I don't need a few hours to get to my apartment, even if I go by foot or take the subway."

Casey snorts loudly and grins at me when I turn my head to him. "Sorry to disappoint, kid; you currently are at the west coast. In the base you found out about, by the way."

"I assume you can oversee the rest of the briefing, Colonel Casey. Beckman out."

With that last message, the redhead pushes a button and the screen fades to black, while I finally turn around to Casey.
"Now you just wait a diddly darn second, I'm in Burbank, California?! How long was I out?!"

"Obviously long enough to get you on a plane and fly you from New York to Burbank," Casey snorts. He's in a good mood today, there are more snorts and grunts than growls.

"Well, now what?" I ask and shrug my shoulder.

"Casey probably won't be, but I am really sorry. It's procedure," Chuck says with an apologetic smile.

"Oh, no, not again..."

And again, everything fades to black. I hate tranquilizers.
I'm torn from my artificially induced slumber when my head is drenched in ice cold water, making me jump from... a sofa?

"Hi there, Sleeping Beauty," Andrew singsong-shouts with a grin.

Sometimes, my life feels like a messed up version of Groundhog Day.

"Shut up, or piss off, preferably both; my head is killing me," I groan.

"Serves you right," Zoe / Cassandra grumbles from the side. "We heard from Beckett that you were in that hostage drama and thought you'd come back immediately. Imagine our surprise when we suddenly got an alarm that you left New York, and only half an hour later, we had government agents knocking on our door telling us you won a visit to a summer camp called 'Kamp Woody' for your 'exceptional school performance'."

I frown at the two of them and ignore the icy droplets of water slowly dripping from my forehead. "You have a tracker on me?"

"So not the point, Gerthson!" my fake aunt growls with an angry fire burning in her eyes. Remember what I said about the women in my life? Yeah...

"Wait, do you guys know what happened, like, at all?"

As I'm met with two almost identical frowns, I let out a soft sigh. "I guess that's a no then. Are you aware of my Intersect's origin?"

Zoe shakes her head, but Andrew raises an eyebrow. Right, he was there when I got mine.

"Yeah, it's the fixed version of the Intersect from the Chuck universe. What does it have to do with what happened at Castle's party?"

"Well... suffice to say I'm not the only Intersect in this universe anymore."

"What?!" "What." Two voices overlapping to a single word, one with only slightly more force than a breath, and one shouted, both in absolute shock and disbelief.

"While tearing the bad guys a new one, I stumbled upon Team Bartowski, occupied with doing pretty much the same thing as I did. I may or may not have let slip some things I shouldn't have known and, bam..."

With that, I start recounting the whole story, as clear as my tranquilizer-induced haziness allows.

"... and now I am employed by the National Security Agency, working with the only other working Intersect in the Universe. Well, in this one, at least."

"Well... shit," Zoe says and combs through her short, black hair with one hand.

Andrew snorts. "That's putting it lightly." Even his sarcasm seems strained.

Honestly, they are taking it way better than I expected. Although it seems that the weather has taken offense, it's starting to brew up one hell of a storm.
"I have to confer with my bosses. This is unprecedented. Another reality crossing over into this one... I haven't even heard of this. This is crazy." She starts pacing in the living room, in front of the sofa I'm sitting on.

"I think it's best if you hold your feet still," she says finally. "We don't know what were dealing with. You still have a job to do; whatever is happening, as long as we don't know what it is, you'll do squat in this investigation. We can't risk you getting hurt or worse."

I want to start to protest, but my cell phone decides now is the perfect time to ring.

"Gerthson?" I snap into the phone.

"Heeey, it's Castle," the familiar, cheery voice says from the other end, seemingly oblivious to my mood. "Glad I could get a hold on you. I called a few times, but you never picked up."

"Yeah, my batteries died. I'm sorry, was there something I can do for you, Castle?" I answer distractedly.

"I was just wondering, as the charity event went down the drain, so to speak... do you have time for dinner this evening? It's the least we can do."

A small smile fleets over my lips. Dinner with the Castle family... "Sounds awesome." And it's true. After all that has happened those last few days, a little get-together with friends might just be what I need.

"Perfect! Just be here in half an hour, and we take care of the rest, okay?" he says, and I can hear the smile in his voice.

"Alright; see you this evening," I say and press the call away. I grin as I look up at my fake aunt and uncle. "Something positive, at last: I'm invited for dinner over at Castle's."

Zoe tries to hide a smirk behind a fist, but to no avail. "That's nice. I think it'll be a good way to take your mind off things. We won't mind, it prevents you from meddling in our investigation," she tells me with a wink.

I think there's more to it than that, but I keep my silence for the time being. No need for further antagonizing her. Or getting embarrassed. Maybe both. You never know with her.

I give them a curt nod and turn to start getting dressed.

Opening the door to my walk-in wardrobe with a smile, I let my eyes roam over the shelves filled with so many nice things... one of the few luxuries I really, really, really liked about getting rich.

Hey, I'm living a dangerous life, I'm allowed a few vices, okay? Even shopping...

Still, gotta go with the classics here. Let's see... ah. There we go. Grey jeans, check. Black turtleneck, check. Grey tweed jacket, check. I don the precious pieces in record time and rush out of the door, throwing a hasty goodbye over my shoulder.

A glance at my watch confirms that it's a little late for a walk, and it would be better to take a cab - and a glance out of the building's front door once I'm off the elevator confirms that the weather doesn't disagree with that. There's again such a big-ass storm coming up, just like before the charity event. I like rain. I like snow. But I do hate me some storm. Especially when it's getting colder.

Anyway, the doorman hails a cab for me, I sprint to get in under the rain and tell the driver Castle's
address as I let myself fall onto the backseat.

Having paid the cabbie, I make my way into the building.

"Ah, Mr. Gerthson! Mr. Castle has already called ahead. So nice to see you again," the doorman says as he holds open the door for me. I guess he has seen me the evening of our glorious laser tag match with Alexis. Good memory, I give him that.

Thanking him with a small smile and a nod, I enter and walk through to the elevators, pushing the button for the highest floor. I grimace as I wipe the remnants of the ugly weather off my jacket - rain is not the best for the lining - but I have to bite back a snicker when the elevator music starts with yet another rendition of "The Boy from Ipanema".

The doors open with a soft ding, revealing a grinning Richard Castle at the door. A random thought fleeting through my brain whispers that the doorman has probably announced my arrival, but I push it back. This is not the time.

"Hey, Jonny. I'm glad you could make it," he says and invites me in with a grand flourish. He does take a little after his mother.

"I'm glad you invited me - you saved me from a serious tongue-lashing by my aunt and uncle," I quip. "Aw, don't be like that, I also enjoy your family's company," I add with a laugh when he grips his chest in mockery.

He shuffles me further into the loft, but I think I hear him mutter something along the lines of, "But not too much, I hope." Figures. Dads.

"SURPRISE!"

I flinch at the loud noise, just a little bit. When I open my eyes again, I see the living room filled with the Castle family and the homicide division family, all spotting smiles on their faces. Martha, Alexis, Beckett, Montgomery, Ryan, Esposito, Lanie... they are all here...

"Eh... hi?" I say, and wave a little shyly, because, honestly, I have no idea what the flying fricklefreckle is going on.

Castle puts his hand on my shoulder. That sneaky little rascal knows exactly what I'm thinking. "Well, I thought that it was not fair that you risked your life at the charity event to save us all and the HRT gets all the praise." I want to interrupt, but he knows that and just keeps talking. "And while, yes, I do know and understand the reasons why you insisted on it, Beckett blabbed, by the way, you deserve to get a little recognition for what you've done for us. As it happens, the team at the precinct shares that opinion, but we all know you don't. Hence, the surprise party. There is dinner, just with the extended Castle family," he ends with a smile.

Gah. I hate surprises.

"Fine. But if you start singing songs about me, I'm out of here. That's where I draw the line."
Surprise!

Castle takes my jacket and return to my side, but in the meantime, there’s a bit of an awkward pause; thankfully, that's when Martha steps forward and pulls me into a hug. A one-handed hug because her other hand is holding a champagne flute, but still a hug.

"Come here, Jonathan. Thank you so much for saving my son and granddaughter," she says as she breaks the hug.

I give her a shy smile. I'm not exactly used to her flamboyant personality, even after a year of more or less frequent encounters, and I doubt I ever fully will. "You're welcome, Martha. Although I can't say it was entirely altruistic; my butt was on the line, too."

Martha however is having none of that and waves my comment away. "Nonsense, darling. There were hundreds of people in that building with a history of selfish behavior and none of them moved an inch. I know Richard tagging along with the police isn't safe, but I wouldn't have dreamed that a charity event would turn out to be so dangerous. Thank god you were there. To be honest, I won't stop worrying, but it's less when you are there to keep an eye on them." Frankly, I think it's the opposite; danger seems to follow me around, and in extension the people I work with, but I don't think it would be wise to tell her that. I sincerely hope there's plot armor in this universe.

"She's right, you know," Captain Montgomery throws in with a smirk. "and let me tell you something from a professional: That performance was not too shabby for a sixteen-year-old boy."

That elicits a chuckle from the boys. And Castle. Who promptly speaks up. "Speaking of which, how did you do that, exactly? There were more than a dozen heavily armed men against just you. That were bad odds, even for you," he states with wide eyes. The kind he always gets when there's a conspiracy theory around the bullpen.

"I met a joint NSA/CIA strike team who basically had the same goal as I did, so we combined our efforts." I mentally high-five myself, because that delivery was beautifully deadpan. "It took us a while because there were only four of us, but in the end, we got the job done."

Castle punches the air in excitement. "Yes! I knew it!" I admit, I almost crack up when he bites his knuckles and bounces up and down, but I hold strong. "You see, Beckett? It's all the law of averages. Eventually I had to be right," he tells her with a laugh.

Beckett smirks at her partner's antics and rolls her eyes. "Yeah, well, maybe. But not today, I'm afraid."

Hearing that, Castle's eyes grow bigger and bigger, and his head whips around to me. "Is that true? Did you just fool me into believing this to be a conspiracy?"

His mock hurt slash betrayed look finally proves too much for me and I crack up laughing. "Yes, Castle. I'm sorry, but you know full well that you have a teensy weensy bit of a sweet spot for the alphabet agencies and conspiracies in general, and this was an opportunity too good to pass up on, am I right?" I confess with a smug smirk. Sorry, not sorry.

Holding out my hand expectantly without breaking eye contact with Castle, Esposito obliges me and feeds my birds. "He's right, Castle," the detective says. "You're too easy."

The writer straightens his back and bows his head to me. "In that case, well played, sir. I admit defeat in this battle, but remember that the war has not yet reached its end."
Another eye roll by Kate. "God, Castle, why do you always have to be so dramatic?"

He gives her a nonchalant shrug. "What can I do? It's inherited," he adds and gives his mother a kiss to the cheek. "That said, there are good pieces of meat in the oven, for whom the situation is starting to get too dicey."

With that, he disappears around the counter to tend to the meal.

"Don't scare us like that again! But I wanted to thank you, too," Alexis tells me quietly and gives me a bone-crushing hug. Which turns out to be not that good of an idea, because my ribs are still bruised from that bullet.

I hiss softly at the hard contact, and make Alexis pull back anxiously. "Did you get hurt?" she asks. I wave her concern away. "Nah, it's nothing. One of the bad guys just got lucky."

The young redhead gives me a disapproving glare. "It's not nothing if I made you wince with just a hug."

"To be fair, it was a bone-crushing hug," I counter meekly.

"Nonsense," she mutters, and before I can react, she has pulled up my turtleneck to look at the (by now rather impressive) bruising at my ribcage. I can't really tell if it's impressive by myself, but the way Alexis gasps at the discoloration is a fair indication.

"Lanie, you're a doctor, right? Can you take a look at this, please?" the young girl asks.

Said ME looks rather unconvinced at that idea. Thank god. "You do know my patients are all dead?"

"Lanie, Alexis, you don't have to do this," I object. "The painkillers take the edge off, and there's not much else you can do about bruising, anyway. I'll be fine. Besides, there are less painful ways to get to see my abs," I quip with a smirk. Fortunately, said abs are in fact quite formidable by now, thanks to Andrew's rigid training regiment.

"Which she has no business seeing unless it's an emergency," Castle butts in from behind the oven. "That goes for both of you," he adds and points a large wooden ladle at Lanie. "You give her bad ideas if you do."

"Excuse me, Castle?" said ME asks and puts her hand on her hip. "I can ogle whomever I want, just so you know."

"Okay, credit for correct use of 'whomever', but considering the age gap and the fact he's a minor, this discussion is kinda moot."

"I don't know, Castle," Beckett joins and taps her chin in thought, "those abs really do make a woman forget the age gap. I can see Alexis going for that," she adds, making both mine and Alexis' faces heat up quickly. Oh, this woman is evil.

Alexis crosses her arms and gives the detective a deadly glare. "Kate!" she exclaims loudly. I can't help it, but I think it's cute when Alexis is annoyed. Just saying.

"What?" is all Castle can squeak out for a moment. "That's my daughter you're talking about," he scowls.

"I know, Castle," Kate laughs, "and I know that it makes you squirm... It is fun seeing you squirm."
He gives her the stink eye over the counter. "Evil, teasing woman."

I clap into my hands. "Well, it seems dinner is ready; shall we?" No need to further heat up the discussion any more.

"You can go take a seat, dinner will be there shortly," Castle shouts as he bends down at the oven. Everyone makes their way to the big table in the middle of the room. I want to, too, but Javi holds me back at the arm. "I haven't said anything, but I've seen that kind of bruising before," he tells me with a low voice. "I've been a soldier. I know you've been shot wearing a vest, and I can understand that you don't want to talk about it, but you'll probably need to eventually. PTSD is not a joke, and it can even take some time to set in. If you want to talk... you have my number."

With a short squeeze of my arm and a clap on the shoulder, he puts on a smile and walks over to the others.

"Thank you," I mutter, just loud enough for him to hear, making him turn his head to me and gives me a curt nod before turning his head back to the table.

"What were you two talking about?" Ryan asks his partner as I follow Esposito to the others.

"He asked for advice about how to fool Castle," I tell him with a smirk.

"You do know he will never let me live this down, right?" Espo says and swats my shoulder, playing along.

"My whole job revolves about knowing things, so yeah, I do know; that's why I told him," I say and grin broadly. "But I'm sure Ryan here won't overuse this knowledge, isn't that right, honey milk?" I ask and turn my grin at the now slightly paler Irish detective. "Aw, don't worry. My lips are sealed. Also part of the job," I tell him with a wink.

I think I successfully distracted him.

Time to move on? Time to move on. I clap my hands. "Anyone else hungry?"

The meat almost melts as it touches my tongue, the sauce leaves a warm, burning aftertaste - in short, perfect. "Castle, this is delicious."

The writer grins at the praise. "Thank you. I got the recipe in exchange for a photo op at the restaurant where it was created."

Beckett rolls her eyes. "Of course you did," she mutters under her breath. If Castle has heard it, he chooses to ignore it.

"But enough about the food, you still haven't told us how you managed to save the day," Castle inquires. Again. "Those guys were armed to the teeth."

It's not that easy to accept praise when I didn't do all that much. I wave him away. "It turned out to be not as hard as one might think. They had high-end military grade weapons, yes; but luckily, those were garbage to most in close quarter combat. That, plus they were absolutely unprepared for actual resistance from the hostages. I caught most of them unaware, and they had little to no clue what I was doing because they didn't communicate periodically. They were trained, but they made rookie mistakes."
That seems to mollify him to a certain extent, at least enough to not ask any further - at the moment. Then I catch Lanie looking at me. "Still not done ogling?" I tease.

"Boy, with a body as ripped as yours, I don't see an end to that anytime soon. How old are you again?"

Wow, she doesn't even blush. However, two can play this game. "Seventeen, soon-ish... but if you're looking for a boy toy, I think there are others at this table who are more than willing." To my pleasant surprise, both Lanie and Javi look at each other before averting their gazes somewhat shyly. "Uh-huh, that's what I thought," I say and lean back in my chair with a smug grin on my face.

The rest of the surprise dinner is rather uneventful, but not unpleasant. Castle's cooking skills find enthusiastic critical acclaim among the guests; Espo and Lanie throw each other bashful glances because neither of them wants to admit having feelings for the other; Castle jokes around and Beckett rolls her eyes, the same as always; Montgomery and Martha are engrossed in a discussion about theater - who would have thought? The boys (and I still am somewhat baffled by the fact that I can call them 'the boys' - my fan boy heart is squealing of joy right now) are warming up to me a bit; Alexis... I don't know. We'll see.

It's long past nightfall when I finally bid farewell to the others. The friendly doorman downstairs offers to hail a cab for me, which I gladly accept. It was a nice evening with friends, but I'm actually quite beat right now. You'd be surprised at how much effort smiling for hours involves.

"Where to, pal?" the driver asks as I let myself slump into the backseat.

I think for a moment before answering. I just ate a lot of really great stuff, but there's no better pick-me-up after a long, awesome, taxing session of social interaction than breakfast food. "Where's the next pancake place?"

I slip a bill to the driver and climb out to take in the sight of the diner the cabbie has recommended. It's a dingy little hole-in-the-wall, but he has assured me that their pancakes are awesome - if you're not too inquisitive about the ingredients. Considering I have a built-up resistance to most poisons by now (including most truth serums except for the real expensive ones), I'm not too afraid to sample it. I think.

I step through the door and find myself back in the fifties. No, there is no time travel involved (I think), but the whole diner seems not to have changed for the past sixty years. Strangely, it's not worn out at all; someone must have kept it up meticulously. Although there are more than enough tables are free, the bar is quite packed, mainly with people waiting for their pancakes to-go; it seems their pancakes really are that good.

I'm maybe five steps into the place and at the end of the queue when someone bumps into me from behind. That someone turns out to be a quite stunning woman, maybe forty years old.

"Sorry, I was looking at my phone," is all the lady says, but she flashes a smile at me in apology.

"Don't sweat it, the place is... packed..." My voice trails off because I get a good look at her face as she looks up from her smartphone. I'm not usually one to freeze if he has to talk to women, but something about this woman is... off. I know her, but I can't place her. She's not from 'Castle', that much I know; I would've flashed on her already.

Long, wavy brown hair, stark blue eyes, those cheekbones... it can't be her, can it? Oh for the love
"Take a picture, it'll last longer," she says with amusement lacing her tone. She seems to be used to men staring at her, as I obviously am doing right now.

"Doubtful, I have an almost perfect memory," I quip distractedly, which makes her laugh a little. I really shouldn't tip her off, but I can't not know. "Say, your father wasn't a soldier, by any chance?"

Her head comes up again. Now I seem to have her attention. Good. Keep her occupied. Get her to talk. She won't suspect a thing, hopefully. Not from a kid, anyway. "He was indeed, how did you know?" she asks with a raised eyebrow.

I wave her curiosity away. "Oh, 'twas but an educated guess. Mainly posture and such. Reading people is a hobby of mine, you could say." If she really is who I think she is, which gets more likely by the second, then we have a big, ugly, fat problem on our hands. An 'oh god, oh god, we're all gonna die' kinda problem, perhaps.

That said, if things are about to go south anyway, I might as well get some fun out of it. "It's a burner with the ladies, pretending to be a medium," I tell her with a wry grin. "and while, no offense, you're a little too old for me, I wouldn't mind giving you a demonstration," I add.

She stares at me for a moment before throwing her head back and laughing out loud, making a few heads turn. "I don't know you, young man, but I like your style. Fine. But be warned, I'm an experienced psychotherapist. I may not be as easily read as most other people," she shoots back with a grin on her own. "Also, you're buying."

Oh, shit.

May I introduce Beverly Barlowe, psychotherapist for VIPs in a small, sleepy town with an estimated average IQ of 250, called Eureka.

As in, another freaking UNIVERSE, Eureka. Because Eureka doesn't exist. Or, at least in this universe it doesn't- didn't exist. First the Chuck universe, now Eureka has crossed dimensional borders, too?

I'm so screwed. Again.
This is a bad idea, I just know it; I should be running home and tell the people who actually understand this multidimensional stuff instead of playing twenty questions with Beverly Barlowe. If more parallel universes cross dimensional borders, this could be catastrophic. Scratch that, it is catastrophic. I just don't know to what extent yet.

On the other hand, when do you get the chance to play a prank with a character from one of your favorite shows? 'Always look on the bright side of life', even if you're hanging at the stake already. I think it could be a bunch of fun scaring the shit out of Miss Barlowe here.

It's finally our turn, so we order quickly and find ourselves a cozy little table in the back of this establishment. Here's hoping the pancakes are as good as the cabbie has promised, or I'll be seriously disappointed.

"So, let's assume for a moment here you didn't tell me your deal with not being a mentalist," Beverly opens our conversation once we're seated with our pancakes. "Humor me. What can you tell me?" She sounds more than a little amused at the antics of a sixteen-year-old boy.

Oh, it's on. Screw world annihilation. I'll make her take me seriously. I take a deep breath and take her hands into mine, tracing the lines with my thumbs. "I may not be a Mentalist - I really cannot communicate with the dead - but... you of all people should know that's not necessary." I can see a little anxious spark in her eyes. "The very concept of time and space - space time - is an ever changing constant. Only a few chosen people were ever able to comprehend it to an extent far beyond the scope of even the most visionary minds humanity has to offer. Not all of them were exceptional scientists. Some were, of course."

"What are you talking about?" she asks with narrowed eyes.

I allow a little smirk to show on my face. "Why do you think Einstein was able to formulate his theories?"

She lets out a nervous chuckle. "If you planned on convincing me with conspiracy theories, I must say I'm disappointed. I expected more."

"Tsk, tsk... ye of little faith," I snicker, "there is no conspiracy here. Only explanations. No men in dark suits and sunglasses. Only physics on steroids, if you will. You should be quite familiar with that, am I right? Don't answer that, I can feel it. You've been close. You could say, you have found it," I add.

It's a broad hint for her, but I couldn't resist. The town's name Eureka was originally an exclamation by Archimedes which is ancient Greek and literally translates to 'I have found it'. Given that the existence of Eureka as anything other than a quirky little town in Oregon is highly classified (the 'get you killed for knowing it' kind of classified) and unknown to civilians, I think it's safe to say that she knows that I know.

"The akashic field, this mysterious aura that supposedly predates the Big Bang and cannot be affected by space time, exists everywhere in the world, but only the people connected to it can feel the traces left behind when someone has spent some time in close proximity to a strong source. It sometimes can give glimpses in the past and or the future and or alternate time lines. A little advice from someone who's literally wise beyond his years: Your little group is more than you think it is. Always ask yourself if what you're doing is what your father, or Grant, would have wanted."
With that, I stand up, leave enough money for the bill, take a final (and first) bite from my pancakes and walk away with a smug grin on my face. Boom. It's not quite an explosion I'm walking away from with eyes straight ahead, but it's quite satisfying nonetheless. The last look on her face, completely befuddled, mouth hanging agape, is priceless. "Take a picture, it'll last longer," I snark loudly as I walk out, without looking back.

The pancakes were delicious, by the way. I gotta stop by here more often.

I hail a cab from the curb; the second one that drives by comes to a halt and I climb in. And now to the less fun part of this new discovery.

"We are so screwed."

"Yep, totally screwed. We're dead."

"You do know that I came to you for guidance, right? That thing where you're supposed to, I don't know, not make me freak out? I mean, come on, this sucks!"

They share a look before staring me in the eyes again."Yep."

I don't know how they can be so calm about this. "I know this looks bad, but you guys are experts in this kind of stuff, if I recall correctly. Don't you have, a contingency plan?" I try to be calm, but honestly, it isn't working.

"Nope," Zoe says, "as far as I know, this has never occurred; that either means it really has never occurred, or nobody has lived to tell the tale - both not exactly comforting thoughts. I'm part of the Elders, I would know about any contingency plans."

"But why are two universes colliding with this one so much worse than a single one?"

Again they share a look. "It's perfectly normal for universes to collide and merge sometimes," Andrew starts explaining. "Imagine space time to be a multidimensional river where realities flow around obstacles only to be reunited once the obstacle has been passed. What is perfectly normal for two realities is basically unthinkable for three, or two mergers so shortly after another. It's next to impossible for that to occur naturally. There are too many things factoring in. Energy, probability, relativity, and so on. Highly interesting, but also highly theoretical. For this to happen, so many things must align... there has to be something or someone behind this; there's not much else that could have upset the balance so gravely."

"Wait a second, rewind and repeat, please: What are you saying?" I ask, more loudly than necessary.

Zoe shrugs. "It's not a coincidence that we have three realities in one world."

I motion for her to continue. "Which means what exactly?"

"How about 'Oh god, oh god, we're all gonna die'?" Andrew snarks. Guess I've rubbed off on him, because that's my line. "You can't imagine how important balance is. While one merger is barely more than a minor hiccup, a second shortly after is exponentially worse. The universe will try to reset instead of adapt. That usually means Death. With a capital D. It'll take some time before the universe has recovered enough to start the 'cleaning process', though. Maybe a week. Maybe more."

"And you have no idea how to beat this?"

Zoe gives me a sheepish smile. "Nope." She gives Andrew a short glance. "We'll contact the G-Man
to see what we should do. In the meantime," now she's looking at me and I think the look on her face means trouble, "do what you can to find out what exactly is causing this."

Yep. Called it. "Woah, woah, where's that coming from? I though I should keep my feet still?"

She shrugs. Again. I don't like this. "We have maybe a week to stop humanity from disintegrating. I think now is the perfect time to try a Hail Mary, especially since you won't be our only lead."

"Fine, I'll do it," I answer and gulp loudly. "But where should I start? As you can recall, I don't really have an information network."

"Oh, but that's where you are wrong," Andrew butts in with a grin. "You are now an NSA asset. Use your connections to find out when the Universes merged."

"Are you mad?!" Zoe doesn't seem to like this idea. At all. "Do you want the US government on our trail?"

"Relax, Your Elderness," he mocks. "you might know about Chuck, but Jonathan is an expert. Team Bartowski, which he is now part of, is tight. If they find something, they will protect him at all costs."

"Fine," she huffs, "but if they get their hands on what's in his head, it's your head that's on the line."

"I rather like my current one, so please, do be careful," he quips to me.

"Well, I'm not too keen on being dissected, either, so I'll try," I shoot back in similar fashion. "I'll be in my room, doing, you know, spy stuff and such."
Once I'm locked into my room, I pull out a slide-shelf below my TV monitor, revealing a brand-new STU-7 phone - a military-grade communication unit with 512-bit encryption. That probably tells next to nothing to most people, but as a (former) IT guy, this almost gives me a nerdgasm. And the best thing is, nothing but a small "STU-7" lettering in the corner discerns it from a bulky, old-fashioned cordless phone. No one randomly coming by and seeing this would be able to tell that this thing is virtually uncrackable - the most secure thing money can't buy, for the time being at least.

Pushing that amusing thought back, I dial a number I was told to learn by heart. Spy stuff and such. The phone starts whirring like an old modem for a few seconds before a computerized voice states that the line is secure.

This number apparently connects to Chuck's apartment, who is sitting in front of his computer right now and is fervently hacking away on the keyboard with headphones on and a bottle of Chardonnay at his side. I have to chuckle a little at his antics. There's not much I can do to snap him out of this. Not that I particularly want to, either. One, it's fun to watch, two, I refuse to deal with a pouting Chuck if I want to ask for a favor.

After two more minutes of intense coding, he finally pushes back his office chair, pulls down his headphones and gives the monitor a lopsided grin. "And that's why they call me 'the Piranha', suckers!" he cheers.

I clear my throat once, loudly. His head snaps around, and the lopsided grin turns into a sheepish smile.

"I hope I'm not interrupting something?" I ask, also with a small smile on my lips.

"Nope, not at all," he gives back quickly.

I nod at that. "So, 'the Piranha', huh?" I ask with raised eyebrows. "I should've known that you have a past as a hacker."

That in turn makes him raise his eyebrows. "You know of the Piranha?"

"Course I do, he's a legend," I say and chuckle. "I won't even ask what this was about, it would probably tell me next to nothing, anyway."

"That's probably true. So, why did you call? It has to be way after midnight on the east coast... Is there something I can help you with?"

"Yes, there is, actually. I ran into a woman today, who appeared to be more than meets the eye. It could be nothing," it isn't, "but I've grown to trust my gut. If it's alright with you, I'd like to tell you a couple of names, see if anything pops up in the Intersect."

"Err, I'd love to help you out here, buddy, but I can't use the Intersect just like that. I'd have to clear that with my team."

I smile at his apologetic tone, and I know full well that he means every word of what he says. He really is a good guy. "I understand, Chuck. I'm not a full member of your team just yet. It's way past my usual bedtime, but I think that in this case an exception is warranted. How long before you could get back to me?"
"Tell you what, I'll ask Sarah and Casey to meet up at our base and we call you once we come to a decision. I suppose half an hour should be enough?"

"Alright. Thank you for at least considering it. See you in thirty."

With a smile and a wave, I terminate the call.

Half an hour later, as promised, my secure phone chimes. Once I pick up, three faces greet me, not all of them as friendly as I've hoped.

"Not a week on the team, and he already wants something from the Intersect - why am I not surprised?" Casey asks with half a smile, half a sneer.

John Casey knows better than to just pick a fight for the kicks of it - most of the time. If he tries to get a rise out of me, he'll have to try better, I think with a small smile on my lips. Which is apparently not the reaction he thought he would get, judging by the irritated frown that fleets over his face. I'll file that under victories, though, and better move on, before my inner monologue becomes to obvious for the people I'm talking to; that's never a good start, especially if you want something from them.

"Astute observation, Colonel. Nonetheless, I assure you I wouldn't ask this of you if it weren't of dire importance. Now, onto more pressing matters: Have you decided yet?"

Casey narrows his eyes. "You said it was of dire importance; to what exactly?"

"Oh, nothing... or at least it will be nothing if the Intersect has no data on the person I wish to check for," I tell them with a shrug - telling them everything and nothing at the same time. My teachers hated me for it. Alas, I really do want to get that name checked. "Or," I drawl, "in case Chuck finds something, it could mean the end of the world - literally. Spontaneous combustion on a planetary scale, sudden black hole creation, Earth implodes or explodes, whatever. Take your pick on how our beautiful blue planet ceases to exist." Another shrug.

"And you didn't think of telling us sooner about this threat?" Sarah almost yells.

"Well, I would have if it had been possible. As it is, I just came back from meeting said person, That said, as I see that you are still undecided, how about a compromise? I give you two agents the name without Chuck hearing it, I end the call, you let Chuck check it, and if you are in need of the whole story, you call me back. Or even if that's not the case, so I won't be in the dark about whether or not I should shit my pants."

Sarah and Casey exchange looks, none of which I can decipher from behind a monitor- then Sarah whispers something to Chuck, who in turn stands up and leaves the room, although hesitantly. "Fine. Now what is the name of that alleged apocalyptic threat?" Casey growls, but it's a curious, almost non-hostile growl, so I breathe a little easier.

"She's not the threat, but rather the indicator that the shit has hit the fan. Anyhow, her name is Beverly Barlowe. I'll be right by the phone waiting for your call."

After the call has ended, I inform Andrew and Zoe about the development. They're not too happy, but honestly, who would be? After the few moments that takes, I rush back into my room and start staring at the phone intently. It doesn't make the waiting time go by faster, and it's neither productive nor particularly distracting; in fact, it even helps me focus - and given how our luck has turned out so far, I will need to be as focussed as possible, or else, hello, new cozy cell in Fort Leavenworth.
Or hello, Guantanamo. Or hello, padded cell. Or hello, cozy bunker.

Or perhaps I should stop my vivid imagination right there.

Luckily for me, the phone chimes before I can follow that thought train further. When I answer the video call, it's actually a conference; not only is Team Bartowski present, but also General Beckman.

The General softly massages her temple with one hand and lets out a sigh laden with frustration. "Mr. Gerthson, would you please explain to me why you are in possession of highly classified information about this country's most secure and well-hidden research complex?"

Wow. No beating around the bush. "How secure is this line?"

Beckman quirks an eyebrow at my question. "If your question is of technical nature, you should've read the manual," she tells me drily.

Stop the presses! The director of the NSA, General Diane 'Hardass' Beckman shows her funny side!

I give her a wry smile for her effort, despite the dire situation. "No, I meant who has access; not only to this video feed, but also recordings, that sort of thing. I don't intend on painting a bulls eye on my back just yet."

She pierces me with a icy stare for a few long moments before shaking her head. "I swear to god, if you make me regret spending a codeword-level security sequence on this conversation, you will regret the day your grandparents were born," she sighs.

I can do little more than gulp as she rattles down a string of letters and numbers before a computerized voice announces that the surveillance protocols have been deactivated.

Beckman folds her hands and puts them on the table, giving me a raised eyebrow. "Now, Mister Gerthson; you had something to say?"

I close my eyes for a second and take a deep breath. Here goes nothing. "First off, I'm not crazy. I'm not one to see conspiracies where there aren't any. I do not consume any drugs, legal or illegal, for recreational or medicinal use. That said... I'm not from this universe."

For a very long moment, nobody says a thing. Then the General speaks up. "Thank you for your contribution, Mister Gerthson; a team will be dispatched to remove all classified technology from your possession. I believe we're done here. Team?"


Intimate details only they could possibly know about? Yes, please.

Her hand that was already set on pushing the button to end the connection stills, but that's not enough for me, so I go on to Sarah. "Agent Walker. Budapest. Assault on the Mob's dinner table. Ryker. Baby. Molly."


I think I have their attention now. They all look like they've seen a ghost, and if you think about it, in a way they have. "Now you know why I didn't want that recorded. And no, don't even think about testing or experimenting on me or asking about the future, because then I'll be out of here quicker
than you can say 'butterfly effect'. The reason I know these intimate details about all of you is that in my dimension, Chuck's adventures were made into a TV show. That was true for this dimension, too. Somehow this dimension merged with one where you are real, and I'm the only one who knows about it, because I'm a anomaly in this universe myself. The same goes for Eureka, by the way. Which is bad, because apparently, this universe won't be able to handle the excess energy of two new realities forcing their way in."

Beckman shakes her head, as if to clear her head of the grandiose stupidity she just witnessed. "This is preposterous... but I've seen too many stupid and unthinkable things happen in our business to dismiss it out of hand. Let's pretend for a moment that I believe you. What would you propose as our next move?"

I give her a shrug in response, which she doesn't seem to like, so I ramble on. "We have basically nothing to go about; but as we have to deal with a highly irregular physical phenomenon, the squints in Eureka are the only ones with even a remote chance of stopping this particular brand of world annihilation. I would send in someone undercover to investigate. The question is, do you want to let them in on what is going on?"

She gives me a hard look for a few seconds before sighing loudly. "I'd really rather not..." She slams her fist on her desk and waves any concerns away. "Ugh, screw it. I should schedule a meeting with a shrink, because, so help me god, I believe you. It's not worse than what my predecessors seemed okay with during the Cold War's height. You are dismissed. I will call all of you back once I've decided who to send in. Good night, Team Bartowski."

"General, wait!" Chuck exclaims from his seat.

"Yes, Chuck?" Beckman asks and takes off her glasses.

He clears his throat once before speaking up again. "With all due respect, General Beckman... why don't you just send in Jonny?"

"Do you really think sending in a seventeen-year-old boy into a top secret town-sized research facility is a good idea?" she asks.

"I can perfectly look after myself, you know," I huff. "As you might remember, that was part of the reason why you made me part of the team."

"You'll be at least considered for the mission," the General tells me with a warning glare. "You're still a minor, so that's not going to be easy, if you'll be chosen at all, that is."

I give her a somewhat sheepish smile. "That's also not quite true. I'm in the body of a seventeen-year-old, but I've lived for twenty two years already. Don't ask me how, that's part of being a dimensional anomaly."

"I'm starting to wonder why we let you live in the first place. That you know about Eureka is a rather large thorn in my side, and now you tell me you're a dimensional anomaly? You're really not making this easy on me." I can't really tell if she's joking or not, but at this point, I just don't care anymore.

"Well, I hope you can decide about that soon, because, you know, total global destruction at hand. I would gladly volunteer for the Eureka mission, but if you have doubts about me, then go ahead, waterboard me, give me your hardest interrogators, whatever." Whatever is making me stand up to the head of the NSA, I don't know; but I would really like to punch it in the face.

"Fine," she grits out. and a few key strokes later, an address pops up on the bottom of the screen.
"Be there in an hour, and an old friend of mine will take care of your security clearance; and for your sake, don't be late." With that, she terminates the connection.

Apparently, General Beckman doesn't like being put on the spot.

"Antagonizing the general is not a wise move; still, it was nice knowing you," Colonel Casey quips with a wry smile and cuts the feed, too.

Well, shit.

An hour later, I'm standing where the General has told me to be, which has turned out to be an underground parking garage. My step-parents were of course furious that I just went and told people about my 'special origin', but eventually they came around to see that it was really the only option. That didn't make them any less furious, though. Thus, meeting with an unknown NSA or CIA agent who is supposed to interrogate me and is an old friend of General Beckman doesn't look that uninviting anymore.

I can feel that someone is watching me, but I trust Beckman not to have me killed on the spot. For now, at least. The only thing out of order I can spot is a car with tinted windows whose engine is running. I make my way over to it; I want to get this over with as soon as possible.

As I get there, the doors unlock, and a muffled voice tells me to get into the back. With a small shrug, I climb in. Might as well just roll with it.

"Thank you for your cooperation. Bringing someone in doesn't always go so smooth. Always remember: your compliance will be rewarded."

Did that guy just make a HYDRA reference right off the bat? I think we might even get along if he keeps that up.

"I'll have you know that I usually don't do that kind of work anymore. Diane called in a big favor for you. Consider yourself lucky - not many people are still alive who can say that they were interrogated by Jackson Hunt. I believe we have much to talk about, son."

Or maybe not.
"To your left is a black bag, actually. You should know the drill," Hunt tells me in a conversational tone, all the while staring forward.

"Is that really necessary?" I sigh.


Another long-suffering sigh later, I pull the black cloth over my head. "I'm lucky for not being claustrophobic," I quip; the cloth is heavy, making seeing through it impossible. Which kind of is the point, actually.

"It will probably be futile to ask where we're going, right?"

"Oh, yes." Then, a sharp pain erupts in my calf, making my mind scream 'NEEDLE' inwardly. I hate needles. "Don't worry, it's just a tranquilizer."

"Oh, you've got to be kidding me," is all I manage to groan weakly before everything goes even blacker than before.

Bwah, that is some serious sweaty-sock-in-mouth taste. And a headache, too? Just my luck, heh... Hands and feet bound, check. Chair solidly fused with the ground, check. Eyesight nonexistent, check. Ah, still the black bag. Doesn't help that I'm feeling dizzy, too.

That moment, the offending piece of cloth is lifted from my head. "Ah, good. You're awake. Sooner than I thought, even." It's rather dark here (no wonder, it's still in the middle of the night), but to my surprise, I find myself in a construction site.

"Yeah, I'm used to tranquilizers - you've met Colonel Casey, right?" I grumble, which elicits a chuckle from Hunt. Then I realize (again) that the person interrogating me is Agent Hunt. Jackson Hunt. As in, Castle's dad... and Alexis' grandpa.

"Listen, kid, to be honest, this whole thing is basically a formality," he tells me. I'm not sure if that's supposed to make me feel better or not, because right now, his conversational tone scares the crap out of me. "I've known you for quite a while now, and you've never given me a reason to doubt you."

"I certainly hope so. I made a promise to keep your family safe, to multiple people and for different reasons, but I guess it won't hurt to extend the same courtesy to you, too," I declare with a small wave of my hand.

"My family?" he asks, aghast. "What do you know of my family?"

Oops. There goes my mouth again, running off like there's no tomorrow.

One of the few things my training hasn't been able to rein in completely.

"Oh, please," I snort, with way more confidence that I'm feeling, "it's my job to know things. It is the truth, you know. I'm sworn to protect them. Richard, Martha, and Alexis."

His eyes narrow at the mention of his granddaughter. Oh crap. "Do they know?"
Phew. Not the question I feared. "Not explicitly, no. I've saved them in the past, but they don't know it's also an obligation."

"Good... let it stay that way. But while we're at it, you could clear some other things up for me; and since you already know who she is, you should think very hard about how you'll answer: What exactly are your intentions with my granddaughter?"

Wait, what? "Honestly, I don't quite know what will come of this, but she's cute, she's funny, she has a brilliant mind, and she has a great character. Alexis is everything anyone could ever hope for, and I would be lucky if she chose to pursue a relationship with me, although with my line of work, I sincerely doubt I deserve her. And I have no idea why I just blabbed that out." I really don't. Sewing my mouth shut sounds really tempting right now. Me and my fast mouth.

Triple-shit.

Hunt gives me an innocent shrug and a smile. "That would be my home-brewed tranquilizer with a little truth serum mixed in it. Very effective, especially since it's very rare; keeps people from building up an immunity against it."

See? I knew the jovial tone in his voice was a bad omen. "I can't exactly say I have a good track record with home-brewed serums. Things tend to go... ballistic." I revel greatly in this beautiful pun, but since he doesn't know why I would smile like that, he only cocks an eyebrow.

"I sense a story behind that, but sadly, we do not have time for this. Now, do you have any intentions of treason?"

"No?"

"Do you want to get to Eureka under false pretenses?"

"No."

"Do you have any idea what may have caused the crisis we're in?"

"Sadly, no. Do you really think I would have told the head of the NSA that I'm not from this universe if I had even the slightest idea?"

Hunt snorts at that. He can probably imagine General Beckman's reaction.

"Since I'm still around and not in a padded cell, you know she believed me. That's also how I knew about your family, by the way."

I hate truth serums.

Followed closely by tranquilizers.

He narrows his eyes at me, but to my surprise lets it slide.

"Well, good enough for me, even if it's a little less than usual. Congratulations, you don't have to die today. Now, let me just call the General real quick." And there is that blasted jovial tone again.

Could've gone better.

Could've gone worse.

He pulls out a smartphone, which is more advanced than most technology at the moment, of course,
and holds it in front of me.

Then the display lights up and shows an only slightly disgruntled General. "Nice to see you're still up and running, Mister Gerthson- figuratively speaking, of course," she adds with a small smirk after a quick glance at my tied up state. "I figured Agent Hunt would call me later, to be honest, but I'm glad to see that you've been cooperating, apparently."

I look up at Hunt for a moment, a little bit amused about how his truth serum was interpreted as cooperation. When I look back at General Beckman, she doesn't acknowledge that she's seen what I just did; if anything, her smirk got a little wider. Guess I'm not the only one who knows about the truth serum.

"Agent Hunt will take you to the rooftop. A chopper awaits you; it will take you to Eureka."

"That's... unexpected," I breathe, "right now?"

Beckman gives me a sharp look. "Is that a problem, Mister Gerthson? I thought you had volunteered."

"No, not at all, General."

"Then godspeed, Mister Gerthson. You'll need it."

With that, she cuts off the feed, leaving me a tiny bit stupefied.

"Yeah, Diane has that effect on people," Hunt tells me with a chuckle. He must've recognized the look on my face, then.

"Once more unto the breach, eh?"

He cuts all the ties and hauls me up. Once he has made sure that I can walk (apparently not self-evident with his home brew - I hate tranquilizers), he leads me to the staircase.

"Good answers, by the way," he says as we climb the stairs, staring straight ahead and with a small smirk on his face. "I'm glad I don't have to kill you."

He holds up a calling card. "Call this if you need help - but your fingers better be on fire if you dial that number."

I take it with a nod, too dazed by that gesture to acknowledge it verbally. Thus, the rest of the climb is spent in silence; until we reach the door to the roof, that is.

Hunt stops with his fingers on the door handle, taking a breath, but not saying anything yet. "Don't walk away from her," he whispers after a few seconds, "I've made the same mistake with her grandmother and I'm regretting it every day. Eventually, your life will catch up with your family. Make the most out of your time until then and be ready when it happens, and maybe you won't end up a sad, old man."

With that, he opens the door and shoves me through towards the already waiting helicopter, closing the door behind me before I can shake off the stupor his advice has left me in.

The chopper crew waves for me to climb in, and I oblige. Ducking, I make my way to the open door without getting cut down by the rotor blades and gladly accept the help from the man in the passenger cabin. He pulls me up and hands me a helmet.
I'd be squeaking of joy right now if I weren't so shell-shocked.

"Beckett!" Montgomery's voice pushes through the busy noise of the precinct, which causes the detective to snap her head around. The captain is standing in his door and waves her in, to the mild surprise of Ryan and Esposito.

He motions for her to close the door behind her once she's stepped in.

"Is there a new case, sir?" Beckett asks with a small frown.

The older man shakes his head. "No. At least not yet."

This only deepens her frown. "What is this about, then?"

"It's about Gerthson."

"What about him?" she lets out with a small groan. She swallows the part where she wants to ask "What has he done now?", but judging by Montgomery's chuckle, it came across anyway.

"Do you have any idea where he is?"

Beckett shrugs. "I'd assume he's at home; although the last time I've seen him was at Castle's loft, for the surprise party."

"I have unis following everyone on this team and the Castle family, in case the people behind the charity gala assault want retribution, but they've lost Gerthson's trail soon after he left the party, and nobody has seen or heard from him ever since. It's been a day, but his family hasn't reported him missing yet. It could be nothing, but you know as well as I do that 1PP will have my head if my hunch turns out to be true."

She makes a face at that. "Alright, I'll take Esposito and Ryan and ask around a bit." She turns around to leave once Montgomery has nodded his all-clear.

"Oh, and Kate?" She stops and looks over her shoulder. "Don't make it official just yet. Nobody from the press has figured out yet that Gerthson was the one who broke up the hostage situation. I would like it to stay that way, are we clear?"

"Crystal, sir," she assures her Captain with a nod and a smile and leaves for the bullpen.

"Esposito! Ryan!" The two detectives have already left their casual position and fall into step behind Beckett as she strides past their desks.

"What is it, Beckett? A new case?" Espo asks as they file into the elevator.

"Sort of," she tells them with a smirk before hitting the button, "we're going to look for Gerthson." She really enjoys their aghast expressions before the doors close.

"Who's there?"

"Detectives Beckett, Ryan and Esposito, NYPD. We have a few questions for you, if you don't mind."

A disgruntled mumbling is heard from the other side, but the door opens up nonetheless, revealing a middle-aged man clad in something akin to a silk dress suit pajama? "Sorry for being so grumpy,
you just woke me up from a nap, and I haven't had my daily 5 o'clock dose of caffeine yet."

Beckett bites back a smirk; naps in the afternoon aren't really her thing, but she knows exactly how he's suffering due to lack of coffee right now. "Sorry, Mister McRiosca. We were just wondering where Jonny might be; we expected him to come by the precinct today, but he didn't show up."

Andrew waves their concerns away. "Oh, Jonny is just away on business. You are certainly aware of the nature of his job; he is recruiting new members for his information network. I think he's supposed to be in the Midwest right now."

Ryan and Espo exchange looks, but Kate doesn't need to see their faces to know that they think this smells fishy, too.

"Excuse me, can I use your bathroom real quick?" Esposito asks, and Andrew motions towards the side, albeit reluctantly.

"Well, that's too bad," Beckett offers with a tight smile, "but if you can get a hold of him somehow, please tell him that we're worried and that he should check in as soon as he gets back."

"Aye, will do."

Esposito chooses this moment to return from pee break, and Kate takes that as her queue to flee the scene.

"I'm sorry that we have disturbed your sleep, Mister McRiosca. We'll see ourselves out, don't worry."

With that, the three detectives quickly leave the apartment and make their way down to the street, where Espo holds Kate back.

"Beckett, wait. There is something big going on."

She frowns at her friend. There aren't many things that could make the SpecOps veteran fidget nervously like that, and not one of them is good.

"When I went to the bathroom, I walked by Jonny's room. The door was open, so I took a peek. That guy has a top-level secure communications device. Military grade, it's a newer version of what I've seen in my special forces days. That means he's involved with either NSA or CIA. That he vanished cannot be a coincidence. This could be big trouble, Beckett."

"It's Gerthson. It's always big trouble with him," she quips with a grim smile.

"So, what did you need me for, Beckett?" Castle asks with a smile as he lets himself fall into the seat at her side. "It's a rare occasion that you actually ask for my help instead of just telling me where to find the crime scene."

_This was a bad idea_, she thinks before returning the smile. "It's not a case yet," Beckett reveals and casually leans back into her seat. "But it's possibly with ties to an alphabet agency, so anything we talk about is hypothetical at the moment - but I thought you might want in on the action."

Castle narrows his eyes playfully, purses his lips and leans forward. "Ouh, tell me more. This ought to be interesting."

"We have not enough tangible evidence to actually make a case, not even a body. But we're pretty
sure that something fishy is going on. Since we have no body, we'd have to file a missing person's report, but we can't be the ones to actually file it."

"Well, the case is pretty clear," he tells Beckett with a glint in his eyes, "you need a puppet."

The detective frowns at her writer with the barest of disbelieving smirks. "A puppet? Of what use would a puppet be to me?"

He shrugs. "A puppet is basically a non-evil version of a patsy, if you will. You need someone to actually file the report."

"Hmm... maybe. The problem is, the potential victim's family is confident the victim is just on a business trip. We know better because we've had surveillance on him. He just vanished, into thin air, but filing a missing person's report is the last thing the family would do."

"Did the guy have any friends or neighbors who would be able to state that he's gone? A girlfriend, ideally?"

Kate's face looks absolutely crestfallen. "Not many friends, and no girlfriend, either - sadly."

Now it's Castle's turn to frown. "Well, that complicates things. Do you think you could convince one of his friends to pose as his girlfriend?"

Beckett's eyebrows rise. "Do you think I would accept false witness statements?

Castle grins at his detective. "It's perfect!" he exclaims. "It either doesn't come up, or if it does, your false girlfriend ashamedly admits that being his girlfriend was only wishful thinking on her part, and she grasped at the chance to save her friend and played the part. It's so cheesy everyone will believe it."

"And you really think this could work?" Beckett asks, her tone laced with skepticism.

"Absolutely," he assures her with wide eyes.

"Then it's settled! I have the perfect person for this in mind..."
"That was a perfidious plan, Beckett," Castle grumbles as they walk to Kate's cruiser with the boys. "To think that you would fool me like that!"

"Actually, it was Esposito's plan. Totally worth it," she tells him with a smirk, then pointedly feeds Espo's birds.

The writer throws said detective a half-hearted glare, but refrains from saying anything.

When all seat belts are fastened, Ryan speaks up. "What's the big deal, anyway? Gerthson's a nice guy, mostly well-mannered, funny, not too bad looking... he seems like quite the catch, but you're freaking out about Alexis even pretending to be his girlfriend?"

"Oh, you know nothing, Kevin Ryan," he drawls with raised eyebrows. "Have you 'met' Jenny's parents yet?"

"No... but she does exist." Ryan protests, sensing the slight teasing in Castle's voice.

"Sure thing, bro. Whatever helps you sleep at night," Esposito snickers. Even Beckett rolls her eyes with a smirk.

"Anyway, if you do meet them someday, rest assured, no one will ever be good enough for their little girl. The same goes for Alexis. It's my job as a father, even more so since I'm a single parent, to vet the potential boyfriends and to sort out the foul apples. Which means, all of them."

"Isn't that a little harsh, Castle?" Kate asks from the driver's seat, amusement lacing her tone. "I know from experience that this sort of behavior only triggers a rebel phase."

Castle gulps. Loudly. "Rebel Alexis... good god, why did you say that?"

"Relax, Castle," she chuckles. "I'm sure she won't run off and buy a Harley Softail- or get a navel ring." she adds with a smirk.

"Navel... Ring?..." Castle asks, mouth agape and eyes glassy.

"I think you just broke him, Beckett," Esposito quips with a grin.

"So not fair to distract me like this, Beckett," Castle grumbles.

Kate raises an eyebrow and smirks at him. "Will you look at that, we're at your loft already. How the time flies!"

Ryan and Esposito share a snicker.

"Actually, Ryan, Esposito, why don't you wait in the car while Castle and I go talk to Alexis?"

Ryan makes a surprised face, but Esposito gives her a sour glare. "Not. Cool, bro."

They make their way up to the loft and Beckett let Castle open up the door.

"Pumpkin? I'm home again!" he shouts up the stairs.

"Coming, dad!" a muffled voice is heard, and true enough, seconds later, a familiar redhead comes
Alexis almost misses a step when she sees that Castle's not alone, but she can keep herself upright with the handrail.

"Kate! I didn't know you were here, too. Is something wrong?" Alexis asks.

Kate grimaces. "Actually... there is. Gerthson is missing."

Castle's daughter frowns. "He's missing? But he's been here last night; you were, too. Doesn't he have to be gone for twenty four hours before you can do something?"

"Indeed," Kate agrees and nods her head, "but Captain Montgomery has had uniforms following us all, including Jonny, in case the people who highjacked the charity event want retribution. They lost Jonny's trail after midnight, and there has been no sign of him anywhere, and he has never made it home. The thing is, we can't do anything yet, we have no indication that he has been kidnapped, he's not missing long enough, his uncle said he's on a business trip, but that's bogus, too."

Alexis frowns in confusion. "And what have I got to do with any of this? Not that I would mind being kept in the loop about my friend, but that's hardly standard procedure."

Castle jumps in. "It isn't. On the other hand, hardly anything about that little rascal is. Now, were the police to file a missing person's report, the Captain has to explain how he knows of it. When he reveals that he had him under surveillance, they will want to know how, and-"

"They don't know about his involvement in the charity drama," his daughter finishes the thought.

"Exactly," Beckett agrees. "That's where we need your help."

"Of course, Kate; anything," Alexis replies.

Kate cringes for a moment before she manages to school her features again. "I'll let you reconsider after you know what we'd ask of you, but-"

"Anything short of barging into a warehouse and gun down the bad guys, I'm in," the young redhead tells her with a smirk. "And that's because I don't know how to shoot a gun. We Castles are loyal like that," she adds with a fond smile to her dad.

Castle returns the smile before frowning - he remembers now why they came here. "We need you to play his girlfriend," he states flatly.

"Come again?" They can almost hear her jaw hitting the ground.

"You heard him just fine; last time I checked, you had ears," Beckett quips.

Alexis narrows her eyes at her. "That's not exactly what I had in mind-"

"I certainly hope so," Rick adds, causing Beckett to roll her eyes.

"- but I'll do it," she says with confidence, although her face reddens immensely. "He is my friend, and he saved my life. I would do it even if he hadn't, but even more so as he has. It's not like I'm committing perjury; I won't be under oath, will I?"

"No you won't," Beckett says, a little bit surprised at Alexis' legal knowledge. "but we still need to organize everything."
"Then we better get started, don't we?" Alexis says and hops down the last step.

"Sir, when is the FBI team supposed to show up?"

Montgomery chuckles. "Relax, Beckett. They will be here any minute. Everything is prepared, right?" Beckett nods wordlessly. "Then you have nothing to worry about," he tells her with a shrug.

"It's just... we have no idea how the FBI got wind from our investigation so fast. We didn't tell them anything, and it has taken them, what, three hours to dispatch a whole team of agents after Castle's daughter helped us file the missing person's report? I don't like this."

"Me neither, but we have no idea what Jonny's up to, and that alone is terrifying enough that I will welcome the FBI with open arms."

Kate eyes her Captain warily. "With all due respect, I don't know how you can be so positive about this... sir."

A snort escapes his mouth. "Why is it that after 'with all due respect', people say the least respectful things?" he muses with raised eyebrows and shakes his head before looking outside at the writer sitting at his best detective's desk. "Live as long as I do, detective, and you'll become surprisingly fatalistic. The FBI is the lesser of two evils... for now."

He just finishes the sentence when the soft chime of the elevator rings through the bullpen. All eyes swivel to the origin of the sound and wait for the doors to reveal their cargo.

As they do, about half a dozen FBI agents start unfurling themselves from the elevator. Montgomery and Beckett step out of the Captain's office to greet them, where they are joined by Castle.

A familiar face steps forward from the group of agents and tugs his suit into place again. "Next time, guys, we'll draw lots who has to take the stairs, okay?" he grumbles under his breath.

A fleeting expression of surprise flies over Montgomery's face. "Agent Sorenson, nice to see you again."

"Likewise," Will replies with a soft sigh, "although I wish it were under better circumstances. Where can we set up camp?"

The captain motions to Kate. "You remember Detective Beckett, I'm sure. She'll be your liaison to the NYPD during the case; she can show you the way."

Kate nods and turns towards a clear space in the back of the bullpen and starts marching towards it. Castle, as always, follows suit, and so does Sorenson.

"So, are you two finally together by now?"

Kate's head whips around sharply, and she fixes the FBI agent with a glare that only makes him smile at her. "No, we aren't," they both say at the same time, causing him to chuckle.

"You're so cute when you both do that," he tells them with a smirk.

"I thought you came here for a missing person's case, not to interrogate me on my love life," Beckett shoots back and turns her head back around to the front.

"Well, technically, he didn't question, he made an observation, and he did it to both of us, not just to you... shutting up now," Castle finishes as Kate gives him a flat 'really?!' look over her shoulder.
Sorenson raises his arms in mock surrender as they arrive at the space that has been set up for the FBI. "Relax. I am. Now why don't you tell me about that missing kid of yours?"

Kate furrows her brow at him in irritation and crosses her arms. "He's not my kid, Agent Sorenson, he's my informant."

He raises an eyebrow at her. "Fine, if you want to play it that way, why don't you tell me about that missing informant of yours?"

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