Monday's Child

by NotWillingToAdmit

Summary

Jemma Simmons’ life fell apart on a Tuesday.

But it came back together again on a Thursday.

Notes

Experimental.

It's gonna be alright in the end.

Promise.
Tuesday's child is full of grace,

Jemma Simmons’ life fell apart on a Tuesday.

A simple, ordinary Tuesday, much like any other Tuesday except for the fact that Grant Ward was HYDRA….as was John Garrett and… her team was gone…. Dead… (No don’t think that. Coulson had survived being dead, and this wasn’t nearly as bad as that and Melinda May was Melinda FREAKING CALVARY MAY…) and Jemma Simmons was flexicuffed in a Hydra truck sitting next to John Garrett who just wouldn’t SHUT UP.

“Did I ever tell you about the time that I went through the skylight? I thought I was done for, but I still emptied…” he asked a rather enthralled Ward who acted as thought it was the very first time he had heard the story.

After far too long (six very long stories; none of which could be true based on the laws of physics that Jemma knew intimately unless they had been overturned by HYDRA also), Ward decided to take a long drink from a water bottle. Her mouth was quite dry, and he smiled, a distinctively unWard like smile as he offered her a drink. She pretended to play along, to appear grateful. She drank enough to wet her lips but then she took a larger gulp. Then as Ward pulled the bottle away from her, she spat at him. A pitiful act of defiance.

Garrett roared his approval of her spunk but Ward’s eyes darkened into a murderous rage because she had embarrassed him in front of Garrett. He was close to hitting her with the rifle butt, determine to regain Garrett’s respect, but then Garrett put out his hand. The blow never landed as Ward was Garrett’s trained dog.

“Bakshi wants her brains intact, not splattered on the truck wall,” Garrett stated mildly. He exhaled and smiled at Jemma. “Ward has no sense of control. It’s one of his many weaknesses as you saw when he killed Fitz. I’ve tried to teach Ward control, but some people lack motivation to overcome their beginnings.”

It was a barbed comment directed toward Ward as the younger man’s face fell at his mentor’s chastisement.

A jovial Garrett continued, “Now, Simmons, I’m sure you’ll have proper motivation soon enough, but it’s for the best if you willing change your alliance. You’re far too physically fragile for Bakshi’s motivation.”

“Never,” she insisted.

Garrett pouted. An honest to God pout and then he brightened. “Still loyal to Coulson, I see. It was the cupcakes, wasn’t it?”

Garrett knew that Coulson had brought Fitz Simmons cupcakes when he was struggling to convince them to join his team.

“HYDRA can offer you far better things than cupcakes,” Garrett assured her.

Jemma Simmons said nothing, instead she tried to focus on being strong, and not crumbling due to fear and grief.
Garrett helped her out of the truck. In grateful appreciation for his assistance, she attempted to kick him in the ‘nads. Instead of getting angry, he just flipped her over his shoulder and loudly laughed while she struggled.

“Kid’s got spunk,” he informed Ward. “Shame you didn’t learn anything from her. Come on Jemma, we’re off to see the Wizard, aka Bakshi.”

Sunil Bakshi was a rarity, a Shark impersonating a human, who also wore a flawless suit. If he wasn’t a soulless member of HYDRA, she would have thought he was rather handsome. However, she had learned that pretty packages often hid a rancid inside. (See Ward, Grant.)

“Dr. Simmons,” he urbanely stated as John Garrett placed her in a chair. “Please accept my apologies for your rough treatment. I would have preferred not to have been forced to have you endure that. A bad first impression is almost impossible to overcome.”

A bright, dead smile was offered and Jemma struggled to hide her fear. Meanwhile, John Garrett leaned against the wall and faked disinterest. The truth of the matter was that he was deeply invested in Simmons joining HYDRA willingly as his Deathlok enhancements were failing. Odds would have been better for his long term survival if Fitz had been captured, but the engineering genius had escaped.

However, he had lied to Simmons because he was a desperate bastard. Her emotional identity was heavily bound to being the Simmons of Fitz Simmons. Rip that from her, take SHIELD away from her, and quite possibly she would willingly join HYDRA.

Yeah, and he had a bridge in NYC to sell.

“You come with sterling recommendations,” Bakshi continued, as he reviewed her profile on his tablet. “I am quite interested in having someone of your skills work for us.”

“Never,” Jemma protested.

“You organization is shattered, your team dead,” Bakshi calmly stated. “Your employment opportunities are rather limited since you don’t have the possibility of positive references from your previous employer.”

“Thank you, but I’m not interested,” Jemma offered. “If you’d let me go, you can interview the next candidate. I’ll need these removed, please.”

She extended her restrained wrists toward Bakshi, who merely blinked, once, twice, three times. The silence spread and spread until Bakshi smiled his dead smile.

“I’m terribly sorry, you are the only qualified applicant,” Bakshi finally explained. “We would prefer that your cooperation, however if necessary we can ensure that you… comply … with our requests.”

John Garrett didn’t like that idea, because he found Comply by Hydra method a tad bit too enthusiastic. Muscle memory remained but the important stuff, like how does one jump start a life support system that been a best at stop gap measure at keeping someone alive, was often found leaking out of one’s ears after one of Bakshi’s motivational sessions.

“Take her to a holding cell,” Bakshi commanded Kaminsky and Jack Rollins. Much to his annoyance, both HYDRA personnel had difficulty controlling the slight woman. He waited to speak
to Garrett until after Kaminsky had stunned Simmons and carried her out of the room.

“There’s someone I wouldn’t playing doctor patient with,” John Garrett announced to Sunil Bakshi. Garrett watched as Baksii’s lips thinned in nearly hidden disapproval as he thought Garrett was being crass.

Why yes he was, but like everything he did, it was done deliberately, with a goal in sight. Bakshi was a street rat, he endeavored to hide it underneath a layer of acquired sophistication and poshness, but Garrett enjoyed picking at the cracks, hoping to reveal the true Bakshi.

“Your staff needs remediation if they can’t subdue a ninety pound woman,” snapped Bakshi.

Garrett let Bakshi’s censure roll over his back and return back to the universe. Very zenlike attitude, but it really IRKED Bakshi as his nostrils flared. And WIN for Garrett.

“Your usual methods of ensuring compliance may be too intensive for that delicate flower,” Garrett stated. He had to be careful, push him toward the goal of keeping Simmons’ intelligence intact, but her focus towards a different goal.

*I am a dying man, grasping at straws.*

“You are dismissed, Garrett,” Bakshi ordered.

Like the dutiful, dying dog that he was, Garrett nodded his head in easy agreement. As he was about to leave the room, he stopped to give Bakshi sufficient intel to push him into acting the way Garrett required. “She’ll probably attempt something noble and stupid,” Garrett informed Bakshi. “Starvation diet, or provoking Rumlow about his receding hairline so he gets pissed enough to kill her. And for the record, I didn’t bring that psychopath onboard. Some dogs need to be put down when the madness comes on.”

Garrett wasn’t surprised when he and Ward were assigned clean up duties, as Bakshi was a prissy bitch. He cleaned, he organized, he catalogued the various toys in the fridge (and kept a few!). He faux listened to Ward bitch, bitch, bitch about the ignominy of it all. After a week, he was returned back to civilization.

“How’s Brains?” he asked. “Is she complying yet?”

Because really, how much could they screw things up?

Plenty, he realized.

It was time for Garrett to take over. Idiots! Every single one of them.

Jemma Simmons had been subjected to several days of the Faustus Compliance Training. She had stared at the screen and repeated the mantra until Bakshi and Whitehall were convinced that she was HYDRA. She had been tested, had passed, and then she had returned to her room where she had opened her wrists in an attempt to join her team and her family in whatever the afterlife was.

Quickly, professionally and ultimately unsuccessful.
They had hospitalized her and even now she was restrained to her bed in the hospital ward. There wasn’t much she could do to continue to fight her capture, but her hunger strike was now in its third day. A feeding tube was threatened, but she still held true to her goal until John Garrett arrived in her hospital room.

“Come along, bring it in, and then you can leave,” he explained. He sat down next to Jemma’s bedside and he shook his head in fake paternal disapproval.

There was a rattle of carts and the most delicious aroma filled the air.

Roast. Gravy. Yorkshire pudding. Cauliflower cheese. Plus swedes and…. Her mouth watered and her stomach further betrayed her by growling.

“I think this meal promises to be far better than cupcakes,” John Garrett informed her. “However, we will have to take it slowly as you’ve been a very bad girl, Simmons. We will start off on broth and work our way towards solid food.”

He placed his one hand on her face and forced her mouth to open. Far more gently than Rumlow had tried, as that had left her with bruises, but still with sufficient pressure for her mouth to open. He took a ladle of broth and placed it against her lips.

“Open your mouth, here comes the helicopter,” he began.

Sunil Bakshi and Daniel Whitehall observed John Garrett force-feeding Jemma Simmons. He succeeded in having her down eight ounces of chicken broth with a few spoonful of mashed vegetables, a HYDRA victory in the battle against Jemma Simmons’ formidable willpower.

“The modified Faustus protocol will start tonight,” Bakshi announced to Whitehall, who nodded his head once. “Do you wish any modifications after watching the dinner and show?”

“I’ve already revised the protocol, so you will start the regiment tonight,” Whitehall informed Bakshi. “Inform Garrett that she will be his responsibility henceforth. I predict that Dr. Simmons will be elated being the recipient of his attentions.”

Whitehall nodded his head, so Bakshi realized he was dismissed.

Jemma Simmons almost didn’t notice when the classical music began to play in her hospital room. *Gabriel Fauré - Pavane, Op. 50*, she realized which quickly segued into *Venus, Bringer of Peace*. Her eyes were closing during *Lady Radnor' Suite, Slow Minuet*, a futile battle against a physical lassitude that had to be chemically induced. When Sunil Bakshi arrived in her room, complete with whiff of brimstone, she was too stoned to verbally protest.

“Dr. Simmons,” he began in his smooth, cultured tones. “Your employer wished to reassure you that in spite of your recent health issues, your offer of employment has not been rescinded. In fact, we pride ourselves on our Employee Assistance Program, so you will receive much needed mental health assistance, as much as you require, as you recover from your nervous breakdown.”

Even while somewhere down deep, Jemma Simmons screamed a futile protest, she found herself answering, “Thank you for understanding, Mr. Bakshi.”

“Just listen to the classical music, it’s been selected specifically for your emotional health,” he
explained in the honey tones of a viper. “I was quite delighted when you ate for your visitor. He will be making regular visits to ensure that you eat. A healthy body, a healthy mind are completely intertwined. Now go to sleep, Dr. Simmons and dream of a word at peace.”

The sounds of *Sospiri, Op. 70* guided her to sleep.

She wore long sleeves during her first week in the lab. Everyone seemed aloof, no doubt knowing about her nervous breakdown, so she concentrated on her work, struggled to do her best. A few thoughts would float to her mind, as though there was a separate mental Jemma screaming at her to fight, fight, fight, but she repeated the mantra and calmed her unease.

Jemma Simmons was lonely though. No friends, and John Garrett hadn’t visited her once since her discharge. Not once, even though he had been roped into feeding her at the hospital.

Well, perhaps she’d go to the Bucket of Suds for happy hour and karaoke. Sit in the back of the room and pretend that she had friends. (She didn’t, as they were all dead, dead, *dead*).

She was walking to the parking lot when she heard a familiar voice call her name. Jemma Simmons turned to face John Garrett and she felt… **giddy**. Unbelievably giddy… like a school girl with a crush…. even while her mental Jemma screamed a futile protest that something was seriously wrong if she was crushing on JOHN GARRETT. HYDRA CYBORG.

“You doing anything?” Garrett asked. “A pretty girl like you must be going out on a Friday night.”

*He thought she was pretty!*

“No, not doing anything,” she admitted.

“How about dinner?” John asked.

“It’s a date,” she blurted, even as she blushed.

And John Garrett smiled.
Chapter Notes

Thank you to the brave souls that are reading this.

“I haven’t been on a date in years, decades even,” Garrett admitted. “Not since 1992. However, I do remember the important part that the gentleman pays.”

After some playful banter over Garrett the dinosaur not being able to handle an independent modern woman who would pay her own way on dinner, they decided on Japanese. Naturally, since it was a Friday night, the place was packed, so they decided to order take away, and eat in the park. The fates were against them, as the formerly overcast clouds decided to empty themselves even as they found the perfect spot for dinner. They ended back at her apartment, and she felt uneasy asking Garrett to come inside.

Agent Coulson dead… Ward betraying them all…. Garrett…. Garrett the Clairvoyant.

She heard Bakshi’s calm voice in her head, repeating a self-calming mantra with her.

Breathe in, breathe out.

FITZ! Her inner Jemma screamed loudly, struggling to be heard above Sunil Bakshi’s dulcet tones. FITZ!

Breathe in, breathe out.

“Hey, I won’t get fresh,” he promised as he unpacked their dinner. “Scout’s Honor.”

Breathe in, breathe out.

“You were a Scout?” she asked.

“No, but I had friends that were. My family was poor, couldn’t afford luxuries like Scouting.”

She nodded and found herself in front of her sound system. After she had confessed to her therapist that she fell asleep every night to the classical music CD he had given her, he had seemed pleased. At her daily meeting with Sunil Bakshi, he had presented her with a new CD to which to listen, so instinctively, blindly, she found herself playing it.

“Bach’s Cello Suite No. 1 in G Major?” Garrett asked.

“It’s very relaxing,” she murmured.

Breathe in, Breathe out.

“How’s the therapy coming along?” Garrett asked.

She flushed and turned away.
“Share with me what you’re comfortable telling, I won’t get angry,” he promised. “After I got fragged in Sarajevo back in 1992 – I reached that point where I debated ending it all. My fiancée left me and I had nothing because I was far more loyal to SHIELD than they were to me. I was merely expendable, to be left to die as my extrication was too problematic for them to care and…. It was difficult.”

Her mental fog had her drifting, and she realized that he was anticipating that she’d say something. It took her a moment or three to remember what he said, and she offered, “She left you?”

“I had extensive scarring, and well, some parts weren’t working like she was accustomed to,” he admitted. “It’s August, why are you wearing long sleeves?”

She readjusted her sleeves in order to hide the scars on her wrist. They were jagged and ugly and her therapist had assured her that they weren’t as pronounced as she believed. Bakshi had insisted on the best plastic surgeon they had, she had been informed, which added another sense of owing Bakshi more.

I don’t even like him, she thought. I don’t trust him, why is he helping me? Coulson would have helped me.

A flash of Coulson…. Dead… filled her mind… and she fought back the urge to vomit.

Breathe in, Breathe out.

Garrett held out his hand and hesitantly, she placed her hand in his. To her shame, he pushed up her sleeve to reveal the angry lines that ran parallel. John touched them with a very gentle finger as he spoke to her.

“Scars are not something of which to be ashamed. They’re proof positive, that you were stronger than whatever tried to break you,” he informed her. He watched her for a bit then nodded his head. “You haven’t put on the weight you lost, so time for you to eat.”

To her surprise, she was ravenous. Jemma cleaned her plates and part of Garrett’s, which left her feeling overly full and in a mental fog. She watched, and didn’t comment, while John cleaned her small kitchen. That done, he thanked her for a very pleasant evening and advised her that it was time for him to leave.

“Must you?” she plaintively asked.

The idea of being alone for the entire weekend, with no one to talk to, with only herself and her mental Bakshi urging her to breathe in, breathe out was unexpectedly overwhelming. She was on the verge of a panic attack and while she knew how she was supposed to respond; Call the Therapist, she was grasping for any other solution.

She reached for his wrist, and hesitantly placed his hand on her shirt.

“Please?” she pleaded, even while inside, she was screaming, no, no, no, no. THIS IS JOHN GARRETT!

The cocky John Garrett that she knew was gone, replaced by a very somber John.

“I can’t,” he whispered. “I physically can’t. Since I got fragged, I don’t think it’s physically possible
for me. That’s why my fiancée left, and… Christ, don’t cry.”

She wiped her eyes, even though the tears continued to fall.

“What’s going on in your head? Should I get Bakshi?” he asked.

That made her cry still harder, even while her mental Bakshi intoned Breathe in, breathe out….

“I… am… lonely,” she finally hiccupped after crying a river or three. “I just want someone to hold me until I fall asleep. I want to feel… Safe.”

“So you thought offering me sex that I’d stay to cuddle afterwards?” Garrett joked. At her emotional retreat, he exhaled. “I’m an idiot. Let me take my boots off and….you go change.”

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Really, what he did to stay alive. Cuddling? Though if all his parts were working in his nether regions, he would have been quite happy to give Simmons the ride of her life. He was a dog, after all. Bakshi’s revised brain washing of Simmons wasn’t working as well as Posh Boy believed, because there were moments when Garrett knew the old Simmons was there, fighting to regain control.

Jemma returned to her bedroom and appeared quite uneasy. She wore a t-shirt that said ‘Stand back, I’m going to TRY SCIENCE’ complete with a Mad Scientist figurine and matching flannel pants.

“Where do you want me?” He asked.

She gestured, he plopped himself on the bed, and she curled next to him. She clicked on her Bose and classical music began to play. It was thought a light switch had been flicked as Simmons completely zoned out.

“Does that help you sleep?” he asked.

Head nod.

Well yes, because the subliminal compulsions especially designed for Jemma Simmons were in full affect.

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Jemma Simmons was given additional classical music CDs during her next therapy session. She had revealed that she had gone on a ‘date’ (Liar, she thought) with someone that knew of her history and that she and the gentleman in question had cuddled. Her therapist had been delighted, as it meant that she was carefully and deliberately moving on from her previous trauma, as opposed to rushing in head first. (Skye!)

Actually, she had lied about cuddling as in truth, she had fallen asleep on Garrett. The awkwardness of his position had caused his arm to fall asleep and his back to spasm by the time she had woke. However, in spite of his obvious pain, he had suggested a movie followed by dinner for that afternoon. The movie theater had been rather frigid so he gallantly offered her the use of his leather coat. He had placed his arm around her and she had rested her head on his shoulder.

She had felt safe… protected.
Keeping an eye on Simmons was exhausting (Cuddling didn’t let him sleep), painful (Hello back spasm!) but still he persevered. He noticed, and didn’t comment, how she seemed to brighten when he made an appearance in her life. It was all Bakshi induced infatuation, he was sure. Especially when on their ‘dates’, cuddling with Jemma meant that she’d end up sitting between his legs and that she’d place his arms around her.

However, it still surprised him one night when Jemma took his hand and guided it under her shirt. Then when he failed to protest, she placed his hand on her breast. When he began playing with it, as he had always been a breast man preFragging, she wiggled her bum against him in the most delightful way. Her response embolden him so he slid his free hand twixt her legs even while *Aphrodite* by Chadwick played in the background.

Simmons was primed and went off like a firework grand finale within minutes. A trifle bit unnerving for Garrett as he hadn’t even broken into a sweat, so he continue to touch, tease and explore a highly responsive Simmons.

After multiple mind blowing orgasms, Jemma took his hand that was between her legs and moved it to a safer location.

“A little oversensitive right now,” she apologized as she wrapped his arm around her.

“Sorry,” he murmured in between nibbling her neck.

“Don’t be,” she murmured. She was quiet for a moment and then she spoke. Hesitant. “John? Are you…. I mean…. That’s not your gun, is it? Because I’d like to….”

“It’s not my gun,” he admitted. “I’m not sure… if I can maintain it….”

“Let’s go to bed, John. I had the depo shot so we don’t have to worry about that.”

Jemma led him by the hand to her bedroom, and then carefully undressed him. She focused on his eyes, not the scars, left by burns, bombs and bullets while he lay back on the bed. After he was comfortable, she straddled him.

“God, you’re beautiful,” he whispered with a cocky smile. “I could admire this view for days.” Then he lost his smile as he came quickly, far too quickly with barely a gasp.

“I’m so sorry,” he whispered.

“Don’t be,” she whispered as she leaned over to kiss him. “Least we know it’s possible now. That’s far better than what we believed yesterday. We’ll just have to practice so it’s as good for you as it was for me.”

She stroked his face and smiled down at him. “Now hold me,” she ordered as she rolled off him.

Really, she was being quite demanding but she noticed that recently, whenever her inner unease grew, her mantra wasn’t to repeat *Breathe in, breathe out*. Instead it was to imagine that John
Garrett was holding her, as she felt safe and secure then. Her inner demons, that Jemma who protested and fought and screamed incessantly were thankfully quiet.

“We’ll have plenty of practice,” she promised him.

“Practice makes perfect,” he agreed.

As Jemma found out six weeks later, practice did not only make perfect, it also made pregnant. A thrilled Jemma Simmons delightedly realized when she stared at the third positive pregnancy test on her bathroom counter.

“Bakshi assured me that compliance will be rewarded,” she affirmed. “I have complied, and I have been rewarded.”

*I have a part of John growing inside of me now.*

Inwardly, a horrified Jemma Simmons screamed and wept.

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Director Coulson exhaled slowly and shook his head in answer to his team’s unasked question.

“No news on Simmons,” he informed his team. “Nothing. My source believes that she is alive, but there’s nothing concrete.”
Jemma’s euphoria quickly faded when she realized that John might not be as happy with the news as she was. It wasn’t though she was in a real ‘relationship’ with John. He was just having a great deal of enjoyment rediscovering the joys of sex. While for her, their ‘relationship’ was a lifeline, a balm to the overwhelming ache of having lost everything. She had even covertly copied his medical records to see if there was something she could do to help relieve his chronic pain that he couldn’t successfully hide from her.

Therefore, it was with a very heavy heart that she threw away the pregnancy tests, uncontrollably wept while she took a very long shower and then dressed for work. To her horror, as it was that type of day, John Garrett met her in her apartment’s parking garage.

“Good news, office is closed,” he explained as he waved his phone in her direction. “Water main break. I thought since today is Friday, I could convince you to pack for a long weekend.”

He smiled brightly, and then his expressive face fell.

“What’s bothering you?” He asked. “You look as though you don’t feel well.”

She smiled weakly and to her surprise, John held out his arms, offering her an all-encompassing embrace. “Need a hug?”

With a tearful nod, she accepted his embrace. She held on to him tightly even as he stroked her back. His very solidity stabilized and grounded her.

“You’re just so tense. However, I know a very good way to relax you,” he offered with a very saucy grin. “You look so peaceful when you drift off to sleep next to me.”

Jemma pulled away from him. Well, she attempted, as he refused to release her.

“Talk to me,” he requested.

“John, I’m… pregnant,” she whispered. “I had the shot. I know I did.”

Instead of being furious, he just tightened his embrace. “Let’s go to bed,” he whispered.

“Isn’t that what got us into this mess?” Jemma asked, half laughing, half crying.

“I think we need to talk, and you need reassurance that I’m not angry. I’m not, I’m rather in awe of my boys. I didn’t think they had it in them, though I know that they were in you as often as they were up for the challenge,” he admitted.

She poked him in his chest and she shook her head.

“You’re horrid,” she mock protested.

“No, I’m Garrett, but you can call me the Great Inseminator,” he slyly stated.
Really, he thought he was gonna lose his teeth when she told him that he had knocked her up. Must have been that Alien Jesus Juice that was circulating in his veins. While John Garrett admitted that he was an absolute asshole (Check!), all around dick (double check as it apparently it was in working condition now!) and possessing all the sensitivity of a petrified redwood tree, he was… God help him…. fond of Jemma.

Not just because of the sex.

She was a little ray of sunshine in his life.

Sadly, HYDRA enhanced sunshine because really what sane woman would want to deal with Jonathan ‘Asshole’ Garrett? He knew the only reason she didn’t attempt to strangle him in his sleep was due to her HYDRA conditioning, but yet he tried with her. Flowers, dinners, movies.

God help him, she reminded him of the first girl he ever crushed on. He had been five, a dirty and ragged five year old with an alcoholic father who abused and despised him, who had called him a sissy and pussy and worse and… Nancy had been an older woman (Six!) with big Disney Princess eyes who had been nice to him, who had smiled at him. She had been the only kindness he had experienced in that horrific year after his mama had died. For years, decades even, he had kept his imaginary Nancy sacred. He kept her memories close to his heart, next to the few tattered remembrances of his mother that even his father couldn’t twist and foul. Even after he become the Clairvoyant, he had never looked up Nancy, because the realization that she hadn’t become a happy mother with 3.2 kids, a hopelessly devoted husband completed by a dog and a cat would have destroyed him.

Jemma was different from Nancy in a very important way.

Jemma was real.

And she smiled at John Garrett. When they had sex, she actually touched him, all of him. Not just there, but the burns, the scars… and she didn’t look away. And while Nancy had pitied him (he had known it, accepted it, but didn’t dwell on it because that despondent five year old needed something like her in his life), Jemma didn’t. He knew he was woefully out of practice when it came to happy boy girl bed type fun stuff, but she always made him feel as though he had done it right.

And for those reasons, he do anything to protect her, because now he wasn’t a scared four year old boy who wished Daddy wouldn’t hit Mommy. No, now he was a masterpiece of cybernetic technology who wouldn’t let anyone hurt Jemma. If anyone tried, he’d kill them.

She had been worried about his reaction, so he needed to watch himself with her. Be on his best behavior. Treat her like glass, put her on a pedestal so she would learn to trust him.

Next time they went to bed, he’d be gentler, not so damn ham-fisted.

And she wasn’t a weakness, not to him. She made him stronger because he had to be. For her.

(It was a lie, this Jemma, a HYDRA fabrication, but …. He’d work harder on being better for her.)

“What do you want to do?” he carefully asked as they sat down at the kitchen table. “I will support any decision that you decide to make, financially, emotionally. I must confess, however, that I think you’d look absolutely adorable pregnant.”
“I just…” Jemma stopped and ceased talking.

“It’s happening very fast and it’s a great deal to process,” he assured her. “With everything that’s happened in the last few months, you need to steady yourself. Take a deep breath and tell me what you want to do.”

She inhaled and exhaled.

“Would you be angry…” Jemma had barely started before she stopped. She looked away from him, as though she feared his reaction.

“No,” he interrupted. “I wouldn’t be angry with any decision you made.”

“I’ve…. lost so much…. My family…. Fitz… Skye…” Jemma began. “I want to raise our baby. I can't lose this, also.”

Garrett said nothing, so hesitantly, she looked at him. He was smiling, a big, broad smile, complete with dimples.

“I’m gonna enjoy fattening you up,” he admitted which caused her to laugh. As he was smiling like a crazed loon. “You’re still really underweight.”

“You’ve done enough,” she teasingly protested.

“Let this be our secret for now,” he requested. “I guess you have to tell Human Resources because you might need to be reassigned out of the chemical labs. Other than telling them that, keep this between us, and have them wonder…. until they realize that you’re pregnant. There’s no one I care to tell.”

She felt a chill run up and down her back as she thought about Ward. Ward who had betrayed them by pretending that they were friends, the man who had killed Fitz.

“Ward?” Jemma asked.

“No, especially not him. He’s still as emotionally stunted as the day I met him. He’d probably be whiny and jealous. You need to focus on you two right now. Did the doc say when you’re due?” Garrett asked.

“I haven’t been to the doctor,” she confessed. “I just did the tests about an hour ago.”

“Do I get to see them? I will try not to gloat too much about my swimmers,” he promised. “But I do admit that I am quite proud of the boys.”

She blushed and shook his head while his smile widened.

“I tossed them,” she admitted. “I wasn’t sure how you’d react, so I didn’t wish to set you off if this wasn’t good news.”

His face fell even as he bit his lip. John leaned towards her and grasped her hands. “Hey, you are the best thing that has or will ever happened to me. Remember that. I’m sure you have a spare test that you haven’t used, so why don’t you do what you have to. We’ll sit together and act that we don’t know what the results are. Maybe you can tell me that you think you’re pregnant, and that you want
to take a test. Act like you weren’t scared of my reaction.”

His eyes were strange and his voice held a sense of entreaty as though he really needed her to pretend, so she nodded.

“John,” she whispered. “I think I’m pregnant. Would you stay with me while I take the test?”

“Absolutely,” he promised. “I will be with you every single step of the way.”

The first part she did in private, then she invited John into the room. He walked behind her, placed his arms around her lower belly and then peered at the stick.

“Hourglass is good?” he whispered.

“It will take up to three minutes,” she explained. “When the hourglass is gone, there will be a result.”

“So, why do you think you’re pregnant?” He continued to whisper.

“My breasts are really sore, and I’m late. I think the Depo shot failed, John.”

He nodded even as he continued to hold her. The seconds ticked by and then she whispered, “Hourglass is gone. Will you tell me the results? I just can’t look, what if I’m not?”

Jemma turned towards him. His embrace tightened and then she felt him lean towards the counter. There was a sharp intake of breath and then John informed her that they were having a baby. He swept her off her feet then and took her not to the bedroom, but to the kitchen. Jemma was placed in a chair, and she was absolutely flummoxed when he opened the fridge, rummaged and began placing food on the table.


“I need to make Mamacita a sandwich,” he explained. “A really big sandwich. I may even make you two!”

Only after she ate everything on her plate, did he carry her to the bedroom. He was surprisingly shy and diffident with her, so much that she had to ask afterwards. Carefully, though, as John was being… odd. Not that he hadn’t been unbelievably sweet and affectionate before, but now he was treating her like she was made of glass.

“You didn’t enjoy our lovemaking?” he softly asked.

“I did,” she protested, as well, she had. Though she couldn’t help smiling when he called it lovemaking, not sex.

“It’s gonna get better, Jemma. Promise.”

Sunil Bakshi was…. delighted… when he heard of the upcoming blessed event. Zola’s Algorithm had predicted that Jemma Simmons would be nearly impossible to force into compliance. However a pattern had emerged from Zola’s Algorithm that had had caused Bakshi to put a plan in play. Take
everything from her, tell her that everyone she loved was dead, remove her depo implant and then put John Garrett into her orbit.

John Garrett, proverbial loose cannon that Bakshi wouldn’t trust. Zola’s Algorithm couldn’t make hide nor hair of Garrett, except to present odds that it would be beneficial to be on their side. A child had resulted from subliminal suggestions given to both Simmons and Garrett, though he wouldn’t admit to anyone that he was surprised how quickly it had occurred. Simmons must have been utterly devastated to take that crass arse GARRETT to her bed.

“A growing child should listen to the classics,” he explained to Jemma’s therapist. “Give her these to which to listen.”

Each CD had been carefully prepared to reinforce the message that would ensure her compliance. Her unwilling compliance.

Trust HYDRA. Protect the baby at all costs. You’ve lost everything, you can’t lose this. Only HYDRA can keep you two safe. You can not trust SHIELD. They won’t help you. They will separate you from the baby. They will accuse you of conspiring with their enemy. By helping HYDRA, you can keep your baby safe. You love your baby and would never let anyone harm your baby.

Jemma Simmons didn’t tell anyone she was pregnant, but the sideways glances she received as the months passed confirmed that some suspected the truth. However, since most of her coworkers were men, she hid as much as she could beneath an assortment of snazzy jackets.

She had left the office one day, extremely late for her lunch, when she met Barbara. John would be upset, as he had made a little schedule for her of what and when she should eat, but today her stomach had stated, no, no, no it wouldn’t tolerate the healthy lunch he had made for her, but instead wished for her old standby from the hot dog truck and really, that Mac n’ Cheese Attack Dog was calling her name.

However once she got there, she was torn between the S’more dog, the Peanut Butter & Jelly with Captain Crunch hot dog, or the deep fried hot dog, peanut butter, fried egg, bacon & maple syrup. She decided to order all three, skip the sides to try and remain virtuous. For added health benefits, (CALCIUM!) she ordered a chocolate milk.

“Please tell me that you’re pregnant, because I have the urge to vomit looking at last hot dog,” a very tall woman stated. The Amazonian had dark hair, killer boots and an id that stated that she worked at the same location that Jemma did.

The woman smiled at the food truck worker who greeted her with a warm, “Two White Soxs Dogs and a side of tater tots it is, Barbara. You should be more adventurous – like her.”

Barbara dramatically shuddered, and then chatted with Jemma. “If the baby isn’t kicking yet, after that lunch you’ll feel little feet, little arms and a headbutt, I’m sure.”

“That obvious?” Jemma asked as she had believed herself to be still looking rather trim at the halfway point. To hell with her physician’s agonized despair that she had put on twenty pounds already. John assured her that he adored her curves.
“You disguise it well with the clothes but that lunch.” Barbara shuddered. “Barbara Morse.”

“Jemma Simmons.”

“I’ve seen you at the office,” Barbara admitted. “You heading back to the salt mines or do you want to get some Vitamin D therapy?”

“I think I’d like to sit outside for a bit,” Jemma admitted.

Barbara ‘Bobbi’ Morse was a skilled interrogator so she was able to learn a great deal from her lunch with Jemma Simmons. Jemma’s obvious infatuation with her baby’s father (GARRETT. Rumor had it was JOHN GARRETT!) left Bobbi feeling as queasy as if she had eaten Simmons’ lunch. Later that afternoon, she reached out to her handler, advised him that she had located Jemma Simmons and detailed her report. She agreed to wait for further instructions and try to make contact again with Jemma to re-evaluate her mental health rather than attempt extrication.

Felix Blake groaned after disconnecting from his conversation with Bobbi.

“Is there a problem, Agent Blake?” his junior agent asked.

“I need to speak with Director Coulson, and he’s in his office,” Blake admitted. “Elevator’s still down, isn’t it?”

“Can’t you call him?”

Yes, if he would, if he could. However this conversation couldn't be phoned in.

“No, this conversation has to be held face to face, I’m afraid.” Felix Blake put both hands on the table top and willed himself to stand. “No, I don’t need your assistance. I think you’ve done enough for me.”

Mike Peterson let Felix’s character assassination roll off his back. It was a high pain day for Blake; translation nobody wanted to deal with the short tempered and acerbic Agent. Hell, nobody wanted to deal with him on a good day, which was just fine with Felix Blake, Grump Extraordinaire.

However, he was also the only senior agent who was willing to be Peterson’s handler (Coulson had said that Blake had volunteered because he figured he’d be the only one willing to give Peterson a fair shot) which meant that Michael Peterson was familiar with the many shades of Blake’s dark moods. Truthfully, Peterson was surprised to realize that he liked Blake as Blake normally treated him pretty decently considering Peterson had broken most of his bones. Most of the time he liked Blake, as sometimes, Mike did want to put him through a wall to shut him up, but those times were quite rare.

Blake bit back a curse when he finally managed to stand.

“Sorry, Michael. The dampness is getting into my bones. Pizza and the Red Soxs later?” He asked, as he put on his forearm crutches and began the long trek to Director Coulson’s office.

“Yeah, as my boys are gonna destroy those Soxs,” Mike teased.
“In your dreams, Michael. While I’m gone why don’t you give Ace a call?” Blake suggested. “Mack says that it’s safe.”

“Thanks,” Peterson answered. He picked up the phone while Blake left the room.

“Hey,” Skye announced to Phil Coulson to grab his attention.

“Hey?” Coulson repeated. As the Director of SHIELD, should junior agents really greet him with ‘Hey!’?

“Agent Kranky Bear is on his way up to see you. Mike just texted me,” Skye explained even while Lance Hunter asked if Mike was also a WiFi hot spot.

“Up three flights of steps?” Coulson shook his head. “Must want privacy. Everybody out.” He gestured at the various agents at the room and then looked at very unimpressed May. “Well, except for you. After climbing three flights of steps, he may desire to kill me. You’ll defend me, won’t you?”

She rolled her eyes in response.

“Blake,” Coulson greeted when Felix Blake arrived. Melinda May stood in the corner and was not acknowledged by either men. It was a common pretense so that they could pretend that it was a private meeting.

“heard from Morse. The good news is that she has made contact with Simmons,” Blake began as he collapsed into a chair. “Bad news is…I told her not to extricate her. Too many variables… Simmons is pregnant and …. Garrett’s the father.”

“I didn’t think John was a rapist, but then again I didn’t think he was a traitor either,” Coulson finally announced when his boiling rage had cooled enough for him to speak. “He’s dead. If I don’t get him, May would you do the honors?”

“Most assuredly,” May quietly stated.

“Problem is… Morse says that either Simmons was HYDRA all along, or they’ve broken her. Jemma believes herself in love with Garrett, and seems to be quite happily pregnant. Morse says Simmons isn’t acting like it’s an abusive relationship. In fact, it’s the opposite as Simmons was raving about how well Garrett is treating her. It was only a brief conversation, but now that contact has been made, Morse thinks that she can ‘accidentally’ run into Simmons at the office.”

Some days, Phil Coulson wished Nick Fury would show up, so he could give SHIELD back to him. Let Nick deal with all the issues, the traitors, the lack of funding… the social media campaign… while Phil Coulson retired to run a comic books store. Today was one such day.

Naturally, Nick didn’t appear.

Phil made a hard call. Instead of extracting Simmons, he need more Intel.

“Very well. We keep this information between the three of us,” Phil decided. “And Blake?”
“Yes, Director?”

“Next time, I come down to your office.”

Barbara had been quite correct. After today’s lunch the Bump had decided to rouse and let Mum know that Bump wasn’t happy with her lunch selection. There was fluttering and movement and quite possibly gas from the hot dogs, but definitely, Jemma Simmons had quickened. It was the happiest, most surreal experience of her life and she couldn’t wait until she could share it with John.

When Garrett came to their apartment, he found her reclining on the couch, wearing one of his old tees. She had pulled up the shirt to expose her belly and her hands were resting on the Bump.

“Hey, Mamacita,” Garrett announced as he entered the room. He sat on the floor next to couch, kissed her and then kissed her belly. “You look lovely.”

“Here,” she said. She took his hand and placed it just so. “Can you feel it?”

He waited for a bit, and then he shook his head.

“Not yet.” He put his back to the couch and exhaled.

“Rough day?” Jemma asked as she began to stroke his hair.

“Yes, but something kept me going all day long.” John explained as he reached into his pocket. “You have three days off thanks to it being Johann Schmidt’s birthday on Monday. How about we celebrate Johnny’s birthday by running off to Vegas and getting married?”

Jemma sat up even as John turned to face her. In his hand, there was a ring box and he extended it to her.

“Jemma Elizabeth Simmons, will you do the honor of making an honest man out of me?” Garrett requested.

Jemma Simmons burst into tears and happily nodded her head.

Chapter End Notes

The hot dogs mentioned in this story actually exist. I, however, have never tried them.
Friday's child is loving and giving,

Skye’s search criteria for the missing Simmons at last found a match. The completion of her data crunching was announced, not by earth shattering trumpets, but a quiet chirp on her phone.

“I gotta go,” she announced to her fellow Scrabble players. Ignoring their plaintive protests, she asked Fitz to join her in her computer area.

He gestured with his hand and then spoke, “Gem?” He had almost completely recovered from his near death experience by the Ward the Betrayer but there were times when he slipped back. Times like now when his emotions overwhelmed him, as they all missed Jemma so badly. It was though part of their souls were missing.

Skye nodded.

The two left together and Lance put down his tiles. “Never met the lady, but she sounds amazing. Shall we be nosy and follow, pretend to be supportive? Mike’s cheating with his enhancements so we can’t win.”

“Am not,” Mike protested. “You just can’t spell.”

“Oh, so when you’re working with The Kranky One, you often slip antidisestablishmentarianism into your conversations?” Lance sassed as he stood.

“Maybe if you hadn’t tackled him in the hallway when you were skateboarding, you’d realize that Agent Blake isn’t such a bad guy,” offered Trip. “He doesn’t bounce well or happily as you discovered.”

“He’s a personality match for my ex-wife,” Hunter protested which caused a tired groan from the studio audience even as they followed him. “Demonic Hell Beast that she was.”

“I’ve always found Felix very personable,” Izzie inserted while Hunter protested her betrayal. “Vic thought the world of him.”

“This is weird,” Skye admitted to Fitz. “There’s a wedding license that was issued two hours ago for Jemma. In Vegas. All the demographics is the same so it’s her, or someone has stolen her identity.”

“Who’s the lucky guy?” Fitz asked. Since he was a rather progressive soul, he added, “Or lady?”

Skye grimaced, as really, the lucky bridegroom was one of the LAST people on Earth that she’d marry,

“Something must be wrong because there’s no way she’d marry him unless she was under duress. Pulling all the feeds for the various Vegas chapels because the wedding is supposedly taking place today. I’ll do real time analysis plus pull the last two hours.”

There, that should give her time to digest the horrible truth if it WAS Jemma Simmons.

“W-w-ward?” Fitz trembled.

Skye concentrated on acquiring the footage, but she assured Fitz that it wasn’t Ward.
“However, some might think this a worst candidate,” Skye regretfully confessed as a pre-taped Jemma Simmons appeared on the wall display. Her hair was up, her face was beaming, and she was wearing a strapless a-line tea-length dress completely with a baby blue bow that rested above her rather pronounced belly.

Her groom… HER GROOM…. Was out of uniform. He was wearing a Nehru style jacket, with a baby blue scarf around his neck and there was not a turtleneck to be seen.

His face softened when he saw Jemma, and damn her for a fool, but Skye almost believed that he was being honest. For once.

“GARRETT?” Trip asked as John Garrett kissed Jemma Simmons in front of the camera.

“I think I’m gonna hurl,” opined Lance Hunter as they watched Jemma Simmons ‘melt’ into her intended’s arms. For all his many faults including his high sartorial crimes against humanity, it seemed that Garrett was quite the Lothario gauging from Simmons’ response and her budding figure.

“She must be drugged,” Fitz wisely stated. “He is most assuredly not her type.”

Perfectly symmetrical men with full heads of hair was Jemma Simmons’ type.

“I’m heading to Vegas. Field trip anyone?” Izzie Hartley announced as she instinctively reached for her knives. Trip nodded his head in approval, and announced that he’d drive so Izzie could plan her revenge.

“Think Kranky will let you come on our field trip?” Lance asked Mike. “We might need your skills.”

“You just want me for my rocket launchers, Lance.” Mike paused, tilted his head and then spoke. “Coulson and Blake are coming down here. They were aware that Simmons was in Vegas, and they had several teams sent to the Chapel to extricate her. However, they had missed Simmons’ departure from the chapel and they are searching the area. They want to discuss the situation with you and we are not to leave HQ until he gives us permission.”

“Coulson never lets us have any fun,” protested Izzie.


“Simmer down. I feel the earth moving under my feet and not in a good way, Tremors,” Mac stated.

“Seriously,” Blake snapped as he struggled down the steps. “Still no money to fix the elevators? You can build a helicarrier, but you can’t fix the elevators?”

“They promise to have the parts by Friday,” Coulson wearily promised Felix Blake. “However, for what it’s worth, you are taking the steps much smoother these days. And really, Blake. When you call your Director a fucking asshole, could you try to keep your volume a little lower?”

“You told me that you needed me because I wouldn’t keep my volume down and I’d tell you when I thought you went off the crazy train,” protested Felix. “Remember, I failed the employee physical six times? I need an exclusion from the Director to get back in? It’s all your fault that I’m on the payroll.”
“He didn’t realize your loud volume conversations would happen quite so frequently,” inserted Melinda May. “Or in front of so many witnesses.”

“Neither did I!” cheerfully admitted Felix Blake. “Mike says that the kids are in uproar about Simmons right now. He says Skye is quaking, but not as bad as she could be. Building’s still standing! Oh wait, I forgot, this building was modified to withstand a magnitude 12 quake.”

“And yet, the elevators don’t work,” added a helpful Melinda May.

“Absolutely! How utterly fucking stupid!” Blake exclaimed.

Coulson struggled to regain control of the situation and wished Nick Fury would show up. That comic book store in Portland was looking better and better except for the fact that Asgardian lived there. Sigh.

“As you both know, I would have told them what was happening with Simmons once Garner had reviewed the tapes. We have no idea what’s happening with her right now. Well besides that she’s carrying the Spawn of Satan,” Coulson explained. Then in a softer voice, directed only to May and not the cursing Blake. “Et tu, May?”

“The verbal sparring takes his mind off his chronic pain,” she softly admitted. “Though I admit that I didn’t think putting him as Peterson’s handler would work as well as it did.”

“Peterson felt very guilty about what happened. Blake understood the position Peterson was in when he waffled stomped Blake, and he volunteered. Because if Mike had really wanted to, he could have killed Felix. There was enough of Mike Peterson left, that fought against Garrett’s commands to kill Blake. Blake understands that.”

It was a rather simple wedding ceremony, just the two of them plus the minister and a few hired witnesses in a rather tasteful chapel in Vegas. She had been slightly concerned, ok more than slightly, that Garrett would have them married by Elvis, but he had slowly changed after the realization that there were three of them now. The gregarious Garrett existed when he was at work, or dealing with other people, but with her, he was often quiet and somber. His long, rambling, simply impossible stories of past bravery and fearlessness were silenced. The few times he had started one of his rambles, he had stopped in midsentence and just sighed. “You’re tired of my tall tales,” he admitted.

“You’ll have a new audience soon,” she had reassured him. “He’ll love them.”

For their wedding, Jemma wore a vintage dress that she had found at a second hand shop. Bobby’s Bridal Barn had overwhelmed her with its vast selection and the heat, so she had fled. She had walked for a bit and had found herself drawn to a quiet little shop that she was relieved to discover was run by a fellow expat. Fiona, the shop proprietress, had listened to her request for help locating a simple white maternity dress that might pass for a wedding gown, and had asked, “Don’t you have anyone to help you pick a dress, love?”

Buckets of tears had been shed, as Jemma had explained that there was no one, that she had lost her family and friends during the Battle of New York and the aftermath and… Fiona had simply held her until she ceased bawling. Fiona had flipped her OPEN Sign to CLOSED, brewed her a cuppa and asked her questions about the baby and the man she was marrying. It like she was talking to her Nan, who had always loved Jemma, even if she never quite understood what exactly Jemma had been
studying.

She had spent two hours with Jemma, as they reviewed the various dresses. At last they found a cute A-line, but there was something missing. Fiona had pondered for a bit, and then she had smiled. “Something blue and borrowed. Let’s try the dress with a blue bow.”

The bow had been the perfect touch, as it showed off her breasts and Bump while giving her a semblance of a waist.

John had forgone his usual turtleneck so he looked different in a suit. Yes, there was a collar and scarf to hide his burns, but he even wore real shoes.

“Who are you and what have you done with Jonathan Garrett?” She whispered as he escorted her down the aisle.

“You’re changing me,” he informed her. “For better or for worse, I am not the same man you first met. God help me, but how I love you.”
Sunnil Bakshi was ordered to Daniel Whitehall’s office. He entered and Whitehall was intently staring at a computerized DNA helix image. There was an exotic looking woman who wore a dark dress embroidered with flowers. The petite figure stood next to Whitehall and they both seemed… pleased.

“The fusion of Kree, Chitari and Human DNA appears successful in our test patient. I am having Bio Science prepare the surrogates for implantation. I’m disappointed about the nanobots, but I believe that issue can be resolved shortly,” she stated. “The father is proving utterly besotted so his conditioning has been extremely effective. He’ll ensure that the test patient remains safe.”

“Well done,” Whitehall informed the woman who slunk… perhaps… slithered… was the better word… out of the office.

“Confirmed that they were married in Vegas,” Bakshi informed Whitehall. “I filed a flight plan to see what might turn up.”

“I’m sorry we couldn’t stay longer in Vegas,” John softly informed Jemma. He was putting their luggage into the Jeep and she just shook her head in answer. “However, I think I’ve used up all my luck by you making an honest man out of me.”

“It’s alright, as long as I’m with you two, I’m happy,” she admitted.

She smiled up at her husband…. Her husband….and his face softened. He traced his index finger down her face and he bit his lip even while he shook his head.

“You’re the most amazing person,” he softly informed her. “Do you really mean that?”

Jemma nodded, and Garrett swallowed once, twice, three times. He embraced her, and she clung to him. John Garrett was almost her personal sedative, because sometimes, she felt as though she was falling apart, that there was another Jemma inside of her, screaming and fighting but being with John, being loved by John… silenced her inner demon.

“With you, I feel safe,” she shakily confessed. “I need that so much. When I’m with you, I don’t have nightmares.”

He held her until she felt calm and serene once more. He could tell when she had relaxed as his mood shifted into one of amusement. “I’m sorry we decided to take the Jeep. I’d really like to christen you into the mile-high club.”

“Looking like this?” she softly protested. For added reminder, she pointed at her expanded equator.

“Yes, especially looking like that,” John assured her.

“Garrett filed a flight plan to leave Henderson Airport in sixty minutes,” Blake informed Coulson. “Has to be a setup. Scrambling the agents to go there and May stated that she was going. The plane
is a Cessna, which is his particular preference.”

Phil opened his mouth, but Blake held out his hand.

“They were ordered to treat Simmons as gently as possible, and with May there, you don’t need to worry,” Blake reminded him. “Now you get to tell the Baby Agents and Izzie about Simmons. Hope you don’t mind, I’ll sit this one out.”

“No, no, no. You got the information from Morse, so you have to answer their questions.”

Blake’s refusal was non-verbal, but still thunderously loud, so Coulson sweetened the pot. “The elevator is next on capital improvements.”

Felix Blake’s eyes narrowed in disbelief. “Swear it. Swear it on The Sainted Mother’s Red Hat.”

Phil grimaced even while Felix appeared, if anything, further displeased with Director Coulson.

Yes, Coulson had brought the Senior Agent in specifically to keep Coulson focused and humble, but sometimes Blake was a killjoy.

“I swear that the repairs for the elevator are next on the list of capital improvements. I so swear,” Phil stated.

“On the Sainted Mother’s Red Hat,” added Felix.

“Seriously, we’re not at the Academy,” Phil protested, before he acquiesced. Felix Blake was in a hell of lot of pain, after all. “Very well, I swear it on Peggy Carter’s Red Hat.”

“Run the video one more time,” Izzie requested. “Focus tightly on Simmons’ face.”

Skye agreed and the two women intently watched.

“Do you think… Garrett…” Skye stopped. “Because there was no way Simmons was HYDRA. None.”

“She’s not acting like he raped her,” Izzie bluntly stated. “When she enters the chapel, she’s very uneasy, not just wedding jitters, but once she sees Garrett, once he touches her, she relaxes. See how her shoulders relax? They’re no longer hunched, but down? She’s not HYDRA, least not willingly. I think she’s been brainwashed into trusting Garrett.”

“And the baby?” Skye asked.

“We believe the baby to have been created in the standard fashion,” intoned Felix Blake. He was more than a little bit irked that he had to go up and down, then up then down the three flights of steps. “We have someone on the inside who recently spoke to Simmons. Her intake on the situation is that Simmons is in love with Garrett.”

The silence spread and spread until it was thankfully broken.

“I think I’m gonna hurl,” offered Hunter.

“Find a big bucket, as I’m feeling pretty queasy myself,” Mack agreed.

“Joining!” offered Izzie even while Fitz turned even paler.
“But… **GARRETT**…” Skye protested. “John Garrett!”

“Cyborg!” added Lance Hunter. “I’m pretty sure what value added part he requested.”

Hunter realized that Mike Peterson was less than amused, so he added, “Sorry, mate. Least you’re on our side, but you can smell the crazy on him.”

Phil Coulson waited for the children to stop squabbling, and then continued.

“We believe her to have been inculcated,” Coulson explained. “Perhaps physical intimacy with Garrett was part of her instructions.”

“They’re **MARRIED**. AC. MARRIED. She’s carrying the **TURTLE NECK WEARING SEED OF CHUCKY**,” protested Skye. “Do you really think she agreed to that?”

Coulson, not having much time for horror movies as he had been busy saving the world from Tony Stark for the last decade, looked sideways for Melinda May and her accustomed support. However, she had left on the mission to rescue Simmons, which meant he’d have to Google Chucky later.

“Garrett can be quite… **charming**… when necessary,” inserted Felix. With a grimace, he added in a very soft tone, “Earnest and heartfelt, in fact.”

“We have to get her free of **him**.” Skye insisted. Her fury was outwardly controlled though Felix Blake noted that the hanging lamps were swinging.

“We are working towards that goal,” Coulson stated. “However, you will not be. The walls are shaking, Skye.”

Jim and Mary Bowman, two recent retirees, madly in love with each other, and quite happy in their new (used) plane were about to set off on their new adventure. In their new (used) plane. Until they were surrounded by serious looking people who wore a great deal of black and all of the spooks had guns that were pointed at them. Jim, bravely, took two steps so he stood in front of Mary.

There was a small woman with dark hair who took one look at both of the Bowmans and grimaced. “Put the guns down,” she ordered. “We’d like to search your plane, please.”

“Go right ahead,” Jim offered. “We have nothing to worry about.”

His wife sighed at Jim’s hopeless yet rather sweet naïveté, and shook her head. “Actually, Jim, I have to confess. The drugs are in my pocketbook,” offered Mary. “Arrest me, not him, please.”

The petite through rather fearsome woman looked at them and stated, “Drugs?”

“We have a little weed,” Mary admitted. “We’re from Colorado and it’s permitted for medicinal purposes. It’s not recreational! I’m assuming you’re here as I forgot to remove it before we flew here? I have my medical marijuana card. It helps with the chronic pain.”

Jemma had enough time to change from her wedding dress into a flowing skater dress. John
appreciated the dress change. Since he was the one driving, he required entertainment. He hiked up her skirt and slid his hand up her leg.

“Seriously?” she asked as he placed his hand just so.

“We’ve got a four hour drive ahead of us, so I want you to take a nice, long nap, so you’re rested for our honeymoon,” he explained. For added incentive, he added his best bad boy smile which caused her to blush.

“You think I’ll fall for your grin?” she asked. She quivered for just a moment and then slowly exhaled. “Your hand, yes, but I don’t trust that smile.”

“I find you rather… coy,” he teased. For a brief moment, something stirred within him, and he remembered… he remembered... He stopped that train of thought, as it had long left the station. Instead, he began to carefully and deliberately stroke her, while keeping his eyes on the lonely road ahead of them.

Well, most of the time.

Sometime later.

“You ok?” Jemma sleepily questioned.

“As long as I have you two, I’ll be just fine,” he assured her.

“I’m worried; lately you look exhausted,” Jemma confessed.

He was. His parts were failing, and each day the painful condition known as living exhausted him to his very core, but he knew that he had to persevere in order to keep Jemma and the baby safe.

“Well, my fiancée is a sexy super model,” he explained. “I need to keep her sexually satisfied.”

“I took some of the GH.325 serum,” blurted Jemma. “I’ve modified it, will you let me give it to you? Please? If anything happens to you… I don’t know what I’ll do.”

“Yes,” he assured her. “You can inject me with it.”
Chapter 6

When they arrived at the cabin, John insisted on carrying Jemma over the threshold. She protested that he’d throw his back out, he laughed and then he deliberately placed her on the couch. He sat down… ok… collapsed… next to her and smiled even as he pulled out a box from his jacket.

“For you,” he explained.

Jemma’s smile faded as she hesitantly took the package.

“Come on, open it,” he requested. “Traditionally a groom buys his wife a gift on their wedding day.”

“I didn’t get you anything,” she softly protested. Really, the syringe of GH.325 couldn’t be considered a gift. It was a lifeline, the only chance John had to see their child being born because he was physically failing. Yes, he tried to hide it with a snarky comment or three, impossible tales of derring-do, but at night, she’d listen to him breathe, fearing that moment when … he passed… leaving her alone…. among HYDRA.

And John was HYDRA, but John would keep her safe; though she had witnessed the dark side of John… and… yet he was so careful with her…. the conflicting thoughts made her confused and unbalanced. He seemed to know when she was shaky, as he’d appear as if he had been summoned and he would stabilize her. Like now, when he placed his arm around her and stroked her hair, her anxiety eased enough so she could just breathe and not concentrate on breathing.

“Open it!” John insisted.

Jemma hesitantly opened it as she could just imagine what he’d gift her with and then she looked at John. His gift was… unexpected…. It was an intricate silver choker but that wasn’t what had surprised her. It was the meaning behind the pattern.

“These are… amino acids,” she slowly stated.

“And…,” John prompted. He seemed delighted by her confusion as though he was proud of himself for confounding her. Knowing the bastard, he was.

“It spells out, ‘I am starstuff’,” she whispered.

“As Carl Sagan stated, the nitrogen in our DNA, the calcium in our teeth, the iron in our blood, the carbon in our apple pies were made in the interiors of collapsing stars. We are made of starstuff. Our son is most assuredly made of star stuff,” John stated as he placed his hand on her distended belly.

“Starstuff Simmons Garrett,” Jemma tearfully stated as her hormones were unexpectedly running amuck, the little bastards were running with scissors, no less. “Not calling him that.”

He leaned toward her and he carefully wiped away her tears with his fingers.

“Why the tears? Did you just realize what an ugly fuck you just married?” John softly asked. “Are you having regrets?”

She cried harder even while John kept asking her what the problem was.
John insisted on making love as husband and wife after she had stopped crying. Perhaps *insisted* was the wrong word, as he didn’t force or compel her, but instead when she worried about his physical reserves, he was determined to prove her fears needless by being sweet and attentive. His bullheadedness meant in the afterglow, when they should be cuddling, she was listening to him breathe and worrying about what would happen to her…. If anything should happened to him. (Oh God, no. Bakshi and Raina…. And… WARD…. Oh God, WARD…. WARD…. WARD….)

“Hey, Brains,” he whispered. “Shouldn’t you be sleeping? I was trying to wear you out so you’d get some sleep. Starstuff needs you to sleep.”

She brushed her hand against his face, tried not to recoil as he was grey and clammy…. Cardiac clammy….

“I was thinking I should inject you with the GH325 tonight,” Jemma stated.

“Might be a good idea,” he admitted. “You done wore me out, Brains.”

“You shouldn’t have…” she protested. Her voice shook as she reached for the vial.

“Come on, Brains. A woman like you gets married…. What at most…. Three, four times in your lifetime? Wanted your wedding night with me to be really memorable, so your other wedding nights would pale in comparison.”

John struggled to laugh, failed to catch his breath and then closed his eyes.

Her hands shook even as she somehow managed to locate a vein. It was a big, juicy vein, and she tourniqueted his arm. She didn’t even bother to swab his arm with alcohol, instead she just aimed, hit her target and injected. The modified GH325 was thick, so it was a slow push.

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He was floating…. Floating…. Peacefully when he felt the fire of creation burning his arm…. Running up his arm through his body…. Hitting his heart with power of a QuinJet engine… he gasped…. As he saw….Creation…. the moments before the Big Bang when there was Nothingness yet Everything…. Stars being born…. Dying in a fiery cataclysm…. Countless worlds created…. destroyed…. Races…. DNA Helixes burned into his retinas…

Chitauri…..

Kree…..

Human…..

Merged…. Fused… into one child…. their son…..

Raina’s dark eyes…. Her thirst for…. Humanity *evolving*….

Their son….. *RAIN*….. Christ he had to protect Simmons… their son….

Their daughter…. Who’d would be born with Simmons’ mitochondria DNA…. even if he was dead…. There would be a daughter…. Thanks to Raina….

His heart faltered, stopped… even as he heard Jemma pleading with him not to die, not to leave her and their son alone…. even as…
He died.

Jemma Simmons took her delicate hand and aimed. She struck John’s chest with the ulnar aspect of her first, HARD, and he gasped even as his body arched. He inhaled, then exhaled as he collapsed on the bed.

“I think you just broke my sternum,” he wheezed. “But let me see your hand. I’m sure you bruised it.”

He sat up, even while Jemma protested. Being John, he ignored her protestations to focus on her hand. He palpitated it, make her squeeze his hand and he moved it through a series of motions, and then he nodded his head.

“Ice it,” he requested. “I think you bruised it.”

“You need to go a hospital,” she protested.

“I only trust you to take care of me,” he explained. “Not Flowers, not Posh Boy….”

“Ward?” Jemma nervously asked.

He pondered that thought, but only briefly. Ward was driven by his emotions, not seeing the big picture (see Skye, Infatuation). He’d be no match for Flowers and Posh Boy.

“Never,” John insisted. He rolled towards her and kissed her on her cheek. He moved up to her ear and made as though he was kissing it. Instead, he whispered an email address, “Anything happens to me, and I’m not around to keep you safe, you contact that email and send this message. Coy Boy, Oh you exquisite little tart. Then add your coordinates and tell him that I’m dead.”

She stiffened even as he kissed her several times. “I really fucked him over, but he’ll help you. I know he will. Don’t trust anyone at work, trust him. I’ll review my Safe houses with you - not even Ward knows about them.”

“Your contact will help me even after quoting Tipping the Velvet athim?” Jemma asked. “Isn’t that a historic romance about a male impersonator?”

“Yes, we had a long wait for extrication one time and that was the only book,” John softly admitted.

“He’s SHIELD?” Jemma protested.

“I doubt it, now after it collapsed. However, he’s better man than I am. Now go to sleep, Mamacita.”

“You should…” Jemma protested.

“No, I feel better than I have in years,” he softly informed her. “Decades, and it’s all due to the both of you.”

Phil Coulson took May’s phone call, listened and then thanked her for her call. He disconnected and Blake tilted his head before he dryly stated, “I know that look. No Simmons? What did you reel in?”
“A pair of senior citizens who like smoking weeding for medicinal purposes,” he admitted. “So fake report was filed to see what we’d send.”

“We fell for it,” Felix sighed. “Damn, I’m getting old.”

Felix sat down and didn’t say more, which was a bad sign. Meant that he was in a hell of a lot of pain, as his usual complaints were white noise, to distract those observing him.

“No, we didn’t fall for it. I knew the odds but hoped Simmons could be extricated,” Phil admitted.

Felix said nothing but Phil heard what he didn’t voice which was "Yes, she probably wouldn’t have appreciated it. She’s been brain washed and she’s pregnant with Chucky’s baby. I hope for her sake that the brain washing is absolute. I’d hate to think that somewhere down deep she’s screaming for help and we can’t get her out. I’m not giving up on getting her out, but…”

Coulson nodded his head in agreement.

“For what it’s worth…. Garrett does care a great deal for her. His body language at the wedding,” Felix hesitantly offered. “He’s taken on the role of her protector.”

“I need to get her out and deprogrammed,” Coulson insisted.

“And what happens to the baby if Simmons decides she doesn’t want a physical reminder of John Garrett? What happens if you extricate her and she’s got four months left of being pregnant with Garrett’s baby? Have you got Gardner on retainer?” Felix asked. “If you can’t afford to fix the elevator, you can’t afford Gardner’s consulting costs.”

“I’ll start having a weekly bake sale,” Phil informed Felix. “What are you gonna bring?”

“I don’t bake. I buy. Sign me up for a dozen of Hartley’s tiramisu cupcakes,” requested Felix. “I’ll give half of them to Peterson.”
Chapter 7

Jemma found her GH325 enhanced honeymoon to be blissful, but utterly exhausting. The GH325 worked well, perhaps too well, as John was keen and eager… like a hormonal fifteen year old boy. While she appreciated his carnal interest as she was currently feeling awkward and uncomfortable and… appearing distinctly unsexy, her husband was a bit too exuberantly ardent. She was just about to toddle off to bed for some much needed rest when John bequeathed her a slanted grin.

Oh no, she knew that grin. Its appearance predicted that she’d be in bed and carnally worshipped in the near future.

And while normally she would have raced (waddled) him to the bed or any available flat surface, she was …. KNACKERED.

“You finally look pregnant,” he murmured. He then stood behind her and wrapped his hands around her belly. “The belly is in the house.”

“I didn’t look before?” She protested.

“You were hiding it. Now it’s obvious, you’re pregnant.” He kissed her neck even while he rubbed her belly. “Very sexy, very pregnant, and all mine for the loving.”

Typically she would have been thrilled by John’s desire, not now. Now, she yearned for that oh so elusive temptress - SLUMBER.

He kissed her a few more times then he ceased kissing her when she failed to respond.

“What’s going on in that overclocked mind of yours? Tell me,” he softly requested as he gently turned her around to face him. With a gentleness that still surprised her, he placed his fingers under her chin, and lifted it so she would look at him. “Brains, talk to me.”

“I’m exhausted,” she softly admitted. “Flattered but absolutely knackered, John. Can you put your new toy away for a few hours?”

The bastard smiled; no doubt because he was proud of himself. His conceit earned him a poke in the ribs.

“What?” she asked.

“Does this mean I can get eight hours of shuteye?” Garrett questioned. “I’m exhausted, Brains. It’s grueling keeping you sexually satisfied. As your adoring husband, I’m delighted to do it, but, Brains… I have to confess, I’m in dire need of a nice long nap.”

“You’re tired?” Jemma repeated.

“Brains, as much as today was magnificent, I think seven times is my limit. I’m not sixteen anymore,” he explained. “It’s just since today’s our first full day being married I thought I should keep you in a state of carnal bliss so you’d know… that I really love you. Plus find you erotic as all get out, especially now.”

A pop of his eyebrow, a shit-eating grin and a shrug of his shoulders.

“It’s not just because we’re having a baby together,” he softly informed her. “I really do care for you.
Never ever doubt that. Sometimes, you make me wish…”

Garrett stopped and shook his head.

“I make you wish what?” Jemma asked. She put her hand on her distended belly which seemed to have grown substantially since they were married. Or maybe it was the lingerie which accented her bump.

“I wish that I had taken a sharp left at one time, instead of the right. Things… would be different,” he softly confessed. “However, you never would have looked at me. Certainly, we wouldn’t be like this. However, in the here and now, you look exhausted, Brains. Why didn’t you tell me that I was being too exuberant?”

Because when John was loving her, he kept her churning thoughts away.

Jemma softly admitted, “I like it when we’re close. I feel safe when I am with you. Since… since everything happened, after Ward… after… I am always afraid… except when I’m with you….”

She began uncontrollably trembling, as she remembered… her friends dying… GARRET… HYDRA…. Ward…. Ward… Jemma Simmons fiercely loved her unborn child, but… HYDRA…. JOHN GARRETT…. Her heart was pounding so fast… so fast… Her imaginary though still suit clad Sunil Bakshi began imploring her to “Breathe in…. breathe out….”

Sometimes, she believed that there was another screaming Jemma Simmons deep inside of her, who was screaming and wailing in futile protest. Sometimes, she deeply feared that Jemma Simmons, gaining control, because how would that Jemma react to the baby?

“You’re breathing too fast,” a very concerned John remarked. “Did you bring the CDs?”

Jemma shook her head.

He held out his hand. “Come on, time for bed. Let’s get you comfortable and work on slow, deep breaths. For now, remember the 5.2.5.rule; inhale for five, hold for two, and exhale for five. Inhale…. Slowly…. ”

John Garrett positioned her carefully on the bed, and then sat next to her. Her breathing was racketing up and she just couldn’t catch her breath.

“I can’t breathe,” she said. “Though if I can talk, I can breathe.”

“Shhh…” John whispered. “Listen to me… inhale…..through your nose….one….two….three… four…five…. hold…. One….two….. now slow exhale……one….two….three….four….five…..”

Jemma just focused on breathing and after a few minutes, her heart no longer felt as though it was about to escape from her chest.

“Better?” John asked.

“Yes,” she whispered.

“Good, now close your eyes, and I want you to listen to me,” John suggested. His voice was soft and loving as he walked her through a mental relaxation exercise. Her tense muscles relaxed and she felt as though she was close to sleep… and then she was. She slept soundly for hours, and she dreamt of
a little boy with dark brown hair with startling blue eyes who intently stared at her from the edge of her bed. The little boy looked exactly like a very young Garrett except for his serious mien. In all of recorded history, John had never ever been that serious.

The little boy looked very… sad…, not serious…. but sad, she realized… and scared. As though he was convinced that his Mum didn’t love him.

She held out her arms. ‘Come here,’ she whispered. ‘Mummy loves you so much. Mummy does, she really, really does.’

He just looked at her, refusing to come closer.

‘Come to Mum,’ repeated Jemma.

He carefully crawled into bed and she cuddled him close to her. ‘I love you, Sean. I truly do.’

She was rewarded with a shy smile from the little boy.

‘I can’t wait to meet you,’ she whispered.

When she woke, Jemma was disorientated, as for a moment, she thought her dream had been real. Then the aching, painful reality returned, nineteen more weeks of appearing less than svelte with assorted body aches. John was sitting next to her in their bed and he was intently reading a rather thick book. When he realized that she was awake, he closed the book, leaned over and buzzed her on her head. Then John helped her into a comfortable sitting position, for which she was quite grateful as she was as graceful as a stoned sloth.

“Morning,” he greeted her. “Should I say, afternoon? I think you slept very well.”

“I had the oddest dream,” Jemma admitted. “There was a little boy and… Sean looked as though he could be our son.”

“Sean?” John asked.

“He looked like a Sean,” she admitted. “I know we haven’t really talked names, but…”

“Sean is a good name,” John easily agreed. “Did Sean give you a middle name?”

“No. But he smiled at me,” she gushed. She placed her hands on her expanded equator and gently pressed. Sean responded back by wiggling. In response, she deeply concentrated on how much she loved Sean and then fiercely warned that other Jemma, the protesting, annoying Jemma to shut the hell up as she was scaring Sean.

As Felix anticipated, the kids weren’t happy when they realized that Simmons had not been rescued and instead they had captured two dope smoking seniors. The kids were vocal, they were strident, and they were most assuredly insubordinate. Finally he had enough, as really, Coulson was The Director. For better or for worst, GOD HELP THEM ALL, Coulson was the Man in Charge.

“Enough!” Felix growled. He put all his physical comfort into the growl, so he was surprised when
Hunter didn’t pee on the floor like a badly trained Pug.

The children ceased their squabbling and Felix gave the brats his best don’t you think of fucking with me glare. They settled down except for the agent that he had nicknamed Shakes. Shakes, believing herself unique and protected in her role of Coulson’s Special Snowflake, was about to lead the children in rebelling against their bedtime when Izzie stepped in.

“My apologies, Director. We all think the world of Simmons and we’re worried. Quite worried about her.”

The Director and his personal gadfly then left the room.

“Thank you, Agent Blake,” Coulson stated. “Your support in there was appreciated… and surprising.”

“Fury would have slapped them down, HARD,” was all Blake said. However his unspoken disapproval was loud and clear.

“I’ll take that under advisement, Director,” Coulson murmured.

“You hired me because you wanted me to keep your ego under control; I wasn’t hired to stroke your ego or anything else,” Felix reminded his former subordinate. “I was willing to retire someplace flat with no steps.”

“I’ll get the elevator fixed,” Phil promised.

Felix just rolled his eyes.

The months passed while Jemma focused on her new life. There were monotonous days at work (which was ridiculous as she could still science, even with child!), and nights with John, unnerving obstetrician visits where Raina was omnipresent and the occasional lunches with Barbara, who had rapidly become a much needed friend and sounding board.

Well, truth be told, Jemma had exactly two friends. John and Barbara.

Certainly Grant Ward was not considered a friend even though he was John’s protégé. No how, no way, not after killing Fitz. He made her uneasy the way he smirked at her increasing awkwardness as though her pregnancy was a source of extreme amusement for him. There was a thousand small jarring observations about his odd behavior combined with his unnerving relationship with Kara, Jemma avoided him as much as possible. Seriously, was Kara brainwashed? She must be; the way she clung to Ward and every single word he said? The nauseating way she called him ‘Baby’?

He was a mad dog, and she feared being alone with Ward.

Thank God, she was married to Garrett. They had a real connection.

Kara, his soul mate, the love of his life, was dead. He had shot her three times in the chest because that bitch Melinda May had tricked him, forced his hand. Really, bedding May had been a chore…
Grant Ward was in a dark, murderous rage as he drove toward his unsuspecting victim.

“You were played,” Garrett had informed Grant when he reached out for sympathy from the man he viewed as his father. “You were weak and you were stupid. You completely underestimated Melinda May because you’re an idiot. I wasted my time on you as you constantly make excuses for your fuck ups. Blaming May for Kara’s death? I’m sorry about Kara. I am, because she deserved a better boyfriend than you. Fuck, even Posh Boy would have been better for Kara, he wouldn’t have filled her full of lead. I figured the way you went on and on about how hot the sex was, I figured you had a safe word.”

Garrett had leaned back in his chair before he had delivered the final verbal blow. “Thank God, my son won’t be as pathetic as you are.”

Well John, wouldn’t it be **heartbreaking** … when you came home to your knocked up Simmons and discovered that she was the victim of a robbery gone horribly, horribly wrong.

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Jemma Simmons was reading a magazine when she realized that she wasn’t alone. Grant Ward was in her house and he appeared to be in a daze.

“Well, look at you, Simmons. Quite knocked up, aren’t you?” he asked. He snapped his wrist and Jemma saw he was holding a wicked long knife. “Must be quite tired of being pregnant by now. Let me help you with that.”
Jemma Simmons was face to knife with a seemingly deranged Grant Ward.

“Kara’s dead,” Grant informed her. His voice was dead and his eyes were …. Blank…. As though his humanity had been switched off.

“I’m very sorry to hear that,” Jemma stated. She struggled to keep her fear from her voice, instead offering what she prayed was a sympathetic tone. “I know how much you love her.”

“May killed her,” Grant explained. “All I could do… was hold her…. while her lungs … filled up …. with blood.”

His knife was placed between her full breasts. The knife’s location distracted her from focusing on the fact that Melinda May was alive.

“Garrett told me it was my fault, because I didn’t love her enough to keep her safe,” he explained. His voice was quite soft and introspective. He pressed down on the knife, and she felt the pinprick of the knife tip against her skin, heard the rip of her silk shirt. “Seems that he has the same problem. He doesn’t care enough about you and the brat to keep you safe from harm. Well, what can I say, but I am the man that I am because of Jonathan Garrett.”

Ward smiled, a smile devoid of humanity, and Jemma warned herself not to panic.

“I know how much you love her.” Jemma offered that warily.

“She choked to death on her own blood,” Ward repeated. “That BITCH … killed her.”

“How did you two meet?” Jemma asked. “You never told me but I saw how you connected. I witnessed how she looked at you. She loved you, Ward.”

Yes, keep Ward talking in the hopes of not dying. She had triggered the panic alarm, so please… John… PLEASE…. Would be here soon. In time to save Sean… please… JOHN.

However, she saw her chance, and grabbed it.

After his conversation with Ward, John had decided to play hooky from HYDRA for the afternoon. He was a block away from the house as he had taken a shortcut which avoided the school buses, when his cell phone vibrated in a distinct pattern. Jemma had hit the panic alarm, and he gunned the motor. When he arrived, he clicked on the surveillance monitors, watched the feed long enough to get the lay of the land, saw how terrified Jemma was and he made his plan.

Ward was cocky, convinced of his superiority when faced with someone he viewed as weak. Jemma may not be as physically strong as Ward, but she was far smarter than Ward and easily underestimated by those that thought Brawn meant Power. She moved, the knife slipped and she managed to break a bottle of hot sauce against his face. Ward bellowed, as no doubt broken glass and hot sauce were a painful combination.

It gave John time to act, so he pulled Ward away from Jemma and ferociously attacked. Damn it, it had to be a hand to hand fight, as it was too risky for him to shoot Ward. What if Jemma got hurt by
mistake, he’d never forgive himself. However, he was too old to go mano y mano with Ward for long.

John arrived and he berserked. A horrified Jemma watched as John began punching Ward. It was a brutal ugly fight as Ward was younger and stronger of the two combatants, plus armed with a knife, but John was crazed. However, it was for naught, as Ward stabbed John.

It was a sickening sound.

Ward continued to pound on an incapacitated Garrett, and had seemingly forgotten about Jemma. It gave her a moment, to escape but instead she found the Kimber that John had given her and returned back. Garrett was lying on his side and Grant was kicking him. “This is for Kara, I… loved…. her….” His declaration of love was punctuated by savage kicks to John’s chest.

“Step away from John, or I’ll shoot,” Jemma stated.

Grant turned to face Simmons, content that John Garrett was down for the count.

“Simmons?” he softly queried as though disbelieving that Jemma Simmons was ACTUALLY pointing a gun at him. “You really have changed, Simmons. I’m disappointed in you. I mean, fucking Garrett? And apparently enjoying it enough so you’re spawning?”

Yes, it appeared that Ward had conveniently forgotten that he had tried to kill her, and was placing the blame on her.

“Step away from John, or I’ll shoot,” she repeated. Her hands were shaking, but she knew that this was her only chance to save her family. She was artificially calm, but she knew that she had to protect the baby at all cost.

“Simmons,” Ward repeated even as he shook his head in fatherly disapproval. He took a step towards her and then instinct took over. Shots…. shots… rang out even as Ward fell to the floor. She remembered not to drop the gun… because Ward was alive, moaning piteously, but he was alive.

“Good job… Brains….” John mumbled. “Distracted him so…. I could get the shot… couldn’t risk… shot… near you…. Better call an ambulance… not getting up.”

His color was ashen and he was taking in only short pants of breath.

“Remember what… we discussed,” he breathed into her ear.

“Don’t leave us,” she pleaded. “You’re the only one I trust.”

John mouthed, “Coy boy.”

“I know, I know.”

Barbara Morse, Fierce Valkyrie, arrived at the house, along with Sunil Bakshi. Also in tow was Raina. Barbara let the medics take care of John while she focused on Jemma. She was a calm,
reassuring presence for Jemma, as she was familiar to her Jemma to their many lunches.

“You’re getting checked out,” she informed Jemma. “Don’t worry about John, you need to focus on you and the kid.”

“I’m fine,” stated Jemma.

“Jemma, you’re bleeding. Once the adrenaline wears off…” Barbara began before she was interrupted.

“Dr. Simmons, I will personally oversee Grant Ward,” Sunil Bakshi assured Jemma. “He will never bother you again. And yes, Morse is quite correct. You and your child must receive medical attention, as I will never hear the end of it from Garrett if you don’t get seen.”

Bright, shark smile.

“Come now, I’m sure Raina will roll out her new sonogram machine. She promises me that the picture is almost as clear as if you were holding the baby in your arms. Come now, Sean needs to be seen. I know you only want the best for Sean.”

Her fear of Raina almost paralyzed her into refusing aid. However, she knew that she had to take care of Sean, so… so… she knew what she must do. However, her unease was apparent to Barbara as she came to her rescue.

“I’ll come with you?” offered Barbara.

The knife wound was fortunately more of a shallow scrape as he had been thwarted by her underwire bra. (God, she’d never complain about them again as it had deflected the blade into a safer angle.) There was a bruise or three and then her adrenaline stopped flowing. She began to shake, uncontrollably, and Barbara sat next to her hospital bed and attempted to soothe her.

“They placed a chest tube in Garrett and his color’s better. He’s breathing easier. Ward knicked his lung,” Bobbi explained to her. “As for Ward, he got shot twice, plus Whitehall is involved. You won’t have to worry about him. Now, slow down your breathing as you’re breathing too fast. I don’t want you passing out, as Garrett would barge in here to make sure you’re ok. The only reason he’s not in here now is because I promised him that I keep an eye on you. Plus, they restrained him.”

“You know John?” Jemma asked.

“Used to work at The Firm,” she explained which is what HYDRA Agents drolly called SHIELD. “Had a few assignments together, didn’t realize we were both the same until we met here. I promised him that if you got released tonight I’d make sure you had a safe place to crash.”

“I’ll need my body pillow,” murmured Jemma. As much as she didn’t want to return back to her home, she would need to do so. She would need clothes, her medications… her burner cell that John had given her.

“Give me a list, and I can pick up what you need.”

“I can’t ask you to rummage through my scanties,” Jemma protested. “I’ll need to pick up what I need.”
“Scanties?”

“If I told you I’d needed pants, you’d bring me trousers. You Yanks have butchered the Queen’s English.”

Barbara laughed, and then Raina appeared with the ultrasound tech.

“Stay?” Jemma whispered. “I don’t want to be alone with her.”

Slight nod was her answer.

“I’m here,” Barbara promised.

“And there he is,” Raina cooed. “He’s sleeping right now so hopefully we can actually measure him. He has a tendency of being difficult when we try to measure him.”

“Takes after his father?” Barbara quipped. “Though I never realized that John was a thumb sucker.” Jemma snorted.

Raina just ignored them. They measured, and measured again, and then she and the technician had a brief discussion.

“Is everything ok with Sean?” Jemma asked. From what she had viewed, Sean had appeared to be in tip-top shape.

“You’re both doing very well. He’s almost six pounds and roughly nineteen inches long. His heart rate is exactly where it needs to be and he doesn’t seem to have been affected by your ordeal. Your doctor agrees that you would probably rest better out of the hospital, so you can leave.”

“I need to see John first,” Jemma insisted. “And I’ll want a color print of that one picture so he can have it.”

“How’s the test patient?” Bakshi asked after Jemma had left the ultrasound room. He was intently examining the ultrasound pictures. As though he had any idea of what they truly represented, Raina mentally snorted. Sean Garrett was humanity evolving.

“I didn’t tell the incubator…” Raina began.

“Your envy of Jemma Simmons’ intelligence is noticeable and utterly tiresome,” Bakshi commented.

“That her baby is seven pounds four ounces and almost twenty one inches long. He’s the size of a full term baby. We’ll have to keep an eye on him in the upcoming weeks to confirm that he is still growing.”

“He’s the size of a normal human baby, not a Kree-Chitauri-Human hybrid,” Bakshi reminded her. “Whitehall is not impressed with the less than stellar results of your experiments. Your track record is poor, I don’t need to remind you that all the surrogates you had acquired died due to a systemic allergic reaction to the implanted fetuses? We were anticipating there would be more than one to determine the suitability of the generic splice for creating additional super soldiers. Dr. Simmons and
John Garrett will not let you experiment on their child willingly.”

Raina was about to make a snappy comment when Bakshi cut her down.

“Do not make the incorrect assumption that we are … lenient… when it comes to failure. Grant Ward would be able to tell you that, if he is still able to communicate by the time Whitehall is finished. Whitehall is quite displeased with Grant Ward.”

Bakshi never raised his voice, he kept his tone calm and mellow, as though he was discussing the weather. That made his threat even scarier to Raina.

“I’ll need the placenta and stem cells when the Hybrid is born.”

Bakshi tilted his head and smirked. “Whitehall will decide if you will be the recipient. Others have made the same request. Others… whose experimentations have not been such complete… miscarriages.”

And Raina knew true fear.

“Hey, Brains,” John whispered when she arrived at his bedsides. His color was much improved and his hand was strong when he squeezed her hand.

“Don’t talk,” Jemma protested. “You need your rest. We’re both fine. I had a checkup and he was sleeping. I think he slept through all the excitement. I have a picture of him for you.”

Garrett smiled when Jemma showed him the picture and explained about Sean’s checkup.

“Where are you staying tonight?” John asked.

“Barbara Morse is putting me up at her apartment.”

“Bobbi?” John murmured in honest surprise. “I didn’t realize Barbara was Bobbi.”

“Do you trust her?” Jemma nervously asked.

John turned to face her and puckered his lips. She reached over so it would appear to those watching that he was kissing her, but in actuality, he was whispering.

“Not completely. I thought she was a true and true to old regime. She’ll keep you safe though, and she hasn’t done anything to bring her loyalty into question.”

He leaned back into his hospital bed.

“Yes, I trust Barbara. However Brains, I want to sell the house. I don’t want you living there.”

“I was happy there,” Jemma protested. She had been, as she had felt safe and secure…. For the first time in far too long and Ward had destroyed that.

“I was also. But new place, new memories,” John informed her. “Now go, get some sleep.”
It took time, far too much time and energy to pack up a few necessities and return back to Bobbi’s small apartment. However there was a second bed, and it was big enough for her, Sean and her body pillow.

She was completely exhausted, overwhelmed by Grant Ward and… John… and… it had been so difficult to actually step foot into the house that she had been happy… until tonight… or yesterday, as it’s that late as she’s exhausted. She had steeled her nerves to actually walk into the kitchen, but Bakshi has been busy. The floors have been stripped and polished to remove the blood. There was new paint on the walls and it’s almost as though the last few horrible hours have never occurred.

But they had. New paint and spackling would not cause her to forget John Garrett slumped against the floor, a knife embedded in his chest.

It’s only when she was safe…’safe’… in Bobbi’s spare bedroom that she permitted herself to cry. To mourn, to grieve all that she has lost (FITZ! SKYE!) and came close to losing (John, Sean)

When at last she was completely cored, she turned on the burner cell. John promised her that the encryption was unbreakable, her email secure, that no one would be able to track it and that it was safe to use. It took her a few minutes as her hands were that unsteady, but she typed out an email.

“Coy Boy, Oh you exquisite little tart,” and SEND.

She felt better, because she had reached out to someone that Garrett trusts will do the right thing. She’s not leaving John, but she wanted an escape just in case. (Ward!) Jemma decided that she’ll check the phone in the morning, as she doubted that Coy Boy, whomever he might be, was actually up at three am. However, Sean was resting on her bladder, so she had to manage that. When she returned back to her bed, there was a flashing light on the burner cell.

The infamous Coy Boy has responded, it seemed. She wondered about Coy Boy and his relationship with John Garrett even as she opened her email.

SRSLY, Garrett, you are an evil fuck. What is this? A drunken Booty Call? After what you did to me? Fuck off, asshole. See you in hell first.

John hadn’t lied that Coy Boy wouldn’t be thrilled to hear from him.

No, this isn’t Garrett. He gave me your contact info just in case I needed help. He said you’d help me. I’m sorry to bother you.

The walls were closing in on her, as there’s only John she can trust, and he’s injured. Sean picked up her unease, and she couldn’t fall asleep due to his kicking.

The phone begins to flash which meant Coy Boy had emailed her back.

If this is who I think this is, I will help. Only Garrett had this email, that's why I thought it was him. What can I do? Are you in need of immediate assistance?

Nothing for now. I just needed reassurance that you were actually willing to help me. Things are crazy right now, I’m scared.

I will do whatever I can for you. Promise. Keep in contact else I’ll worry. BE CAREFUL. I cannot STRESS that enough. Don’t tell anyone EVEN HIM that you’ve reached out to me.
Felix Blake rolled over in his bed and slowly exhaled. It was an achy night, and his ribcage had been hurting something fierce, so he had been awake when Simmons had emailed him. Though it could have been Garrett, as he was a sick fuck like that, but the person could spell and type, so it couldn’t be John. He had been the recipient of John’s emails so Blake knew that they looked like a third grader had typed them. Well, forget that, as most third graders could type better than Garrett.

“Coy Boy? I guess it’s a good thing that I never closed out that email account. Forgot I even had it,” he murmured.

His lover sighed. “ Seriously, you’re awake? Put the tablet down and get some sleep. My boss is a cranky bastard if I’m late to work.”

“Sorry, Mike,” Felix Blake softly apologized. “I need to call Coulson.”

“Should I leave the room?” Mike Peterson asked.

“With your cybernetic enhancements, you’ll still hear the conversation. Just don’t make any noise when I call him,” Felix requested. He dialed a number, waited and then began, “Yes. I know what time it is. I think I just heard from Simmons. Whomever it was, they reached out to me, as something has happened in Hydraville and they’re scared.”
After the ‘incident’, Jemma felt trapped as she was escorted by one of Bahski’s people everywhere (including the ladies’ room). Her only ‘alone’ time was when she crashed into her bed at Bobbi’s apartment (And she half expected that Bobbi would come barging in to keep an eye on her). It was a Friday afternoon and she had played hooky from work pleading physical exhaustion. In actuality, it was so she could have some private time. Jemma, after confirming that she was alone, reached for her phone as it was long past time to check in. She vowed to keep their conversation short so not to risk being discovered. As she began to text, she doubted Coy Boy understood how much their correspondence helped her during her darkest days.

Felix Blake was in a high level meeting at SHIELD. His phone sounded and he answered it, much to the amazement of everyone in the room as Phil Coulson blithely continued the meeting. Blake began texting, a two finger method that made Skye cringe.

_Hey Coy Boy. You there? I’m scared._

_Always here._

_Just needed reassurance._

_I understand. Remember, I am always here for you. Mouth still in hospital?_  

_They’ll get tired of his stories soon and kick him out. How’s Sean?_  

_Getting bigger. No sign of vacating. Thanks. Have to go. Naptime._

_Take care. You need me to get you out, I will._

_If anything happens to him… yes… he’s the only one I trust._

_I understand._

_I do trust you, as he said I can trust you. But I don’t even know who you are._

_I’m a friend. That’s sufficient for now._

Blake put away his phone and nodded once in answer to Coulson’s unasked question. The meeting concluded shortly afterwards, so Blake and Peterson walked back to his office.

“So, seeing Ace this weekend?” Blake asked.

Mike nodded his head.

“Glad that you are, it’s obvious that you miss him,” was Blake’s response. “Stop by my apartment, and I picked up something. It’s a little too advanced for my grandson, but I think it’s good for a kid of Ace’s age. Matt’s too young for it.”

It was a white lie.

Blake was persona non grata in reference to his family after the implosion of his marriage to Martha.
(Thanks, Garrett, cock tease, though he had to credit himself for waking up and realizing that his sexuality was questioning itself and noticing that boys were just as enticing as girls). Hadn’t ever met his grandson or his granddaughter even though he snuck into the big events in his family’s life and had even suffered through various school musical concerts. (God, he nearly clocked that one parent who claimed that Felix’s granddaughter had been the one to squeak during We Wish You a Merry Christmas as it had been HIS kid.) Since he and Peterson had been mattress bouncing for the last six months, he had hoped one day to be introduced to Ace, not as his father’s boyfriend or fuck buddy, but… perhaps… friend… but… Mike wasn’t interested.

Mike believed that nobody knew about the two of them and their ‘understanding’ and he’d much prefer to keep it that way. Unfortunately, Phil Coulson was aware and keeping a close eye on the situation for his own nefarious purposes. The first morning after, Felix had dutifully informed Coulson of the reason why as he had requested to be removed as Mike’s handler. Too much conflict of interest, too much looming awkwardness as it had been years… since a few frantic tumbles with other similarly repressed souls. That the night before had been a huge fucking mistake was left unvoiced.

Coulson had just blinked at him. Coulson’s plaintive wondering what he had done to Nick Fury so Fury had promoted him before scampering off to parts unknown painfully obvious, before he tartly informed Felix that Mike Peterson had requested Felix as his handler. That had been news to Felix, as he thought he had put in the request in to Mike’s handler because he thought Mike deserved a chance. Seriously, why would anyone request Felix Blake as their handler?

While Felix has been digesting that news, Director Coulson then assured Felix that he would discuss transitioning Mike to another handler. Nevertheless, it was Mike’s decision and Felix had to respect his judgement.

And Mike had refused to transition to another handler. Phil, being such a great boss, charitably decided that he’d let it slide unless someone else noticed or their personal relationship caused interference in their work relationship. Felix didn’t trust Phil when he was being generous, because he’d collect on the favor owed sooner or later and Felix would end up hurting. (See – Felix Blake, severe stomping, Deathlok).

Their relationship at work hadn’t changed, but outside of work, it had mellowed into … something nice… a warm companionship… they never talked about the fact that sex had been added to the equation, because they were men.

“How about my makeup?” Mike quipped. Felix had gotten quite deft at spackling and smoothing out the worst of Mike’s burns before he visited Ace.

“Of course,” Felix agreed. “It would be so much easier with a nano mask.”

“When the Director locates one, he says I have first dibs,” the heavily scarred agent assured him.

“Good,” lied Felix. Once Peterson had his pretty face again, he’d be less likely to hang out with an old man. Yet, it would be better for Mike, because Felix Blake sometimes bitterly regretted the loss of the PreJohn Garrett Felix Blake, his marriage…. His kids….. Mike was still young enough to grab life by the balls before it slipped away. He didn’t deserve to slip into his grandkids’ musical concerts and pray that his ex-wife didn’t recognize him. His two daughters and son had no idea what he looked like as Marsha had told him to get the fuck of their lives, him and his unresolved queerness when they were young. Marsha was pragmatic, she didn’t mind that the cash flowed in, as he dutifully paid child support every month until the kids were grown. However, she wanted him physically out of their lives as their kids hated him.
And if his gifts to Ace via Mike were blatant attempts to successfully give all the returned presents over the years, well, it was what it was. Didn’t need Andy Gardner to natter on and on about guilt. After the third year of returned Christmas, birthday and just because gifts, he had just added additional money to that month’s child support.

“I'll stop by later, bring some wings and the liquor,” Mike offered. “My boys are gonna smash yours.”

Felix nodded.

Coy Boy was quite correct, as John Garrett was quickly kicked out of his hospital bed by the staffers. The two of them moved into a small, cozy apartment and they spent a great deal time together before the imminent birth of Sean. It was good, the chance for closeness, as being physically next to John helped ease Jemma’s fears, the nightmares… as John was sweet and affectionate with her. As John was recuperating from his injuries, they weren’t able to make love, thank God, as she was feeling awkward and HUGE…. Instead, they spent a great deal of time talking and cuddling, and John’s… gentleness… almost made her forget how …. Crazed… John had been when he had attacked Ward. He was unbelievably soft spoken and reassuring when she confessed her dark fears about falling back into the depression that had caused her suicide attempt. He had kissed her before assuring her that he’d keep an eye on her and the baby.

In time, their son arrived, via C-section weighing thirteen pounds two ounces and some twenty three inches long. He was a marvel with the bluest eyes and a full head of hair, and Jemma was quite proud of her sprog. And to hell with those that said babies couldn’t smile were wrong, as a gleeful Sean smiled and yes... giggled... whenever she or John talked to him.

And she loved her big boy with all of her heart, and then some, because he was the greatest thing that had ever happened to her. The moments where John picked up Sean and kissed him, she thought her heart would explode from sheer joy.

“Bakshi assured me that compliance will be rewarded,” she thought during those moments of overwhelming happiness. “I have complied, and I have been rewarded.”

Felix Blake was lying on his left side in his bed when The Phone buzzed. It was an extremely high pain day for him, damp, cold, miserable weather which soaked into his aching bones. He reached for the phone, knocked it off the nightstand and he groaned. He cursed, bitched and butchered the English language while he reacquired the cell phone.

As he anticipated, it was from Jemma. He had been deeply concerned as he hadn’t heard from her in a while, but Bobbi had reported that Jemma had given birth. No doubt, she was focusing on the kid. However, two months of silence was unnerving, but he feared reaching out to her because undoubtedly Garrett was hovering.

There was a picture of what had to be a twelve month old baby, but it was captioned, Will you be my (secret) godfather? - Sean.

He couldn’t help himself. His response was instinctive.
Two months later

Raina wore a brightly flowered dress to her meeting with Bakshi. To her uneasy surprise, Whitehall had decided that he would be sitting in the meeting. It was all very urbane and cultured, as they were having tea as part of their meeting.

“Your recent report on how the utilization of the Hybrid’s stem cells combined with an infusion of the mother’s placenta cells is quite interesting,” Whitehall stated. “You truly believe that this will prevent the anaphylaxis from occurring in the surrogates?”

“Yes,” she stated. To calm her nerves, she then took long sip of the tea.

“Would you bet your life on it?” Whitehall questioned. His voice was strangely intense.

“I’m sure she would,” hissed Bakshi.

The cup fell from her suddenly immobile hands. Her vision was growing dark but she could still hear them talk.

“I believe we have a volunteer to be the first surrogate for the latest strain of Hybrids,” commented Bakshi.

“I do appreciate a scientist who volunteers to be a Guinea pig for their hypothesis. Such faith is reassuring though I never thought our Raina was maternal. Girl or Boy, Bakshi?” Whitehall murmured.

“Girl,” Bakshi decided. “If successful, the girl will be the mother of our super soldiers.”
Chapter 10

Jemma Simmons was a very proud Mum of one Sean Jonathan Garrett. However, even though she was exceedingly proud of her son as he was the smartest, cutest boy ever, he was... way above the growth chart. Even sitting unaided at three months, which filled her with a maternal pride. However when he was caught toddling along at four months panic, not pride, was her response. There was no humanly possible way he should be able to do walk at that young age.

And Sean giggled. Loudly. His joy sounded as though an angel laughed.

“You are your father’s son,” she informed her son.

He was still smiling, quite proud of his accomplishment, when he lost his balance and landed on his fortunately quite padded bum. Instead of crying or voicing some sort of protest, he just arched an eyebrow in surprise at the fickleness of gravity, looking so much like John Garrett that Jemma giggled.

Which caused Sean to again merrily chortle. He was such a happy baby, he never ever cried.

“Now, you’re only sixteen weeks and three days old, you shouldn’t be walking,” she informed Sean. Sean, being a contrary beast like his Da, managed to stand... under his own power... and he toddled over to her.

She held out her arms and he fell into her arms. She covered his face with kisses.

He tapped at his mouth and Jemma pretended a mock exasperation as she adjusted her shirt. “You are so your father’s son. Watch out for your teeth, love.”

“How does he take after me?” Garrett quipped as he walked into the room. He looked at Sean who was nursing and he laughed in approval. “Yeah, he’s a breast man like me.”

Garrett sat next to Jemma, carefully kissed her and then leaned back in the couch. “I heard a very interesting rumor today.”

“Which is?” Jemma asked.

“Flowers been... pollinated.”

“Sometimes your eagerness for allegories confounds me. Speak English,” Jemma protested.

“Raina’s pregnant. It’s gonna be hard for her to use her body when she’s nine months gone,” chortled John. “She always thought she was a sex goddess when I dealt with her.”

“So you find Raina attractive?” Jemma murmured. She was a tad irked with John’s comments about Raina and her blatant sexuality. Since Sean’s birth they hadn’t been intimate and Jemma was in the MOOD.

“No, there’s a Machiavellian aspect to her personality that I found a distinct turnoff. It irritated her to no end that I wasn’t interested in her when she was sauntering around in her skin tight dresses. I refuse to let my dick do my thinking for me... except in reference to you. I let it do all my thinking then.”

Jemma tensed and Garrett softly sighed.
“I didn’t mean it the way you’re taking it,” he said. “You had a very large baby and a c-section to boot. When you’re feeling healed under your hood, and ready for it, yes, we’ll start having sex again. Until then, I’m not gonna push the issue. I am not looking for sex elsewhere, and I can promise you that Raina is not having my baby. Swear to God!”

He radiated genuine sincerity.

“So you do want to have sex with me?” Jemma softly questioned. Her gaze was elsewhere, but John gently moved her face so that their eyes met.

“Hell yes,” Garrett assured her. “But you had stitches and complications. I was recovering also, so I’m being an adult about this. For the first time in all of recorded history, I might add. I would much prefer to be childish.”

He winked at Jemma and her anger melted.

“They said a glass of wine would help,” she murmured. “After Sean is fed, that is. Perhaps a massage? I bought massage oil. I even brought lubricant just in case?”

“I’ll put Sean to bed,” he offered. “When he’s finished at the milk bar.”

After a very pleasant, exceedingly languorous session of love making, a blissed out Jemma was content to cuddle. John had been sweet and affectionate…. And most assuredly THOROUGH. Perhaps in spite of his exasperating nature, his refusal to clean off his boots before he entered their home, and a half dozen other misdemeanors, maybe she would keep him.

“I’ve missed this,” she murmured.

“Agreed,” John rumbled even as he rubbed her back. “You ok?”

“You were brilliant,” she assured him. “Very, very nice.”

She was drifting off to sleep when John whispered, “I’m glad Coy Boy was receptive. I fucked him over really well, so I wasn’t sure he’d be willing to help. Figured for you, he would, for me, not so much.”

Her heart skipped a beat or three and her post coital relaxation was lost.

“You know?” she softly asked.

“Yes, I was worried. About you. Also about Coy Boy as he had been hospitalized a while ago. I know he got released but nothing more. To even think of using him just proved…” John exhaled.

The stillness was such that she could hear John’s steady heartbeat. The quietness spread and spread until she had to speak.

“Who is he?”

“Someone who rightfully doesn’t trust me. Don’t tell him that I know you’ve been in contact with him,” requested John.

“He seems nice,” she offered.
An amused snort was John’s answer.

“He’s cantankerous, astringent and… yet, he’s coy and quite scrappy. Analytical and a cheat at poker,” Amusement, fondness and yes, caustic exasperation colored John’s tone.

“I think I’m jealous.” Her protest was joking, but not. There was a dark undercurrent in what Coy Boy has said; his initial greeting of ‘SRSLY, Garrett, you are an evil fuck. What is this? A drunken Booty Call? After what you did to me? Fuck off, asshole. See you in hell first’ and what he won’t say, that makes her ponder the relationship between John and Sean’s godfather. Yet Coy Boy (CB for short) has always been polite and supportive in their dealings. A burgeoning trust has been formed, as he always contacted her at the promised time.

“There was a… flirtation… His marriage had broken up, his sexuality was … situational…. And I… was and still am, the Utter Emperor of Assholes.” That confession was softly voiced, tinged with regret.

“Please don’t tell me that you broke Sean’s godfather’s heart, John.” Coy Boy, you exquisite little tart.

“No, I don’t think it was ever that serious,” admitted John. His hand began stroking her in that way, and his grin was lecherous. “Not like us.”

“John, do you think… Sean is… odd?”

“No,” John insisted. His forceful refusal to even consider that Sean was anomalous was both reassuring yet completely wrong.

“He’s walking, John. At four months, and he’s over three feet tall.”

“He’s just really, really advanced?” John offered. Pulled closer against him, instead of being receptive, Jemma stiffened. Her ear was kissed and John whispered, “You were infected with the Chitauri virus, I have GH325 in my system along with Extremis. Don’t you think it’s odd that we’re together? I’m old enough to be your father.”

“I love you,” protested Jemma. The instinctive reply was reassuring and calming.

“Brains, I adore you,” was his heartfelt response. “But we need to have a serious chat. In a normal world, you wouldn’t have even looked twice at me, what with my age, my value added parts, my receding hairline and my refusal to shave regularly. I am not, nor have I ever been, in your league, Brains.”

Her protest was unvoiced, because John was correct.

“And you got pregnant immediately, Jemma. You were on Depo. Flowers assured us that Sean was born premature. Yet, you required a c section as he was a really big boy. As much as we had fun with the natural way of making babies, I wonder if there was some assistance…” prompted John.

“But it proves you can’t trust anyone with Sean. Not Flowers, not Barbara Anna, only me. His next checkup, put him in shoes that are scuffed as though he’s crawling. He tries to stand, trip him. Bakshi’s interest focused on our son would be a very bad thing. God forbid we ever have a daughter, because the mitochondrial DNA?”

John’s perceptive hypotheses were rational… and SEAN. Overwhelming anxiety and fear threatened to drag her under and drown her. Not her dear sweet Sean whom she loved so completely.
“Brains, you need to take a long, slow breath. Inhale.” John crawled to her and then helped her sit.
“You’re safe, I will never let anyone hurt you or Sean. I swear.”

Soft, soothing comforting words. Jemma couldn’t tell anyone what John said, because she just focused on breathing. Long slow inhale… hold… exhale…

“That’s it,” murmured John “Sleep.”

Drifting off to sleep, a small stuffed animal disrupted Jemma when it decided to join them in their bed. Sean stood next to bed and his ‘gift’ from his Godfather Coy, a soft and squishy puppy sat next to her. (Truth demanded that she had bought Puppy, as Godfather CB had remarked that Sean needed something from him, even though he couldn’t really gift it.)

“Put him in bed?” John asked.

“Just tonight,” promised Jemma. “Just…”

“I understand.” He kissed her shoulder and then leaned towards Sean. After a brief examination, Sean was snuggling in bed. “Doesn’t need a change.”

“You should do that once in a while. You are his father.”

“I’ll teach him the fine art of peeing in a snowbank later.”

Next morning

Daniel Whitehall smiled at Raina, who had completed a much needed reinforcement session with Faustus. “How are you, Raina?”

“My daughter is absolutely amazing,” Raina beamed. “I am just overwhelmed that I am to be her mother.”

“Compliance is always rewarded,” was Bakshi’s softspoken reinforcement. “Now, if you will follow me, it’s time for an ultrasound.”

“Hopefully, I can nap afterwards. I’m absolutely exhausted.”

“I have some CDs for you. They are very helpful in developing a child’s mind,” Bakshi promised. “They also will help you rest.”

SHIELD

Phil Coulson read Felix Blake’s detailed report and then placed it on his desk.

“Any comments?” Felix tersely questioned. He was leaning against the wall to give his aching back some support.

“None. It doesn’t seem that we’ll be able to extract her unless we risk harming her or the baby,” Phil agreed. “She doesn’t realize that she is being followed everywhere by HYDRA security?”
“Maybe consciously, she doesn’t, but subconsciously? I’ve warned her to only contact me when she
is in her rocking chair. The windows are located in such a way that her observers can’t read her texts
to me.”

Phil then asked the one damning question, because if Felix answered in the affirmative, he’d move
heaven and earth to rescue Jemma Simmons. “Still no interest in leaving?”

“No.”
Jemma found that being the Mum to a nine month old Sean was exhausting. Not that it wasn’t possibly one of the most rewarding experiences in her life – right up there with her double doctorates. Her simply amazing son was still growing at leaps and bounds, as he was almost three and half feet tall and thirty pounds; however his growth rate seemed to be slowing down. Fortunately his growth was slowing, as he had rapidly outgrown most of his clothes after he had worn them maybe three times. Sean ate solid foods but he still snuggled with her for nursing in the morning and before he went to bed.

But while he might be the size of an almost three year old, he didn’t speak. His eye and hand dexterity wasn’t well coordinated, but as John reminded her, Sean was nine months old. Not three years old, so not to look for trouble and expect too much from him.

“Now pick up your shoes and put them in your room. You can only wear one pair at a time,” Jemma instructed. Sean, being a happy little boy, dutifully picked up his shoes, toddled off to his room and returned with a book, his blanket and his stuffed dog. With a copious amount of mock surprise, she asked, “The dragon book?”

A happy nod was Sean’s response.

“Your godfather really knows what books to suggest,” Jemma informed Sean. Sean, giggled, and nodded his head even as he crawled into her lap for snuggle time. “His grandkids must adore him as you always love his recommendations.”

During one of their sporadic conversations, Godfather CB (Short for Coy Boy) had suggested a dozen or so books, and Sean had eagerly devoured each book. However, Sean’s favorite book was Dragons Love Tacos.

“Now, Sean, which one is the purple dragon?” she queried.

He pointed at the correctly colored dragon. Jemma assured him that he was absolutely, positively correct. She asked him other questions about the various dragons and the assorted tacos, and each time Sean pointed to the correct one.

“Hey, Sean!” Jemma happily exclaimed as she recited the first page by rote. “Did you know that dragons love tacos? They love beef tacos and chicken tacos. They love really big gigantic tacos and tiny little baby tacos as well?”

Sean nodded his head happily. He loved dragons, tacos, dragons with tacos, and being read to every chance he could finagle.

Yes, hopefully, dragon tacos would keep him from having a meltdown when he went to the pediatrician.

“Did someone mention tacos?” John asked, as he had snuck into the room without her noticing. “That sounds like a wonderful idea. Let’s have Tacos tonight. Whatta say Sean?”

John crouched down to Sean’s level, and held out his arms. Sean leapt into his father’s arms and they both giggled.

“What are you doing home?” Jemma questioned. It was Friday afternoon, and John wasn’t due home
until later.

“Figured you needed backup,” John murmured as he leaned down to kiss her.

“She flirts with you again, she’s a dead woman,” growled Simmons.

At six months pregnant, Raina was huge, uncomfortable and not at all happy. Her feet were swollen, her former flower dresses had been put away MONTHS ago, and she knew her staffers viewed her condition as rather amusing. There was a loud scream from the hallway, which meant that The Brat had arrived for his follow up exam.

*Your brother is a spoiled freak of nature,* she thought to her daughter she was carrying. It might not be her daughter genetically, but it was hers. *I’m sure it’s upbringing as opposed to genetics.*

*Flats,* she was reduced to wearing shoes with no heels which made her even shorter.

“He’s in room six,” her staffer informed her when she exited her office.

“I can hear him,” Raina scowled. “I believe the *entire* complex can hear him.”

“Some babies don’t like doctor’s visits.” The staffer had the nerve to defend the Spawn. “He’s had a great many tests and blood draws. I can understand why he’s not happy to be here. He’s normally quite sweet.”

Sean began acting out the minute he recognized the building. He adhered to John for physical protection; he wept and screamed. Jemma’s heart shattered as her little boy was terrified but John continued to carry Sean into the medical office.

“Hello, Sean Garrett here,” John jovially informed the front desk staff. “I’m sure you can hear that his lungs are in fine shape.”

By the time they were escorted into an examination room, an exhausted Sean was merely sniffling half-hearted broken sobs even as he clung to his father.

“Now, Sean, you are a very brave boy,” his father assured him. “Whatever they do to you, they’ll do to me first. I won’t lie to you, it might hurt, but I’ll feel it also.”

John Garrett’s outer persona was noise. Lots of noise, smart ass comments combined with a snarky grin. Inwardly, he watched, he observed and he cataloged. He noticed how Sean tensed when Raina came into the room, so he shielded his son as much as he could.

Because he remembered being that small and scared; how no one protected him.

No one had cared.

Not at all.
Sean seemed emboldened by having his father sitting on the exam table with him, so he only slightly whimpered when his blood was drawn. Well, to be fair, John had made a face when his blood had been drawn. He had also noticed that Jemma had swooped in and stolen his blood while making it appear that she had trashed the vials in the red bag waste.

Sean was sent off with Jemma when the Medical Inquisition was completed. The various staff members fled the scene, and Flowers waddled… waddled away to make her escape. Except for the fact that John Garrett stood between her and the exit.

“You’re not touching Sean again,” John informed her. In response, she smirked and he had an overwhelming desire to wipe the petals off her muumuu. “Any of children of mine, in fact.”

Her smirk faltered for a moment, and her hand moved to her belly, slightly, then stilled, as though she wished to protect her baby from him, but was worried about being too revealing.

Interesting slip, one he’d need to investigate. Carefully.

Who was the father?

“I’m sure you can understand how a parent needs to protect their children from those that would harm them.” He smiled; kept his voice cool, calm and composed and then leaned down to her. “Remember that I will protect my children. Don’t ever forget that, Flowers.”

Definite fear in her eyes.

Two tacos and an ice cream later, Sean was once again a happy boy. Each parent held one of his small hands and he was content to skip or jump… or leap…. as they returned home. As it had been a very exhausting and stressful day, he was quickly tucked in and asleep before Jemma had finished reading Moo, Baa, La La La. He hadn’t even stopped off at the milk bar for a nightcap before he was comatose.

“Ice cream?” Jemma murmured.

John flashed that wild smile of his, and winked. “Least I didn’t promise him anything with four legs and a tail.”

With a gentleness that never failed to surprise her, he placed his hand on her lower back. Then he turned her to face him and he lingeringly gazed over her with a crooked smile. There was a twinkle is in his eye, and Jemma smiled. Her eyes were aglow and there was a blush to her cheeks which meant she was feeling frisky.

“So, Sean’s asleep. It’s early, what do you want to do?” he leered. “How about…”

“I need to go to the lab and spin your blood,” Jemma cheerfully informed John. “I should be home by ten.”

“Seriously?” a disappointed John sulked.

“Yes, I won’t be able to get a decent HDL/LDL ratio on you for weeks after all that queso menonita you inhaled tonight. I’ll pump, so if he wakes and wants milk you can be prepared. Try not to go out and getting matching tattoos while I’m out,” Jemma informed her husband. “I’ll be home soon. Promise.”
“Why are you spinning my blood?” John asked.

“I like keeping an eye on your Hg1AC and your triglycerides. Be home soon, promise,” Jemma assured him. She stood on her tiptoes and she whispered in his ear, “Tomorrow’s Saturday, so we can sleep in if we stay up late.”

While John’s cholesterol levels were a tad high, that wasn’t why she wished to spin his blood. No, she wished to examine the various blood cells in John’s blood. The GH325 had not been the permanent panacea she had hoped it would be. His color was … off… and…he tired easily… no… no… she was just looking for trouble. Once the blood was spun, she would realize that she was being silly.

She spun bloods once, twice, three times… the results confirmed her dark fears. Jemma then destroyed the blood, the results and any trace that she had been in the lab running John’s blood. To cover her tracks, she ran a vial of Sean’s blood so she would have an alibi for being at the lab at night. Due to Sean’s rapid growth, Jemma always ran her own set of bloodwork.

There was no doubt in her mind that John was ill.

She escaped to her car; developed tunnel vision and when she came around, she found herself outside the city, staring down at it.

If anything happen to John… what will happen to Sean? What will happen to me?

There was a lifeline, a thin, tenuous lifeline… but…she had never spoken to him.

What if he really didn’t exist? Don’t be stupid. He does! He does!

I need to talk to you. Please. I know it’s risky, but I need to talk to you. Jemma hit send and she waited.

As always, Coy Boy immediately answered.

Do you need me to get you out?

I need to know that you really exist. I need reassurance.

I’ll call you in five minutes. I can’t talk for long.

Her phone rang. Her screen displayed it was Mike’s Pizzeria that was located near her office, so she picked up the phone.

“Hello?” she answered.


“You exist,” she breathed. “You really do.”
How stupid, really, but with her world spinning apart…. John ill…. John, who kept Sean and her
safe… Coy Boy was a steady constant… To her relief, Coy Boy chuckled. He had a very warm
laugh and his voice was soft when he added, “I know exactly what you mean.”

“Good.”

“How are you? I’m worried.” Yes, his voice was full of concern.

“He’s sick.” Her voice trembled and she roughly wiped her eyes. “I don’t know what I’ll do if…”

“My godson?”

“No.” Her assurance caused him to exhale a sigh of relief. “He loves those books you recommend.”

“Excellent. I’ll send you additional suggestions. Now, I swear to you, I will do everything to
extricate you and my godson when you give me the word.”

“What about him?”
Pause.

“He’s made his decision. He was never one to change his mind.” Coy Boy’s voice went flat…
dead…

“He really hurt you.” Why was her intuition screaming that she should recognize Coy Boy’s voice?
And the issue between the two men, it wasn’t just hurt, but a profound betrayal; emotionally…
physically? “Why are you agreeing to help me?”

Longer pause.

“Time’s up. Goodbye. Remember, I’m here.”

The phone disconnected.

John was asleep in their bed, as was Sean. The two of them had been joined by Sean’s stuffed puppy
and three books. Changing quickly, she slid into bed; kissed the two men in her life goodnight. Even
the puppy was given a brief smooch as Sean always insisted that the puppy get a good night kiss.
The niceties completed,

Jemma Simmons watched John sleep.

Pondered how much she really knew about him. She reviewed the various incidents on the bus…. the
time when Sitwell, Blake and Ward had been on the bus, and she had thought Hand and Blake
were possibly HYDRA. Hand, shot dead by Ward… Blake… stomped by Mike Peterson…

Blake…

The senior agent had only stopped weeping from the agony of a crushed chest after she had given
him far too much morphine. Garrett had hovered over Blake, and he had demanded that she do
something… anything for Blake’s pain. She thought his concern was based on friendship…

Had it actually been guilt?
Whatever had happened to Blake?

He had been the enigma of the senior agents on the bus. Felix had only spoken to May or Coulson, deliberately ignoring Garrett’s attempts at conversation. John had been amused at Blake’s behavior… what had he said to Blake that caused the other agent to storm away.

“No need to be coy, Roy.”

*Coy Boy was Felix Blake.*

And he was most assuredly NOT HYDRA.

But was Felix Blake… *SHIELD*?

Felix Blake put the phone down and stared at the ceiling of his bedroom. Mike had gone to visit his son, hadn't invited Felix to tag along, hadn't even considered bringing Ace here for the holidays even after Felix had suggested it. He hadn't even broached being introduced to Mike's son because it was crystal clear that Mike was pretty ashamed of shacking up with Felix.

Maybe, it was time to move to a nice one level home or maybe a Craftsman style home with two floors at most. He had the money, and well... apartment life wasn't cutting it. The elevator had needed repairs again and he was tired of climbing steps. Yes, with three bedrooms... just in case his grandkids ever wanted to visit.

Oh, who the hell was he fooling? That part of his life was beyond dead.
Jemma watched John sleep and then he woke to see her staring at him. She twisted her lips into a mock pout and shook her head at Sean in their bed. It was a violation of the cardinal rule, no kids in the adult bed.

“Sorry, Brains. Kid had a nightmare about Flowers... I don’t want her near him ever again,” he whispered.

“I agree. Today, she truly defined the word horrid,” admitted Jemma.

“So what do the labs say?” John asked. At her non response, he exhaled even as he reached for her shoulder. He gave it a gentle squeeze. “I’ll start taking my vitamins tomorrow.”

“I might be able to acquire more of the….” She couldn’t say more as Sean was stirring. “Hi, Sweetie. Keeping Daddy company?”

A sleepy, sweet smile was her response. “I’m sure a big boy like you wants to sleep in your own bed?”

“Come on, I’ll put you to bed,” John informed their son before he could voice a protest. He scooped up Sean, complete with stuffed puppy and books in a quick motion and juggled him to his bed. An out of breath John quickly returned and kissed Jemma with a fervor that surprised her.

Phil’s phone alarmed. The ringtone, Beethoven’s 7th Symphony - 2nd movement, was a fine example of depressing classical music and absolutely destroyed the romantic mood he had struggled to create.

Rosalind finished kissing Phil and pulled away. Her exhalation of sexual disappointment was a sharp contrast to Mozart. She fluffed her hair even as she sat back on the couch, crossed one leg over the other in order to taunt Phil with her shapely legs. “That man is such a professional kill joy.”

“And Banks isn’t?” Phil joked; he always protected His Staff. Especially if he secretly agreed, but that was the reason why he needed Felix Blake on his team.

“Banks is jealous,” Roz admitted as she began to button her shirt. That completed, she put on her high heels and shook her head. “I’ll leave.”

“Come on,” Phil protested. “You haven’t enjoyed a cannoli yet.”

“Yes, I did, and they were delicious. But when your personal gadfly calls, you drop everything and you’ll be distracted for hours. I’d be jealous except for the fact that Felix doesn’t find you sexy at all.” She tossed off a sultry look before she left his apartment.

“For the record, he does,” Phil vainly protested to the closed wooden door. “I’m very sexy.”

The door was not impressed by Phil’s supposedly excessive sexiness. One might even say it was board by his comment.

“I am!”
He collapsed into his couch even as he dialed Blake.

“Sorry to interrupt your tête-à-tête with Roz. Heard from your prodigal lamb,” Felix informed Phil. “She’s scared.”

“Does she want out?” Phil asked.

“No, she needed to hear my voice. To confirm I exist. John’s sick; she’s scared for Sean and herself so I am assuming that it’s not just the flu. She asked me if I would extricate John…” Felix ceased talking.

Phil Coulson had never gotten a handle on what had gone wrong between Felix Blake and John Garrett; just that the conversations with the formerly on good term agents had turned quieter and darker. John had always made a few comments, like he had always did, but Phil had sensed that verbal barbs had been deliberately thrown, in order to get under Felix’s skin. In response, the formerly light-hearted Felix had turned inward. Finally, he had left their circle of friends and had attached himself to Victoria Hand who had proven true to SHIELD to the very end. Yet, Blake had always been willing to assist Coulson.

And Felix had been the one that noticed that all hell was breaking loose within SHIELD.

The silence continued until Felix finally confessed, “I told her that John had made his choices and he was never one to change his mind.”

“He isn’t,” Phil agreed. “What her response?”

“She commented a bit about minor issues, then she asked me why was I helping her?”

“Your answer was?” was Phil’s prompt after another far too long gap in the conversation.

“Time was up, so I had to disconnect,” Felix stated.

Again, not the real reason.

“Seriously, why are you?” Phil asked. “Since you came back, you’ve become the patron saint of Lost Causes. You could have given the responsibility to anyone, but you took it. Like you took on Mike.”

“I remember her taking care of me after Peterson crushed my chest. She was there, during all of it, and she never left. I owe her,” Blake finally admitted. He still had horrific nightmares where he re-experienced the experience of Mike Peterson crushing his chest, how he had been in an absolutely exquisite amount of agony and how he focused on her soft voice. There were moments when he was convinced that he couldn’t take a deep breath, even though rationally, he knew that he could.

Yet he also remember Jemma Simmons’ soft English accent, how she had been a literal angel of mercy. I’m here. We’re working on finding you something for the pain but I worry about suppressing your respiratory system.

“I’m requesting you to transfer Mike to a new handler. I may have to move quickly in reference to Simmons and I won’t be able to concentrate on Mike. He requires a handler that can focus on him and his unique skill sets.”

Yes, that sounded respectable, opposed to the fact that Felix Blake was simply … tired. Every repaired bone ached (all thirty seven of them), and while he was weary of his solitary existence, he
thought it would be better if he just didn’t have to face people.

“You home?” Phil questioned.

“Yes.”

“I’m coming over. We need to discuss this,” Phil informed Felix.

“You’re on a date, Coulson.”

“Not anymore,” Phil admitted.

“There seems to be a certain symmetry between your job and your apartment,” Coulson snarked when Felix opened the door to his apartment. “How long has the elevator not been working?”

The older agent was using his crutches and he grimaced as he collapsed in his chair. His discomfort failed to prevent him from grabbing one of the cannolis.

“Date night Coulson. Tonight is Date night with the Randy and Risqué Roz, what are you doing here?” Felix questioned. “Shouldn’t you be getting laid? You’re in a much better mood after you and Risque Roz get frisky.”

“You two have such cute nicknames for each other. It’s so endearing,” Phil then turned serious. “I believe discussing the sex life of your Director can be taken to Human Resources for a complaint on creating a hostile workforce.”

Instead of the anticipated arched eyebrow, the haughty head tilt, the caustic comeback; instead Felix said… nothing… The agent’s appearance was… haggard and exhausted. He even had one hand nestled under his arm pit as though he was in pain.

“Felix, what can I do for you? Not what can Director Coulson do for Agent Blake as the director will transfer Mike to another handler, but what can Phil Coulson do for Felix Blake?” Phil softly asked.

“I need to move out of this apartment. Help me find a place, vet it so it’s safe and secure….and no steps, Phil.”

“I actually know a place. It’s on the base…” offered Phil.

“No, no. I need some place that I can retire,” inserted Felix.

“You’re retiring?”

“It’s time. This job is for younger, healthier people. Once Simmons decides to stay or go, I’m leaving the organization. Spend some time with my grandkids.” Felix smiled briefly at that happy thought and then his grin disappeared. “Graddad wants to be able to play ball with Allie. I told you about her? She’s fucking amazing… She’s on a traveling softball league and she’s the youngest … and best on the team. I like watching her… and I can’t get to enough games if I’m always saving the world.”

Phil made the appropriate comments but he noticed that of the few pictures Felix had of his grandkids, he was in none of them. They were all action shots; Allie swinging with true gusto at a ball, Jillian playing her clarinet with all the focus of a natural virtuoso, Joe and Nate on the sidelines of peewee football. Some of the younger grandkids were playing a type of toddler soccer.
And Felix was in none of the pictures.

None.

You got divorced; I remember hearing it was bitter, and then…. you joined Hand’s clique.

“How are you and Mike?” Phil questioned.

Felix’s smile was bittersweet. “It was… pleasant while it lasted but it’s over. I couldn’t really introduce him to the family and… couldn’t really go out. A six foot five cyborg with rocket launchers is rather noticeable.”

“He can take them off when he’s not working,” Phil offered.

Felix snorted.

“Tomorrow, I’ll show you the house. You can have gratis if you stay on as a consultant. I need you to keep me humble,” offered Phil.

Felix shook his head.

“Take a look,” Phil requested. “It’s one floor, no steps. It’s safe, Felix. Safe as I can make it.”

Mike Peterson was about to have a very serious conversation with Ace. This particular conversation was quite overdue. While Felix had been rather patient, Mike could tell that Felix was wondering exactly what the problem was, why Mike wouldn’t introduce him to Ace. Felix had even offered to take Mike and Ace away for the holidays, just so Ace could have fun in the snow.

While Felix hadn’t introduced his family to him, it was because Mike didn’t feel comfortable with… normal people. SHIELD agents understood what he had endured but… to meet Felix’s family… with his burns and scars … after what he had done to Felix and yes, he still had nightmares where he stomped the hell out of Felix Blake. Jesus Christ, a terrified Felix had offered to help him, even while Mike had been choking the life out of him…. Mr. Peterson... stop. You have a son - Ace. He needs you. We can still help you, Mike. Afterwards, Felix had brushed off his sincere apology with a quiet, “We’re both fathers, Mike. Our kids are the universe to us.”

“Come on, Dad. Let’s talk or go play video games,” Ace prompted him.

“Hey, I want to talk to you about something important.”

Ace smiled and laughed at his father’s serious expression. “You look nervous.”

“I am. I know that I haven’t been around for a while, but it’s because I did something bad, and I needed to fix it.”

Mr. Peterson... stop. You have a son - Ace. He needs you. We can still help you, Mike.

“Dad, were you in jail?” asked Ace.

“No, remember those bad people that kidnapped you? I had to do bad things for them so they wouldn’t hurt you. After you were rescued by Auntie Skye, I felt… like I had to atone for what I did. I did some horrible things… in fact, I hurt this guy really badly. I didn’t want to, but the bad guys…
they threatened to hurt you, so I hurt him instead.”

Mr. Peterson... stop. You have a son - Ace. He needs you. We can still help you, Mike.

Mike Peterson is DEAD.

Ace nodded his head.

“I actually work with him now, and … he understands exactly why I did what I did to him. We’ve become pretty good friends. He’s given me a second chance I didn’t really deserve…” Mike paused; thought of the first time he and Felix had been intimate. How Felix had finally taken charge, how Felix had struggled to make the experience good for him… even though Mike had been hesitant and awkward because he had known that he had nearly killed Felix… and Mike had been utterly terrified of hurting Felix again… Mike then blurted… “And I’d like you to meet him...”

“Ok,” Ace easily agreed.

“Ok?” Mike repeated.

“Ok.” Ace repeated.

“He’s a guy,” Mike needlessly explained.

“Dad, seriously... it’s ok. Please, it’s 2016. I mean, he sounds like a good guy because he didn’t give up on you like Milagros did.”

“Don’t call your mother by her first name,” Mike protested by rote.

“Ok. I approve as this guy didn’t declare you hopeless like Mom did. How long have you been dating?” Ace gave his father a sly look as though disbelieving how much trouble Mike had with admitting the fact that he was dating.

“For a while,” Mike admitted.

“He’s been picking out my gifts, right?” Ace asked.

“Guilty! He’s got grandkids a little older than you, so he sometimes accidentally picks up something that matches your age better,” Mike confessed.

“Seriously, Dad. You believe him when he tells you that?” Ace teased. “Let me guess, he doesn’t make you pay for them, right?”

Mike Peterson said not a word.

“Dad, he’s been bribing me so I’ll like him when I meet him. Seriously.”

Mike Peterson exhaled. Loudly. Felix Blake had wanted to meet Ace. He had been selecting the presents with Ace in mind… skillfully asking Mike questions about Ace’s interests and lying to Mike about the presents being for his grandkids.

“How old are you again, Ace?”

“Twelve,” Ace easily admitted.

“How long have you been dating? You seem to know an awful lot about dating.”
“For a while, just don’t tell Aunt Mindy.”

“Please tell me that Aunt Mindy has given you the talk?” Mike pleaded. At Ace’s blank look, Mike stumbled over, “How boys have penises and girls have…”

Ace couldn’t keep a straight face, as he began uncontrollably giggling.
When his move to his new place was all said and done, Felix Blake realized that he had very little to represent his life.

There was that entire broken back bit with enough metal residing in him to fear thunder storms, but besides that…. Not a great deal.

His apartment had been broken down to the throwaways and the keepers. His discarded furniture had been donated to Habitat for Humanity as he just didn’t want the hassle of moving then. Plus, with all the accumulated bad karma he thought it best to just junk everything and start anew. [Including a new mattress].

The keepers were a few cardboard boxes, far too many books, and the one box he didn’t trust just anyone carrying. Certainly not Coulson, who had disasters that trailed behind him like a pack of ill-trained puppies. No, never. Not when The Box held his few cherished pictures of his kids and grandkids. Izzie saw him staring at The Box and she tapped his hand.

“I’ll carry that,” she offered. “I’ll be careful.”

Izzie and Vic had been the only ones that knew the entire sordid saga about his divorce, how his kids wished him dead, that he had never met his grandkids (and never would)… and… everything else… Garrett… and Izzie knew about Mike, but not the latest. Vic and Izzie had been his beard, while he had been their dress so there had been no secrets between them. Thankfully, there had been no condemnation as Felix had enough self-recrimination for a lifetime of a thousand years or so.

“Thank you. Stay for dinner tonight?” he asked.

She nodded.

Once upon a time, (yes, it had even been documented, Lance Hunter) Felix Blake had been sociable and polite. He would have gotten a few six packs, ordered some pizza and some other delicacies for those that had helped him move. Not now, not when every bone and mental implant was complaining something fierce.

He had just put the last picture just so – his favorite (ha!) granddaughter Allie as she looked exactly like her mother, Jenny, when he had last seen her. Before… Marsha had told him that his kids wanted nothing more than for him to die, die, die. Allie was in a place of honor next to his picture of him, Victoria and Izzie.

“You look tired,” Izzie offered as he gingerly lowered himself into a chair.

“Exhausted. Lately, pain’s been …..” He exhaled and said nothing more as really what would be said?

“Mike’s coming onto my team,” she informed Felix after a very long pause.

“Take care of him. Make sure Hunter doesn’t try to turn him into a big damn dead hero,” Felix
I asked Coulson to put him somewhere… safe.”

Izzie said nothing for the longest time, so he finally spoke. “It’s over between us, Izzie. It wasn’t very serious, so no harm, no foul.”

Izzie snorted a very unladylike snort, which caused him to grimace a smile.

“That would work if I didn’t know you as well as I do,” Izzie disagreed. “What happened?”

“I asked if Ace had ever snowboarded? Offered to let him borrow my safehouse in Silverhorne for the holidays, all on the up and up, and Ace could learn how to snowboard. I thought Ace would like that, because… Nate loves snowboarding. They’re about the same age, after all.”

Nate being grandson # 1, who he had never met, but still… Felix had kept his eyes on them.

“I wouldn’t have interrupted his time with Ace, but I could have sat by the fire and did some reading. It’s got the four bedrooms so we wouldn’t have shared a bed – not with Ace there,” Felix explained. “Wasn’t gonna push it, but … I wanted to meet Ace. Mike said no to Silverhorne. Maybe he didn’t want me to meet him. It’s likely he’s ashamed that he’s Friends with Benefitting an old crip.”

“I should have realized it was nothing. He never expressed an interest in meeting my family. One hand, thank God, but I would have told him the truth. I’ve been telling lies about them for the last twenty years, it would be nice to confess the truth to someone. You’re the only one who knows the truth.”

“Felix,” was Izzie’s soft protest.

“I’m just… tired… Izzie. Tired of the pain, tired of being made to feel ashamed and unwanted because of how God made me. This had been my longest relationship since Marsha…. And... it didn’t mean a damn thing to Mike. It would have been nice to experience….even for a short time… the relationship you had with Vic. It was nice, you know, to have someone to watch a ball game with.”

Izzie said not a word, but she didn’t have to speak. It was enough that she was still there, as there was no one else in his life.

Nor would there ever be.

He just needed to accept that painful truth.

“So when am I gonna meet him?” Ace asked his father. “Did you bring him? Is he stashed in some hotel waiting for you to talk to me?”

“Huh?” a confused Mike asked as his head was reeling from this conversation. Plus the mental idea of stashing one irascible Felix Blake in a hotel room had blown his mind clear out of the solar system.

“Dad… when I am meeting your boyfriend? You should have brought him today,” Ace slowly stated to his father.

“He’s not here. He actually wanted me to bring you to Colorado for winter break. Said you could take some snowboarding lessons there.”
“Snowboarding!” Ace exclaimed with true excitement. “Let’s go, Dad! What do I need to bring?”

At Mike’s continuingly puzzled expressions, Ace explained, “Shaun White?”

“I turned him down,” Mike explained.

“Oh no,” Ace deflated. “How’d he take it?”

“He was ok with it,” was the response. “I wanted to talk to you first, Make sure you were ok with everything.”

“Dad!” his son protested. “Have you called him since you were here? You haven’t, have you? Dad, are you sure you’re still dating him? I mean, you turned him down for a snowboarding vacation and you haven’t called him since you’ve been here. He might have cut his losses, moved on, found someone new.”

“I really don’t think either of us have people standing in line waiting to date us.” He was a six foot five cyborg and Felix… was … well… AGENT BLAKE. It had taken months for Blake to relax in being Felix.

“Dad, you’re taking him for granted. So not good,” the twelve year old Ace woefully informed him, full of the vast knowledge that he had earned from all of one or two years of dating (and YES, he was talking to Aunt Mindy about that). “He’s probably walked. Too bad, he had excellent ideas for presents.”

“Ok, I’ll call him.”

“Right now, Dad. I’ll go play with my Bot Builder set.” Ace smiled and then giggled. “I can’t believe you were worried about telling me. I mean, Gwen has two moms, and Rick has had a mom, a dad, two stepmoms and a stepfather.”

What the hell exactly was Ace learning at school?

“So talking to your Aunt Mindy.”

“Is he part of our team, Dad?” Ace asked.

“I don’t know if that’s serious,” admitted Mike. “I haven’t met his family yet and they’re important to him. I feel guilty enough how badly I hurt him, I don’t think I could meet his grandkids.”

“Call him!” prompted Ace.

“You go play with your Bots, and I’ll call him.”

“Make sure you thank him for the Bot Builders! He even included the Battle Bot extension kit. Nobody in my class has it, as it was a limited edition.”

“Ok! Ok!”

Blake’s burner cell was out of service – nothing surprising as Blake usually switched it out every few months.

But Blake’s home phone number had also been disconnected. He received the bland female voice who stated, “The Number You Are Trying to Reach Has Been Disconnected. No further information is available at this time.”
He called the office, requested to speak with his handler, but instead of Blake, he was transferred to Director Coulson.

Oh yes, that didn’t make him the slightest bit concerned.

“Did something happen to Agent Blake?” Mike asked as he immediately feared that one of the Deathlok’s induced injuries had flared.

“No, no. Agent Blake is fine as can be. Agent Peterson, I moved Agent Blake to a new project. I’ll need you and your abilities to work with Agent Hartley. She’ll be your new handler. When you come back, you’ll report directly to her.”

It seemed that his son had been utterly correct. Felix had decided to cut his losses and move on. Damn shame he couldn’t enroll in Ace’s school so he could be as smart as his son.

After being given the dose of GH.325 by Simmons aka Jesus Juice, John Garett had experienced dreams. Not just dreams, but vivid, realistic dreams that held the portent of truth and tonight was one such night.

He was in a SHIELD Humvee. His thumbs, his hands, his elbows, his knees and his feet were ziptied. Securely.

A grim faced Felix Blake… obviously in pain… but still….

**BLAKE?**

BLAKE was driving, hell bent at escaping or perhaps intent on breaking an axle as the Humvee bounced back and forth on the mountain trail.

There was an explosion that rocked the Humvee and Felix cursed.

“Cutting it a little close there, Blake?” John snapped because he could never shut up.

“I only promised you that I’d get her and the kids out,” snapped Felix. “I could get rid of your dead weight and we could move a lot faster. Izzie, gag the asshole.”

“I like that idea,” Izzie Hartley stated as she tapped at a computer screen. There was a sound of a hiss, and another explosion this time behind them. “Got one, Felix.”

“Great, only two dozen more plus three helicopters. But hey! Who is keeping score when it’s just a bunch of old friends getting together?” Blake snapped.

“They hate you. Will he really help me?” whispered Jemma. Her face was pale and Sean tightly clung to her. He was wearing an outfit that Jemma had recently bought out for him, even though she said that he wouldn’t fit it for a few months. Their daughter… (daughter!) was asleep in a carseat between them and she was… small… maybe a few months old. She wore a pink dress with a pattern of cherry blossoms…. Because… a dying… Raina…. Had requested that the child she had carried for nine months … wear flowers… for her.

**RAINAI She was a surrogate for their daughter?**

*Bakshi had desired more Chitauri-GH.325 Hybrids so he hadn’t waited.*
“Because I’m an asshole of galactic proportions,” he softly admitted. Because he had been one, was one and would soon die one. His time was close to an end and he had decided that his final act he was to get Jemma out. “Coy boy said he’d keep you safe. He will.”

“This is for Vic,” Izzie stated as she stuffed the gag back into his mouth. “We hear from you again, we’ll throw you out.”

“I won’t stop the Humvee,” Blake cheerfully assured him.

“I wish Peterson was here, Blake. We could use his rocket launchers,” Izzie admitted as she aimed at another HYDRA vehicle. “You and I might have had a chance to survive this mission of sheet stupidity.”

Blake said nothing, but the Humvee’s speed increased. The Humvee became airborne for a moment, landed hard and Jemma put her hand over her mouth. “I feel seasick. Is he deliberately hitting every rut?”

“Seriously, you couldn’t have asked him?” Izzie barked.

“Peterson and I haven’t spoken since I resigned as his hander,” Blake finally stated. “Not one word.”

There was an explosion, the Humvee rocked from the impact and John Garret found himself awake in his bed. He gasped for breath, and Jemma stirred next to him.

“Nightmare?” she whispered.

He nodded.

Christ, he was running out of time.
Chapter 14

John Garrett had lived as long as he had by grit and determination plus strategic (ok… copious) use of duct tape. (Thanks for nothing, SHIELD and yes, he was looking at you, Nicky Boy.) He also had a sixth sense which he had honed over the years, and something wasn’t right in HYDRAville. It was at first a nagging suspicion, because really if the angelic Jemma Simmons was in her right mind, she would never would have bedded him, never come back for more after the first premature firing of his AK47 and she never ever would have had a kid with him.

And also, let’s be honest, John Garrett wasn’t family man material. But when Sean held out his arms to him, and gazed at him with those startling blue eyes… he could understand how losing his family could shatter a man.

See Blake, Felix.

And yes, something was seriously wrong with John Garrett as he felt … remorseful… about the part he played in Felix Blake’s rancorous divorce and bitter estrangement from his children. Shit, Blake had grandkids by now, didn’t he? Grandkids he had never seen as Marsha had threatened to torpedo Blake’s career by revealing the true reason for the divorce. What a Gordian knot that had been, lose everything or keep the job so he could still pay alimony and child support. Then John Garrett, King of Assholes, had bitchslapped him and then kicked him in the nuts when Blake had been down by joyfully informing Felix Blake that there had been nothing between the two of them.

Yes, there had been that one shy kiss between them.

Oh, you exquisite little tart.

Damn shame that Felix had decided to explore his confused sexuality with the King of Assholes.

So John watched, he observed and he pondered.

Things that didn’t make sense. Sean’s amazing growth spur, his obvious off the charts intelligence and the all too frequent blood draws. Jemma had survived the Chitauri virus, he had been pumped a hell of a lot of junk to keep him warm and upright which in turn had kept him upright. If you knew what he meant.

Especially Flowers. Her obscene focus on humanity’s evolution. And now her pregnancy, her svelte frame was, at most, a fond memory, as she was as big as Jemma had been.

Who was the father? Nobody knew, there wasn’t even so much of a hint of who the DaDa was… though some wit had declared it was Whitehall and Bakshi… and Flowers always appeared terrified when he was near her…. And that dream…. That… dream… of escaping Hydra…. with a baby girl…. His baby girl with Jemma…. Carried to term by Flowers.

“Sean’s asleep,” Jemma softly murmured. “Come to bed, you look exhausted.”

John wasn’t exhausted so much as he was physically failing. The old ticker was skipping beats, he found himself short of breath, and… he took naps…

His Spidey Sense was screaming that he needed to get Jemma and the kids the hell out of Hydraville… Yes, kids, as his Spidey Sense was screaming that Flower’s kid was his and Jemma’s.

“I’ll be there in just a minute. That should give you enough time to put something on so I will need to
disrobe you.” His sincere offer was ruined by his lecherous leer.

Jemma blushed and pointed her finger at him. “Hurry.”

“Promise.”

He kept leering at her while she scampered to their bedroom and was then out of his sight. After a slow count of thirty, he reached for a burner cell that would melt if the correct code wasn’t entered.

He texted a message and hoped his favorite exquisite tart would answer.

Not for his sake but for Jemma and the kids.

It was either him or Phil, but only Felix Blake was crippled by parental guilt. He’d do it for his godson.

Pragmatic Phil would save Jemma, just so he could have Melinda May shoot John on sight.

It was a high level pain day. Off the charts, but it was also **Cookie Day**. His daughter-in-law was always punctual as the cookies would be dropped off just when the sale started as his granddaughter Allie had to be at softball practice in thirty minutes. Yes, he was a Grandfatherly stalker, but he liked keeping in the know on his grandkids. Plus he had bragged for days to Mike about Allie’s pitching when she had a no hitter!

Let’s not think about Mike, he reminded himself. Let’s focus on the strategy and logistics of obtaining the cookies. If he took a nice leisurely ride, he’d get there maybe an hour after the cookies went on sale and hopefully, the Bacon Chocolate Chip cookies would be still there as last time someone had snatched them before he arrived. (Bastards!)

He was in a fey mood, as Garrett had reached out to him last night.

Fucking John Garrett.

John Fucking Clairvoyant **Let’s Stomp on Felix Blake** Garrett.

He would have deleted the message except for the last two sentences.

*I’m asking you for help for Sean, father to godfather. You intimately understand what lengths a man will go for his children.*

Blake hadn’t answered the text, because … because… he didn’t trust John.

He limped across the parking lot, and to his disappointment, the cookies weren’t there. Well, it looked like he was taking home a couple cake pops instead. Probably better for his waistline as he wasn’t up to running on the treadmill these days, and the SHIELD pool had been emptied thanks to budget cuts. Even though Coulson promised that was the next on capital improvements, right after the elevator. Therefore, he put on his big boy pants and waited in line, trying to place most of his weight on his good knee.

“Sara!” The cashier called out. “The guy who always buys your cookies is here!”

Oh damnit to hell, Sara was his daughter-in-law and she was **there**. So was his granddaughter, Allie, who was on crutches.
“Hello, Flowers,” was John’s greeting when Reina and her belly entered her lab. “How are you feeling? Must be tired.”

Reina’s first reaction was to instinctively shield her belly from him. It was the slightest of gestures before she caught herself.

“What are you doing here?” Reina asked.

“Just thought I’d stop by, discuss how many blood draws you’ve put my son through. I was just thinking… if Jemma and I have any more kids, would they have to endure what Sean has?” He drawled. He then moved closer to her, using his height to intimidate her. “I mean, we’ve never gotten a reason why you’re doing all that to him.”

Definite fear in her eyes. Flowers thought she was so remote, so aloof.

“His growth is rather… abnormal,” she finally stammered.

He looked at her belly and then looked at her.

“Might say the same about yours,” he informed her. Then, only because he knew that cameras in the room had mysteriously gone off line, he drawled, “Or should I say… Jemma and mine?”

Well, he had predicted that she’d lie, lie, lie to him when confronted. However, he never would have guessed that she would turn white and latch onto his arm with a death grip.

“Take me to medical right now…” she hissed.

Felix Blake slumped his shoulders and straightened his sunglasses as his daughter-in-law Sara walked his way. She was carrying a paper bag and she gave him a bright smile.

“So, you’re the man that likes my bacon chocolate chip cookies,” she informed him. Her voice held a slight southern drawl which didn’t match the intensity of her green eyes. “They told me that you were here at the last bake sale, but my husband ate my donation by mistake. Matt thought I made the cookies for him. It’s like the man forgets about these monthly bake sales.”

Sara laughed, a warm laugh full of love and a fond yet wry acceptance of her husband’s peculiarities. While Felix struggled to maintain his fake smile as he remembered the last time he saw Matt. Couldn’t forget the last time he had struggled to reach out to his oldest on the news of his engagement to Sara, and how his son’s response had been radio silence.

“I thought I’d make it up to my loyal customer, by making you two batches, plus I threw in a few maple bacon cake pops. New recipe, you have to tell me if you like them.”

“Thank you,” he managed to pull that much of a sentence together, but it was too much as Sara’s head tilted.

“Have we met before? I have the feeling that I have,” she murmured.

“He sounds like Dad,” offered …. His granddaughter.
He faked a warm smile and shook his head in a negative.

The line moved slightly, so he shifted his weight. He couldn’t help his wince from escaping.

“Are you buying anything else? Should I be jealous that my number one customer has a new favorite?” Sara quipped. “Don’t tell me it’s Margie’s Key Lime Pie. Just a hint, she doesn’t use real Key Limes. She uses Persians.”

Then in a conspiratorial tone, Sara added, “It’s quite the scandal.”

He just waved his money at her while his bark of a laugh escaped at her witticism.

“Allie, can you run his money over to the cashier?” Sara asked even while Allie grumbled about her ankle. However, Allie did as her mom requested.

“She doesn’t have to,” he instinctively protested.

“Her ankle flares up every time I want her to do something. You’re in more pain than she is.” Sara continued to stare at him, and then she shook her head. “Your voice sounds like Matt, and… you do look a little bit like him.”

“My sympathies,” offered Felix.

“You’re a regular here. Who do you have in the school?”

“No one, just love your cookies,” he said. “Not a baker.”

“Really?”

He nodded. It was the truth.

“You come to the concerts. Faye says that she stood next to you at the last one. You came in late, and stood in the back even with that bad hip. Nobody comes to those concerts, willingly, and yet you do. You sound like my husband… he’s your height… and…”

Her eyes narrowed. His granddaughter bebopped from the cashier and handed him his change.

“Allie, go ask Mrs. Galage if she needs help.”

“But Mommmm…” was the protest.

“Do it,” she snapped with all the Don’t Fuck with Me authority of Maria Hill, and her daughter stopped protesting and hopped over to assist the geriatric Galage handle the dispensing of sugar cookies.

“If he wore those sunglasses… stood next to you, tilted his head… you could be… related.”

“No, I don’t have any children,” Felix lied. “Well, time for me to leave.”

It was long past time to never, ever return because he couldn’t deal with Matt’s rejection… not again…. Not after meeting his granddaughter.

And if he admitted to anyone (Izzy!) that he repeatedly wiped his eyes on the drive back to the base, he would tell her it was due to the pollen.

But that wasn’t his only issue.
I’m asking you for help for Sean, father to godfather. You intimately understand what lengths a man will go for his children.

Goddamn Garrett, what game was he playing now?

And thinking of John, made him remember Garrett’s shenanigans over the years including that entire chest stomping. The remembrance of not being able to breathe panicky feeling threatened to overwhelm him, so he was grateful when he finally made it back to the base. He’d grab a meal at the commissary and then return back to his office. He’d call Izzie, see if they could talk, see if she could get him off the ledge.

-=-

Reina grabbed on to John Garrett with a vice like grip. “Stay with me,” she ordered to a very perplexed John Garrett as the medical staff bustled around her, even as they prepped for an emergency C-section and threw out terms like Placenta accreta. “If anything happens to me, you will raise her.”

He leaned over her, and she whispered in his ear, “Don’t let Bakshi use her…”

She writhed in pain and then she spoke her last, “Have her wear…. Flowers… for me…”

And Reina died even while the baby wailed a futile protest at being born.

They tried to separate the baby from him, but he refused. Because he knew that if they were separated, something would happen to his daughter… Jemma and his daughter.

“Bakshi, I’m not leaving her, because I’m her father,” he informed Whitehall’s toadie. “I’m am, because Reina told me I was.”

Jemma shook her head at her doctor’s proclamation.

“They’re not a stomach bug,” her doctor explained. “You’re pregnant.”

She felt sick to her stomach, in a way that wasn’t morning sickness. No, she shouldn’t be pregnant as she had been especially fastidious after Sean’s birth. However, she kept her face from showing her unease, instead she pretended happiness.

“No, she wanted to tell him that she was scared, that… she was feeling terrified and….

Well, her terror and fear turned into raw rage when she found John loudly announcing that he was the father of Reina’s baby. The rage overwhelmed her and when it dissipated, she heard Sean loudly sobbing, felt how her hand throbbed and marveled at the shiner she had given John Garrett. It was striking now, and it would only grow more impressive in the upcoming hours.

She broke into tears then, and John embraced her even as she fought him off.

“Jemma, we need to talk,” he whispered. “Be angry with me, but I didn’t fuck Reina. Trust me. I didn’t. That’s our daughter in the incubator. Our baby.”

Mike Peterson returned back to the base with assorted helpful suggestions from his son, Ace. Some ideas had been immediately dismissed as Mike didn’t think flowers would fix the issue.

“Talk to him, Dad. Tell him you were an idiot,” had been one helpful hint. His son had giggled and ignored his father’s look of blatant disapproval.

The “Have you seen Agent Blake?” line of questioning, (ok, so it was really the “you were trying to avoid Agent Blake where wouldn’t you be?”) led him to the cafeteria where he saw Felix. The greying agent was at the coffee machine (naturally), so Mike thought nothing of walking up to him and tapping him on the shoulder.

Felix turned to face whomever had distracted him from being properly caffeinated. When he realized it was Mike, his pulse rate, already elevated, shot up to new heights and his breathing increased exponentially.

Blake freaked, that was the only way Mike could explain it to Coulson later. Blake backed away from Mike even as he pulled out his Smith & Wesson M&P and pointed it at Mike. He had been tempted to make a quick quip about their’s being an unpleasant breakup but not deserving a shooting, when he realized that Blake was seeing Deathlok, not Mike Peterson. That look of true fear on Felix’s face… well… it haunted Mike every damn night… and would continue to do so henceforth.

“Don’t…” Felix shakily protested. “One… step… and I’ll… shoot.”

Mike raised his hands to show that he was unarmed, but Blake back away still further and knocked over a display rack with a mighty crash. Blake collapsed and then he put both hands on his chest while he contorted himself into the fetal position.

“Can’t…. breathe…. Can’t… breathe….”

Several hours later, the defining diagnosis was he was fucking crazy. No, they phrased it with more compassion. Acute anxiety attack with a resurgent episode of PTSD.

Didn’t matter, he was so totally fired, which meant no pension. It had been one of Peggy Carter’s brilliant ideas to keep everyone focused and honest.

Pulling a gun on Mike Peterson though for a moment, it had been Deathlok staring at him. And he had known that Deathlok was gonna crush his chest and… and…

No family, no job, nothing. But… if he brought in John Garrett…. Jemma Simmons…. Maybe… just maybe…. Coulson would give him his retirement. And just maybe… just maybe… he’d take John’s son from him. For old time’s sake.

_Asshole, what do you want me to do?_ He sent to Garrett.
The plan set in motion, Felix Blake easily agreed to Phil Coulson’s ‘suggestion’ that he take some time off.
Jemma shook her head at her doctor's proclamation.

"It's not a stomach bug," her doctor explained. "You're pregnant."

She felt sick to her stomach, in a way that wasn't morning sickness. No, she shouldn't be pregnant as she had been especially fastidious after Sean's birth. However, she kept her face from showing her unease, instead she pretended happiness.

"John will be so delighted," she lied even while her inner Jemma screamed that John was dying. That she shouldn't be pregnant because she had taken precautions, doubly sure to take precautions. "I can't wait to tell him the good news."

No, she wanted to tell him that she was scared, that… she was feeling terrified and…. Well, her terror and fear turned into raw rage when she found John loudly announcing that he was the father of Reina's baby. The rage overwhelmed her and when it dissipated, she heard Sean loudly sobbing, felt how her hand throbbed and marveled at the shiner she had given John Garrett. The bruise was striking now, and it would only grow more impressive in the upcoming hours.


She broke into tears then, and John embraced her even as she fought him off.

"Jemma, we need to talk," he whispered. "Be angry with me, but I didn't fuck Reina. Trust me. I didn't. That's our daughter in the incubator. Our baby. Play along with me, as I've got to get you and the kids the fuck out of Hydraville."

She pulled away from him, and she reached down deep for her inner actress. Well, she always tried to be overly prepared, but this time she'd have to wing it.

"No wonder you were so understanding that I didn't want to have sex with you after Sean was born. I needed time to recover and I thought you were considerate, instead you were fucking Reina." She spat that at him and John appeared wounded.

Well, jolly good for him.

"You were so wrapped up in Sean, you never noticed that I wanted some time for me, for you to notice me," John protested. "It was only the one time."

That earned him another slap. It rocked him on his toes, and her hand was throbbing in fake sympathy.

"You put me back together again, and you have just destroyed me," she wept as her heart was broken beyond repair.

Felix Blake began packing his Jeep for a trip from which he might not return. He addressed a few letters to his kids, sealed them, and left them in his apartment along with his will. For a moment, he
had debated leaving a note for Peterson but rationality had returned. That bridge over the River Kwai had been dynamited beyond repair so best let it be. Among a few other items, he had picked up a properly sized car seat on the way home from work, and he needed to install it for Sean. Then he’d leave to meet Garrett and family at one of his old safe houses after ensuring that he had several final solutions as he wasn't planning on letting the Squids keep him if everything went to shit.

There was a knock on his front door, which he opened to find Izzy Hartley on his doorstep. She flipped her knives with a professional grace, and he shook his head.

"Stop scaring the neighbors."

Izzy rolled her eyes at him and he tilted his head in pretend confusion. "You're scaring that sweet little lady that makes baklava every Tuesday night for her senior strip poker club."

"You live on a former military base. You have no neighbors to scare, Felix, especially sweet little old strippers that make baklava. Now, on to important issues. I'm coming with you," she insisted. "You need backup. You can start lying now, Felix, but it would be easier if you just told the truth."

She gestured with her knife and he found himself letting her into his house. Still, he struggled to maintain the upper hand.

"Coulson's writing up my burn notice even as we speak and I'm leaving for a nice long vacation. Sans retirement package, no golden parachute."

"Bullshit," she cursed.

"Did you kiss Victoria with that mouth?" he mocked teased before he sincerely regretted voicing the quip. Victoria Hand's death still stung like hell and he blamed himself. Maybe if he hadn't been vented, maybe if they hadn't been super glueing all the minute pieces of his back together, perhaps he could have convinced her not to trust Grant Ward.

"Yes. She found me rather piquant." Izzy admitted that easily and then she reached so she could place both hands on his face. She kept the eye to eye contact unbroken when she softly asked, "What's really going on, Felix?"

"Izzy, I pulled a gun on Peterson…. I'm tired… I'm in near constant pain… and…this job has taken everything from me. I have no family. I think I have enough funds in my burn fund to live on for a while. When that runs out, we'll see."

He had set it up so when he died, his slush funds would go directly into college funds for his grandkids. Naturally, Izzy wasn't having any of his lies.

Shit, she was still the best lie detector in the biz regardless of her knife fetish.

"You got a car seat for a three-year-old, and you've got letters on the table addressed to your kids. You're rescuing Simmons."

Blake snorted once before he quipped, "Yes, an old man who is currently classified as forty five percent disabled because of his previous broken back, who had just had a complete meltdown at work and threatened to shoot another employee who he had an affair with is gonna take on HYDRA by himself to rescue someone who may not really want to leave. You should write fiction, Izzy. I'd buy a copy to read, because I ain't got nothing planned for the remainder of my life."

Izzy shook her head in protest. "I see someone who thinks he's lost everything so he doesn't care if the odds are against him. Because he thinks it's a fair exchange – the slim chance to rescue Simmons'
kid will balance his guilt that he lost his own kids so long ago. I can't lose you, Felix. I lost Victoria. I don't have a spare friend like you anymore. It was always you and Vic."

The two long time friends stared at each and said nothing. Because what could be said?

Fortunately, Felix's burner call announced itself.

"I have to tell Simmons that I'm no longer her contact," he informed Izzy.

A stunned Jemma… the baby was supposedly THEIRS was unwillingly led by John Garrett to the post-partum room where the baby was being attended to by nurses. She couldn't see much besides that the baby had a shock of full dark hair.

"I want to see her," John insisted. "Give her to me."

There were sputtered protests from the nurses and John ran roughshod over them. The new father picked the baby up and stared at her. He checked to confirm that she had all her fingers and toes and he was filled with an overwhelming need to protect her.

"Hey, I'm your old man. You're not dating until you're thirty-seven, ok? Laying the ground rules down now." John turned towards Jemma. "Do you want to see her?"

Jemma shook her head even as she willed her heart to stop pounding in her chest and John exhaled.

"Jemma, don't hate her because of me. Right now, this poor baby just has me and you to take care of her. Plus Sean, you're gonna be the bestest big brother ever," John informed his son. "Aren't you son?"

Sean looked up at his mother and leaned against her for guidance. Not getting any, as Jemma was too busy looking for her own clear-cut instructions on how to handle the Hydra insanity known as her life, he then nodded his head once.

"What about your girlfriend?" Jemma snapped. "Are you going to fight for custody? Get a good lawyer, maybe one that can handle our divorce."

"Reina's… died during childbirth," John explained. Then with a sincerity that had to be fake, he pleaded, "Jemma, I need your help."

Help? He needed help? What about her? She was teetering on the edge of vast chasm and HE NEEDED HELP?

They were providing quite the raree show for the nurses, Jemma knew, so she then decided to look at the baby. She was trying not to panic… trying to be rational… She was already planning on running her own DNA test… just in case.

SHE HAD TO GET AWAY, her inner Jemma screamed at her. No longer muted, her inner Simmons was screaming with a renewed fervor and excessive volume. YOU NEED TO CONTACT FELIX BLAKE.

"You better figure out how to feed her. I'm going back to my place with Sean," she informed Garrett. That done, she left even as John pleaded her not to leave.
She returned home, pretended not to notice that she is being followed, even as she stopped at the local burger joint for some decidedly unhealthy food. Because she's pregnant (How? She thought even while her all too logical brain pointed out that she and John had regularly been breaking the bed slats and there was always the remote chance that her birth control could and would fail…. AGAIN), she decided to have a milk shake.

One large vanilla shake.

Calcium you know.

Once home, she informed Sean in a happy voice that sounded fake to her own ears, that they were going to have dinner together, just the two of them and read a book.

"Go find your favorite book, and meet me in the reading chair," she instructed her son. Sean nodded and ran to his room.

It would take him several minutes to find his favorite book and he would probably bring back as many as he could carry. It would give her enough time to reach out to Coy Boy.

HELP.

After far too long, but really, it had been less than minute, her phone blinked.

?

SCARED. GET SEAN AND ME OUT. PLEASE. – she texted.

THE MOUTH CONTACTED ME. PLAN IN MOTION. DESTROYING YOUR PHONE NOW. SOON – C.B.

NO! she typed back even as her phone gave a slight shake and then messages began scrolling across her screen.

System file Cannot Be Found / Cannot Resolve Internal Error, Rebooting now. Her phone continued to boot and reboot with assorted arcane messages until at last, the screen was dark. It was also quite hot to touch so whatever Blake had done, he had completely fried the phone.

She was terrified and then Sean ran in the room. He had only Puppy, the soft toy that his godfather had technically given him. He climbed into the chair next to her and he handed her the toy.

"Sean, this isn't a book," she reminded him, so proud how her voice didn't shake as her son needed her. He nodded, once, and handed her the toy again. Then he cuddled next to her.

"Is Puppy scared?" she softly questioned.

Again, with the head nod.

"Daddy and Mommy just had a fight. It's ok. We both love you and Puppy very much, I promise you." She wiped tears from her eyes and her son stared up at her.
"No cwy, mama," he told her. "Nooo."

It was the first words he had ever spoken. Ever. And it was a SENTENCE. A THREE WORD SENTENCE by a slightly less than twelve-month-old boy who was physically larger than a three-year-old. He was a marvel, a genetic marvel, she realized anew.

And she was having another one.

Plus the one that had just been born.

"You're talking, Sean. You're talking!" She struggled to sound happy clappy, but instead she detected true fear.

John Garrett returned back to his apartment. Fortunately, Jemma had neither time or the energy to change the locks or reset the alarm. There were fast food wrappers on the floor, and he followed the trail until he found Jemma and Sean in Jemma's nursing chair. A milk drunk Sean had finished off his night cap and he was sleeping the sleep of the deeply sated.

"Hey," he said. For good measure, he extended a large bouquet of flowers.

"Do you think that will make everything better?" Jemma asked. Her voice was cold, and sharp and it cut him to his very soul.

God, what the hell had happened to him? What the hell had Hydra done to him to turn him into a family man? And what was Bakshi planning on doing to the kids? He had to get them out before he died.

"No, but I think if we go away for a few days, we can hash everything out. What do you think?" He softly questioned.

She nodded once.

Each day, Jemma remembered to breathe. The simple act of inhale… hold…. One…two…three…four… five and 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He squeezed her hand and then asked, "Ready?"

"John…. I'm pregnant," she informed him. She kept her eyes straight ahead as she couldn't… just couldn't… look at him.

"You're pregnant? How?"

"Do you really need to ask?" she snarked. "You've managed to get two women pregnant, so I'm assuming you were actively involved both times."

And she scored, as John Garrett flinched.

That small victory earned, she decided to close her eyes and savor the conquest for as long as she could.

Jemma was disorientated when she woke to the sound of John closing a garage door. She watched him as he walked around the rather spacious though windowless garage as though looking for something. Then he carefully knocked a rather syncopated rhythm on a door. The door opened and John Garrett grinned as he turned to face Jemma.

"Jemma, I'd love to introduce you to Coy Boy." John stopped and then continued, "Coy Boy, Oh you, exquisite little tart. Is this how you say hello after all these years?"

John was still grinning like a loon even as a graying, grim faced Felix Blake placed his gun's muzzle firmly underneath his jaw.

"One move, and I'll blow your fucking head off," snapped Felix Blake. "I'm here for Simmons and your son. You're completely optional."

John laughed, which caused Felix Blake to jab his muzzle HARD into John's neck. "What's so funny asshole?"

"Jemma, you didn't tell Coy Boy about the new additions, did you?"

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