A Slightly Different Case from Dusk till Dawn

by 2Lot

Summary

The BAU is put on the case of the criminal brothers Seth and Richard Gecko. After they escape prison, they take Reid hostage and vanish into Mexico. Richard is a paranoid schizophrenic serial murderer and rapist with a little too much interest in the good doctor; Seth just wants to get the two off them away from the police without too much mayhem—but finds his newest hostage to be more and more distracting as well.

Follows the movie. Which means towards the end there are vampires. And slash.
Chapter 1

Hello everyone. This is an older story I am posting for a friend of mine, since fanfiction.net is being funny about deleting stories these days and she doesn't want it to be lost. It's a crossover but you don't have to have seen the movie to understand it, it's all going to be explained. Enjoy^^

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Preface

Reid was vaguely aware that he was a mere hair's width from dying.

He ran faster, clutching the revolver in one hand and the stake in his other, his heart pounding in his ears.

It was bad enough that the whole case had spun out of control leaving a pair of psychotic criminals on the loose, that it had severed their team profoundly and turned his whole life upside down.

That he was used to.

What was worst was that he had so little opportunity to despise Seth Gecko for all he had done to him over the past days when all they had were each other to keep swarms of bloodthirsty monsters off their necks.

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Prologue

Prologue (14 years ago)

#

Seth felt numb as he walked out of the sanatorium with long strides, trying to shake off the screams and threats and pleas that seemed to cling to him, trying to tear him back by his shoulders. He didn't turn back around though, didn't stop walking until he was well outside, unable to hear his brother's voice.

Only then did he sink down on the steps in front of the building, letting his head fall onto his knees heavily. Richie's voice was still echoing in his head, his little brother's face so young and scared as he clung to him, trying to keep him from leaving him alone in there. Nothing had seemed to be left of the malice, the madness that usually gleamed within his dark irises, gone seemed the creature that scared Seth and that needed to be dealt with.

Seth took a deep breath, balling his shaking hands into fists as he stared at his knees with burning eyes. If only he could run away from the guilt, too.

It was the right thing, he told himself again, they'd assured him that they could help Richie, make him better. But it didn't feel right. It felt like he was abandoning him, betraying him. He, the only person Richie could still count on in this rotten world.

Pain stung where his fingernails dug into his palms as he fought the urge to jump up and run right back into the facility.
It would be so easy to just give in like he had time and time again, to walk in there and get Richie away from those doctors, the medication, the restraints, easy to forget all the suspicious accidents that ended with animals or even other children hurt, all the other disturbing occurrences.

After all, who were those people to say they could take better care of Richard than he? He was his big brother, he had witnessed the events that had made Richard into what he was, he'd been by his side all throughout his downward spiral -they, they were nothing. They wouldn't understand, not those doctors who looked down on people like them.

He raised his head, about to get up –whether to walk away or walk back into the sanatorium he didn't know –when he realized he wasn't alone anymore.

A young boy, about ten years old, skinny, with chestnut colored hair, messy clothes and big glasses was standing in front of him on the step, looking at him curiously. He drew back shyly when Seth looked up at him from out of dark eyes but didn't walk on like people usually did when he glared. Instead he just kept standing there, uninvited and yet, unwittingly, a welcome distraction from his chaotic thoughts.

"Why are you crying?" the boy asked right out, fine eyebrows creased over large hazel eyes.

The rude answer he normally would surely have gotten was somewhere lost in Seth's muddled brain, leaving him to merely shake his head, furiously swiping a hand over his face, "M'n't."

He looked away stubbornly, waiting for the kid to get the hint and walk away –unfortunately, his social skills didn't seem to be the best though because he just kept right on staring. Seth breathed out slowly through his nose, trying to collect himself while the boy stood there, quiet for a long minute as though he was trying to make up his mind about what to do.

"It's okay to cry if you're sad," he finally said, "My mom says it helps."

"Well, why don't you go back to your mom then and leave me the hell alone?" Seth snapped, irritated.

He felt a slight pang of guilt when the kid flinched at his harsh tone, but looked away again anyway. He had enough issues already, he didn't have the nerve to deal with some child now…

"I don't know," the other shrugged, voice small, "you just looked like you might need some-"

"Well, I don't." Seth cut him off again.

Then he sighed, frustrated. What the hell was he doing? Why wasn't he just walking away? The last thing he needed right now was a strange 10-year old who wanted to play psychiatrist for some reason. He'd talked to psychiatrists far too much already today.

He didn't know whether to laugh or get mad when he felt the kid shift closer, still not giving up.

"I can't go to my mom. I want to but the doctors say she needs to rest to get better. I don't want to keep her from getting well."

At that, Seth did look up, in surprise instead of anger this time.

For the first time he really looked at the kid, the worn clothes, the slightly dirty glasses covering the saddest eyes he'd ever seen. He gulped, an image of a younger Richard suddenly flashing across his mind. Back then, in the orphanage, before it had all gone to hell…when he'd been small and scared and helpless…back then Richie had had the exact same expression, innocent and lost. It seemed like
an eternity ago. These days he was barely able to find traces of who his brother used to be.

"What's wrong with her?" he asked before he could help himself, for the moment distracted from his own worries.

Where were the kids parents anyway, he asked himself for the first time. Why was he here all alone, unsupervised?

The boy shrugged, fiddling with the hem of his overly large sweater, "She's a paranoid schizophrenic and the past few months her episodes have gotten more and more severe. My dad is always working but he says she can't keep on taking care of me without getting help so he made her come here. They didn't tell me when she'll be coming home."

Seth blinked, momentarily stunned by the boy's use of language that seemed too advanced for his age. Then he thought about the content of what he'd just heard.

"She's a patient here?"

The kid nodded. Seth just stared for a long moment, digesting that information. This child's mother had the same condition as his brother? Well, that explained the lost expression as well as why he was here. It looked like by some weird chance they were both fighting the urge to run back in there and get a loved one out, and it seemed they also both had nowhere else to go.

This time Seth did laugh, but it came out as a croaked, bitter sound. There he had it again, another example of God sticking it in and breaking it off. Another child's life screwed up from the very beginning.

"Do you have family here, too?" The boy's voice distracted him and Seth started to wonder if he was maybe looking for moral support or if he really had nowhere to go. In the end, he didn't know what made him answer, but it was probably one of those two reasons.

"My brother," he admitted quietly, "He's...messed up. They said he'd have to stay here for a long time so he could get better. Our foster parents decided this and I'm not old enough to get him out... and I don't want to, because somehow I know they're right...but I don't think I can leave him here..."

He clenched his shaking hands, overcome with sudden emotion and hating himself for the renewed show of weakness.

There was a short silence in which the boy seemed to think his words through, then he said, "Maybe it is better f he stays here-"

"How would you know that?" Seth snapped, his pain suddenly morphing into anger that gushed out of him, "You don't know anything!"

He regretted his outburst almost immediately when he saw the kid's intimidated reaction. It was like looking into a mirror.

He could see his own darkness reflected in those eyes then, his temper, the anger that he always carried around with him and that so often got him into trouble. That too was due to Richard and their past, he knew. He had felt the hatred growing inside him for years now, festering, strengthened every time society rejected him because of something Richard had done wrong, because he sided with his
It was like that old fuck of a doctor had told him just an hour ago, like everyone who'd ever tried to influence him positively had told him. Richie, with all of his madness and darkness, was inevitably going down - and he was tearing Seth down with him. There was no denying it; it had been four years since their parents died now, more than enough time to learn to cope and move on, to look into the future. Instead, all they did was live in the past, haunted by the nightmares of their childhood. Richie was likely forever stuck there, in his mind, he knew that.

But he, he was sixteen now and instead of planning his future he kept holding back because he couldn't bear to leave Richie behind. Ever since he could remember he had hurt people and broken rules, laws even more times than he could count - all because they had accused Richie of crimes he had (probably) not committed or lies (hopefully) they'd spread about him. And with every hateful word, with every obstacle he decided to bring down for the both of them, he could felt the hate growing, the anger, the disdain.

He could feel the person he used to be fading to be replaced by someone he didn't recognize, someone who scared himself and who scared others.

Seth let his head fall onto his knees again, anger fading to desperation rapidly.

"I know it's for the best," he whispered, "But it doesn't feel like it. Leaving him here…it feels like I'm destroying his life…but I know that if he stays out, he'll destroy everything around him, including me. I fucking know that…but he's my only family, and…"

He didn't even think about the fact that he was spilling his guts to a ten year old anymore, someone who probably didn't get half of what he was saying. It felt like a relief to simply get the words out, and if it was only for himself to hear.

He was all the more surprised when he did get an answer. Gingerly it seemed, the boy set down on the step as well, keeping a slightly larger distance than usual.

"You love him," he said, with words that should be but somehow weren't far beyond his level of maturity, "I love my mom, too, and that's why I want what's best for her, even if it doesn't feel right for her or for me. Even if it hurts."

They looked at each other then, really looked. Seth couldn't remember the last time he'd truly allowed himself to look openly into someone's eyes, to let someone see his. It was like looking into a mirror, but also like looking into the past. He could see the same fear, the same sheer loneliness in the boy's eyes that he carried around with him every day. He could see the good, too, the goodness and innocence that was definitely there, the exact traits he missed so dearly looking at Richard. In a couple of years, he wondered, would that innocence be gone from this kid's eyes as well?

"You're tougher than you look, kid," he murmured.

He meant it too. Somehow he knew that this boy wouldn't end like Richard, despite the circumstances. If he was this strong and insightful now, no age would be able to soil his spirit.

"Most people are," the boy replied, unimpressed, old young eyes burning into Seth's memory, "when it comes down to it."

Looking back, years later, that moment was what made his decision.

The perfect clarity and truth in a ten year old's statement was what changed the course of his future. Suddenly he just knew he could do it to. Because he too had more strength than he thought he did.
He could walk away from this, ascend from all the darkness dragging him down. If this little kid could do it he could, too.

With one last glance into the kid's eyes he got up and walked away without looking back.

It was time to start moving forward.

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Chapter 1

14 years later (Present)

When Spencer Reid entered the bullpen of the BAU that particular November morning, he didn't have the faintest clue that it would mark the beginning of something that would make him doubt everything he'd ever thought true.

His work day started normal enough; he walked past Aaron Hotchner's office, wishing his chief a good morning before making himself the first of many more cups of coffee for the day. Then he went through some case files that had somehow found their way onto his desk, and waited for the rest of the team to arrive half an hour later.

Elle Greenaway was first to rush into the bullpen; she snuck past Hotch and picked up her files from Reid's desk with an apologetic smile.

Jason Gideon and Jennifer Jareau were next, both of them obviously already in full working mode judging by their faces. They briefly stopped by Hotch's office and talked to him about something; he nodded sternly in response.

"Conference room in ten," he called loud enough for Reid and Elle to hear. Both nodded, wondering what their next case would be. Hopefully they would travel somewhere warm…

Derek Morgan was last to enter the bullpen, somehow managing to look fresh and vibrant even though he must have run the last couple of blocks judging by the time.

"What's up, people?" he grinned as he sauntered over to Reid's desk.

Both agents smiled at him.

"We have a new case," Reid informed him, "You're just in time."

"Aren't I always?" the older profiler joked, then he snatched Reid's cup of coffee from the table and took a sip before his friend could protest, "Alright then, let's do this."

And with that he turned around and headed for the conference room with an enthused spring in his step that left both Reid and Elle jealous as hell.

Yes, Morgan was in an unusually good mood. But then again, like Reid he had no idea yet of the events that lay ahead of him.

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"Alright, JJ. Where are we going this time?" Hotch asked, his face as stern as ever.

The others gathered around the round table and prepared to listen to their media liaison's information on the new case. JJ pointed towards the projection on the wall.
It showed the crimes scene photos for about a dozen cases with each mangled body almost too soiled with blood to be properly recognized.

Elle grimaced at the gruesome images, "Hard to say what the cause of death is, isn't it?"

JJ nodded before giving them the information she had gathered, "We have thirteen victims that have been killed over the last seven years, mostly women but also some men, all fairly young. Their bodies have been found in five different states all over the US. They were reported missing only to show up in some secluded area a couple of days later – several of them were raped and all were either shot or stabbed to death."

She paused when she saw their confused faces.

Morgan was first to voice his concerns, "But, JJ, what makes you think they are all connected? I mean, sure, the murders are all brutal, but there is no distinctive MO that distinguishes them from normal murders. I bet we could find hundreds of other murders just like that."

The others nodded in agreement and Hotch added, "There's two more things. Let's say they are connected. If we are dealing with a serial rapist, wouldn't he assault all of them and also go for either women or men, not both? And the same goes for his method of killing. An UnSub doesn't just go from stabbing someone multiple times to shooting them without reason."

"A gunshot wound suggests a goal oriented kill, quick and easy. No actual contact with the victim," Reid chimed in with trivia, "That cannot be compared to actively stabbing someone multiple times which is much more physical and ruthless if not sadistic. A killer like that would be too disorganized and compulsive to purposefully choose a gun to kill someone."

He too was met with overall approval.

JJ opened her mouth to say something but was interrupted when Gideon immediately drew a conclusion from Reid analysis, "So you're saying we might have more than one killer working together?"

Reid only shrugged, frowning: "If they are connected at all. Morgan is right, nothing suggests that--" "Well as I was about to say before you interrupted me…" JJ finally managed to squeeze in, interrupting her overenthusiastic colleagues, "There is in fact a connection. The rapes can be linked to one man."

She pressed a button on her remote and the image on the wall changed.

It showed the mug shot of a man around thirty, with short dark hair and thick glasses. One had but to look at his eyes to see that he spelled trouble (1).

"Richard Gecko, 29 years old. Previously convicted for several robberies and sexual crimes. He did three years in prison for an attempted rape back in the 90’s. His current whereabouts are unknown, he was last seen in Greenbelt, Maryland. We have video of him robbing a liquor store there. His DNA was found on all and in four of the victims. This was only found out now because his DNA wasn't in the system until spring. And what looked like unconnected murders until then now looks like the handwriting of a serial killer."

This new information didn't help clear up any of the confusion, but simply brought up new questions from the team.

"Fine, but that doesn't prove he murdered them," Morgan noticed, "And it doesn't say anything about the ones that were simply shot."
"He was in contact with them shortly prior to their demise. There´s very likely a connection," JJ explained, starting to sound annoyed by their reluctance to see her point.

"Let´s say there is," Hotch finally conceded, "But why did we get this case if they already know who the guy is? Put his picture all over the media and they should have him in a matter of days."

JJ nodded grimly: "That´s the problem. Local PD have been looking for him since the Liquor store incident but he has completely vanished. But that isn't why we were involved. Like I said: Gecko can be connected to the rapes but not all of the actual killings."

"So there is more than one MO after all?" Gideon deducted swiftly.

"Most likely."

"So we have Gecko who abducts them, rapes them…and probably stabs them, which is both very violent and compulsive. And then there must be someone who shot the others, right?"

"So there is more than one UnSub," Gideon repeated his earlier assumption and JJ nodded.

"But then, how can we be sure that the shootings are connected to the stabbings?" Morgan demanded to know, completely ignoring JJ growing impatience.

The young woman sighed softly, "Again: Gecko´s DNA was found on all victims, but not all of them had been sexually assaulted. We think that all victims were abducted by a team of at least two people including Gecko for some reason. It could be that the ones that were shot were just killed to keep them from going to the police; those weren't passionate crimes. If Richard Gecko didn't kill them, he most likely knows who did."

"Alright," Hotch at least seemed open to her theory now, "So we either have a team of killers, or the man has multiple personalities. Was there any other DNA found on the victims?"

"Not exactly. There were fingerprints though."

"Whose?" Reid piped up curiously.

JJ pulled up another mug shot on the screen.

It showed another man in his early thirties who also had short dark hair and eyes that seemed almost black. That was where the resemblance ended though.

Compared to Richard Gecko this man had an equally dangerous aura about him, but he didn't look nearly as deranged. In fact he could be described as handsome, wearing an expensive-looking dark suit. The only indication that he was somehow connected to crime were a black tribal tattoo snaking up his neck from under his collar and the coldness of his gaze.

"Seth Gecko, 31," JJ informed them, "He is Richard's brother and has been in the Kansas State Penitentiary for the past year for armed robbery during the course of which two police officers were killed. It’s possible that his DNA is also on the victims and that the MEs just didn't look closely enough (2). We are currently working on that."

"What do we have on their past?" Morgan asked, suddenly sounding more convinced now that he’d seen the second picture.

JJ immediately perked up now that the team started to become interested, "History of domestic violence, both parents deceased when they were young. Both brothers went from foster family to
foster family, most of which rejected them quickly because of their violent and antisocial behavior. Richard was admitted into a psychiatric hospital at the age of 14 after he was suspected of having caused the death of a fellow student. Seth seemed to be doing better for a while then, focusing on school, until during one of his visits to the sanatorium Richard attacked one of his nurses with a knife and set his room on fire. Both brothers fled the scene and couldn't be found after that. We assume they travelled around the country, living off of small scale thefts and robberies all the while running from the authorities. They later moved on to bank robberies and extortion - which is how some of our victims were abducted actually - until Seth was incarcerated. Since then there has been no trace of Richard.

Hotch nodded thoughtfully, rubbing his forehead, "So we think that Seth Gecko might be the one to shoot the hostages he had to take during his robberies so they wouldn't be able to help trace him?"

"It is possible," JJ nodded, "But we can't be certain about that yet. It´s possible that he didn't kill them, that there is a third UnSub, but we can't tell without the murder weapons. All we have are his fingerprints on the duct tape that the victims were tied with and some on their clothes or superficial wounds: Maybe he only helped to abduct them."

"So he could be one of the killers, or a third team member who is used for the dirty work. Terrific," Morgan’s good mood from before had long vanished. He already saw a very long and complicated week coming towards them.

"In any case he knows what his brother´s MO is and he has done nothing to stop him in eight years," JJ said, "There are probably even more corpses that just haven’t been found."

Now it was Elle’s turn to frown as she gave her opinion: "So he either doesn't care that his brother is a sadistic rapist or he is in no position to stop him. In that case, we might have one dominant and submissive partner in that team."

"Maybe," JJ agreed, holding up her files, "The only thing we know for sure is that Richard Gecko hasn't stopped killing after his brother was arrested. If anything the number of murders has increased."

"He's becoming unstable without his brother?" Reid wondered, "But that would make Seth Gecko the dominant partner…"

"We won't know that until we’ve seen them interact," Gideon concluded briefly, "What’s important is to stop Richard Gecko from assaulting any more people. We need to stop him ASAP."

The rest of the team voiced their agreement in unison. They would have to track down Richard Gecko for the rapes anyway. And if they could solve the murders along the way- all the better.

"So what do we do?" Morgan inquired, already answering his own question, "We get all the information we can on Richard Gecko, establish a profile and then try to anticipate his next move?"

This time JJ actually smiled a little, "Actually, Seth Gecko will have a court hearing this week in Wichita about those DNA traces they found on the victims. They probably won’t be able to prove much - but that's not important. The hearing is open to the public."

Morgan caught on to her train of thought immediately, "And you think his brother might come there?"

She shrugged, "It’s our best shot."

"Alright, people, here’s what we’re going to do," Hotch concluded, getting out of his chair, "The
hearing is in two days. Before that, we will go to the prison Seth Gecko is staying in. Maybe we can cut him a deal, get him to sell out his brother’s location or even lure him out. And if not that, he might at least spill something about his involvement in the murders. Morgan, Reid, Elle, you’re going to see him today. The rest of us will look for more possible victims and start looking for people the brothers have a relationship with."

He left the room with Gideon and JJ at his heels.

"Alright then," Morgan sighed, stretching in his chair one last time as he looked over at Reid and Elle expectantly, "Looks like we're going to Kansas."
Part 2: The visit at the prison

"Will you give it a rest! I know what I'm doing!"

"If that were the case then we would not be stuck here. Look, Morgan, all I'm saying is that it would have been better…"

"What do you know about driving anyway? Just cause you've read every book abou…"

"Hey! It's too late now anyways, you guys," Elle pinched the bridge of her nose, trying to ignore the growing headache she was developing.

The plane had touched down early but they only arrived at the Kansas State Prison around noon after being stuck in traffic for almost an hour (due to some unfortunate decisions made by some of them).

Morgan's mood was respectively bad and the fact that Reid wouldn't stop discussing better routes for the way back didn't help much.

Elle was quick to announce their arrival at the service desk, hoping to get out of range should Morgan blow up.

Neither of them was especially enthusiastic about the case, Morgan for said reasons, Elle because of her general hatred for cases involving sexual assault and Reid because he was stuck with both of their bad vibes.

About fifteen minutes later, they were led to an empty interviewing room that had no windows but a large mirror wall on one side.

"Are you going to ask him the questions?" Reid asked Morgan as he unpacked the needed case files and arranged them on the table.

Morgan nodded, "Sure. Elle can help me. Will you make sure that the rest of the people on our list are available so we can talk to them after? We'll start with longtime cellmates and move on to the guards this afternoon."

"Sounds good," Reid agreed as he put his satchel back on and turned towards the door: "Good luck, you two."

Elle smiled briefly at him, already taking her seat at the table. Morgan hesitated, stopping Reid before he left the room:

"Hey, Reid."

The young doctor turned around, his eyebrows raised, "Hmm?"

Morgan offered him a somewhat sheepish smile, rubbing his neck, "Sorry about before… I didn't mean to cut into you like that."

Reid returned the smile without hesitation, glad that Morgan was willing to forget about the rather unpleasant morning.
"Don't worry about it," he shrugged, and added before he could stop himself, "I can imagine how infuriating it must be when someone else is always right."

Morgan scoffed at that comment, rolling his eyes in mock annoyance, "I didn't say you were, Reid."

"We'll see about that on the way back," Reid grinned over his shoulder as he opened the door.

Then he turned around - and almost jumped out of his skin when he suddenly found himself faced with no other than Seth Gecko. Seemingly appearing out of thin air, he was filling out the door frame, barely an inch between them. The older Gecko brother looked much like in his mug shot except maybe even more intimidating. Reid couldn't help but stare as the man made to brush past him, surprised that he was even taller than him.

Their eyes met fleetingly, Gecko's cold, dark ones about to pass him when he hesitated unexpectedly, something flashing across his face. His eyes widened slightly as he fixated Reid, turning towards him.

Startled, Reid recoiled, only then able to shake his stupor and react. A second later a guard he hadn't noticed before yanked Gecko back into place by the chains around his wrists, breaking the moment.

Reid gulped, hoping that his lapse hadn't been visible on his face as he mumbled an apology and then stepped aside to let them pass, trying to calm himself. He really needed to start being more attentive to the world around him –that couldn't hurt in their line of work…

He counted to three in his head, then looked up again, shocked to find Seth Gecko's black eyes had remained on him as he walked past, fixating him before he turned around and walked towards the table wordlessly. Reid stood there frozen, his heart rate just slowly recovering from shock.

'What was that just now?'

He stood there for another few seconds trying to make sense of why the prisoner had reacted the way he did, coming up blank.

It wasn't until the man sat opposite of Elle and Morgan with his hands chained to the table that Reid remembered he had things to do. He was halfway down the corridor when suddenly he changed his mind.

Quickly, he turned around and walked straight into the room opposite the mirror wall. He greeted the man watching the monitors, then looked into the interrogation room.

His actual task would have to wait for the moment, for now he wanted to see how the interview would go. He was halfway down the corridor when suddenly he changed his mind.

He watched the monitors, then looked into the interrogation room.

His actual task would have to wait for the moment, for now he wanted to see how the interview would go. He watched as Morgan and Elle introduced themselves and got started.

"Mr. Gecko," Morgan began, sorting through the file in front of him, "I take it you know why we are here."

Gecko had seemingly gotten over his little lapse quickly; he didn't look towards the door again, instead all focused on the FBI agents interviewing him now. He smiled wryly, leaning back confidently in his chair as he mustered both agents; he didn't seem nervous in the least. But then, even if he was guilty he had no reason to: He was already in jail.

"Of course," he replied smoothly, "You’re here about my baby brother, right?"

It was a little irritating to hear the homicidal maniac from their pictures referred to that way and that reflected on Morgan's face, but he nodded anyway, "We are investigating against Richard Gecko in
connection to thirteen murders and four rapes over the past eight years. We were hoping you could help us with that."

"Were you now?" Gecko drawled, one corner of his mouth pulled up ironically while his eyes remained cold as ice. He didn't continue but just looked at them with slight bemusement.

Reid thought of the videos and photos he had seen of Seth Gecko robbing stores and banks, coldly pressing his gun against the heads of countless innocent people without batting so much as an eyelash. It was almost invisible now that he was acting all calm and polite, but there was no mistaking the underlying darkness radiating from him. He cocked his head to the side, revealing the tattoo on his neck and Reid was suddenly glad it wasn't him in there who had to bear those eyes on his skin.

Of all the UnSubs they encountered on a daily basis, those who smiled were usually the worst.

Reid's eyes flickered from Gecko to Morgan who was visibly getting annoyed by the prisoner's attitude and unexpected refusal to cooperate. Of course, Morgan would rather be mad than scared. He wasn't a blinker.

Right then, Morgan looked like he was about to say something harsh, abandoning false politesse, when Elle answered in his stead.

"Yes, we were," she said, her gaze just as cold as her opponents.

There was no proof Seth Gecko had harmed the victims in any way but she regarded him like he still had their blood on his hands.

Elle pushed the crime scene photos across the table, unable to hide her contempt for him.

Gecko overlooked them briefly without so much as batting an eyelash, then he shrugged, "Sorry to disappoint you. I haven't seen Richie in over a year."

"We know you haven't," Morgan almost growled, sounding acidic in his impatience, "He can hardly take a break from being on the run just to drop by a federal prison. But you haven't answered the question."

"No, I haven't," Gecko smiled with an infuriating calm. He knew they wanted something from him and he was obviously enjoying it immensely.

Reid frowned. Their initial profile was dissolving right before his eyes…

"Listen," Morgan now snapped angrily, "We have proof that he committed those rapes, we have proof that both of you were in physical contact with them before their deaths."

Gecko wasn't overly impressed with Morgan's aggressive alpha attitude. For a moment, his left eye twitched, making it seem like he was angry at the tone, but when he spoke he was in perfect control.

"So what do you need me for?" he asked tauntingly.

Morgan and Elle must be realizing it too by now. If Seth Gecko was indeed involved in the murders, he could in no case be the submissive partner. His whole confidence and demeanor spoke against it. No, he was a leader, an alpha just like Morgan.

Not a great combination with the potential urge to kill.
What it came down to, Reid concluded, was that if they were a team, Richard Gecko would be the one following Seth's orders. Which meant Seth's involvement must be bigger than they thought.

Unfortunately, that meant that the likelihood that they could scare the man into cooperating now was low to zero. All they had left to try was play on his obvious connection to his little brother and hope that that would strike a nerve.

And Elle did just that.

With some effort she let her expression soften and become somewhat concerned, "Seth. If Richard didn't kill those people, then take the heat off of him. Help us find whoever did and help your brother and yourself."

Gecko shot her a look of barely concealed contempt; apparently he didn't like her using his first name - or he realized she was playing him by using it.

Highly perceptive, Reid mentally added to the profile as he listened intently.

"So do I get this right?" he inquired with mock apprehension, "You're saying there is a maniac out there doing this..." He pointed at the pictures in front of him, "And you're either accusing my brother or assuming I know the guy who did it somehow. And based on that you want me to snitch on him?"

He laughed into their faces, leaning forward with gleaming eyes, "And then what? You cut me a deal, I get out and the next thing I know he slits my throat in revenge. Why, no thank you, Agent Morgan. I think I'll just try my luck with the American justice system."

That said, he leaned back in his chair, waiting for them to react. His dark eyes wandered to the mirror wall and met Reid's in a way that didn't feel coincidental though it obviously had to be.

Reid couldn't help but shiver.

What was it about this man? He just kept surprising him. Not just because he'd managed to unsettle and startle him in a way that rarely happened anymore as used as he was to working with murderers.

No, on top of that Seth Gecko was collected, intelligent, eloquent, handsome and most of all ruthless, all going against their initial profile, all indicating sociopathy.

They would have to reevaluate their whole profile.

And that meant: There was no point in trying to bribe or scare this man.

Apparently Morgan realized that as well, because he got up and started putting away the photographs wordlessly, not even sparing the man another glance.

Elle got up as well, looking down on the convict disdainfully.

"Sorry I couldn't help you," Gecko told her amiably, knowing full well how infuriating that was to her.

"Oh, don't worry," Elle replied coldly as she followed Morgan out of the room, "We will find your brother and then you'll wish you had helped the both of you when you had the chance."

She clearly didn't expect him to answer but turned to face him when he did.

"If you find Richie, you'll wish you had run while you had the chance, sugar," he said lowly, for once letting the darkness behind his eyes come forth just by a bit.
One didn't need to spend years in Elle’s line of work to get the implication.

For a moment she looked like she wanted to spit in his face, but then she merely walked out the door after Morgan, letting the lock snap in loudly behind her.

The flight home was mostly silent. There was no bickering, no light conversations, just tense silence with the occasional remark about the case thrown in.

It was hard to tell whose mood was worse, Elle's or Morgan's.

Finally, Reid took heart and began setting up a renewed profile out loud in case someone wanted to participle after all instead of sulking.

"Alright, so we were wrong to assume that Richard Gecko was the one in charge. It makes sense, too, in the way that Seth Gecko is much more collected and cool headed. If he is one of our killers, I would say he shoots the people. He is ruthless, but not compulsive in the way that would make him repeatedly stab someone: He barely looked at the victims' pictures. He didn't seem appalled which suggests a lack of empathy but it wasn't like he couldn't take his eyes off them."

The other two nodded and he continued, "If Richard is the one stabbing the victims, that makes him very compulsive, disorganized and deranged; someone who wouldn't be able to hide his murders skillfully over the course of years. It could mean that he is spiraling out of control now that his brother isn't guiding and looking out for him anymore."

"So why haven't we found him yet?" Elle asked moodily.

"I don't know," Reid admitted, "But I believe Hotch is right to think he might come to his brother's hearing."

"So we will see more of Seth Gecko. Charming," Morgan grunted, before focusing on Reid, "What was that by the way when you left the room? Did you say something to him? He was staring at you."

Reid shrugged, trying to seem unbothered even though he had just been thinking about the same thing, "No, I didnt. I have no idea what that was."

Both Morgan and Elle looked at him with an expression somewhere between displeased and worried, but neither of them pushed the subject. After all, it had just been a weird occurrence and none of them wanted to keep thinking about Seth Gecko any longer than necessary. They had no idea that he would give them a lot to think about all too soon.

Seth Gecko was deep in thought as he was led back to his cell.

So a special unit was on to Richie now. If only they knew how easy it would be to get to Richie, how soon they would see so much more of him...

But these people that had come here hadn't been very special in his eyes...they hadn't even been particularly smart. The muscular black guy had been too full of testosterone to really pay attention to his answers, the darkhaired woman too busy despising him to see the truth behind all these cases. If the rest of the team was like that they wouldn't have any trouble, he knew, no need to waste any more thoughts on them.

What had made him pause though was the third one, the young man who had left the room just as he arrived. He'd barely gotten a look of his face, but it had been long enough to break his concentration
for a split second. Gorgeous hazel eyes had met his for just a second, distracting him. Pretty boy...

In consequence, he'd found himself surprisingly and dangerously distracted during the interview; his thoughts had kept going back to that brief moment of passing, caught up on it somehow. Initially, he had assumed it was attraction, misplaced yes, inconvenient at the moment, definitely -but understandable...the boy had been just his type and he was going through a bit of a dry spell here.

But now back in the cell, in the dark, alone with nothing but his thoughts, it suddenly seemed like there was more to the feeling.

Hadn't he looked familiar? No, how would he? The team had flown in from Virginia while Seth had never seen more than a few bars and the prison of the state he was currently in. He was rather proud of not associating with anyone in law enforcement. And yes, that kid had seemed too young, too easily scared to be an agent too, but he had to be connected to them in some way. So why would he be familiar?

Still, the question kept bothering him, those eyes remaining on his mind.

In the early hours of the morning, he finally pushed it aside forcefully. Why was he even so bothered? Had more important things to deal with. It wouldn't be long now till the breakout, and those agents wouldn't know what hit them. Coming face to face with Richie alone would certainly not turn out well for them, but once he was out as well, they would bring hell down on those feds' heads. Each and everyone of them would feel their wrath if they dared cross them.

So that boy had better not be one of them, because in Richie and Seth’s world, having pretty eyes was by far not enough to escape harm. In fact, in regards to Richard, it was actually more of a high risk factor...

Seth shook his head harshly as he felt an unexpected and certainly unwelcome pinch of unease at the thought, the inevitable mental image of Richie, eyes burning madly and drenched in blood, emanating a darkness that scared even him sometimes.

In his year in prison, that reality had been far away, but soon they would be reunited again, and he already knew that it would take all of his strength and skill to keep them both free and alive -only if he still had time left he could try maybe to minimize the trail of blood they left in their wake, the amount of lives that would fall prey to Richard's madness.

Chances were he'd try and fail, like always when it came to Richard. It was something he'd just had to come to terms with. It wasn't perfect, no, but in the end, if it came down to the two of them versus the rest of the world, he would always chose the former, no messy how dirty he'd have to get his hands in the process.

xxx

Chapter 4: Escape

The court room that belonged to the Wichita Municipal court house was unusually full for such a low scale crime that day.

Reid tried to make a way through the crowd to his seat, trying not to step on the heels of Hotch who was walking in front of him and not to be squished at the same time.

Apparently, the Gecko case had attracted much public attention due to the connection to the rapes.
He started to wonder if it wouldn't have been better to keep that information under wraps; it would have made spotting an UnSub in the court house much easier and less dangerous for everyone. But then, people needed to be alert and know to steer clear of Richard Gecko.

Reid whimpered when a hard elbow connected with his ribs painfully. Behind him, Gideon and Elle were having similar problems.

Morgan wasn't with them.

He was helping JJ and Garcia at the office. Whatever that meant.

Reid frowned, knowing full well that JJ didn't really need his help, Morgan had just wanted to get out of having to see Seth Gecko again. It was understandable in a way, but then again they had to deal with much more unpleasant people on a daily basis. But something about Seth Gecko just seemed to bug Morgan extraordinarily.

Maybe it was the knowledge that they had nothing on him and no real chance of catching his brother, or the fact that Morgan always seemed a little touchy about cases concerning abuse.

Reid stumbled as someone suddenly bumped into him from behind. Just before he could hit the floor Hotch grabbed his arm and pulled him out of the crowd and onto their bench.

"Thanks," Reid huffed as he collapsed next to his boss. The older man just nodded distractedly, typing something into his cell phone.

"I promised Jack we´d go ice skating this weekend," he gave Reid a strained smile when he noticed him looking, "But now it looks like that won't be happening."

"I'm sorry, Hotch," Reid replied truthfully.

He knew how much it gnawed at his boss that he was losing even the last remnants of his private life to his job. To Reid, the team was his family and he spent every day with them, so it was all the same to him.

But Hotch was probably right. Unless Richard Gecko was stupid enough to let himself be caught today, they would work all through the weekend.

His attention was diverted when Seth Gecko was led in and the judge called for order. The voices around them died down to murmurs as the hearing started. Reid watched as the case was presented and Gecko was questioned to the assaults. The man displayed much of the same eerie calm he had just two days ago, with the difference that he looked more comfortable in the black suit he was wearing than his prison clothes. More like a business man than a professional thief in any case, too handsome really to even have to kidnap or rape someone...

Reid realized he was staring then and tried to focus on the hearing that had already started.

"Mr. Gecko. Did you have any part in the abduction and killing of said victims?" the prosecutor was just asking and the man shook his head dispassionately.

"Is the same true for the sexual assault? And please remember you're under oath, sir," the prosecutor reminded him, igniting a shadow of annoyance to flash over Gecko's face.

Whether it was the unnecessary reminder or that particular accusation, Reid did not know, but it took some of Gecko's calm away for the first time. He stared the man down out of black eyes without wavering. "I'm not a rapist," he hissed spitefully, actually causing the prosecutor to take a cautious
step backwards.

As the questioning continued, Reid mustered the convict's face closely, trying to form an opinion on him. He really seemed quite upset by the idea of sexual assault. That was surprising. If Seth Gecko was indeed a psychopath he would have no scruples -or issues lying under oath. But he looked truly offended at that last accusation, and there was nothing about his mimics or body language that suggested a lie.

"Do you believe him?" he whispered to Gideon on his right.

The older man shrugged lightly without turning around, "He seems sincere. What interests me more is that he wasn't so clear about the murders."

True. So maybe he was a murderer with a strict moral code…or an excellent liar…

But if he truly despised what had happened to these victims, why would he have let his brother continue for so long? It just didn't make sense…

Reid pondered that question until the end of the hearing.

Finally it ended, and Seth Gecko was led back to the waiting area where a prison guard would pick him up soon. Despite the handcuffs he carried himself proudly, shooting a condescending look at Hotch and Gideon as he walked past them.

He knew they were frustrated and seemed to enjoy that: Nothing much had come out of the questioning, just like they had expected. Seth Gecko would remain in prison for his prior crimes and Richard Gecko would continue walking the streets, without them knowing even which state he was currently in.

Now, basically their only hope was to wait until another person went missing –the worst part of their jobs.

Reid knew the others were thinking about the same thing as they walked out of the court room, it was obvious on their faces. They briefly stopped in the hall so Gideon and Hotch could talk to some people and then left the court house.

On the long drive to the airport, all of them were mostly quiet, pondering the case and hating their situation.

They were almost at the runway when Hotch's and Gideon's phones started ringing simultaneously. Both men answered with dawning alarm on their faces, which only got worse as they listened to what the callers were saying.

Elle and Reid exchanged a worried look as they waited impatiently to be filled in.

Finally, Hotch hung up, cursing uncharacteristically loud. He looked at all of them with dark eyes, looking incredibly angry and disappointed at the same time, "Seth Gecko has escaped the courthouse."

"What?" Elle asked incredulously, "How…?"

"They were going to have a prison guard pick him up from the waiting area," Gideon who was a little calmer, explained, "He was led to the police car outside accordingly and drove off but never arrived at the prison. The car was found just now with the dead cop inside the trunk."
"Let me guess," Elle said drily: "Stabbed to death?"

Hotch didn't even bother answering, too busy swearing under his breath as he was, "Just five more minutes! We should have stayed, made sure…"

Gideon put a calming hand on the man's shoulder, shaking his head lightly, "We couldn't expect something this planned out, Hotch. It doesn't fit the profile for Richard Gecko to be so calculating; he should have just barged in there with a gun."

"We should have known Seth would be smart enough to have a plan and somehow let his brother in on it," Reid frowned.

The thought that those two men were out there now made his stomach turn and clench. He paced around uneasily, one hand messing up his hair unconsciously, "He must have known even when we came to see him. That's why he was so confident."

"Were they able to track them?" Elle asked the most important question. It was answered with a head shake.

"No. There were tire marks leading away from where they found the police car, but so far they have no concrete lead."

Then all four agents just stood there in their dread and anger, not sure on how to proceed. They couldn't believe they had screwed up like that.

Finally, Hotch got himself together and took the lead like he was supposed to, "There's nothing we can do about it now except work on the background info back at Quantico and visit places they've been to. Then we wait for them to make a mistake."

Gideon nodded grimly: "By this afternoon every town in the country will have their pictures in every store window. We will find them and catch them."

He was met with glances that were wary rather than confident.

"Of course we will," Hotch agreed firmly before turning to get into the plane after all, just to add more darkly, "The question is how much more destruction they will cause before we do."
Warning: There are some pretty graphic descriptions of violence in here (even though it’s not as bad as the movie, I censored it a bit). So pardon the killing and extensive swearing, neither that nor the dialogue is my invention anyway.

So, this is basically the opening scene from the movie. It’s on utube under "From Dusk till dawn opening scene" (the 9 min. version).

Again: From Dusk till Dawn does not belong to me and I don't make money off of it.

There’s is almost no BAU in this, it's mostly to introduce the relationship that the brothers have. I think it shows very nicely who’s in charge (and who’s a complete whacko…).

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Big Spring, Texas. November 5th

It was about an hour and a half before sundown when Texas ranger Earl McGraw stepped out of his police car and walked into Benny's World of Liquor to buy a bottle of Jack Daniels for his dinner.

He crossed the parking lot, walking past a 1975 Plymouth -the only other car standing there.

He entered the store, casually saluting the store owner behind the counter. He and Pete Bottoms had known each other for years and he always came here after his shift, knowing that he wouldn't be judged for his drinking habits.

He barely glanced at the customers in the back of the store, two young couples it seemed, before turning to Pete with a sigh, "Long, goddamn day, I tell ya."

Pete shrugged, wiping his sweaty palms on his ugly Hawaiian shirt. It wasn't even warm in the store but McGraw was beyond caring about trivial things like that after the day he'd had.

"You're preaching to the choir, man," Pete agreed, his voice somewhat shriller than usually. He handed the ranger a bottle of his brand without having to ask.

"You okay?" McGraw asked him with one eyebrow raised as he took it.

"Yeah, yeah, fine," Pete said, "I just wanna get out of here, is all. You wouldn't believe the people that come in here all day long. Sick world , I tell ya."

McGraw eyed him warily as he clutched his Jack Daniels tighter and Pete backpedalled immediately. "I mean, like, you hear about those two guys who are on the run since Wednesday?"

McGraw nodded, pulling a grimace as he did, "Yeah, broke out of prison or something up in Kansas. Been hearing people talking about it all week."

He leaned over the counter, picking his teeth as he said almost conspirationally, "They're probably headed for the border which would bring them right this way. But I'll tell ya, they'd better not cross me."

He made a gesture like his fingers were a gun going off and laughed at his own joke, not even noticing the lack of response from his friend. Pete nodded with some delay, his eyes flitting over to the back of the store from time to time.
"Alright, I'll be off," McGraw sighed, stretching his sore back muscles, "Can I use your restroom real quick?"

"Knock yourself out," Pete murmured, wiping his forehead.

McGraw had just disappeared behind the bathroom door when the man by the beer cooler stalked over to the counter, dragging his presumed girlfriend with him by her long, red hair. He looked furious, barely keeping in control, the skin of his neck taking on an unhealthy shade of red just where a tribal tattoo was snaking out under the collar of his dark suit.

Seth Gecko grabbed his hostage more tightly, aiming his revolver directly at Pete's head. The girl sobbed softly as he pulled her hair harshly.

"Do you think I'm fuckin' playing with you, asshole?" he growled lowly, waving his gun towards his hostage, "Do you want this little girl to die? Or that little girl?"

He gestured behind him where Richard Gecko was standing, pressing the barrel of his gun to another girl's throat. Pete instinctively lifted his hands, more sweat dripping into his eyes as he stared at the gun pointed at him.

"Or your buddy with the badge? Or yourself?" Seth hissed, releasing the safety catch for emphasis, "Now, I don't wanna do it, but I'll turn this store into the fuckin' Wild Bunch if I even think you're fuckin' with me!"

"What do you want from me?" Pete hissed back in a hushed and panicked voice, "I did what you said. I had to let him use the toilet, he does it every day!"

The ex-con barely listened to his explanation, his dark eyes narrowed to slits in his impatience, "I don't care! I want him out of here, in his car, and down the road or you can change the name of this place to Benny's World of Blood! Do you understand?"

Pete was about to answer when Richard Gecko suddenly leaned forward to whisper something into his brother's ear.

The older man looked up at Pete in response, his eyes flashing dangerously, "Were you giving that pig signals?"

The shop owner shook his head furiously, "What? No! I didn't do anything!"

It was hard to say whose glare was more deadly, Seth's or Richard's.

Seth briefly assessed his brother critically as though he wasn't quite sure what to believe, then shook his head lightly and aimed his anger at Pete again, "You callin' him a liar?"

Pete gulped, apparently realizing that he was treading on very thin ice: "I'm not calling him a liar, okay? I'm simply saying that I was not signaling the cop."

Richard glared at him before turning to his brother again, murmuring: "Seth, it's too risky. Why don't I just go in there, blow the ranger's head off and we can get outta here?"

"Don't do that!" Pete interrupted panicky, scared for all of their lives.

He looked at Seth beseechingly, "Look, you asked me to get rid of him, I'm doing my best!"

Seth just glared at him, pressing the barrel of his gun to the man's forehead: "Yeah, well, your best
better get a helluva lot fuckin' better, or you're gonna feel a helluva lot fuckin' worse."

All of them flinched slightly when they heard the toilet flush in the next room.

Seth motioned for his brother to go to the back of the store again, before fixating the shop owner once more.

"Stay cool," he warned him lowly before following his brother to where the ranger wouldn't see them.

Just then, McGraw walked back towards the counter, seemingly still unaware of the situation.

He rummaged through his shirt pocket, looking for money, "Well, I gotta get going, Pete. I've got TV to watch and booze to drink. How much is the bottle?"

Pete was just about to answer when suddenly a forty-five automatic appeared seemingly out of nowhere, blowing the ranger's brains out without warning. McGraw went down under Pete and the girls' screams of shock.

Richard Gecko stared down at him coldly as he lifted his weapon and shot him two more times in the chest to make sure he was dead. He might have fired another time but Seth was already there, harshly grabbing Richard's wrists and shaking him.

"What the fuck are you doing?" he snarled incredulously, both the girls and Pete forgotten for the moment as he tried to make sense of his brother's actions.

Richard stared at him blankly for a short moment, then simply said in a somewhat monotone voice: "He signaled the Ranger."

Seth looked at the man in question suspiciously, who shook his head frantically: "I didn't, you gotta believe me!"

"Yes, you did! You mouthed the words 'help us'!" Richard shouted back at him, his eyes taking on a mad gleam.

"Liar!" Pete yelled, his nerves finally snapping, "I didn't say-!"

"Shut the f-" Seth started yelling, sensing that he was losing control over the situation.

Neither of them got to finish their sentence though because Richard suddenly lifted his gun again and shot at Pete without a warning. As Pete went down behind the counter, clutching his bleeding shoulder, Seth grabbed Richard again, roughly hauling him against the counter.

"What the fuck is wrong with you?"

Richard pushed him off angrily, "Seth, he did it. You were by the beer cooler with your back turned. I was by the magazines, I could see his face. And I saw him mouth, "Help Us."

While they were busy arguing, none of the brothers paid any attention to the sobbing girls running outside -or Pete fumbling open the safe behind the counter in search for a weapon.

Meanwhile, Seth let go of Richard's arm, staring at him in exasperation. He pinched the bridge of his nose with his free hand and sighed heavily.

"Start the car," he told his younger brother instead of arguing any further.
Richard eyed him warily, "You believe me, don't you?"

Seth didn't look at him, nerves worn so thin it was clearly audible in his voice, "Yes. Now, shut up and start the car."

Still, Richard hesitated like he had already forgotten about the situation they were still in: "You… you're not just saying that, are you…? You're…"

"I fucking believe you!" Seth barked at him on his way to the door, waving for Richard to follow his orders: "Now. CAR."

He was already halfway outside, waiting for his brother to follow when suddenly Pete jumped out behind the counter, screaming as he fired his own gun at Richie several times.

Richie let himself fall to the ground just in time to avoid the bullets from the shop keeper and then those from behind him as Seth barged back into the store, also firing in Pete's direction with a murderous expression on his face.

His prior annoyance with his little brother was immediately overshadowed by his rage at the man who had tried to kill his only family. He emptied his clip in his fury, only managing to hit the liquor bottles above the counter but not the other man.

Soon, both parties were hiding behind some piece of furniture, stuck in a siege.

"Richie, are you alright?" Seth shouted over to where his brother was cowering.

"Yeah… yeah…" Richie replied slowly, only to add, "I told you he said help us."

"I never said help us!" Pete screamed from behind the counter as he reloaded his gun.

"Well, that don't matter now, 'cause you got about two fuckin' seconds to live!" Seth yelled back as he grabbed a roll of paper towels from off a shelf above him and set it on fire it with his Zippo lighter.

With one neatly placed toss he threw the roll over the counter where it reacted with the spilled alcohol and immediately set fire to that whole part of the store.

Seth swiftly got up and smiled to himself in satisfaction as Pete's screams came from behind the counter. So much for that.

Richard shook his head in amusement and stood as well, casually patting dust off his jacket as though there wasn't an inferno going on right behind him.

He shrugged unimpressed when he saw the deep frown on his older brother's face and grabbed a slightly signed roadmap from the counter before following him outside.

They walked to the car with long strides, still squabbling as the store went up in flames behind them. Neither of them flinched when there was a deafening explosion and parts of the roof came down.

"What did I tell you?" Seth got into Richards face, more annoyed than anything as he climbed into the driver's seat: "What did I say to you? I said buy the road map and leave."

"What was I supposed to do, Seth?" Richard defended himself with a pout, "He recognized us!"

"He didn't recognize shit," Seth cursed, stepping down on the gas pedal aggressively. The engine
roared to life and they pulled onto the empty country road, leaving the burning store behind them without a backward glance.

Richard still wouldn't let up, as so often not noticing his brother's fading patience: "Seth, I'm telling you, the way he looked at us - you especially - I knew he knew."

Seth ignored his words, snapping at him instead as he sped the car up to eighty miles, "Low profile. Do you know what the words "low profile" mean? It is NOT taking girls hostage! It is NOT shooting policemen! It is NOT setting fire to a building!"

Richard leaned back in his seat, unimpressed by his brothers ranting as they sped down the highway: "All you do is bitch, bitch, bitch…"

One hour later and several hundred miles away, the entire BAU team was standing in the conference room, incredulously staring at the large TV screen that was just showing Benny's World of Liquor going up in flames.

A female reporter was updating the total death toll for the Gecko brothers and interviewing the chief of police in Texas.

"My God…" Elle gasped, staring at the flames and pictures of the newest victims.

The others were just as shocked, most some of them getting increasingly angry once they snapped out of it.

"Wheels up in twenty," Hotch told them as he stormed out of the room agitatedly, "We're going to Texas."

So in this chapter all parties meet. Since the order of events is kinda messed up in this fic, I'll clarify some things.

So, Richie broke Seth out like in the movie then they went to the Liquor store, but Richie didn't get shot and they didn't have a hostage yet either. They go and kidnap the Fullers from there, take them over the border to that bar and encounter the vampires. Then everything is much like it is in canon. They fight and kill some vamps, Jacob and Scott die and Kate leaves with some money.

The difference is Richie doesn't die and they don't kill all vamps, they just manage to flee and now they've got the furious vampires tailing them. They run from them through Mexico where they are also followed by the BAU team.

This next part takes place one week after the escape and while the brothers are already running from the vampires and they need money to get far away quickly.

Also, I think I mentioned that this is taking place during the early episodes. That's important here because Reid had that gun-test thingy in one episode and this takes place before that.

Savy? I thought so.

November 10th, Town of Floria, Mexico
It had been almost a week since the infamous Gecko brother escape and the BAU team was running out of ideas on how to track them.

Ever since the liquor store incident they had followed the criminals' trial along the Mexican border without success. They were relatively sure they had crossed the border at some point, so they were investigating outside the US now.

It wasn't any more successful.

In fact, it was like the Geckos had disappeared from the face of the earth.

Granted, it was considerably harder to look for them in Mexico where not every small town was equally informed of the police's quest and the police was less coordinated when it came to working with other police departments (1). In addition to that, they had the language barrier which slowed them down considerably. Elle spoke fluent Spanish and Reid was nearly on her level, but the others had to struggle through each interview. So after more than a week of fruitlessly driving through dust and sand they were running out of patience and clothes to wear.

To make matters worse there were no new incidents with traces they could have followed and so they had to assume that the Gecko brothers had long vanished into the depths of Mexico.

As a result, Hotch and Gideon had actually started talking about putting the case on ice for now and returning to Quantico among themselves. They had been met with resistance by Elle who was set on finding 'those misogynic bastards' and Reid who spent his days obsessively collecting data and creating statistics about places the brothers would most likely have gone to.

On that particular day, Morgan and Reid had been assigned to interview the locals in a small town named Floria while the rest of the team did the same elsewhere; they had spent most of the daylight hours driving from bars to courthouses to police stations to private households without finding so much as a useable trace.

Morgan was clearly annoyed as he steered the SUV through the busy streets of Floria, honking the horn impatiently whenever some pedestrian didn't get out of his way fast enough. Next to him, Reid was scribbling busily in his notebook, miraculously not looking exhausted at all. He actually seemed to draw energy from the hatred their UnSubs inspired, using it against them methodically.

Morgan couldn't help but smile a bit as he watched the young man working from out of the corner of his eye. Spencer Reid was really one of a kind.

"What are you doing?" he finally asked with slight bemusement.

Reid looked up in surprise, his long hair getting caught in his reading glasses from the sudden movement. He pushed it aside with his long fingers and showed Morgan what he'd written, "I'm still working on this one angle. Remember when I said they would probably stay inside somewhere close to the border because everyone is looking for them? Well, I made a list of towns near the point where they crossed the border and guess what, Floria is one of the most likely places they could be at."

"How come we haven't found them yet then?" Morgan asked sardonically.

He wasn't sure if he actually wanted to find those bastards. Ripping their heads off without warning might set him back a little career wise….

Reid didn't pick up on his mood, still speaking fast with a lot of hand gestures, "Well, they could be
in some motel - or hiding in some household, forcing the owners to cover for them. The way it is we don't have great chances of ever finding them."

"But?" Morgan decided to indulge his friend, playing along.

"But they will have to come out eventually to buy clothes and food and equipment if they want to keep traveling. Plus, they will need money. Maybe we should check some of the banks and stores around here. Ask if people have seen anyone suspicious."

Morgan looked at his with his eyebrows raised, unable to hide a grin, "Do you actually think we are going to run into them at Target?"

Reid shot him a dirty look, finally realizing Morgan wasn't taking him seriously at all. He didn't back down though.

"Well, there's not much else we haven't tried yet," he said stubbornly, "Plus, if I have to wear this shirt for one more day I'm just going to give up on personal hygiene completely."

He flicked some imaginary speck of dirt off the front of his shirt with his nose wrinkled. Morgan chuckled at the sight, but he didn't protest. He, too, was getting uncomfortable with having only one change of clothes -especially in this climate.

"Target it is, then," he announced.

They made it to a store that sold clothes in a little less than ten minutes. It wasn't Target but they did alright. Things got a little tense when Reid couldn't find anything that matched his usual corduroy-and-mismatched-tie-style, but Morgan finally convinced him to wear something more accommodated to the climate for a change.

When they finally left the store, Reid was wearing dark jeans and a mauve colored T-shirt with short sleeves and a v-neck.

He kept pulling at it awkwardly until Morgan swatted his hands away, "Stop it already! This will be much more comfortable for working outside. Plus, it looks like a thousand times better than the shirt and tie thing you pull off at work."

He suddenly grinned, ignoring Reid's frown completely, "Hey, if I'm not careful, you'll be snatched by the next pretty lady we come across."

"Very funny, Morgan," Reid pouted, still not entirely comfortable with his new style.

He felt like he was copying Morgan's in a way, without having the charm and confidence to go with it. Plus, he really didn't know how to tell Morgan that he wasn't looking for any pretty ladies. Or any ladies period. To tell the truth, he was more into tall, dark, handsome and male.

He didn't say that to Morgan of course. There was no need to bother him with that; even if he were okay with it, the last thing he needed was for Morgan to play matchmaker again and ask him for an example of whom he would find attractive.

Not like he couldn't come up with a current example. Reid couldn't help but think back to that day in the courtroom when Seth Gecko had walked in in a suit as dark as his eyes, of the way his stomach had flipped when their eyes had interlocked back at the prison. His brain was just too big to fool himself into thinking that that had been entirely due to anxiety. But who was to blame him? Guys who looked like that were everybody's type, right?
He shook his head vehemently. He so shouldn't be thinking things like that.

Seth Gecko could be as tall, dark and handsome as he wanted to, that didn't change the fact that he was tall, dark, handsome and homicidal. And just because he was physically attractive didn't mean that Reid ever wanted to come across that truly frightening man again. Reid chased the thoughts of Gecko away just as they began to be tainted by memories of crime scene photos and smiled innocently at Morgan.

His friend seemed pretty pleased with himself after the makeover, actually smiling for the first time in what seemed like days, so Reid decided not to argue with him. It wasn't like anyone but prostitutes ever came on to him anyway.

They made their way out of the shop and walked over to the city bank to withdraw some money. While they were standing in line, Morgan passed the time by pretending to be on the lookout for their UnSubs, laughing at the sheer improbability of it.

In the meantime, it was Reid's turn and he greeted the teller in front of him in Spanish, "Hello, I would like to withdraw some money."

The teller was a young woman with wavy dark hair and cute freckles that shone through her makeup. Her name tag indentified her as one Hazel Martinez.

"Right away," she replied in accented English, giving him a brilliant smile as she took his card from him, "Is there anything else I can do for you?"

Reid was about to ask what else there was when Morgan's hand on his shoulder stopped him.

"See, Reid?" Morgan grinned over his shoulder, winking at the girl, "Your new look is working for you."

Reid blushed, shrugging off Morgan's hand in embarrassment. Again, he chose not to comment. He gave the girl another awkward smile, making her giggle softly.

Morgan shook his head with a chuckle, letting go off Reid to give him some room. He turned around, looking around the bank to pass the time -and stopped laughing abruptly when his gaze fell onto two men who walked into the bank behind them.

Clothed in black, with shades over their eyes and a revolver in hand, Seth and Richard Gecko were standing right there as though they had never disappeared at all.

Morgan was frozen in disbelief shock for a moment while Reid, his back to the doors- kept on talking to Hazel without noticing. The older agent blinked, thinking his overworked mind was playing tricks on him now –all this time searching for them and now they were just here…

Meanwhile, Seth Gecko quickly made his way through the people standing in lines while his brother stayed by the door. No one noticed them until sudden shots rang out, practically pulverizing the security cameras at the ceiling. People screamed in surprise, panic breaking out immediately.

Reid was ripped out of his conversation abruptly when Hazel screamed, half jumping into Morgan at the noise. He whirled around, mouth gaping wide open as he saw what was happening.

"I don't fucking believe this," Morgan swore under his breath.

Reid followed his gaze, eyes widening as he recognized the Gecko brothers. He didn't get one word out, simply staring at the men in utter disbelief for a second.
Morgan fumbled for his gun, his mind racing. What were the odds?

In the evolving chaos, they hadn't been spotted yet but if Seth got one good look at Morgan he would certainly recognize him. He cursed silently; they were two against one considering Reid didn't have a gun –and they had to consider lots of innocent bystanders who might get hurt.

He didn't have a lot of time to think.

In that moment, the bank's security reacted, drawing his gun and running towards the brothers, preparing to shoot them. More shots were fired, and people screamed when the man went down, hit, coughing blood and soon becoming motionless. Everybody froze in shock and fear, some –including Hazel –even cowering on the floor with their hands over their heads.

Seth Gecko lowered his gun arm, waving the weapon casually around the room as he walked over to the counters, "Any more heroes? No? Then everybody down on the floor."

In less than twenty seconds everybody was flat on the floor, only small whimpers and cries disturbing the sudden silence. Behind Morgan, Reid inhaled sharply. Morgan wanted to curse the kid for always, always having to be right…

"Get down," he murmured over his shoulder, ignoring Reid's soft sound of protest and his refusal to move at all.

Meanwhile, Seth smiled in satisfaction and was about to turn towards the teller in front of him when his gaze fell on the only two people still standing. His eyes narrowed angrily at the disobedience for the first split second -then they zeroed in on Morgan and realization dawned on his face.

Morgan, who knew he had only one chance, pulled out his gun in one swift movement, automatically covering Reid as he aimed it at Seth.

"FBI! You're under arrest!" he yelled, his finger on the trigger, ready to shoot the second the bank robber made one false move.

Unfortunately, he had forgotten about the second brother by the door. Richard saw what happened and shot at Morgan without hesitance, spraying the area around him with bullets. People screamed in panic and Morgan –with nowhere to take cover- had no choice but to fire back.

He missed once, then Richard Gecko screamed in pain, clutching his bleeding hand to his chest. His eyes flashed to Morgan, deadly with rage instead of fear or surrender. With a feral snarl he emptied his clip, shooting wildly until one bullet hit Morgan squarely in the chest from fifteen feet away. Morgan went down with a cry of pain, swaying backwards with wide eyes.

"Derek!" Reid yelled in shock, jumping forward to break the man's fall.

Morgan's dead weight dragged him down and pain shot through his knees as they connected harshly with the floor, but Reid barely paid attention to it. Morgan was staring up at him with huge, pain filled eyes, his mouth moving as if to form words that never came out.

Reid cursed under his breath, feeling the situation escalate. How ws this possible? He hastily pressed one hand to Morgan's chest to put pressure on the wound, his mind racing as much as his heart. He needed to help Morgan, but how?

After the first second of shock, his mind set in again and he hastily reached out for Morgan's gun, picking it from his limp fingers. Without it he wouldn't stand a chance –and he was the only one left who could save them.
He had barely gotten a good grip of it when suddenly a violent blow to his temple threw him backwards, his head and ribs hitting the marble floor hard. He gasped as the breath was knocked out of him and his head and side exploded with pain. By the wall, a woman screamed.

Through the stars dancing in front of his eyes, Reid pushed himself into a sitting position as best as he could -only to hear the clicking sound of a gun being cocked right above his head. Slowly, he lifted his head only to stare right into the barrel of a revolver. With growing dread he let his eyes wander along the arm holding it until he met Seth Gecko's black eyes.

The man looked down at him coldly and threateningly, "Drop the gun."

Reid hesitated, his fingers clenching around the only means he had to protect Morgan, himself and all these people. He remembered what had happened to the liquor store; if he surrendered he would likely be shot as well as if he resisted.

"Now," the older Gecko brother hissed violently, his finger tightening on the trigger, "Or your friend the pig gets a new nose hole."

He moved his arm, aiming at Morgan instead.

"No, wait!" Reid gasped, dropping the gun without another second of hesitance.

Then he slowly lifted his hands above his head, cursing his own nerves.

But what choice did he have?

He looked up to meet Seth Gecko's eyes again, trying not to blink as blood ran down the side of his temple from his fall. His heart was pounding rapidly in his chest as he waited for the man to make his move. For a second he thought he was just going to shoot him as well, but the ex-con just fixated him, expression unreadable.

Reid held his gaze, trying not to look intimidated and at the same time not to panic at the thought of him being forced to sit still while Morgan lay there with a gaping hole in his chest and his blood rapidly staining the floor around him.

In the end he must not have looked like much of a threat, because Gecko slowly relaxed, looking not quite as trigger happy as before upon realizing he was still in control. He took his eyes off Reid's face, briefly glancing at Morgan disdainfully.

"Richie, you okay?" he then called over his shoulder.

Behind them, the younger Gecko brother was still clutching his dripping fingers, "The bastard shot me in the fucking hand!"

Reid watched breathlessly as he pulled out a roll of duct tape and wrapped it around his wound. He prayed silently that that would be the end of it, but Richard charged at them, more furious then ever as he struggled with reloading his gun.

"I'm gonna kill him, Seth!" he spat out, moving to kick Morgan in the side.

"NO!" Reid yelled, instinctively throwing himself in front of his defenseless friend.

Richard's boot connected with his face, throwing him backwards with a moan once more. Reid struggled to get back up in case there was going to another attack against Morgan but Seth unexpectedly grabbed his brother's arm and stopped his raging fit with one pointed look.
"I know you," he finally said in an odd tone of voice, "You...were at the prison."

Reid didn't answer, not intent on digging his own grave.

Unfortunately, Seth didn't seem to need him to put two and two together, easily deducting that Reid too must be connected to the FBI people chasing him in some way. His expression grew dark, eyes cold and hard.

"Another fed...Get up," he suddenly ordered, "Slowly."

Reid complied in lack of an alternative, still torn by fear for Morgan's fading life. He couldn't hear him anymore and hoped that he had just passed out from the pain. He was afraid he might not have to worry about that too much longer when Richard drew closer, raising his gun again. He held his breath, mentally already preparing to find himself on the floor next to Morgen within a moment, but Seth surprisingly grabbed Richard's arm just then, diverting his attention. He looked over the younger man's hand for a moment, lips a thin, angry line.

"Alright, change of plans," he then suddenly decided, "Gimme the tape."

Richard complied and was then instructed to keep his gun trained on the rest of the people.

Meanwhile, Seth walked up to Reid, roughly grabbing him by his shirt and hauling the young man to his feet. With one swift movement he pinned one of his arms behind his back, painfully twisting it in the process, and patted him down quickly, looking for more weapons. Reid ground his teeth together to bite back any sound of pain, fearfully cringing from the contact.

"Where is your gun?" Seth demanded to know when he didn't find anything.

"I don't have one," Reid ground out from behind clenched teeth, resisting the urge to try and break free as long as Richard Gecko was standing so close to Morgan. Seth's iron grip around his wrist tightened painfully in response.

"Are you fucking playing with me?" he growled into his ear, "You're with a cop for a reason, so unless you wanna tell me he's screwing you I'm gonna assume you work with him. So I'll ask you again: Where is your gun?"

"I'm not allowed to carry one," Reid repeated as calmly as he could, adding a small lie, "I'm not a field agent."

It was a risk, but then who would believe that a certified FBI agent walked around without a weapon on him?

Luckily for him, Seth believed him easily, his grip letting up some. "Is that so? Well then, today's your lucky day. You get to be in the field, up close with the bad guys," he mocked.

He roughly spun Reid around to face him, looking down at him warningly as he pressed the gun to his throat, "Make one wrong move, and I'll turn this place into a goddamn house of horrors, do you understand?"

"Yes," Reid gulped, unresisting even as Seth grabbed his wrists and bound them together tightly with several layers of tape.

Once he was sure Reid couldn't get free, he shoved the young man towards his brother who caught him and kept him from 's breath caught in his throat as Richard grabbed him, but he didn't do anything but hold him tightly while Seth finally went to over to the counter.
"You, get up," Hazel whimpered as he leaned over the counter and pulled her up by her arm, tossing an empty bag in her direction, "Come now, sweetheart, we don't have all day. Fill it to the top."

With shaking hands she hurried to comply, collecting all the money she could find that wasn't locked in the safe. Several hundred dollars later, Seth nodded in satisfaction.

"Alright, time to go."

He grabbed the bag with one hand and then dragged Hazel right over the counter by her arm. She shrieked in fear when he grabbed her by the neck, dragging her towards the exit.

"Don't!" Reid gasped in terror when he realized they intended on taking the woman along.

Images of their victims flashed through his mind and he instinctively tried to break Richard's hold and come to her aid. He might as well have kicked a brick wall for all he was achieving.

Seth turned around to him, smirking briefly, "Don't worry, you're coming along, too."

Reid shrank back, his mind racing to find an escape plan. There wasn't one of course. His eyes flashed to his unresponsive colleague on the floor.

"But…Morgan…" he finally got out; "He'll die…"

Seth just shrugged indifferently, "Someone will call him an ambulance once we're gone. So the longer you stand there the more blood he loses. Any more questions?"

Reid shook his head reluctantly, knowing that Morgan's best shot at survival was to get the brothers far away so someone could take care of him. Plus, he couldn't leave Hazel alone now, could he?

So in the end, he let himself be dragged outside by Richard, following Seth and Hazel. They hurried to a car much like the one the brothers had had during the liquor store incident; Seth opened the back door and pushed the bank teller inside.

Then he looked around the street for any approaching threats only to find none. He motioned for his brother to hurry up, then shoved Reid in the car next to Hazel. Then he got into the driver's seat. As soon as Richie had gotten in as well, Seth locked all car doors before stepping all the way down on the gas pedal.

The motor howled and they were pushed into their seats when the car sped up from zero to almost fifty in under ten seconds.

They left the crime scene behind long before the first police cars were even alerted to the scene, heading straight for the desert.
Reid tried to think straight past the buzzing of his aching head and Hazel's soft sobbing next to him. They were still racing down a highway in the desert land, Floria long having disappeared on the horizon behind them. The sun was setting, tinting the landscape in a somewhat fitting crimson glow and Reid knew that once it was dark, no one would be able to find them out here.

He tried to calm himself down and stay in control like he knew Hotch, Gideon or Morgan would - with minor success. But come to think of it, they probably wouldn't have let themselves be taken hostage either. It seemed he was the only one always getting into situations like that...

He tried to distract himself from blossoming self-hate but only succeeded in thinking about the way Morgan had looked when he'd left him, bleeding and unconscious. What if he died? But what else could he have done? It had all happened so fast. And if he had refused to do as he was told, both of them would likely have ended up like that security guard...not that that wasn't still an option now...

He took a calming breath to suppress the fear for his friend, knowing he could do nothing for him right now. He could only pray that Morgan would somehow make it.

What would happen to himself, he didn't know. He had to assume the brothers would kill them as soon as they felt safe.

But he couldn't let that happen, he had to try and save the girl. Again, he wasn't the first one he'd picked for that job, not even the second one really...

Reid cursed himself for being so little physical, so obviously at a disadvantage even if he hadn't been tied up.

Hotch could have stood up to these criminal without blinking. Mentally as well as physically. Gideon with his endless calm could have too and Morgan...well, Morgan had tried and failed.

Reid shuddered. It was hard to wrap his mind around what had happened when just an hour ago they had been clothes shopping together. He was vaguely aware that Morgan's blood which stained his hands must also be sprayed all over his new shirt, as well as his own blood that was still trickling from his head wound.

He clenched his hands to fists, pushing against the duct tape that was slowly cutting off his blood flow. It didn't budge.

Next to him, Hazel sobbed louder than before, shrinking into her seat and Reid had but to look up to know why.

Richard Gecko was turned towards them, eyeing them with a mad glint while he kept his gun pointed at them. As if they could go anywhere.

"Richie, buckle up," Seth chided from the driver's side and the younger man obliged reluctantly. Seth looked on edge somehow, despite the easy escape, his jaw set tightly, brows furrowed everytime he looked over at his brother or into the rearview mirror.

Reid tried to figure out if it was because of him, or them, or the situation -but his thoughts kept whirling around his head disorderly so he just sat and waited tensely as Seth raced through the evening scenery, watching him pull an orange prescription bottle out of his suit pocket and popping a
couple of pills. The ex-con washed them down with hard liquor straight from the bottle in his hand without batting an eyelash. Then he handed the bottle to his brother who took a large gulp and spit some of the alcohol on his bandaged hand for disinfection. He looked at little less on edge after that.

About ten minutes later - right in the middle of nowhere- Seth wordlessly brought the car to a halt and got out without killing off the engine. He stalked over to the backdoor, sticking his 45 into Reid's face again as soon as he opened it.

"Get out," he ordered and Reid did as he was told with weak knees. So this was it then…

Over his racing heart, he heard Hazel's crying grow louder as Seth grabbed his upper arm and dragged him some feet away from the car and into the desert. Apparently she thought they were going to shoot him here before driving on. There wasn't much contradicting that theory either.

He briefly considered at least trying to fight back but knew without a doubt that he wouldn't be able to break the steel grip around his arm, much less be a real threat to either brother without a gun. All he could try was use his intellect, talk himself out of it…

He remembered Seth's reaction to reverse psychology back at the prison. Maybe not the best idea. That left him with nothing.

They stopped surrounded by sand and his arm was let go of as Seth positioned himself in front of him. Reid gulped, trying to straighten up as best as he could as he kept his eyes fixed on the older Gecko brother. After all, this was the man who had made his heart race when he had first met him in prison—and back then he had been handcuffed and heavily guarded. Now that he was standing in front of him, it was so much worse.

The eyes. The prison tat. Not to mention Reid’s dried blood on his knuckles.

Everything about the man screamed, RUN.

Unfortunately though, Reid couldn't.

Seth released the safety of his gun and Reid tried his best not to beg, to stay brave. If he was going to die, he would do it without blinking.

Instead of pulling the trigger though, Seth stood there, the silence between them growing with every second that ticked by. Reid held his breath while the man seemed to assess his face, watching as the desert wind blew some fair strands of hair into his face. For whatever reason, he suddenly looked conflicted.

The moment was broken by Richard who was walking towards them, taking another swallow from the bottle before throwing it a few feet away.

"Do you want me to do it?" he asked in a mockery of helpfulness, his mangled hand already fighting with his own gun. Reid couldn't help but flinch.

Seth's eyes didn't leave Reid's. "No."

It didn't sound like 'No, I don't want you to do it.', more like 'No, I don't want you to do it.'." Both Richard and Reid looked at him in surprise.

"But, Seth," Richard immediately started arguing, "We can't let him go! He's with the FBI. He's a cop!"
He immediately shut up when Seth shot him a dark look somewhere between pissed and threatening.

"Of course we're not letting him go, Richie," he cut off any further questioning in a clipped tone.

Without any further explanations, he tucked his gun into his belt and grabbed Reid's arm once again, pulling him closer.

Reid instinctively recoiled from the touch but didn't have a prayer against his captor with regards to physical strength. Seth ignored his struggling and patted him down like he had in the bank, only more thoroughly. After a moment, he pulled Reid's cell phone, credentials and handcuffs out of his pockets. He looked over them briefly before pocketing the cuffs and throwing the former two into the sand, crushing the phone under his boot.

"There," he said pointedly, "Now he's not."

Richard took a long, nerve wrecking moment to catch up with his brother's train of thought, but finally he nodded slowly in agreement.

"You're probably right," he shrugged, "He could be useful."

Reid's heart -that had just stopped racing once he realized he wasn't going to die now -skipped a beat when Richard fixated at him with an odd expression in his eyes while saying that last sentence, somehow getting the sensation that he and Seth were talking about two different kinds of useful.

Again, Seth didn't seem to notice his brother's eerie behavior and simply waved him towards the car where Hazel was still crying. "Fine. Now get the girl to shut up, will you?"

Seth sighed somewhat exasperated as he looked after Richard for a second, then he turned back around and his grip on Reid's arm tightened as he suddenly pulled him even closer. Their faces just mere inches apart and Seth's dark eyes bored into his', a clear warning not to cross him and ...maybe something else, Reid couldn't be sure.

Before he could figure it out though, the older man stepped back, giving him another dark glance, "You, too. Get in the car before I change my mind."

And with that he released Reid's probably already bruising arm and walked him back towards the car.

The rest of the ride was spent in silence, Hazel's sobs stifled by the duct tape over her mouth.

They didn't stop again for a long time.

xxx

About three hours after they had left the bank, Richard eventually started complaining about being tired and after a few initial snarky rebuffs Seth finally caved in and started looking for a place to spend the night.

They eventually came across a rundown, standard issue motel.

Seth parked the car and got out to see if there were any rooms available while Richie stayed with their hostages. Reid -who had barely gotten over his near death experience- looked around for any opportunity to save them, but there was no one else in sight.
Plus, with a gun constantly trained on Hazel's head he couldn't risk to yell for help. For the moment he could do nothing but wait and hope for an opportune moment—if he had that much time. He couldn't help but think that Seth letting him live was completely uncharacteristic and that the man could change his mind any minute.

He tried his best not to notice Richard Gecko' eerie gaze on them until Seth returned, swirling the keys to a room on his fingers. His mood seemed lighter now that they were relatively safe from detection. The brothers quickly moved their hostages into the room, locking the door behind them.

"Both o'you," Seth then gestured towards Reid and Hazel, "Plant yourselves over there."

He pointed towards an old couch by the door. They did and he went on to look out the windows cautiously, looking outside into the setting dusk for a moment. then he shut the windows tightly and pulled the shutters down. Reid watched how his features relaxed just the tiniest bit once the room was secured.

"Do they have cable here?" Richard asked in a voice that reminded Reid of a bored child's.

The tension in Seth's posture returned as quickly as it had gone, the prior hint of a smile vanishing.

"No, they don't," he replied tersely, like he already knew what was going to follow.

Indeed Richie frowned as he threw himself into a chair, "Do they have any x-rated channels?"

"No," came another clipped answer. Seth's fist briefly clenched in the lower parts of the curtains.

"And no water beds either, huh?"

"No, no water beds either," Seth ground out, "Just four walls and a goddamn roof."

"What am I supposed to do then?" Richard all but pouted, once again seemingly not catching on to his brother's foul mood. Seth turned away from the window to glare at him.

"How about you watch our hostages and help me make sure we don't get killed in our fucking sleep?" he snarled aggressively.

That finally seemed to give Richard a clue to back down for he simply sighed and nodded, silently pointing his gun at Reid and Hazel from then on. Even under stress, Reid couldn't help but automatically profile the brothers' dynamic, Seth's short, changing temper and Richard's obvious instability. All in all, not the best combination.

Hazel was still sobbing next to him and as much as Reid hated himself for it he really wished she would pull herself together already. He needed to think of a plan to get them out of this situation and he already had a hard time thinking with just his hurting head.

It was obvious he couldn't try and make a run for it.

The door was locked and one brother always had an eye on them. And he didn't doubt for one second that they wouldn't hesitate to shoot them if they tried to flee, not after what had happened in the bank. Plus, he wasn't sure if Hazel would be able to react fast enough if they were to try it.

He watched Richard pick on his taped hand with a grimace of pain, cursing under his breath. Seth noticed it as well because he walked over, his anger suddenly gone again. He knelt down in front of the chair as he inspected his brother's hand almost gingerly.
"How's it feel?" he asked quietly, not at all threatening or aggressive like before. Reid watched his transformation into a caring brother with utter surprise, watched his hard features soften, while Richard seemed accustomed to it.

"Hurts like hell," he muttered, letting Seth remove the tape layer by layer.

Seth inspected the wound for a moment before soaking a tissue with liquor from the mini bar and carefully wiping off most of the blood. Richard hissed at the sting but didn't pull away, waiting for the older man to finish.

After a moment, Seth got out the roll of duct tape and started wrapping the wound with it again.

"There, it was wrapped too tight, is all," he told Richard quietly as he got up, "We'll need to get a first aid kit or a doctor to look at that, but for now it should do."

They talked for another while, somewhat rushed and too low to understand them.

Finally, Seth seemed to think it was time to set the house rules. He let Richie be and pulled a chair in front of the couch, straddling it so his arms were lying on the backrest.

"Alright then. Let's cut to the chase," he began, all softness gone again.

He coldly fixated the mess that was Hazel, reading her name tag, "Hazel. My name is Seth, that's my brother Richie."

The girl stared up at him apprehensively.

"So Hazel, I have one simple question for you," Seth said, "Do you want to survive this?"

She nodded jerkily, makeup messily running down her flushed cheeks.

"Good," Seth continued coolly, taking no notice of her frazzled state, "You sit here nice and quiet, you don't cause us any trouble, you don't ask any questions and you'll get through this just fine, ok? You have my word."

He actually pulled up the corners of his mouth a little during that last part, and Hazel nodded hastily, never noticing that the smile didn't reach the man's eyes. Reid did though and he wondered if it was because he was lying or because he really was incapable of feeling empathy. Where they really going to let her go just like that? He highly doubted it, given their track record.

He started when Seth's dark eyes suddenly darted to his face, holding his gaze. He wasn't smiling anymore, just looking him up and down, making Reid nervous again about his immediate future. An image of Hotch's classic death glare shot through his mind but before he could make up his mind about how to act, Seth spoke.

"Dr. Spencer Reid, am I right? Youngest fed I ever did see I must say. How old are you?"

Reid hesitated slightly, surprised by the question. He couldn't be sure, but there seemed to be a hint of softness behind the coldness of those brown eyes. "I'm 24," he answered quietly.

Something passed over Seth's face at his quiet answer and Reid felt grateful that he had trusted his gut and gone with vulnerability instead of defiance or false bravery. He didn't dare hope it do be of much use in the long run but maybe Seth's question meant he had been hesitant to kill them so far because of their young age? He dared look at Seth more directly, trying to maybe find a hint of emotion on the man's face that would give him away.
Just in that second though, Richard Gecko shifted nervously behind them and Seth straightened up almost startled, his expression darkening quickly.

"Alright then, Spencer Reid," he said coolly, "You're alive for now and if you'd like it to stay that way I suggest you do exactly what I say when I say it. Got it?"

He nodded, seemingly taking Reid's silence as a yes. "Great, because I could do with some answers."

He leaned in closer as he fixated the young man, "Tell me about your investigation. What does the FBI know about us?"

Reid swallowed nervously under the man's intent gaze, feeling his stomach clench. So this was why he was still alive. Reid bit his lip, already dreading the reaction to his response. He gave it anyway, simply because it was what any agent would do.

"Nothing really," he explained truthfully, "We didn't have much of a lead-

The rest of the sentence got caught in his throat when Seth's eyes suddenly flashed angrily, just before he raised his gun and pressed it to Hazel's temple, pulling back the hammer.

She squeaked and pressed her eyes shut while Reid watched in horror. So much for hope. He had expected to be hit again, but not this. In just one second, all hopes of their captor possibly having scruples vanished from his mind, one look into Seth's face telling him that he was dead serious. He would kill her and it would be Reid's fault.

"One more thing I forgot that is crucial for your survival, Hazel," Seth hissed, voice cold as ice, "And that is Dr. Reid's full cooperation. You'll have nothing to worry about as long as he isn't stupid enough to try and bullshit me."

He looked at Reid's pale face, one eyebrow arched impatiently.

"So what's it gonna be? Do I have to shoot the girl and find some tooth picks to shove under your fingernails or can we come to an agreement? And I should warn you, I'm not a very patient man."

When Reid didn't answer immediately, Seth pulled Hazel's hair harshly and started counting, "1… 2…"

His finger tightened on the trigger.

"Alright! Please don't hurt her!" Reid blurted out in near panic.

He took a shaky breath, trying to steady his nerves while Seth let go of Hazel. He felt incredibly stupid for being surprised by Seth's sociopathic behavior but he also knew he couldn't do this. He couldn't sit here and risk her death just because Gideon or some textbook would call getting a criminal's respect the best approach. Seth wouldn't go for that anyway, he could already tell, he just wanted compliance or he would snap faster than he could say 'I'm not lying.'

Shame at his own weakness burned his cheeks as he closed his eyes and started reciting everything he remembered about the UnSubs.

"You're Seth J. Gecko, 31 years old, born on May 6th, 1973 in Lexington, Kentucky. Previously arrested for small scale thefts and extortion, later escalating into several bank robberies and abductions. Arrested in 2001 after a bank robbery during which two police officers lost their lives and since being held in the Rolling's Kansas State Penitentiary. Likely dominant partner in the
dynamic of a killer duo, suspected of having shot several of the victims in this case, likely psychopathic tendencies."

He took a deep breath and kept on talking when no one said anything, knowing he wouldn't be able to do this later:

"Richard B. Gecko, age 29. Also born in Lexington, Kentucky on April 17th in 1975. Early history of mental instability and violence. We have evidence of you stabbing several of the victims. Previously arrested for armed robbery and…", he hesitated, somehow unable to get the words sexual crimes out with Hazel sitting right there.

Instead he replaced it with, "…and it's true that we do not know much about your plans. We merely searched as many villages and houses as possible without success. Until this morning we thought you had completely disappeared. Meeting you at that bank was completely unexpected, I swear."

Then he fell silent, praying that it would be enough.

Seth eyed him a little skeptically, be it because of having his own biography quite obviously recited or because he had noticed the short pause in Reid's speech. The cold fury from his gaze had faded quickly though and to Reid's great relief he lowered the gun unceremoniously.

"See, that wasn't so hard, was it?", he then asked almost amiably.

Most of his threatening posture was gone by now and Reid breathed an inaudible sigh of relief. It seemed like it would be the best strategy not to talk back to him or provoke him in the future. He obviously was most reasonable when he thought himself in control and the stupidest thing to do would be underestimating the instability of the man's temper.

Reid nodded silently and Seth did the same in satisfaction.

"Alright then. We'll continue this in the morning. For now you two stay here and don't cause us any trouble," he concluded, getting up and walking away.

Reid sat still for another minute, paralized as he tried to calm his inner turmoil. Staring at his sweaty palms he tried to make sense of what was happening here. He'd told them what he knew and they obviously did not have any scruples when it came to murder. So why was he still alive?

What else did they want? What else did he have to give? He didn't dare ask though; he had a feeling he would find out soon enough.

They were allowed to use the bathroom separately and clean up as best as they could. The door was barely closed when he started searching for something he could have used as a weapon. There was nothing but soap and towels though.

Disappointedly, he then tried to clean up some. He didn't even try cleaning his wound with his hands bound like they were; he merely wiped away some of the blood that had dried on his face and neck. Hazel went in after him and when she came back her face was a little less messy-looking.

With that out of the way, Seth folded out the couch, told Reid and Hazel it would be their bed for the night and tossed them some blankets. He and Richie got ready to go to sleep in the adjoining room, talking quietly among themselves. Hazel lied down, curling in on herself immediately and Reid slowly followed suit. With the door locked and the key safely in Seth's pocket, he would have to wait till morning to do anything.

When he was sure that their kidnappers were preoccupied with themselves, Reid took the chance to
turn towards Hazel who looked just as awful as he felt. The incident with the gun still had her shaking all over.

"Don't worry," he tried his best comforting smile, "It's going to be alright."

She looked at him out of big brown eyes, still scared out of her mind but unable to answer due to the tape covering her mouth.

"My team is going to find us," Reid continued in a hushed voice, trying to give her at least some hope. He wasn't sure how much he believed in his own words but that was no big surprise. He knew the brothers' MO, Hazel didn't.

If the team didn't do something very soon or if he didn't come up with some sort of miracle…he didn't even want to think about it. And he didn't want her thinking about it either.

"Just trust me, okay?" Reid gingerly touched the back of her hand with his for a moment, "You'll get out of this, I promise."

It took a moment but then she lightly squeezed his hand, nodding minimally.

Reid was about to say something else when the door to the bedroom suddenly opened and Seth strode towards the couch with a dark expression. Alarmed, Reid quickly sat up and moved in front of Hazel who cringed and backed away from him as far as she could.

But Seth didn't pay any attention to her. He grabbed Reid by the shirt and pulled him forward impatiently. Before Reid could say or do anything, a handkerchief was shoved into his mouth and tied behind his head.

When he was done, Seth caught him under the chin, pulling his face up so that their eyes met. Reid's heart missed a beat as he stared into the man's face apprehensively, acutely aware of how close it suddenly was. Seth fixated him like he had in the desert for just a moment, raising goose bumps on his skin. His grip wasn't painful but firm enough to get his attention.

"Last warning," he told him quietly, taking just a little too long to let go, "You'd better be quiet now or I'll have to come back out here."

With that he went back into the other room, leaving the muted hostages to their own thoughts and fears for the night.

It took a long time before Reid's pulse went back to normal. About an hour later, Hazel finally drifted into an uneasy sleep, exhaustion and stress getting the best of her. Reid lay on his side wide awake, his eyes pinned at the ajar door and the light behind it. He knew it was impossible to not sleep at all and stupid on top of it if he wanted to be able to function at all tomorrow. Still, it was hard to just relax with two trigger happy maniacs in the next room.

He knew he wasn't nearly prepared for this. He had always been annoyed with the team for trying to protect him and keep him out of harm's way when it was his job as well as theirs, but he was beginning to see their point…he wasn't sure he had the skill or the guts to deal with this situation, the ability to manipulate these men into not harming them. How could he comfort Hazel when he was scared for his own life?

Eventually, instead of resting he listened to the quiet voices coming from next door, hoping to catch some useful information.

It didn't take long for him to grow first confused, then worried. If his ears weren't betraying him
completely, the conversation was about vampires. Not metaphorical ones, not the ones seen in some movie – No. Real ones.

"So how the hell do you know they haven't found us yet?", Richard argued just then, only to be shushed by Seth.

"Because we aren't dead yet. If they knew where we were they would have busted in here come sundown and sucked us dry on the spot."

"But…" "No buts, Richie. We'll get the police off our case come morning and then we get out of this area. And if those goddamn monsters still find us somehow we'll drive a goddamn stake through each and every one of their black hearts."

The conversation quieted down then and soon the lights were turned off as well. Reid pondered the new information with growing unease.

What the hell had that been about? He didn't put it past Richard Gecko to have delusions with the way he had presented himself today, but Seth as well? That would mean the whole profile was off again, that they were deeply disturbed and mentally ill instead off ruthless killers. It didn't seem to make sense.

Wouldn't they have seen vampires all day long already if they were that paranoid? They had seemed normal, not even very jumpy. But then, it had been day…vampires only came out at night.

Unable to make sense of this new information, Reid decided to go over what else he had learned today in case he needed it later on. It was pretty obvious by now that Seth Gecko was the dominant partner in this dynamic. And while didn't strike Reid as particularly disturbed or mentally unstable, he was definitely ruthless and his short temper was truly frightening. That in combination with the case files he had seen would usually have been enough to not even let him hope but -there had been something about Seth's behavior.

He had let Reid live when Richard wanted to kill him, twice, he had spared Morgan when he didn't have to kill him and he had promised Hazel not to hurt her...plus, there had been the hesitance, the brief flashes of emotion he hadn't been able to place...

Reid sighed, exhausted. He couldn't shake the feeling that there was an important part to Seth Gecko's profile he was missing. Maybe...hopefully that was a good thing... If Seth was feeling something like a conscience...Richard looked to Seth for guidance and let himself be reigned in by him even during the worst rages. That meant that if he could get Seth to stop and see his errors, Richard might follow suit...

Somehow he didn't see that happening though despite all his clever theories.

He shook his head harshly. He mustn't try to make up the best scenario or tell himself these men were less dangerous than they actually were. After all, it was pretty obvious that both of them were dangerously unstable if not emotionally disturbed in their own way. That in combination with aggression...he didn't want to think about it.

All he could hope for was that the man actually believed in giving his word to someone, that his promise to at least leave Hazel alone if they played along hadn't been empty. His mind wandered off to all this crimes scene photos he'd seen. Pictures of young people like them who had been in exactly the same situation - only to be found brutally killed and with horror frozen on their dead faces later.

He couldn't help but doubt that Seth Gecko's word was worth all that much in the end.
"You had better be quiet now, or I'll have to come back out here."

With that, Seth quickly got up and walked away, then slammed the bedroom door shut behind him, cursing under his breath as he shrugged out of his suit jacket. What a mess…

Richard was sitting on the bed, looking up at him somewhat skeptically as he let himself fall onto the bed exhaustedly. For a moment he looked like he was going to say something, then though he merely focused on the TV again.

Seth was grateful for it. He was done for the day, all he wanted to do was sleep so he could stop thinking. He felt drawn from the day's stressful events and having to deal with both his brother and those fucking monsters tailing them all at once. At least they hadn't caught up with them yet –but now he had the police searching for them with renewed efforts after what had happened in the bank.

Seth stared at the ceiling blankly. He still didn't know what had possessed him taking that FBI agent along.

Well, he did know, he just couldn't believe the mess he was suddenly in. He never allowed emotions to guide his actions because it was deadly in their world, and he was usually so good at it. Today he had screwed up.

In a way, he was surprised Richard hadn't started asking him questions yet, seeing as his actions earlier had been completely out of character. They had a number of unspoken rules they lived by, rules that were there mostly to keep Richard from going berserk -but today he had broken them for a change.

Normally, both FBI agents would have ended up dead next to the security guard, simple as that. He'd been well in the process of getting that done, too -but then he'd made the mistake of looking into the younger man's face before shooting and it had been him.

The young man from the prison.

Seeing him again, despite having known he was affiliated with the FBI, had been completely unexpected, and it had momentarily thrown him off his game. He usually was rather good at shutting off his emotions during kills, to distance himself from the person or see them as deserving death. Naturally, thinking like that of civilians, of women and children was nearly impossible and it was part of the rules he'd set for himself to not harm those groups and to try, however seldom successful, to keep Richard from harming them, too.

In this case neither was involved and yet his hands had gone inexplicably weak, his focus being drawn to frightened hazel eyes and for a moment he had been sure he wouldn't be able to pull the trigger. If only the kid had looked more like a cop, more like he could actually defend himself…if only Seth hadn't spent the three nights prior thinking about…

Angry at himself, he'd tried to ignore those thoughts, focusing on the fact that he was a cop, an enemy. It had worked to a certain extent…until…

Until the boy said something, his voice the last puzzle piece needed for realization to hit him, paralyze him.

It was him.
All those years ago…the boy at the sanatorium...

That was why he had seemed familiar. Fucking hell...

He had thought it was his mind playing tricks on him at first, but with every second he kept staring at the young man's face it had become more and more obvious to him that he had to be right. It had been 14 years...but the age fit, the appearance, the peculiar way of speaking...and the eyes.

Those eyes. Either he was losing it now, his mind playing tricks on him, or those were the same eyes.

After that, it was like his body had acted on autopilot, completely ignoring his brain which was too busy with the onslaught of repressed memories and emotions it was suddenly subjected to anyway. Suddenly, he'd been unable to see anything but that little boy's face from his past when he looked at the agent, unable to help being reminded of everything that had happened that day, of how he had felt, of who he had been. There was a reason he usually repressed those memories: His hesitation to kill had suddenly turned into outright reluctance, a feeling he could neither rationalize nor shake off. It had felt like he was sixteen all over again, the gun suddenly heavy in his hand.

Problem was, Richard had had no clue what had happened; he had still been expecting him to kill their enemy and the situation had demanded it, too.

So, too conflicted to make a permanent decision, he had done the only other thing he could think of: He had taken the kid hostage as well, buying himself time to think.

Consequently, he now was in a world of trouble.

"Why don't we just kill him, Seth?"

Richard's voice suddenly broke through his thoughts, interrupting Seth's train of thought rather abruptly. His head snapped around to find his brother at looking him with the same expression of barely concealed skepticism as before. Richard shrugged, "I mean, we already have money and his team will work over time to find him, right? If we just kill them now, we'll be rid of the problem."

For a moment, Seth considered it. Let Richard take care of the problem without even bringing up the fact that he couldn't. Kill the kid and be over with it. The mental image of letting Richard walk out there and do just that in his usual violent, creative manner turned his stomach.

Careful to keep a blank face, Seth slowly turned his head away again. "No," his tone left no room for discussion, "No, we're not gonna do that."

He was almost afraid his thoughts would show and prayed that Richie would just stop talking, go back to his usual indifferent passiveness and let Seth make the decisions for both of them without questioning them.

"Why not?"

Seth ground his teeth inaudibly. Apparently today wasn't his lucky day.

He sighed heavily, trying to remember how he had justified his insane decision to himself and then convert that into an argument that would work on his brother.

There was no way that he would tell him the real reason for his screw up, whatever it was, nostalgia or misplaced attraction or a mix of both. Because Richie, being Richie, was usually unstable even on the best of days and that naturally only got worse when Seth gave him the smallest bit of leeway, or
failed to give him strict orders and guidance. And that was how people around them usually ended up mutilated or dead or both. No, he was the leader here, the strong one, he couldn't allow himself to be seen wavering.

No, the kid was alive for now and until he had figured out the truth, found out where he stood, what he would be capable of doing, he would pretend that everything was normal and act like he always did -because it was the only way of knowing for sure that his brother would react the way he always did.

"Think about it," he finally improvised, "with the money we'll get for him we won't ever have to look back. We can stay in Mexico for the rest of our lives. Plus," he grinned, adding an afterthought that he knew would help win Richard over, "if we pull this off just right, those fucking agents will never forget who outsmarted them."

He glanced sideways just in time to see Richie mirror his expression, his a little darker and less sane maybe.

"That does sound good, Seth," he mused, his eyes suddenly gleaming, "We should let them know that the fed is suffering more every minute they don't pay us. Then, when they can't look on any more and give us the money, we'll let them find his dead body."

Seth felt his mask slip a little at that mental image and hastily replaced his expression with a familiar frown that said, 'no-nonsense'.

"No. They won't give us the money unless he's alive."

Richard frowned, but gave in when Seth's expression grew irritated, "Huh, you're probably right. Doesn't mean we can't hurt him though, right?"

The last part he said in a tone that was sickeningly familiar and this time Seth couldn't help but openly glare, hoping Richard would interpret it as general anger about the suggestion.

"Richie, you know that's not how we do things. If you want us being back together to work out, you'll stick to my rules. We do what we have to in order to survive and be free. Nothing more. I keep fucking telling you: This isn't some game!"

At least for him it wasn't. Richard, as usual, didn't even seem to grasp what he was getting at, merely rolling his eyes in annoyance.

"Uhg, you and your moral code. I would have thought you'd gotten past that in prison. Fine, 'no unnecessary deaths, no mindless torture of innocents, blah, blah, blah'" He said it like it was a ridiculous imposition, only to immediately follow it with, "So ok, the girl may be innocent, but he is a cop. Your rules don't suddenly apply to cops now, do they?"

He looked at his older brother expectantly, almost hungrily and for a few seconds Seth just stared back, mind blank. No, they didn't apply to cops.

"He's not a real cop, you heard him," he finally said, trying to shrug the matter off, "He's just a kid, he's not gonna give us any trouble."

That should do for a reason, it was partially true and it fit into what Richie was used from him. For now, it would have to do –maybe in the morning he'd be able to sort this out.

In his mind, that was the end of the discussion, so he was almost surprised to hear Richard keep talking.
"But if he does?"

Clearly, he really didn't want to let this go. His brother was eyeing him without blinking, so obviously out for blood that for a moment Seth let himself feel some of his pent up anger and frustration. God dammit, they had only been reunited for three days and already he was starting to lose sight of his brother in the image of a bloodthirsty monster in front of him.

"Then we'll deal with it," he said decidedly, leaving no more room for discussion, "Let me handle him, Richie. Let me handle all of this. I'll get us into Mexico and away from all this shit. That's all that matters, everything else is just gravy."

He made himself smile, in the way he often had when they were younger and seldom did these days, in the way that said he would take care of their little family and that Richie needn't worry.

Thankfully, it worked.

Richard finally relented; he nodded slowly and then didn't ask any more questions about Reid. They briefly spoke about the vampires following them, but Seth also shot that conversation down in its roots, tired of talking.

He lay awake for a long time after Richard had finally turned off the TV and gone to sleep.

His thoughts were in turmoil, his chest full of emotions he usually kept well under wraps. He hadn't felt like himself for hours, but now in the silence it was getting worse.

He couldn't help but think about how he had acted towards the agent this evening, how for some reason he had wanted to try and be calmer, less aggressive than he usually would have been, because the kid looked so distressed already. He knew he couldn't be doing that, under no circumstances, because this agent, no matter how little he looked like it was a trained agent of some sort -and he would try to work against him and get himself and the girl to safety for sure, just like he had already tried by denying any knowledge of their case.

Seth remembered how angry he had suddenly become, having been almost too caught up in frightened doe eyes to see the intention behind them. In retrospect, he might have overreacted a little to compensate for his mistake after that, going slightly overboard with the whole tooth-pick-finger-nail-thing. Still, better to be overly feared than giving the guy hope of manipulating his way out of this. now that he thought about it, he probably should have punched him or something the second he tried to play him, just to make their positions clear.

It was what he usually would have done. Problem was this...this situation was so confusing, upsetting...he didn't much feel like himself. He wanted to be himself, do what he always did...but he simply couldn't seem to in this situation and he was unwilling to ponder why that might be.

And to make things worse, memory flashes he had suppressed for over a decade had been hitting him full force all day, brought back by seeing this boy again. How he had felt back then, angry and scared and disgusted and powerless...almost ready to start hurting back a world that had done nothing but to him for 16 years, but not depraved enough yet to actually do it...

He had almost forgotten what it was like to feel anything other than anger, frustration and contempt.

Seth shook his head, angry at himself. The last thing he needed was to be reminded of how he had felt as a sixteen year old and to let any weakness shimmer through. Considering where they were at now, that could only lead into a catastrophe.

Luckily, he had always been good at compartmentalizing.
So he had met Spencer Reid once before. It had been in a different life, plus, he didn't actually know him. The memory that he had been holding on to for all these years wasn't that of the person he'd met, it was of how he had felt back then - it was just a symbol. He didn't matter anymore than any other hostage they'd ever had, he was just mixing up his emotions.

Yes, it had made him hesitate when he was supposed to kill him, and that had been fucking stupid - but what was done was done, he had to see this rationally.

He would do what he had to. Come morning he would have pulled himself together. He would handle this like any other time they'd taken hostages. Demanding ransom had initially just been his excuse to Richard, but the idea wasn't all bad, really. Why not? They could use the money.

Yes, they would try that way first - not because he couldn't kill the kid - just because it wasn't rational. And if later on it turned out he would have to kill him anyway - he would. Because he didn't care, because it didn't matter, because he wasn't weak.

He just had to internalize that so he wouldn't let his feelings screw with him again the next time he was faced with those big hazel eyes. And once he had, he would have to make sure the agent realized his position as well.

Yes, if he did it that way it would all work out.

Just like it always did.

xxx

Night had long fallen over Mexico but the BAU team wasn't sleeping and they all knew they weren't going to get any sleep in the next few days either.

They had gotten the shock of their lives that morning when the local police had informed them that there had been a bank robbery in which Morgan and Reid had been compromised. They had raced to the hospital, expecting the worst.

Initially, they had been relieved when they had been informed that neither agent had arrived there dead - but that relief had faded quickly faced with the prospect of Morgan being in critical condition and Reid not being there at all.

Now they were back at their temporary station, working like crazy and getting nowhere. There was no security camera footage, no trace of Reid or that female bank teller. He was just gone and not knowing was wearing all of the down.

"What if he's already dead?" Elle muttered, distraught, as she stared blankly at their profile, "Remember the hatred Gecko had for us? They would have shot him as soon as they didn't need him anymore."

Hotch shook his head, squeezing her shoulder, "We can't think like that. As long as we don't hear anything we have to keep searching."

He and Gideon exchanged a grim look over her shoulder. In truth, there was no way of not thinking the worst. After all, they knew who they were up against.

Who knew how much time they had before Reid would be beyond saving?

xxx
They were back at the store in Floria, warmth and light flooding through the open doors, letting in the summer breeze. Around them was the buzzing of cheery voices and children’s laughter.

Reid smiled when Morgan ruffled his hair playfully, shooting him a toothy grin. All felt so comfortable and easy - like it was a childhood memory. Except Reid didn't have childhood memories of all his worries had being taken on by others, of when he had felt at home and as part of something bigger. He had them with the team though, with Morgan. In him he had a best friend, a brother, someone who cared for him and made him smile when he was down.

He looked at Morgan walking next to him and the man nudged his shoulder in return. It seemed like he was about to say something but then he focus seemed to be drawn to a spot over his shoulder and his expression darkened. Suddenly, all around him the world began to lose its color and sound. He blinked and it was suddenly cold and dark, a feeling of dread creeping up on him.

Scared, Reid turned around to see what he was looking at and gasped when he saw a figure lying on the ground close by. She wasn't moving but he recognized her immediately. The girl, Hazel, bloodied, violated, broken, dead…

Horrified, Reid made to run to her, only to be grabbed by his arm and held back. His head snapped around to find it was Morgan; he was about to yell at him to let go - but suddenly froze in mid motion. Morgan's dark eyes were widened as he stared at Reid and then he lifted a hand to his mouth like he was going to be sick. Reid reached out in worry just as Morgan’s body suddenly convulsed and he coughed violently, crimson spraying over his chin and fingers.

"Reid..." he croaked with bloody lips.

Reid stood frozen in horror while, Morgan motionlessly in his arms. "Morgan!" Reid cried fearfully, tears running down his cheeks. He looked around frantically for help but there was nothing but darkness.

He cried out again, shaking Morgan to keep him awake: "No, Derek, please, don’t die! Don't leave me alone here, I can't do this alone!"

"NO!"

Reid woke with a start, covered in sweat and shaking. He looked around frantically, still caught in his nightmare. It didn't take him long to realize Morgan wasn't there, that he was nowhere near the mall, and definitely nowhere near safety.

The room he was in was empty except for a girl sleeping next to him, fully clothed and with her wrists tied. Hazel…

It all came back to him quickly then, the bank, the kidnapping, the remaining threat of death…

He closed his eyes, fighting down the instant wave of nausea and panic that threatened to overcome him. It took almost a minute but eventually he managed to calm his mind by telling himself that not all was lost yet, that there was hope of them making it out of this alive…

He managed to collect himself not a second too early, because just then, the door to the bedroom opened just then and Seth and Richard Gecko walked in, their sight making Reid's stomach twist again. Both men looked at him almost suspiciously for a moment; he must have cried out in his sleep, even through the gag.

Reid sat up straight and watched them tensely, holding his breath.
Yesterday night, he had pretty much come to the conclusion that they must want him for something, and that was why they hadn't killed him yet. That gave reason to hope.

He hoped it was ransom because that meant he had a chance of getting out of this alive - and because the one other option he could think of was that they were just waiting for the right moment to send the FBI a message by killing him before their eyes. Reid could only pray it wasn't the latter; he was well aware that if necessary he wouldn't be able to properly defend himself like this, the aching places he'd been hit and kicked and the bruises he could all but feel blossoming under his shirt a constant reminder of that -but he tried to be ready anyway.

The image of the dead girl from his dream flashed before his eyes and he shuddered, terrified at the thought that that might happen for real sometime soon. If he died…there would be no one there to protect the girl. He couldn't let that happen…but he had no idea how to prevent it.

Fortunately, for now neither brother did or said anything threatening though and Hazel kept on snoring peacefully next to him. He hoped their behavior was a good sign. It was really too early to tell and he couldn't read these men yet, find out their intentions. In lack of alternatives, Reid took a deep quiet breath, mentally readying himself for whatever lay ahead as he watched his kidnappers.

Seth looked just like he had the day before, the bright sunlight somehow unable to take away from his dangerous aura. His five o'clock shadow had darkened considerably but surprisingly he looked more energetic, optimistic almost. Maybe sensing Reid's gaze, the man met his eyes with an unreadable expression for a moment before walking over to the TV and turning it on. There, he flipped through the channels, ignoring the wary eyes on him.

Minute by minute, Reid waited tensely for any indication of what would happen today, what he had to expect but it seemed he would have to wait until Seth felt like telling him. He glanced at Richard - only to realize he was in the process of watching him intently, seemingly lost in deep thought as he stared at his legs.

He froze.

God, he had spent so much time worrying about Seth planning on hurting them when Richard clearly was the more disturbed and compulsive one…and the one with all those assault charges against him. Reid immediately felt nauseous when he saw the distant look in the man's eyes and shifted uncomfortably, wishing he could shield himself somehow.

Richard didn't miss his movement and his eyes flitted to Reid's. Instead of looking embarrassed at having been caught staring though he merely shifted his focus. Reid felt his stomach cramp as the man's eyes wandered from his mouth down to his collarbone and the bare part of his shoulder where the shirt had slid down during the night. He tensed up in dread, wishing he could use his hand to rearrange the garment. He had almost forgotten that the assault victims hadn't all been women.

Just as the tension seemed to grow unbearable, Seth turned around, his gaze falling on his brother, following his eyes. His tanned face was marred by a deep frown for a moment - then he walked over to his brother, tossing a folded back pack at him.

"There's a little convenient store nearby," he instructed him in a clipped tone, "Get us some breakfast."

Richard grumbled moodily but he looked away from the bed and the moment was over. He slowly made his way to the door, mumbling under his breath as he did so. Seth's voice stopped him just before he closed the door behind him, "And Richie? Try to remember what we said about keeping a low profile, ok?"
Richard just scoffed and left without answering.

The door fell shut behind him with a loud thud that finally woke up Hazel as well. She needed a moment to orientate herself, but then she shot up, staring at Seth with fearful eyes. He regarded her momentarily without much interest before turning back to the TV. Apparently, her waking up wasn't a cue for him to act either…it looked like they were safe for the moment…

Trying to let that deduction calm him down, Reid briefly made himself smile at her - with about as much success as the night before - and then paid attention to what Seth was watching. Right then, there was a female newscaster on the screen talking about their bank robbery. Reid's pulse quickened immediately and he leaned forward; maybe they would talk about Morgan or the investigation.

"...-sand dollars were stolen. The Gecko brothers have since then vanished again after having kidnapped bank teller Hazel Martinez, 21, and a federal investigator. Another agent who was at the bank as well was in critical condition this morning."

Reid drew in a shallow breath, feeling nauseous again. At least it seemed that Morgan had been rescued in time…still, he was in critical condition and that could mean a lot of things…

He was hoping for more information but they just went on about how investigations were going nowhere so far. Eventually, Seth turned the TV off.

"Looks like we don't have to worry about your buddies showing up here anytime soon," he declared, looking smug and relieved at the same time. He really did seem calmer, the set of his shoulders as relaxed as his facial expression with things going his way.

Reid couldn't reply gagged as he was and figured it might be best; after yesterday's fiasco, who knew what would set the man off again. He was still not over the shock of almost dying, and of almost causing Seth to shoot Hazel just because of a wrong answer he'd given.

Maybe it was best he didn't say anything, let the man be in control…He would only be able to pretend to cooperate to a certain extent of course, he was a federal agent after all, but if it worked it might make him less aggressive towards them.

Seth didn't seem content with talking to himself though; he walked over to the bed, kneeling on the mattress as he reached for Reid whose heart instinctively missed a beat from fear. He forced himself to stay still though as he felt the thief's calloused hands push his hair to the side and ghost over the back of his neck as he looked for the knot he'd tied there, ignoring his racing heart.

"There," Seth said almost jovially as he tossed the cloth to the side and straightened up again, "I trust you got a good night's sleep?"

Reid pressed his lips into a tight line to keep from saying something he might regret. By now Seth's mood change seemed more than a little off. Did he actually except them to be at ease just because he was -or was he purposefully taunting them?

Just as Reid started pondering if he might be a sadist after all, Seth kept on talking casually, "Well, mine wasn't great either, but, and that's the good news, we are officially off the radar again."

He ignored the lack of response as he walked around the bed to Hazel's side, "Alright, we have a big day ahead of us, so rise and shine, sweetie pie. Clean yourself up, then we'll get some food in you."

Hazel hurried to get up as quickly as possible without her hands. Seth pulled her up the last few inches by her upper arm, helping her regain her balance. The whole gesture wasn't nearly as rough as the day before which resulted in Hazel being a little less teary. He led her to the bathroom, closing
the door behind her, "You've got ten minutes."

She disappeared and Seth leaned against the wall by the door as he waited for her, looking over to where Reid was still sitting on the bed, "You can go when she's done."

Reid nodded quietly. After a long moment of waiting for Seth to do something besides standing there he carefully pushed to his feet and stretched. Seth made no move to stop him, merely watching him with a guarded expression.

It unsettled Reid almost more than as if he'd openly threatened him again. This way, he wasn't sure where he stood. Well, whatever Seth was thinking, cleaning up, having breakfast…it seemed that at least they weren't going to die in the next few hours.

He bit his lip absently; he had to find out what Seth was planning so he could prepare himself. It certainly was a risk what with Seth's short temper, but maybe he could try and get him talking about that?

He felt slightly less anxious with Richard gone and Seth seemingly being in a better mood. He tried not to think about how fast that could change, instead trying to come up with a tactic. It proved to be difficult. There were techniques they had learned at the academy for talking to UnSubs in a situation like this, yes, but he wasn't sure enough of what drove Seth to risk setting him off with the wrong tactic.

Still, Seth in a good mood was the best he could hope for and he had to try something.

Once again, he found himself wondering what Hotch or Gideon would have done in his situation. Would they have been confrontational or complacent? He couldn't imagine the latter –no, they would have worked to get to their captor, to stand up to him even if it was just with psychological warfare. The thing was, he didn't need to test Seth's limits, he had already unwillingly done that yesterday. No, confrontation definitely wasn't the way.

He had to find another in, a soft spot maybe. He thought of how Seth had given Hazel his word yesterday, of how upset he had been in court upon being called a liar. Maybe that was a point to start? His honor? It seemed like an odd choice of words in connection to a man like him, but Reid knew it didn't really matter how he defined the word, it mattered how Seth did. If he could find a pattern there, he might be able to have something to work with...

"Can I…ask you something, Seth?" he began carefully, mouth dry.

He'd been told to shut up very clearly yesterday, and he had no idea how using the man's first name would affect him -but just now it had seemed like Seth might be more willing to let him talk and maybe even answer? No, apparently. His captor's gaze darkened for a moment, his jaw tightening and Reid was already sure he made yet another mistake, flinching.

Surprisingly though, Seth just assessed him for another long moment, before nodding curtly. Reid breathed an inaudible sigh of relief.

"I was just...wondering," he started out carefully, "...What are you going to do with us now?"

Seth raised an eyebrow at his question, luckily remaining calm though, "Isn't it obvious? You're our hostages. You'll guarantee that the cops will leave us alone."

He shrugged like that explained everything.

Reid considered this for a moment, trying to find any signs of deceit on the man's face. He seemed to
mean it. Slightly encouraged that apparently this was the less awful kidnapping scenario he'd thought of earlier, he continued quickly, "Yes... But, the cops have already lost your trail, you said it yourself. I have some experience with this sort of situation and I can assure you, keeping us here is just going to attract more attention to you and keep you from disappearing completely. You needed us to get out of the bank, yes, but now? Don't you think it would be smartest to just let us go?"

He hadn't meant to say as much at once, but his inner profiler had just taken over for a moment. He immediately regretted it when Seth eyes suddenly flashed angrily, his mouth pulling into a frown. Apparently, this wasn't the kind of conversation he'd had in mind.

He took a step away from the door, ignoring the way his captive tensed up this time.

"If I thought that, Spencer, I would have already," he replied in a cold tone which was bordering on dangerous, "And I'm sure that as a profiler you know that, too. So why don't you ask me what you really wanna know while you have the chance?"

Reid felt his breath catch, his insides tangling at the sudden threatening tension, the dangerous potential of the question that had seemingly come out of nowhere. How was it that this man saw behind his tactics so easily? He sensed that he was treading on very thin ice by the way Seth reacted to having his plans questioned - but what else was there to do if he was going to accomplish anything?

He gulped, his heart pounding in his chest. There was no need to actually ask a question – they both knew what this was about, so he didn't waste any time beating around the bush.

"The BAU would never stop chasing you," he said quietly, a warning to not attract the wrath of a team full of federal agents because he'd killed one of them. Seth didn't look surprised in the least at his words, but also not impressed. Reid felt every hair on his neck stand up as he was met with a smile that was like ice.

"I think they'll find I'm very good at running."

Dread drained the color from Reid's cheeks as he stared back into those black eyes, suddenly unsure if he'd ever seen any humanity in them at all.

This wasn't his game, he had to realize, it was solely Seth's, and he felt like he was about to find out some more of the rules.

He couldn't help but flinch again when Seth took another step towards him, then another, only the last of his pride keeping him from recoiling when the man was suddenly standing right in front of him. His heart was pounding so fast he could feel it in his throat as he tried to look at him without blinking, without showing his fear - but he could tell by the man's knowing smile that he was doing a poor job of it.

A moment that seemed to last a sheer eternity passed, in which neither moved, Seth merely staring down at him and Reid expected to be grabbed or hit at any second, but neither happened. In the end, Seth's hard glare lightened somewhat, and he scoffed, shaking his head with a slight smirk brought on by a joke that was clearly about him. Disturbing, yes, but still, better than him letting his temper reign free... 'Close shave...'

"Don't worry, Spencer," he finally said slowly, "I do happen to have a plan for which I need you, and need you alive."

The words sunk in only slowly – again, Seth looked annoyed but not like he was lying and Reid
wanted to feel relief.

Instead he felt something cold settle in the pit of his stomach when he thought of all the different ways those words could be interpreted. They didn't have to involve anything with the police - especially with Richard in the equation. Reid felt his stomach turn as he thought of Richie's comment in the desert and the way he had looked at them this morning. No, he couldn't let that happen...

"Money," Seth's voice suddenly interrupted his unpleasant thoughts, his brows furrowing briefly, "...I'm sure they'll pay us a lot of money to get you back. So why should I give you up for free?"

There was no sign of dishonesty in his voice as he said that, yet Reid couldn't help but doubt anyway. By now he didn't have to play up being intimidated and vulnerable anymore. Despite the discomfort it had caused earlier, he made himself look into Seth's eyes again, trying to find an answer there. Seth returned his gaze evenly, his' almost neutral again, apparently awaiting a response.

"Wh...How much do you want?" Reid finally asked, unable to get what he really wanted to know past his lips. Addressing the subject of some of Richard's convictions might make everything worse, give him ideas even.

Seth shrugged again, seemingly oblivious to his thoughts, "Enough to get our asses into Mexico and never have to turn back."

"And when you have the money, you'll just let us go?"

"If your team cooperates and pays -and you haven't done anything to make me hurt you until then, yes, why not?"

Reid nodded slowly. There were regulations against making deals with criminals so he had no idea what would happen but he couldn't think about that now. The team would do all they could, he knew that. He took a breath, trying to push his unease regarding his future out of his mind.

"They'll give you more than enough," he lied quickly, nervously licking his lips, "But...as long as you have me...what do you need Hazel for?"

He knew his renewed attempt at helping the girl had gone too far before he'd finished the sentence. The anger that Seth had semi-successfully overcome just minutes ago returned full force, making him look truly frightening as he loomed over him.

"Are you saying she's useless to me?"

But he couldn't go back now, could he?

"You don't need her, Seth," he changed tactics, trying to save what he could, "You already have total control. She's only one more person you have to watch. What's the risk of letting her go? It's not like your faces aren't nationally known already."

He had hoped appealing to the man's ego would help calm his anger, but he was wrong again. Before he could say anything more, he was suddenly grabbed by the back of his neck in a bruising grip and Seth was right in his face, scowling. He flinched away but Seth held on tightly, immobilizing him with frightening ease while his other hand freed the gun from his belt and pointing it at the closed bathroom door with Hazel behind it. The shocked no died on Reid's lips as Seth spoke.
"You're right, she's useless," he leaned forward to look him dead in the eye, as scary as every mug shot he'd very seen of him, towering over him as he pulled back the hammer of his gun, "She can die this second, or she can live another hundred years, I don't give a rat's ass. The only reason she's here is to make sure you don't do anything stupid. I thought I made that clear yesterday, but apparently you don't want to understand me."

Reid shook his head hastily, pulse thrumming in his ears, all strategy immediately abandoned and forgotten, "I won't-"

"I know you won't," Seth interrupted, "Because if you do, if you try to run, or get help, or if you keep trying to play me with that reverse psychology shit, I will kill her. Do you understand?"

His eyes bored into Reid's, the painful grip in his hair preventing him from nodding.

"Yes."

"Do you believe me?"

"Yes."

With that, Seth finally nodded. He lowered his gun but didn't take his other hand down, forcing Reid to keep looking at him.

"Perfect," his lips pulled apart in a seemingly pleasant smile while his eyes remained hard, "Then we have a solid basis for any future cooperation. You don't fuck with me, I don't fuck with you. I get my money and we all go our separate ways."

The breathless silence he received in response seemed to be enough then, because he finally let up, breaking eye contact and leaving a shaken Reid to compose himself while he walked over to the bathroom.

He loudly knocked on the bathroom door, "Time's up, sugar!"

Seconds later, Hazel stumbled out of the door, still looking all kinds of terrified whenever she looked at Seth. Reid tried to give her an encouraging smile but it probably looked more like a grimace than anything else with the way his insides were feeling in that moment. He was still shocked by how fast the older Gecko brother's temper changed, how he could go from pleasant and sane to absolutely mad in under a second.

To make things worse, Seth wasn't just ruthless - it was becoming clearer and clearer that he was indeed highly intelligent. He had seen behind his tactic within three seconds - how was he supposed to work with that?

Reid's chest clenched in misery. What did he have left now? He was weak, couldn't even keep up the pretense of ardor. Any of the others guys would fight, would have used this opportunity to overpower Gecko - but he didn't even need to try that, it would be ridiculous to think he could take on this man. He had his intellect but even that hadn't worked.

How was he supposed to protect Hazel if he couldn't even protect himself? He couldn't just sit here like he was told to and trust in the word of a serial killer, could he?

He was pulled from his thoughts when Seth grabbed Hazel's arm, supposedly to pull her away from the door, and she whimpered fearfully. Reid tensed nervously when a flash of annoyance crossed Seth's face, but instead of lashing out the older man just sighed.
"Look," he finally said to both of them, sounding impatient, "I was in a slightly less shitty mood than yesterday when I woke up this morning, so let's all try not to ruin that, okay? We'll all just hang here till I can exchange you for cash, and in the meantime I want you to fucking relax, ok? Do as I say and nothing will happen to you."

He looked at them expectantly and when there was no answer, neither positive nor negative he threw his hands up into the air in resignation, not pressing the issue any further.

He walked over to the TV and turned it back on without a word, then motioned for them to sit down. They didn't talk anymore until Richard returned.
Chapter 6

As they waited for Richard to return, Seth sat by the window, one leg on the sill as he smoked a cigarette and looked across the parking lot from behind closed curtains. His hostages were still sitting on the couch without speaking, naturally, after he had literally scared them into silence.

Seth sighed, annoyed for some reason he couldn't quite pinpoint. This morning he had been in a much better mood after all the stress and danger from the day before had ceased to breathe down their necks and he'd somehow managed to convince himself that everything could be handled after all, that the kidnapped FBI agent was no threat to him, neither regarding his plans nor his mental stability.

He'd started out with his resolutions from last night in mind, acting cool and detached, just like he would with anyone else.

Unfortunately, it had only worked briefly –namely, until his hostage had screwed everything up. Despite yesterday's warnings he had started talking to him again. In retrospective, Seth knew it had been his first mistake to let him, he should have known there would be a purpose to whatever the kid asked –but he had managed to look so meek and frightened while asking that he hadn't been able to help trying to reassure him.

Seth growled angrily, his fingers clenching in the curtains he was holding.

How fucking stupid was he to fall for the same trick twice? Kid probably knew all too well that his appearance inspired sympathy and made people underestimate him –in fact, nothing about his words or behavior had been in the least bit challenging or provoking and with anyone else it might have worked. As it was though, that exactly was what had made Seth angry enough to once again snap and threaten the girl's life with his gun drawn, the realization that the agent was acting like this on purpose, playing into his instincts on purpose.

For a moment, he'd panicked, sure that this Reid did remember them meeting all those years ago, that he somehow knew how hard it was for Seth to separate his hostage from a child he had once known and couldn't bear to hurt. But it couldn't be. If he did remember, he would have used his knowledge more explicitly, would probably have tried to talk to him about Richie's sickness already.

No, by fortunate circumstances, he didn't know who Seth was, which meant he was probably only acting the way he did because his profile included Seth being choleric and reacting allergic to being challenged or provoked. Not that that too wasn't bothersome, but it was much better than the alternative he supposed. This way he would only have to be on the lookout for mind games.

Seth sighed, trying to calm his mind. He guessed he was mostly angry at himself because as much as he tried he still didn't feel like himself and knew it was because of him. He probably should have expected that Reid would try to talk him out of his plan, he was a profiler after all –the fact just kept catching him off guard because until he opened his mouth he so didn't look like a cop. It wasn't even just the constant reminder of his past, he knew; even before he'd realized that something inside him had rebelled against hurting the young man. He just looked too young, too fragile, too innocent, too pretty…

He bit his lip, forcefully interrupting his thoughts as they wandered into the wrong direction. Thoughts that were distracting him, thoughts he had no use for.

He turned his head to look across the room, taking in the agent's tense posture and pale face…
high cheek bones, the soft hair...he remembered it brushing his knuckles when he'd grabbed him before, the sensation making him want to grip him even tighter, pull him closer.

Groaning inaudibly, he shook his head to clear it. Fine, he was...appealing. He could admit that and it wouldn't change a thing. Not about his conviction and not about Reid's situation. He could control himself, he wasn't Richie after all.

The thought of his brother brought another question to his mind that he'd been wondering about since the day before: Did Reid know about Richie? What he tended to do to people during his episodes besides stabbing them uncontrollably? He hadn't said anything about it when asked, but Seth suspected he knew anyway and that that was the reason he was so anxious to get the girl out of here...

Just in that moment, Richie finally returned, carrying sandwiches for all four of them. Glad for the distraction, Seth removed Hazel's gag and made her sit down at the table, then gestured for Richie and Reid to follow suit. Reid sat tensely, obviously still shaken but trying hard not to look too glum for Hazel's sake, all the while avoiding looking at either brother completely.

They ate in silence which was only interrupted by Richard's complaints about the motel and Seth's annoyed answers.

Afterwards, Hazel was told to sit in the bedroom. Reid looked after her warily until Richard closed the door behind her and went to stand next to his brother. "Sit," Seth gestured towards the couch, waiting for Reid to comply before he turned to his brother, "Check on the car, Richie, see if there's enough gas left."

As usually, Richie followed his brother's orders without question, leaving the room. It left the two of them alone once again, and Reid shifted nervously on the couch.

"Alright, we need to talk logistics," Seth had his arms crossed as he went to sit down as well. This time he was going to do this right, all business, no shenanigans.

Reid looked at him warily, backing up into the couch cushions somewhat. Worried probably that Seth would want more disclosed information about the team and that a refusal would make him grab him again.

Seth ignored it as best as he could; for now there was really only one thing he was interested in. "How long do you think your team's going to take to find you? How will they proceed?"

Reid looked at him quietly and for a moment Seth thought he was going to refuse to answer despite his obvious apprehension. It wouldn't come as the biggest surprise considering the last time he had encouraged him to speak it had ended with being threatened with a gun. But that had been his own fault for trying to play him; it didn't mean he would snap during every conversation now.

Luckily for him though, just as Seth was beginning to get irritated, Reid finally seemed to deem it best to cooperate and this time only offer the amount of information required. "Considering they have no more information about your whereabouts than yesterday I'm guessing they're still pretty much in the dark...unless there are new leads like security camera footage."

"You sure about that?" Seth raised an eyebrow, "I thought you were supposed to be the best profiling team the FBI had?"

"We are just that," Reid nodded, "but when a profile only says that an UnSub is likely to go into hiding, that doesn't really help much with the actual search. As far as they know, you could be
anywhere along the border, in any house, any motel."

Seth nodded, satisfied with that answer. It made sense and he was pretty sure that the kid wouldn't try to play him again just minutes after the last near death experience.

"Alright," he decided, "here's the plan then. You're going to call your agency from some phone box a little off so they can't trace us and tell them we want to cut a deal. Then we go meet them and make the exchange. We'll leave as soon as I have figured out from where to make the call."

He fully expected a confirmation and frowned when he received none, the agent merely staring at his hands tensely, lips pressed into a thin line.

"Any objections?" he prompted him impatiently, a warning edge to his voice.

His change in tone finally got him the attention he wanted, even if it was in the form of a nervous stare. Reid's eyes flickered from him to the door with the girl behind it and back, eyebrows knitted and jaw tense, then he looked up at Seth with an expression that contained an surprising amount of determination considering how apprehensive he looked.

"If I…if I cooperate, help you get your money, will you promise to let Hazel go unharmed?"

Seth could see he wasn't breathing; he had that damn look in his eyes again that made him want to say yes. Familiar anger welled up in him and he felt his left eye twitch, face and voice darker yet.

"I was under the impression I had already done that," he ground out.

He was sure Reid immediately caught on to his mood shift, however, instead of falling silent, he continued in that aggravatingly calm, reasonable voice that Seth just knew was forced, "Yes, well, you'll understand I find it hard to just believe you. How do I know-"

He flinched, falling silent when Seth turned abruptly, facing him fully, his looming presence one of immediate threat. Seth ground his teeth audibly, only sheer force of will keeping him from moving further into the other's space. He balled his fist in the backrest of the couch instead, stilling it.

The gall of this kid, to challenge him again and again, to doubt and question him, to try and make demands! What did he think this was? A video game? Didn't he realize he only had one head to lose?

"You don't," he snapped, "all you have is that precious profile of yours and if were you I wouldn't bank on that too much." He looked at the young man whose back was now pressed to the couch even though he had clearly tried not to move. Not as confident as he looked, now, was he?

He scoffed derisively, leaning back a little, "After all, it said a lot of things, like me being a sadist, or a psychopath. Lucky for you that it proved to be useless I would say."

He felt slightly better getting some of his pent up anger out there, even if it was just in words, also because that very subject had been bothering him since the day before. He usually couldn't care less about labels, but he knew he wasn't a psycho. He was the sane one, the rational one -Richie was the uncontrollable nut job who killed compulsively. He was just a man who did what he had to, to protect what he cared about. He didn't know why it was important to him that Reid saw the difference, but he was glad to have set things straight now.

Until…

"Lucky?" Reid repeated, his voice sounding oddly hoarse. His hesitant resistance seemed to
suddenly morph, his eyes growing cold and older somehow as the shadow of contempt flashed over his face, "Psychopathy or sociopathy are not necessarily coupled with the urge to kill or maim. It merely means that the person doesn't have any sort of empathy, that it doesn't matter to them what happens to other people as long as they get what they want. You confirmed that mindset just an hour ago. Us getting hurt would facilitate you getting the money and as if that weren't enough you have a brother who could put Ted Bundy to shame. So how exactly does that make me lucky?"

For about three seconds, Seth just stared, stunned by the response. He just couldn't believe it. Here he was, gun in hand, barely one hour after bullying the kid into fearful compliance...or so he'd thought - and now they had moved on to active rebellion? How as it that this slip of a kid was hiding all this inside of him? For a brief moment he felt something akin to respect.

Then though, his anger won over just like it always did. How dare he talk to him like that? Insult him, his honor - and Richie!

His arm whipped back, pure instinctive rage controlling the movement. Reid recoiled instantly, flinching back into the couch in expectancy of a blow that would almost certainly knock him out.

He gasped, cringing, staring wide eyed when Seth's fist missed him by inches, slamming into the cushions right next to his head. They both stared at each other silently for several seconds, Reid not daring to move a muscle because despite the fact that he hadn't been hit, Seth was suddenly right in his face, black, threatening gaze feral and so full of anger it seemed like he would lash out again at any second.

Seth was breathing heavily through gritted teeth as he tried to regain control of himself. He stared into those large, unblinking eyes, suddenly so full of fright again, then at his fist, digging uselessly into the furniture.

What the hell had just happened? What was wrong with him?

He ground his teeth audibly as he glared at the agent. "I don't think you realize that things could be much worse for you than they are right now," he finally hissed, "otherwise you'd be much more careful about what you say."

He didn't know what he would do should he get yet another retort – he never found out though because in that moment the door opened and Richard walked back in. He took in their position with an odd expression somewhere between surprise and confusion and Seth pulled back quickly.

"Richie, I'm gonna go figure out from where to call the feds," he said brusquely, pushing to his feet, "You stay here and keep watch."

He didn't wait for a response before he stormed out, slamming the door shut behind him without a backward glance. He was still fuming, couldn't think clearly. He needed some air or he was surely going to bash in someone's head.

xxx

Reid stared at the TV without blinking, every nerve in his body poised to jump at the slightest noise. To the other side of the room, Richard was busying himself with something he couldn't see from his position. He didn't dare turn his head to find out, afraid to divert his attention.

He felt the hairs on his body stand up at the thought. No, Richard's attention was really the last thing he wanted, especially as long as Seth wasn't there with them.

Reid picked at his hands nervously. The older Gecko brother had been gone for almost 45 minutes
now and still the remnants of their conversation had him shaking. He didn't know what had overcome him when he had talked to Seth like that. He knew he shouldn't have acted the way he did, especially after how it had ended the last time. This was no place to openly be the profiler, and Seth was definitely not the kind of person on whose bad side you wanted to be.

Provided he even had a good side of course. He still wasn't sure of that, and maybe that was part of why he had reacted the way he did. The situation, the not knowing was just so stressful and scary. Seth kept saying that nothing would happen to them, yes, but his behavior was just too inconsistent to get a good read on him. One second he was so cold and mean and plain frightening that Reid was sure the only way their were getting out of this would be in pieces, and the next he would hesitate, and there would be this undefinable something flashing across his face, softening it, making him look so...human... that it made Reid want to hope.

Still, he should know better than to risk pushing the man. His best chance was to appear compliant and nonthreatening, he knew that. And if he hadn't before, he surely did after this morning. There'd been a number of confrontations but during the last one he had been sure that he'd gone too far, that he was going to get seriously hurt. Honestly, now that he thought about it, he had no idea why Seth hadn't hit him then. He'd been so close and he'd looked so, so furious...and then that last threat. He really needed to be careful what he did if he didn't want this whole situation to escalate...

Reid rubbed his eyes exhaustedly. The situation was just too much too handle for him. He knew he needed to be the profiler here, but what if acting like it would only get him into more trouble? He didn't know how to handle Seth, how to protect Hazel...and especially not what to expect for their future. Because even if he did choose to believe Seth, and the man would stay true to his words that still left one very big variable. Richard.

Reid glanced at the younger Gecko brother through his hair nervously.

Truth was, he might not be sure about Seth's intentions and general sanity, but at least it seemed like there was a chance. With Richard he was sure there wasn't though. And if Seth had told him the truth, it would really be better to be in the hands of someone who didn't care if he lived or died as opposed to someone was not only a murderer but also...

He stopped abruptly, unable to bring himself to think about that. He could only pray that it wouldn't come to that, that Seth truly just wanted the money. If Seth really only wanted to escape, he might just have a chance to get out of this alive. Of course, he might still be shot if anything went wrong during the transaction or if Strauss refused to cooperate, but there was a chance. If one or both brothers were compulsive serial killers though, they would not spare them no matter how much money they received. In that case, they would either end up with a hole in their heads or worse … like their assault victims.

Reid shuddered at the notion. He didn't even want to go there. Too vivid were the pictures of their crimes scenes before his eyes. How was he supposed to know which of those was the case and how he should react if it was the second one? How was he supposed to trust Seth?

He was interrupted in his thoughts when Richard Gecko suddenly spoke up, turning to look over at him. Reid all but jumped out his skin when the silence was suddenly broken but tried not to let it show.

Richard's voice sounded weirdly soft and polite, almost shy as he asked, "Hey, you're a doctor, right?"
Chapter 7

Richard's voice sounded weirdly soft and polite, almost shy as he asked, "Hey, you're a doctor, right?"

Reid looked at him nervously, not sure what to make of this. Richard had never really spoken directly to him before but he sounded a little too…normal.

Richard held up his bandaged hand for an explanation as he continued: "Can you help me with my hand? I think it's infected."

Reid tried to see any sign of deception on the man's face, any sign that this was some sort of trap, but Richard seemed completely authentic in his request. Also, there was no arguing he did have a hole in his hand.

"Um, I'm not a medical doctor," he replied, wishing they could just go back to being silent. He didn't know how deranged this man was, how solid his connection to reality was, if he would even understand his reasoning.

Right now it looked like he didn't.

Richard blinked in confusion at the differentiation.

"But you know about medicine, right?" he repeated, his injured hand still hanging in the air like he had forgotten to take it down.

"I…" Reid hesitated, trying to think of a way to decline that wouldn't include the risk of setting the man off.

"Please," Richard smiled innocently from behind his glasses, looking like he couldn't harm a fly, "I don't think the tape should be on it any longer. I have gauze and a clean bandage here but I can't really do it myself."

Reid bit his lip as his stomach clenched with a sinking feeling. No matter how innocent the man's request seemed, he didn't like this…it felt wrong…

Richard saw the apprehension on Reid's face and promptly misinterpreted it, "It's okay. Seth won't get mad at you, I promise."

Like Reid was worried about that. He was actually kind of wishing Seth would come back already, and that said something. At least he knew what to expect there.

Richard on the other hand behaved like a small boy in the way he talked and depended on his big brother…and Reid really didn't want to find out if he was prone to tantrums.

"Uh, I can't…use my hands…I mean…" Reid lifted his bound hands, praying that the man would just let it go.

"I can take that off," Richard suggested, like he didn't know it would get him in trouble with his brother.

When Reid still didn't move, he shrugged and started to get up, "That's okay, I'll just ask the girl then…"
"No, wait!" Reid practically jumped off the couch, earning himself a startled look from Richard with his violent reaction. He didn't say anything though because Reid made himself walk over to the desk then.

His heart was racing again, every fiber of his being screaming to back up, to not let this man near him. Knowing there wasn't much of a choice though, he finally lifted his bound hands.

He jumped slightly when Richard's good hand quickly wrapped around one of his wrists and he suddenly had a knife in his other one. Where had that come from so fast?

Before he could freak out though, Richard had already cut through the tape around his wrists and sat back in his chair again.

Reid forced himself to take another calming breath, telling himself he was being ridiculous. He was in no more danger than he had been all along when Seth had still been here –and even if he were, Richard wouldn't do anything against his brother's orders…would he…?

He quickly pried the remainders of his restraints off his skin, grimacing at how much they had cut into his skin. He felt a little better with his hands free though and so he told himself to just get it over with as quickly as possible.

Richard smiled encouragingly and extended his injured hand expectantly. Reid took a deep breath, trying to will his fingers to stop trembling as he reached out and carefully started peeling the bloody tape of the man's hand.

As much as he tried, he couldn't seem to relax even when Richard just sat there and let him work; he still felt like impending doom was just around the corner.

But what choice did he have? He couldn't and wouldn't let Hazel near this guy…

He dropped the used tape onto the table top and soaked a clean tissue with the disinfectant standing next to the bandages.

He could practically feel Richard's eyes burning on his skin, making him even more jumpy as he cleaned the wound, all the while trying to touch his hand as little as possible. Finally he could start wrapping a new bandage around the wound and hurried to finish.

Richard smiled at him as he watched him work, "You're very gentle. It almost didn't hurt at all. It always stings when Seth does stuff like this for me."

Reid did his best to muster a smile in return even if it looked strained, glad that his hair was covering part of his face. He couldn't bring himself to reply.

He finished almost hastily and was about to walk back to the couch when Richard's hand was suddenly around his wrist again, holding him in place with surprising strength.

A jolt of shock shot through Reid as he literally jumped at the touch, his eyes becoming wide.

Richard stared at his hand, seemingly neither noticing Reid's startled gasp nor that he was trying to pull away. Instead he pulled Reid's hand closer to him, regarding the torn skin on his wrist with what seemed like concern.

"That must hurt," he stated, "We should fix you up, too."

Reid was fighting to stay calm but it didn't help to realize just how much strength was behind that
restraining hand. He might not be able to break free if he had to…

"No, that's alright, thank you," he forced himself to say, "It's not that bad."

The way Richard looked at him in response sent a shiver of terror down his spine. His eyes seemed to be burning from inside, all false innocence gone. "You don't have to pretend like you're strong. I know you're fragile, so easily breakable…Seth does, too…"

The last part sounded almost distant, like he was speaking to himself, his thumb moving in light circles over the inside of Reid's wrist. He didn't seem to notice the young man recoiling from the touch or that Reid didn't answer, his words stuck in his throat as his mind was racing.

Reid almost felt like spider webs were crawling up his arms and legs, ready to tighten and trap him by surprise. He tried to pull away more vigorously, wondering if Richard really didn't notice or if he just pretended to.

This time though he got a reaction. Richard relaxed his hold for a brief second without warning, causing Reid to stumble backwards into the desk. He had barely caught himself when the man was suddenly standing right in front of him, towering over him much like Seth had this morning.

Reid shuddered at the comparison. It was a completely different situation for some reason and he felt real panic rising in his chest, paralyzing him. Richard's hand had found its way back around his wrist, but this time he moved the other one too, lifting it to lightly push some loose streaks of hair out of Reid's face.

Reid shrank back instinctively when the man touched his hair and face, but Richard's grip was like steel and he had no room to back up.

Images tinged in crimson flashed across his mind for the second time that day, feeling more real than ever. His breath caught in his throat, his legs feeling like they might buckle under him at any second. Not that it would have mattered with the way he was wedged in the space between the larger body and the desk.

The man leaned in uncomfortably close, still seemingly oblivious to Reid's reaction. He frowned lightly, shaking his head disapprovingly as he inspected the wound Seth had inflicted on Reid's temple.

"I wonder if that's why he's kept you," he murmured like Reid was some object, "He has this silly idea that innocents mustn't be harmed." He hummed quietly, eyes darting over his face, "You're not though…are you? I told him so, but he wouldn't listen, I told him you would get us into trouble…Will you? Are you going to get my brother into trouble? Cause I can't let that happen…"

He looked at Reid inquiringly, with that not-entirely-sane look; Reid forced himself to keep breathing as he shook his head, praying that the man would finally let him go then, that this disturbing conversation would be all Richard was aiming for.

His hopes faded when the hand in his hair tightened and cupped the back of his head, immobilizing him. Richard's voice dropped and he looked at Reid from behind half lidded eyes, "I think you just might. What if I told him about what you said to me earlier…he wouldn't think you're so innocent then."

Reid blinked in confusion, too tense to think clearly but feeling panic rise up in him nonetheless, incited by the man's gaze and him drawing even closer. What was he talking about?

"You know that thing that you said…" Richie explained, seeming a little flustered now, "…before I
went to the store…I can do that for you….I mean… if you really want me to I will….

The hand on the back of his head flexed, inevitably pulling him closer.

With no idea what the man was talking about, Reid just stared up at him, his mind screaming to break free, to put some much needed distance between them already. Delusional, he was delusional...

"I didn't say anythi-" he gasped, wincing when Richard's grip suddenly became crushing, pulling him closer inevitably.

"Don't lie to me," he snapped, suddenly angry, "I know you want it!"

Then, before he could shake his head, the man suddenly yanked him to the side by his hair, sending him toppling to the floor. Before he could process what was happening, he was being pinned down, straddled as Richie yanked his head back by his hair painfully, exposing his throat.

Reid's heart shuttered, missing several beats before he could think to try and push the man off of him. Then though he fought with all his strength, kicking and hitting, only to have his wrists grabbed and pushed to the floor over his head. Richard held him down easily and Reid felt bile rising in his throat when the man's thumb moved to stroke the side of his mouth, his bottom lip. He jerked his head back in revulsion, sending a sharp pain through his skull, only to end up with large fingers wrapping around his throat squeezing tightly.

Richard leaned over him, his eyes livid, his touch just a snap decision away from becoming crushing. The he pulled his hand away, out of view.

A small whimper escaped Reid as he drew a knife and pressed it to his throat.

Was this what all their victims had felt, seen in their last minutes…?

--------------------------------------------------------------------------------

**xxx**

It took about thirty minutes for Seth to figure out from where to make the call to the FBI. By the time he started his way back to the motel room, his inner turmoil hadn't subsided, if anything his open rage had morphed into a sort of grim determination.

Even now, their hostage kept invading his mind, distracting him to an irritating level -at the moment he was still caught up on their last encounter. He rubbed his temples angrily, taking deep drags from his second cigarette of the day. He really didn't know what the hell was wrong with him that he put so much thought into this at all. Usually, when they took hostages, he took the time to explain the no-talking-no-escaping-no-pain-rules to them and then did his best to keep them alive and Richard from flipping. Nothing more, nothing less.

It didn't always work out, mostly because of Richard, but even their hostages' deaths only ever angered him for a short while before he let it be water under the bridge and moved on. Because what he'd said earlier was true, they could live or die, either way he didn't particularly care...

This time should be the same.

But it wasn't, clearly. But why? Why was he letting this FBI agent walk all over him?

He knew damn well that anyone else daring to talk to him the way he had this morning would have regretted it deeply soon after, sure to have walked away with at least a black eye or even a broken
jew. He'd been so close too, back there, but…

Yes, what? It seemed that his body simply wasn't registering conditioned commands with this boy, short circuited every time by the large hazel eyes staring at him, especially when they looked all wide and scared and vulnerable. Especially for that, he felt like punching himself. What a cheap trick to be manipulated with.

And yet he couldn't help it. Every time he kept getting pulled in by those eyes, only to have the rug pulled out under him when the kid switched back into agent mode.

Seth cursed under his breath, throwing his cigarette bud to the ground carelessly.

Whatever was happening to him, he had to stop it. He was making a fool of himself. The kid was no one, and after this he would be gone from his life one way or the other for good.

The key seemed to lie in the memory, the emotion he connected with seeing those eyes. He probably just needed to get over himself and the pitiful remnants of who he'd once been and then all of this would stop having so much power over him.

Right, not a problem. He had long since learned that there was no use in crying over what might have been. Back then, he might have been a better person, but with the life they were leading staying like that would have gotten him killed years ago. He could never go back.

And once he accepted that, any chance that this Spencer kid could evoke any sort of emotion in him would be gone, too.

Easy as that.

After all, even if he was right, what did it matter now?

Yes, he had held on to the memory of those innocent, hopeful eyes for over a decade, back when he had still thought he could be good, and even long after Richie was with him again -however faint, they had always been a reminder of the person he could have been if things had been different, they had kept him from completely giving into to the darkness.

But even if so, what he was holding on to was merely a symbol, not the actual person – that person, that boy didn't even exist anymore for all he knew; he was a fed now. The inference was the important point here, not the implication and definitely not the person implying something. He mustn't forget that.

He didn't have time to hang on to the memory of who he had once thought he could be.

He came to his conclusion just as he saw the motel sign coming up in front of him.

He would act as always. Cold and detached, brutal, even deadly if he had to be. He wouldn't let himself be manipulated into feeling anything, especially not empathy for this stranger. And next time he talked back or opposed him he would make sure to remind him of the rules properly, he would make due of his threat. Yes.

Seth made sure to put on his most unsettling, darkest expression as he finally walked up to the door of their motel room. No more weakness from now on. Kid thought he didn't care about anything? Well, he would give him reason to.

His grim thoughts were suddenly disrupted by sounds coming from behind the door, sounds that sounded like muffled yelling and fighting. Immediately he was alert, getting his gun out as he
grabbed the door knob and stormed inside, ready to shoot him and Richie free from a police invasion.

What he saw was not what he had expected.

He froze in the door frame for a second, taking in the scene before him with wide eyes. The girl was nowhere in sight and his brother was on the floor kneeling over their male hostage, one hand tearing at his shirt, the other pressing the blade of his knife into his throat.

Seth had seen Richie in this position far too many times to not know what exactly was happening, knew the insane expression on his face too well, and recognized the look of sheer terror on his victim's face instantly.

Only that this time it wasn't the possible end of his well laid plans which was on the forefront of his mind as his gaze locked on the same hazel eyes he'd cursed just a second ago, immediately making him forget everything he had plotted.

xxx

Seth's limbs acted before his brain had fully caught up, something inside him just snapping at the scene in front of him. He dropped his keys to the floor and practically lunged for his brother, grabbing and hauling him backwards with so much strength it sent him sprawling to the floor.

Richie's face crunched up first in pain from the impact, then in unrestrained rage against his unknown attacker. Seth actually saw him adjusting his grip on his knife, ready to attack him, just before he recognized him and stilled, immediately morphing from a deadly predator to looking like a kid with his hand in the cookie jar.

He looked away, already feeling rage rise inside him at that faux expression.

Instead his eyes flitted to Reid who pushed himself up and staggered backwards, against the desk, clutching at his throat and shirt. There were fresh bloodstains on his collar and he didn't appear to be breathing as he stared at Richard, his lips pressed into a thin white line, his face ghostly pale.

The image did something to Seth that forced him to look away again –it caused a sharp pull in his chest, turning his stomach as he thought about how this would have ended had he not come back when he did, about seeing that face ashen with dead eyes…it made him want to reach out, touch him to convince himself that nothing had happened…

No. Stop.

Just as quickly as that thought had come he clamped down on it, grinding his teeth in frustration.

Thoughts like that were dangerous and he had sworn to himself to stop just two minutes ago. He knew he couldn't personalize the kid like that; he couldn't –and especially not openly- be so bothered by possible collateral damage.

No, the only thing he should worry about in this situation was Richard screwing with his plans. Rational things.

Resolutely, he turned his face away from his hostage, instead focusing on Richie again.

This wasn't about Reid in particular. It was about Richard's behavior. He didn't think any longer about what it meant that this disturbed him so much more than usually, all he knew was that he was fucking furious about the situation and he'd have to let it out on someone.
His brother was still looking at him like he always did in situations like these. He just sat on the floor like a kicked dog, like he didn't understand what had gotten his brother so angry. Like he hadn't meant any harm, like the 13-year old kid he'd once been, reprimanded for seemingly unjust reasons.

Seth barely suppressed a growl at that. He was painfully familiar with those two sides of the coin, with playing the same old game for years and years only to be the one who had the remaining mess to deal with, just so they could go back to pretending it had never happened.

Ultimately, it never failed to send him into a fit—but this time he felt more furious than he had ever been.

"What do you think you're doing?" he hissed, his voice deadly quiet.

Richie looked a little surprised at the amount of rage he was confronted with. Usually, Seth didn't go into a full-fledged fit unless someone lost at least a limb.

"He tried to knock me out and run off," he shrugged, "I stopped him."

At the blatant lie, Seth was barely able to keep his temper in check. He should have fucking known. Richard always managed to fuck up everything, especially anything concerning his plans. He was about to grab him again, maybe to punch him or something, he didn't know—but stopped himself at the last second.

He closed his eyes briefly, trying to stay rational. What good would it do to flip out now? It wasn't like Richie understood or cared about what he was doing wrong.

No, the rational thing to do here was to make sure this situation wouldn't escalate any further. Richie was under control now that he was back. Which left…

He looked back over at their hostage, the way his chest moved with his irrational breathing, the way his eyes darted from place to place, the shaking—whatever Richie had done or said, exactly, he looked closer to snapping than in all the hours they'd spent together so far.

Shit.

He had seen enough people in this sort of state to know this could turn dangerous any second. Who knew how Reid would react once he found it in him to move?

On instinct, he quickly reached out, about to grab Reid's upper arm to reassure his control of the situation, to make sure he wouldn't flip, or run or something similar—but stopped in his tracks when the younger man recoiled violently, an expression of terror still etched into his features.

Seth froze, feeling a sudden unwelcome pang in his chest when he realized the expression was no longer only caused by Richard but also by him now.

In that moment he really wanted to punch his brother in the face. Or scream. Or both.

Fuck, this was all getting out of control…

Seth took a deep breath to collect himself.

"Richard, out. Now," he then dismissed his brother coolly. There was silence for a moment, then the sound of Richard getting up and a door slamming.

Seth didn't look after him. He would deal with him later—but he couldn't be in here now, not if he
The door slammed shut, and Reid flinched. Seth frowned, more and more realizing how bad this was as he really looked at his hostage.

Considering his situation, he had looked afraid before too, tense and nervous and intimidated around them—and as much as he had been sure that at least part of that was authentic he had known from the very beginning that this slip of an agent had a lot more guts and self-control than he let on. He had found himself confronted with it during every conversation they'd had so far but only now that it was suddenly gone did he really notice how big a difference it made.

Now, he looked so rattled that it made him appear younger than ever, true fear in his eyes as he looked at Seth.

He hated it immediately, could feel it affecting him despite his best efforts. If it had seemed hard to distance himself before, this was making it impossible. Had it really only been ten minutes before that he had been planning on being less soft from now on?

"Breathe, kid," he said the first thing that came to mind, trying his best to look and sound non-threatening, "I don't know what the hell happened here, but it's over now, so calm down, ok?"

It wasn't the brightest thing to say, granted. He was pretty sure that what he had walked in on was a potential rape-and murder-scenario.

Consequently, he wasn't very surprised to find that his words had little effect, also because he didn't do non-threatening very well in general. Instead of relaxing, Reid inched back along the desk the closer Seth came, eyes flickering between him and the door. . .

He needed a moment to breathe, to realize that the danger was contained now, Seth figured. Unfortunately though, he couldn't take the chance that that would work, especially since Richie had apparently been dumb enough to untie the agent.

Holding up both hands in what he hoped looked like an appeasing gesture he took another step closer, now almost close enough to at least grab a hold of the other's arm.

He saw the flash of determination in Reid's eyes too late, only realizing his mistake when his hand on the desk suddenly moved and then darted forward, silver flashing in the corner of his eye.

Seth recoiled just in time, suddenly finding himself on the pointy end of a letter opener that he had so far neglected to notice. He stood frozen for a moment, stunned by sheer surprise as Reid brought the improvised weapon in front of him protectively, looking no less terrified but just as determined as he pointed it at Seth, knuckles white.

"Stay away from me."

Reid grabbed the metal in his hand so tightly it cut into his palm.

He hardly noticed the sting over the pounding of his heart, pumping adrenaline through his body. This was how a shrew must feel, he thought disjointedly, nearly 1200 heartbeats per minute, living in incessant distress.

He pushed the random thought aside, trying to stay focused. So much had happened in the last five minutes that his instincts were far ahead of his brain action wise, something that couldn't be beneficial. The terror of being completely helpless during Richard's attack sat deep, was just as real as if he were pinned on the floor still, just an inch away from death.
And with Seth standing there, he didn't even try to calm himself, knowing that nothing but this undiluted panic he felt would be an appropriate reaction, especially now that he was certain rational thought wouldn't help in this situation.

There was no way to talk himself out of this; he had been foolish to hope for that. Richard had shown him that by attacking him and Seth had shown him by letting it happen. He had actually made do on his threat, he had shown him how bad his situation actually was, that there would be no talking himself out of it. They were cold blooded killers, the both of them and if he didn't get out of here now, he knew he never would.

He grabbed the makeshift weapon in his hand tighter, unprepared for this but going with the flow. He knew his chances of winning an open fight were infinitesimal – but he had to try.

His eyes never left Seth, who looked just as shocked as he by this sudden action, hands empty and raised for now but overall still terribly tall and broad and muscular. He was saying something about him calming down but Reid wasn't listening; he knew it was all lies. Seth had a gun, as did Richard outside and if he only so much as blinked he knew he would find himself at the business end of it immediately.

"Hey, what are you doing, kid?" Seth's voice was deceptively calm, almost none of his usual threatening expression remaining. Reid could see his mind working behind it though, knew he was thinking just as frantically as he. He was certainly hiding it better though. "What do you think you're gonna accomplish here, huh?"

Reid didn't answer, keeping his grip steady and the man at a distance as his thoughts raced. If he could get past Seth, get Hazel, get to the car somehow…

"Are you listening to me, kid?" It was almost comical the way the whole situation suddenly seemed reversed with Seth trying to talk him down. Well, he would have just as little success as Reid had with him. Not that it stopped him from trying.

"I know what you're thinking and it's not gonna work," his kidnapped inched another step closer, black eyes fixating him intently, "Now why don't you hand that thing over and I forget this happened? We go back to cooperating rationally and nothing will happen to you."

Reid almost laughed at how ridiculous that statement sounded. He had no idea why Seth insisted on repeating that same empty statement over and over when it was obvious that it was a lie. It seemed he really was a sociopath.

That made it clear he had to do this. He knew he only had one chance. If Seth got a hold of him, he was finished; there was simply no comparison in physical strength.

"Keep your hands up," he demanded, voice shaking but hands steady, "and turn around slowly."

He knew the man's gun was tucked into the back of his pants. If he could get to it, he had a chance of getting the situation under control. If Seth complied.

For now, he didn't move, still disturbingly collected. He raised an eyebrow, his dark gaze calculating, testing, "And if I don't? You gonna stab me, Spencer? Coz otherwise we're stuck in this situation."

He didn't repeat the line about not hurting him again. Maybe he had given up on trying to win him over with lies; at least it seemed he was moving on to scare tactics instead. He stepped closer still, leaving only about two feet of space between them so that his chest was almost touching the blade of the letter opener.
Reid drew back, unable to help it. His heart picked up in speed even more and he was starting to feel like he was going to hyperventilate. He forced himself to stay steady, to not sway for even a second.

"Don't think I won't," he hoped he at least looked convincing.

Seth didn't take his eyes off of his as he advanced by another inch, showing him clearly that he didn't. He seemed poised to pounce at the tiniest opening, just waiting for him to make a mistake. Their eyes were boring into each other, a battle of wills.

"See, the problem is I do," Seth slowly shook his head, "I don't think you have it in you to murder someone in cold blood."

"It's self-defense," Reid hissed, refusing to let that man get to him, or make him feel guilty about what needed to be done, "If you honestly think I'm not going to fight us getting raped and murdered, you're crazy."

At the accusation, an odd expression suddenly broke Seth's expression and it seemed his intent faltered momentarily, morphing into one that was somewhere between anger and indignation. He looked hesitant for a moment, then he shook his head, jaw tense.

"No one's gonna…" he took a deep breath, "Look, Richie is-

"Don't!" Reid interrupted him, his voice cracking. Anger was only going to make him lose more of his sparse control, but he couldn't help it as it boiled up in him, "We both know what he is, how this is going to end!"

Seth stopped in his advance momentarily.

He kept his face blank even though his mind was racing. This situation had gotten so terribly out of hand and he needed to do something about it as soon as possible. Reid had clearly given up on trying to cooperate and now seemed prepared to do anything to get out of here. But for whatever reason that was –Seth knew he couldn't let that happen. He had to stop him. Technically, he was sure that overpowering his hostage wouldn't be much of a challenge –but then, he had already underestimated him too often today, their current situation was enough proof of that.

He had tried to calm the kid down with words, make him give up by himself but it hadn't worked. He had been about to change his tactic to a more physical one when Reid's last accusation made him hesitate.

So that was it.

Reid thought he had lied about them being safe as long as they complied. He thought that they were going to die. That was why he had suddenly decided to fight.

Seth grimaced. Well, no wonder really, it hadn't taken Richard much longer than an hour to prove him a liar. This answered his question of how much the agent knew about what Richard had done in the past. He had probably seen the crime scene photos, images that were grueling enough to even turn Seth's strong stomach.

So it was understandable that he was frightened.

But…even if that was a misfortunate turn of events, he had saved Reid, hadn't he? Didn't that prove that he wasn't okay with what Richard had done?
Apparently not. The kid looked absolutely terrified, like he was sure Seth would just stand by and let Richie have at them, or maybe that he might even join his brother in the assault...

The generalization made him so angry for a moment that he saw red, only realizing his shift in expression and posture when Reid tensed, drawing back even further.

He blinked very slowly, trying to calm himself, to think about all of this rationally. In Reid’s defense, he didn't know him, he had no reason to trust in his morals or promises, especially not after he had left him alone with Richard and let that happen...and he probably really couldn't expect him to calm down with the way he was cornering him now…

"Nothing's going to happen," he found himself saying, relaxing his stance and letting his features soften slightly. He made sure to look Reid straight in the eye as he continued, to look honest, "Because I'm here, too. That…that is not how it works, ok? It's not what I do. Richard is...unstable. I thought we were past it but now that I know differently I'll make sure not to leave him alone with you anymore."

He surprised himself by uttering those words. It was unusually hard to say them, making him feel like he was admitting a personal failure, leaving him open for attacks. He did it anyway, because the kid looked so terrified, somehow hoping to get him to understand, to at least believe the utter truth when he heard it.

Instead of appreciating this concession though, Reid looked at him incredulously.

"Do you actually expect me to believe that after everything?" he asked tonelessly, followed by a bitter scoff, "Just this morning you were very convincing about not caring whether we live or die." He glared. "Your word means nothing to me."

Seth was surprised at the amount of anger that simple statement caused in him; he had to ball his hands into fists, fighting not to let it get the best of him at that. The kid had been infuriating, pushing his buttons when he had been completely at his mercy already. Now that the scale was somewhat balanced, his words were sharp and cold and acidly, his face not hiding how exactly he felt about Seth. And he found he didn't like hearing it. At all.

Seth ground his teeth, swallowing his anger as he stepped closer yet again, trying to focus on what he was doing. "Well, it's all you have."

The sharp end of the letter opener came dangerously close to his collar as Reid made an unexpectedly, certainly desperate step forward. "No, it isn't. Now, back up and turn around or I will stab you."

Seth stood very still, assessing his hostages every movement. The whole situation had driven his pulse up as well, and his whole body was on alert in a way he always felt in tense situations. It might have been relieving after all the suppressing he'd done these past hours if there hadn't been so much at stake.

There was no way of telling what Reid would or would not do. With all restraint shed like this, it seemed to Seth like he was getting the first real look at everything this boy was, everything he could and would be if he had to. He'd seen people in the same situation break down well before this point, but it seemed they were just getting started and the fire he suddenly saw burning in those clear eyes, desperation as much as determination, certainly spoke against rash actions on his part. Seth found himself captivated by the expression for a moment, before realizing how completely inappropriate it was at the moment.
He shook his head.

"Don't be stupid now, Spencer," he drew closer again, crowding the agent, "even if I didn't have a gun, Richie's just outside."

"I said get back!"

The letter opener got dangerously close this time and Seth knew he would have to act now or never. Nodding slightly he made to comply, inwardly already planning a tackle of some kind, just waiting for the right angle and moment.

It turned out he didn't have to.

In that moment, by a stroke of luck, the door behind them suddenly opened and Reid's eyes darted across the room in alert. The second of distraction was all Seth needed.

In a flash, he darted to one side so he wouldn't risk being stabbed as he pounced, suddenly right by Reid's side. The young man gasped in shock as his wrist was grabbed and twisted, striking out blindly and missing Seth's face by inches.

Fight reflex taking over, Seth let go of restraint and quickly slung one arm around his neck, a choke hold that immobilized Reid at the same time, back pressed tightly to his chest. He held on tightly as the agent struggled in his grip, kicking and lashing out blindly. A sharp elbow missed his mouth just so, the surprisingly forceful movement almost making him lose his grip.

He grabbed the young man tighter, restraining him successfully, but he only had so many hands. The second Reid opened his mouth to scream he already knew it would be too late for him to stop it.

Before their hostage could get a single sound out though, Richard was suddenly right in front of them, having darted across the room, and slapped a large hand firmly over Reid's mouth. The agent's struggles renewed, his voice muffled but clearly panicked as he thrashed in their grip. Richard wordlessly stepped closer, trapping slender limbs between them effectively; he leaned in until his face was right in front of Reid's, eyes gleaming dark and dangerously as his fingers pressed down over both his nose and lips ruthlessly, cutting off his air supply.

Seth didn't move for the longest moment, merely staring at what was happening.

Suddenly he felt like his vision had been flipped around, like he was seeing this from a completely different, and very unsettling angle. He faintly felt nails clawing at his hands, a racing pulse thrumming against his bare arms where they pressed against Reid's body. He could feel every twist and tremble, lean muscles straining against his chest and arms, locks of hair pressing against his cheek from the way Reid was overstretching his neck, trying to get away from Richard. He suddenly felt much too fragile, like he would break under his bruising hands.

Seth felt his stomach drop at how wrong it felt, how sickening. He looked back at Richard, who still had that mad gleam in his eyes, not removing his hand, just fixating their hostage's face. It was the same he had worn as a teenager when torturing the neighbor's cat, curious, sadistic, completely bare of any sort of empathy. If he hadn't felt nauseous already, that expression would have done Seth in.

He opened his mouth, about to tell Richard off, but just then the body in his arms went slack, all struggles ceasing. Seth instinctively caught the slender man as he dropped, unconscious, wrapping an arm around his waist to prevent him from hitting the ground.

"Back off," he snapped at Richie, simultaneously stepping back to disconnect Richard's hand from Reid face. Richard complied with an affronted expression.
Seth ignored it, trying to block out his brother as he sun to his knees, supporting Reid's weight. Unmoving and pliant, the body in his arms suddenly felt even more fragile. His arms tightened around it as he unsuccessfully tried to shake the horrid, dreadful feeling that had taken a hold of him these past seconds.

He didn't dare look down into the kid's face, sure that his expression was already betraying his emotions. Trying to cover it up, he glared at his brother extra angrily, not holding anything back, "I thought I told you to wait outside."

Richard didn't even seem fazed by what had just happened. His stare was blank for another moment, he looked like he was going to say something but then he just turned around and walked towards the door again without a word.

Seth stared after him, heart racing, speechless for a moment. One second he felt numb, stunned almost as he stared after his brother –then, suddenly the urge to get away from all this got overwhelming, forcing him to his feet. He slung one arm each around Reid's back and legs, lifting him into his arms effortlessly.

He didn't take the time to analyze what he was doing as he headed for the door of the motel room, opening it with some effort.

Richard was standing against the car when he walked outside, looking at him with an odd expression, somewhere between tense and curious. With a jerk of his head, Seth instructed his brother to open the passenger door, then slid the unconscious FBI agent into the vehicle.

He quickly checked the supplies they kept in the back seat now: A map, a blanket, the handcuffs he had taken off Reid. He grabbed those and closed them around the young man's wrists, securing them to the door handle. It didn't exactly make him feel better, but he knew his hostage wouldn't exactly be calm when he woke up and he could risk getting into a car accident.

Once he had closed the door, he walked back around the car, ready to give his brother a piece of his mind. Even now he was barely keeping down the rage boiling in his chest, the urge to physically make sure Richie understood what he had done wrong.

Richie looked at him in apprehension.

"Seth..." he started weakly, but was cut off immediately.

"Don't even fucking start!" Seth snapped, making his brother flinch, "We have three days tops to get through without any major screw-ups! Now, do you think you can do that? Do you think you can act normal for three freaking days?"

"Of course," Richie gave in, frowning like he was offended or something. Seth turned away before he got even madder.

How often had he heard Richie say that?

But not this time. Not...him. No, he would make sure of that –and right away.

"Great," he spat, "Now, I'm going to go make the call with the fed. Stay in the motel room and don't fucking move until we come back, you got it?"

It was the best he could do for now. Distance. Make Richard stay behind. He would deal with the long term solutions once he returned and wasn't quite so agitated anymore.
Richie looked a little surprised but didn't protest: "Yeah, Seth, I got it. How long's it gonna take?"

"I dunno. We'll have to evade the road blocks. Whatever happens, don't leave the room, don't do anything to get us caught, and for fuck's sake, leave the girl alone, got it? If you pull any shit like this again this side of my funeral, I'll make sure to make you wish for yours."

It was harsher than usually, but then the situation was worse, too. Richard didn't look too surprised though, he knew exactly how upset Seth got over issues like these. Seth waited until his brother finally nodded, looking at least a bit like he'd understood.

"Fine," he sighed, a little calmer, "Call me if you have any problems…and remember to take your pills."

Again, Richie nodded and Seth decided that he had to be satisfied with that. He looked down to where Reid was slumped into the car seat, strands of hair falling into his face. He was still unconscious. It was for the better because that way he didn't notice the two pairs of eyes glued to him, his hair, his neck, his collar.

Seth looked away quickly. Richard didn't.

Suddenly Seth couldn't get out of here fast enough.

"Don't fuck this up, Richie," he threatened darkly.

Then he turned around, quickly climbed into the driver's seat and started the motor, driving off.

He could almost feel Richie's gaze on the back of his neck and clenched his fingers around the steering wheel. He practically raced off the parking lot, not beginning to feel better until they were on the high way, rapidly speeding in the opposite direction of Richie's madness.
They had been on the road for nearly two hours and Reid hadn't stirred once so far.

Seth glanced over at his hostage for the fifth time now, relieved and tense at the same time. He had long woken up by now, after all he hadn't hit him on the head or anything... Maybe he didn't want to...

He turned his attention to the road again, deciding to just let him sleep for as long as possible; once the kid woke up there would have to be some sort of conversation, he knew, and he hadn't figured out what to say yet.

His thoughts had been turbulent since they left the motel, the conflicting emotions inside him still setting him on edge. Things had certainly gone out of hand these past hours, and he had been driving, trying to think of how to fix them. So far he hadn't come to very many productive conclusions.

All he knew was that he was furious at Richard for fucking everything up as usual, but also at himself because deep down he knew it was his fault as much as his brother's. Richard was always an unpredictable force to be reckoned with -the problem was that he hadn't been there to control the situation, control him.

And why? Because of that damn agent!

Of course that was the root of all his trouble. After all, he never would have left in the first place if he hadn't been so upset about their conversation –but he had, and now he had the aftermath to deal with.

Seth growled, still feeling the urge to punch something in his frustrated state. Damn it. He had a mission here, a plan that needed to be followed if they were to be successful. This whole endeavor felt like it was slipping more and more out of his hands. He hated it, and yet he couldn't seem to stop it.

But he needed to. He needed to find a way to deal with his situation so that he would end up in Mexico, sipping tequila, and not back in jail fighting sweaty, toothless men for his place in the hierarchy.

No more screw ups from now on.

The next logical step in his plan was the phone call which was important to get the money. He needed to function for that.

He sighed. If only it were that easy. Thing was though, he mainly needed Reid to function for it, something he wasn't sure would happen anytime soon given the circumstances.

For all he knew, the kid could pick right up where he left off in the motel, panicking and fighting him with all he had. It wouldn't surprise him, considering what had happened with Richard and his obvious failure at reassuring him about the state of things –but he couldn't afford it. Especially not out in the open.

He pondered what to best do –try and convince Reid once more that he was going to be fine if he cooperated and hope for him to calm down, or simply go on as before and use his fear to make him comply...he would have to see what would work better once Reid woke up.
Inwardly, he hoped it would not have to be the former because reassuring the kid would mean being reassuring, which would include being at least sort of kind and empathetic. And he just knew he couldn't do that; he'd given into that urge back at the hotel and evidently it had backfired horribly.

No, he needed to stay distanced and objective—if only to avoid any sort of bond to form between them. It was Kidnapper 101: Never risk any degree of Stockholm Syndrome to develop. The hostage always ended up not taking threats seriously anymore and the hostage taker with scruples.

Usually he was great at abiding that rule, but then, he'd never before actually felt the urge to comfort someone either. He cared about Richie and himself, no one else. That was what made him strong, made him a survivor.

He grimaced, reminded of how seeing the kid freak out at the motel had affected him, how it had almost all gone to hell right there because of it...

Seth took a swig out of the liquor bottle close by, wishing for a cigarette.

No, that couldn't happen again. After all, people like him, who had lived one way for nearly two decades, didn't suddenly become emotional. He would have the occasional angry outburst or fit, yes, and after particularly bad days at Richie's side he'd sometimes find himself lying in bed, staring at the ceiling and simply feeling hollow and sick—but not this.

It was just two more days of this at most.

Just be distant and cold and to the point. Be cool.

He would just have to try even harder to be as scary and mean and ruthless as possible, considering he not only had the kid but also himself to convince.

He glanced over to the passenger's seat once more, the way the young man next to him was slightly curled in on himself, strands of hair falling into his delicate features and once more making him look troublingly young and innocent. The image of those features distorted in horror flashed across his mind again and he quickly looked away again.

'Shit, shit, shit. I'm losing my fucking head.'

He found himself wishing the agent would finally wake up. He needed to see that sharp, that calculating and slightly contemptuous look that infuriated him so much. Maybe that would help him focus on who he was dealing with, and balance out the ill feeling in his gut…

Seth waited almost impatiently, trying to redirect his thoughts with minor success.

After another while they finally came across a rundown gas station. There were no cars or people to be seen, just a washed-out cardboard cutout swaying in the wind, and a little store that seemed deserted. A little further down the road he could see some houses, probably a small village. He looked around, luckily finding what he was looking for: A phone booth.

This would have to do, he decided. It was far enough away so that they'd be relatively safe if the call was traced, and there seemed to be no curious eyes to watch them. He slowed the car and pulled up next to the phone booth.

The moment he killed the engine, Reid finally woke up, blinking into awareness.

It was easy to know the exact moment he realized where he was, indicated by a sharp intake of breath and the jingling sound of the handcuffs moving. His face grew ashen, his eyes wide as saucers
as he turned to stare at him, obviously recalling everything that had happened.

Seth kept looking straight ahead, avoiding The Eyes as a precaution this time and waited for whatever reaction was to come.

xx

Reid woke with a start.

There was no brief period of confusion as to where he was, or who he was with. They were in the car again, on some deserted strip of a dirt road he'd never seen before. The motel room was gone, but Seth was still there, lounging in the driver's seat next to him, just then taking one last draw from a cigarette before throwing it out the open window.

Reid's eyes followed the movement of his arm, shuddering at the immediate memory of it wrapped tightly around his throat, choking him. Their last interaction flashing across his mind, he recoiled against the car door, fear slamming into him. Seth wasn't even looking at him and yet his heart was racing like a rabbit's.

The motel… Richard, attacking him….then Seth…he'd fought back…

Reid shuddered. He could still feel the adrenaline rushing through his body, the terror, the helplessness he'd felt, trapped between his abductors. The last thing he remembered before he'd blacked out was Seth's arms wound tightly around him, and Richard's breath on his face, a look in his eyes that he had only ever seen during the worst of the BAU's cases.

He been sure then that he either wouldn't wake up again at all, or wake up wishing he hadn't.

But now…they were here out by some gas station, probably to make the phone call, he figured. He was alive, the other two were gone…

Gone.

Hazel.

The sudden realization that if she wasn't here…she had to be with Richard hit him like a train, turning his stomach. Oh, God.

He jerked upright, only to be stopped by his own metal cuffs around his wrists, cutting into his skin as he moved. The sensation sent a swell of panic through him that he couldn't even begin to suppress.

If she was alone with him, he would…

Horrified, he stared at Seth's profile, trying to find an answer there. No, he wouldn't have…but he had left her alone there, just after seeing what his brother had done-

He froze when he remembered what Seth had told him just this morning. "If you try to run, or get help, or if you keep trying to play me, I will kill her."

At that memory he felt like he was going to vomit, a feeling of utter dread settling in his stomach.

If there ever had been any kind of deal between Seth and him, it was now certainly void. After all, he had not only threatened but also attempted to stab him, a clear deal breaker…

"What did you do?" he gasped, before he could think better of it.
Finally, Seth turned to look at him from out of cold, dark eyes, expression guarded but clearly irate. Obviously, he wasn't over the recent events yet either.

"I did a lot of things today, Spencer, most of which I would have rather avoided. I'm afraid you'll have to be more specific."

Reid tried not to cringe under the man's angry gaze, even though he could feel his stomach turning in apprehension. But he knew he was in a world of trouble already - right now he needed to know if at least the civilian could be saved.

"Hazel," he insisted, "Where is she?"

Seth's brows furrowed, then he merely shrugged, indifferent, "Back at the motel."

Reid paled. God, please, no.

"What did you do to her?" the question almost didn't make it past his lips.

As much as he should have been, he wasn't prepared when Seth's suddenly sat up, pushing the car door open brusquely. He watched tensely as the man got out and walked around the car swiftly, opening his door so quickly that Reid was almost thrown out of his seat by his cuffed hands. Before he could fall though, a strong hand grabbed his shoulder, pushing him back. Reid's heart missed a beat at the touch, and he flinched, sure that Seth was about to hit him and tried to pull away. The grip on him tightened, fingers digging into his shoulder, showing him once again that he was chanceless.

With his free hand, Seth produced a key out of his jacket and started to undo the handcuffs.

"For future reference," he said coldly, eyes never leaving Reid's face, "let me just make clear that her well being was your responsibility. How did you think attempting to gut me with a letter opener would affect our deal?"

Reid clenched his hands to fists as the restraints around them fell but Seth's hand remained, controlling him. His words sounded as much like a threat as a confession.

Was he admitting that Hazel was actually-

"You broke your word first," he argued, half accusing, half pleading, stubbornly refusing to think his last thought through to the end. She couldn't be...he had tried so hard... "I had no choice but to-"

He yelped when Seth's grip suddenly tightened and he was dragged out of his seat. Before he knew it he was on his feet, slammed against the side of the car so hard it knocked the air out of him. Again, he expected a punch of some sort, heart skipping a beat -growing confused when it still didn't come.

He supposed he could hold his breath for it though... Seth's eyes were blazing as he leaned in threateningly close, right in his face as he finally vented some of his anger.

"Yes, you did have a choice," he hissed, one large hand gripping Reid's shoulder, pressing against his collarbone painfully, "You could have believed me when I told you you'd be fine as long as you played along."

Reid, who had tilted his head back instinctively to create some more room between them, stilled at those words, gaping at his abductor incredulously. Was he actually blaming him...? Before he could think better of it, he snapped back, momentarily forgetting fear in his own agitation. "I did! Your crazy brother-"
The rest of his sentence got caught in his throat when Seth slammed him against the car again, cutting him off effectively. Reid gave a wince of pain and fright, immediately reminded of the danger he was in by just one glance into furious black eyes. He instinctively ducked his head, eyes pressed close.

Seth could snap any second, what the hell was he doing aggravating him?

By now, the older man's fingers were clutching his shoulder so tightly he could already feel the skin bruising, and he was earnestly starting to wonder why he hadn't hit him yet. He certainly looked like he wanted to.

But he didn't. Instead he took what sounded like a deep breath, blinking very slowly twice. He grinned, a mere display of teeth, fingers flexing.

"Yes, he screwed up," he then admitted through his teeth, forcibly calm, "And then, I stopped him before anything could happen. I didn't let anything happen to you, just like I said, didn't I?"

Reid blinked and stared at him, momentarily at a loss of words.

He had no idea what Seth's actual motives were at this point. He kept saying one thing and then doing another. But he didn't want to think about that either because it made him incredibly confused and angry atop of scared, two things he couldn't afford.

Yes, Seth had stopped Richard but it wasn't like that counted for anything!

He needed him now, that was the only reason he was still standing…while Hazel, being unimportant, was likely-

His stomach turned, crimson flashing before his eyes. Suddenly, he felt the certainly suicidal urge to claw at his abductor's face until that fake earnest expression was unrecognizable. How dare he, act so full of indignation while knowing his crazed brother was up to his second rape/murder attempt for today.

"You need me so the team will hear my voice and pay you," he said bitterly, "don't make yourself out to be something you're not."

He immediately regretted his words when Seth was suddenly right in his face again, lips a thin white line as he glared, gaze turning to ice. The man's free arm came up to rest against the car's roof just next to Reid's shoulder, trapping him.

As before, Seth didn't have to say anything, the shift was there and clearly perceptible in the way he suddenly was much too broad, and tall, and threatening again. Reid stared back, unblinking and petrified despite his tough words. His heart started racing again as the man leaned indecently close until their faces were so close that their breath mingled, the hand on his shoulder suddenly moving to grasp his neck. He stopped breathing as a calloused finger pushed his chin upwards, keeping it there.

Trapped truly. No one to call to. No way to get out of this by himself.

He almost wished he hadn't just said those things to a choleric murderer who was very well able and willing to retaliate physically. Almost.

"I'm not, actually," Seth was fixating him, pronouncing every word as he spoke, anger boiling just beneath the surface, "You clearly don't believe me, but I have been very inclined to keep both of you well so far, because I do have principles I live by, and because I don't maim and kill for the fun of it. Like it or not, I am the reason you're not currently choking on your own blood on that fucking motel
room floor, I am the reason Richard hasn't made an example of you yet for the police to find." He let the words sink in, lowing his voice as he continued slowly, "And trust me, he knows a lot of ways to hurt someone and still leave them able to sound alive on the phone. As do I by the way."

Reid knew he must be pale as sheet as he stared back, and could only hope the rest of him wasn't trembling as much as his hands. He stood frozen with his breath held, not daring to move as cold shivers ran up and down his spine, everything about Seth too much, too close, too…

He barely kept a hold on himself, keeping from simply breaking down from distress. All that Seth was conveying to him right now was that he was indeed to be feared, and that consequently Reid was probably right in his assumption.

He wouldn't bend now, not this far into a game he would lose anyway. It might be stupid, a matter of false pride, but then, what else did he have? He was going down anyway and with Hazel gone he had nothing left to lose.

"Then why don't you?" he challenged just as coldly, refusing to avert his eyes.

The question made Seth blink, at least momentarily thrown off, and Reid felt a tiny bit of satisfaction at it.

Slowly, his abductor's expression shifted, somewhere between irate and oddly amused for a moment, and he relaxed ever so slightly. "Is it so hard to believe that I am at least partially human, too?" he murmured, half absentmindedly.

Reid didn't cave, unblinking. He wasn't going to fall of any of that. Every fiber of his body was filled with terror for a reason. "How can you call yourself human when you've left an innocent girl alone with a bloodthirsty monster?" he spat disdainfully.

As expected, Seth's expression quickly turned hard again. For a moment his hold on his neck tightened painfully, so much that Reid winced, and he looked capable of doing pretty much anything.

Then, by a sudden change of mind, he let go of Reid's neck and shoulder, grabbing hold of his arm instead, dragging him away from the car roughly and towards the phone booth. Unprepared, Reid stumbled after him, only catching himself when they were already inside.

Reid felt his heart flutter in his chest despite his best efforts, he couldn't help but feel more than a little claustrophobic in the confined space of the phone booth with no room to back up and Seth only one step away between him and the door.

He flinched when Seth slammed the door shut behind them agitatedly, finding himself pushed against a wall once again.

"You know what?" the man snapped angrily, "I doesn't even matter what you think of me, of this. I was trying to make this easier on you, but fine."

He picked up the phone and pushed it into his hand, glaring at him threateningly. "This is what's gonna happen. You're gonna make the call now, or I will hurt you until you do. Got it?"

Reid didn't have to think twice.

"No."

"Excuse me?" Seth raised an eyebrow, a dangerous edge to his voice.
Reid shook his head nonetheless, determined. He held his ground, meeting Seth's gaze full of contempt. "I'm not calling them. For all I know Hazel is probably already dead! I'm not helping you get your money, not after what you did-"

"I didn't do anything yet!" Seth barked, making him jump, "The girl is fine. But that can change really quickly. Now, you're gonna do as I say or I will-"

"You will do what?", Reid interrupted him disdainfully," Beat me? Torture me? Kill me? You're going to do all of that anyway, aren't you? Well, go ahead, I'm done playing this game."

xxx

"Go ahead, I'm done playing this game."

Seth stared at the young man in front of him, for a moment completely out of his depth. He simply couldn't believe this. The kid was practically shaking with fear, flinching every time Seth so much as moved a muscle.

And yet, somehow, at the same time he was standing up to him anyway.

For a moment, he simply stood and stared into those clear unblinking eyes, taken by a sudden feeling of awe. It was unsettling as much as it was unexpected; he couldn't recall the last time he'd felt something remotely akin to respect for anything safe anyone.

It wasn't the first time Seth felt astonished by something Reid threw his way - with the difference that this time it failed to anger him somehow. Instead it lit something inside him he quickly clamped down on, startled -because it was the exact opposite of what he should be feeling.

Needed to be feeling.

Because damn, he would have to really hurt him now to get him to call his team.

Sure, he could call them himself…but even then, Reid wouldn't say what he wanted him to, maybe nothing at all…and then he'd have to hurt him also, just to make his team aware he was alive and suffering.

The only alternative was to give in and prove that the girl was fine but allowing for that would mean losing the upper hand, and giving the impression that he could be manipulated. He would have liked to think that as frazzled a state as Reid was in by now, he wouldn't be able to make any cunning plans or deductions anymore -but the very situation they were now in had to be proof enough that he was by far more resilient than he looked. No, he couldn't risk it.

Seth wanted to growl in frustration. He'd done so well in his plan so far - all for nothing?

Just do it. Whatever is necessary. You've done it a hundred times.

He gazed at the delicate face and form in front of him, trying to imagine smashing a fist against them, putting a knife or bullet in them…

The thought appalled him more than ever.

"Call them."

"No."

There was no other way.
Seth reached into his jacket pocket, rummaging through it. Reid's eyes followed his movement, swallowing nervously. He knew there was no one there to help him. His posture grew tense, fearful, and yet he didn't take back his refusal, just stared at him unblinkingly with large shining eyes.

Seth resisted the urge to look away, feeling like he was being burned by that gaze. He couldn't…not like that…

He made two decisions at once, in a split second. With practiced skill he leapt forward, grabbing his hostage and spinning him around. Forcefully, his long fingers grabbed a hold of a slender throat, pulling sharply and leaving them pressed closely together, back to chest. With the other hand, he drew his knife, switching it open and pressing it to the kid's face before he could even think to struggle.

He could feel Reid's breath hitching in fear as he was grabbed, his head forced back into the crook of Seth neck, instinct leading him to squirm and lash out to try and get away, futilely of course, he just tightened his grip and pressed the knife in more firmly, a clear warning, until Reid stilled, frozen.

At least he didn't have to look at his face now. This ought to be easier…

For a moment he was quite happy with his plan, almost feeling back to old form again.

"I'm not playing either, Spencer," his voice was positively menacing, "Make the call."

He received no answer, just another shallow intake of breath and nails digging into his wrist. If he concentrated on it he could feel the racing pulse under his fingertips.

"Are you sure now?" he growled into Reid's ear, dangerously low, "Because I would hate to have to cut up a face like yours."

It sounded like a line out of some cheesy gangster movie, yes, but that wasn't nearly as bothersome as the fact that it was the truth. He really would hate having to do that.

Luckily, that thought didn't seem to occur to Reid as he stood trembling, flinching when the pressure of the blade increased, just barely not breaking skin yet. He still didn't answer, just instinctively cringed back into Seth, eyes pressed close as he waited for his captor to make do on his threat. It was plain that he wasn't going to back off now, no matter how serious he took his threat.

Seth stared at the pale face which was suddenly right by his own as Reid angled his head sideways to avoid the knife. He could see every emotion flashing across his face this way, could feel hot, shallow breaths against his neck, locks tickling his skin. The sensation made him freeze. As he kept on staring, his gut clenched and he suddenly felt breathless.

It was in that moment that he realized he wouldn't be able to do this.

The thought terrified him in its weight, but there was no shaking or pushing it away anymore.

He pressed his eyes shut tightly, trying to get a hold of himself. What the hell was happening to him? It wasn't just the insane sensation of guilt, the unwelcome empathy that was forced on him. In that moment, he realized it was everything.

Suddenly, he was actually aware of the slim, shaking body pressed against his, delicate and trembling and warm, of how close they were...registering facts like the way the kid's hair smelled, or the spot where his fingers were grazing a flat stomach, or that if he leaned forward just a bit their cheeks would be...
Startled by his own digression, Seth froze for a second, almost pushing the agent away from him in his shock. He barely held on to enough reason not to do that, merely standing there,petrified as his thoughts raced. Shit.

Shit, shit, shit.

What the hell was he thinking? And now!

Oh, he was in much deeper shit that he'd thought he'd been.

He pressed his eyes closed tightly, trying to get a hold of himself. Not that too now.

But he knew it was pointless.

He already knew that Reid looking like some kid wouldn't stand to kill had never been his only problem, that even before he'd made that connection, there had been something else capturing his attention, fascinating and distracting him, pulling him in.

Those clear eyes, the mind, the voice that was so controlled and yet told him so much, the ardor no one would suspect behind such a fragile shell, strength, intellect, beauty. Everything.

He could feel the effect he had on him clearly now, magnified, in the increase of his heart rate and body temperature, the sudden tingling sensation where their skin touched where Spencer was pressing against him, the undeniable, instinctive urge to pull him even closer, to drop the knife and bury a hand in his hair instead, to lean forward and breathe in the scent of his neck and hair…so close…

Oh, God.

This kid...Spencer...was undoing him. By some power Seth couldn't understand, which scared and confused him. Had from the first minute.

Seth shook his head, disbelieving. Always, always, he'd been so good at controlling himself. But now he wanted, wanted so many different things, all of them conflicting with his mission -and the worst part was he was apparently helpless to stop himself from feeling that way.

Shit.

Seth couldn't believe his own thoughts. He stared down at Spencer's shoulder, the sharp collarbone moving with every shaky breath—and knew his game was up.

He couldn't do this, couldn't cut up that face anymore than he could cut up his own without it being agonizing.

For a long moment he was unable to move, simply overwhelmed by this realization and not knowing what to do.

What the hell was he supposed to do now? He didn't know what was wrong with him, why he as feeling this way, not even what exactly it was he was feeling.

What he did know was that he could under no circumstances act upon it, give in even further. If not for a hundreded other obvious reasons, then because Richard was counting on him to pull this off. His brother, his family. He couldn't leave him hanging because someone he barely knew was somehow frying his brain.
He couldn't.

He had to find a way to deal with all of this. Now.

Spencer was sure his heart would jump out of his chest any second as hard as it was hammering against his rib cage.

It was the knife pressing against his cheek, reminding him of Richard, as much as Seth's hand wrapped around his throat, letting him know he was serious now. He was barely breathing, just waiting for the pain that he expected to come with every second he refused to answer. Everything in him screamed to just give in and do as his kidnapper said, but the remnants of his rationality told him to stay strong, that he was right. This, it would have happened anyway, either now or after he'd made the call.

Better to get it over with and at least get a small victory out of it. Of course, knowing that didn't make it any easier…

He pressed his eyes shut tightly, every inch of his body locking in tension, wishing Seth would just get it over with.

Nonetheless his heart dropped, when the man behind him finally shifted, apparently done waiting.

"Well, then I suppose there's only one thing left to do," he murmured and Reid stopped breathing and waited.

And waited.

Nothing happened. No pain, no blood…

The hand around his throat vanished, merely the knife holding him in place now, and he could feel Seth rummaging through his pockets once more. For a moment, irrational fear almost made him want to beg after all…what else could he be planning, more painful than a knife…

He blinked in confusion when Seth pulled put his phone and hit the speed dial.

Seth was uncharacteristically quiet, not bothering to explain his actions as he waited for the other party to pick up. He merely moved the hand with the knife down, resting it against Reid's stomach instead.

"Richie," he then said, voice sounding slightly hoarse, "It's Seth… No, I'm fine. We're about to make the call. Everything alright with you?... Yeah?... Okay, listen, the girl…we still clear on you not coming near her? Right. Well, I might be forced to tell you otherwise in just a minute, depending on how this conversation goes. But first, get her on the phone."

Reid, who despite not understanding what was going on had almost felt relieved, felt his heart start racing again at the implication of those words, at both the idea that Hazel might actually be fine, and that she might not be for much longer.

He shifted nervously, only to have Seth pull him closer by his waist. The man didn't say anything, just kept the knife pressed to his stomach as he extended an arm and held the phone to Reid's ear.

"Hello. This is Hazel," he immediately heard the slightly shaky but definitely lively voice on the other end of the line.
Reid had to bite his lip to keep from making a sound; he pressed his eyes shut as relief washed through him, overwhelming him.

She was okay. Three hours and nothing had happened. Richard hadn't hurt her. He'd done as Seth had told him. He grabbed the man's clothed forearm without thinking, steadying himself.

"Hazel," he managed to get out after a moment, fighting to keep all strain out of his voice, "This is the FBI agent that was with you this morning. Are you alright?"

"Yes…I'm still scared…but I'm okay…" she answered softly, sounding relatively stable, "I've been alone in the bedroom all day."

"Good," Reid nodded to himself, eyes still closed. He could feel tears burning behind his lids.
"Good. We'll be back soon, don't be frightened."

Then she was suddenly gone and it was Richard's voice on the phone again, "What now, Seth? Is there a chance of plans?"

He sounded so enthusiastic that Reid felt his stomach turn. He could feel Seth shrugging behind him, voice terribly casual as he answered, "I don't know Richie, let me think that through for a minute."

He covered the phone with his free hand, bending his head so he could look at Reid's face, "There, she's alive. Now will you do as I say or do you plan for her to also fall victim to your pride?"

His voice sounded incredibly frustrated but Reid barely registered it. His relief was already replaced by even worse dread this time. He nodded immediately, almost without thinking.

Knowing Hazel was alive changed everything. Part of him knew of course that his chances hadn't improved, that she was still with Richard and could still die once he'd made the call –but that didn't matter. He couldn't not try to save her.

He felt the shell of determination and bravery he'd clung to by his fingertips for the past minutes slip, useless, leaving him bare as he actually was, terrified and at the bothers' mercy.

"I'll do it," he whispered, hating how his voice sounded, "Please, don't let him hurt her. I'll do whatever you want."

Seth nodded, his grip relaxing slightly, "That's all I'm asking for."

Then he held the phone back up to his own ear, "Richie, I gotta go. Listen, everything stays as before. Lock the girl back into the bedroom and only let her out to go to the bathroom. Don't talk to her, don't touch her, stay in the other room, watch TV and keep a low profile till I get back, you got it?"

He held the phone up to Reid's ear again so he could hear Richie agreeing, then he hung up. Reid didn't move, still and staring straight ahead.

"There, she's peachy. Happy now?" Seth said gruffly, "Now, let's get this over with so she can go home, shall we?"

Reid nodded numbly.

He took hold of the phone, dialing the numbers by heart, not thinking about anything else. He couldn't, not right now. He couldn't think about their chances, or about Richard, or about Seth and his odd behavior and his heavy arm around him. Not about why he was still this close, or why he
hadn't made do on his prior threat—not when this change of tactics was so terrible.

Reid knew it was time to give up. He'd tried everything, but he knew when he was beat. Seth had won after all, he still had all the cards.

"What do you want me to say to them?" he asked tonelessly.

Seth shrugged, "They just need to know it's you. I'll tell them my terms."

Reid nodded.

He could still feel the cold metal of the knife against his hip, a silent warning, as well as Seth's overbearing presence; he resisted the urge to shift away, knowing it would be pointless and risky. Giving up fighting all out of a sudden was completely going against his instinct, but he made himself anyway because he had to.

He tried to hold on to the remnants of his calm, focusing on the phone instead as Seth leaned over his shoulder so he would be able to listen in on the call, his breath hitting Reid's.

It didn't take long for Hotch to answer the call. Despite himself, Reid's heart flipped when he heard his voice, "Hotch, it's-"

"Reid? Where are you? Are you hurt?"

He closed his eyes, forced to wait a moment before he trusted his voice enough to speak, "No, I'm not, Hotch. And the girl is alive, too. They want ransom."

His boss thankfully was more collected than he, "We expected as much. Don't worry we'll get you out of there. Reid, can you tell me something about-"

He never heard the rest of the sentence because suddenly Hotch was gone, replaced.

"Reid? Are you alright? Where are you?" he suddenly heard Derek's voice, worried and urgent.

He had no idea where Morgan had suddenly come from, if Hotch was at his bedside, but it wasn't important right then. Morgan's voice sounded strained and worried, bringing back memories from when he'd almost bled out in the bank - but Reid was incredibly relieved to hear it nonetheless.

"Derek…oh, I'm so sorry…" he burst out before he could stop himself, his voice cracking, "We should have never…"

He could feel his throat closing up, dread once again threatening to overtake him, and fought to keep his composure.

Morgan was fine, he was alive. At least that was for sure.

"Stop it, Reid. None of this is your fault, you hear me?" Morgan scolded him promptly, "I'll be fine. They're transporting me back to Quantico so Garcia can take care of me. But Hotch, Elle and Gideon will get you out of there, okay? Tell me what the situation is, pretty boy. Have they…have you been hurt?"

Reid hesitated, knowing what Morgan was asking about. Richard's M.O. The files. He didn't have the time or strength to answer appropriately thought, plus he doubted Seth would let him. "I -no, I'm not hurt."

"And the girl?"
"I don't- she's alive…"

He knew what he probably sounded like, and hated worrying his team mates, but he simply couldn't get a better hold of himself, still far too shaken up by everything that had happened. Tears were burning in his eyes that he could barely hold back and all he wanted was to just break down and plead with Morgan and the others to help him, get them out of here, but he couldn't, he couldn't do that to them or himself. But he couldn't speak without his voice breaking anymore either.

Seth seemed to be reading his thoughts, because suddenly his long fingers wrapped around Reid's hand with the phone in it, pulling it to his own ear and taking over the conversation.

"Hello, Agent Morgan. I'm glad to hear you're alive," he sneered, careful to make sure his politesse sounded as fake as it was.

Morgan didn't waste any time playing nice; his voice changed from warm and soothing to deadly as he growled, "You won't be able to say that about yourself if you touch one hair on Reid's head! You hear me, you sick son of a bitch? You touch him and you'll wish you'd gotten the chair!"

"Somehow I doubt that given your situation," Seth replied coolly, before turning serious, "No, Morgan, this is my show now and you people better do as I say unless you want this to end very badly, you got me?"

There was dead quiet after his words before Morgan launched into a tirade of profanities.

Reid swallowed loudly, eyes still pressed shut as he listened to his friend losing it, half wishing he could do the same, half afraid he already was.

He shifted again, but Seth squeezed his wrist warningly, holding him in place. He breathed through his nose, feeling it getting too much slowly but surely. There just wasn't enough room to move, to breathe, in the tiny space, with Seth's tight hold on him, reminding him very second of his control over his life…

He took deep, slow breaths, knowing he couldn't hyperventilate now. It didn't help much. He had to get out of here.

Seth didn't seem to notice his state, fully focused on his mission and just as intimidating as always.

"I swear I'll hunt you down and then…!" Morgan was just threatening when he was interrupted by Hotch again, taking the phone form him resolutely.

"Mr. Gecko. This is Aaron Hotchner, I'm Reid's chief. I want to thank you for contacting us. You've done the right thing."

"Cut your bullshit, chief," Seth answered curtly, again recognizing he was about to be manipulated and counteracting, "I didn't call because I want to chat with you but because I want something, and you'll make sure I get it or I'll send your boy back to you in pieces, easy as that. Are we clear?"

He heard several gasps over the line, knowing that the shocked team was listening in. Reid tensed against him, the hand in his grasp trembling. He was going to be sick for sure. Seth looked straight ahead, refusing to get distracted now.

"What do you want?" Hotchner was now asking, having abandoned his little farce. He sounded like FBI now, nothing else.

"One hundred thousand dollars and for you to stop tailing us," Seth replied immediately,
unimpressed by the chief.

There was silence for a moment and some rustling in the background, then Hotchner said, "Mr. Gecko, I'm prepared to try my best to get you what you want. But I'm going to have to pass that by my superior. And that will take some time."

"Have an answer by tomorrow, same time. I'll be in touch," Seth replied, "Oh, and Agent Hotchner? Do your best."

Then, before anyone could answer he noisily slammed the metal piece of his knife against the plastic of the phone booth right next to Reid's ear.

Hard.

Reid yelped in shock, jumping away from the noise and into Seth. The thief grabbed him more tightly, but didn't move again, calmly listening to the shocked silence on the other end of the line.

Reid stared at the dent in front of him unblinking for a long second, heart racing, before he realized Seth hadn't meant to hit him. He was confused for the shortest moment until Hotch's anxious voice from the phone made him realize what had happened.

"Reid? What happened…REID!" Hotch demanded breathlessly, fear clearly evident in his voice. In the background he could hear Morgan curse.

Reid felt his stomach sink. Oh no, to Hotch it must have sounded like Seth was hitting him, making due on his threat.

He was about to say something to calm his distraught friends when Seth simply hung up the phone, ending the connection.

"That should get them moving," he said, satisfied, "Thank you, Spencer."

Reid didn't reply, stock still in the man's arms. His mind was a chaos of thoughts and emotions: Morgan's face in front of him, Hazel's teary eyes, Gideon, Hotch, his mom, and then Richard and Seth and his hands still not having let go, and the bitter realization that him being alive had no more value now, and that now was the moment he would finally find out if Seth Gecko was a man of his word.

Just as before, he couldn't help but doubt it.
„Do your best, Agent Hotchner.”

And with that Seth hung up. There, that could have gone worse.

In the past few minutes he had decided to make the best of things, even after the unpleasant realization he’d just had. Yes, giving in and letting Reid speak to Hazel had been a bad move - but he hadn’t had another choice, had he? Not with his own mind and body working against him…

He shook his head, unwilling to rip into himself once again. He couldn’t think about that now, try to understand it even -he could only try to push it aside as best as he could and hopefully make things work anyhow.

He would just focus on the things he was sure of and could control until he had a quiet minute to think. Considering how little time he’d had to come to that conclusion, he’d done rather well at that he thought: Now, at least everything was officially going as planned again, he’d gotten closer to his goal and he’d put a damper on those arrogant profilers' mood. At least one thing he could still feel in control of, making him slightly less irate with himself.

Unofficially he wasn't sure just how much damage he'd done, just how much Reid would be able to interpret into his actions and how it might change things…

Seth ground his teeth, desperately grasping for the sort of cold determination he used to have. It wasn't there, in fact he’d never been so confused and unsure…but that wouldn't change anything! That thought was the only consolation he had.

What Spencer thought didn’t matter anymore now that he'd made the call; the FBI people were the ones to get him his money and they believed he would do anything or it. That was all that mattered. And so what if the kid thought he'd found a weakness? Seth might not be able to slice up his face but he would have no problem whatsoever leaving him tied up and gagged for the remainder of their time together to keep him from running or starting with reverse psychology again. Right. The plan was in no way jeopardized.

He nodded to himself, relieved by this conclusion. He just had two more days to get through without any more mayor lapses of judgment, and it'd all be fine.

Now. On with the plan.

He finally focused on his hostage, who was still with his back to him, obviously, as he hadn't let go of him yet. It occurred to Seth that he probably should do that now before reason waved him goodbye once more and he got distracted by their proximity.

However, just as he was about to do that, to move away and tell Reid to get back in the car so they could move on he realized something was wrong.

With the call having gone well, he had expected the thick tension between them to subside; to maybe see Spencer dejected at having given in, but overall relieved. After all, the girl was fine and so was he. That clearly wasn't the case though.

Spencer was standing stock still against him, trembling worse than ever, his breathing so shallow and irregular that he was probably close to hyperventilating. Every limb of his body seemed to be locked in tension, from his balled fists to the tightly shut eyes and mouth. It looked like he was only barely
keeping control, like he was just seconds away from a full on panic attack.

Seth knew well what those looked like, he just hadn't expected one – Reid had had such good control over himself until now, plus, with the call over there was nothing to be scared of anymore. What the hell was going on?

"Hey-" he put his free hand on Spencer's shoulder, only to feel the younger man flinch violently, his breath hitching.

He stilled, confused and alarmed. What was happening?

xxx

Reid was sure his heart was about to jump out of his chest considering the way it was hammering against his ribs, leaving him short on breath. Whatever control he'd had over himself was completely gone by now.

In his time with the BAU he had gotten into trouble a lot more often than he liked to admit, he had been at the mercy of several UnSubs, psychopaths, sadists, mental patients. But this, this was just much too real, too close, just too much for him to handle.

Coming so terribly close to being assaulted, though with a knife this time, for the third time today, along with his fear for Hazel, his team's distress and Seth's threats was just too much at once to cope with. Especially because he knew those dangers weren't over yet -no, they were even more real now.

With the call ended and his contribution made, he was as of now of no more use to a sociopathic serial killer who had very reason to be pissed at him. He had no more leverage now, Seth and Richie could do anything to Hazel they wanted and to him as well, just short of killing him. Maybe even that, depending on how they planned for the exchange to go. Reid knew he was at the end of the road, that there was nothing more he could do, not talking, not fighting, not bargaining. It was over.

He drew in a shuddering breath, wishing he could support himself somewhere but not daring to move, almost expecting Seth to stab him right here after all. True, he probably wouldn't be stupid enough for that, but that didn't mean he couldn't drive somewhere more secluded…there was desert all around them.

It was all Reid could do not to let his numb legs give in right there, not to lower himself to begging which would be useless anyway. Instead he just waited for the inevitable. By now, his chest was so tight he thought he was choking; he felt nauseous and dizzy, sweating and shivering at the same time, Classic signs of a panic attack, his brain supplied, Flashing vision, feeling faint or nauseated, a numb sensation throughout the body, heavy breathing (and almost always, hyperventilation), tunnel vision, mostly due to blood flow leaving the head to more critical parts of the body in defense.

He almost laughed at that notion. Like he could defend himself. He could still feel the knife against his stomach, and even if it weren't for that, it was painfully clear by now just how easy it was for Seth to overpower him with bare hands.

No, he was chanceless.

He was going to die.

xxx

It took Seth a few moments of confusion to understand what was happening. Then, he felt stupid for not having expected it.
The kid had held up admirably under the continued pressure and threats so far—but now it seemed to finally be catching up with him. He wasn't acting like someone coming down from a shock—he seemed to be going into one if anything. Which could only mean one thing: Spencer was probably convinced that with the call made the gloves would come off now.

It made sense, considering their earlier conversations and all that crap with Richard. Considering what he'd seen of Richard and thought of Seth, he was probably expecting the girl to die messily and for Seth to prove that every reassurance so far had indeed been a lie. His posture also made it pretty clear that he was practically just waiting for Seth to hurt him as well.

For a moment Seth felt surprisingly angry at that realization. After all, he'd given the kid his word that everything would be alright, hadn't he?

But then, he realized that he couldn't really expect anything else; apparently his tough talk had been more convincing that he'd feared. A lot of the things he'd said before probably hadn't been very reassuring…

Huh. It looked like he wouldn't have to worry about not being taken seriously anymore after all.

He almost felt relieved at that—until he remembered that this situation wasn't ideal either. Not just because there was this unwelcome tugging sensation in his chest that let him know he hated to cause this reaction in Spencer, no because he wasn't listening to those thoughts anymore—It was much simpler, much more pragmatic: He needed to get the kid to calm down so he could get him out of here unnoticed and to be able to stay under the radar where they were going. He couldn't have him like this.

"Spencer," he said testily, not even sure what he wanted to say or if the kid could hear him.

His hostage didn't react; he was still tense against his chest, frozen. Seth squeezed his shoulder, getting another flinch in response. He did his best to ignore his reaction to that as well as the renewed skin contact.

"You can relax now, kid, it's over. You did your part, now we just have to wait for your buddies to come up with the cash."

Still no reaction. Frustrated, Seth turned his hostage around by his shoulder.

He realized it was the biggest mistake he could have made the second they were facing each other. Every last bit of color had washed out of Spencer's features, and his eyes were shining with tears, for the first time entirely unguarded. They showed all of his fear plainly, absolutely no control or calculation left.

It did Seth in completely.

He promptly forgot what he had been about to say, too caught up in the sudden shift he was witnessing which left only a fragile, terrified, helpless young man. In that moment he completely forgot he was a cop at all.

He forgot who he was. All he could suddenly think of was that this wasn't right, that he didn't want to see him this way, that he needed to do something…

He took a step closer before he knew what he was doing, in his space once more, his fingers flexing around thin shoulders. Spencer instantly drew back, his breath stopping as he pressed his back against the wall of the phone booth. It didn't do much space wise. Seth realized he was too close again quickly, but took considerably longer to do anything about it; it was astoundingly hard to pry
his fingers away from where they were touching warm skin, tingling at the contact.

He drew in a deep breath and blinked slowly. With no little effort he focused on those huge, unblinking eyes again, reading in them.

Spencer was entirely focused on him as well, though, he suspected for other reasons. Oh yes, he was clearly aware of the fact that Seth could do anything he wanted—and did expect the worst.

It was then that Seth realized this was a deciding moment.

Not in the way Reid feared, but much more for him. How he acted now could change everything.

But even as his brain was practically screaming warnings at him, his body was acting of its own accord. He relaxed his tight grip and drew back reluctantly, his voice taking on a tone he had last used with Richard when he was 10.

"Calm down. I'm not about to hurt you."

He offered the most honest expression he could muster, then waited for his words to register, for the young man to process that he meant it. For a moment Reid seemed to break out of his daze, hazel eyes flickering to meet his and it almost seemed Seth's expression had been authentic enough. But then they darkened quickly again, full of mistrust.

Seth sighed, torn between frustration and helplessness. Looked like he needed proof.

He got his phone out once more, dialing Richie's number blindly.

"Richie, it's me again. Listen. The call went well, we'll get the money. Yes. Now, listen. I want you to let the girl go." He grimaced briefly in annoyance at his brother's answer, but was too focused on other things to care much.

A look of confusion very slowly broke across Reid's face, through all the dread and anguish.

"Yes, that's what I fucking said, isn't it?" Seth told his brother, "Exactly. Get a car from the parking lot, drive her near some town or something, leave her and get the fuck as far away as you possibly can from there. Go to the border, We'll meet you there tomorrow… Just get moving, Richard. And don't you screw this up. Remember what I told you. You still have that disposable phone we got, right? Okay. Get in the car and call me once you're ready to drop her off. Don't take too long, I'll be waiting."

With that Seth hung up. He had never broken eye contact with Spencer and held it now too, afraid that any distraction might make him realize how insane what he was doing was. There was no going back now though.

Well, at least he seemed to finally be getting somewhere.

Reid's breathing had evened out somewhat and if it was only from utter surprise distracting him. He was still, staring at him right out now, emotions flashing across his face to quickly to decipher.

Seconds passed in which neither of them said anything, both of them just silently measuring each other up. Reid looked like he was trying to find the catch, like he was still expecting everything to go to hell within the next blink of an eye. In the end, he gathered up the courage to ask outright, "What-?"

Seth knew the multitude of questions that word entailed, all of them justified. He still had no better
answer than ten minutes ago.

"I already told you," he replied quietly, "I may be a bastard but I'm not a fucking bastard. You choosing not to believe me is your problem."

He had to look away then, suddenly feeling exhausted by the entire argument; he felt like it had been going on for ages. He couldn't remember the last time he'd tried to justify his actions to anyone, and he had a feeling he wasn't very good at it.

For a long time there was only silence, broken y the sound of unsteady breaths. He was actually surprised when he heard Spencer speak, maybe having expected him to never say another word now that he thought it pointless.

"How can I?" the young man's voice was very quiet, sounding accusing and pleading at the same time somehow. When Seth looked up he found his face averted, unwilling to believe him, but clearly needing to.

"All those people in our files…was killing them necessary? And even if you thought so, you've never stopped him either. Why would this time be any different?"

Seth almost found himself relieved to hear traces of the familiar sharp accusing tone in his voice, letting him think that maybe they weren't quiet as backed into a corner anymore. If Spencer was arguing, maybe he was starting to hope again. He was hoping for an explanation.

Seth frowned, "I've stopped him more times than I can count. But I wasn't always there."

There was a tiny flicker in those eyes, just for a second, that made him think he was being believed.

'I'm sorry I wasn't there this morning', he wanted to add, 'I wouldn't have let him touch you.' But he couldn't. It seemed far too intimate, too revealing. Instead he settled for reassuring Spencer about the girl, knowing it was what he really worried about right now.

"He's not going to do anything this time because he knows I'll have his head if he does. The girl will be fine, and you will be fine, too, provided your team doesn't screw up during the exchange. Okay?" he felt like a broken record by now, but repeated the words anyways, "Until then you can stop panicking."

Reid didn't answer. He wasn't looking at him anymore now, sinking down the wall the moment Seth's took his hands off him. There he simply sat, silent, arms wound around his knees. Waiting for Richard to call back. For proof.

Seth decided it was all he could expect under the circumstances.

x

It took Richard 15 minutes to call back. Seth picked up the phone and listened to his brother's report first, before letting Reid listen in. Not that he hadn't been convinced Richie would do as he said, just…to be sure.

They were in seeing distance of some backwater town apparently, and Richie had arranged it so Hazel would have to walk for a while before she got there. By the time she would be able to alert anyone competent enough to chase him he would be long gone. "Ok," Seth said, "now give her this phone, take the other one with you. I'll see you soon, brother."

Then Richard's voice was gone. They waited a moment and then Hazel was speaking and there was
the sound of tired screeching in the background.

"Is he leaving?" Spencer asked, and Seth could hear in his voice that he was still afraid to believe it, needed to hear it from her.

"Yes, he just drove off." The girl was crying but she sounded relieved enough to be believable.

Seth watched Reid's posture relax gradually as he listened to her.

"Okay, Hazel," the young agent said, "Just walk over to that town and find an office or a bar, somewhere with a phone. Call Agent Hotchner from the BAU and let him know you're fine, alright?"

He waited until she agreed, then let Seth end the call without protest.

His eyes fluttered closed as he took what seemed like the first real breath in forever and Seth gave him that moment to recuperate. It seemed like a very long time but in the end, Spencer did meet his eyes again; they were still wet with unshed tears but they had almost gone back to their usual expression, and Seth couldn't help but feel relief at that.

"Thank you."

For a second, Seth thought he'd heard wrong.

He froze, then stared at his hostage in near shock -finding there was no hint of contempt visible on his face for the very first time. Spencer held his gaze for another moment, sad and tired but also honest, and Seth felt his heart skip a beat and start beating in an entirely irregular rhythm, taking his breath away. It took all he had to keep his face blank until Reid broke eye contact.

He didn't say anything else then and Seth found himself unable to.

Instead, he eventually forced himself back into action and opened the door of the phone booth. He took Reid by the arm much gentler this time, walking them both in the direction of the car wordlessly. Reid let himself be ushered into the passenger seat without resistance, settling in silently.

Seth started the motor and started driving down the highway again.

Meanwhile at the hospital:

Morgan buried his head in his hands, his shoulders sunken -which was impressive considering he was still in a hospital bed with a hole in his chest. He didn't complain about the pain though, too caught up in his inner turmoil to even mind it.

"Morgan, you need rest," Elle told him, but even she sounded far too preoccupied to put much conviction behind the statement.

Just like the rest of the team, she looked weary and pale, worried sick about Reid.

"They're gonna kill him, Hotch," Morgan mumbled through his hands, then looked up with bloodshot eyes to find Hotch's stare much the same as his.

His boss didn't deny the statement, merely frowned, his hands clenched to fists by his sides.

"We will find him," Gideon said in his stead, but even he didn't sound confident that the finding would take place before Reid was seriously hurt, "He's a top profiler, he will handle the situation."
"How the hell is he supposed to handle it?" Morgan snapped unexpectedly, glaring at the older man, "There's only so much talking will accomplish and we all know how little even that does with those men. We met Seth Gecko at the prison. He wasn't interested in bargains; he was prepared to stay in prison for the sake of spiting us! What tells us he's not gonna kill Reid for the same reason…no matter if he gets the money or not?"

Gideon's face crunched up at those words, but he shook his head. "You can't assume that, Morgan-

"You heard what he said on the phone!" Morgan interrupted him agitatedly, "You heard Reid, the things he didn't say! Something happened already! What if they…?"

He blanched and fell back onto his bed rest with a strained moan. The rest of the team looked at him with pity and unease.

"Morgan's right," Elle finally agreed, looking at Hotch, "We must assume that Richard Gecko will continue on with his M.O. And Seth Gecko obviously has no inhibitions to hurt Reid so far and he certainly won't lift a finger to stop his brother. He never has before."

Hotch nodded grimly, realizing the dilemma they were in. They couldn't find Reid and the girl fast enough on their own -but if they waited for Seth to come to them it might be too late to save them from harm already.

He looked up at the senior profiler in the room, knowing that Morgan was in no condition to think rationally right now, "What do we do, Jason?"

"The next call is tomorrow. Until then we need to get that money," Gideon said grimly, "In the meantime we can try to find them as quickly as possible, get them out of there. Those men clearly know no scruples. There s no saying what Reid is suffering through at the moment. And it is bound to get worse."
They drove for about an hour after they had made the call, until the sky started to turn red.

Seth slowed the car down as they passed a couple of buildings on the roadside, trying to make out a place to stay for the night.

There was no way they could meet up with Richard tonight, not without being outside after dark – and that he couldn’t risk, not with their vampire problem remaining. The memory of their night of horrors in that bar by the border flashed across his mind, making him feel cold.

He shook his head to clear it.

They would be fine as long as they were inside, no one would find them. Still, he instinctively touched the gun tucked into the waistband of his pants, his open suit jacket barely concealing it. In any case he would be ready.

It didn't take much longer until he saw a motel by the road.

Good. They would have to crash here and wait for morning – and he would have to hope Richard could cope with being by himself for a little while longer.

Great, like he didn't have enough to worry about already.

He let his eyes wander to the side from behind mirrored sunglasses, glad he had put them on because that way he could keep an eye on Reid without having to see him tense up every time he looked in his direction.

The kid had not moved or talked ever since they'd gotten in the car, and while Seth was glad that he had been able to stop him from freaking out, he was still worried about the long-term consequences of his actions.

For now, Spencer still looked tense, even deep in thought – like he didn't quite trust the whole thing still. Seth figured he should probably be glad: It meant that he hadn't lost all of his face. Reid was still as wary as the first day; he hadn't figured him out.

Maybe not all that surprising – after all, Seth himself had trouble figuring out his motives.

He still wasn't over his failure to perform back in the phone booth. The intensity of his feelings angered and scared him at the same time. Here he was, Seth-fucking-Gecko, badass extraordinaire, done in by a pair of pretty eyes.

It made him want to scream.

But what would that help? After all, he tried fighting this, whatever it was, every second of the past two days. It had just all become much more intense in that moment before the call, probably because of the combination with physical closeness.

Seth sighed, almost wishing this whole this were just about the latter. That he could deal with. But this… infatuation… it wasn't something he'd ever experienced before, and frankly it scared him.

What if it got worse? What if it was a weakness that would be exploited?

He glanced at Reid again. He didn't think they could simply go back to the way it had been before.
No, he'd let the kid see he was human, and he couldn't erase that unless he did something radical enough to prove it had been a lie. Which he couldn't of course.

Or wouldn't? He remembered how much of a relief it had been to just give in back there, to be able to ease the tension between them, and have Reid look at him in something other than fear and disdain. That feeling in his chest when he'd told him thank you…

Seth grimaced.

Yes, he was definitely screwed. Big time.

Whatever was wrong with him, by now he was sure it wasn't about to go away. And to make things worse, now he would be stuck alone for another night with the kid….

Shit.

What if Reid decided to ask about his odd behavior? Or act upon his conclusions drawn from it?

Worse, what if Seth lost control of himself?

Seth sighed.

It looked like the next two days would be torture for the both of them.

xxx

The convenient numbness Reid had felt coming down from his almost panic attack unfortunately hadn't lasted long.

He shifted uncomfortably in his seat, feeling Seth's eyes on him but not acknowledging them. Now that he could think past his fear, there was a lot of room for confusion.

What had happened in the past hour just didn't seem to make sense, from whichever angle he looked at it.

After Richard attacking him that morning, he'd been utterly convinced that both brothers were sadists/psychopaths and that he was going to die no matter what he did. He'd had no doubt that Seth would stab him there in the phone booth to get what he wanted, especially considering his earlier outburst and short temper.

But then he hadn't. He'd given in and conceded to let Hazel go.

Naturally, Reid hadn't believed him for one second –until he'd proven it by calling her. Now she was free, Seth had kept his word…and Reid was as unscathed as he was confused.

The way he saw it there were two scenarios:

Seth was even worse than he'd assumed and was playing some sort of game with him –which honestly, seemed unlikely now that he had released Hazel. He'd had all the power after all. He could have done anything he wanted to the both of them. Instead he'd kept his word and let her go.

Which meant: The alternative was that Seth had told him the truth when he'd said he didn't want anyone to get hurt unnecessarily.

But how would that fit with his profile?
With all the deaths he was responsible for, and with his ruthless and indifferent behavior so far? Had that been a façade?

It couldn't be. He knew for a fact that Seth was a murderer and that he had known about his brother's crimes for years yet was still with him. If he did, like he'd claimed, have some sort of moral code, it certainly was a very crooked one.

Mentally, he went over the case files again. There was no doubt that their victims had been assaulted by Richard and they had proof that during Seth's time in jail, his younger brother had escalated in his killings. Then there was Seth's statement under oath, the contempt he'd shown for sexual offenders in the courthouse that had seemed so genuine.

Reid bit his lip, conflicted. Could it really be that he'd told him the truth? That he wasn't fine with what his brother did, not even indifferent about it?

How was he supposed to regain any control, to even make up a plan on how to best act with all those conflicting messages Seth sent? How was he supposed to understand if he kept changing his behavior, one second being very convincing that he didn't care about anyone's life and that he would have no scruples killing him brutally, then the next trying to convince him that he wasn't a bad person.

Why?

I may be a bastard but I'm not a fucking bastard.

Reid almost laughed at that memory. What kind of a moral code was that? Seth had no problem hurting or killing anyone who could hurt him or his brother, but anything else was off limits? He was doing it all for…what?

Love.

He almost felt sick for how easily the answer came to him, for even thinking of that word in connection to the Gecko brothers. And yet…

It should have been harder to understand, maybe it would have been if Reid didn't know exactly what it was like to have a sick family member, one who was a danger to themselves and sometimes others, who he would love and protect unconditionally…whatever wrong they had done.

Seth and Richie had been all alone and on the run for decades, since they were children…Richie was all Seth had. Just like his mother had been…

Reid shook his head harshly.

No, that wasn't the same. His mother didn't go around raping and murdering innocent people. He could see why it would be hard for Seth to have his brother incarcerated from the beginning, but still there was no excuse for not doing that, for letting him go on with his destructive behavior and even aiding him with that.

He wanted to erase those thoughts from his mind, didn't want to have to think about questions he didn't have solid answers to. But now that he'd started, there seemed to be no way to stop…instead, he started thinking about how Seth had stopped Richard's attack on him, of how he had not cut him with that knife even though it would have been the easiest way to get to his goal, how he had gone to the trouble of reassuring him even though he could have just knocked him out or something, of the tiny flickers that he thought he'd seen in the man's eyes before, proof of emotion, of humanity.
Could it really be? That he would just have to keep quiet and put up with Seth's presence until the rescue? That he wouldn't get hurt any more if the team got Seth his money. It had been so long since a case like that that it almost seemed like a surreal concept.

Nevertheless he found himself wanting to believe it. Seth had kept his word regarding Hazel, so why shouldn't he do the same regarding Reid?

Reid sighed heavily, feeling his head spin. He was as afraid as he was eager to believe that.

At least it would be something to go on, something to hang on to.

He couldn't help but hope.

xxx

Reid was interrupted in his thoughts when Seth suddenly steered the car towards a little motel by the side of the highway.

Immediately, he felt apprehensive again without being able to stop himself. What was he doing? Weren't they going to go back to meet up with Richard? Not that he was eager for that, but…

"Why…are we stopping?" he made himself ask, his voice hoarse from lack of use.

"We're staying here tonight," Seth explained as he walked over to the passenger side and prompted Reid to get out as well.

He took a controlling hold of his arm instantly, firm but not nearly as rough as usually this time.

"Be calm and act normal," he said, eyes on the motel instead of him, "I don't want to have to kill anyone today."

Reid gulped, unable to suppress a shiver. It really didn't matter how often he heard Seth say the words, it made him freeze up in dread every time. Despite his earlier conclusions, he still had no trouble believing that if necessary Seth would kill the people here just like he'd killed that man in the bank.

Seth didn't turn to see him nod before he began walking and pulled him along towards the motel's entrance.

Getting past the employee at the reception desk was surprisingly easy. The man didn't ask them many questions, not even when Seth only demanded one room instead of two…he merely glanced at Reid with an odd expression on his face, but then quickly looked away when he saw Seth's dark glare.

Five minutes later they were in the room, away from curios eyes again. Seth closed the door behind them and leaned against it with a groan, looking as exhausted as Reid felt.

"Okay, I don't think anyone recognized us, we should be good," he said after a moment, like that was something Reid would like to hear.

He didn't think he was supposed to reply so he just looked around the room; it was similar to the one they had stayed in the night before if only a bit smaller. There was no couch or desk, just a closet, a bathroom and a large mirror on the opposite wall of a double bed…

One bed.
The apprehension he was already feeling turned into a knot in his stomach.

Before he could analyze his worries though, Seth recovered from his momentary lapse, pushing away from the door. He got his gun out, pulling Reid with him by his wrist as he secured the rooms.

Once Seth seemed sure that there was no one else there, he stopped next to the windows, gazing outside silently. Reid stumbled to a halt next to him, trying unsuccessfully to keep a distance anyway; he still ended up much too close to his kidnapper as he gazed outside. It seemed to take a long time, but eventually Seth tucked the gun away again, then locked the windows and pulled the curtains closed, peeking out only through a small gap.

All the while, he didn't meet Reid's eyes once, just as he ever relaxed the hold he had on him. The young profiler stood by nervously, his initial worries suddenly replaced by ones of a whole other kind.

What was Seth so worried about keeping out? He'd just said that no one would find them here. At least, no police…

Reid shuddered when he remembered the brothers' conversation the night before. He had almost forgotten about it with everything else going on. Vampires. They had been convinced that vampires were after them, trying to kill them…

With a silent sigh, Seth eventually let the curtains fall.

Then he turned around, his eyes falling on Reid, widening slightly like he'd forgotten he was there. Reid stared at him tensely, not sure what he was waiting for. Instead of saying anything though Seth quickly looked away again, letting his hand fall away.

Then he just left him standing there and walked over to the bed, carelessly throwing his suit jacket on the covers. Reid watched as he closed his eyes for a brief moment, taking a breather. He looked ready to snap under just a tiny addition of more pressure.

Reid felt his stomach knotting up even further. Great. He was trapped in a room with a violent criminal with control and mental problems. What had he been thinking, hoping he would be safe from now on?

He couldn't help but stare at Seth. The man looked so…sane. And his profile had said nothing about paranoia or delusions on his part.

Maybe the vampires were Richard's delusion, and maybe Seth only played along to placate him? He could only pray it was so -because if Seth too believed he was being followed by vampires then that would make him just as unstable as Richard, and this thing would very likely end a horrid, gruesome end. Of all the horrible deaths he could think were in reach for him at the moment, being staked in his sleep wasn't exactly his favorite.

Reid shuddered, blanching slightly. It wasn't as if he hadn't seen sick cases like that before. It happened.

Had he been scared by the wrong things all along?

He glanced around the room once more. Seth was still between him and the door, and he still had his gun. There was just about as little sense in running as there had been this morning…

"Why…are we stopping here?" he asked apprehensively.
"I told you," Seth replied curtly, still not looking at him, "Because it's late. We'll meet Richie tomorrow."

Reid didn't reply, but his thoughts must have been reflected on his face because suddenly Seth was looking at him, a shadow flashing over his face that Reid couldn't completely identify. It was nothing good though.

"What?" he asked with his eyebrows raised, somewhere between exhausted, annoyed and...nervous?

Reid tensed, thoughts racing. What was he to do? He really wanted to think that Seth wasn't mentally insane –apart from the possible sociopathy he already knew about of course. He wanted to relax on that basis.

But he knew he wouldn't be able to even consider that until he knew for sure…

"Is it because of the…the vampires trailing you?"

Seth's face fell the second he said the word vampires, eyes widening and shoulders tensing. Reid resisted the urge to take yet another step back, already regretting having asked a possibly triggering question.

xxx

One question, one pointed, loaded question was all it took to ruin Seth's cautious resolution to avoid looking at those Eyes again. His head snapped up just in time to see Reid tense up all over.

He had almost thought they would spend the rest of the evening in silence, not sure whether to be bothered or glad about it. It might have been better, overall, because it meant he wouldn't slip up and Reid wouldn't ask any tough questions.

But apparently, Reid wasn't about to be ignored even if it would be in both their interest. Seth had known he had questions burning on his tongue, but he had expected them to be about…well, pretty much anything other than that.

Crap. He hadn't realized he'd overheard that conversation with Richie.

Until now, he had assumed that pale face, held breath tensely and carefully kept distance were due to the fact that he was still distrustful of the value of Seth's word. This complication though, he hadn't expected.

"If I told you yes…" he answered slowly, carefully picking out his words, "…that Richie and I are being hunted by a bunch of bloodthirsty monsters…would you believe me?"

He knew the answer without Reid having to say it.

It was evident in the widening of his eyes and the way he instinctively shifted backwards. If he told him what had happened in that bar, Reid would simply file him under deranged psycho along with Richard and they would be back to start.

"If you've seen them," Reid finally said slowly, cautiously, a diplomatic answer that reminded Seth of doctors trying to calm down mental patients so they wouldn't attack them with forks.

"No," he heard himself say before he'd really thought about it, "Of course there are no vampires. Richie sometimes sees things that aren't really there…and I try not to upset him too much."
He watched the way Reid's shoulders relaxed ever so slightly at his words and it almost made it
worth the lie.

It probably didn't matter. With any luck they had lost the vampires along the way and Reid would
never have to see the truth.

So what was one tiny lie for the greater good? Seth knew he wasn't crazy. He had seen the vampires
that had killed Jacob and Scott along with many more people…but for now, a slightly different
version of that story would probably come in handy.

"Richie was talking about some fuckers we ran into down in some strip joint in Mexico," Seth lied
smoothly, "We kinda pissed them off and they chased after us for a while –but we've seen nothing of
them in three days and if the cops can't find us they won't either."

"Oh," Reid said quietly, letting out a breath, "Ok…"

Seth did his best to keep his expression as level as possible. He knew he hadn't actually explained
why he couldn't drive at night but Reid seemed actually relieved that he wasn't insane that he didn't
even seem to think it through.

He frowned slightly at the thought of how easily he'd been upset by it though, ready to think the
worst immediately. It appeared he still didn't really trust in what Seth had told him.

Seth sighed. He knew it shouldn't bother him, as long as it didn't affect his safety. The problem was,
he was tired of this continued struggle to control everything, he was worn out and he really needed a
drink and some sleep, preferably in that order.

Well, he didn't have the former on hand -and the latter might become problematic as well. The room
only had one bed; there hadn't been another option. He highly doubted that after the day he'd had
Reid would react positively to having to sleep in a bed with him, especially since he would have to
tie him up somehow. Not with the way he was affected by just being in the same room with him, like
he was about to pounce, like he was one wrong move away from trying to bolt again. It probably
wouldn't be too hard, to accomplish it anyway, but the thought of having Spencer wide awake and
frighthened, staring at him without sleeping all night -which he probably would- wasn't very attractive
to him. That way neither of them would get any sleep at all.

Grudingly, Seth realized he had to do something.

He made a decision then.

"Come here," he demanded, holding out a hand.
Chapter 11

'O, it is excellent to have a giant's strength, but it is tyrannous to use it like a giant.'

-Shakespeare

As expected, the minimal signs of relaxation Reid had shown vanished immediately, uncertainty and alarm shining in his eyes, hands clenched by his sides. His eyes flickered from the door to Seth and the bed again.

Seth rolled his eyes, then simply crossed the distance between them and pulled Reid to him by his wrist again. The reaction was what he had expected. Reid didn't actively try to pull away, apparently having learned from earlier today, but he froze with tension, fingers clenched as he stared at his captor apprehensively.

Again, Seth felt torn between relief and frustration.

It seemed he really had been too worried that Reid wouldn't take him seriously anymore. But then – right now he was probably still thinking him a maniac with a mental break and a gun…and he knew from experience that most people found that combination upsetting.

In the end, his frustration won though. Yes, he couldn't force Reid to believe or trust him. More than that: He shouldn't want to.

"Seth-"

God, that tone. Not that, too.

Yes, he shouldn't, shouldn't, shouldn't. But what use was it too keep telling himself that, when clearly everything was working against him?

He looked down at the thin, thin wrist in his hold for a long moment, almost wanting to laugh at himself. The only reason Reid was so scared was because he knew that he was completely at his mercy. He did have all the power…and yet, ironically Reid seemed to have so much power over him that it was completely useless to him.

By now, he had no idea how the kid could not see that; it was affecting him more and more with every second they spent together. He didn't recognize himself anymore, impatient and weary one second, annoyed and frustrated the next…only to now forget about all that once again and have nothing left but that nagging desire to not feel those hands cold and shaky in his, and to not have Reid look at him like he thought he was about to get his neck snapped all the freaking time.

In that moment, his weariness won over. He knew he was being stupid even before he opened his mouth, but that didn't stop him.

"I get it," he said quietly, loosening his grip.

Reid looked at him in surprise at his odd tone, not used to anything but shoves and threats. Seth didn't make the effort to put on a dark expression then, knowing his true emotions were partially
bleeding through anyway. Maybe, he couldn't help but think, for once that could be a good thing.

"I do," he continued, "This is fucking scary, I've been rough on you, you cost me my last nerve today –well, the situation wasn't pretty. But now, we're in the clear and as far as I'm concerned we're cool. I'll have to rethink that if you try to gut me again of course, otherwise all you have to do now is to get through one more day of putting up with my presence. So why don't you just try to get into that mindset and save yourself from a heart attack?"

Even before he was halfway through that little speech, Seth wanted to slap himself. What the hell was he saying? Like fear was something to be turned on and off at will! He sounded completely mental…sure to convince Reid that he really did have a couple of screws loose in his head.

He looked up and sure enough, he thought he briefly saw utter perplexity, quickly followed by what looked like anger flashing across Reid's face. He didn't say a word though, probably for fear off saying something like, 'Fuck you, you insensitive bastard.'

And Seth found himself actually glad to see something other than fear for once.

Well, too late to go back now anyway…

"I know you don't trust me as far as you can throw me," he conceded, "But think about it. Even if you're right, it wouldn't make a difference. If I wanted to break my word there would be nothing you could do about it. So why not start freaking out once it's actually happening and take a break in the meantime?"

Reid just stared at him wordlessly for almost half a minute and just as Seth was sure that he was going to curse him after all, he let out a short burst of laughter instead. It was short-lived, more bitter than amused, but still, some of the tension went out of his body.

"Is that how you usually reassure your hostages?" he asked.

Seth was too surprised to answer for a moment. Then he exhaled, letting out a small breath he hadn't known he'd held, suddenly feeling much less on edge. Sure, his little speech had been pathetic, not fit to console anyone –but still, for some reason it seemed like he was making some progress anyway.

"No."

He smirked briefly, sure that it was implied that his words meant, 'No, I don't console them', not 'No, I usually do better.'

Reid mirrored the expression for a split second, managing to look brought down at the same time somehow, "A first then? Wow, how pathetic do I look?"

Seth blinked, unprepared for a response like that.

Of course, Reid did look a mess. His hair was tousled and his shirt crumpled with dark sprinkles all over. He'd wiped of most of the blood from his head wound the day before, but there was a definite bruise on the left side of his face, leading all the way down to his eye. Not exactly a black eye, but close enough. Especially when combined with the other bruise left behind when Richard had kicked him in the bank. His split lip was scabbed over and his cheek had a definite shade of green to it.

He looked far from pathetic though. He looked…like Seth might just reach out and smooth his fingers over those marks, or kiss them better…

Absentmindedly, Seth brushed a thumb over the inside of Reid's wrist, feeling the marks left there by
duct tape and hand cuffs. Reid wasn't moving, tension also slowly draining out of him to be replaced by tiredness.

"Not at all," he barely recognized his own voice now, throat suddenly feeling dry as he gazed at their hands, "To be honest, you're surprisingly tough."

Reid looked up at him silently, a hint of suspicion in his large eyes that Seth almost missed, like he was trying to find traces of mockery in his eyes. When he couldn't seem to find any, he went back to looking confused.

The expression shook Seth out of his trance. He quickly shook his head to clear it. What the hell was he doing…

"However," he said quickly, clearing his voice, "you also look like you could use a drink for your nerves. I'm going to go to the bar downstairs for a bit to come down. I'm starting to think we should get you one, too."

"You want to go to the bar? But-" Reid protested but Seth didn't wait to hear him out. Suddenly the room felt too small for him as well.

"Oh, I'm not worried," he said lightly, "After today I'm convinced that you won't endanger others for your own sake. So let's go."

He steered Reid out of the room before he could say anything else.

Yes, he really needed a drink now.

As he walked out though, Spencer next to him without protesting, the warm skin under his fingers taking up a disturbing amount of his attention, he couldn't help but think that changing the room wouldn't change much in the long haul.

In fact, he had the creeping suspicion that whether he tried to be evil or nice, nothing would change in the end. Somehow, it would all end in disaster. He knew it, just as he now knew he'd be powerless to prevent it.

Why not try then, he found himself thinking, to at least make it a decent evening for the both of them until then?

xxx

Reid hadn't thought it was possible for him to get more confused than he already was.

Clearly he'd been wrong.

Two days into his ordeal, a time frame in which he usually could have completed three profiles, he was less sure about Seth than ever.

Yes, after he'd kept his word regarding Hazel he had tried to accept the idea that maybe he wasn't in as much trouble as he could be, but it was really no wonder that no one could just forget being beaten up, choked out and threatened with torture and murder. So obviously, when Seth had grabbed him again, his first instinct had been to freeze.

But then…then he'd started being all…he didn't even have a word for it. Just like he didn't have one back in the phone booth.
He didn't understand how Seth could be one way and then calm and sane and almost sympathetic the next minute. He just didn't make any sense, constantly changing like that.

Still, he figured that as much as Seth's comment about not being able to protect himself anyway should depress and disturb him - in the end he had a point. Nothing had changed since his hopeless situation in the phone booth.

The only difference was Seth.

Whatever his motive, his reasoning... he had apparently decided to act human from now on.

It was mainly on instinct that Reid decided to take the risk of being wrong then.

He didn't understand what was going on, but he wasn't about to do anything that would make Seth morph back into his scarier persona. No, he'd hang on to this relative peace for as long as possible, that was the smartest thing to do. And maybe... maybe it would turn out Seth had told him the truth... or not, but then he could still start fighting.

Reid tried not to think too much about the dangerous direction his thoughts were taking, or about how much it had to do with the constant stress — instead he watched quietly as Seth closed his suit jacket to hide his gun properly, then ushered him outside into the night that was already falling. It was only a short distance to the little bar by the reception but Seth hurried them along anyway and into the building.

The room they walked into was small, with only a couple of truckers at old wooden tables. There was Spanish music playing and the man from earlier was standing behind the bar, looking up as they entered.

As they approached, Seth seemingly casually threw and arm over Reid's shoulder, inconspicuous yet decisive in controlling the situation. Spencer let him. He wasn't about to endanger the people in here stupidly by acting out. He knew well that everybody here could die if Seth was recognized and decided to shoot his way out like in the bank; they wouldn't be able to do much against him.

Oddly enough, he felt less nervous here anyway than he had in the room.

Seth seemed in a better mood too as he ordered a bottle of tequila and two glasses.

They sat down in one corner from where they could oversee the whole room but had the wall in their back. Reid thought the barkeeper was still looking at them a little funny, but he didn't do anything either, so he looked away again, watching as Seth poured two glasses and downed his immediately. He poured himself another, but pushed the second one in front of Reid before drinking it.

"You like tequila?"

Reid shook his head. Not just because he really detested the stuff, also because no matter how slowly his brain seemed to be working today, even he realized that getting drunk in his situation would be tremendously stupid.

Unfortunately, Seth wasn't deterred, "Yeah, no one does. Not really the point."

He pushed the glass into Reid's hand, "Here you go, Doctor. Have at it."

Reid thought about refusing, but Seth didn't give him time to. "Come on. Takes the edge off."

As if to prove his point, Seth took another shot. Then he looked at Reid expectantly, eyebrow raised.
Reid decided he had no alternative. Seth’s mood was good for once, at least No-dead-civilians-tonight-good. Better not ruin that.

Plus, that one drink wasn’t going to tip the scales too much, right? He brought the glass to his lips and tipped his head back, grimacing at the taste of the liquid washing down his throat. When he looked back at Seth, he found one corner of the man’s mouth twitching with amusement. He nodded in satisfaction, then immediately took his empty glass and refilled it for him.

"I don't think I should-" Reid shook his head, unsure how to get out of this. But Seth wouldn't have any of it anyway.

"Relax, we talked about this, remember? Drunk or not, it won't change much about your situation."

That statement actually made Reid want to drink the next shot.

"Right," he mumbled bitterly, bringing the drink to his lips again. It went down burning his throat, but he did feel a little better after it despite himself.

Seth downed another shot without even blinking, slamming the glass on the table. He seemed to have quite the tolerance level. Then he leaned back in his chair, stretching.

"No offense, kid," he told him, "you did put up a surprisingly good fight. You know, for someone your weight class."

Reid didn’t answer, torn between too many conflicting thoughts. He wanted to be offended by that statement - but he knew it was shamefully true. Plus, Seth didn’t even seem gleeful about it, merely truthful. Before Reid could come to a decision, Seth leaned forward again, assessing him directly suddenly.

"What do you do for the FBI anyway?" he asked, seeming skeptical, "You have no gun, the upper body strength of a twelve year old…"

"I know I’m not very physical," Reid found himself glaring before he could think better of it. He had no idea what Seth was doing, if he was mocking him or just suddenly in the mood for chatting. He just knew he didn't care for it. he might not be as strong as Hotch or Morgan, but he had his own qualities.

"I have an IQ of 187 and an eidetic memory, that's my place on the team. I don't need to be both, that's what teams are for."

He was almost afraid Seth might get angry over his attitude, but the man just scoffed, unimpressed, "That Morgan guy is your partner? Might wanna find a better one then, eh? He didn't exactly do a cracker jack job at protecting you."

This time Reid did glare openly, suddenly not caring if Seth got angry, "What happened is hardly his fault."

He still felt cold at the thought of Morgan bleeding out on the floor of that bank, all because he’d tried to protect him; he certainly wasn't going to talk about him with the man responsible for his condition.

Luckily, Seth didn't seem bothered much. "He sounded worried about you on the phone."

"Of course," Reid was really starting to wish they could just go back to no talking. The expression in Seth's eyes suddenly seemed unsettling. "He's my best friend. We're like family."
He didn't know why he added the last part. Maybe because some part stupidly wanted to make Seth understand what he'd done by hurting Morgan…like it would even matter to him.

However, when he said the word family, something seemed to flash across Seth's face, a thought too quick to identify. He looked at Reid with renewed interest, leaning further over the table. Suddenly, there was an air of expectation about him as he looked at him.

"What about your real family?"

xxx

"No man chooses evil because it is evil; he only mistakes it for happiness." -Mary Wollstonecraft

xxx

"What about your real family?" Seth looked at the young agent across from him expectantly.

They had seemed to make process in the past few minutes; Spencer wasn't quite as on edge anymore -which probably had to do with the strong alcohol he'd consumed, but still – and Seth felt himself getting calmer along with him. His worries and regrets about this situation were fading fast with every minute here.

This was working out.

Spencer wasn't causing any trouble, and Seth was just distracted enough from him by the alcohol and the people around, able to finally relax a little and clear his head from the overload of thoughts.

Making conversation had initially been incidental, something he was just used to doing when drinking with someone. And Spencer seemed to have decided to take his advice; he'd composed himself enough to even have the semblance of a normal conversation with him and he'd found some of his wit back.

At this question though, the young man stiffened, and Seth could practically feel him pulling up invisible shields around him again.

Family apparently was a subject touchy enough to risk angering his kidnapper.

Not that he hadn't known that; that was the whole reason he'd steered the conversation in this direction. He'd wondered before how it was that Spencer didn't recognize him from all those years ago, even more so now that he'd learned about his good memory. It was probably a very bad idea to risk Spencer understanding the reason for Seth's scruples if he hadn't so far…but he just had know for sure what he was already suspecting.

So even though it threatened to ruin their armistice, he looked at Spencer inquiringly, making it clear that he was waiting for an answer.

"They're alive," Spencer finally said, though reluctantly, "But they don't have any money."

Seth frowned briefly at the addition, but didn't let himself be deterred, "That's not what I asked. What do they do?"

Another long moment of silence. Spencer's expression was showing his discomfort clearly; his lips were pressed together tightly, he barely parted them in order to answer, "I haven't seen my dad since I was ten. My mother used to be a professor…"
Ah, they were getting somewhere…

"And now?"

"-she's not."

Seth sighed inaudibly. Wow, this was like pulling teeth.

He wasn't too surprised though. Spencer wasn't very talkative to begin with and he knew from own experience that talking about a sick family member one felt protective of was hard.

Still, he had to know.

"Come on, Spencer, there's nothing wrong with a little friendly conversation, is there?"

Especially if one considered the alternative. He didn't add that but he assumed Reid got it anyway. "Whatever your drama is, it'll look like a walk in the park next to mine anyway."

Spencer looked at him in utter silence for a long moment, apparently torn between wanting to refuse an answer but afraid to, and assessing Seth's face closely, scrutinizing him. Whatever he was wondering about, he seemed to come to a conclusion.

"She's a paranoid schizophrenic. There's a genetic, chemical imbalance in her brain which can only be helped with medication she cannot take by herself. She has been ill since I was a child and she's living in a sanatorium now."

He described his mother's condition calmly, but the hint of pain in his eyes was still visible.

Seth nodded, feeling his own expression soften. He remembered how lost that little boy had looked all those years ago, just as lost as Seth had felt…

"That must have been hard for you," he said, meaning it.

Something flashed across Reid's face too quick for him to decipher, a shadow that now tinted his eyes. "You should know."

xxx

Reid could have slapped himself the second the words fell from his mouth.

What the hell was he doing?

Seth was calm and nonthreatening for once and he had to go and immediately ruin that by aggravating him again?

He didn't know what made him say those words out loud. All he knew was that as glad as he was that Seth was now acting borderline civil, he wouldn't let him take the last bit of his life that was his at the moment, too. He wouldn't let him any further inside his head, wouldn't give him any more ammunition.

Granted, Seth did look sincere in his understanding, but Reid was sure that he cared about his mother as much as he cared about Morgan…not at all. He was just bored, but Reid wouldn't sit here and let him rip open scars inside him just to pass the time. Especially not when Seth's own family was much more to worry about.

Still. He knew Richard was a sore spot and brining him up was just beyond stupid of him. He could
see anger rising up like storm clouds behind Seth's eyes and his fingers clenched around his glass in tension, expecting another outburst. Clearly, his kidnapper wasn't used to taking as well as giving out. Like he hadn't already known that…

"That what you think Richie is?" Seth face was pulled into a frown as he leaned over the table on his elbows, fixating Reid with barely concealed anger, "Chemically imbalanced? It's not his fault he's the way he is."

Reid tried not to cringe under the hard stare directed at him, forcing himself to stay perfectly still. Why the hell hadn't he just kept playing along and told the man what he wanted to know to keep him calm? Now it would all go back to…

"I-" he started but Seth shook his head harshly, cutting him off.

"Do you think we were always like this? No. That might make this easier for you, but things aren't always as black and white as you people like to make it out."

His mouth twisted in a mixture of disdain and something else that almost looked like pain. He kept staring Reid down but made no move to get up or even touch him. "We used to be children too, with a life and a family."

Spencer found himself staring at Seth with wide eyes, utterly surprised by this turn in the conversation. He'd expected threats or insults…not vindications. But Seth wasn't going back to acting as badly as on their first day. He still looked irritated, and his eyes were blazing with far more emotions than he was probably aware of -but he didn't do anything.

It took Reid about three seconds to realize that fact. He tried to find more aggression behind Seth's dark eyes…and found pain instead. Actual emotion.

"What happened?" The words formed on his lips before his brain could catch up.

Seth looked at him intently then, scanning his face…probably for insincerity.

Reid tensed slightly. He'd tried this before, getting Seth to talk about himself in the way he usually got UnSubs to do it. Seth always recognizing his intentions had been a big part of his troubles so far.

This time however, the man actually answered. Maybe it was the situation or the alcohol or whatever was going on with Seth that Reid still didn't understand, maybe it had to do with the fact the he could tell Reid really wanted to know on some level. Whatever it was, his gaze turned from irate to more somber as he spoke.

"Richie and I lived with our parents till I was ten. It wasn't always easy but we got by," he didn't look at Reid as he spoke, busying himself by pouring himself another glass, "Then our father got in trouble with some men he'd borrowed money from. He couldn't pay them back... so they got to my mother. We had to do a closed casket. When we came home from the funeral, my father brought us to bed then put a bullet through his brain, right in our kitchen."

He didn't react to Reid staring at him in horror, continuing, "After that we went from foster home to foster home. I tried to keep an eye out for Richie but it wasn't always enough. What happened had disturbed him. Then one of our foster fathers… the things he did to Richie... he didn't talk for weeks after that..." he was staring into nowhere, like he was talking to himself. "They wouldn't believe us, wouldn't get us out of there. So I took Richie, we packed the stuff we could carry and ran. We have been running since, and we've learned to protect ourselves."

Reid stared at him with wide eyes, gone pale as his brain supplied the mental images to go with the
words. He had no idea why Seth had decided to share this with him—but it was obvious to him that what Seth was referring to was the perfect stressor for both Richard's schizophrenia and behavior.

He wound his arms around himself instinctively, suddenly feeling cold.

It was hard to feel pity for Richard after what he had done, but Reid could definitely understand better now...such experiences could scar a person for life, or as Gideon had once described it, a person's environment could easily pull the trigger to a gun already aimed by psychology.

Despite Seth's words, he still was relatively certain that Richard also had the genetic set up of a serial killer but of course he wasn't stupid enough to want to argue about that. It was very obvious that Seth in a way was just as scarred by what had happened as his brother.

Reid felt his heart beat rise as more and more puzzle pieces came together in front of his mental eye. That story said a lot about Seth as well...

He was still undoubtedly a criminal...but at least he could now see what motivated him now. It wasn't bloodlust but childhood trauma, misplaced loyalty...love....

Reid realized this notion had occurred to him before, but now it was so much clearer somehow, not seeming ridiculous at all. And it changed so much for him as well.

With this information he could believe that Seth might actually have been a decent man under different circumstances and that traces of goodness were within him.

That he wasn't a monster, but human. And wasn't it human to err in ones ways, so easy to take wrong path when pushed onto it and kept on it by a family member one would do anything for?

Richie, as wretched as he was, was all Seth had. And Seth clearly still saw his brother as an innocent youth even twenty years later, someone he would do anything to keep safe and continue to see as a victim even if Richie had long grown into a predator himself.

Reid knew it was entirely inappropriate; still, he suddenly felt a swell of pity and sympathy in his chest as he stared at the man across from him, into a face that ignited fear all over the country but that could have belonged to someone else, someone well adjusted and successful under different circumstances...eyes that would surely be able to make people swoon if it weren't for the darkness deep within...he thought he could see that clearly now that his vision and instincts weren't clouded with fear for once, could see who Seth would have been...

There was a long silence that Reid knew he couldn't possibly fill with anything he could come up with. He wanted to say he was sorry, but feared Seth might get mad over that...still, true to himself he couldn't quite keep silent.

"It's not your fault," he eventually offered cautiously, "That he is...like this. Or what happened. You were just a child, too. You don't have to-"

But Seth cut him off again, his face tight, "He's my flesh and blood. And he's better when he's with me."

Not by much, Reid wanted to say, but bit his lip, knowing they were on thin ice here. It would probably be best to just nod and say nothing...but now that he was seeing something more in Seth he simply couldn't just let it be.

"Yes, but...don't you ever want for it all to stop?" he asked softly. Surely, if this was all true, Seth couldn't want this life. "Don't you want to live a normal life? This doesn't have to be you-"
"Do you want to know what happened to the man who hurt Richie?" Seth asked suddenly, eyes bottomless as he met his gaze. His knuckles were white where he clenched his hands on the table. "I killed him. Shot him dead with his own gun one night when he was coming out of Richie's room. I never regretted that, not once. And if that makes me evil, but then I don't want to be good."

His eyes turned cold again at those words, probably in memory of the man he'd killed and Reid felt a shudder running up his spine. His fingers clenched in the table cloth as he stared at the older man with no words left. He knew he should feel horrified, and he did, but not because of the man's death, but because he knew what a boy must have gone through to do such a thing.

"Seth," he didn't even know what he wanted to say anymore, only the agent inside him rebelling now. He couldn't condone killing, but he also couldn't say that he didn't understand. His vision blurred, and he wasn't sure anymore if it was from the alcohol or all the injustice in the world.

Seth watched his facial expression shift with an odd look in his eyes, something alongside all that pain. "You don't think he deserved to be punished?"

Reid didn't say a word, didn't think he could. But he could read from Seth's face that it didn't matter if he answered verbally, that his silence was answer enough. Seth smirked mirthlessly, nodding to himself as he poured them both another glass.

Reid struggled to find words as Seth pushed his into his hand again but the other shook his head, guessing his thoughts. "Don't. The boy I was might have deserved pity. But that was too long ago to matter."

"It could matter again," Reid didn't know what he was doing anymore, what he was saying. All he knew was that now that he was looking, Seth's eyes were so much deeper, containing so much more soul than he could have even suspected now that he didn't have his shield up. It made them shine in a whole new light, one he didn't dare look away from for fear it might vanish again.

"No", Seth shook his head, his walls coming back up in pieces. He broke eye contact and leaned back in his chair, fishing for a cigarette and lighting it, staring into the darkness.

"That was then, this is now."

xxx

It was in the afternoon when the call reached them. Aaron Hotchner was connected to some local deputy, calling from a village somewhere near the border. He listened with a face that could have been made of stone for a minute, then nodded, "Alright, bring her here, please."

Then he hung up and turned towards the rest of the team. "They found Hazel Martinez. Alive."

He was met with surprised gasps.

"And Reid?" Gideon asked immediately.

Hotch shook his head, "Still missing. But we'll talk to her as soon as she gets here. She might be able to tell us more about the brothers, and what happened to her and Reid."

xxx

"You look tired." Seth voice broke the silence that had lingered between them for almost half an hour now.
Reid blinked heavily as he looked up, shaken up from disorganized thoughts. His vision swam from the movement for a moment, before Seth's face came into focus again. The alcohol was taking effect more and more and he felt dead tired.

After all the stress and running around before, just sitting here in the half dark, surrounded by the low sounds of music and people was apparently a sign for his body to take the rest it needed.

He didn't put too much effort into fighting it. Hazel was safe, Richard wasn't there, and Seth…well Seth hadn't done anything scary in almost half a day…on the contrary, he had pretty much convinced him that he wasn't crazy and plain homicidal, that he'd been right to stop freaking out.

The story he'd been told had shocked him; even though he'd known it roughly already from their files, hearing it from Seth point of view had made it much more real somehow.

But he was glad he had. Now he finally had a basis to judge Seth from, and he understood so much more now. The way Seth defined himself, why he felt the need to act all ruthless and tough under stress but still had kept enough of his humanity to not want to cause any unnecessary destruction. It wasn't perfect of course, he was still in danger –but it made enough sense for Reid understand and that alone was a huge relief.

He remembered he'd been spoken to then and blinked again, focusing on Seth's dark eyes. They had an odd expression to them, but maybe he just thought that because he was so used to seeing them cold and hard. He didn't bother to analyze it anymore, knowing there was always something about Seth he didn't get. All that mattered was that they didn't look threatening or angry or dangerous, that he was okay.

On some level, he knew there was something wrong with those emotions, that he shouldn't start feeling so much less stressed, so much safer just because Seth hadn't acted out against him in the last few hours but he was too tired to think about that then.

"I am," he murmured, lifting his hand to brush his hair to the side but ending up leaning his face on his palm instead, "…Where did everybody go?"

Somehow the tables around them had emptied and the music was so low he could barely hear it anymore.

Seth shrugged, his expression relaxed as well, "Home, I spose. It's late."

Reid nodded numbly, slightly slurring his words as he spoke, "Home. How nice for them. I should…visit my mom…after this…"

It occurred to him that there might not be an after this, but it was relatively easy to push the thought away now, here in the quiet of their armistice.

Seth didn't attempt to remind him either, merely nodding. "She live near Quantico?"

"No. Las Vegas. That's where I was born. She's never left the state, hates flying."

There was no reply for a long moment.

Eventually Reid looked up again, slightly confused. Seth's expression had changed again, into something else he couldn't decipher and that didn't seem to fit the situation, but Reid couldn't muster the energy to feel worried anymore. Instead he thought of his mother… if he did make it out of here alive he would visit her far more often.
Seth kept his eyes trained on Spencer's face even after the young man's attention had drifted away from him again. He was processing what he'd just learned, slowly, unblinking as he tried to make sense of it.

Nevada?

But…that didn't fit…they had met in Kentucky.

His thoughts started racing. Had Spencer gotten something wrong, left out a trip there? It was possible considering his current state.

Still, Seth found himself frozen at the thought that he might not… He stared at Spencer across the table, taking in all the features he knew all too well by now: The sharp angles, softened by honey colored hair and expressive light brown eyes, the lithe frame…

He'd been so sure.

But Spencer didn't seem to remember either, even after two days.

Could he have made a mistake, mistaken his identity? The thought turned his stomach.

No. No, not after all this drama and trouble…that couldn't all have been over something that wasn't even real. He remembered those eyes, so large and full of loneliness and pain, aged before their time…they had been just like Richie's, just like his own…someone who had been where he'd been.

Seth's hand clenched around his glass as he realized just what he was thinking.

What if he had just projected those memories onto Spencer because he did have those same broken eyes that spoke of a lonely troubled childhood while at the same time being as warm and soft as that boy's all those years ago? What if the connection only existed in his head?

He stared at his hostage wordlessly, suddenly unable to feel the ground underneath his feet.
"I thought I was a fool for no one
But oh baby, I'm a fool for you
You caught me under false pretenses
How long before you let me go?
Glaciers melting in the dead of night
You set my soul alight"

xxx

Reductio Ad Absurdum

xxx

Seth stared straight ahead without blinking for almost ten minutes.

He didn't want to believe he'd been wrong. Not after all the self doubt and drama he'd had been through these past days. But it was too late now; the doubt was there and he had to realize that it was very well possible that Spencer Reid wasn't the boy he had met 14 years ago.

He would have thought that the realization would have been welcome, because it would make things so much easier. If there was no connection, there was no longer any reason for him to be held back by memories and scruples, and he could go back to not caring…

His eyes focused on Spencer who was slightly slumped over, strands of hair falling over his drooping eyelids; he seemed lost in his own thoughts, completely oblivious to Seth's.

The older Gecko brother took the opportunity to put his assumptions to a test, to look at his hostage the way he usually looked at things, as something that was outside of a cosmos that only contained him and Richard, as meaningless. He tried to think of possibly breaking those thin, pale fingers, of yanking at those soft locks to force Spencer's head back as he pressed a knife or gun to a slender throat, of putting a bullet right between those eyes…

Those eyes which had a habit of burning right into his soul, which somehow managed to break the ice that enclosed his being so tightly, those eyes which had just minutes ago looked at him with true empathy for his fate after everything that he'd put their owner through today.

The thought of seeing them break, of seeing the light fading from them made him feel sick instantly, in a way he usually only experienced upon discovering one of his brother's bloody screw ups.

Seth didn't have to strain himself any further to know that nothing had changed. He felt just like he always did when looking at Spencer, completely beside himself.

A swell of almost panic overcame him at that. Damnit, how could that be? How could it be that once something that had been the foundation of a whole house of cards had broken away, that the rest of the house remained standing?

"Actually," Spencer's voice broke through his thoughts, slightly slurred, "It's only logical that a
wrong premise can lead to a true conclusion, just not the other way around."

Seth stared at the young man, realizing that he must have spoken the last sentence out loud. Logical? How the fuck was that logical? Why did he still feel-

He pushed to his feet abruptly, suddenly afraid to finish his train of thought. Instead, he walked around the table, trying to focus on the fact that they should really take cover in the room again. To think, Vampires, cops, danger…not...that...

"It's time to go back," he said, a little more brusquely than necessary maybe.

When Reid took too long to understand it was meant as a command, he reached out to pull him up by his arm, impatient. Spencer swayed dangerously, the sudden movement too much to compensate for in his alcohol induced state. Before he was all the way up, he staggered, blindly reaching for the table to steady himself and missing.

Seth caught him instinctively, suddenly finding himself with his arms full of the thin agent. Reid gasped, instinctively grabbing a hold of his suit clad arms to keep from falling. He attempted to steady himself, only to stagger again almost immediately, completely out of balance. Without thinking, Seth grabbed hold of him more firmly, keeping him upright.

The sudden proximity was enough to immediately divert his thoughts completely, leaving him soley focussed on the lithe frame in his arms, so close that their chests were touching and he could feel Spencer's hair and breath against his neck. His own breath caught at the sensation, and suddenly he felt hot. His brain and body were betraying him, both short circuited effectively, just like the last time they had been this close...

Spencer strained against his grip just then, hands still clutched in Seth's suit even as he tried to find his stand. The useless attempt to shake him off reminded Seth that the last time they had been this close he had held a knife to the kid's throat, Spencer shaking against him, tense with fear and trying to get away...

Right now, he wasn't putting nearly as much effort into getting away but Seth was pretty sure that that was either because Spencer was far too tired and intoxicated to even make the connection Seth Gecko-dangerous-too close anymore, or because he simply couldn't act upon it properly.

Briefly, he allowed himself to feel rotten about that incendent and its consequences - but even that didn't do much to distract him from the fact that his heart was hammering inside his chest, pumping hot blood through his veins, making him feel dizzy. Feeling cpressed against him like this...it suddenly felt so right. So nessecary. Like he would suffocate if it were to stop.

His fingers flexed around the kid's arms as he held him upright, inadvertently pulling him closer still till there was virtually no room left between them. He wanted…wanted…to pull Spencer closer and not let go until he realized nothing bad would happen to him…until he would want to be this close to him, closer still… He wanted to keep feeling that warm skin underneath his fingers, more and more of it, exploring, tasting it-

"Let me go-"

He was shaken out of his thoughts when Spencer twisted in his grip again, voice tight and trembling. Seth blinked, looking down to find his hostage dazed but tense as he tried to pull away from him. His grip tightened instinctively for a moment and Spencer winced, fear flashing in his eyes for a split second. Seth frowned but didn't let go. Because Spencer would fall if he did and having him break something would be a liablitly, he told himself, unwilling to admit how much he wanted to just keep
The only thing bothering was Spencer tensing in his arms again, traces of misery and desperation creeping into his expression as he realized he had no chance of untangling himself. Seth grimaced. Drunk or not, he realized, a repetition of today's éclat in the phone booth would of course be greatly upsetting...

"It's okay," he found himself saying, surprised by his own soft tone of voice.

He kept his grip just steady enough to be supporting, smoothing one hand over Spencer's arm reassuringly. It was okay. He didn't have a knife now. And he certainly wasn't going to use one.

Unfortunately, he'd done everything so far to not let Spencer in on that particular thought process, so really it was no surprise that he wasn't believed. The young man pulled away again, more forcibly this time and Seth made himself let go -just long enough to throw one strong arm around his waist when his legs gave out under him. This time, Spencer ended up pressed even closer against him, leaning against him with almost his full weight. Seth briefly closed his eyes as he felt Spencer's breath hitching, body tensing even further against his in apprehension.

"It's fine," he kept his voice as steady as his grip, trying to sound reassuring somehow, "I've got you."

He waited, and really, Spencer stopped squirming after a few moments, giving up an unwinnable fight.

"I would think…that's mutually…exclusive…"  

There was that bitterness again, thinly veiled only by the kid's obvious exhaustion. The alcohol was clearly loosening his tongue.

Seth chose not to answer, just as he chose not to examine the reaction those words caused inside him. Just for a second he had forgotten how things really were. His troubles, his newest doubts, the fact that Reid had every reason to not want to be too close to him… those issues were still there though, standing between them, made obvious by what was happening.

His jaw tightened, tense. What had he thought, really? That a couple of drinks and a few empathetic words would somehow magically erase everything that had happened between them? That what he was feeling would ever in any way be appropriate...or reciprocated?

Suddenly, Seth felt cold when he had been hot just seconds ago. Yes, what the hell was he thinking?

He took a step back, bringing as much distance as possible between them without losing his grip, looking at the door instead of those eyes.

"Come on, we're going back to the room."

Spencer shook his head, eyelids drooping, "I don't want…to…"

Seth's fingers flexed around slender arms again for a short moment before he got himself under control; then he nodded, answering more steadily but just as quietly, jaw tight.

"I know. Let's go."

x
Somehow they made it back to the motel room.

Seth locked the door behind them, keeping on arm wrapped tightly around Reid's waist to keep him on his feet. The young man may have wanted to protest some more, or even walk on his own, but was far too out of it for either at this point. Spencer was still tense against him, getting worse the closer they came to their room and Seth, after having worked through feeling miserable, was beginning to be annoyed by that.

Yes, sure. He had threatened the kid a couple of times...but he had been reasonable for hours now, he had shown a more human side of himself, and he had let Reid know it wouldn't happen again unless nessecary. So why couldn't the kid just fucking relax already? He wasn't Richard after all…

They made it over to the bed and in the attempt to get the kid onto the bed at least somewhat elegantly, Seth ended up being pulled down as well, having to brace himself with his hands on either side of his hostage as Spencer sank backwards into the mattress, clearly losing to his on coming nausea and dizziness. He ended up much too close, in a pose that was all sorts of suggestive to him, and with Spencer once again staring up at him like a mouse trapped in front of a snake.

His eyes were shining like glass in the moonlight from the street, beautiful and drawing him in despite their expression and Seth found himself unable to move away, simply staring down at him as a mess of emotions warred inside him.

His right hand, pressed into the pillow, was close enough to Spencer's face that he could feel strands of hair between his fingers; he found himself itching to move it just a little, to just touch...to trace those sharp cheekbones and slightly parted lips, the pale skin stretching over a prominent collarbone. He did move just minimally, testingly maybe, the tips of his fingers brushing the side of Reid's neck just barely. He felt the kid shudder at the touch in the same moment that his eyes were drawn to a dark line on his neck, just by his fingers, the mark left there by first Richard and then him pressing a knife against the tender skin.

Spencer flinched, his breath hitching fearfully; he tried to pull away again, his free hand coming up to close around Seth's wrist. He looked up at him with wide, unfocused eyes, suddenly terribly vulnerable again and Seth knew that no matter his demeanor, the terrifying incident in the phone booth had been on his mind till now. That despite everything, he was still expecting something awful to happen.

Seth frowned, trying to tell himself it was his own fault that it was like this. There was nothing he could do about it but prove those fears unnecessary.

Because, attraction or not, he was not like Richard. In any way.

And yet...the image of his brother staring at Reid, that look in his eyes, just hours before he'd found them both on the floor of the motel room, a knife to Reid's throat...that image now threatened to blend with other pictures in his mind. Just how was he different from Richie when he also…?

No. No, that wasn't the same. He would never... except, maybe...just with the way the kid looked so...delectable like this...

He gulped, forcing the thought away immediately. Hell no. How the fuck was he supposed to convince Spencer that he was going to be safe with him for the night, if he couldn't even convince himself?

He pulled his hand away, and then, realizing he had been staring into Spencer's eyes with an intensity that must be disturbing given their close proximity, he averted his gaze, backing up some.
Professional. Whatever happened to being professional?

God, he needed some sleep...to not think for a while. As it was, he wouldn't come to a productive conclusion anyway now.

He looked around, finding Reid's handcuffs on the bedside table and reaching for them. As expected, Spencer tensed again the second Seth took hold of one of his wrists and pushed it into the pillow over his head, securing it to the headboard swiftly. Spencer's breath hitched in alarm as he pulled at the restraining cuffs. He struggled to get up but Seth pushed him back down into the pillows with one hand on his shoulder.

He knew this wasn't ideal, but it was necessary.

"Relax," he murmured, smoothing his fingers over the wrist in his grasp, "Just making sure you'll still be here in the morning. Go to sleep."

For a second he thought Reid do just the opposite, fight, scream maybe...the way he looked at him was just too frightened. He didn't move, just holding the kid's eyes with what he hoped was a calm, reassuring expression, trying not to think about what he'd do if this went out of hand...

It seemed to take forever, both of them staring into each other's eyes intently, but eventually Spencer nodded minimally, sinking back down into the mattress. Seth smiled slightly as he pulled away, giving the kid some room to breathe. He got up and walked around the bed, shrugging off his jacket before lying down on his side.

He could feel Spencer staring at him in the dark, unmoving, breaths flat and unsteady. He didn't move though, just staring at the ceiling for God knew how many minutes it took for Spencer to come to the conclusion that he wasn't going to suddenly pounce. Eventually, just as exhaustion was starting to lull Seth to sleep, the kid spoke.

"Why...did you tell me...?" Spencer's voice was barely more than a whisper in the dark, hushed, uncertain. His breathing had evened out somewhat and Seth figured he was back to being calmer again...feeling safe enough to think about other things. Like their conversation earlier.

Seth turned his head to look at the kid's face in the shadows, but hesitated to answer. He knew what Reid was asking about: Why had he told him that story of his youth? In all honesty, he wasn't too sure why he had done it...he had just felt like explaining might change something...

"I wanted...wanted you...to stop looking at me like..." Seth didn't finish his sentence, his voice suddenly gone.

He watched in the dark as Reid's eye lids sank again and again, too heavy to stay open. He was pretty sure that what he'd just said hadn't been heard and he was glad for it.

He watched as sleep claimed Spencer's unwilling mind, tension finally fully draining from his slender frame. After a moment he stretched out on the far side of the bed, pulling the covers over himself.

His thoughts were still in chaos, too much on his mind to properly process.

For a brief period there in the bar he'd actually felt remotely good, because Reid hadn't acted like he was a complete psycho, because they had seemingly bonded over their pasts, because seeing the kid constantly distressed by his presence had been starting to distress him, which in turn had distressed him even more...

And then...the realization that he might have confused the kid with someone else and all the
uncertainty that came with that had so far done virtually nothing about those feelings. No, he still felt torn between frustration about his own feelings as well as Reid's behavior, the disturbing feeling of protectiveness he felt coming on everytime he looked at the kid, and worst of all, the desire that he felt and which completely contradicted both of the other feelings. It had been building slowly, suppressed purposefully at first -but now he couldn't do that anymore, couldn't ignore it...

Now it was sweltering inside him, burning in a way that definitely was in no way caused by or connected to their possible meeting 14 years ago. No, that at least he was sure was all Reid...

He glanced over at Reid again, taking in the way his eyelashes cast shadows on his cheeks, the soft fall of his hair caressing his face and neck. He reached out before he knew what he was doing, running his fingertips over a soft cheek. It felt like velvet to his touch, startlingly delicate. His fingers twitched, eager to take a firmer hold; he wasn't used to touching anyone with gentleness or care. Grabbing people generally worked rather well for him.

He had never worried about breaking anything before. Reid though looked frail enough to shatter like glass under his fingers. It made him want to be careful, gentle…his thumb brushed just past slightly opened lips, igniting a soft sigh…

It was only then that he realized how little space there was left between their faces.

Seth drew back quickly, retreating back to his side of the bed. What the hell was he doing? He shouldn't be doing this, shouldn't take advantage…More so, he shouldn't tempt himself into doing something he'd certainly regret. Inwardly, he cursed the fact that he was now trapped in this small room, in the same bed with this current temptation right next to him. Great job, really.

Think about tomorrow. The FBI, the vampires, Richie...

He tried to, hard, but in the end his eyes stayed focussed on the soft rise and fall of the youth's chest, the way he was slightly curled in on himself…and there it was again, that feeling, that strange mix of instant physical longing and some other, unfamiliar emotion...

It was a shadow of what he'd felt when he was seventeen, he realized, a part of him awakenign that had been buried for forever and that he had been sure had died. And yet, there it was, like a tiny drop of flame in midst of the vast mass of black that was his being, his soul. Tiny, weak, and yet somehow managing to reach every last corner inside him, setting his soul alight.

Seth stared in the dark, feeling himself getting lost in the experiecne, enraptured and frightened by it at the same time. He didn't know how, but this kid brought out something in him he hadn't know even still existed, something he hadn't realized he'd missed until it was back with him again.

It was unsettling to feel anything other than anger, frustration or exhaution after all these years...but it didn't feel entirely bad. And staring down at Spencer's delicate features underneath he moonlight, he would go so far as to say that once he got used to it again, it would feel great.

But he wouldn't, wouldn't he?

There was only one more day and all of this would be over, one way or another. This change he was feeling, he was sure it was because of Spencer and it would stop once he was gone. He would go back to being dark and cold inside again...

Unless...

He scoffed drily. What a ridiculous thought. He couldn't take Spencer with him where he was going, if only because the kid certainly didn't want to go anywhere with him. He probably wouldn't be able
to change enough for that to happen ever; it was too late for him to be awarded with any sort of light.

There was no room for anyone else between him and Richard, he knew that. There were only tears and blood and death.

And Spencer deserved neither of those.

He was just a kid, unfortunately having gotten caught up in the sick joke that was Seth's life. If he stayed with him any longer he would die for sure, either suddenly and brutally, or piece by piece over time.

Seth closed his eyes, trying to shake the grim thoughts that were starting to haunt him. He wouldn't let that happen, any of it. For once in his life he'd be the better man.

This would end tomorrow. Tomorrow, however the day might turn out, would be the last day he'd ever see Spencer Reid. With any luck, the kid would go home, get counseling and recover after a few months of jumpiness and very little sleep.

He'd have nightmares for sure, about guns and knives and Richard. He'd have nightmares about Seth, too, he knew. But it would be over and he'd have a change to get over it, too forget.

Seth would make sure of that. No matter how hard it would be on him.

xxx

Hazel Martinez looked a mess as she sunk down into a plastic chair in the BAU's makeshift office. Her makeup was all over her face and her hair was tangled into wild knots. Elle sat across from her slowly, giving the young woman an empathetic look.

"Hazel, my name is Elle Greenaway. I'm with the Behavioral Analysis Unit."

They had kept Hotch and Gideon as well as other men at a distance for now, not sure if there was reason but not wanting to risk the girl having a panic attack. They'd been assured she wasn't physically hurt, but she hadn't talked much either so far…

"I'm on the same team as Spencer Reid. He was with you when you were kidnapped, wasn't he? Can you tell me what happened after you left the bank?"

The girl nodded shakily.

"They took us to a motel, they said they wouldn't hurt us if we cooperated…but when Dr. Reid didn't tell him what he wanted to know, he just changed and became really brutal. He put a gun to my head and…" Her voice cracked, tears filling her eyes.

"It's okay," Elle said softly, "take your time."

"Dr. Reid said he would do whatever Seth wanted, just to leave me alone. He gave them information and then they let us sleep. The next day, Seth went out and left us with his brother…I was in the other room but I heard…"

"What?"

She swallowed hard, picking at her sleeves nervously, "…He…Richard…attacked him. Threw him to the ground and choked him…I think he…was going to…"

She broke off, her voice cracking. Elle had gone pale, the worst case scenario on her mind.
"But then Seth came back and there was a lot of yelling, more fighting. Then they were gone and I was alone with Richard. I was so frightened…but he just ignored me for hours…until they called us. I talked to Dr. Reid, then they let me go."

Elle could barely hide the surprise on her face at that, "Do you know why?"

A shaking of head.

"What did he say where he was? What was happening? Did he sound like he was hurt?"

"I don't know. He sounded…I don't know, desperate, panicked. I think Seth was threatening him."

Elle felt her stomach turn, "With what?"

But Hazel just shook her head, unable to continue on. Eventually Elle thanked her and left the room, joining Hotch behind the door.

"I'm fearing the worst," she shook her head desperately, looking sick, "those men are the worst kind. I think Hazel was let go because Reid made some sort of deal…a sacrifice on his part. We need to find him now."

"We're doing all we can," Hotch frowned, "but without any more leads we have no way of knowing where he is right now."

He turned to stare at the info board in front of him marking the possible route of the Gecko brothers through Mexico along with pictures taken of them from security cameras.

The team was busy swarming around him in their makeshift office but they were getting nowhere. There was no use searching every tiny village in Mexico; they would never find them that way.

No, if they were going to get Reid back it would have to be during the exchange. But that was high risk…

He looked around at the tired faces of his colleagues; they were all at their limits. They had barely slept in days, sick with worry about Reid.

Now, with what Hazel had told them, they worried even more. Reid had been well enough to talk the day before, but who knew what was happening to him right now?

The uncertainty was what hit them worst of all, Elle and Morgan pale with dread that Seth might make due on his threats, Gideon and he worried Reid might die from injuries until they got to him.

He sighed when the phone rang.

Morgan was calling for the tenth time today asking about how far they'd gotten. He'd been forced to be transported back to Quantico the night before where they could take proper care of him, but he'd fought the decision despite his weak state. JJ had gone back with him and he was sure Garcia would welcome them at the airport.

Hotch was staring at a picture of Seth Gecko, trying to plan the best way to act during the exchange, to predict the man's plans and reactions when Gideon stormed in, turning on the TV by the wall.

"Look at this," he insisted. They both turned around quickly.

The local news were reporting on what seemed like a crime spree; the reporter was speaking Spanish but they saw the pictures of people on the screen.
"They're saying they all vanished over the past week without a trace," Elle translated, "Most of them were truckers or tourists which is why it took a while for them to be reported missing but they all disappeared in this area."

"Do you think it has to do with our case? Why would the Gecko brothers kidnap even more people?"

"It's not them," said a voice from the door suddenly, and they all looked up in surprise to find an officer escorting yet another young woman in their direction.

She had long light brown hair and a pretty face, but there seemed something wrong with her eyes. They had an ardor to them that wouldn't go with the golden crucifix around her neck.

She walked over to Hotch and extended a hand: "My name is Kate Fuller. I understand you're looking for Seth and Richie?"

xxx

The remains of the BAU team stared in surprise at the girl in front of them who had introduced herself as one Kate Fuller.

She looked rather uncomfortable and oddly out of place in her cargo pants and oversized t-shirt but she walked towards them with determination, clearly set on talking to them.

"Fuller?" Elle asked instead of a greeting, "Wasn't that name in our files somewhere?"

"Probably not," Kate shook her head before anyone else could answer, "I met Seth and Richie about a week ago and haven't told anyone about it so far. There have been missing person reports on the news though for me and my family."

Right. Fuller. A family that had fallen off the grid after a road trip through Texas last week. They had been reported missing by friends back home who hadn't heard from them –but there hadn't been a single trace of them.

Now, Hotch realized that there could be a connection to their case. Could Richard and Seth have kidnapped them? Was it possible that he was standing in front of the possible sole witness to have escaped their UnSubs?

"Ms Fuller, I'm SSA Aaron Hotchner," he stepped forward and led the girl towards his desk so she could take a seat, "Why don't you start at the beginning and then tell us why you think you can help us."

Kate nodded, looking grim as she began, "So, my dad, my brother and I, we were on a cross-country trip through Texas in our motor home till last week. We'd been on the road for days and my dad wanted to sleep in a real bed for once so we stopped at a motel near the Mexican border. We had barely gotten to our rooms when two men barged in with guns and took us hostage. They said they needed us to get them over the border into Mexico."

Hotch felt his heart suddenly racing. He'd been right. They had a lead.

"A motor home…that's how they passed the border undetected," Gideon deducted, immediately making the same connection as Hotch, "Maybe they're still using it and that's why we could detect them!"

But Kate shook her head, shooting him down, "No, I have it."
While Gideon looked disappointed, Hotch leaned forward urging her to continue with her story.

"Yeah, well their names were Seth and Richie," Kate pointed at the mug shots on the desk, "They said they would let us go once the night was over… but we had to stay at this bar with them until their contact would pick them up."

A shadow fell over her face, making it easy for them to guess what must have happened and why this underage girl was in Mexico all by herself now.

"But they didn't keep their promise?" Elle asked softly, trying not to upset her.

Kate's head shot up to glare at her with sudden anger, like she had insulted someone or something, "I'm here, aren't I?"

Seeing Elle's shocked expression, Kate's anger quickly crumbled and she looked somewhat guilty, "Sorry, it's just…Seth is not a bad guy, you know…he did let me go in the morning… and he would have let my dad and Scott go too if not for…"

She broke off, her expression changing unnaturally quickly once again; she looked down and picked at her nails.

"What?" Hotch asked as gently as he could despite the urgency, "What happened?"

When Kate looked up again she looked a little less sane than she had just seconds ago, her eyes shining, "Ok, people, look this is gonna sound real crazy but I swear to god it's the truth... The bar we went into…it was full of vampires. They tried to kill us, but we fought them off together. We managed to kill some of them but…my family, they died…"

There was along moment of surprised silence. Neither agent did quite know what to say. Had that girl just said vampires?

"The Gecko brothers killed them?" Elle asked after a moment of silence, probing carefully.

"No, weren't you listening?" Kate snapped, jumping to her feet, "Vampires bit them! They turned into monsters and we had to kill them, too! My dad made me promise I would!"

Her eyes filled with tears as she sunk back down into her chair, not looking at them anymore. "Afterwards we ran outside again before they could lock us in and hid in the motor home until the sun came up."

They all stared at her in astonished silence. She really did seem to mean what she was saying. Hotch felt his heart sink.

That girl clearly suffered from a major psychotic break, how else could she believe what she was saying?

He tried to hide his disappointment and anxiety, but could clearly see it on the faces of his colleagues. Not only was this girl clearly not a reliable witness –no, she was more evidence of what happened to people who had been abducted by the Gecko brothers. He didn't want to know what those men must have done to her to cause that kind of mental response…

Kate looked at him out of big disappointed eyes, wrapping her arms around herself protectively, "You don't believe me, do you?"

"It's kind of a lot to take in," Hotch told her carefully, face blank.
"Well, it's the truth," Kate said stubbornly, "I wasn't gonna say anything but I saw the missing people on TV and they all vanished real close to that bar...I think...maybe because Seth and Richie killed some of them, the vampires might have left the bar and be out for revenge...you know, looking for them and eating and turning the people on their way."

While Hotch mentally added finding a good clinic for the girl to his to-do list, Gideon suddenly seemed interested, "Wait a minute, Hotch. Ms, do you remember where that bar is?"

Kate shrugged, wary of his sudden interest, "Sure, I drove from there to here."

"Can you lead us there maybe?"

"Hell, no!" she shook her head, looking horrified, "I can tell you how to get there but I'm not ever going back there! I just told you so you're prepared. If your colleague is with Seth and Richie, he might be in danger, too."

She frowned when no one rewarded her with an answer to that statement and didn't say any more. As Elle led her away to get her statement on paper, Hotch shot Gideon a worried glance.

"You don't really believe what she said, do you? She's obviously been severely traumatized."

"Of course not," Gideon told him, "But that doesn't mean the bar can't exist. We should go check it out. There might not have been vampires but Seth and Richie could have been seen there. Maybe that will help us find Reid sooner."

Hotch nodded grimly, "Fine. But it might take us hours to get there. The exchange is supposed to be in the morning."

"We'll bring the money now and leave for the rendezvous point as soon as we've inspected the crime scene. Unless we get lucky and the bar is where they are hiding again. We should bring some back up, just in case."

Hotch sighed as they got ready for the long ride, mirroring Gideon's worried expression, "Let's just pray they haven't done to Reid whatever they did to that poor girl."

xxx

When Seth opened his eyes he was lying on the motel bed still, but instead of darkness there was brilliant light shining through the windows, illuminating every corner of the room. It was warm and quiet all around, nothing disturbing the comfortable silence.

He sat up, watching the dust mites dancing before his eyes, for a moment stunned by how calm and relaxed he felt. He didn't remember the last time he'd woken up to an environment so peaceful and quiet...

Why not?

It took him a moment to remember.

Because of Richard, because of enemies out to kill them, because they were on the run...

A small shock ran through him at that thought.

On the run.

The FBI.
Hostages.

Spencer.

His eyes flew open as he remembered and his head snapped around to stare at the other side of the bed. It was empty, just like the rest of the room. Spencer was gone.

Seth jumped off the bed, immediately panicking - until a sound from the bathroom made him spin around. Pulse racing he stalked towards the room and ripped the door open anxiously. More light blinded him for a second, but then he made out the figure standing in the middle of the room, back turned to him.

At the sound of the door, Spencer turned around, blinking at him in surprise. He pushed an errant strand of wavy hair behind his ear as he stepped closer, a questioning look in his eyes.

"Seth? What's wrong?"

Seth blinked, too confused to act for a moment.

What…?

Spencer's voice, slightly worried, sounded familiar and yet different; it was warmer, lighter, not sounding scared or reluctant in the least. He looked different too, an expression on his face that he had never had when looking at Seth, surprised, yes, but not in the least bit anxious, but rather trusting…

Something was off, a little voice in the back of his head was telling him. It was drowned out by the blood rushing loudly through his ears, by the beating of his heart. Seeing Spencer like this-

Seth had crossed the distance between them before he knew it, reaching out and pulling the young man into his arms to hold him tightly. Spencer gasped softly at the sudden action but didn't resist, sinking against Seth's chest, warm and real and pliant.

Seth stared with fascination into Spencer's beautiful eyes, stunned by how the sunlight reflected in them made them sparkle and his whole face shine. God, he was so…

Entranced, he reached up to cup Spencer's face, feeling soft skin under his fingers.

He expected the young man to pull away now at the latest, but there was not even a trace of reluctance or fear on his face as he looked up at him, completely open and amiable. Seth fingers wound themselves into long hair of their own volition somehow, seeking more contact, while his thumb gently traced a prominent cheek bone. A smile tugged at Spencer's lips as he closed his eyes and leaned into the touch, sighing softly.

The sight was enough to undo Seth. Unable to control himself any longer, he pulled the young man close by the back of his head, bringing their lips together hotly, urgently.

He was half convinced it would all just vanish then, or that Spencer would pull away from him, shocked, repulsed.

Neither happened though, nothing changed or broke.

Instead, Spencer melted into his embrace, pressing closer as he returned the kiss enthusiastically, moaning softly into his mouth. Seth groaned, his grip tightening in Spencer's hair. The sensation of the kiss, of feeling Spencer in his embrace, so close, effectively eviscerated all other thoughts. Seth
wasn't prepared for the onslaught of emotion, for how with one simple touch everything around them seemed to fall away, leaving only heat and endorphins running through his body.

He pulled Spencer closer, deepening their contact, greedy for more, enveloped by his warmth, his scent, his noises. This was perfect…

"God, thank God," he tore himself away from that sweet mouth to kiss his temple, his neck, "I thought you were gone."

"I'm not going to leave, Seth," Spencer leaned back slightly so that he could look at him, his head cradled in Seth's large hand. His eyes were eternally deep and beautiful as he looked up at him from under lowered lashes. "How could I?"

For a moment, Seth just stared in confusion, then Spencer moved to bring up his arms between them -and Seth caught sight of the heavy metal handcuffs around his wrists.

Shocked, his head snapped up, only to find himself confronted with cuts and tears, bruises and bloodstains suddenly covering the young man in his arms. There were dark shadows under his eyes, more blood on his lips and neck. Blood on his shirt, on his pants…

"Why so surprised, Seth?" he asked softly, "You're the one who did this."

Seth woke with a start, his heart racing.

He gasped, immediately feeling his clothes sticking to his skin uncomfortably as he squinted against the bright morning sun. A dream…just a dream…

He quickly sat up and looked around the room. There was nothing out of the ordinary; Spencer lay motionlessly by his side, blood free and sleeping deeply. Seth sighed, immensely relieved to find that he hadn't woken up.

Taking a deep breath, he ran a sweaty palm over his face, trying to control his breathing, the impressions of his dream still tangible. It had been so real he could still feel his skin tingle…could still feel the horror…

His eyes fell on Spencer, finally relaxed in sleep, curled up slightly and completely oblivious. The sight immediately brought back the matter of his dreams.

Fuck. Now there he had it. Even his subconscious was now alerting him to the fact that something was off. Not even in sleep he could escape these…feelings anymore.

He groaned softly, rubbing a hand over his face.

There was no way around admitting how right it had felt, how exhilarating, to have Spencer be affectionate towards him, to have him relaxed and willing in his arms… He could still feel the evidence of his excitement physically right now.

Maybe that was the most disturbing part, considering how terribly nightmarish that last part of the dream had been. All that blood, those marks on that lithe body… he had looked like one of Richard's victims after he was through with them.

But it hadn't been Richard in the dream. It had been him.

His gaze wandered over the still form next to him. Reid was lying on his side, the blanket tangled around his legs. He had one arm under his head since he couldn't move it too much and the other
curled around his stomach. Parts of his shirt had ridden up to expose his lower back and hipbones, a
sight that threatened to again divert Seth's thoughts—until he noticed what looked like frayed
shadows on the pale skin.

Seth frowned, looking closer.

There was a large one on his ribs, then several parallel ones on his upper arms…

With an ill feeling he reached out, gingerly matching them with his fingers. He pulled his hand back
quickly, realizing they were bruises he had caused. Just like the one on his cheek bone, or the ones
around his wrists…

Damn, he had really grabbed him that hard?

For the first time in years, Seth actually found himself squicked by the sight of wounds he'd left. He
knew he wasn't nearly as bad as Richard tended to be, but he could in no way claim that he didn't
often become violent with people. He never gave it a second thought.

This though…that ill feeling at the bottom of his stomach wouldn't vanish, even as he looked away.
This…it being Spencer…it didn't feel right. Despite his mind, the kid was physically so delicate, so
easily breakable…he shouldn't be touched like that. He deserved to be taken care with…to be
touched just right-

Seth shook his head harshly. He couldn't believe himself for thinking about that just seconds after…

He got off the bed quickly and quietly and walked over to the bathroom, making sure Spencer
remained asleep before he pulled the door closed behind him.

In the bathroom he quickly discarded his clothes and turned the water on cold. He hissed when it
made contact with his skin but it served its purpose, helping his body relax and his mind become
clear for a while. He closed his eyes and breathed slowly, trying to ignore both the unwelcome ill
feeling in his gut and the heat inappropriately coiling right beside it. God, he was truly fucked.

I think I'm drowning
Asphyxiated

I wanna break this spell
That you've created

He had so much already to worry about. Fucking vampires, Richie, the cops, the exchange…soft lips
pulled into an innocent smile, light hair grazing his hot skin…

As much as he tried, he couldn't shake the sudden mental image of having Spencer in his arms again,
right now, of pushing him back against the wet tiles and press up against him until there was no more
room left between them, of sliding his hands over his lithe body and making him shiver, of grabbing
a handful of that hair and pulling his head back to expose a slender throat to his lips and teeth…of
feeling Spencer gasp against his lips as he claimed his mouth…

Oh, holy fucking hell.

He couldn't stop. Thinking. About it.

Seth cursed under his breath. How the hell was this happening to him?

He couldn't remember ever having a reaction this strong to one single person.
Certainly similar ones that were related to the quality or nature of his fantasies—but never anything that derived its intensity from the fact that it was a certain person in those fantasies. Lovers, like everything, were hardly ever more than one time things with him, easily replaceable, their faces forgotten soon if even memorized at all. But this, the thought alone of making Spencer shiver at his touch, of hearing him gasp because of him…it was enough to make him dizzy with desire.

You're something beautiful
A contradiction

I wanna play the game
I want the friction

He cursed as he braced himself against the cold tiles, willing his body to stop betraying his mind as the cold water chilled every part of his body except the one it was supposed to. Goddamn it. Yesterday had been bad, but now…it was like the kid had slowly clawed his way into Seth's core, bit by bit, until there was nothing else he could think about anymore…until he didn't recognize himself anymore.

How did it come to this?

He had to stop this. He was losing his mind, slowly but surely growing obsessed with someone who by definition shouldn't matter to him at all. Wanting, caring… that wasn't him.

Again, his mind flashed back to how it had felt, a scenario in which Spencer was his, willingly, lovingly, where he didn't have to bruise him to keep him by his side. He had wanted that so much in his dream, it had felt so incredible…

He shook his head, not daring to allow the question if he might still want it now.

No, that dream had also shown him reality. Spencer was only with him because he was forcing him to. After everything, he would never want to be close to him in any way…

And he was right of course.

Resigned, Seth got out of the shower and got redressed. He frowned at his worn pants but put them back on in lack of an alternative, leaving his vest and suit to get some air by the window. He really needed to get a change of clothes once they got to El Ray.

No, what he really needed to do was to stop obsessing about this, and to control himself instead.

Just one more day. One more day and he wouldn't have the kid as a constant reminder of how fucked he was anymore.

Just one.

--------------------------------------------------------------------------------

Reid woke to the noise of the shower running.

He blinked, disoriented at first, only to snap to awareness when he remembered he was still amidst his own personal hostage drama. He shot up immediately, only to almost dislocate his arm when the handcuffs wouldn't give and to feel his head explode in agony. He groaned, grimacing as he stillled and pressed a hand to his eyes.

Right, yesterday….the bar, tequila…Seth, the story…that odd moment when he'd actually felt
sympathy for his own kidnapper…the hazy memory of what had happened afterwards…

He paled at the memory. Quickly, he looked around, not seeing Seth anywhere and concluding that he must be in the bathroom. Glad that he had at least some time to compose himself he sank back against the headrest, closing his eyes.

God, how stupid could he have been to drink that much yesterday? In his situation? He shuddered at the thought of all the ways that could have gone wrong.

It hadn't though.

He couldn't help but linger on that.

He was still in one piece. All Seth had done was give him alcohol for his nerves, talk, listen, and then put him to bed…

Spencer couldn't help but let out a short, not entirely sane laugh at the thought. Of all the murderous fugitives with homicidal, sadistic brothers who could have kidnapped him—he had gotten the one who entertained the idea of moral standards? It seemed like a joke next to all the cases he'd lived through with the BAU.

And yet, here he was, far from Richie and in one piece.

Calming down a little, he thought about everything he'd come to learn yesterday, fitting more puzzle pieces into the profile in his head.

It looked like he really could start believing Seth when he said he wouldn't hurt him unnecessarily or for fun even. If he wanted anything other than getting his money and his trip to Mexico, he could have taken it a dozen times by now.

Instead, he had for some reason morphed into an actual person, growing less and less cold and aggressive for some reason the more it wore Reid down. By the end of the night yesterday, he had gotten Reid to completely rethink the person across the table. Even sober, Reid couldn't help but still feel a sense of sympathy for the child his abductor had once surely been, and traces of which clearly still resided within Seth buried under all that callousness and ardor.

Two days ago, had been convinced the man was a monster just like his brother, but now…

Reid shook his head, suddenly worried by his own thoughts.

Yes, he now knew Seth's background and motives, and he believed that what the man had told him was true—but that didn't excuse what he had done, what he did every day in the present. He had still shot Morgan (not killed him), kidnapped and threatened innocents (Hazel was free) and had threatened Reid personally severely (only threatened, he'd never followed through)…

Reid groaned in frustration. Great, now his mind was starting to go. Perfect timing.

He needed to keep a clear head to get through this. He might be almost sure now that he could get out of this relatively unscathed if anything went wrong…but he would be stupid to stop worrying now. Even with everything he'd come to understand about Seth yesterday, there were still gaps in the profile he couldn't fill, inconsistencies that might be potential risk factors…

Before he could think any further, there was a noise in the bathroom and the door opened. Reid looked up, slightly startled, but surprisingly, for once not feeling instant fear at the thought of seeing Seth. In fact, apart from the chaos in his head, he was feeling relatively relaxed. It seemed that the
fact that he had made it through the entire night unscathed had subconsciously convinced his brain that he would be fine now as well.

Seth walked out of the bathroom then, fresh from the shower and wearing nothing but his black pants. Reid blinked at the unexpected sight, finding his eyes inevitably drawn to the man's bare, muscled chest, the low fit of his pants...

Wow.

"Got a headache?" Reid's eyes snapped up to meet Seth's when the man spoke.

"Uh, yeah," he murmured.

Had he actually just...?

Seth chuckled slightly at his answer, already walking over to the desk to pick up his shoes, "Not much of a drinker, are you? Couple o'shots and you where so smashed I practically had to carry you here."

Reid could feel his cheeks heating up in embarrassment at that image. Of course he remembered what state he had been in...having to cling to Seth simply so he would fall over his own feet. Not that the man had had any trouble getting him here...no wonder...

Without a suit or shirt he could see the muscles on Seth's arms and back move under his tanned skin. His eyes wandered to the man's shoulder, for the first time noticing also that the tattoo that decorated Seth's neck was actually a large tribal, snaking all the way down Seth's shoulder and arm...

He blinked quickly when he realized what he was doing, suddenly mortified. What the hell? Yes, he could appreciate a nice male body...but now? This was Seth Gecko.

He shook his head, unable to believe himself. Looked like the alcohol still wasn't entirely out of his system...

Silently, he watched as Seth put on his shoes and then walked back into the bathroom to retrieve his white undershirt, vest and jacket. He put them on without haste, like Reid wasn't there looking, then grabbed the gun from the desk and tucked it into the back of his pants.

"You wanna shower before we go?" he asked without looking up, surprising Reid.

He had hoped that yesterday hadn't been for nothing, that Seth would maintain his new less scary behavior and better mood --still he hadn't actually expected it, to be honest.

When Seth looked up at him inquiringly, he nodded with some delay, still baffled.

His kidnapper nodded, then walked over to the bed and sat down at the edge at level with Reid's waist, searching his pockets for the key to the handcuffs.

Reid didn't move as Seth pulled it from his pocket and then leaned over the bed to reach for his bound arm. Warm fingers circled his wrist and Reid felt his heart rate pick up automatically, as always when Seth got within reaching distance...but this time he wasn't entirely sure that it was all anxiety he felt. After all, he didn't expect Seth to do anything now...

But that had to be it, what else would it be?

He sighed in relief when his arm was finally free and Seth pulled away; suddenly he couldn't get into
the other room fast enough.
Chapter 13

It was noon by the time they were back on the high way.

Seth steered the car with one hand on the wheel, smoking a cigarette with the other. He didn't usually smoke this much, today however he felt like he could just light the next one with the rest of the first.

It was nerves he assumed, something that felt disturbing because it was so rare with him. He glanced over at the passenger's seat; Spencer was looking out the window, absently picking at the hem of his shirt. His hair shimmered golden in the light coming through the windshield and Seth looked away again quickly when it reminded him of his dream.

He groaned inwardly. He wouldn't have believed that pulling this mission off could get any harder for him, but seeing how he felt this morning, he'd clearly been wrong. It was obvious that he had long lost it. Even now he didn't know what exactly it was that he wanted from Spencer...he just knew that none of it was appropriate for the relationship they had.

He could only hope that the kid hadn't caught on to his odd behavior yet, that would be a right disaster.

Luckily, Reid seemed continuously oblivious, confused by his behavior maybe but with no idea what caused it. Clearly, he didn't remember much of last night, because Seth was sure that if he did he would have been able to read his feelings out of his words, out of his face for sure.

Seth frowned at that. He couldn't have that. Under no circumstances. He couldn't have Spencer to think he'd found a weakness in him. And much more importantly, he couldn't have the kid get the idea that Seth was like his brother.

Seth's hands clenched around the steering wheel at that thought. He hated to even consider a parallel like that between Richard and him, but if Reid caught on to this…it would undoubtedly be his first thought.

He glanced to the side again, assessing Reid's posture and facial expression. This morning the kid seemed much less distressed and jumpy and he liked to think that it wasn't just tiredness wearing him down but partly his own achievement. He knew the kid had been worried sick at the beginning of last night, but now that he had gotten through it he seemed to finally be accepting the fact that Seth had told him the truth. It made for a certain degree of relaxation, maybe a tiny bit of trust.

And Seth couldn't help but admit that he wanted it to stay like that. Be it rational or logical or neither—it just felt better and that was all the reason he needed.

Problem was, they were now headed back to meet up with Richard and then to make the exchange, neither of which would help with maintaining their current status quo, he knew.

Spencer turned his head to look at him in just that moment, as though he'd read his thoughts, "Where are we meeting Richard?"

Seth could hear the tension hidden poorly in that statement; he wasn't surprised. His brother had left a lasting impression on the kid yesterday. "I haven't set an exact time or place yet. He was supposed to find somewhere for us to spend the night before the exchange and then call me. He's probably about to."

From the corner of his eye he saw Spencer nod silently. He also saw the way his fingers clenched
and unclenched in the fabric of his shirt, heard his breathing change for a moment.

"Don't worry about him," he kept looking at the street, trying to sound casual and yet reassuring somehow.

He didn't of course.

"Why would I be worried?" Spencer murmured, sarcasm clearly audible despite how quietly he had spoken.

Seth frowned. He wanted to say that there was nothing to worry about because he'd be there and make sure there wouldn't be - but it was clear that that wasn't the answer Spencer was looking for or would believe. Whatever had improved between them over the last hours, clearly the kid's confidence didn't reach far enough to trust Seth to keep him safe from Richard. Which meant that from now on he would just keep getting tenser and more scared with every mile they got closer to Richie.

Seth's frown deepened. He didn't even want to think about how it would be once they were all locked into a room together…he didn't know which would be worse, watching Spencer stare at Richard, or watching Richard stare at Spencer…

Out of a sudden overwhelming impulse, Seth turned the wheel around, steering the car off the road.

Spencer looked first up, then at him, confused and surprised. "What-?"

"I need some breakfast," Seth simply announced, jerking his chin in the direction of the little diner that had appeared in front of them at the side of the road.

As far as he was concerned, meeting up with Richard could wait a little longer.

xxx

"Aren't you hungry?"

Spencer looked up from the surface of the table he was sitting at, across at Seth who was holding a menu in his hand.

He shook his head, knowing he was too nervous to eat.

They had left the motel about an hour ago, gotten back into the car –but instead of driving right back to meet Richard, Seth had stopped at a little diner on the side of the road.

Now they were sitting at one of the tables in the back of said diner, Seth seemingly relaxed as he tried to decide on something to eat. He merely glanced around the room every couple of minutes, at the door, the patrons, the other guests -but no one was paying them any mind, no one was recognizing them, so he remained calm.

Reid was nervous however, this time not because of Seth in particular but because of their situation. He had no idea why Seth had decided to take this sort of risk just for pancakes. Why couldn't they just go straight back? Not that he wanted to see Richard again anytime soon of course -but any second someone could recognize them, and then what would happen? Would there be yet another bloodbath…?

He fidgeted on his seat, wishing he could just leave, that he for once had a choice in this. He'd rather have to face Richard then see even more people get hurt…
"You need to order something," Seth interrupted his thoughts, undeterred by his earlier refusal as he pushed the menu across the table. His tone made it clear the point wasn't up for discussion. Well, so much for having a choice…

Reid sighed, grudgingly flipping the menu open and looking over it distractedly. He really didn't feel hungry at all…but as it was he could only play along and hope nothing would happen.

"I'll have some toast then," he announced after moment, distractedly.

Seth raised an eyebrow at his choice but nonetheless waved the waitress over to them, ordering for them both.

The young woman smiled at them merrily as she took notes and Reid found himself wondering what they must look like to her. Surely, they hardly looked like two buddies on a road trip. In fact, he was surprised that the girl didn't seem at all worried or suspicious. True, he was sitting so that she couldn't see the bruised side of his face, but if she only looked close enough she would have to see other marks or the stains on his shirt…she would have to see that there was more to Seth too, that he wasn't just some good-looking guy in a suit…

She didn't though, innocently hurrying back into the kitchen once she'd taken their order.

Reid frowned slightly, glancing at Seth's profile. It seemed so obvious to him that there was more to Seth than met the eye, that certain aura, the way he held himself…it all spoke of underlying danger. But maybe it was only so clear to him because he knew, or because of his job…maybe, if he looked at Seth with strange eyes he would see something else, too?

He shook his head tiredly. What did it matter? A different perception didn't change the truth underneath the surface. Considering that, he was glad the girl and everyone else had remained clueless. He wouldn't wish the stress he was dealing with on anyone.

Their food arrived and they ate in silence, Reid still pondering the situation.

Truth was, today he felt a little better in the situation, no matter how crazy that might sound. Yesterday, he had at times been on the verge of a nervous breakdown –today that had melted into a general feeling of tension and knots in his stomach when he thought about the future.

Statistics about how in extreme stress situations the brain would take measures to fool the body into calming for purposes of self-preservation ran through his head. He supposed that was probably the case here, too…at least partially.

The bigger part of it was however, undeniably, Seth's changed behavior.

Reid frowned as he nibbled at his toast, careful not to start staring at the man across from him again. He still had no idea what had caused this change in Seth, how the two sides of the coin he had seen so far fit together, which one was more real…

Briefly, he wondered if maybe Seth knew enough about common psychological responses to act just civil enough to keep his hostage collected and quiet.

That didn't seem to make much sense though, considering he hadn't done that from the beginning. Plus, he didn't really have to keep Reid collected, not when he could have just put him in the trunk of the car, tied up and gagged, where no one would be there to make suspicious. He hadn't though, just like he hadn't followed through on stabbing him when it would have made everything so much easier for his case.
Reid shuddered at the memory. Seth had had him cracked after that, and they had both known it…

What he didn't understand was why Seth had changed after that.

It still wasn't all sunshine and roses of course, but it was enough to leave him confused. No more gun waving, no more throwing him against walls or cars…no more death threats…

And more importantly…

He blinked when a memory fragment from the night before flashed before his eyes…Seth's face hovering over him, his dark eyes wearing an expression that seemed almost pained…

'I wanted you...to stop looking at me like…'

Reid frowned, confused. He hadn't just imagined that, had he?

Neither the fact that there had been something in his expression…not those words…

But why would Seth say something like that?

What did he want to stop?

For Reid to stop being terrified in the situation? Why? That made even less sense… he'd made it so clear before that he didn't care…

It could be due to prolonged exposure time, he pondered. It wasn't entirely uncommon for kidnappers to be cool and tough at first but then involuntarily start seeing their victims as people, humans. Kind of like a reversed Stockholm Syndrome.

He doubted that Seth was having that problem though. This wasn't his first abduction after all.

Still, there was something, undeniably…

He thought of the tiny flicker of something he sometimes thought he saw in the man's eyes, something that didn't fit his demeanor and actions but that he couldn't successfully define. He'd had it back in the desert first, then after Richard had attacked him, then when telling him to calm down in the phone booth…and last night too, just after he'd cuffed him to the bed. Reid tried to focus on that expression in his memory, to analyze it better somehow…but nothing he came up with made sense. It was all too obscured by the man's violent, aggressive behavior which over layered everything. It didn't fit…it just didn't make any-

"What are you thinking about?" Seth asked in just that moment, startling him out of his thoughts.

Reid head snapped up, finding Seth's expression merely calm now, his eyes resembling the surface of a lake. No chance of seeing anything that might lie beneath…

"I-" he thought quickly, making something up, "I was just wondering… how is the exchange going to go? I mean, are you just gonna grab the money and drive off…?"

Seth frowned at that, seemingly not to happy the topic –reminding Reid that this, too, Reid asking questions about the man's plans had been unthinkable just two days ago. Now, though, Seth didn't only not threaten him with anything…he even answered.

"Course not, 'M not that stupid," he shrugged, "No, they'll have to give us the money and then we'll drive off with you until we've lost them. Later we'll drop you off with a phone in the desert, like the girl."
Reid swallowed hard around the piece of toast he'd been chewing. He tried not to think about how worried that plan made him, or how little Hotch and the team would like being presented with it.

He knew there was no point in arguing with Seth anyway. But maybe he could do something else…

"And then what will you do?" he asked after a moment's consideration, cautiously, "Live happily ever after with your brother in Mexico? You know…with the way he is devolving it won't be long before the Mexican police gets on your trail again-" 

He didn't know what made him say anything at all. He knew it was a risk to question anything Seth said, especially when it came to Richie; he'd found out about that very quickly after all.

Sure enough, Seth's brows furrowed at his question, his shoulders tensing, "Will we be caught either way? That what you're trying to say?"

Reid tensed at his tone, everything inside him rebelling against angering his kidnapper. He'd learned his lesson concerning that on the first day.

Or at least he'd thought so.

Now, with Seth's newfound calm and willingness to talk about himself and Richie… the agent inside him couldn't help but try to find an angle yet again, something he could work with. Seth cared about Richie. Seth worried about Richie.

He supposed that was as much of an angle as he would get. And it technically wasn't too late yet to get the man to give up…there never had to be the dangerous situation of an exchange…

"I'm- just…" he picked at his hands nervously, before deciding to risk it ad looking straight up, "Seth…you must know I'm right. It would only be a matter of time until you were either apprehended or…but if you just admitted your brother to a center that could give him the help he needs…he's ill, he wouldn't be convicted…. And then you wouldn't have to worry, you wouldn't have to go on like this-"

He broke off in mid-sentence, his breath catching in his throat when Seth suddenly grabbed his wrist over the table, face tight and eyes narrowed dangerously. Spencer stared at the other wide eyed, feeling his heart miss a beat as he waited for the man to lash out in some way, waited for the grip around his wrist to become crushing.

However, neither happened. Seth just stared at him for along moment in which Reid didn't dare to blink, unable to read the man's expression –then he loosened his grip, suddenly looking amused instead of angry.

"You trying to give me tips on staying under the radar, Dr. Reid?" Seth chuckled, "How very unconventional. Careful , or I'll start to think you actually care about what happens to me."

Reid dug the nails of his free hand into his leg underneath the table, willing himself not to move otherwise. Again with the unpredictable behavior…

Despite his racing heart he willed himself to continue, trying to see Seth's lighter grip as a chance, an improvement.

"Would that be so hard to believe?" he asked quietly, keeping eye contact, "I see nothing but evil in my job, but you…you told me you don't want to hurt anyone, that you were pushed into his life…"

Before he could get any further though Seth interrupted him with a dark frown, the fingers around
Reid's wrist flexing, "I didn't tell you because I wanted pity, or because I'm looking for help."

Reid took a conscious, deep breath, keeping a clear head. Seth was looking at him with a mixture of sentiments, no longer casually blasé. Reid couldn't make himself look away; he could tell that he was upsetting Seth and that alone was enough to rattle him…but...

Maybe it was the fact that it wasn't just anger he was seeing in the man's gaze, or the fact that it hadn't fully surfaced this time…but he couldn't stop now.

"Why did you tell me then?" he asked softly, honestly wanting to know.

Seth just stared back at him with those dark, flashing eyes, not answering even after a full minute. Reid frowned, confused and disappointed.

He shook his head, "I don't get you."

He didn't get Seth. Everything the man said or did was contradictory.

For a moment the expression Seth was wearing intensified, then he suddenly released his hold and dropped his gaze, effectively breaking the moment. He cleared his throat, looking down at his glass before taking a large gulp.

"There's nothing to get," he finally said, discarding the matter, "All you need to know is that that is how the exchange is gonna go. What Richie and I do afterwards isn't your problem. Just be glad you get to go home."

Reid frowned, but didn't say anything else, cautiously pulling his hand back. Something really was off here…but he'd just used up enough of his nerves for that bit of conversation and he didn't exactly feel ready to keep boring.

They sat in silence for a while then, neither talkative anymore. Seth seemed in thought as well, a frown still etched into his features and Reid thought it wise to keep quiet for now. At least it seemed like what he'd said hadn't left Seth entirely cold. Maybe later he could try again…

He was still pondering the possibility of maybe being able to talk himself out of harm's way after all - when his eyes suddenly fell on the TV hanging across the room over the bar.

The news were on and they were showing his face. He blinked, freezing in shock for a second. Richard's and Seth's pictures came on next, then JJ speaking in front of the press. There was no sound but it was clear what the program was about.

They were looking for him.

His heart skipped at the thought and he wasn't sure whether he felt like smiling or crying.

That indecision lasted for about three seconds –that was until he realized that their faces were being shown in this bar, while they were in it, with all these people here…

If someone were to just pay attention or few seconds and then attract Seth's attention by so much as staring…now Reid felt positively sick.

He tried not to let his renewed tension show as he glanced first at Seth, who seemed oblivious, and then around the bar at the other guests. His stomach turned when he noticed two men with hats and cowboy boots on the other side of the room looking over at them.
He pushed to his feet before he'd thought his actions through, suddenly anxious to get out of here as fast as possible. He couldn't risk the lives of all the people in here.

He made it about one and a half steps forward before Seth was right in front of him seemingly out of thin air, blocking his path. Reid stumbled half into him before he caught himself, instinctively bringing up a hand against the man's chest to keep a distance.

He tried to take a step back but found a strong hand pressing into the small of his back, the muscles of a thick arm tense against his side.

"What are you doing? Sit back down," Seth hissed quietly.

He was looking past him at the other tables, his breath hitting the side of Reid's temple.

Reid felt his heart rate get even more out of control but he knew better than to try and shake the man off, compliantly stopping in his steps.

"Can we leave?" he asked quietly, "I really need some fresh air."

For a moment Seth looked suspicious. Then though, he nodded, going through his jacket pocket and throwing some money on the table. His hand stayed in Reid's back as he turned in the direction of the door without another word, certainly ready to grab on tightly should need be.

Reid let out an inaudible sigh of relief as they passed the door without incident. As they walked onto the parking lot, he risked a glance behind through the glass windows of the diner. Those two men were still looking after them, talking to each other now. They got up just as they reached the car.

Seth hadn't noticed them it seemed, simply opening the passenger door and motioning for Reid to move. "Get in, I'll stop a little down the road."

Reid complied, hoping his expression didn't betray him now. Had those men recognized them? Would they call for help? Alarm the team? He couldn't stop his heart from racing now. His palms began to sweat.

If someone was quick enough, followed an intercepted them…it would still be dangerous but much less so now that Seth was without Richie.

They'd been driving for about ten minutes of sheer torture when Reid saw it -another car in the rearview mirror. It was the men. He gulped. Not the police…but still, they could have called someone, or even have guns themselves…

He froze in his seat when he felt Seth's eyes on him, his heart suddenly so loud he could hear nothing but. Seth frowned at him, slowing the car down. "Fuck, you're white as a sheet. You really need some air?"

Reid could only nod. Yes. If Seth stopped the car, if they got out…it would better the chances off…his eyes fell to the gun tucked into Seth's pants. It could go either way within a matter of minutes.

He stumbled out of the car as soon as Seth stopped by the side of the road, leaning against it. He actually did feel sick now, he didn't even have to act anymore.

Seth walked around the car to stand next to him, a frown on his tanned face.

Reid could feel him opening his mouth, knowing he was about to ask him what was going on –but then he stopped, instead swearing under his breath. Reid didn't have to look up to know he had seen
the other car too now. He could hear the tires of the truck screeching to a halt close by, then the sound of door slamming and heavy boots.

"What the fuck?" Reid could hear the sudden tension in Seth's voice.

The two men from the diner were walking up to them. They did have guns on their belts.

Reid forced himself to straighten up then, carefully inching away slightly from Seth before looking up. He knew that if it came to a confrontation and he wanted to avoid ending with a gun against his temple again, he would need to drop himself to the ground or jump away the second the two men made their move…

He stopped breathing, anticipating what was going to happen next.

xxx

"What the fuck?" Reid could hear the sudden tension in Seth's voice.

It reflected how he was feeling exactly.

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"Hola, caballeros," one of the men waved, walking up to them, "you gentlemen need some help with your car?"

He seemed perfectly at ease, calm and friendly. Reid's eyes flickered between him and Seth tensely, expectantly. It was hard to read from the man's face or voice what he was thinking though, if he actually knew or if Reid had been wrong.

Their presence alone was enough to make Seth nervous though. His expression had rapidly darkened and now resembled that he'd had in the bank. Reid felt his blood run cold.

"No," his kidnapper said, "we're good, we were about to keep driving."

Reid held his breath—and felt his stomach sink when the man just shrugged and nodded at that. "Oh, alright then, have a good day," he said, tipping his hat.

Seth nodded grimly, some of the tension in his shoulders and fingers fading as he watched the man turn away.

He turned around without replying, and Reid did his best not to let his face betray his devastation as his kidnapper made to walk back towards him. His nausea increased, accompanied by growing panic now. No, no…that couldn't be…they were just going to leave?

His hands curled into fists as Seth stopped right in front of him, reaching past him to open the car door. Seth was silent, his gaze unreadable, but his posture and the set of his jaw were clear warnings to stay quiet or else.

Reid stared back silently, barely resisting the growing urge to just yell or pull away, despite the risk…to not let these men leave him alone again.
He opened his mouth, but was suddenly distracted by a fast movement behind Seth's back.

Before he could so react at all, the man with the hat was suddenly right there, one arm raised, and then he brought the butt of his gun down on Seth's neck hard.

Reid gasped, staring into shocked black eyes incredulously as Seth grunted in pain and staggered, grabbing for the roof of the car to support himself, suddenly leaning heavily against him and the car. Before Seth could regain his balance, the man behind him lashed out again, throwing his fist back and hitting Seth over the head with enough force to send him to the ground.

Reid gasped in shock as Seth went down, groaning in pain, and then again when the man quickly grabbed his arm, pulling him away from the car. He stared at him at a loss for words, for a moment torn between relief and tension.

"You're that kidnapped FBI agent, aren't you, boy?" the man asked, assessing him briefly; he seemed sure of the answer even before Reid nodded.

In that moment relief won out. Thank God, so they did know…he was saved…

The second man came up next to them, gun drawn and aimed at Seth who was struggling to get up with an expression that was as pained as it was murderous.

"So you must be Seth Gecko," he said over the tip of his nose, "There's a bounty on your head, ya know that? Quite a bit, too." He laughed. "Well, no wonder. You've been naughty, kidnapping FBI agents now. How much were you gonna try and make from this?"

Seth was slowly getting to his feet, one hand pressed to his neck, the other hovering by his waist.

"None of your concern, asshole," he spat.

He seemed to be getting over the surprise of this ambush surprisingly quickly, if the look in his eyes or his poised limbs were any indication.

Reid gulped fearfully. He wanted to tell the men to watch out, to not underestimate Seth –but the first man was quicker, answering Seth with a dark chuckle.

"It is actually. We could use some cash too, you know? But we don't like to share."

Reid's heart, which had been racing, missed a beat at those words, and then started back at a new, certainly unhealthy pace.

He turned to stare at the man, incredulous.

What?

Had he just heard that right?

The man holding his arm found him staring and grinned, flashing yellow teeth at him. Reid felt his stomach turn and his throat close up. He tried to pull away, but the man's grip was like iron, keeping him in place.

NO. He felt the color draining from his face. No, that couldn't be…he couldn't be that unlucky…

"Oh, that's rich."

Both of their attention was diverted by Seth, who had taken a step forward and let out a short,
incredulous laugh. His eyes looked utterly black suddenly, with no softness left in them, just sharp edges and disdain and anger. He had effortlessly morphed back into the frightening criminal Reid had first seen on a mug shot and that criminal clearly wasn't happy about someone hunting on his turf.

Reid shuddered at the sight, frozen in place. He was suddenly torn, caught between a rock and a hard place. He was scared, he wanted this man to let him go, to get away from him…but he couldn't, not alone…there was only Seth –but Seth was just as frightening right now, and he wanted just the same as these men. His life, for money. There was no good option here.

Not that he was being asked what he wanted anyway. Neither man even looked at him as they glared at each other.

"What makes you think I'll give him to you?" Seth asked, low and menacing. There was an edge to his voice that clearly said he was just a second's snap decision away from becoming violent.

His opponent didn't seem impressed though. "Oh, I think you misunderstand," he laughed, standing his ground, "We're law abiding people. We're not gonna get in trouble for kidnapping a federal agent. No, it's you we're gonna deliver to the cops and get our money for."

Reid blinked, looking at the man in confusion. What?

Seth stopped in his steps, perplexed for a moment, then he laughed out loud. "Even if you had any chance of making that happen -it's hardly worth the effort."

The man shrugged, endlessly calm, "No, not the way it is now. But I can imagine that the bounty will go up considerably when the FBI finds out you killed one of their own. We'll just have to keep you locked up somewhere until they've found the body."

The smile vanished from Seth's face.

Reid stared straight ahead, frozen, somehow unable to move and look up the man holding him instead. He felt like a bucket of ice water had been poured over him, those words echoing in his head to till it was ringing. Kill…and not even just kidnap…they wanted to kill him…

No. This isn't happening…not after everything…

His rampant thoughts came to an abrupt halt when he suddenly felt the cold barrel of a gun pressed against his temple. Reid flinched violently, eyes going wide in horror.

The man's eyes showed no sign of hesitance or remorse. He meant it.

Instinctively, Reid started to struggle, terror taking over what should have been a situation full of relief. The man frowned at him clawing at his arm, then, without warning, lashed out and let his fist crash into Reid's face brutally.

Reid was thrown to the ground by the force of the impact, crying out as his nose exploded in pain. The pain was like an electric shock going through his body, jerking him to full alert. Whatever control or semblance of calm he'd retained until then –it was washed away by the autonomic response to more pain and guns and threats on his life, finally one too many, too real, too much, the chemicals flooding his brain leaving him dizzy with panic.

Everything began to bleed into each other then, his ears ringing. He brought a shaky hand up to his nose. It came away bloody and shaking.
Over the ringing of his ears he thought he heard Seth starting to yell something, but before he could even look up, there was a brutal hand grabbing the back of his neck and yanking him back up. He stared up at his attacker with frightful, watering eyes, finding the gun aimed straight at his head once again, safety catch released.

"Sorry, boy," the man said without the slightest bit of remorse, "But you're worth more dead than alive…. and it's not like he wouldn't have done the same once he got the money." He chuckled as he jerked his chin in Seth's direction.

But Reid couldn't look at Seth, too preoccupied with his racing heart, and his life flashing in front of him for the third time in just two days. This time it seemed, he was going to die for real.

xxx

Seth had gone into full operating modus the moment he'd recovered from the hit to his head.

It hadn't taken him much, the feeling of adrenaline and sheer aggression in the face of danger had a welcome ring of familiarity to it. He didn't feel nervous then, just grimly determined to put these fucks back in their place and give them what they deserved for fucking with him.

What were they thinking?

He was Seth Gecko! Did they think he was just going to step aside and let them steal his… let them take Spencer?

Ha, they'd better think again.

If they had the opportunity before they ended face down in the desert sand with their throats slit.

His confidence grew when they said they wanted him, not the kid. How laughable of them to think they'd be able to detain him. The prospect of a good fight and being able to break some bones had almost put him in a good mood. Almost.

Until that one guy suddenly had a gun in Spencer's face, and there was blood and his vision suddenly went red -and then everything came down to a matter of seconds.

He moved before he'd thought out a proper plan, jumping the guy with the gun, and by tackling them both to the ground causing the gun to miss Spencer's head by inches. Both men yelled in anger and surprise but he didn't care.

How dare they-!

He let the sudden rage bubbling up inside him take control without much hesitance, knowing he needed just that right now. He got a good grip of the throat of the man under him and squeezed, then let his arm snap back, then forward, efficiently breaking the man's jaw.

He smiled grimly as he heard the telling crack of bone, followed by pained cursing and more struggling. Letting his anger run free, he punched him in the face again, and again, until he heard the man's partner yelling behind him and then the sound of a safety catch being released.

Seth whirled around, on his feet within two seconds, shooting the man in the chest, one, two, three times, until he went down.

He smiled in grim satisfaction as he stared down at the body crumpled to the floor, about to fire again when he was distracted by a sudden choked sound close by.
Glancing to the side, he found that his first victim had somehow managed to get back up while he was distracted. He had Spencer pressed to his front, shielding him, a firm grip on the kid's throat as he fumbled with his own gun.

Spencer's eyes were wide and terror filled as he gasped for air, clawing at the man's grip futilely, gaze glued to Seth's without blinking.

"Drop your gun or neither of us will get anything out of this," the man growled, his voice muffled by his broken jaw. He was clutching the kid's neck so tightly it would surely leave more bruises, by now having managed to bring the gun to his head again.

Seth stared at the scene in front of him, his mind gone blank for a moment until it all came rushing back, irritation, anger, hatred…fear?

Yes, fear. Seth tensed. He couldn't remember the last time he'd been scared and yet…that sight, the blood, Spencer's wide eyes…the thought of him getting a bullet in his head…

He raised his gun arm before his emotions could start screwing with his brain again. "Suits me," he said coldly, "You're either leaving without him or not at all? Pick now."

A slight flicker of uncertainty in the man's eyes as he looked from Seth to his injured partner was confirmation that Seth was till the better poker player of the two of them.

"Let him go and then get the fuck out of here, before I change my mind," he snarled, eyes murderously.

For a moment nobody moved, all they heard Spencer's strained breathing.

Then the man suddenly did let go, shoving the kid to the ground as he pushed to his feet and scrambled over to his bleeding partner. Seth had half a mind to shoot him just for the sake of it then; he might have, hadn't Spencer, sprawled on the ground and gasping for air, been so much of a distraction to him.

He moved without thinking, standing between his hostage and the men, gun still trained on them. He watched without moving as the first man dragged the other back to their car.

Only when they were finally in the car and down the highway did he relax.

For a moment afterwards he just stood there, letting the adrenaline leave his system. Then slowly, he let his gun arm sink and turned around.

He wasn't overtly surprised to see Spencer hadn't moved, still on the ground and frozen in shock from what had happened. His face was white as a sheet where it wasn't smeared with fresh blood and the terror still hadn't left his eyes. He was trembling all over.

Seth stared at him with a frown, inwardly cursing. It was plain to see that the whole encounter had left a lasting impression on his hostage. Oh fuck, not this again…

Seth grimaced. Shit. Of course almost dying for the fourth time in just two days would be a little rattling. After all, Spencer hadn't been like him, able to defend himself properly and thus able to fight fear off with a sound plan and confidence…

He hesitated at that thought, the image of Spencer's face, terrified suddenly appearing before his inner eye again. It affected his gut and heart in the most unsettling way, making him feel ill... God, when that guy had been about to pull the trigger…
Before he knew what he was doing he had stalked over to the kid, bending one knee to kneel in the sand. Spencer flinched when he touched his shoulder, hazel eyes sharpening and flickering from his hand to the gun in his hand fearfully.

He tried to scramble away but Seth quickly tightened his hold, pulling him back in.

This way, he somehow ended up with the kid in his arms, pressed against his chest. He could feel the lithe body against him shaking, weak hand struggling to push him away without success. Spencer's breath was hot and irregular against his neck but he held on tightly, one hand around Spencer's back, the other around his neck. Spencer kept squirming against him but he barely felt it. The kid was just too thin, too fragile…God, he was so fragile…

"It's fine," he promised, his fingers smoothing over the tangled hair underneath his palm, somehow trying to stop that shaking, "it's over."

He didn't know why or how often he repeated those words, or how long it took for Spencer to stop fighting him and eventually just become limp in his hold, realizing it was indeed over, that the men were gone. Eventually he just gave up, sinking against him with an exhausted sob, face buried in Seth's shoulder as he shook.

Seth just held on as tightly as he dared, thinking he might never feel the urge to let go again.

Moments passed which might as well have been hours.

Seth had his eyes closed, just breathing, feeling his fingers in the kid's hair and focusing on it till the dreadful feeling in his gut went away, till he was calm again.

It wasn't until then that he realized what he was doing.

Startled, he pulled away, but somehow didn't find the strength to move his hands as well.

Spencer looked up at him out of red rimmed, flickering eyes, wetness on his cheeks. Most of the blood on his face had rubbed off on Seth's shoulder but he still looked like hell and Seth forgot about his reservations quickly again as his eyes fell on the kid's bloodied nose.

"Shit," he cursed under his breath as the thought occurred to him that it might be broken.

That fucking bastard. He'd shoot him again if he could.

He took a hold of Spencer's chin to turn his face and assess the damage. The young man's breath hitched at the sudden movement, but otherwise he didn't move as Seth checked his nose carefully, his touch uncharacteristically light.

He could feel the kid staring at him, but refused to think about the implications of his actions. His hands were moving of their own volition anyway now, the important parts of his brain somehow having shut off…

"It's not broken," he murmured after a moment, relieved.

His hand fell away from Reid's nose but remained on his chin, fingers cupping his jaw. He could still feel that slight tremble, but when he looked up the expression of fear in Spencer's eyes had been replaced by something else, something he couldn't quite put his finger on. He squinted, trying to figure it out, but found himself once again distracted, instead starting to focus on the tiny specks of green in those large doe eyes, the tears still clinging to dark lashes…
"Seth-

Seth blinked, his breath catching as he realized how close they suddenly were, faces just inches apart. Spencer was starting at him unblinkingly, completely still under his hands.

What is he thinking?

His thumb brushed along the underside of the kid's jaw, lost in their gaze. Some tiny voice in the back of his brain was telling him he should have let go minutes ago - and yet, feeling the kid's warm skin under his fingers, him alive and breathing...he just couldn't do it. He moved closer by another fraction of an inch, feeling that sudden pull again, that longing to just lean in and-

"Please...let me go."

Spencer's voice, broken and barely audible effectively shocked Seth out of his trance. He stiffened, his grip slipping slightly as he stared at Spencer.

The kid still wasn't moving but there was a definite broken expression in his gaze now, a crack too big to fix alone, caused by too much violence and fear and pain. He was clearly at his limit.

"Please," Spencer was gulping down tears, trembling under Seth's hands, "I can't...any more...just, please..."

xxx
"Please…I can't…any more…just, please…"

Seth froze as he stared down into Spencer's eyes, suddenly ripped out of his trance like state and thrown back into the harsh reality in front of him.

It immediately became obvious to him just how much he'd misread the signs. The kid still wasn't moving away, yes, and there wasn't fear or disdain in his expression for once—but only because it was now completely overshadowed by pain and exhaustion and desperation. Spencer looked like he had after their fallout in the phone booth, just ten times worse, worn down to the core. It seemed this had been one blow too much to his armor if he was now actually begging him to let him go, abandoning what he'd retained of his pride until now.

For a moment, Seth couldn't move, feeling his heart hammering against his ribs so hard that it was actually hurting, taking his breath away. Not only because of what he'd let himself feel just half a minute ago…also because this...those tearful eyes and trembling lips were much too effective, completely doing him in.

Shit. Just what he'd been afraid of.

Weakness.

But he couldn't turn it off… He didn't want to see this, didn't want to be the cause of it…

His fingers flexed around Spencer's chin as he fought an inner battle, holding on to reason by the very tips of his fingers. It was almost a full minute before he managed to get himself under control again.

"I can't," he said, voice thick but unwavering, "I need you."

He couldn't begin to describe how true that statement was, but judging by the devastation creeping into Spencer's expression the young man had only caught on to the most obvious one.

He wasn't surprised when the kid pulled away from his grasp, upset and probably resentful, averting his face. It wasn't like he couldn't understand. Or that he wanted to draw this out.

He just didn't have a choice.

"It's just one more day," he found himself saying, "Then it'll all be over."

Normally, even saying that would have been too much for him –but now it didn't seem enough by far somehow.

He looked down at Spencer who was staring into the distance, blinking hard, hands balled into fists in the sand, biting his lip in an obvious effort to keep any sound from leaving his lips. It took almost five full minutes until the kid finally pulled himself together. Honestly, Seth had been almost afraid he wouldn't after this last encounter, in the end though, Spencer moved suddenly, lifting first his chin and then straightening out his clothes with still slightly unsteady fingers.

A quick glance into his face showed that he'd somehow managed to get himself under control again, merely a shadow of the emotions he'd seen before remaining. Seth was relieved and bothered at the same time by how often this slip of an agent had already dragged himself off the ground again, no
matter how hard he'd been shoved. He couldn't help but wonder if he would be able to yet another
time…

Hopefully, he wouldn't have to find out. Hopefully, if Richard didn't flip again and if the exchange
went well…

Seth frowned, knowing that the chances of both of that happening weren't exactly high. But he had
to try and make it happen. He had to if he didn't want to see the kid crack completely, and, damn his
weakness, but he really, really didn't want that.

Fine, Seth decided. So he wouldn't. He'd done much harder things in his life. He'd keep Richie under
control. And Spencer's team wouldn't risk the kid's life…would they?

No. It would all go well.

"It'll all be fine," he said, almost to himself, distracted when Spencer snorted softly next to him.

He turned his head, only to find that his hostage was attempting to get to his feet. Seth pushed to his
feet quickly in response, catching Spencer's arm when he swayed on his legs.

Spencer didn't try to pull away, letting Seth steady him, a change Seth couldn't help but notice. He
was careful to keep quiet about it though, his grip as light as possible as he pulled the kid back
towards the car. Spencer sank into the passenger seat without a word, closing his eyes in exhaustion.

At the sight, Seth couldn't help but think that he really did look just one more knock away from
completely cracking.

He frowned before walking back around the car and getting in as well. There was nothing more he
could do, or say here to make this better…not if he wanted to stick to his plan. So he didn't and
hoped that his hostage would be strong enough to make it through just one more day alone.

However, he drove for almost half an hour before calling Richard and arranging a rendezvous point,
just so he wouldn't have to say his brother's name out loud in the car too soon and thereby make
things even tenser.

Spencer barely seemed to hear him though, looking out the window with a blank stare. He didn't say
anything else to Seth during the ride, his useless pleas the last thing he'd allowed past his lips. Seth let
him and spent his time trying to ignore the uncomfortable feeling in his gut that it caused.

xxx


Reid didn't know how long he forced himself to simply focus on his breathing. It seemed a small
eyternity before he felt sure that he would start screaming, or worse crying again if he opened his
mouth.

The imprint of almost being shot remained fresh even as they left the scene of the incident. He could
still feel the cold steel against his temple, still feel rough hands pressing into his neck, immobilizing
him. Reid didn't have any illusions about it going away anytime soon of course, he knew enough to
understand that with the amount of stress he was experiencing it would be a miracle if he started
feeling anywhere near normal or calm this side of Christmas.

He tried it anyway, simply because he was in no position to break down.
He needed to stay strong...if not he would break down again like he just had in front of Seth.

He closed his eyes, pained.

Not like that had been any good. He didn't know what had made him believe there would be any use asking Seth to let him go... it had just all been so much. The danger, his terror...and throughout all Seth, who had made it all go away, who had prevented that man from shooting him in the head.

He shuddered at the memory. God, he'd been so scared...and Seth had saved him, had caught him afterwards when he'd broken down...

Reid kept his eyes closed tightly, afraid he might start hyperventilating again.

The thought alone that he had just laid in his kidnapper's arms and cried his eyes out...

True Seth hadn't given him much of a choice, when did he ever, but he had held him until he'd calmed down...

Maybe that was the scariest thing of it all, he thought. Not only that Seth for some insane reason suddenly seemed to care what happened to him, but even more so the fact that it actually made him feel better.

God! He really, really wanted to scream.

At himself.

Nothing about Seth should make him feel better. The man was a killer. He literally had blood on his hands right now. The mere thought that those same hands had stroked his hair and face should make him sick.

What the hell was wrong with him? He didn't know what was happening anymore.

Seth didn't care about him. Obviously, otherwise he wouldn't keep doing this to him and just let him go. But if he didn't...then what was that expression in his eyes that he got when he looked at him, that he kept hiding and that kept showing through more and more...? Back there, kneeling in the sand, Seth's hand around his face, it had been clear on his face...

What was that?

Just like all the times before he failed to find an answer. Seth's profile clearly said that he could practically turn off his emotions, that he didn't care about anything or anyone...except his little brother.

Reid blinked, suddenly shocked when a thought came to him. Could it be...

Could it be that Seth saw something of his brother in Reid? Not the current, crazy, bloodthirsty version of Richard of course...but the little boy he'd once been?

Reid gulped, suddenly feeling dizzy. Oh...

That was the only thing that made sense. Transference.

He knew of the effect he tended to have on people, something Garcia usually called the puppy dog effect...but so far it had never occurred to him that Seth, Seth Gecko, would be anywhere near affected... Yes, over the past days they had bonded in a way but...
Reid couldn't help but softly bang his head against the window...that idea was just so ridiculous...and just more proof that his mind was starting to go on him, desperate for any straw to cling to in order to get through this nightmare....

Yes, if he was right, that probably meant Seth would find it hard to hurt or kill him...

But he wasn't!

Was he...?

Reid stared out the window, tears forming in his eyes despite his best efforts.

God, he really was going insane...

xxx

It was dark by the time they pulled up to another standard issue motel, much like the other two they'd been to so far.

Reid looked up, blinking tiredly; he'd nodded off slightly at some point from sheer exhaustion and was now started awake by the sound of the engine being killed. His pulse quickened instantly as he realized the moment to meet Richard Gecko again was suddenly here and he wasn't nearly prepared for it in any way.

He wrapped his arms around himself instinctively, feeling colder and weaker than ever despite his brief rest.

He didn't want to have to be strong and fight anymore. He just wanted for it all to stop already. But he couldn't let his guard down –not until he was safe with the team again, not until it was all over.

Alone with Seth he might have been a little more relaxed, and maybe, maybe the man cared enough for some screwed up reason not to want to hurt him...but now that they were about to reunite with his brother...he knew he couldn't build on Seth keeping the man away from him. Dozens of case files were proof enough that he couldn't.

The thought was that was enough to make him feel shaky and sick all over.

Next to him, Seth stirred, clearing his throat. Distracted, Reid glanced to the side, finding black eyes looking straight at him. He did his best to look back squarely, to keep his head up like he'd promised himself, but he was sure Seth could see his exhaustion -just like Richard would be able to see it. He shivered involuntarily, the cold spreading further inside of him.

"He's not going to touch you."

Reid's fingers dug into his arms painfully at those words, panic threatening to resurface, but he didn't look away from Seth. He wasn't sure why...but there was something in the man's eyes, something that managed to calm him somehow...Those eyes, which had been cold and angry just hours ago were now back to that odd mix off deepness and honesty, something that really made Reid want to believe that he meant that, even if it was hard...

Seth watched his expression closely, his mouth pulled down into a frown. Then his gaze intensified, eyes suddenly like live fire.

"He's not."
Reid blinked, surprised by the sudden intensity in Seth's voice and eyes.

For a few seconds they just held each other's gazes, Seth's full of unspoken emotions, his jaw tense and his hands tight around the steering wheel, and Reid silent, taken aback by the sudden change. He stared back, heart skipping in his chest.

Oddly, it wasn't worry he felt in that moment, more relief over the determination he saw.

Looking into Seth's eyes right then, he couldn't help but actually believe.

"Okay," he could barely hear his own voice but it was clear that they both realized he'd said it.

Seth's expression seemed to shift slightly then, relax maybe, just for a second before he quickly looked away, his face becoming unreadable again.

Reid didn't ask him to say anything else. He knew what he'd gotten was more than he could have asked for considering their situation, and also that he shouldn't put too much weight into anything his kidnapper said.

However, despite himself he did feel a little bit better than before.

xxx

They got out of the car and entered the motel then, heading straight for the little bar in the building where they were supposed to meet Richard.

Reid nervousness grew with every step they made and for the first time he actually perceived Seth's hand around his neck as sort of comforting, a connection that kept him from being completely ungrounded.

He took a deep breath, willing himself to stay calm.

He'd be fine. He needed to believe that. It was all going to be fine.

He followed as Seth walked up to the bar door and pushed it open -only to freeze in shock at the scene in front of them.

xxx

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He followed as Seth walked up to the bar door and pushed it open -only to freeze in shock at the scene in front of them.

Reid gaped in horror as he stared straight ahead into the bar room. Seth had stopped dead in his tracks next to him, his grip tightening as he cursed under his breath.

The little bar they had walked in looked much like the one they had spent the prior evening in.

Except for the fact that it was almost completely demolished, tables and stairs turned over and splintered, the windows broken and the bar littered with broken bottles.
What really drew their eyes in though were the bodies. There were five of them, four men and one woman, all of them sprawled on the ground, unmoving, marks all over them, massive stab and gunshot wounds.

Reid felt the air leave his lungs at the sight in front of him, his body reacting violently as he came to understand what must have happened here. Dead...all of them...murdered...

"The fuck?"

He flinched when Seth next to him suddenly yelled, stalking into the room and towards the bar. His hand slipped from Reid's neck but the young man didn't move, petrified as he watched Seth storm up to one of the corpses—only to realize that there was a second person already next to it, unmoving but definitely looking alive. He recognized him on the second look.

Richard.

Reid's heart missed a beat and his stomach turned as his eyes fell on the knife in the younger Gecko's hand, and the gun lying next to him on the floor.

Oh, God.

His eyes fell onto the body next to Richard, a woman who had been stabbed repeatedly. She still had color in her cheeks. She'd been alive minutes ago...

He was going to be sick.

xxx

Seth couldn't believe what he was seeing.

His shock as usual didn't last long, being quickly replaced by fury. Richard. Always, always.

Fuck, not again!

What the hell had he been thinking, leaving Richard to his own devices? He stared at the dead people lying around the room, not doubting for one second that his brother had killed them all. He didn't know why or how, considering he'd spoken to Richard less that three hours ago and everything had been fine—but he knew.

"Richard!"

His brother looked up when he called his name, his eyes flashing animalistic for a moment before he recognized his brother.

"Seth?" He sounded confused, looking around like suddenly he couldn't explain the situation to himself. Not upset though. Of course, never upset. Just psychotic and manic and deadly and destructive...but never remorseful, never understanding...

In that moment, Seth felt all the pent up frustration and misery over his brothers illness, about the situation, about Spencer, become too much and boil over.

"What's the matter with you, Richard?" he hissed, furious.

Richard got to his feet, raising his hands defensively, "Seth, before you flip out - you have to know what happened."
"Yeah?" Seth stared at him, feeling his control fading at an alarming rate. He knew it wasn't smart to flip out now, because he still had Spencer to watch and damaged control to do –but in that moment he just couldn't help it. "Yeah, tell me what happened. I need an explanation."

Richie nodded quickly, adjusting his glasses with a blood speckled hand, "I was waiting for you when they attacked me, Seth. I had to defend myself!"

He grew agitated when his brother just stared at him, "They did! They were vampires, Seth! I could barely fend them off. I had to kill them or they would have killed me! Ok?"

"Ok," Seth repeated, and Richie looked relieved until Seth's eyes flashed with anger, "OK? Bullshit! One day! I ask you to keep it together for one day and I get this! What is wrong with you?"

He had gone from hissing to yelling during that last part, fury finally boiling over and making him forget he should stay reasonable.

Richie tensed at his outburst, putting on a frown that showed nothing even resembling guilt. Merely annoyance and indignation. "Nothing! Nothing's wrong with me! I told you, they-!"

But Seth was done listening to excuses. Every fucking time. Year after year. His whole life, always listening to these bullshit excuses.

"Is it me?" he interrupted hotly, "Is this my fault?"

"What? No!" Richard shook his head, still not acting in accordance with the situation, more like they were arguing about a lost set of keys. He didn't understand. Or maybe he did and just didn't care. It was what pushed Seth over the edge.

"IS THIS MY FAULT?" he jabbed an accusing finger in the direction of the corpses, his voice betraying his rage, "Do you think this is what I am?"

"No, I-"

Richard didn't even get a word in before Seth was in his face, shouting, "This is not me! I'm a professional fucking thief! I DON'T FUCKING SLAUGHTER RANDOM PEOPLE wherever I go!"

He knew it was pointless. But Seth couldn't help it, couldn't bring himself to calm down. Not this time. Richard's darker side had always disturbed him and this wasn't the first time they'd had this conversation –but this time it was different.

He vaguely wished his reasons for flipping out like this were more honorable -but the biggest part simply was that Spencer was seeing all this, that it was running everything he'd worked towards in the past days, and worse, the knowledge that one of the dead bodies in this room could just as easily have been Spencer. The thought turned his stomach and made him see red.

With a snarl, he grabbed his brother by the neck and slammed him hard against the wall, banging his head against it as he dug his fingers into his face, "What you are doing, WHAT YOU ARE FUCKING DOING IS NOT HOW ITS DONE!"

Richie didn't try to push him off, already having his kicked puppy face in place again. He stared up at his older brother out of wide eyes as Seth kept yelling, trying to ignore it. He grabbed his face harshly, forcing eye contact, "Say, Yes, Seth, I fucking understand!"

Richard didn't have to be told twice, seeing his opening, "Yes, I understand. I understand, Seth."
As he stared into his little brother's wide eyes, Seth felt the rage being drained from his body, leaving exhaustion and misery to gnaw at his insides. He wasn't a damn fool; he understood that Richie didn't really care. He only cared about placating Seth. He was about to yell some more then, not because he thought it would be any use –just to vent his anger somehow.

He was however distracted by a sudden movement by their feet, followed by a sharp intake of breath from where Spencer was standing. His eyes fell to the floor, to the woman's corpse –only to widen in surprise when he saw she'd opened her eyes and was moving, alive somehow.

Xxx

Reid stood frozen in shock as he watched Seth and Richard quarrel, somehow unable to move his feet. All he could see where more dead people, all he could think of were blood and screams and guilt and horror.

When he saw the woman move, he felt immense relief for just a second. A flicker of light in the pitch black he was finding himself in, a drop of water on the flames seeming to burn him from inside.

Hope.

She sat up, surprisingly quickly, and Reid found himself hurrying towards her, completely ignorant of Seth and Richard frozen in their spots, just staring incredulously. It wasn't until he was almost at her side that Seth suddenly moved, his arm shooting out to grab Reid's and pull him back harshly.

"Don't!"

Reid stared at him with a mixture of incomprehension and anger for a moment before trying to tear himself away, hard, determined to get to the injured woman and help her somehow. Seth's grip was like steel though, digging into his arm painfully as he yanked him back yet again.

His voice was strained, "Don't go near her." With his free hand he was reaching for his gun and Reid felt his blood run cold as he pulled it and aimed it at the woman's head. Seth certainly wouldn't…

"No!" he yelled, not thinking twice before throwing himself between the two, blocking Seth's shot. Seth cursed as he fought with him, an odd look of distress on his face. "Stop it! Look. Look at her!"

He yanked Reid around so he was facing the woman and the young agent froze, forgetting to struggle over the shock that ran all through his body. The woman had gotten up by now, something that should be impossible considering she had at least been stabbed repeatedly –but she was standing, grinning at them like nothing had ever happened.

Reid gaped at her, about to ask what was going on when suddenly her features changed right before his eyes, morphing until her once pretty, youthful face was distorted into a grotesque, bumpy mask with yellow eyes staring at him hungrily. Her body changed as well, growing, turning into something out of a horror movie with hands that suddenly bore sharp, large claws.

Reid jerked away in shock, stumbling away from her and into Seth whose grip just tightened, pulling him back further.

The woman followed after him, her smile now hellish as she advanced. She grinned widely at his horrified gasp, exposing rows of razor-sharp teeth, "Now, now, don't tell me you only help pretty girls?"

Reid just stared at her, his brain unable to keep up with what was happening, or to process it even. He knew what he was seeing, his body was reacting, his heart racing, his palms sweating –but he couldn't move, or think.
What was happening? He hadn't just actually seen a woman turn into –what? –right before his eyes. No, that couldn't… Was he going insane now? Had he finally snapped?

He didn't get the chance to come to a remotely productive conclusion because in just that moment the other corpses in the room suddenly started moving as well. Reid stared wide eyed as they all got to their feet, also turning into monsters right before his eyes. He felt his body go numb with shock, his legs threatening to give in. The only thing holding him upright seemed to be Seth right then. But neither Gecko brother was saying anything either, both just stood there, probably in shock as well, frozen.

Reid blinked, trying to make what he was seeing go away –all they did see however was the woman in front of him suddenly move forward much too quickly, lunging for him with a piercing shriek. Reid could see her razor sharp teeth coming towards him, his neck, and he knew without question that she was about to rip his throat out somehow. That he was going to die.

It was impossible. But it was happening. And he still couldn't move, couldn't-

Seth yanked him back just in time, spinning him around so that his back hit the wall hard. Reid gasped, watching as the woman flew just past him, crashing to the floor with a thud and an angry shriek. She got up, furious, about to charge again, and Reid felt his heart stop for the second before suddenly shot rang out and she was thrown back, landing on the floor with a bullet hole in her head. Reid stared at the blood oozing from the wound. It was green.

Reid pressed himself against the wall as Seth walked up to her quickly, shooting her a second time and causing her to disintegrate right before their eyes, turning to sticky goo on the floor. Reid couldn't do anything but stare at her remains, his heart racing and his mind still refusing to process what he'd just seen.

No. No, no, no, no.

There were no monsters; they were the stuff of mysteries and children stories. Something that superstitious people believed in but which a man of his intellect and knowledge could only roll his eyes at.

And yet he couldn't deny that he had just seen a real monster.

No, not a monster. Six monsters.

Five of which were still alive.

He tore his eyes from the messy puddle on the floor to stare at the remaining monsters, which were now on their feet as well, slowly advancing on them with that same hungry murderous look in their yellow eyes. Okay, he was sure he was hyperventilating now.

He looked to Seth, not sure what he wanted, maybe to beg for a rational explanation, but found that the man didn't even look surprised. Instead there was a look of grim determination on his face as he reloaded his gun and stood to face their attackers.

Richard was doing the same, gun and knife in his hands, standing next to his brother. "I told you they were vampires," he said, almost gleefully.

Seth didn't look at him, shoulders tense, body poised.

"Shut the fuck up, Richie."
Both men fell silent then, neither looking scared or confused or anything remotely appropriate for the situation. The only difference was that while Richie looked almost giddy at the expectation of violence to come, Seth's face was grim and dark.

He didn't understand. Why weren't they more shocked, more surprised that the laws of nature had just been violated right before their eyes? Somewhere buried in his reeling mind, Reid remembered conversations about vampires, Richie's excuses and Seth's promise. But, no, he'd said that-

"Seth…"

He didn't realize he'd spoken until Seth turned around, meeting his gaze with something akin to regret mixed into that dark determination. He sighed heavily, his face crunched up in distress for a moment before he opened his mouth to speak.

Before he could get one word out though, there was the sound of a gun being cocked, accompanied by Richard's voice, "Seth, watch out."

The vampires were advancing quickly now, their expressions murderous.

"Shit," Seth cursed, cocking his gun again, "Richie, back me up."

The two men quickly stood side by side, ready to fire, to fight.

"You might as well give up now," one of the men –monsters- grinned, showing rows of shark-like teeth, "Now that we found you the mistress will know where you are. You won't get away again. Better come along quietly and hope she'll grant you a quick death."

What? Mistress? But Reid didn't have enough time to try and understand any of that.

"No, thanks," Seth replied coolly, shooting the speaker several times without blinking.

Reid flinched at the noise and he realized that he had no time for reflection. Whatever these creatures were and what they had planned -they were obviously real enough to kill him. His mind was screaming at him to move, to do something. But he didn't have a weapon or any idea what to use against vampires…

Hell, he'd already been way in over his head with a hostage scenario –now he was supposed to deal with kidnappers and vampires?

At least Seth and Richie were holding their ground. Richie was now shooting at a third vampire and Reid expected him to go down like the woman, but this one was quicker than and he dodged the bullets, charging. Breathless, Reid watched him morph completely into a creature from hell as he flew at Seth.

Just in time, Seth threw himself to the floor, rolling off to the side and getting back to his feet with fluid agility, immediately shooting again. This time he hit the man's arm, greenish blood staining the surrounding area. The monster didn't stop though, advancing further on Seth while the others surrounded them slowly.

With rising dread, Reid realized that this was going to turn into a splatter fest pretty soon from the looks of it. And the odds were against them.

He was ripped from his thoughts when he saw a movement to his right and realized that while two monsters seemed busy with Seth and Richie, a third was now advancing on him. It grinned, watching as he searched for a way out.
A little off, he could see Richie battering his attacker with a chair, repeatedly hitting his head with it while Seth had apparently been tackled to the ground, a vampire pinning him there and snapping for his neck with sharp teeth. Seth held him off with both hands against his shoulders, yelling for Richie to be done with his attacker and help him out.

"Get a weapon," he yelled, and it took Reid a moment to realize he was talking to him.

Forcing his limbs to work, he retreated and grabbed a chair leg lying near his feet, using it as a barrier between him and the advancing monster.

It wasn't much help.

More quickly than he would have thought possible, the vampire suddenly jumped at him, grabbing the chair leg and pulling at it so forcefully that Reid was thrown through the air along with it. Pain shot through his back as he felt himself crash through the glass door leading to the patio. He landed on the hard ground, glass and gravel digging into his skin painfully.

He didn't have time to ponder just how strong these vamps had to be to throw him that far because almost immediately he was roughly grabbed by his hair. Reid gasped in pain, blindly reaching up to ease the pressure on his scalp as he was pulled up and dragged across the floor.

A sharp tug at his scalp brought him to his feet, and he yelped in pain as he was forced to look into the face of the monster holding him, cringing when yellow eyes stared at him hungrily. The vampire moved in closer, unbothered by Reid's thrashing against his grip and leaned in to sniff at his neck.

"Don't you look tasty," he grinned, exposing long fangs in the process. Reid shrunk back and was rewarded with hard fingers closing around his neck, cutting off his air supply and holding him still effectively.

He was vaguely aware that his feet had left the ground as he desperately tried to breathe, kicking at his attacker. The man leaned in again, fangs bared and ready to bite down when suddenly another vampire grabbed his arm, stopping him.

"Were not supposed to kill them yet, remember?" he reminded him, sounding annoyed, "The mistress wants them for herself."

Reid didn't understand what they meant by that but frankly he was too busy hyperventilating anyways to pay much attention to them.

"Check again," the first vampire growled without releasing his grip, "This one wasn't at the bar. The mistress never has to find out."

Reid felt himself freeze in terror when a cruel smile spread over the second vampire's face and he stepped up to them, looking just as hungry as his companion.

"Well, in that case - you go first."

"Don't mind if I do."

Reid whimpered in horror when sharp nails dug into his hair again, harshly tugging his head to the side so his neck was exposed. He knew that he would lose conscience soon without new oxygen but he had a feeling it wouldn't be soon enough to escape the feeling of fangs ripping into him.

He cringed and pressed his eyes shut as he waited for the inevitable pain.
Seth huffed in relief when he used his last strength to push the vampire pinning him up, giving Richard the opportunity to stake him with a chair leg. He watched the monster disintegrate with an unearthly scream and pushed the remains off him before they could stain his clothes.

Then he rolled over, taking a deep breath before pushing himself off the floor and looking around to find Richie sitting among four now finally dead bodies, reloading his gun. He still felt the adrenaline rushing through his body, a familiar feeling that enabled him to live the life he did and that had hardly worn off since they had first encountered the vampires' nest a week earlier.

He still couldn't believe their bad luck for running into those monsters again—but he didn't have time for introspection then.

Just then a strangled scream echoed through the room. His heart missed a beat when he saw the broken glass doors, and Spencer outside just seconds away from becoming vampire food… The sight sent a current of true fear through his body for the first time since he’d stepped foot into the bar.

He was on his feet before he knew it, grabbing his gun-

Richie's hand on his arm pulled him back harshly before he could run towards the door.

"Leave him, Seth. Forget about the money - we need to take cover."

Seth hesitated for a moment, staring between his brother and the door. As always, situations of danger like these let him forget any disagreements they had instantly, allowing them to work as the perfect team. And for all his flaws, Richard was effective in situations like these.

Like now. Richie was right.

Going outside would be suicide.

Through the nightly air, he thought he could already hear the familiar flutter of wings. He knew what that meant. Bats. More vampires. Probably dozens of them.

If they wanted any chance of getting out of here alive they had to block every entrance to this room now and try to hold out till morning with the bullets they had left. It wasn't a good chance but if he went out there now the chances would drop to zero. Richie was right; the smartest thing he could do was stay and try to save the two of them.

He looked at his brother, just as hyped up as he and ready to kill whatever came to close to them – then, before he could feel guilty for risking both of their lives so stupidly, he turned and stormed through the broken door and into the night.

As expected Richard yelled and cursed loudly, but soon he could hear his steps behind him.

The flapping of wings was more insistent now that they were outside, seemingly much closer and more threatening but Seth ignored it and fixed his eyes on the two figures that were only a couple of feet away now.

The vampire had the kid by his throat, ready to maul his neck. Reid had his eyes pressed shut in fear, gasping for air - but he didn't look like it had already bitten him.

Seth forced himself to stand still and aim, blowing the vampire's head off just before he could bite down. The two bodies toppled to the floor when the vampire fell onto Reid. The young man winced,
staring at Seth with glazed eyes for a second before his eyes rolled back in his head and he dropped to the floor, motionless.

Seth cursed, running towards him. He'd barely fallen to his knees on the ground next to his unconscious hostage when he heard it.

The sounds of impact on the ground around them.

He looked up to see at least a dozen vampires emerge from the dark around them, surrounding them, fangs and claws bared. They eyed them viciously, predators seeking their helpless prey and Seth knew that their chances of getting out of this would have dropped below zero by now if that were humanly possible.
"Don't tell me it’s not worth dying for. I can't help it, there's nothing I want more." –Bryan Adams

The first thing he felt was pain, spreading through his limbs, radiating through his throat and lungs. He took a ragged breath and coughed when it burned, breathing in what felt like dust.

Reid forced his body to move and felt his fingers scrape across cold stone and sand.

He winced, realizing that part of his discomfort came from lying on the cold, hard ground. The air around him was hot and stuffy though, making it even harder to breathe.

He tried to remember why he felt this drained, why his throat hurt this much. There was something like a shadowy memory lurking in the back of his skull but it was as blurred as his vision, merely leaving him with a feeling of dread.

He moaned softly in discomfort and suddenly something warm touched his face, brushing back his hair. With some effort he blinked and focused on the shadowy figure hovering over him. A tanned face with dark hair and even darker eyes came into view, a tattooed neck connecting it to the hand touching him.

Seth.

His memory returned with a shock like he had been doused with freezing water, replaying everything that had happened over the past three days with brilliant and brutal clarity.

He sat up with a gasp, immediately cringing when pain shot through him. He ignored it, too occupied with not immediately hyperventilating again as he processed the situation. He drew in a sharp breath, his eyes widening as he kept staring through Seth.


Vampires.

"Oh, God."

He could feel the blood washing out of his face, his hands going numb at the same time.

No, that couldn't….but-

No. He had to be calm, to sort this out…

Hastily, he looked around, searching for some indication that it had all been a bad dream.

The room he saw was small and dimly lit with narrow walls and only a wooden door on one side. There wasn't anything else in it except him, Seth and Richie.

Richie was sitting with his back to the opposite wall, shooting him a dirty look before ignoring him as he picked at his bandaged hand. Seth was kneeling next to him, his hand still hovering in the air where Reid had been. He looked drawn, his suit dusty and torn at the sleeve and there was blood dripping down his temple.
Reid blinked hard, trying to remember if Seth had looked like that after the diner…but no, he hadn't. His heart fell. That meant…

Suddenly, he very much felt like panic was the appropriate reaction here. If all that hadn't been a nightmare…

"What-", he croaked, voice failing. He tried to get to his feet, only to have a sudden spell of dizziness force him back onto his knees, the room around him blurring.

"Don't get up yet, you took a pretty hard fall," Seth said quietly. His tone seemed entirely inappropriate for the panic Reid was beginning to feel welling up inside him.

Reid stared at him, unable to find words. He was trying hard to put his thoughts into order, but all that kept pushing to the forefront of his mind were images of horrific masks with sharp fangs and hungry eyes, claws gripping him…

He had been sure he was about to die then. He hadn't for some reason –but he didn't know what had happened or where he was, if those monsters had brought them here, or worse, were still close by. His anxiety rose with every memory flash, sending his heart racing. He had to get out of here, wherever this was…

Seth moving closer snapped him out of his stupor and he stared at the man with wide eyes, frightened and questioning.

"We're alone here," Seth said like he had read Reid's thoughts, "It's safe for now."

Behind them, Richie scoffed at his brother's tone. Seth shot him an icy glare over his shoulder but Reid was too preoccupied to pay much attention.

"What happened?", he asked, wishing he could sound less shaken and exhausted from both the pain and the sensory overload, less scared, "Where is here?"

--------------------------------------------------------------------------------

Seth didn't know what to say.

Spencer already looked bad enough without being told that they were trapped in some god forlorn vampire hideout, waiting to be made dinner. It would have been better for him to stay out cold.

Seth himself had awoken about half an hour ago, to the realization that the vampires attacking them must have knocked them out and kidnapped all three of them, and to the reality of one person he cared about being majorly pissed at him while the other was motionless on the floor.

His first move after making sure they were alone and that Richie was alright had been to make sure the kid still had a pulse. His worry apparently had been showing because the action had only served to make his brother glare angrily, even angrier than before. Seth had ignored him so far. He knew what Richard's problem was. He obviously thought they were only in this predicament because Seth had saved Spencer, something he obviously couldn't understand.

It was true of course - but he still couldn't bring himself to regret it. He hadn't been able to leave Spencer. Not that he could explain why to his brother…

Seth sighed. They probably wouldn't have had a chance anyway with how many vampires there had been. The elast of his worries now should be that Richard might become suspicious of his odd behavior. So what if he thought Seth cared…right now he was there to stop him from acting out and
later...well, if there was a later, he could think about it then...

For now he was just glad they were all uninjured.

He frowned. Probably not for long though.

He hadn't needed to do much thinking to figure out that they were here so the so called Mistress – table-dance-chick-Santana-something, Seth remembered vaguely- could get revenge on them for killing so many of her coven the last time. And whatever she had planned for them -it would neither be quick nor painless.

Richie and he had since tried to find a way out of their predicament but since there was no way out of the room there wasn't much they could do but wait and listen to the occasional rustling on the other side of the door, indicating that the vampires were doing something out there and prepare themselves for when that door would be opened. They could go out by themselves of course once Specner was awake -but they had no weapons. Their guns were gone, taken.

Things looked bleak, and he supposed he could understand Richard's foul mood.

They had sat in silence till the kid woke up. He had, eventually. Needless to say with a lot of angst and questions. After all, you didn't come across real live vampires very day.

"Where are we?" Reid repeated in that moment, a noticeable edge to his voice. Clearly, he wasn't taking this new stress very well.

Seth sighed inaudibly. He knew he had some explaining to do. And he wanted to find a way to do it gently. But he needed to hurry -they had to come up with a plan to get out of here soon.

"You remember what happened, right?"

He could see from the distressed expression on the kid face that he did, even as he shook his head harshly. "No, I don't- that can't-"

"Yes, you do. We were meeting Richard, and all those corpses in the bar turned into the living dead," Seth cut him off. He just had to get it out there; there was no room for sugarcoating.

"Do you remember the bar I told you about…the people we had trouble with?" he asked after a moment of consideration, "That was them, the rest of their coven. They're vampires. We killed a lot of them about a week ago and now they're out for revenge. They brought us here, locked us in."

He watched the color drain out of Spencer's features completely, not so much a surprised as a dismayed expression on his face. Clearly, he remembered and what he was hearing made sense- but he just didn't want to believe.

Spencer shook his head, staring at him for a long moment as though he was hoping to find some sign that Seth was mentally unstable after all and making all of this up. Obviously a pointless effort considering Spencer had seen the vampires with his own eyes.

Still, he shook his head again, desperately grasping for straws. "But you said…"

Seth shrugged, frowning, "I knew there was no point in trying to convince you. Some things you have to see to believe. You were freaked out enough, plus, I thought we'd lost them. Clearly not."

xxx
Reid stared at Seth for ten long seconds, unable to react.

Everything inside him was rebelling against what he was hearing. He didn't want to believe anything the man was saying, wanted to discard him as insane just so he could have his own peace—but he also knew what he had seen and that Seth was telling him the truth.

Vampires were real. He had seen them, felt their imprint on his body...there would be no wishing them away.

Reid took in a shuddering breath as he came to terms with what that meant. They were trapped in some underground cell by supernatural monsters out to kill them. And unless some miracle happened, they were gonna die.

Suddenly, he felt like laughing hysterically. To think that just this morning his biggest worry had been the treat of two psycho criminal brothers holding him hostage. Apparently that hadn't been enough though—no, now the fates had decided to throw vampires in the mix as well. He was beginning to think that someone or something out there must really hate him. Or be a big fan of irony.

To think that he who spent his days hunting the most dangerous individuals in the United States would be ended by a crowd of mystical creatures...

Well, that notion along with everything else seemed like a good cue to finally break down and let go of the rest of his composure.

He didn't realize how badly his whole body was shaking until he felt Seth's hands on his shoulders, heavy and warm, grounding him.

"Breathe."

He looked up into deep, black eyes, instinctively holding on to their focus to keep his vision from blurring. Seth squeezed his shoulder, "Don't lose it now. We're gonna get out of here."

Seth's voice was so steady and convincing that Reid almost wanted to nod, feeling himself latching onto that reassurance instinctively. Seth nodded as he watched him, waiting for him to calm down, his voice remaining calm, "We're not gonna die because of those fucks. We beat them before, we will again."

They had. If what Seth was saying was true they had gotten out of a situation like this before, so maybe....

"What the fuck, Seth?"

Reid jumped when Richard interrupted them suddenly, his voice angry.

They both looked at him to find he had gotten up, a dangerous expression on his face.

"What's going on here?" he spat at Seth, "First you haul us into this mess by running after him and now...what? We're suddenly a team? Last time I checked he was a bargaining chip for easy money and now-" He gestured wildly to Seth's hand which was still on Reid's shoulder. "What the hell, man?"

Reid felt his heart sink at that, suddenly cold inside again. Not just because Richard's presence alone was enough to set him on edge...also because he was right. He had been so quick to be reassured by Seth just now, desperate for good news... but Seth was still Seth Gecko.
When had the man who had put him through hell in the past few days suddenly turned into someone to calm him down, to reassure him, someone on his side? Why was he so quick to just accept that change, to believe Seth…?

Yes, having vampires wanting to kill them sort of put the brothers' scare factor in perspective a bit-

But still. Richard was right. Technically he was no more than a bargaining chip to the brothers. His life didn't mean anything. There was no reason why they should help him get out of here if it wasn't beneficial to them. They wanted the money yes, but if sacrificing that would mean staying alive, they'd certainly choose that…

Seth would, too…wouldn't he?

Xxx

Seth felt Spencer grow rigid under his hand as they both stared at Richard losing his composure and he knew without turning around what the kid was thinking.

Fucking Richard!

He was on his feet, anger suddenly boiling up and over as he glared at his brother.

"That is your biggest concern right now?" he snapped, sounding more aggressive than he would have liked.

He knew that technically Richard was right and that he had only reminded Spencer of what was fact--but that wasn't their reality anymore! Spencer mattered.

And right now, in this situation, it didn't matter anymore what Richard thought about that because they had bigger worries…his brother would hardly have time to rebel against his change of attitude, not with the impending death threat just outside the walls of this room.

But then, Richie had never been great at timing or propriety.

"Clearly it's important so I don't see why we shouldn't discuss it now," he shot back stubbornly, like he wasn't aware of the seriousness of the situation.

Seth was in his face before he knew it, anger now fully breaking to the surface. "Maybe because there is a crowd of bloodthirsty monsters out there who won't hesitate to rip your throats out and flay us alive the first chance they get?" he growled.

Richard just shrugged, indifferent to his worries, "So we do what we did last time. While they're distracted with him, we take off and get out of here.”

Behind him he heard Reid breathing in sharply. Seth just stared at his brother, feeling his own expression grow hard as he fought down all the rage and repulsion he was suddenly feeling towards his little brother. He knew it was being hypocritical, after all they had done this with Jacob and Scott…but they wouldn't do it this time, not with Spencer.

He knew Richard could read his thoughts off his face by the scowl on his brother's face. "Why the hell not, Seth? Have you forgotten he's a fucking fed? He would have died anyway so what does it matter?"

Seth forced himself to take a deep breath, reminding himself that he had to stay calm and collected even if he felt anything but. "This isn't the time, Richie," he finally ground out from behind clenched
teeth, "We need to stick together now-"

He didn't get to finish his sentence because in that moment Richard suddenly pushed past him, lunging for Reid and hauling him to his feet, his hand wrapping tightly around Reid's throat and slamming him into the wall before Seth could do so much as blink.

The young man gasped in pain and shock, hands clawing at Richard's futilely while the older man hissed viciously, "I knew from the start you were gonna be trouble. Well, not for long. You're about to become bait."

Seth didn't wait to see what else Richard had planned. Forcefully, he yanked his brother back by the shoulder, pulling the two apart. Richie struggled as his hand dug into his shoulder but Seth didn't let up, restraining his brother.

"Are you really serious, man?" Richie snapped, livid as he fought his grip, "This is not the time for your morality tick! He's nothing-"

That was the last straw. Instead of an answer Seth let his arm snap back and punched Richie square in the face. It wasn't as hard as he would have liked it to be and Richie merely stared at him in bewilderment but it helped rein in some of his rage. Silence followed, and he could feel both men staring at him in shock and disbelief over what he'd just done.

Seth kept his face a careful mask, merely letting his anger show through. Too late now to think about the impact of his instinctual actions...

"I told you to shut the fuck up," he growled at his brother, "Last time I checked I was calling the shots. So you are not going to question my judgment. I say we need him so you don't touch him. Got it?"

He waited for Richard to nod, finally having realized that Seth wasn't playing around on this, that he had gone too far.

Then, he let go, trying to get himself to calm down.

Shit.

He knew he'd gone too far just now. And that he couldn't let his temper rein him like that, especially now. Between the three of them he was the only one still able to think rationally right now. He had to keep his head in the game, or they were all goners.

Explaining himself to Richie, or worse to himself, would have to wait until later…if there was a later.

xxx

Reid felt like he was trapped in a nightmare as he stared at the two men fighting in front of him. He had sunken back to the floor after the attack. His fingers were clutching his throat were Richard's hand had been just moments ago, the shock reverberating through his whole body.

The younger Gecko brother had just proven to him that vampires weren't the only thing he needed to be concerned about. The man clearly would be all too glad to sacrifice his life for his own...

If Seth hadn't-

He couldn't help but stare at the man's back incredulously as he fought with his brother.
Even with all of his theorizing and analysis of what Seth might or might not see in him, he would have never expected the man to actually side with him against his own brother. After all, Richard was the one who really mattered, right?

But what Seth had done just now...even he couldn't tell himself it was just for practical reasons. He really wasn't much of an asset in a possible fight, not in his state and without weapons. It would have been much easier for the brothers to actually use him as bait...or just leave him behind...

But Seth wasn't doing that... In that moment Reid didn't care about what did or did not make sense anymore, or about the possibility that Seth might be lying...

He just felt overwhelmed with relief; he simply had to believe that he meant it, that there was hope for him...the only option was death.

"Alright, here's what we're gonna do," Seth suddenly said, now speaking to both of them, resolute in his words, "We're gonna need every ounce of skill and strength we have to get out of here. So we're gonna work together. I realize this isn't the perfect constellation for that but I need you both on board now. Together we can make it. So, what do you say?"

He glanced at Richard briefly, finding his brother nodding reluctantly, before looking back at Reid, expectant.

Reid gulped, staring back. He knew he was expected to answer now, that he had to make a decision.

To trust Seth or not to trust him?

He glanced from Seth to Richard, who was still glaring, and remembered what the man had said before. That they were just in this predicament because Seth had tried to help him. Now, he didn't know how much of that was true...but if it was...

He still didn't trust any equation that had Richard in it of course, and he didn't doubt that if came down to it he would break his brother's word over and over again and push him into the vampires' arms the first chance he got. But the brothers had fought these monsters before and somehow gotten away. If they could actually pull themselves together for the moment, they might make it out of here somehow.

And Seth...

He looked back at the older brother, finding dark eyes fixated on him. Seth's expression was tense and dark, but Reid thought he could still make out whatever lay behind that, proof that he wasn't lying...

For one long moment they merely held each other gazes, Reid trying to find anything deceitful in those dark eyes. There was nothing he could find, just that same expression Seth so often gave him now. The one that gave him hope, that made him positive that Seth wasn't indifferent, that he cared for whatever reason...maybe even cared enough not to let him die.

Maybe…

He seemed to have taken too long to think because Seth suddenly leaned down, extending a hand and grabbing onto Reid's.

"Get up," he said resolutely, deciding for him, "I'm getting us out of here."

Reid let him pull him to his feet. In the end, he realized, there was nothing to do but to take the leap.
Going with Seth was his best shot.

"Alright," Seth nodded, grimly, "Let's do this."

He squeezed his hand tightly for a brief moment, his gaze intense enough to make Reid forget to look away. He held on a second longer than might have been necessary, then squared his shoulders and turned around towards the door, pulling Reid with him. Meanwhile Richard had turned towards the door and turned the knob, finding it unlocked. Apparently no one was worried about them getting out. Well, if that wasn't motivating...

"Let's go," he nodded to Richie, determined. With that, they left the room and walked into a dark hallway with torches on the walls. It was empty, leading into an impenetrable darkness, but Reid thought he could hear noise and rustling somewhere close by.

Seth didn't say anything else, not looking back either. He was focused on his task now, much like Richard whose scowl seemed to be frozen on his face by now, but who didn't say anything either, too busy securing every corner they turned. Reid let Seth pull him along, only hearing his own thumping heartbeat for the longest minutes of his life as they made their way into the unknown.

As they walked, the noises seemed to come closer but there was no other way to go. Both men tensed in apprehension as they slowed down and Seth's grip on Reid's arm tightened. He stopped for a moment to take a wooden torch from the wall, motioning for Richard to do the same. Then he got another and pushed it into Reid's free hand wordlessly.

Reid gripped the makeshift stake tightly, nodding silently. He would have to take what he could get.

"Do we have a plan, Seth?" Richie asked quietly as they walked, taking the words right out of Reid's mouth.

Seth shrugged, looking ahead, "I was thinking something along the lines of, Kill every fucking son of a bitch who crosses our path, repeat. We don't have any weapons other than this but if we can get our hands on some real stakes or crosses-"

He stopped in midsentence when they turned around another corner and realized the hallway was at an end and they were standing at the entrance of a large hall.

From its middle, dozens of hungry yellow eyes stared in their direction. 30, 40...he couldn't count them all... Reid's breath caught at the sight, his heart falling as he grew pale.

"Never mind," Seth said dryly.
The sun had gone down an hour ago but they had kept driving, knowing they were running out of time.

Hotch was starting to get more anxious by the minute, fearing that they would miss their rendezvous in the morning just because they had decided to go look at some shady bar in the middle of nowhere.

For three hours they had driven along the highway, seeing nothing but dust and sand until even Gideon had almost given in and agreed to turn around.

Just then, a light in the distance had caught their attention. It had turned out to be the place they were looking for, a large building with bright neon lights and shady clientele included.

A couple of trucks were parked in front of the entrance and music blasted from the inside. Everybody stared at them as they neared the door in their neat suits and ties, looking completely out of place between all the lowlifes and whores.

Hotch kept his stern glare ahead, remaining professional and focused. He didn't actually believe that Seth Gecko would be stupid enough to hide in this hell hole out of all places but there wasn't anything left they hadn't tried yet and this was their last chance to catch the brothers unprepared, meeting them on their own terms.

He looked over at Gideon's worried expression and at Elle's scowl as she eyed the half naked dancers by the entrance and the crude announcer.

His colleague met his eye and nodded and Hotch signaled for the three deputies they had brought along to follow him inside. Even if it wasn't likely, he didn't want to risk walking in there unprepared.

Before they went in he made sure everybody had their guns with them and paused in confusion at the devices he saw the three Mexican cops carrying. They looked like large wooden sticks.

"What are those?" he asked in the little Spanish he knew.

One of the men said something he couldn't understand and Elle translated: "Stakes. You know, against the vampires."

Hotch looked at her, then at the men and back at her, trying to see if they could be joking but the men looked dead serious and more than a little scared.

He sighed heavily, letting it go. There was nothing he could do now concerning superstitious small towners and there was no harm really in having some 'stakes'. He just wished he could have some sane people on his side. He looked at Elle, glad the other two agents were with him at least.

"Have you told them that that is ridiculous?"

In response, Elle merely pulled at a chain around her neck, revealing a little silver cross to him, "You tell them."

He looked at her incredulously, realizing she wasn't laughing either. He turned to Gideon, hoping that at least his old friend wouldn't disappoint him.
"How about you? Any hidden stakes I need to know about?"

Gideon shrugged, looking mildly amused by his annoyance, "No. But I had some garlic bread for lunch so I was hoping I'm covered anyways."

Hotch had no choice but to file his words under joke, otherwise he might have thrown a fit right there in the desert.

This was going to be one hell of a night, he could feel it already.

They made their way through the door and were faced with a large room with several tables, a bar and a stage; the air was full of smoke, sweat and heady perfume.

Next to him, Elle made another face seeing the girls dancing by the wall and one the tables. It would almost have been funny if not for their dire situation. A swift look around revealed that if the brothers and Reid where here, they were at least hiding somewhere out of sight.

Hotch walked up to the bar and waved the barkeeper over. The man walked over to them with a skeptical look on his face, "This bar is only for truckers. Go get a drink elsewhere."

"We're not here for a drink," Gideon said next to him, flashing his credentials along with pictures of Seth and Richard, "We just need some information. We are looking for two men: Seth and Richard Gecko."

As though he had said a magic word, suddenly all eyes in the room seemed to land on them, all conversations dying until there was only the music left. The bar keeper eyed them with an eerie expression as he took the pictures from him.

"Are you, now?" he sneered.

xxx

Just five hours earlier, Seth Gecko had been a fugitive with an unstable brother to take care of and the utterly self-destructive urge to kiss someone who was supposed to be his enemy slash victim.

Five hours ago he had thought his day couldn't possibly get worse.

Seth gripped the gun in his hand tighter as he stared at the army of bloodthirsty creatures which occupied the wide room in front of them, staring at them with hunger in their eyes.

Next to him, Richie cursed under his breath, and he heard Reid take a shuddering breath when he realized just how much danger they were really in.

Knowing he had to keep a level head, he quickly assessed the room. There were three hallways leading away from this room into the dark and unknown. One of them was right behind them and obviously a cul-de-sac. The other two were blocked by monsters dying to rip their throats out.

And opposing that tremendous threat was a dream team that couldn't have been a worse fit.

Terrific.

Now, how to get out of here…there were a couple of tables and more torches in this room, things they could use as stakes…but even with that he wasn't sure they'd be able to make it to the exit. If it were only he and Richie, maybe, but he had Spencer to think of as well. The kid had barely swallowed the fact that there were vampires…he didn't look ready to fight them by far. On top of
that, his fighting skills so far hadn't been very impressive…

He eyed their opponents carefully, waiting for them to strike immediately but they just stayed in place, some shifting restlessly towards them but none openly attacking. Why not?

Last time he had been here all it had taken was one order from the table dance chick and every fucking creature in this joint had pounced on them like rabid dogs. Where was she by the way? Were they maybe not allowed to attack without her here? Then they might have a chance…

"Stay close," Seth said, too low for the vampires to hear, "We're gonna try and make our way to one of those tunnels."

Next to him, Richie nodded and he decided to take Reid's silence as approval. They moved forward slowly, keeping their respective weapons in front of them which even succeeded in warding off the vampires closest to them—until they closed in again once they had passed them. They were quickly becoming surrounded.

Behind him, Reid gasped when one made a jump at his turned back; he spun around and struck out with the torch instinctively, making the beast retreat with a snarl. Seconds later, Seth jabbed his torch at it as well, causing some more to step back.

"Back the fuck off!", he snarled, not even caring if they could comprehend him in their current state. To his surprise he got an actual answer.

"Now, why so rude? Don't tell me you're leaving already? We haven't even had dinner yet…"

All three of them looked to where the eerily soft voice came from, watched as the crowd separated to let the speaker through.

Seth recognized the woman immediately. There she was.

She was one of the few who hadn't fully transformed yet, her thick dark hair falling heavily around her stunning face.

Santanico Pandemonium, he finally remembered her name. The so called Mistress.

He remembered her doing a table dance for Richie over a week ago, the way she had moved and looked so seductively, wordlessly promising bliss to every man she looked at. Until she had morphed into an especially vicious vampire, almost ripping off some guy's head as she plunged her fangs into his throat.

She was giving him a smile now but didn't do much to hide the fire burning behind her eyes, promising him the same fate.

"So we meet again," she leered at them, slowly moving closer still with graceful steps, "I was beginning to fear I wouldn't get to repay you for trashing my lair and killing my family."

"What makes you think this time will be different, bitch?" Seth hissed, lifting his torch, ready to attack. Even if he was going to die, he refused to let her get to him.

The female vampire just laughed at his action, her eyes flashing yellow, "Last time you were lucky. This time, you will be dead before sunrise. Or at least you'll wish you were."

She took a moment to let that notion sink in, knowing full well that her implication wasn't lost on any
Reid couldn't move.

Literally. They were surrounded by monsters out to tear them apart and he was frozen with fear.

He didn't know why he'd thought going with the brothers would somehow make a difference where his fate was concerned. They weren't getting out of here. There were just too many of them.

The vampire mistress gave them about ten seconds to come to terms with their imminent demise, assessing first Seth, then Richie with a cold, calculating smile before turning to Reid and faltering for a second.

Reid shuddered as she fixated him with narrowed eyes.

Pretty as she undoubtedly was, that woman's smile almost scared him more than the horrific creatures surrounding them. He shuddered in terror. His mind was racing along with his heart, just trying not to panic at the situation and keep it together. This was a thousand times worse than any nightmare he'd ever had.

How long would a burning stick keep him safe?

Probably for the better part of a minute.

Looking at the sheer amount of monsters they were faced with he realized that he wouldn't even have to worry about whether or not Seth would keep his word -because he wouldn't have the opportunity to break it.

"Where's the girl?" the female vampire suddenly interrupted his thoughts, looking annoyed, "I told you I wanted her, too."

She looked around at her followers who cringed guilty while Reid blinked in confusion.

What girl? Hazel?

He heard a scoff and turned to look at Seth who by some mystery he didn't look scared at all. Or confused as to what she was talking about.

"Already getting sloppy, huh?" Seth mocked her condescendingly, "Well, don't you want to find Kate first? It would be a shame to let her get away."

Kate?

"Do not worry about that," Satanico smiled, compassionless, "We will find her eventually and she will die another day. I don't feel like waiting anymore."

She extended her arms, her red lips pulling back over rows of sharp fangs. Reid watched in horror as her hair retreated back into her scalp and her head turned into a lizard like monstrosity right before their eyes.

"Now, who wants to go first?" a deep voiced drawled from her twisted mouth.

Reid's heart skipped a beat at the sight, and then another when he felt Richard's stare on him at those words; the man shifted backwards in his direction but he stilled under a vicious glare from his
Quickly, Seth stepped in front of both of them, making up for the ground Richie had lost with a murderous expression on his face. Reid found about two seconds to be yet again astounded at that action before he was distracted by fatal danger.

"Come and get us if you can," Seth taunted.

He didn't have to ask twice.

"As you wish," the vampire mistress hissed with a cruel sneer, retreating until she was standing shoulder to shoulder with the first row of vampires.

"Come on, children," she shrieked, jabbing her arms at them, "Time to play some with your food."

With one wave of her hand the vampires behind her suddenly moved –freed from their self-imposed stupor -and launched themselves at the three men without further restraint or control. They moved like one large organism, like their collective intellect had been compartmentalized, lusting for only one thing.

Blood.

"Shit," one of the brothers, he couldn't tell which one without looking, cursed.

And then all hell broke loose. The Gecko brothers fell into action immediately, years of practice showing as they deftly defended themselves with their torches, jabbing the fire at vampires and using the other end as stakes. They managed to hit some of them, the wood going through their hearts easily, like they were penetrating clay rather than flesh.

Reid stared with wide eyes as they dissolved into goo or going up in flames.

He barely had time to register the notion that a fight had actually broken out, that he would die if he didn't start moving when one of the creatures jumped at him with a shriek claws extended to wrap around his throat.

It was less than an inch away from him when Seth jumped forward, stabbing at it viciously so that the creature caught on fire and was thrown back into the sea of its companions, writhing in agony.

"Move!" Seth yelled right next to him, shaking him with one hand.

It snapped Reid out of his stupor like a douse of cold water and he instinctively jumped backwards and pulled his arms up in front of him, swinging the torch at the closest vampires.

They retreated with hisses and growls, only to close back in as soon as he turned to the ones next to them. Through the screeching and howling that filled the air mixed in with their own erratic breathing, Reid could hear Satanico laughing manically from somewhere in the crowd, cementing their doom.

It finally released all of the adrenaline needed into his blood and he started stabbing at their attackers more viciously, burning them if he could. Some part of his brain simply shut off, his body reacting on impulse rather than rational thought.

Seth was fighting right behind him, conveniently covering his back and Richard was somewhere close by as well, fighting like a madman.
Reid felt something like slime hit his face just as he jabbed the torch at another vampire, fending it off, but he didn't have the time or guts to turn around and see what it was or where it came from. His heart was beating all the way up in his throat, as his body whirled around fighting—all while his brain told him he didn't have a real shot no matter how hard he fought. They were too many, too strong, too ruthless.

He wasn't sure if Seth and Richie knew it too and if they had just decided to go down fighting. From the corner of his eye, he saw Richie draw a knife from somewhere and start stabbing everything he could reach almost manically.

Just as Reid was pushing away the feeling of dread that notion gave him even now in the middle of chaos, he heard someone call his name through the raucous.

Before he could think to react, he was pulled backwards roughly by the back of his shirt. He spun around his heart skipping in panic but it was only Seth, keeping him in formation. He caught a glimpse of the older man's eyes, saw the raw energy in them that left no room for fear or doubt and still didn't make him look crazy.

In fact, Seth seemed in perfect functioning mode even while killing, other than Richard who seemed pretty absorbed in his slaughtering.

"That way!" Seth jerked his chin in the direction of the exit to the very left where the least vampires were.

They had moved closer to it while fighting, and the wall was free of vampires—with a good sprint and some well placed bullets they might just make it there.

Reid nodded quickly, incredibly relieved that apparently Seth was at least trying to keep him around to fight of the vampires.

He could deal with everything else later, if he just made it out of here.

He watched as Seth yelled for Richie who didn't seemed to hear him in his frenzy, not even paying attention to more and more vampires closing in on him while he executed the ones in front of him. He never saw a female one jump out of the crowd and launching herself at him like an over sized torpedo.

"Richie!" Seth yelled and Richard finally spun around to look at him, thereby turning his back even further on his attacker.

Everything happened incredibly fast then.

Seth yelled again, jumping forward to grab his brother but it was too late. The vampire latched onto his back like a monkey, wrapping her arms and legs around his torso in a viselike grip and plunging her fangs into his neck.

xxx

Seth's shock only lasted for the fraction of a second. His brother's screams in his ears, he ignored the blood splattering over his face as he jumped forward and shoved his torch right into the vampire's face, throwing her to the floor in flames.

Richard turned around to stare at her almost disbelievingly, staggering as he lifted a shaky hand to the mangled side of his neck, blood gushing over his fingers in a steady rhythm.
"Fucking bitch..." he rasped, before his eyes rolled back in his head and his legs gave in.

Seth cussed loudly, jumping forward to break his brother's fall, dragging him out of the vampires' reach.

He made it to the wall where Reid was already waiting, both tumbling to the ground under Richard's weight. The vampires had turned positively frantic at the sight of blood, baring their teeth and snapping at them.

Seth didn't look at him or the vampires, his face frozen in a mask of tension and dread.

One vampire advanced on them and Reid instinctively opposed it with his makeshift weapon, stabbing it at anyone who came to close to them, suddenly their sole defender when neither brother got back up.

The shock of seeing one of them actually being bitten was greater than he could have imagined. His mind was screaming at him to run now that he was so close to the exit, to at least having a shot at getting out even if he wasn't sure where he'd be running to.

And yet he couldn't seem to make his legs move, felt frozen to the ground by the simple sound of pain in Seth's voice as he was speaking frantically, hushed to his younger brother.

He couldn't leave.

Rationally, he knew it was idiotic of course, that he owed these men less than nothing, but the situation didn't allow for that kind of rationality.

It all suddenly seemed relative somehow. One minute they were one opposing sides of the spectrum, dark and light, good and evil and now it all meant nothing, not now that he was faced with actual true evil. All that remained were three humans fighting for their lives against the creatures of hell. Creatures that Seth hadn't left him with either when he could have just five minutes ago.

Reid didn't move.

Instead, he gripped the torch more tightly with shaking fingers and faced the vampires with bravery born out of hopelessness. Suddenly, it didn't seem so stupid to want to go down fighting, to want to die doing what was right.

He wouldn't turn away to leave the back of a man unguarded who was holding his dying brother. Even if that certain brother definitely deserved death. Seth didn't.

The vampires snarled at him as they tried to find a way past him, but he struck out over and over again until they finally backed off a bit, just hovering, staring at him out of yellow orbs.

He didn't understand why they would pause, why they hadn't pounced on them minutes ago. It would have been easy.

It had to be the mistress. Some kind of plan they weren't in on.

No quick death for them, he remembered, they were supposed to suffer revenge for a sin he hadn't had the opportunity to ask about.

Reid clenched his teeth, afraid that he might scream if he opened his mouth. He was scared to turn around and see what was happening with Seth and Richie, scared to ask even.
From what he'd seen, Richard was dying. He could hear his erratic breathing over Seth mumbling and cussing.

His… their time was running out.

--------------------------------------------------------------------------------

Seth felt numb and nauseous and panicked and pissed at the same time.

He had dropped to one knee, still distractedly aiming his torch at the vampires with one hand while he grasped for his brother's face with the other. What he saw made his blood go cold.

Richie was writhing on the floor, blood gushing out of his mouth and the hole in his neck. His stomach turned.

"Richie, Richie! Hang on… look at me!" he demanded, hating that his voice was suddenly just as unsteady as his fingers.

He was vaguely aware that it wasn't the time to turn his back on the room, that they were still in the middle of a fight but he couldn't make himself get up or look away from Richard's face.

His brother, his little…

"Bit me…fu…cking bitch bit me," his brother wheezed, fighting to get air into his blood filled lungs. Then his eyes rolled back in his head and he took on last shuddering breath before going limp in his arms.

"Shit. No! Don't do this buddy," Seth cursed, pressing his fingers into Richard's neck hard, trying to stop the blood flow, "Come on!"

It was futile of course, he could see that. Not only because he could hardly stop an arterial bleed like this but because his brother was suffocating on his own blood at the same time. There was nothing he could do.

Behind him, Reid shifted hectically, stepping backwards. Even now there was still some part of Seth's brain screaming at him to get up, to stand by his side…but his body wouldn't oblige.

"Seth, he's-

"NO!" Seth snapped, cutting him off with much more vigor in his voice than he himself would have thought.

He didn't want to hear it. Didn't need to.

He had seen a lot of blood in his life, a lot of deadly wounds and this one was different.

It seemed all his strength and calm was evaporating over his outside shell –leaving only dread, and cold panic. He looked back at Richie to find his eyes closed, and his skin waxen under splatters of blood. He wasn't breathing.

"No..." he rasped, "No, don't do this…come on buddy…I need you…"

Not Richie. Not his little brother.

That wasn't part of the plan.
Reid winced.

He really wished he only cared to shake Seth out of his stupor because he needed some backup against the monsters trying to eat them. But the truth was he really just wanted to not have to hear him talk to Richie in that desperate, agonized voice anymore that made it impossible not to feel his pain. Impossible not to see him as human, not to empathize.

It was getting to him, despite his feeling about Richard. All else aside, he was someone's family, someone's little brother. He could only imagine how he would feel if this were happening to someone he loved.

Reid shook his head harshly, trying to clear it. He had to stay focused. Right now he was all that stood between them and death.

Or was he?

He blinked to find that none of the vampires were really advancing anymore.

They seemed to be hovering and waiting just like before the attack, merely gaping at the blood on the floor with hunger. But they weren't lunging at him anymore.

What-?

He got his answer when once again, a familiar figure separated from the crowd and Santanico Pandemonium emerged, her blood red lips pulled into a sickening smile. She grinned at Seth and Richie, fallen apart each in their own way on the floor, waving back her impatient servants.

And Reid knew he had been right. This was just the beginning for her, for them.

Staring into her eyes he couldn't help but feel in his bones that they would all meet the same fate. They would all die here –but it wasn't going to be in the next five minutes.

"Stay away," he warned her, trying to get his voice to stop shaking and she only laughed at him.

"Oh, don't worry about me," Santanico smiled at him, her eyes flickering excitedly, "Worry about him."

Reid didn't have time to question her words because in that moment he saw Richard's body jerk violently from the corner of his eye, sitting up with one fluid inhuman motion. His eyes flew open, flashing a vicious shade of yellow and when a snarl ripped from his throat it was from behind razor-sharp teeth.

Seth leapt to his feet and away from him in shock and the vampire princess laughed cruelly.

Seth stared incredulously as he saw his brother come back to life before his eyes. Only it wasn't his brother anymore.

"Richie?" he asked tonelessly, freezing cold once again from the ice filling his veins.

As Richard turned his head to face him, his whole face seemed to morph, bones being moved and growing until he could barely recognize his brother under a grotesque horror mask.
"Yes, Seth?" he replied grinning, in a voice that wasn't his, that belonged to a demon.

Seth stared at him in horror, unable to move or think even.

This had to be a nightmare.

It had to be.
Chapter 17

Reid whirled around, horrorstruck to see an even more grotesque version of Richard Gecko getting to his feet in a spiderlike manner, his yellow eyes pinned on Seth.

He felt his head spin, unable to deal with everything happening. With the adrenaline still pumping through his body he had to actually force himself to keep still.

No. No, God, no. This was bad.

Richard Gecko had been a force to be reckoned with before—but as a vampire? They were so dead.

And Seth wasn't moving. Reid stared at him, shocked.

Why wasn't he moving? Didn't he see that his dead brother now had claws and fangs and was looking at him like he was a piece of meat?

Reid couldn't see Seth's face from where he was standing but he seemed frozen in place as Richard leered at him, licking his teeth in a predatory manner.

"Oh, this is too good," Satanico sing-songed happily from the side, watching with glee, "What better punishment than to have brother kill brother?"

Reid didn't bother to look around, sure that it was by her order that all vampires had stopped attacking. They didn't need to. She had what she wanted. An adequate punishment.

Now the monsters would wait and watch them turn on each other. Brother against brother.

Reid shuddered, feeling more helpless and miserable than ever before in his life. He didn't know what to do, how to react…

Richard was a monster like them now, ready to kill them. He needed to die. But…

His mind flashed back to the expression on Seth's face when he had looked over Richie's injured hand, the way his eyes had softened, and become pained when telling Reid about their childhood and how he had given up everything he knew to save him.

If there was one thing he had never doubted it was that Seth loved his brother. This would destroy him. Reid knew he probably shouldn't care, shouldn't think of those two men as normal people he could feel empathy for. They were murderers, scum.

He knew that, rationally, and yet all he could think of was Seth's chagrined expression when he'd told him his story, his pain which had shown through, explaining so much…

Reid felt his stomach turn when Seth still didn't move, didn't raise his torch against the newborn vampire no matter how much closer Richard moved.

He wouldn't kill his own brother, Reid suddenly realized. He'd be killed before he did. His chest clenched at the thought, a feeling he didn't dare identify gnawing at his insides. He had to do something.

But what? Kill Richard himself? Even if he could manage that somehow…would Seth even let him?

The younger Gecko brother didn't seem very different from his former persona to Reid, expect for
the distorted visage and the fact that the blackness of his soul was now clear in his eyes as he didn't try to contain it any longer. His smile was hellish as he mustered Seth longingly, his clawed fingers twitching expectantly by his sides.

"Aren't you happy to see me well, brother?" he asked slyly, "Aren't you going to give me a hug?"

Satanico laughed at that, seemingly satisfied with his development and Seth tensed at his strange voice, blinking rapidly as if to clear his head. Then finally he took a step back and tightened the grip on his torch even if he didn't lift it.

"Richie. You're my brother," he said lowly, as though he was fighting hard to keep his voice level, "Don't do this...you can fight it...you can..."

He broke off when Richard laughed at his words, edging closer still, "But I feel great, Seth. I don't want to fight anything. Finally, I don't feel the need for restraint anymore. I can just let go and do whatever I want...doesn't that sound great?"

The gleam in his eyes left no doubt as to what he was talking about. Not even Seth would be able to keep the monster within in check now because the last bit of Richard's humanity was gone.

Seth shook his head harshly, fists clenched so tightly that the knuckles turned white, "Richie, you're my brother. You don't want to kill me."

Repeating the words like a mantra, he didn't sound like even he believed them.

xxx

Seth didn't know what he was trying to accomplish, why he as even reasoning with the vampire in front of him.

He had a hard time collecting himself again after he had just spent five minutes mourning his dead little brother. His brain simply refused to keep up with the recent developments.

Rationally, he knew that Richard had died. That this was just his body inhabited by a demon. He knew that these vampires had no conscience, no trace of remorse once they turned. Still, he couldn't help but try and bargain, to find some part of his brother still there, still intact, to find any reason not to have to turn on him.

But Richard was uncomfortably close now, almost within an arm's reach and Seth knew he had to move, had to act.

"Seth," he heard Reid's voice coming from behind him, full of worry and warning, carrying on even when he didn't turn around, "Seth! He's not -"

His voice broke off when Richard's head snapped up and fixated him over Seth's shoulder, looking murderous for a second before his lips were drawn up into a sickening smile. "Hey," he said with false amiability, "We're talking here. Shut up before I rip your tongue out, will you?"

He made a tsk-sound with his sharp tongue, seemingly satisfied when Reid blanched at his words and fell silent, almost stepping backwards until he remembered the vampires in his back. Looking back at his brother, Richard didn't seem to notice that his expression as a very similar one.

"Seth," he said in a low, reassuring voice, closing in minimally. He reached out and Seth tensed but didn't move away, "I'm still your brother. We can still be together."
His eyes darkened with promise and hunger at those words and he made to cross the remaining inches between them.

When Reid saw Richard reach out to grab Seth he knew that he was done playing. If he didn't do something now, Seth would be dead in a matter of seconds and he would be alone. Without thinking any further, he jumped forward, jabbing his torch at the new vampire to get him to back up. Richard stepped to the side impossibly fast, suddenly blurring as he moved too fast for Reid's eyes to follow, only to reappear right in front of him, sharp teeth grinning at him from merely a couple of inches distance.

He shrank back in shock but he hadn't even taken one step backwards yet when Richard grabbed him and whirled them both around like he was moving a rag doll. Reid gasped in fright when the torch was ripped from his hands and landed just out of reach while he found himself pressed to the vampire's chest, one clawed hand gripping his hair and jerking his head back while another squeezed his chin in an unforgiving grip, forcing him to face Seth.

It happened so fast that neither of them could do anything and even when he realized his situation and started to thrash, Richard held him immobile with frightening ease.

Reid could do nothing but stare into Seth's shocked face as he was forced to take in what was happening, frozen on the spot. Seth's expression was one alternating between shock and dawning horror as he slowly righted himself, extending an appeasing hand.

He swallowed hard, "Richie. You don't want to do this."

His little brother just laughed at that, "Of course I do, Seth. It's what I've always wanted. And it's what you want too, isn't it?"

Reid watched their interaction without breathing, blood rushing in his ears as he tried not to move, too afraid to make Richard snap. Richard's words were unexpected, just like Seth's eyes widening in dreadful comprehension when he heard them. The younger Gecco brother laughed again, completely sure of himself, "Don't worry, Seth. Soon you'll be a vampire, too. We'll be together forever like we are supposed to be. And you won't have to worry about your pesky conscience anymore. You want him? You can have him, I don't mind, honest. He can be your first meal."

Reid cringed at those implications, the horrid image of both brothers turned, turning on him flashed across his mind. He stared a Seth without breathing, trying to hold on to the minimal hope that the man would snap out of his stupor at some point and end this.

He could hear Richard talking, taunting his brother, but the words didn't make sense to him and he didn't know if it was Richard's or his fault. What was he talking about? Who would want to be evil and a bloodsucking monster? Certainly not Seth. Seth didn't have the same sadistic urges to kill and maim in him as Richie, he would relish in being able to maim and torture more freely… would he?

He stared at Seth whose expression was now one of guilt and dread as he stared back at his brother, something that didn't make any sense either. He didn't even try to dispute Richard's words, just staring at them, seemingly torn. Why…what…?

Richard chuckled by his ear, like he knew he'd hit a sore spot, "Just imagine you could do anything you want, Seth. Because you can. We both know what that is—so why don't you say it out loud."

"No," Seth finally got out, looking tortured.

"No?" Richard mocked, innocently, "Okay, then but don't come complaining to me later that you
didn't get your share of him…"

Reid felt himself freeze up in terror at the announcement of his impending brutal death, sure that his face looked even more horrified than Seth's at the moment. His breath caught in his throat when Richard pulled his head back even further, exposing his throat.

He shuddered violently, unable to suppress a whimper when he felt the man bend his head to nuzzle his neck, drawing in his scent with a content sigh.

"Hmm, delicious," he purred, addressing his brother, "You have good taste, I'll give you that. Maybe we should let him live for a while longer…we could have so much fun…"

His free hand wandered from Reid's throat to his shirt collar, slashing it to shreds with his nails as he spoke. Reid cried out in pain when he dug in deeper, leaving deep scratch marks underneath his collarbone. He could feel blood flowing down his chest and staining the remains of his shirt, and prayed that biting was the only way to get turned.

His cry seemed to shake Seth out of his stupor at last. He finally moved, lifting the torch in their direction, "Let him go!"

xxx

Seth hadn't thought he would ever be able to move a finger again, so petrifying was the situation he was facing. There was no rationalizing that his brother had turned into a monster.

He knew what he had to do, knew that if he didn't he too would die. Richard's demon had promised him that just a minute ago. And yet, it took him grabbing Spencer and threatening him with suggestions he didn't want to decipher further to get him moving.

In the end, it was the kid's pained cry and the tears in his eyes as they flickered to Seth's that cemented his decision.

He had to kill his brother.

No, not his brother.

It wasn't his brother. He had to realize that. He wasn't a person anymore. He was a threat to his life. To the kid's life.

He squared his shoulder and raised the torch, reading himself to attack.

Richard looked little impressed even at his brother's resistance, taunting him with his smile; he just shook his head lightly into Reid's hair, making the young man cringe from the proximity.

"Ah, don't you at least wanna give it a shot? You'll love this," he purred promisingly, his claws travelling further down Reid's torso, as though he was unsure whether to just snap the buttons or dig his nails into his abdomen. He chuckled at Seth's expression as he followed the movements, choosing to interpret it as anything but dread.

"You finally won't have to feel bad about who you are anymore," he promised, his eyes gleaming cruelly as he carefully chose his words, "We'll be true brothers at last."

xxx

Reid had a hard time thinking straight with his racing pulse and the fear paralyzing him; he barely
heard Richard taunting Seth, sure that by the time Seth made any move he would be long dead.

So many times in the past days had he been sure he was going to die. Now it seemed the moment had finally come at last. He closed his eyes in desperation when sharp claws grazed his stomach, waiting for the inevitable pain.

It didn't come.

One second he was desperately clutching at the death grip in his hair, hot breath too close to his neck, the next a strong hand suddenly wrapped around his neck, yanking him forward and out of Richard's grasp.

Reid gasped in shock as he suddenly found himself against Seth's chest, Seth's left arm pulling him to safety in the same second that his right arm snapped forward, ramming the pointy end of the torch into Richard's side forcefully. He could hear Richard's scream, the sound of the wood going through gooey flesh and green blood splattering all over them in the one second Seth held him tightly before suddenly he was let go, shoved to the ground. He landed hard, pain shooting through his body but he opened his eyes again immediately, just in time to see Seth pulling the stake out of Richard's side and ramming it into his heart.

The vampire stared at his older brother, incredulously, hands fisted in his suit jacket briefly, before he fell to the ground, life leaving his body completely this time.

Reid heard the impact but was unable to look. Instead he stared straight ahead at Seth in the sudden silence, trying to catch his breath and blinking away the tears that were burning in his eyes. He couldn't believe what he had just seen, too shocked to even blink.

Seth…had…his brother…

He stared at the older Gecko brother, unable to process what had happened.

Apparently he wasn't the only one judging by the sudden silence that had fallen.

Seth was breathing heavily, his knuckles white around the stake and his eyes burning pools of coal; for a moment they laid bare every emotion he felt: Shock, repulsion, pain, regret, and guilt. He just stared at the spot where Richard's eyes must have been, looking like he might lose it right then and there and just break down or completely go berserk.

Then though, he blinked and turned away harshly. He caught Reid's eye with visible effort, holding it for a long moment. He must have found something there because when he blinked he seemed at least somewhat in control again. He clenched his jaw and his eyes grew hard; when he looked around there was nothing but cold, smoldering hatred left in them.

He stepped forward until he was past Reid, standing between him and the rest of the vampires now. "Alright who wants to be next?" he growled, sounding barely human anymore, "You'll all get your turn!"

Satanico was the first to lose her composure.

While all other vampires were still staring at Richie's remains she suddenly let out an extremely high-pitched, enraged scream, her eyes flashing murderously as she stared them down. The sound was like a signal to everyone around her and two seconds later every vampire that was left threw itself at them, ready to kill.

Seth didn't hesitate for half as long before he started executing them with deadly precision, not even
blinking in his current state. He had killed at least half a dozen of them by the time Reid was back on
his feet, unstoppable in his pain and rage.

Seth looked like a god of vengeance, black and bloody all over, unhinged in an unpredictable way
that made Reid shudder, simply attacking and killing anything that moved.

Only with effort, Reid managed to get back into motion as well. They fought with all of their power
and skill, side by side until they were far past exhausted, gasping for air, their hearts hammering in
their chests.

Reid soon realized that even like this they wouldn't make it. They were running out of resources fast.
Seth probably knew it too –maybe that was why when a momentary hole in their line of attackers
opened, he made a split decision, grabbing Reid's arm without warning and yanking him backwards.

And suddenly they were running, through the tunnel that had been behind them, Reid stumbling after
Seth as he raced ahead. Behind them he could hear a piercing shriek and then the sound of dozens of
feet behind them, the monsters chasing them. He ran faster, even as his lungs started to burn,
following Seth through the dark as he ran straight ahead, taking lefts and rights until Reid lost all
sense of orientation.

Finally, after what seemed like they'd run forever, Seth took one last turn and then suddenly yanked
them to a stop sharply. For the dozens time in just a couple of hours, Reid felt himself shoved against
a wall, the air knocked out of him. He winced but before he could make a sound, Seth was suddenly
right in front of him, pressing him into the wall with his own body, a heavy hand clamped over his
mouth.

Reid's heart leapt as he suddenly found himself with Seth's face just inches from his, their whole
bodies aligned as Seth's pressed him closer against the wall. He flinched, instinctively struggling in
the seconds it took for his body to realize that it wasn't Richard holding him anymore, that Seth was
just trying to keep him quiet.

"Shh," Seth breathed against his face, unrelenting and unmoving as he listened into the darkness. He
was too close for Reid to see his face, cheek to cheek as he loomed over him.

With the last of reason he still had, Reid made himself still, just stand there as quietly as he could. For
a long moment, they both stood stock still, merely their heavy breaths breaking the silence. The
vampires were still running around the tunnel somewhere nearby, looking for them. Close by but not
in immediate reach at least...

Reid closed his eyes, his shoulders sacking as he realized they weren't in immediate danger for the
moment, hidden from their persuers. He let out a shaky breath, obstructed by Seth's hand over his
mouth. The action once again amde him actuely aware of their proximity, a tiny part of his brain that
wasn't occupied with vampires at the moment noting that Seth was too close, keeping him immobile.
Through the tight grip on his face Reid could feel every callus on Seth's palm, his pulse even, racing
just like his. Normally the oppressive weight of it all would have been enough to make him cringe,
panic -but in that moment their prior issues barely occurred to him as flooded as his organism was
with adrenaline, stress, fear and exhaustion, none of it leaving much room for organized thought.
They weren't in the same situation now, maybe not even in the same roles. Just like him, Seth was
much too preoccupied with other things right now to be a worry.

Like their impending death. Of having killed his brother. Reid couldn't still believe that had actually
happened. Yes, Richard had been evil and about to kill them, but for Seth to realize that on time and
react appropriately...
He'd gotten himself back together and kept fighting, something that had saved both of their lives. And -most astoundingly, he had gone out of his way to save Reid as well. He could have just let him stand there, or be killed, but he hadn't...

Reid took another slow breath trying to order his thoughts, all the while still listening for approaching steps. His mind was reeling. He understood less than ever. He'd assumed that Seth had grown attached to him, enough not to want to see him dead, but this...

He could feel Seth's iron grip on his arm and face, like he would never let go again, his body moving against his with every ragged breath, little tremors radiating all the way into his palm. The image of Seth stabbing Richard in the heart flashed across his mind again with brutal clarity and for a moment he forgot to wonder, only aware of the fact that Seth was shaking, barely in control. Reid's hands which had instinctively come up to push at Seth's arms clenched in the fabric at the crook of the man's elbows instead, holding on tightly enough for his knuckles to turn white. He'd had to kill his brother...

Reid felt a violent shudder go through him as he swayed, dizzy and breathless, tears springing to his eyes.

In that single moment, nothing that had been before mattered anymore. All that made sense, that was of any importance was how close they had both come to dying, the horrors they'd both just seen. They were the same for once, in the same boat.

It took a while but finally Seth grabbed onto him a little less tightly, loosening his grip on Reid's face. Then he let his hand sink, only for it to end up at the juncture between Reid's neck and ear somehow. In that moment he seemed just as shaken as Reid, just desperate to hold on to something and Reid couldn't bring himself to move one inch, or to even turn his face away from the man's hand. For a few seconds that seemed like minutes, he didn't move a muscle, merely holding on tightly to Seth's suit as though to keep the man from crumpling to the ground as he mourned his brother. Reid could feel tears in his own eyes as he stared into the darkness in front of him. He still couldn't find it in him to mourn Richard, and yet they were there burning in his eyes, for the situation, for himself, for Seth...

It took about a minute for Seth to get a grip on himself again. Then, he finally straighten up, pulling his head back. His eyes landed on Reid's face, pinned on it with an expression that was wild still, a mixture of adrenaline filled restlessness, fueled by fury, of unconcealed pain and despair. The look he got at those emotions was just long enough for him to understand he was seeing it, before Seth averted his face, jaw clenched as he stared into the darkness. He could feel the tension running through the man's body, how strung he was, realizing that it must be taking up all of his strength to keep quiet and collected now, five minutes after having killed his brother. It seemed a miracle that he did fare this well at all. If something similar had happened to Reid he was pretty sure he'd just snap.

He wasn't entirely sure Seth hadn't snapped of course. The way he had fought and killed back there, completely without restraint...

Still, it didn't occur to him to feel worried for himself as one of Seth's hands fisted in his shirt roughly, still right in his space like he hadn't even realized it yet. Instead he just felt pity and empathy. Yes, Seth had hurt him. He had threatened his life and caused him trauma that would probably stay with him for the rest of his life. He shouldn't be feeling for him. But he did. He couldn't stop himself from doing it now anymore, his defenses and usual logical thinking chapped down so much that only mere instincts remained.

In the end, almost all of what Seth had done wrong had been out of love for his brother. What was more human than that? It was twisted and wrong and it didn't erase any of the horrible things that had
happened -but he had done it for love. And now Richard was dead, the sole reason for everything Seth had done so far just gone, his family, his life.

"I'm sorry," he whispered, voice so soft he himself could barely hear it. He didn't care if he was crazy any more. It felt right to say it. He knew they were very likely just minutes away from death so what did he have to lose?

At his words, Seth leaned back to look at him, his eyes gleaming and sharp, a multitude of emotions flashing across his face. For just a split second Reid got to watch as Seth's eye twitched, widened in surprise, his jaw clenching and unclenching as he shook his head minimally, looking even more conflicted and regretful than before.

Then that was all gone and the man let out a brief mirthless laugh. He shook his head like he couldn't believe it.

"Yeah. Yeah, me too."

Then he looked down the corridor again, straightening up and Reid couldn't help but feel like that had sounded like a goodbye. His heart clenched, then fell as he heard a noise down the corridor, closer than before. He didn't have time to think about why there would be any sort of good bye between them, especially this kind, or why Seth's expression made him feel so cold and miserable inside. The sounds were coming closer. Multiple pairs of feet, quickly nearing.

Reid tensed, his heart rate picking up again. They were going to find them. This would be it. They had no weapons, they were exhausted…this time they would die.

His hands clenched in Seth's suit instinctively and the man turned back to look at him. In his dark orbs, Reid saw the finality he felt reflected, confirming that this were their last moments on earth. Seth held his gaze with an expression made up of a turmoil of emotions, suddenly looking like he wanted to say something else, torn, conflicted.

"You know what?" he suddenly said, voice rough, "I'm going to hell anyway."

And before Reid could even attempt to understand what he meant, Seth tightened his grip on his face and swooped back in, bringing their mouths together in the most unexpected kiss Reid had ever been a part of.

Xxx

Seth wasn't thinking. Wasn't feeling anything other than the adrenaline rushing through his veins, intensifying his stress, his fury, his pain. He forced himself to block out emotion as much as he could, knowing that if he didn't he wouldn't be able to move, to do anything else anymore, stricken with grief as he was.

Not that it would matter much. They were going to die within minutes anyway.

So it had all been for nothing. Fighting, putting a stake through his brother's heart. Just so they could be torn apart by monsters anyway.

Maybe it was for the best. What did he have to live for anyway when it came down to it. He was a scourge of society, a criminal, a killer, scum. The only reason he had never considered ending it all before had been Richard. Richard who needed him. Richard who wanted him.

For decades now, his little brother had been the only reason he still held on, the only reason he still tried to keep it together. And now he was gone and Seth couldn't find much reason not to completely
let his mind go and go on an unforgiving killing spree until either he or those fucking monsters responsible were dead.

He wasn't a fool; battered and weaponless on the ground in midst of these monsters, he knew that there was no winning this fight. He didn't actually care about winning anymore, he just wanted to take as many of those creatures with him as possible.

It would have style, going out in a blaze of glory.

In the end, the only thing keeping him from just jumping mindlessly into the fight was Spencer. Spencer who was sickly pale and overwrought and shaking violently as he clung to him, clearly pushed much too far by now but yet still alive and warm and breathing.

With eyes that were so broken, but that somehow still managed to muster compassion for him, empathy for his loss, for Richard of all things. He would have expected resentment in them for sure, maybe even hatred but all he saw was the ever present fear suddenly softened by a disturbing sort of acceptance that should have never been there.

That kid, he couldn't believe him...

He wanted to laugh at the sheer ridiculousness of it all but his throat was closing up, and all he could do was stare into Spencer's eyes, feeling a sharp pull in his chest where his heart should have been.

Those eyes were undoubtedly the most beautiful eyes he'd ever seen.

He felt a small shock go through him, his fingers curling more tightly around the nape of Spencer's neck, as for the first time he really let himself feel the full strength of his emotions. The young man looked back at him, motionless and wide eyed, clueless as ever but so, so beautiful...

From far, Seth could hear approaching steps, multiple people- monsters- as they neared, minutes away from finding them. Spencer's fingers clenched in his suit as he too heard the step approaching, breath catching as he realized what was about to happen. Seth looked away from the dark corridor, instead allowing himself to fully focus on Spencer in the minute they had left. They were so close now, nothing seeming to separate them now that all trivial things had faded. He could feel Spencer's body moving against him as he breathed, so thin and wiry but yet so warm, too close, not close enough...

His body decided for him before his brain could catch up, cashing in his last wish despite earlier resolutions. Before he knew it, all reason had waved him goodbye and he had grabbed Spencer tightly, kissing him.

For a second or two the action completely wiped his mind, the only tangible sensation that of relief from finally giving in to an enormous pull he'd been fighting, and euphoria coursing through his veins like an electric current at the contact. He could taste tears, sweat and blood on Spencer's lips but barely registered it, too absorbed in how sweet, how perfect the kiss was despite it all.

Spencer gasped in surprise at the sudden assault, his lips parting slightly as he drew in air and it was all Seth could do to let go completely and not crush the kid under him, hands and mouth desperate, to try and not add another scare to his last minutes. He couldn't let go though, grabbing onto the least bit of contact like a life line...

It took him much too long to come to his senses, to remember the situation, to realize that Spencer wasn't moving at all, seemingly frozen against the wall.

Seth finally forced himself to pull away. He found the kid staring at him like he was seeing a ghost,
utterly shocked. Seth smirked mirthlessly, unsurprised, but internally relieved that this utter perplexity seemed to leave no room for something like repulsion or accusation right then. Doing this had been utterly selfish and unfair—but then again he was the bad guy and in for an eternity of burning, so why not steal one last tiny speck of joy? He allowed himself to savor the memory of that feeling for another second.

Then he turned away abruptly, steeling himself at the same time. The steps were right in front of them now, stopping only a few feet from them. Seth took a deep breath, trying to regain his focus, and looked in their direction, ready to face his demise.

And froze.

Instead of the expected vampires he was looking at several people emerging from one the dark of the tunnel, all of them with their guns drawn. Five men and one woman. He recognized three of them.

The BAU.

Holy fucking Mother of Jesus.

That had to be a joke.
Chapter 18

Seth couldn't believe his eyes.

Spencer's team. Having come out of nowhere. Staring at them with just as much shock and surprise as they.

Holy fucking Mother of Jesus.

That had to be a joke.

Were there really entrances like that in real life? Like they were on the fucking Ghostbusters? Like the fucking cavalry saving the day? He felt a stab in his heart at the notion, torn between bitterness and anger. Half an hour too late to save his brother of course. But then, they had never counted to begin with, had they?

He felt his body growing cold as the adrenaline slowly left his blood, at the creeping realization that it was all over. And not in a good way. Not for him anyway.

They were saved, yes. Maybe.

Possibly, he wouldn't die now.

Other than that he was still pretty much fucked.

If they got out of here alive now, he'd go to prison straighy away, ending up just like he had been before all this, without money, or his mission...except that now he would have a dead brother on top of that.

Within seconds he was back from being a vampire hunter extraordinaire to despicable lowlife kidnapper soon to be locked up and forgotten… It felt like a pretty deep fall. Surreal almost, after what he'd just been through.

All would go back to the way it was before.

And Spencer, Spencer was saved, free.

He felt yet another sting, surprisingly painful, at that. With everything going on he hadn't thought about the inevitability of that happening anymore -but now he remembered that a seperation would always have happened no matter how the situation would have turned out. He looked down at the young man who was still clutching his arms in a death grip, utterly still against him. He was not looking at him anymore but had his face turned to the side, staring in the direction of the tunnels with wide unblinking eyes. It seemed he couldn't believe it either.

The incredulous relief on his face made Seth feel better for the fraction of a second, knowing that at least he wasn't going to have to watch him die, too –before reinforcing his prior train of thought. Five minutes ago it had only been them, no one else, them against the rest of the world –it hadn't been real of course, only havign come about becuase of the dire situation but he would have happily died like that, with the feeling that they were.

Now that was all over though. The team was back, Spencer's actual allies and they- they were less than nothing again. The prospect of that was more dismaying that he would have ever liked to admit. His hold on the kid tightened instinctively, until Reid winced.
Seth quickly let up as he realized he was hurting him again. Who was he kidding? This was how it had to be. He was poison, death, nothing but pain. Everybody in their right mind would want to get away from him as quickly as possible. Spencer had never truly been with him, or his. He had simply taken advantage of the situation, that was all. And once Spencer got a enough breathing room and distance to realize that, he would hate him all the more. Seth knew that, he always had -he'd just never felt the full impact of what it meant until now. It felt like his heart was being torn out through his throat.

He forced himself to shut out emotion completely then, the pain becoming too much. Instead he did what he used to do as a teenager in dangerous or threatening situations. He separated himself from it, shut out emotions.

Not one second too early. The moment he looked back at the tunnel, he found himself face to face with a revolver. He slowly lifted his head to reward the dark-haired man holding it with an icy glare.

"Seth Gecko, you're under arrest. Get away from my agent."

Hotchner, Seth remembered when he recognized the unit chief's voice. Great, the man wasn't losing any time.

"Hotch…" Reid gasped incredulously, his voice a mixture of relief and disbelief.

Seth did his best to block it out; fighting every urge in his body he stepped away from the young man to face his boss instead.

Hotchner was looking at him with an expression that was familiar from everybody in law enforcement he'd ever dealt with, all superior, high and mighty do-gooder. Just as pissed at him, too. Some things seemed to never change. He didn't bother lifting his hands, he wasn't armed after all. It seemed enough for the moment as his opponent seemed much more concerned with his subordinate's condition right then anyway.

Seth looked around to see the dark-haired woman he'd met in prison secure Hotchner's back, just like the old guy and the three Mexicans who were behind them. Now, in the light of their flashlights and weapons, so real-world, the lethal threat of vampires suddenly seemed like a bad dream already, just a Hollywood horror.

Still, there was no denying what had been and what technically still was. The vampires were still here somewhere, ready to attack. Obviously the team had some idea, too, because they all looked rather jumpy, especially the three Mexican men with them who kept turning from tunnel end to tunnel end, afraid to look away from one for too long.

The BAU team seemed mainly focused on Spencer though. Quickly and efficiently, Hotchner stepped forward, gun at the ready as he grabbed Seth's arm and pulled him away while the old guy quickly ran over to Spencer, ready to help him. Reid stared at the man incredulously as he stood in front of him, his eyes wandering over everyone in the tunnel like he thought he was dreaming.

"Gideon…guys…"

He broke off when the older man pulled him into a one armed hug, returning it only after a long moment, still completely disbelieving. He, too, had already had his mind set on dying and it was hard to simply snap out of that. Seth knew the feeling.

The guy, Gideon, eventually stepped back a little, looking the kid over with both hands still on his shoulders, stabilizing him. "Dear god, Spencer, you look like hell," he commented needlessly, staring at the kid's appearance with a pained expression, "Are you alright?"
Seth ignored Hotch who still had his gun trained on him, instead watching Spencer and Gideon's interaction.

Reid looked like he was about to sink to his knees, only held up by the man's arms around him. It looked like the whole weight of what had happened was crashing over him once again. He lifted a trembling hand to his face almost absently, close enough to his lips for Seth to know what he was thinking about. Their eyes met over the old profiler's shoulder. Spencer stared at Seth unblinking, clearly processing what had happened just before the rescue, what it meant and how it changed everything he had thought he knew.

Seth forced himself to keep a blank face. Too late to take anything back now.

Still, why the fuck couldn't those idiots have stormed the place two minutes later, then he wouldn't have to worry about any of this now! Seth clenched his hands to fist by his sides. How in the world could this night keep getting worse and worse? Where was that rock bottom he'd heard so much about?

"Spencer?" Gideon repeated, sounding worried that the kid wasn't actually responsive. Seth followed his eyes as they quickly accessed the amount of injuries sustained, like he was afraid there were some not so superficial ones that he had overlooked. Mental ones even maybe.

Seth couldn't even find it in him to be angered by that. Spencer did look like hell and it was his fault. Maybe not all of directly –but still, it was. And for all this team knew, he and Richard could have tortured the kid in any ways possible for the past couple of days –they had to assume it, really, especially after the infamous phone call.

Spencer still seemed distracted as he nodded, his eyes flitting from him to the tunnels like he expected them all to be gone and the vampires to be back if he so much as blinked.

"Yeah, yes…I'm ok," he finally nodded slowly, absentmindedly pushing his hair out of his face, unwittingly exposing more of his bruised and broken skin.

The woman gasped softly and Seth felt Hotchner's vicious stare on him. The old man's hand grasped Spencer's elbow automatically as if to support him but Reid just gave him a wry smile, slowly finding back to his old form, "Really. It looks worse than it is. I'm okay."

When no one looked convinced he quickly changed the direction of the conversation, straightening up some as though he was trying to look less battered somehow.

"How did you guys find us?"

"Coincidence," Hotchner told him, his expression softening when he looked over at Reid, "Another kidnapping victim, Kate Fuller, described the bar to us. We had some trouble with the staff upstairs but in the end we managed to convince them to show us down here."

The sentence sounded unfinished, like he was leaving important parts out and Seth assumed they had been attacked by vampires upstairs and fought them, or maybe they'd been dragged down here first…which would explain them finding this place so quickly.

And good old Kate had led them here. So much for staying under the radar.

Well, that made the arrival of the cavalry a little more believable at least. He couldn't help but scoff at the last part though, "So what did they do then? Offer to bring you down here for a midnight snack? With you on the menu?"
His comment seemed unexpected, their gazes irritated, like they thought he would stay mute till sunrise or some shit. Hotchner was the first to collect himself, awarding him with a dirty look, bordering on anger, "You have the right to remain silent. I advise you make use of it."

xxx

Hotch knew he had to stay professional now more than ever. They had finally found Reid after he had begun to fear he wouldn't see him alive again –but they were not out of danger yet and he had to make sure they got out of here unharmed.

All of them.

Which meant as much as he would have liked to punch the man responsible for all this in the face at the moment, he had to remain cool and collected. The American justice system would take care of Seth Gecko in the morning.

That didn't mean it was easy though, not with Seth's condescending sneer and the way Reid seemed half dead while still standing on his feet, frazzled and torn all over, skin and clothes. There wasn't a part of him that seemed uninjured. Wrists, arms, and face bruised, marks on his neck and collarbone, blood on his clothes. Hotch's blood grew cold at the sight of their youngest team member.

He wanted to ask what exactly had happened to him but not with Gecko standing right there. It would have to wait. He was just glad that the haunted, unsteady look in Reid's eyes had faded gradually since they'd arrived and he seemed relatively stable.

"How did you end up here, Reid?" he inquired, "We expected you in a motel; we only came here to interview some witnesses. When those guys upstairs attacked us we thought they might be a group of psychotic UnSubs kidnapping truckers for ritual murders…we've found some vacant rooms on our way down here that look like they might have locked people in here."

He looked to Reid but the young man didn't get to answer as Seth scoffed yet again, glaring at him in frustration. "Did they look like psychos?" he snapped, eyes blazing, "They were fucking vampires."

His condescension was too much finally. Everybody jumped when Hotch unexpectedly lunged and hit Seth across the jaw, making him stumble backwards. No one had expected their chief to lose his composure, just like no one would have expected Reid to react the way he did.

"Hotch!" he gasped, shocked, looking like he might have tried to step forward to grab his arm if Gideon hadn't held him back immediately.

Everybody including Seth looked at him in utter confusion for the second it took him to recollect himself. Too late, he blinked, stepping back with a strangely strained expression like he had just realized what he'd done.

Hotch frowned, worried. What had that been about?

He knew he shouldn't have hit even their UnSub, he had just been so furious, seeing Reid like this – but then it had been Reid who tried to stop him of all people?

Before he could say anything though, Reid collected himself, seeming almost embarrassed as he looked down, murmuring for an explanation, "I…he's telling the truth. I know it sounds crazy but it's true. They were about to kill us when you arrived."
Everybody stood about in silence for a long moment, all of them looking worried. Hotch frowned, wishing he could dispute that statement properly. When they had found Reid it had actually only looked like Seth Gecko had him pinned to the tunnel wall for some reason, much too close for his liking.

The problem was, when they had been attacked up in the bar those people, the patrons, they had changed right in front of their eyes…into something that could only be described as monstrous. They had barely been able to fend them off only after they had been dragged down here and even now he knew that they were still somewhere nearby in the darkness, waiting.

Whatever they were, he knew enough to know that they didn't have the time to discuss what exactly had happened now. They needed to get out of here.

He looked around to find Gideon looking worried, be it because of what they had seen or because of Reid, Elle looking grim and determined and the Mexican men obviously jumpy and scared. Clearly, they believed Seth. In the end, Hotch decided it didn't really matter what those people/creatures were. They wanted to kill them, ergo they had to get out of here. That was all that counted now. Reid could tell them the details of what had happened once they were safe and he wasn't forced to be in the same room with his kidnapper-slash-who-knew-what-else anymore.

"We should get going," he changed the subject, "Does anyone remember the exact way back to the bar?"

They all shook their heads, neither having paid much attention when they'd been dragged down here by those grotesque monsters, scared for their very lives. He sighed, trying not to let his nerves show. It would be fine. They had flashlights and guns after all. They just need to find a way out before the batteries died down and they were left in the dark.

"Never mind. We'll start with the tunnel we came through and take it from there," he decided, walking over to Seth with his gun and a no-nonsense expression, "Turn around and put your hands behind your back. No games, now, or I promise I'll just leave you here and swear to anyone who asks that we never found you."

Seth's expression showed no sign that he had understood the threat except for a brief flash of disdain directed at him. They stared each other down for a long moment. Then, though, Seth shrugged and did as he was told. Hotch cuffed his hands as quickly as possible, trying not to notice the fact that Seth wasn't looking at him but at Reid as he stepped back. His expression was hard to decipher but whatever it was - he was sure he didn't want it to continue.

He grabbed the UnSub's upper arm rather roughly and guided him towards the tunnels. The others followed more slowly, first Elle, then Gideon with Reid and then the nervous deputies with their flashlights, guarding their backs.

They advanced slowly into the darkness in front of them, trying to ignore the faint fluttering and whispering that seemed to surround them, lurking just out of reach.

xxx

The last flashlight flickered yet again, making the whole procession stop in worry.

They had walked the dark and narrow corridors of the temple for over two hours now and still had no idea whether they had even come any closer to the exit. Thankfully no vampires had crossed their path yet, but it was likely they were simply waiting for their lights to go out so they could have an easy game. Or they knew they wouldn't find their way out and were merely waiting for them to
starve to death.

Just another reason to try and get out of here fast.

There had been more tunnels they had passed, occasional doors that lead into rooms much like the one Seth, Reid and Richie had been trapped in at the beginning and others that were more spacious with sparse furniture in them.

It seemed like the vampires actually did keep the occasional human down here as a sort of storage system for when there were no truckers coming by. It was frightening to walk into those rooms and see the old blood that stained the floors and walls in some places or the shackles that were on the walls for obvious reasons.

One room they had walked into even had the corpse of a man lying by the wall. Or half of it at least.

All in all, what they found wasn't encouraging.

The deputies were becoming more and more nervous, murmuring among themselves, words that Elle refused to translate, Hotch and Seth kept an icy silence and Reid and Gideon didn’t exchange more than a few words here and there either, all of them far too intent on listening to the sound of scratching and fluttering that still seemed to seep through the walls from not too far.

And now to make matters worse, the batteries of their flashlights were about to die. It didn't take a genius to figure out how well they would be able to defend themselves in the dark. Their guns would be virtually useless…

Hotch watched grimly as the deputy next to him fumbled with the flashlight, trying to manipulate the batteries with little success. He met eyes with Gideon whose expression was equally grave, then sighed in defeat. They couldn't keep going like this, not in the dark and not knowing what to expect around the next corner.

"Alright," he made himself speak up, trying to at least sound confident, "Change of plans, people. Let's find a room we can barricade ourselves in somehow until the morning."

The others nodded all too eagerly and spread out; as much as they all wanted and -in Reid's case- needed to get out of there, it seemed like the smartest thing to do.

It didn't take too long to find a room without any corpses in it that was spacious enough for eight people. Elle and two of the deputies went in first to secure it. There wasn't much in it except for a table and some chairs and some boxes full of spoils just like in most of the other rooms.

There was another door on the opposite wall and they approached it carefully, making sure there were no vampires hiding out behind it. It turned out to be something like a spacious, very basic bathroom, with a shower head by the wall and a toilet in the far corner.

"What do you think they need this for?" Elle asked skeptically as she looked through the cabinet filled with bandages.

"Probably to keep their blood donors alive for a couple of days," Gideon guessed with a shudder, looking over a basket full of syringes that could be used to draw blood without infecting a person right away, "...I don't even want to know."

They returned to the main room where Hotch and the deputies were just barricading the door with everything they could find. When they were done they all took a moment to breathe and come to terms with the situation.
No one wanted to say it but it looked bad. Really bad.

"Reid," Hotch turned around to look at his youngest team member who was leaning against the wall by the door, still looking exhausted and somewhat absentminded, "Can they be killed with bullets? We shot some of them earlier but some of them…"

He still didn't use the term vampires but it was pretty clear by now that they weren't fighting anything human; even he couldn't deny it. Reid nodded, straightening up a little, "You have to aim straight for the heart…I'm not sure but from what I've read decapitating them might also work."

Hotch could tell that he was trying his best to sound like his usual self but the truth was he still looked horribly distraught and the unit chief just hated not being able to do anything about his state at the moment, not even having time to really ask how he was. He was about to step closer and say at least a few short, reassuring words when Seth Gecko interrupted him for the third time that night.

"Nope, wouldn't try that," he interjected from the side, "Tried that already…not recommendable unless you're into drooling hell hounds."

Hotch couldn't help but notice Reid tense, unsure whether it was the comment or the man's voice itself that caused the reaction. He turned around, jaw clenched angrily. How many times would he have to punch the guy until he realized no one wanted in this room wanted to acknowledge his existence?

Seth ignored Hotch's angry stare, walking closer and looking anything but self conscious despite his cuffed hands and compromised position.

If anything he looked unhinged –and even more reckless than in the court room. There was this glint in his eye, something that worried Hotch. It was an expression like he didn't give a damn about the option of dying. All in all not a very reassuring quality in a person on whose sanity your own safety depended.

Hotch scowled. He didn't want to hear anything from that man but it wasn't like he had much of a choice at the moment. And they could use all the information they could get on their opponents – even if it was hardly reliable coming from Seth. He decided to take Reid's lack of protest as an indication that he was telling the truth for now.

"Fine, so that's out," Gideon finally conceded in his stead, "But all six of us have guns. We should be fine if we stick together. And maybe they won't even get in here before dawn."

Seth just scoffed and it was hard to tell whether the expression on his face was condescending or just incredibly irritated. "Sorry to burst your bubble," he chided eyes burning darkly, "But I have news for you, pops. Dawn isn't coming. Not here anyway and not for us. It's not like those fucking creatures magically fall asleep once it gets light outside. No. No sun –no bursting into flames. Those fuckers could probably wait us out even if we stayed in here for weeks."

There wasn't the hint of any doubt in his eyes as he spoke, ensuring that everybody believed his words immediately. For some reason Hotch didn't understand there was no fear in the man's eyes as he spoke of his own imminent death, just that unsettling, seething glow in his dark eyes that made him look as kinds of unpredictably dangerous.

The Mexicans who had been nervous all along had separated into their own little group by the door, mumbling hectically among themselves and Elle was nervously fumbling with the cross around her neck as she listened. Gideon was still fussing over a disturbingly unresponsive Reid –which left Hotch to argue pointlessly with Seth Gecko.
Hotch knew he was losing ground and he didn't like it.

"You know what?" he decided suddenly, glaring at Seth, "I've had enough of this. If these are my last minutes I'd much rather spend them not having to listen to you."

And with that he grabbed the UnSub by the arm yet again, ushering him towards the washroom none too gently before anyone could argue. Gun at the ready, he opened the handcuffs just long enough to secure Seth to the rusted old water pipe by the shower on the wall opposite to the door. To his surprise he received very little protest, and he was about to just walk out of the room again when Seth's words had him halt his movements.

"You're all going to die, you know?" he told him, still disturbingly calm, "The sooner you give in the less painful it will be."

xxx

Seth was sure that if he'd let himself feel the full range of his emotions he would be seething by now. This guy, this Hotchner seemed to think he was some kind of demi-god, not needing his help or advice when he was on the brink of death.

He tried not to let the emotion consume him because letting it would mean letting everything else out too and he was trying so hard to keep it all buried. Too just be cold and unfeeling again -or at least focus on his anger and annoyance.

He was glad in a way that Hotchner wouldn't listen to his advice, and that it would make him vampire food sooner rather than later. At least something satisfying for him to see before he died as well.

"You're going to die you know," he almost smiled at that.

He groaned quietly when Hotchner whirled around, painfully pressing him against the pole with an arm across his collarbones, restricting his air supply.

"Is that what you told Reid? Before you beat him into submission? What did you do to him?" Hotchner hissed hatefully, losing his professionalism bit by bit.

Seth smiled at seeing the man lose his calm, but his expression quickly darkened, eyes flashing at the mention of Spencer. "Why don't you ask him yourself?" he taunted purposefully, eyes gleaming, "Afraid he won't tell you? Or afraid that he will?"

By Hotchner's reaction, Seth knew he'd hit a sore spot with those words. He didn't think there was anything wrong with allowing himself one last moment of power, of triumph over his enemy, knowing that his breaths were numbered. Spencer wasn't here to hear after all and he doubted Hotchner would have time to ask him. Not that there wasn't enough to tell. Seth might not have done to Reid what everyone seemed to think but the past few days had to have been nothing short of psychological torture for him anyway.

He blinked slowly. He didn't want to think about him. It was just making it all much worse. Trouble was, his thoughts had seemed to developped a will of their own, forcing him to think, think, think about nothing else.

"You're going to pay," Hotchner hissed, right in his face.

Amazingly, even his open hatred failed to move Seth. It didn't matter. It was done. This was just a little detour before it all ended. For once in his life it wasn't hard at all not to let trivial matters upset
him. Maybe it was the near death experience, but his thoughts were easily focussed on nothing but the important things. All he could register, all he could see before his eyes were his little brother clinging to his bloodied hand as they fled their former hell of a life, then Richard's distorted visage as he prepared to kill him and the way Spencer's lips had tasted, of feeling the faint flutter of a pulse underneath his fingertips.

Hotchner could rant all he wanted; he couldn't reach him because he was neither of those things.

"I already did," he smiled wryly.

And that he had, maybe not enough, probably not, but he had paid.

His smile vanished as Hotchner stormed out of the room, slamming the door behind him in his helpless fury. It had to be tough on him, no control over the situation, no help to his team, and no power over his only prisoner.

Not that Seth cared. But he could relate. After all, he was powerless as well. Powerless to leave this situation, to turn back time, to stop the pain gnawing at his insides like varmint.

He didn't know if they had a chance of surviving now with the team. He wasn't even particularly sure he wanted that chance. After all, what did he have to look forward to? Another lifetime in prison, of violence and blood and coldness, of nights lying awake, reliving this day, the loss of his brother and of the first person he had ever l-

He shook his head harshly. This was just dragging it out, giving him time to torture himself some more. To think of all his sins and mistakes. The funny part was that while he regretted them all he couldn't truthfully say he would have done anything different even knowing what he knew.

He would always give up a normal life to be with his brother again, always kill for him again…and he would always go into that bank again and rip Spencer put of his life and into this nightmare, simply to have him by his side, even if it was just shortly. He would always kiss him again, and more if he got the chance no matter how wrong or destructive it might be.

Surely it was for the better that he was going to die.

Who knew what else he might have done if he'd just had enough time and opportunity. He thought of Richard's words again, how close they had hit home and shuddered. He'd been right. He was just as depraved as his brother, just as sick.

It was a good thing he probably wouldn't get to see Spencer again. He was barely keeping himself under control as it was; he didn't need any wild cards to mess with his game. He didn't need for anything, or anyone to remind him that he still had feelings, to twist the knife.

Luckily, he was pretty sure there wouldn't be the opportunity for that. After what had happened, Spencer would surely do anything not to have to see him again if he could avoid it. He thought of the way the kid had acted after the kiss. There hadn't been time for any explanations or conversation, but he'd looked pretty shell shocked. Once he got around to it he would likely come to the conclusion that Seth was just like his brother and hate him even more…maybe rightly so. After all, he had fought his urges tooth and nail for three days now—combined with all the stress they'd been through he just knew that another encounter would look much the same, if not worse.

Spencer probably realized that, too. He had to be so relieved to be free of him, as safe as he could be right now in the circle of his friends. Maybe he would even survive.

But what if he didn't?
The thought of leaving someone like this Hotchner and his poor excuse for a team responsible for the kid's life seemed ludicrous. Those people didn't really have a clue what they were up against. With Seth's help they might just put up a good effective fight, but it was obvious they wouldn't be asking him to join.

Well, maybe they would change their mind once they were faced with some real monsters. Seth took a deep breath. The hours of walking around the dark aimlessly, and these few minutes in here had given him a lot of time to think. The loss of Richie was still just as real, a gaping hole in his chest, but if he tried really hard not to feel he was able to think around it now, to be rational again.

It was at least three hours till dawn.

Within fifteen minutes or so from now the vampires were sure to get into the room next door and kill whoever they got their hands on. Seth still wasn't sure what he intended to do about that –of just how badly he actually wanted to live. What he knew for sure though was that if he had to die it sure as hell wouldn't be tied to some pipe in an underground bathroom.

Fine. He would think about the future later if he got the chance. For now he had to free himself.

Seth took another deep breath to steady himself before sinking down until he was sitting on the floor, then he adjusted his hands so that his left thumb was in-between the pipe and his hand. One hard, quick push of his right hand had pain exploding behind his eyelids as his thumb snapped out of the joint. He ground his teeth to keep from making noise before carefully sliding his injured hand out of the handcuff and in front of him.

Re-adjusting his thumb was just as painful as dislocating it and he quickly discarded the idea of doing the same with his right one in order to get out of the handcuffs completely. For now they could stay around his wrist.

He leaned against the pole, waiting for the pain to subside and listening to the soft sounds of conversation coming from the other room. He would need a plan. More precisely, he would need a weapon.
Chapter 19

Hotch was fuming as he stormed out of the bathroom.

He tried not to let it show so the others wouldn't be even more worried but he could see from their expressions that he wasn't doing a very good job at it.

He glanced over at where Reid was standing with Gideon, thinking about going to them and actually asking Reid what exactly had happened during his ordeal, just like Seth had proposed. Ultimately he decided against it, if only because he was afraid of what he might hear and what he might do to Seth Gecko after he found out for sure.

No, he needed to keep a clear head for now.

He searched his pockets for his phone and checked for a signal. It was weak but there and he sighed in relief. At least that. Apparently they weren't as far away from the next village as he had assumed.

Quickly he called the local police department they had just left a couple of hours ago, telling them where they were now and that they needed help. They promised they'd be there as soon as they could but obviously it would be hours before they'd be able to make it. Hotch sighed grimly, unsurprised. They would have to hold out till someone came for them.

He was just about to put his phone back in his pocket when it suddenly started ringing again.

Garcia, it said on the display.

"Yes," he picked up, only to immediately realize he wasn't speaking to their technical analyst.

"Hotch, where are you guys?" That was Morgan's voice, worried and a little annoyed, "I've been calling the station for the past hour, no one could tell me anything except that you'd left."

Hotch hesitated. He really didn't have the time to chat now, or to give speeches about how his injured agent was supposed to rest, not take part in the investigation -but he figured that Morgan deserved to know Reid was alive and safe. "We found a lead and decided to check it out," he explained quickly, "We found them, Morgan. Richard Gecko is dead. Seth Gecko is detained and Reid is safe."

He heard a sigh of relief on the other end of the line. "How is he? Is he alright?"

"He's as well as could be expected. Beaten up and bloody, but walking and talking. The way he's acting suggests trauma though."

"Those bastards. What did they do to him?"

"I don't know, Morgan," he said grimly, "I haven't asked him yet and I'm not sure I should do it now. If you'd seen him you'd know what I mean. He says he's fine but you know Reid. I don't know what he's been through."

There was silence for a moment, then, "Have they- Hotch, did they…?"

Morgan didn't finish the sentence but Hotch could hear from his tone what he was asking. "I don't know. There are just too many injuries and bruises to tell what they are from. Seth Gecko implied something but Reid hasn't confirmed anything."
He wasn't surprised to hear Morgan growl, furious on the other end of the line. "I'm going to break every bone in that bastard's body."

Hotch nodded grimly, glancing over at Reid, "Get in line."

His tone must have been dangerous enough for Morgan to believe Seth Gecko wasn't having any fun right now; at least he calmed down a little.

"Bring him home safely, Hotch."

"We will," Hotch nodded, determined.

Then he ended the call.

For a moment he pondered whether he should have told Morgan about the vampire situation but it was probably for the best he hadn't. The man would either thin he was insane or just worry all the more without being able to do anything about it. No. If, when they made it out of here he could still tell him everything in detail. For now he had to focus on actually getting out.

xxx

"Spencer, are you sure you'll be alright?"

"Yes, Gideon," Reid assured his mentor for the fifth time in the past hour, "I'll see a doctor once we're out of here."

He tried to look less injured than he was somehow, but knew he was wasting his energy. Even if achieving something like that were possible, Gideon still wouldn't have believed him. In fact, he looked more worried every time Reid assured him he was alright. Reid didn't know what to tell him.

Of course he wasn't fine. He was hurting all over, feeling like his bruises must have bruises by now and he felt dizzy and nauseous and on the verge of panic at the thought that those vampires were still somewhere nearby - but what was he to do about it now?

"Probably a concussion," he murmured, deciding to give Gideon something. He was pretty sure he had one after how often his head had been slammed into hard surfaces over the past few days; it explained why his head was spinning, and why it felt so hard right now to just think straight and suppress the remaining latent fear that seemed etched into his bones, just waiting to resurface. It wasn't just because of a concussion he knew, there was more than that screwing with his thinking… but he had refused to think about that so far, preoccupying himself with the very real death threat surrounding them.

He still couldn't believe the team was here, that they had saved him. He had been so sure he would die back there in the tunnel but then they had shown up. For a short while he had felt nothing but intense relief and hope – but by now that had faded to the same sort of lurking despair he'd felt so often over the past few days. Only that this time it wasn't only hopelessness for his own life that he felt, it was for all of theirs, and that was much worse. If the vampires attacked again… he couldn't even bring himself to think about it, scared sick by the thought of any of his friends ending up like Richard had. There was nothing he could do though. They were all trapped here and had to basically hope for the best.

So, no. Of course he wasn't alright. He doubted he would be anytime soon. Or ever.

Still, he smiled reassuringly at Gideon and avoided Hotch's scrutinizing gaze as best as he could, hoping his boss wouldn't start asking him any more questions. He knew Hotch wanted to, needed to
know what exactly had happened to him but thankfully he wasn't asking right now. Reid wouldn't have known what to tell him.

'Yes, well, Seth and Richie kidnapped me, beat me up and threatened me with torture and rape and death but then it wasn't so terrible after all, and Seth is actually not a bad guy when he's not murdering people and he saved my life and I saved his and then he sort of kissed me and now I don't know what's going on.'

No, he doubted that would go over well. Especially that last part…

Thankfully, Hotch was talking strategy for now like he would with any dangerous situation concerning UnSubs and Gideon had turned to listen to him, giving Reid some space. Reid wasn't sure if his boss was still ignoring the fact that their UnSubs weren't even human and absolutely lethal or if he knew that and was just pretending to be confident for the sake of the others.

In any case, he was too busy staring at the bathroom door to even listen.

He needed his own moment to think right now. Desperately.

Somewhere in the back of his mind, Reid knew that he probably wouldn't really be able to think straight even if he tried. That didn't keep away the thoughts and memories whirling through his head though, bright and unrelenting, like a movie he was being forced to watch. Only that now, what it came down to wasn't just images of blood and tears and terror but instead that one last moment before the team had found them.

Everything had been so blurred and hasty and rushed, his emotions in utter turmoil, smearing lines that had once been so clear in his mind. As insane as it would sound to anyone he knew, he had felt a connection with Seth then, both of them suddenly not so different anymore while they were about to die. In a way, expecting death had made a lot of things clearer for him, letting him think in broader terms and not just see his own minimal view point anymore. He had really thought he understood Seth in that moment.

Until of course that kiss had happened.

He reached up, touching his fingers to his lips.

It had been the last thing he was expecting in that moment, in that situation and ultimately he'd been so surprised that it had taken his brain and body much too long to even process what was happening. Before he could even start thinking about reacting —pulling away as he knew he should have immediately —it had all been over already, Seth letting up, looking at him with a strained expression on his face, and then the team had been there.

No time to talk or question, and technically no time to ponder what had happened much what with the vampires still all around. That hadn't kept his brain from reeling incessantly since then of course.

He didn't understand. It didn't make sense.

What had happened? Why would Seth kiss him?

For a moment he felt scared at the possibilities going through his head. But…Seth had made it so clear before that he wasn't interested in the same things as Richard, that there was neither a sadistic nor a sexual component to his actions… but then, why? Reid pressed his eyes shut, suddenly feeling miserable. He knew, knew that there were only so many reasons for kissing someone. It just so happened that none of them made sense in this situation.
There was the obvious option, the one so ridiculous that he didn't even spend more than a second considering it. Then there was the less pleasant possibility. He thought of what Richard had said to Seth after he'd turned, those cruel words that hadn't made sense to him until now. He'd implied that Seth felt just the same as he deep down, that he had that same destructive, dark compulsion…

He shuddered, feeling sick at the thought. But that didn't make any sense either. If Seth had wanted to he could have done anything to him on so many opportunities. He'd had him chained up to a motel bed, for crying out loud! But he hadn't done anything. And picking the last minute of his life to change that made no sense at all either.

So what had he been thinking?

Maybe he hadn't. Maybe it had just been one of those spur of the moment kind of things. They had been about to die after all and he'd heard of people doing all sorts of crazy things in situations like that….maybe Seth had felt a connection too because of their situation and that had been his way of expressing it.

It sounded odd but he would rather believe that than the alternative.

Reid shook his head. He knew he should be feeling appalled now matter what the reason. After all that kiss had been unasked for from someone who had hurt him more than once, literally dragging him into hell. Somehow though it just didn't seem to click. Instead he was torn between the dreadful suspicion that Seth might have more in common with his brother than he'd let on and the honestly confusing idea which had entertained for a while now…that Seth, for some inexplicable reason, actually cared for him. The latter, no matter how outlandish it sounded, was definitely the preferable option there…and it immediately brought him back full circle to everything Seth had done to save him, to keep him from harm so far. Before he knew it he wasn't thinking so much anymore about why he'd done it and was instead once again pondering their instable relationship at large.

Seth had never made less sense to him than now. But he had also never cared to change that fact as much as now…

He shook his head. He shouldn't keep thinking about this. Other things were more important now. He wasn't a hostage anymore, not dependant on Seth any longer. He was free…but…

He closed his eyes, unwilling to believe the mess he suddenly found himself in.

Just two days ago, Reid had been convinced that Seth was nothing but an emotionless lowlife killer, a liar and his enemy. And as stressful as that had been while he was the man's hostage—it would have been a nice mindset to hold on to now that he was saved.

But no. The team had saved him, yes, but he was more confused than ever, just when he'd thought he'd pieced all the parts of the puzzle together. And it was too late to understand. Seth was in the other room, and if they survived this night, he would be in jail and he would never see him again. He should be happy about that, he knew, relieved and grateful to be able to move on without ever having to look back.

Maybe if they'd come a day earlier, he thought, maybe if it weren't for the vampires, or that night in the bar, or Seth holding him in the desert, or saving his life multiple times…

Reid shook his head harshly, regretting it immediately when his vision swam. When had it all changed, become so utterly insane and screwed up?

It was all over now. He shouldn't care what had motivated Seth. He should be glad that it had saved
his life, be glad that it was all over and if they got out of here alive. He should be glad he would never see Seth again after tonight.

But if he never saw him again… No. He already knew he'd never be able to make peace with this chapter of his life, never be able to put it behind him if he didn't understand. He was in too deep for anything else, too emotionally invested to just move on and walk away. He wasn't a machine after all. Of course he knew that Seth was still their UnSub and a criminal, that nothing much would change by talking to him…but he felt like he needed to for his own sake. Work through it all, understand it all, accept it and then put it behind him.

He looked across the room at the door, hesitant. The thought of seeing him again now... he wasn't even sure how to act, how to feel... And to be honest he wasn't sure if he wanted to ask certain questions, afraid of the answers he might get...

But if he didn't ask Seth now he knew he never would. He could hardly bring it up in interrogation or later in jail. If he wanted to understand, he had to ask now.

Reid looked up, silently watching his team walk around nervously and talk close by. Making a split decision before he could come to his senses, he inched away from the group slowly and quietly, opening the door to the bathroom soundlessly and slipping inside.

The door clicked shut quietly behind him and Reid saw Seth standing against a pole across the room, unmoving, his face in deep shadows. He swallowed hard, squaring his shoulders before taking a step into the room. His heart was suddenly beating much too fast again, betraying his nerves. Reid ignored it, not wanting to analyze it too much.

The team was right outside, he reminded himself, plus, Seth would hardly attack or anything. Not without any weapon and after having put a considerable amount of effort into keeping him unharmed...

No, this was just to talk-

His breath caught when Seth looked up, his eyes flashing brightly as he recognized him. His eyes were quickly unreadable again, but Reid could see the fire smoldering underneath, making his heart flip.

He gulped, involuntarily flashing back to the first time they'd met, the way their eyes had met and Seth had just stared at him for the longest ten seconds of his life. Even back in the safety of the prison it had had an immediate effect on him. He'd been able to feel that stare all through his body. It had made him feel worried but yet inappropriately entranced.

Later in the bank, the desert, the motel that same stare had repeatedly sent shivers of fear down his back.

Seth had looked at him like that so often... it had never completely made sense...

Now, he suddenly saw it in a whole different light, clearly seeing the intent, the fire smoldering behind those cold orbs even if he couldn't give it a name. It made him think of the mad gleam in Richard's eye, in the same moment that the memory of Seth pressed against him, hands hard and lips soft on him flashed across his mind. He shivered involuntarily, pulse quickening. Suddenly he wasn't so sure which memory was the cause and that was almost scarier than everything else.

He didn't know how to feel and what to think.

He didn't know anything anymore.
Seth looked up in surprise at the sound of the door opening. He hadn't heard screaming from outside so he doubted it were vampires.

God, hopefully not Hotchner back for another round of verbal sparring. He quickly moved his arms behind the pole again making it look like he was still cuffed to it. Maybe this was a good opportunity…if he could wrestled the unit chief down he'd have a gun at his disposal again…

His eyes widened in surprise when he realized that it wasn't Hotchner but Spencer standing in the door. Shocked, Seth stared across the room, for a moment not sure what he was feeling, thinking. Spencer was the last person he had expected to come in here willingly. And the last he was prepared for.

He had no plan for any further interactions…after all he had counted on being dead by now. He almost wanted to laugh at that thought. He really shouldn't care about how to say or do the right thing now. He truly had bigger problems, dead brother, life over and all that.

But no, of course, true to form Spencer was the exception to anything. Where nothing other than pain had seemed to get through to him anymore for the past hours, thoughts of the kid had been the exception. It should have disturbed him more he supposed, having those feelings so present even now, seemingly unquenchable. Even minutes after killing Richard when he'd been so close to breaking down and in such emotional turmoil, they had only briefly faded into the background, only to then reemerge much more violently due to his fading self-control.

Even now it was happening again.

A minute ago he had been pondering death –now, looking at the kid across the room, he still felt those insistent gnawing emotions, the unhealthy obsessive thoughts and attachment, the discontent over his general state -something that felt uncomfortably like guilt- but also the undeniable urge to pick up right where he'd left off, pulling Spencer close again and finally feel and touch and not let go this time no matter who might protest… Kissing Spencer had felt so perfect, making him forget about all else staring at him for that short moment, keeping away the cold and the dark and the pain.

He wanted that again. Wanted him.

He was almost startled at how easily those thoughts came. Apparently almost dying did a lot for clearing up priorities. It didn't feel like it mattered so much anymore what those feelings would mean for his life, his worldview, his cause…they were there, the only thing he felt anymore now aside from pain and loss. What was the use in fighting them now? He had already changed. There was no going back. He might as well admit it to himself.

For a moment the thought of somehow getting out of here and then saying, Fuck you and your money to the agents outside and taking the kid despite his promises and just vanish again, somewhere where they could never take him away, where he would always have this…this light, this warmth…With that, living on might not be pointless after all. He could almost imagine it…

Except they weren't getting out of here, and even if so, Spencer wouldn't want to go anywhere with him. Because of what he'd done, of who he was, of who they were…

That didn't make it any less real though, just more tragic. Seth smirked mirthlessly. Like he wasn't used to tragedy. It seemed he truly was over, nothing to lose, nothing to gain…

Spencer shifted by the door, effectively pulling Seth out of his grim thoughts and making him notice
the silence that had fallen between them and that was now stretching out. He assessed the kid more intently, suddenly wondering what was going on. Why was Spencer here again? Hadn't he just established that by logic the kid had to be happy to be as far away as possible from him, even without knowing the newest disturbing ideas in his head?

He squinted. With the dim lighting and the distance, it was hard to tell Spencer's expression, but he seemed conflicted, upset.

Oh.

Of course, he was here to yell at him, accuse him. What else? There certainly wasn't any shortage of things to accuse him of and he could do it safely now that he was free again. Probably had waited for that for a long time…

Seth's hands clenched to fists behind his back. He didn't allow himself to feel the cold spreading through him at that thought. Hotchner's accusations he had been able to swallow - but he wasn't sure he was ready for the same from the kid, especially after what he'd just realized…

But then… he probably owed him at least that opportunity after everything he'd made him go through.

And after all, they were just words, right?

Despite his free hands Seth continued to stand still, deciding to let Spencer have his moment if it meant enough to him to even leave his precious friends' side over it. At least he thought it would give him some more time to see those delicate features, those eyes even if they would be angry or tearful, to hear that voice even if it would be full of spite… he still couldn't think of a better way he could have spent his last minutes on earth.

He waited for the kid to finally speak, but more seconds just ticked by without him moving or saying anything and eventually Seth decided to just get it over with and get the ball rolling.

"What are you doing in here?" he kept his voice level, not letting anything seep through.

Spencer bit his lip, hesitant. Seth tried to ignore the sight.

"I need to understand some things, about…what happened."

Seth tensed.

Crap.

He was prepared for yelling and accusations… but questions?

That was a conversation he was not willing to have. He couldn't give him any real reasons for his behavior- well he could, but Spencer wouldn't like hearing the truth. Plus, if he did he wasn't sure that every emotion he was fighting so hard to keep down wouldn't come back up and consume him… He couldn't say he trusted himself in his current state. He had nothing to lose, possibly only minutes left and they were alone here, nothing to stop him from just…

He stopped himself, forcing himself to stay in place by the pipe. No. Everything aside, Spencer didn't want him and he didn't want to hurt him any more. Although, he wouldn't be hurting hi- No. No, he wasn't Richard.

Wasn't he?
Shit. The kid needed to leave, get out of here. He wasn't sure of anything now, least of all his self control.

"What is there to understand?" he asked, deliberately indifferent expression, brusquely, "You were held hostage, we went through hell, there was that unfortunate vampire business –but now it's over. You're back with your team and the good guys won. Be happy with that and go celebrate with them while you can."

It was the best he could manage distracted as he was by the way the kid was worrying his lip still, red against white skin…

He blinked slowly, exhaling deliberately. For Spencer's own sake he hoped the kid would just turn around and leave then.

He didn't of course.

"No, that's not…" he hesitated, "…not what I mean. There is just too much that doesn't make sense-"

He looked at Seth like he was hoping for him to agree, to help him out -and Seth just couldn't move, couldn't do anything. He knew the question wasn't just about his bipolar behavior in general; it was about that, that kiss. Still he was surprised. Especially regarding that he would have expected either accusations or radio silence. Apparently not.

He shifted uncomfortably against the pole, momentarily feeling himself at a loss of words, not knowing what to say to that, how to get out of it. Luckily he didn't have to because in that moment, Spencer's eyes suddenly widened and whatever tight expression had been on his face before was overshadowed by shock.

"He handcuffed you?" he asked, immediately distracted as he stared at Seth's posture.

Seth blinked in confusion, not prepared for the sudden shift. Then again, because he didn't get what the problem was. Neither the kid's tone nor his expression made any sense to Seth. He kept still though, face carefully unreadable. "Course he did. I'm dangerous, remember?"

He momentarily wondered if Spencer did in fact remember that, especially when he hurriedly stepped closer, actually looking worried. The hell? What was going on now?

"But the vampires…how are you going to…?"

Now Seth definitely failed to keep the surprised expression off his face.

What, was he worried about him?

He mentally recounted how many times the kid's head had been slammed into hard surfaces over the past 72 hours and came up with decidedly too many. In any case, the expression on the young agent's face was unmistakable. Seth stared at him incredulously, fighting down the sudden swell of emotion that notion caused inside him. Was he actually…?

Well, they had fought side by side for the past hours, protected each other…but surely Spencer had by now remembered that that had only been out of necessity, that they weren't real allies, and that it was all void now that they were back on opposing sides of the law? Hadn't he?

"I spose your boss isn't overly worried about me getting eaten alive. Probably hoping for it," he shrugged, tone cool.
He stared as Spencer's worried expression only deepened and he looked back at the door, as though he was thinking about going and getting the key from his boss. "He can't...if they come in here..."

"What if they do?" Seth asked, suddenly feeling bitter. He didn't want to believe Spencer actually gave a damn; it would make doing the right thing so much harder. "All that humanitarian crap aside, don't tell me you wouldn't be the tiniest bit glad to see me get what I deserve."

Spencer's head snapped up, and he stared at him, obviously shocked by his words. Then he stepped closer, and Seth could finally really make out his face. His breath caught. The kid still looked awfully battered, like he might drop at any second but he was just so, so...

His eyes were sharp and still full of so much misplaced empathy that Seth didn't know if he felt like laughing or crying.

"Of course not."

He picked laughing, because it seemed like the more dignified choice, but it came out rough and short. After everything, everything. He shook his head. "You're just too good to be true kid, it's unbelievable."

That earned him a frown. "Why is it so unbelievable? You didn't let me die either."

"So?" He suddenly felt like snapping at the kid for being so naive, so stupid. How could he be like this...how could he not see...? "I'm the one who dragged you into this mess in the first place. You don't owe me shit, you know that right? I'm the bad guy here, in case you've forgotten."

He didn't want Spencer to remember that of course, but he said it anyway, because he had to. It was the truth. And they both knew it. Spencer was smart. Once he got some distance he would realize that whatever he was thinking about now, any good that he remembered Seth doing, really didn't mean anything considering he'd caused the bad.

He swallowed hard, fists clenching. It was awful and almost too good to be true at once. Because he wanted Spencer this way, feeling for him, being on his side...but he knew it wasn't real. Seeing him like this...it was too much for him to handle, to stay calm through.

Spencer clearly didn't realize any of that though.

"Why are you doing this?" he asked, brows furrowed, "I know what happened, the bad but also the good. I was there, too. You could have let me die, you could have...done anything...but you didn't. You were going to let me go." He looked down, wrapping his arms around himself. "I didn't want to see it at the beginning," he said quietly after a short pause, "but now...it's the only explanation that makes sense. I can see that you aren't as cold as you pretend to be, that you do care."

His eyes flickered at that but he kept his head up, like he was convincing himself, not Seth. Like he needed to believe in what he was saying because he couldn't stand the alternative. Seth stood frozen as he listened, stunned.

"You're not a bad person, Seth," Spencer took another step closer, eyes softening.

Seth just stared at him blankly, for a moment at a loss of words. He simply couldn't believe this. He had expected anything but that. The kid wasn't here to cut into him, he was actually fucking trying to justify his actions.

It was almost too ludicrous to believe.
A good man.

Seth suddenly felt more miserable than he had the moment Richie died.

Because he wasn't, from no perspective. And because he suddenly saw what Spencer was doing. He'd clearly caught on to Seth's odd looks and behavior before but been unable to explain it to himself…now with that kiss, he only had two categories to put that into. Naturally, he didn't want to believe Seth was like Richard, if only for self-protection, so the only other explanation seemed to be based on Seth being a good person somehow.

Seth balled his hands to fists behind his back, gritting his teeth. He didn't know why he was suddenly feeling mad. It wasn't the kid's fault for trying to salvage what was left of his mental health…he should just leave it and let him have it if it meant so much. His mind was screaming though, that it wasn't true, that everything he'd done had been for selfish reasons, that he would have never done it for anyone else, or out of principle…He didn't know if he was furious at himself for being what he was, or for Spencer acting this way, so stupid, so risky, like he was fucking asking to be proven wrong.

What had he come here for? To hear Seth agree with his idiotic thesis, absolve him from whatever he was struggling with? Couldn't he just have decided that on his own, somewhere where he didn't have to hear…?

"No, I'm not," he ground out, "and if you think that you're an idiot."

It was just too much, too cruel, Spencer standing here talking to him, trying to make amends for him, all the while looking so delicate and beautiful and susceptible and making it so god damn hard not to walk over to him, grab him, finally really touch him…

"Yes," Spencer nodded stubbornly, absolutely oblivious to anything outside his own thought process. He stepped closer, arms flailing like he was trying to convince him somehow and all Seth could think of was that he could smell his hair from that distance. "You do care, no matter how it manifests…it still shows you care, that you're human."

It was getting too much, his hope of staying cool and detached fading with every second longer they were this close. He could practically feel his control slipping, like he was holding onto it with the edge of his fingernails, could count down the seconds the kid still had to leave this room.

"It's not your fault you were pushed into this life. Living like that is wrong, yes, and you'll have to go to jail for it…but those things need to be considered. You certainly don't deserve to get all the blame, and you definitely don't deserve to get eaten by monsters for it."

He was too, too close now, reaching out; it took Seth a moment to realize he was about to actually touch his forearm, like a comforting gesture…. It was too much.

Spencer never got to finish his movement, gasping in surprise when Seth suddenly moved instead, bringing his supposedly cuffed arms up and in front, grabbing Spencer's wrists before he even realized what was happening. Before he knew it Seth was towering over the kid, all control failing him, his grip tight as he glared at him.

"Really, Spencer, how thick are you?"

xxx

It was simply too much.
Seth had never been someone who had great self control and throughout the past three days he had been tested severely by everything and everyone around him. This, Spencer doing this, was the straw that broke the camel's back.

He let go. Of restraint, of reason, of everything that wasn't ruled by instinct. He was left with a raw, undiluted version of his pain, his regrets, his anger, his guilt, his need and desire, emotions that left no room for consideration or moderation, consuming him.

Before he knew it, he had grabbed Spencer by the wrist, hard, unable to determine whether it was anger or want guiding his hand anymore. He didn't know what he wanted to do more, yell at the kid and shake sense into him, or just show him how wrong he was with his claims by crushing him against him, or the next wall, or the ground and just-

Yeah, probably the latter. The thought alone…

He was having trouble seeing what was still stopping him by now. There was nothing redeemable left about him anyway and Spencer was clearly asking for it the way he had come in here…too reckless, too naïve, too stupid…too tauntingly beautiful not to grab, and take.

His grip tightened around the kid's thin wrist as he flinched, staring at him wide eyed, startled by the sudden change. Just startled, though, not fearful.

Seth growled, feeling his control slip as anger overwhelmed him. He yanked at the arm in his grasp hard, getting right into Spencer's face.

"Just what the hell do you think this is?" he snapped, eyes blazing, "Just two days ago you couldn't be in a room with me without being in danger of a coronary, that's how good you thought I was. And now that you finally got away from all of it, you decide to come back in here and act like that never happened?"

Spencer just stared up at him, seemingly frozen in place. He wasn't even trying to shake him off.

"How did you-?"

Seth didn't let him finish, yanking him forward without warning to whirl them both around and push Spencer against the back wall of the room before he could so much as gasp in shock. He was right in front of him instantly, his hands landing on bony shoulders and squeezing tightly, pinning him.

"What the fuck does it matter how?" He was seething, his grip too tight, his control too thin. Spencer flinched at his outburst, his whole body finally going tense after all as he stared up at him, apprehensive and confused.

"Not so confident in me now, are you?" he asked, finding he sounded bitter more than anything. Of course Spencer would come to his senses once he snapped out of whatever deluded lie he'd talked himself into.

He had to. Seth needed to see it happen. Dreaded it but needed it. He needed the kid to struggle, to look at him with hatred or fear or tears- anything less wouldn't be enough to deter him anymore now.

What he got though was so minimal he wouldn't even categorize it under resistance.

"Seth-"

Spencer did sound worried now, his hands coming up to pull at Seth's wrists and maybe dislodge them –but it wasn't enough, was by far not appropriate for the situation.
"Calm down, what's wrong-?"

Something inside Seth snapped at feeling that light touch on his wrist, came undone.

"Everything!" he snapped before he could stop himself, louder than he'd wanted to. His fingers dug into warm flesh painfully as he shook the kid once, all but slamming him into the wall behind him. "Every- how can you even ask that? How can you- I'm still the same man who put a gun to your head and threatened your life and held you hostage! Have you forgotten that?"

He could only guess at what his face looked like then, but combined with his looming stance and brutal grip it seemed to be enough to finally shake the kid up. Slowly, the large eyes staring up at him started to fill with alarm at his behavior. Fingers pushed at his forearms more urgently now, trying to ward him off.

Too late.

xxx

Reid winced as Seth's grip on his arms tightened, the pain as familiar by now as the racing of his heart. He stood tensely, mind racing as he stared at the older man.

He was slowly getting over the shock of him suddenly being free of his bonds somehow, but Seth's behavior was worrying him, setting him on edge. He didn't understand why the man was so angry all out of a sudden, yelling at him. All he'd done was to tell him that he understood it wasn't all his fault…

Why was he acting like this now?

It had to be Richie, he figured. Seth clearly wasn't unaffected by his brother's death, still unstable after what had happened. He wasn't in control of his emotions, that was the only explanation for what he was doing. Transferring any pain and anger he was feeling.

Reid took a deep breath and pushed away the conditioned stress response to being grabbed like right now–over the past hours Seth had had so many opportunities to hurt him and he hadn't. He wouldn't now either, he had no reason. He was just lashing out because he was upset. Understandably so. He should probably be used to the man's short temper by now.

"Seth," he took a calming breath, trying his best to sound calm as well. He was just far too exhausted and battered for any big arguments, but what was he to do but try and calm him down? "Seth, I know you're upset. Richie-"

"Fuck Richie!" He jumped when Seth shook him once more; he looked angrier than he'd ever seen him, barely in control. "I'm upset because you aren't! After everything, you shouldn't be standing here, spouting that shit about redemption…Have you forgotten what I did to you?"

Reid just stared, confusion slowly starting to mix into his worry.

What was going on? Yes, he was upset, mostly because Seth's irrational and violent behavior was unnerving him…but he didn't understand what Seth's problem was. Over the past few days Seth's attitude and tune had changed rapidly and seemingly incessantly, that was true. He'd started out telling him that he didn't care if Reid lived or died, that he would kill him without blinking, and Reid had believed it, then he'd told him just the opposite and after a while he'd believed that too…but this? Why was he suddenly saying these things, accusing himself and telling him he was stupid for believing him when for the past two days he'd worked so hard to achieve just that?
Maybe because he really does care about you, a little voice in the back of his head whispered. Or because he's finally snapped.

He gulped. He knew he shouldn't be pondering this; he should be more worried about the fact that he was all alone, backed against a wall by a man who was undoubtedly dangerously unstable, that he needed to get out of this situation. Still, he couldn't help but still think about Richard and all that pain in Seth's eyes, couldn't help but feel that same sting of pity in his chest at the thought, Seth's his violent behavior much less purposefully threatening than instinctual…

"Seth," he began softly, trying to get him to come down somehow, "It's okay, just calm- I…yes, you did those things…but there were reasons…and I understand. You always only wanted to make things right…I know you didn't do it because you wanted to hurt anyone, you-

He was cut off by Seth's hand suddenly shooting forward and closing around his throat, squeezing tightly.

Reid's heart leapt into his throat, his body catching on to what was happening before his brain did. His mind went blank a split second later, all questions of empathy and pity pushed aside by flight instinct. He struggled instinctively, clawing at the hand around his throat. Seth didn't budge though; instead he just pressed down harder, a look in his eyes suddenly that was truly frightening, over layering the pain and sadness that had kept Reid relatively calm until then.

He stared at Seth in shock, finding his kidnapper suddenly right in his face, black eyes blazing.

"You. Know nothing," he hissed, "This is where I had my hand. Right next to the knife I threatened to cut you with."

Reid cringed, blanching. He shuddered at the darkness in his kidnapper's eyes, the cold hard orbs staring him down angrily. Again, he tried to get free - but didn't accomplish the slightest thing pinned as he was. Seth fixated him with a look that was so wild and out of control that finally, finally, it occurred to him just how wrong he'd been…to come in here alone, to just assume… He'd thought he could predict Seth, read him finally…but now, he understood less than ever.

Except for the fact that he was scared.

And that he was right to be.

xxx

Finally, finally he could see it.

Fear.

Seth held the lithe doctor still with frightening ease as he struggled against the grip around his throat, not bothering to try and reassure him. He wasn't planning on actually inflicting any damage of course –but it was enough to remind the kid that he could, oh so easily.

For a second or so, he was satisfied with his accomplishment. Until he realized his big, big mistake.

He was so close to the kid by now, too close, his every sense on high alert, entirely honed in on nothing but the slight figure under his hands, their proximity stealing his focus, the meager rest of his self control. His hand around the kid's throat was meant to be threatening, because threatening was one of the few things he did well. To scare him, make him remember how scared he'd been and that he'd been right to be. To set things right and maybe prevent even worse from happening.
Right. Worse things. Like this.

He could already feel his anger drain away, his attention diverted by the feel of Spencer's pulse under his fingers, quickened, of blunt nails clawing at him and hot, irregular breaths against his face...So close... Heat started to crawl up his chest, his collar, his breaths suddenly heavy. He drew closer instinctively, until they were chest to chest, leaning down even more.

God, he wanted...needed...

"Seth..." There was fear in the kid's voice now as he said his name. In his eyes, too.

It barely helped him focus. All he could think of was that he had him right here, literally right under his fingers, just one tiny snap decision away from what he truly craved...

No. You're better than that.

Just once, just-

He ran his thumb over the scab under his fingers, another wound inflicted by him, tried to focus on that, on the fact that Spencer was scared, trying to get away from him. It didn't work. Not even close. All he could think about was how close they were, how he had felt the last time they been like this, how close he'd come to-

"Tell me again how good I am," he said, voice hoarse, "When I did this...you were shaking so badly I could feel it all through my body. But I didn't let go. You wanna know why? Because I didn't want to."

He gazed at Spencer without blinking, taking in his every reaction, every emotion flashing through his impossibly large eyes. Only a tiny faint part of him left that even registered how tense and scared he suddenly looked, that that wasn't what he wanted –but even that part was overshadowed by the choruses of voices in his head screaming want, need, take, live fire in his veins, in every fiber of his body.

"I don't want to now..." he whispered, ignoring yet another flinch, "...I thought...I could get through this...without...but it looks like Richie was right after all."

He laughed bitterly. The thought made him sick to his stomach...but not enough to stop what was happening. He'd fought for so long. All for nothing.

He gazed down at Spencer, watched the color washing out of his cheeks at his words, the devastation and dread slowly but surely replacing denial and doubt. He was starting to catch on.

Too fucking late.

xxx

Spencer felt his insides grow cold with every second he stared at Seth and the man's expression didn't change. He shook his head in denial. No, that couldn't...moments ago he'd only been worried that Seth's unstable mood might be a risk if he lashed out...but this...the things he was saying now, combined with how he was looking at him, choking him...

Suddenly he couldn't swallow.

No. No, this wasn't happening. Seth wasn't...wasn't Richard.
He was sure of it –

Except he wasn't.

He shuddered as he realized it. There had always been missing pieces to the puzzle that was Seth Gecko. He had come in here because he'd wanted to find out what they were. He'd known there was the possibility of finding answers he wouldn't like…but he hadn't believed it. Until now.

No. No!

It didn't make sense. Why would he have waited until now if he wanted to-?

He shook his head again, forcing himself to stay still, collected –even though he knew that his eyes were giving him away, pleading with Seth to tell him he wasn't serious…that he didn't mean what he was saying.

"No. Seth. You're not like him. You don't want to hurt me," his voice was barely controlled, sounding pleading more than convincing, fingers digging into Seth's, "You could have…if you wanted to but you didn't."

He was beginning to wonder who he was trying to convince here, his kidnapper or himself. Seth just stared at him, his expression and grip remaining hard.

The latter then.

xxx

Momentarily, Seth was distracted from his more than insistent thoughts by what Spencer was saying, confused even. Then, he realized they still weren't on the same page.

Not surprising, once it occurred to him…what he was saying, in combination to his hand still around Spencer's throat, had to sound like he was talking about wanting to hurt him. For a moment he felt cold at the idea of that…Spencer thinking that he was talking about the gruesome, bestial crimes Richard had so often committed, leaving a trail of mangled, broken and bloodied bodies in his wake.

"No," the word was out before he knew it. That wasn't what he'd meant, not what he shared with his brother. Spencer was right to be scared of him, because what he wanted would hurt him…but for him to think that that would happen…

"No!" he dropped his hand from Spencer's throat, grasping the sides of his neck with both hands instead, forcing his head up. "No! You still don't get it, do you?"

The young doctor just looked up at him without breathing, seemingly frozen under his hands. For a moment, Seth stared at him, momentarily distracted from his longing by the gruesome thoughts put into his head, underlined by seeing the fresh marks of abuse on Spencer's otherwise perfect skin, the red and purple and green reminders of the past three days. His fingers twitched. He suddenly felt breathless for a whole other reason, afraid the kid would just break under his hands if he went on like this…He never touched anyone while mindful not to inflict any damage…not even now, when he wanted to, should…

His face crunched up, expression a mix of anger at himself and guilt. He loosened his tight grip on the kid's face, brushing a thumb over his cheek bone, trying to make right what he'd already ruined somehow. Spencer remained tense under him, only still because he was literally trapped. His heart was racing.
He didn't understand. No, of course not, how could he?

"I never…wanted to hurt you." Seth's mouth felt dry, his voice that of a stranger. He'd never said those words to anyone and meant them, not like this. Just like he'd never felt kike this, so intensely that he was scared. "Never…But I don't know how not to."

Spencer's expression didn't change, still a blend of confusion and fright. Suddenly, Seth couldn't stand it anymore.

He closed his eyes, exhaling slowly as his mind reeled, overcharged with the situation. He could hear Spencer's irregular breaths, felt the movement against his palm as he swallowed. He inhaled slowly, trying not to think about all of that, that white, perfect skin, so warm under his hands…about how he wanted to trace more of it, to press his lips to it, taste it…

"It's my fault..." he ground out, "for making you believe you were safe, when all this time I've been dying to- I tried…but I can't do it anymore, I feel like it's eating me alive…from the inside out…why…did you come in here? I told you-"

The words were spewing out of him now, like a weight coming off his chest with the same speed that Spencer's heart began beating faster and faster at the implications of what he was stammering. He absently wondered why Spencer hadn't called for help yet, or at least tried to get away from him in earnest. He looked scared enough by now and his team was just one room away.

He blinked, opening his eyes to stare at the collarbone right in front of him, the juncture between Spencer's torn shirt and his flat chest.

He wouldn't let him, he suddenly realized. He had to finish this now. He would no matter how destructive it was.

Reason had finally waved him goodbye entirely.

He straightened up slightly, his gaze going up again. Spencer's lips were slightly opened, trembling as though he might call out for help once he snapped out of his state of shock. Without thinking, Seth pressed his thumb against the side of his mouth, a precautionary warning. He couldn't help but feel another surge of heat at the way Spencer's breath caught at the movement, his pulse speeding up even more.

"This is your fault too, you know," he murmured absently, "I know what I am. I'm a killer. I have been since I was twelve. I killed those people on your autopsy tables, and I would do it again without batting an eyelash. I knew what Richard was and I never stopped him, I just looked the other way and got rid of his trash. I knew the girl wasn't safe with him, no one ever was, and yet I left her there anyway…I didn't care, just like I don't care about anything. I don't care that everything I touch breaks. I didn't…until three days ago. You ruined us both. I was fine. My life was a pile of shit but I was okay with that…and then you came along and just…how is it that you defy every rule in my book without even knowing it? Why do you make me feel this way?"

He smirked mirthlessly when Spencer remained a statue, clearly completely overcharged with what Seth was saying and what it meant. He was completely frozen up, looking like he was just waiting for Seth to snap his neck right on the spot, or worse…only slowly growing confused again at what he was hearing.

"I know you don't understand," Seth whispered softly. He half closed his eyes, leaning back in until his face was only inches from the kid's neck, breathing in. "But you will."
He felt Spencer flinch when his breath hit his skin, finally snapping out of his stupor enough to squirm under him, try to lean away.

"Please," his voice had a definite edge of panic to them now, soft as they were, "Seth, just let me-

He pushed at his hands again, trying to dislodge them, to push him away. Seth barely registered it.

"I don't think so, Spencer," he interrupted, unmoving. He was beyond the point of no return. "You want answers, I'm giving them to you. I think I'm about out of self-restraint anyway."

Without further warning he pushed him back flat against the wall with all of his body, leaving no air between them and ending all struggles effectively. One of his hands fell to the kid's hip, keeping him still, while the other remained wrapped around the side of his neck, long fingers tangling in soft locks. He felt Spencer's breath catch, the shock of what was happening going all through his body. Weak hands pushed at his shoulders and chest but it was easy to ignore or misinterpret their purpose.

"Ask me why I kissed you," he said against Spencer's neck, "That's what you really wanna know, isn't it?"

Spencer didn't say a word, rigid in his arms. Seth tilted his head till his mouth was directly by the kid's ear, his nose grazing soft locks as he whispered, "I did it because I wanted to...have wanted to since I first saw you. Back at the prison, then at the bank...it made me so fucking angry, these feelings that wouldn't let me just kept looking at me with those big, frightened eyes and I could hardly remember what I was supposed to be doing! And it just got worse and worse, your eyes, your face, the things you say, now this...I never wanted to be like- but it's like you're fucking taunting me, daring me to just do something."

"Is that what you want?" He ran his thumb over the skin under Spencer's ear, feeling the shiver it ignited. God, why was he so quiet, why wasn't he even trying to tell him to stop...how was he supposed to-

Desire cursing through him, he gripped Spencer's hip tighter, thumb tracing the sharp bone. Spencer's breaths had flattened out, tremors running through his thin body. Seth could feel it all pressed together as they were now, the thought that it was him causing that almost making him dizzy, breathless as he was consumed by heat. His lips brushed warm skin lightly, teasingly, fingers tightening in soft burnished locks as he pulled, forcing him to bear more of his neck.

"You wanna know what I want?" he asked quietly, voice somewhere between husky and threatening. "I want to hold you just like this, closer, tighter, and not let go. I want to take you away from your friends, make you stay with me and only me, so you can never leave...to keep you locked up somewhere until you forget that you hate me, that you ever wanted to leave...until I'm the only one left. I want to hold, and kiss and touch you, your lips your hair, every inch of your body until you forget everything else, until you stop fighting...until you need all of it, need me. Until you want me back..."

xxx

Reid was frozen, unable to move even if it hadn't been for the forceful grip keeping him still. His heart was flying in his chest, his legs jelly, his mind uselessly reeling. He couldn't believe that this was actually happening.

But it was, and Seth was so, so close, whispering right in his ear, making it impossible to ignore the reality of his words, his actions. It had all happened so fast that he'd barely understood yet, come to terms with what Seth was telling him. But it was happening and he wasn't just telling him, he was
showing him, making it impossible to deny…

He took a deep shuddering breath, suddenly feeling like he was going to faint any second. He'd been wrong about everything. He didn't remind Seth of his brother. Seth hadn't meant he wanted to kill or torture him. No, he wanted-

He shuddered violently, stomach dropping. God, how could he not have realized-?

Everything, every little word and look and touch made sense suddenly, so much that it left him dizzy. The extent of what he had missed was so mind-boggling that he couldn't react at all. Somewhere in the far back of his mind there was a small voice, yelling at him that he was still in danger, that he needed to move, to try and get away, call for help maybe…but he simply couldn't move, too stunned by the gravity of what he was realizing. Instead he just kept standing there with his heart skipping beats erratically, entirely too focused on the tingling sensation caused by Seth's mouth against his neck, the heavy hand on his hip…

He drew in a shaky breath, his blood still rushing in his ears, torn between anticipation, fear, and unbidden heat coiling at the bottom of his stomach from the hot breath against his ear…all while his mind was screaming at him to move, to push the man -Seth-fucking-Gecko-for-heaven's-sake!-away, to stop this…this wasn't right, even if it felt- No! What was he? Suicidal?

"Why are you so quiet?" Seth was so close their body heat mingled, that he could actually smell him, feel the muscles rippling under his shirt where his palms were still resting. Warm finger tips were ghosting over the nape of his neck, sending shivers down his spine.

"Didn't you hear me? Say something. Do something or I will." It should have sounded threatening, because he could tell Seth meant what he was saying, but his gravelly voice was just too…soft, too thick with all kinds of emotions. Reid couldn't move.

After a few seconds of silence, Seth leaned back enough to look into his face. His eyes were burning, like two coals and Reid forgot how to breathe at the sheer desire and longing in them…leaving little room for guilt and reluctance but none at all for aggression or that darkness that always reminded him of Richard. Maybe it was that, or it was the sensory overload or the concussion but suddenly his racing heart and clenching stomach weren't so much due to dread and panic anymore as to the very emotions he could see in Seth's eyes. Something lit up inside him, a spark, a slow burning, something he’d felt before at the prison, then back at the motel, something he would never be able to admit to in a hundred years. Being this close...

He let out a shuddering breath, eyes pinned to Seth's unblinkingly, trapped once more. His own body was betraying him—and he knew that Seth knew when his eyes widened slightly, flashing.

The next thing he knew, Seth's grip on his face tightened, and he swooped down, pressing their lips together for the second time that night, this time kissing him for real, claiming his lips with an urgency that made him think of a thirsty man just out of the desert.

Reid gasped, completely overwhelmed as his brain all but short circuited and left him all alone and unprotected, with nothing but sensations. The spark that shot through him when their lips touched was like an electric current, momentarily making him forget that it was Seth gecko kissing him. Then he did remember, and remembered the man's words and the darkness in his eyes and Richard. Shock slamming into him, he tensed, instinctively, pushing at Seth's chest, trying to pull his head back—only to find that he was being held in a vice like grip, inescapable.

He whimpered, for a moment so scared that he couldn't breathe.
Seth pulled back, kissing him more carefully for a moment, gentle almost, his thumb brushing calmly over his cheek. Then he dove in again, seizing, grabbing, taking until Reid found himself with the whole length of Seth's body pressing him into the wall, a leg between his, hip to hip, Seth's hand roaming up his side, his stomach, his arm...leaving a wake of tingling heat everywhere he touched.

Reid gasped, momentarily forgetting that his heart was actually racing out of fear. Seth kept touching him, and suddenly he couldn't think anymore, too wrapped up in sensations that weren't and didn't turn into pain despite what he had expected...just pleasure cursing through his body.

Seth didn't give him another chance to reflect, moving against him in perfect sync with his lips and Reid moaned at the sudden friction, eyelids fluttering as he clutched at the man's suit desperately, pulling him in instead of pushing by now. It was all much too fast and too intense too really think about what was happening and for just the tiniest moment he was actually relieved by that.

For just the tiniest moment he didn't think of the vampires trying to kill them, or his friends worrying about him just outside or every grudge he technically still held against Seth, every doubt, every fear.

For the tiniest moment none of it was true.

Until reality hit him with a vengeance, making him all too aware of what it was he was doing.

Within the fraction of a second his brain logged back in, reminding him none too quietly that he was backed up against some wall in a vampire infested ruin, letting a wanted murderer with anger management issues have his way with him, after said murderer had admitted to some very unsettling motives regarding what he was doing. All while his friends, his team were on the other side of that door, ready to risk their lives to protect him from just that man.

Doubt and guilt slammed into him at the same time, leaving him stone cold sober immediately. He tensed, trying to pull away but between Seth and the wall he still couldn't move. Fear returning immediately, his hands instinctively flew up to push at Seth's wrists, attempting to pry them off his face. For one long, truly horrifying moment, the older man didn't let up, neither giving him room nor freeing his mouth, not even seeming to notice the change.

Cold spread through Reid as he realized what kind of situation he'd maneuvered himself into. Had he actually trusted Seth to stop if he asked before? Had he even thought that far?

Oh, God…

He fought harder, fist hitting Seth's chest as hard as he could as he squirmed in his hold. At least this time, Seth seemed to notice. For a moment, his grip on him only tightened though, making Reid's throat close up.

"Stop..." with immense effort he managed to tear his mouth away, avert his face, saying what he should have said all along, "Seth, please, stop."

He hated how all of his fears seemed reflected in his voice, laying them open but it did finally make Seth halt and pull back slightly, seemingly snapping out of his trance. Breathing heavily, he stared into Reid's wide, pleading eyes for a moment, his own darker than Reid had ever seen them. For a moment he seemed too far gone to even register his words, but then he blinked and his face fell and he let go of his face, almost startled.

Reid just stood and stared at him, hands still buried in his suit from trying to fend him off, trying to catch his breath and get his pulse to a normal level again. He was shaking all over. Whether from
exhaustion, shock or desire he couldn't even tell in his frazzled state. It was all mixed up, nothing but chaos.

He simply couldn't believe what had just happened.

xxx

*When you came in the air went out.  
And every shadow filled up with doubt.

I don't know who you think you are but I'm dying to find out.

I don't know what you've done to me,  
But I know this much is true

I wanna do bad things with you.*
"Please…stop…"

Seth only slowly registered what he was hearing, too caught up in the sensation of the mind-blowing kiss he was in the middle of, the ecstatic rush of having Spencer this close, warm and pliant against him, trembling under his touch…

It took him precious seconds to even realize that the voice he was hearing didn't coincide with the picture in his head, that something was wrong. It was then that he felt the hands pushing at his shoulders, trying to shove him away, tension having returned to the doctor's lithe frame, fear to his voice. Seth felt like he was being snapped out of a trance, doused with cold water as he realized just what he was doing.

He could feel Spencer's shallow breaths against his face, the way his slender body was stiff and shaking against his own, feeble hands fighting his grip.

He let go of the kid's face as though he'd been burned, quickly stepping away.

Shit. Shit, shit, shit.

What the hell was he doing?

Had he actually just-? Nausea slammed into him, filling his gut as he remembered Richard, what he'd said, what he'd tried to do to Spencer. And now he'd done just the same, he'd-

Just the same.

He swallowed hard, fists clenching by his sides.

No, he hadn't meant to, he wouldn't have -…just seconds ago he'd been sure that he could feel Spencer responding to him, kissing him back, that's why he had… –but now, looking at the younger man's expression, twisted on a pale face, as he leaned against the stone wall like it was the only thing keeping him from collapsing he realized that that could only have been wishful thinking. He hadn't asked, he'd just taken, would have kept taking, deliberately blind to the damage he was causing…

He stared at Spencer's pale face, his devastated expression and trembling lips and suddenly felt more despicable than he ever had in his entire life. He'd never meant to hurt him…

'T'm sorry,' he started to say but snapped his mouth shut halfway through. It's not how it's done. That was what he had told Richie over and over again.

Killing people and blowing up buildings is one thing. But you don't a put a gun to someone's head, threaten their life and then kiss them. You don't kiss someone like that and then apologize like it has any value.

He kept his mouth shut, knowing there was nothing to say. Not that Spencer probably would have heard him anyway. Currently he was staring straight ahead blankly, looking more shell shocked than ever, completely out of it.

Seth watched the multitude of emotions flashing across the kid's face rapidly, evidence of his inner turmoil. Shock, fear, doubt, confusion and- guilt?
He frowned, honestly confused for a second. Then he realized.

He had felt him give in.

The thought left him breathless for a moment. So he hadn't just imagined Spencer's reaction, hadn't misinterpreted every shiver and gasp.

But...he looked back at Spencer, finding his face still crunched up in hurt and so much guilt...and suddenly he knew what it was about.

It was guilt over letting Seth kiss him.

His heart lurch. That meant... Spencer had consciously not pushed him away for over a minute. Which meant he had enjoyed it on some level...

That thought set Seth on edge in a whole different way than before, speeding up his heart rate.

But he wasn't an idiot of course, knew better than to let the thought grow roots.

The kid was a mess. The fact that he had somehow gotten the notion into his head that he and Seth were connected in a way, that Seth wasn't a bad guy after all proved that very clearly. His irrational behavior clearly had to be due to the situation and that his mind had suffered over the past days and that his head was sending mixed up signals that didn't belong together.

The problem was, even as Seth thought this, he couldn't actually bring himself to care much. All he could think of was the consequence: That somehow, by some screwed up logic Reid had ended up feeling like he should let Seth kiss him.

On the one hand it felt too good to be true even if it was very likely some side effect of the trauma and it made him want to grab him again and not let go this time, to make sure to convince Spencer he was enjoying himself.

On the other hand, this was still reality, not one of his screwed up fantasies and it was obviously killing the kid to feel that way without being able to forgive what Seth had done, or to fully trust him even...

The agonized expression on his face was proof enough of that if he needed any.

Seth shook himself internally. God, he really was going to burn.

In less than four days he had broken a person into so many pieces they would probably never be whole again...and here he stood, itching to step up to them and continue what he had been doing anyway, no matter the cost.

This was wrong. So wrong.

He steeled himself, about to take another cautious step backwards, maybe to try and say something reassuring -when suddenly a scream from outside the door interrupted him.

--------------------------------------------------------------------------------

Reid's head felt like it was about to explode.

There was just too much crashing down on him at once, so many realizations. The reason behind Seth's whole behavior, its implications and impact, then what had happened just moments ago and finally his own reaction to it. He couldn't tell what frightened him most.
He didn't get the time to process any of it.

His heart dropped when he heard the scream from the main room. Immediately, the chaos inside his mind which had paralyzed him just split seconds ago was wiped away by the reality of what that scream meant.

The vampires! The team!

Instinct taking over, he pushed past Seth, not even waiting to see the man's reaction before he stormed towards the door and out of the room.

He entered the main room just in time to see that a fight had broken out by the door leading to the hallway. His heart flipped when he saw that the vampires had somehow managed to break into the room after all –just like Seth had foreseen.

There was one vampire, snapping viciously at his team and one of Mexican deputies -while the other two deputies were trying to push the door closed against the rest of the vampires trying to claw their way inside as well.

Reid ran over to them, horrified at the thought that one of them might get hurt.

Thankfully, the team still had their service weapons, all of them drawn and pointed at the vampire as they surrounded it, trying to anticipate its next move while the creature stood in their middle, hissing and turning around itself. Then, before Reid was all the way across the room, the creature suddenly jumped at Elle with a shriek.

Reid shouted a warning, running towards them again, instinctively reaching for a gun he didn't have -but Hotch spun around quickly and shot it with perfect aim, leaving it to crumple on the floor in front of him. Gideon shot the still form again just to make sure it was dead and Reid stopped running, about to breathe a sigh of relief when there was a scream from the door.

They all spun around to see that the deputies must have almost gotten the door back shut when one of the vampires had somehow managed to wedge its head back inside, burying its sharp teeth in the closest piece of flesh it could reach -which in this case was a deputy's forearm. The man screamed in pain, trying to pull away while his colleague started bashing the creature in the head until it finally let up with a shriek, retreating until they could slam the door back closed and lock it.

They all stood tense and ready to jump, but there was only some scratching on the other side of the door, no more vampires managing to get in. Slowly, everybody got themselves to calm down, breathing heavily as they reassembled.

Reid stepped a little closer, making sure that neither of his team were hurt. His heart rate was only slowly going down.

"Reid. Where were you just now?" Hotch looked up from reloading his revolver with surprisingly steady fingers, brows furrowed. It seemed his absence hadn't gone unnoticed. Reid swallowed hard, his prior issues returning to him.

Oh, God….if the vampires hadn't attacked just now, Hotch might have stormed into that room, looking for him just when-

He flushed, much too slowly opening his mouth even though he had no idea what to answer, trying to come up with something –but before he could Hotch's eyes snapped away from his face and to a point somewhere behind him, his expression a mixture of alarm and ardor.
Reid spun around when he heard Elle curse next to them, finding Seth standing a couple of feet away.

Hotch, Elle and Gideon immediately tensed when they realized their original UnSub had somehow gotten free and was now standing here as a potential danger to them. Even Reid jumped a little even though he probably should have expected the man to follow him out. He stared at his kidnapper, mental images of him, them, colliding inside his head. Again, he felt that edge of panic, along with gnawing guilt over what he'd let happen, his own stupidity for endangering himself like that, his betrayal of his team…

Seth didn't let anything show in his expression. He was back to his usual dark expression, somewhere between condescending and annoyed, nothing left that reminded of their little fallout minutes ago.

Unless you had your own memories.

Reid shuddered and looked away, unable to meet Seth's eyes.

"Gecko!" He only looked back up at Hotch's tense voice, finding his boss aiming a gun in his, no Seth's direction.

"Reid. Come here," he ordered urgently, an edge to his voice that betrayed his calm exterior. It was only then that Reid realized he was standing right between the two men, blocking Hotch's aim.

He made to step aside –only to suddenly be grabbed by his arm and yanked back by Seth. Reid gasped in shock as he suddenly found himself so close to the man that his arm was pressed against his chest, unable to escape his grip once again.

He couldn't help but flash back to the way Seth had held him just minutes ago and he tried to pull away hastily, horrified by the thought that the others might realize something had changed just by looking at them. Seth didn't let go though, and obviously made no move on him in front of the team who were far to shocked and alarmed to think about anything but the fact that they had an UnSub restraining one of their agents.

Immediately, Gideon and Elle had their guns lifted as well, all attention on the two of them and Reid felt his heart start racing once more. Seth's fingers around his arm were unyielding, making it easy to see why his team was frightened for him, thinking the worst even when Seth didn't have a gun anymore.

They would shoot him anyway, he realized, if Seth didn't let go they would shoot him.

"Seth, let me g-" he started out hastily, but the demand died on his lips when he saw Seth's expression.

He was all business now, cool and collected, nothing giving away his true face except maybe his eyes for a brief moment. They weren't threatening like the rest of his posture, but upset. There was a warning in them, worry that contradicted his harsh grip as he pointed towards the deputy by the door.

"He's been infected," he said quietly, and Reid heard the implied ´don't get any closer to him´ clearly. Reid didn't get to ponder Seth's actions, why he was once again seemingly trying to protect him, and how that too factored into everything that had happened.

He froze.

Infected.
Slowly, he turned back around, heart clenching when he took in the sight of the deputy who was clutching his bleeding forearm. His heart fell.

He had been infected. He would turn into a vampire in a matter of minutes…and Hotch and the other weren't even registering it, too busy worrying about him.

"No-", he whispered, horrified at the notion. He turned toward the team, fear painted on his face. They had to do something or they would all die!

"Hotch-!" he started out, automatically trying to step up to him, but Seth wouldn't let him, holding him back forcefully, completely indifferent to the way his actions would be interpreted.

In response, Hotch's jaw tightened as did his finger on the trigger.

"Let him go!" he growled, "You have three seconds before I shoot you!"

Seth ignored him completely, alternating his focus between the deputy and Reid.

"We have to kill him," he said, eyes hard.

Absently, Reid noticed the conclusive we, realizing that Seth had seemingly switched back into the same mode he'd been in before the team had found them, planning for them as one unit. That too left open a world of interpretation but Reid didn't have the time to ponder anything right then. So he just took things as they were, working with it as best as he could.

"Hotch," he called, "the deputy…he's been bitten. He's going to turn and if that happens he won't be human anymore…just a soulless demon, he has to ki-"

"No one is killing anyone here," Hotch interrupted him in a tone that sounded less like he was actually listening to Reid and more like he was trying to influence Seth. He wasn't even looking at the the deputy.

Reid heard Seth curse behind him, right before the sound of a knife being switched open made him jump, head snapping up. Seth had pulled out a knife from somewhere, snapping it open with an air of cold determination about him.

"We don't have time for this shit. I'll do it if you won't," he said darkly.

Instantly, Hotch and Gideon took a step closer, ready to pounce. Reid just stared at the knife, thoughts racing once more.

Where the hell had Seth gotten that knife from? Was it his? The one he'd had all along? Had no one thought to search him…?

He gulped, his throat constricting at the thought.

That meant Seth had had that knife the whole time, even back in the other room…

It made him feel sick and reassured at the same time. At least it made him pretty sure that Seth wouldn't be bringing the knife anywhere near him—if only the team were, too.

"Drop the knife or you're a dead man, Gecko!" Hotch yelled, closing in. He looked ready to make due on the threat, eager almost, scaring Reid.

Seth just growled in annoyance, but it seemed that he saw the determination in Hotch's eyes as well. If he didn't give in within the next five seconds he was going to get shot for sure.
"You're digging your own grave, all of you," he hissed, but conceded anyway.

He pulled Reid's arm up, pressing the knife into his hand. Reid was so surprised that he almost dropped the weapon, but Seth's fingers around his were insistent, making him hold on. Then Seth's hold on him was gone.

Before he knew it, Gideon had jumped forward, pulling him to the side while Hotch all but tackled Seth, pushing him backwards and then keeping him at gunpoint.

Reid had just opened his mouth to protest when another scream interrupted them yet again, making him freeze up in horror.

He didn't have to turn around to know what had happened.

While they had been busy quarreling the deputy had turned just like Seth had warned them – and now, having turned into a vampire he had promptly attacked his colleague and was in the process of ripping out part of the man's neck.

Suddenly there was blood everywhere. The gruesome sight made them all freeze.

Before anyone could react, the dead man's body fell to the ground while the newborn vampire turned around, grinning maliciously at them.

"Fucking told you so," Seth cursed somewhere behind him.

Reid physically felt Gideon go rigid with shock for a long moment and knew the others were reacting similarly as they watched the man transform into a creature of the night.

"Dear God..." his mentor murmured, horrified at the sight.

Reid gulped, clutching the knife in his hands tightly. Just as before, he felt sick with fright—but also full of adrenaline. What had happened to Richard was still fresh on his mind. He wouldn't let his team get hurt like that. He needed to protect them.

He felt his fingers slipping on the cold metal and adjusted his grip hastily, heart racing.

There wasn't much more time to think though because in that moment the vampire did the last thing he had expected. Instead of mindlessly charging like its predecessor, it took a step back and unlocked the door before anyone could stop it.

Before they knew it, the door flew open and all other vampires barged in, and all hell broke loose.

Reid pulled Gideon back just in time, warding off the vampires throwing themselves at them as best as he could, living through the worst minutes of his life until the team finally got over their shock and started defending themselves.

Hotch was faring pretty well, actually shooting about as many as Reid managed to stab, but he couldn't help but worry about the others who still looked pretty shell-shocked and about Seth who didn't have a proper weapon to defend himself with.

He didn't get the chance to do anything about it though, too busy keeping himself safe and soon enough he was distracted by the third deputy screaming in pain when he was tackled to the ground by three vampires and practically torn apart before their eyes.

Reid gagged at the sight, his heart falling when he saw Elle run over to the man to save him. He
opened his mouth to yell her name, but it was too late.

Before she could shoot, one of the vampires managed to distract Elle and jumped at her, biting her neck viciously. Reid screamed, horrified, as his colleague went down under the attack, running towards her - but Gideon was faster. He ran up to them and shot the monster, reaching for Elle as soon as it had let up, dragging her out of the way.

Reid tried to get to them in order to help, even though a little voice in the back of his head told him that it was too late for her no matter what they did now.

A vampire blocked his way and he stabbed it with uncharacteristic vigor and unshed tears in his eyes, feeling hate for these creatures burning brightly inside of him. One vampire was soon replaced by another and it took a while for him to fight himself through to Gideon in the chaos of the fight.

After a couple of sheer endless minutes, he finally saw his window though and whirled around, catching sight of Gideon and Elle still cowering on the floor.

He was about to run over to them when he saw Elle sit up, grasp hold of Gideon and sink her suddenly sharp teeth into his shoulder.

xxx

Aaron Hotchner wasn't a superstitious man.

He saw too much evil on his job already to want to add any supernatural threats to it.

And yet, caught in some Aztec ruin in the desert, surrounded by vampires, with person after person turning into mindless, bloodthirsty monsters before his eyes even he couldn't help but face reality.

It hadn't taken him quite as long as the others to adjust to the new situation and start defending himself from these monsters; even if he didn't want to believe anything Seth Gecko said, it had taken but one glance into Reid's pale, haunted face to see that this was their reality now.

And so he fought.

He fought against them like he would have any UnSub threatening his or his team's life. Determined and without hesitation, he shot vampire after vampire, not even bothered anymore that he was currently literally fighting side by side with their original UnSub.

He trusted that man as far as he could throw him, but he was sure that he was smart enough to realize their chances to get out of here as a team were higher than alone. With everything else he could deal later. He risked a glance at the thief who was defending himself surprisingly well considering he didn't have a weapon at all, his knife still with Reid on the other side of the room.

Hotch didn't have the time to analyze what their whole exchange from before might have meant, why Seth had done what he'd done, why he seemed to care whether Reid lived or died.

He didn't have time because right then only the fight counted.

A fight which they were losing.

Hotch was vaguely aware of the third deputy going down, but he didn't stop, adrenalin driving him on and clouding his sight.

He didn't stop until suddenly Reid's scream pierced the room, echoing from the walls. Fear causing
his heart rate to spike, he killed the vampire he was currently fighting, jumping to the side to see what was happening.

Next to him, Seth spun around as well, wide eyes scanning the room hastily.

There were about eight vampires left now, the rest having gone up in flames.

Across the room, Reid had been in the middle of fighting his own opponents, but now he was frozen in mid motion, his face a mask of such agony that for a horrible moment Hotch was sure he'd been bitten as well.

Then though, Reid stumbled over to where Gideon and Elle were huddled on the ground and Hotch realized it wasn't Reid.

It was Elle.

Looking at her, he almost didn't recognize her. Her face had morphed, making her look just like one of the monsters they were currently killing.

Hotch felt his stomach turn and his heart clench at the realization that they had just lost one of their team, their friends. He remembered Reid's explanations about them dying, their bodies nothing but shells for demons to occupy, but he didn't think he could ever believe it, ever see her walking and breathing and think of her as dead.

Until he saw what she had done, saw the blood seeping through Gideon's shirt, the oldest profiler's face crunch up in pain. Elle lunged to bite him for what seemed to be the second time, almost dislodging his shoulder with the violence of her assault.

This time it was Gideon who screamed and Reid practically threw himself at them, running up to them to save what was already lost.

Frozen in shock, Hotch more felt than saw Seth rush past him but suddenly he was by Reid's side, grabbing him none too gently and keeping him from his infected team members while trying to stay at a distance from the other vampires at the same time.

"No!" Reid shouted, clawing at the hands restraining him and even from a distance, Hotch could see tears glazing over his eyes. "Let go! LET ME GO! GIDEON!"

Seth ignored him completely, grabbing on to the slender young man even more tightly.

This time, Hotch didn't even bother wasting time on them, oddly convinced by the expression on Seth's face that he was only trying to protect Reid for whichever reason. Instead he hurried over to them, trying to get a look at the situation without losing sight of the other vampires surrounding them. The few remaining monsters seemed to be hovering, hissing and just waiting for an opening.

Heart hammering against his ribcage, he watched as Gideon struggled to get Elle off of him, fighting to get to his feet. He was clutching his bleeding shoulder, gun hand white and trembling as streams of blood ran out from under his shirt and over his fingers.

Elle got to her feet much more swiftly, grinning at them from behind bloodied fangs. Her features still looked so much like always, only her eyes had lost everything familiar, leaving nothing but cold hunger.

Shocked, Hotch found himself fighting for words as she approached them. What was he supposed to do now? Despite the situation, he might have started trying to talk her down; he knew that Reid
would have tried the same thing if he had been able to get a coherent word out—but before either of them could say or do anything Gideon pulled up his gun, shooting her between the eyes wordlessly.

Hotch choked, his stomach turning as his former friend fell to the floor lifelessly; he wasn't sure what was worst: seeing her dead on the floor, hearing Reid's devastated cry or the expression of pain and regret flashing over Gideon's face as he looked down at her.

The unexpected action had stopped the other vampires for a short moment but soon they recovered, inching closer again, uttering enraged snarls. There wasn't enough time to properly process what was happening or to grieve even because not a second later they used their distraction to attack full on once again.

One of them jumped at Seth and Reid from behind; Seth quickly let go off Reid, whirled around and punched it in the jaw. The blow looked powerful but still it seemed that it only had any effect because the creature was in mid-flight. It was thrown a couple of feet into the table which collapsed under the sudden impact, wood splintering all around.

Meanwhile, another vampire attacked Hotch, claws extended to grab onto him - but Gideon was quick to shoot that one as well before it could so much as breathe on the unit chief. The two men shared a glance, silent understanding passing between them, and then Hotch sprinted over to Reid and Gideon's side so they were standing by the wall side to side.

"You alright?" he asked.

"No." Gideon shook his head.

Hotch ground his teeth at the answer; just what he'd been afraid off. Soon Gideon would be trying to kill them just like all those other monsters surrounding them; soon nothing would be left of him. It was hard to believe looking at him now, the familiar brave expression on his face as he faced their enemy with them.

Hotch kept his gun in front of him as did Gideon, the oldest profiler's breathing labored from pain while Reid's was definitely panicked. The youngest member's eyes flickered to Seth fighting on the other side of the room, like he wanted to come to his help, but he was clearly too distracted by Gideon's condition to move away from him.

Seth didn't seem to need help though.

Across the room, the vampire was getting back up to attack again but Seth was faster, already by its side, grabbing one of the fractured table legs and using it as a makeshift stake, piercing its heart with one powerful stroke. Once it had disintegrated he whirled back around, looking almost as frightening as the vampires around them. His eyes seemed like black coals as they scanned the room, murderous, face darkening when he realized Reid was standing next to Gideon, currently fussing over his mentor's wounded shoulder.

Somewhere in the back of Hotch's mind, alarm bells started ringing even louder, reminding him that Gideon wasn't safe to be around anymore.

They had to…

He couldn't bear to even finish that thought. Gideon looked completely like himself if only pretty battered. Blood was steadily streaming from his wound but judging by Elle's transformation he wouldn't have the time to die from blood loss. Hotch could see the realization of that clearly in his colleague's eyes but to his credit he was taking it with composure.
Unfortunately, the same couldn't be said for Reid.

He was still holding the bloody knife in front of him, his other hand clutching at Gideon's arm with shaking fingers as though trying to figure out how to check the blood flow, his breaths sounding shallow and panicked.

"You're going to be okay, Gideon," he was blinking rapidly, repeating the words like he was trying to convince himself. The sight, even at a side glance, was another hit in the gut to Hotch. God, the kid had been through so much already and now he would have to come to terms with his friend and then his mentor dying in front of him, too. How was he supposed to come out of this halfway sane?

Gideon seemed to think the same thing, an expression of pain and regret flashing over his face as he shook his head, more worried about Reid than about himself it seemed.

"No, I won't, Spencer," he said quietly, "I'm already dead and we all know it."

Reid flinched, shaking his head harshly in denial.

Gideon gave him another pained look, seeming as though he wanted to comfort him but there simply was no time with the vampires right in front of them, still closing in, just waiting for them to get distracted.

Instead he risked a quick glance at Hotch, looking more determined than ever.

"I'm finished, Hotch. But you two can still get out of here. I have a couple of minutes before I turn. Let me help you while I can."

For a long moment Hotch could do nothing but stare at the man despite the danger it brought, his heart tearing at the words, the heroic gesture. Then he nodded, finding he was unable to speak. Instead he reached to the side and grabbed Gideon's extended hand, knowing he was shaking it for the last time.

Gideon turned to Reid, squeezing his shoulder with a strained but genuine smile, "You're incredibly strong, Spencer. You did so well. I'm proud of you."

"Gideon, no…" Reid shook his head desperately, tears now freely streaming down his face. But Gideon was now fully focused on the vampires closing in, reloading his gun.

"You have to promise you won't hesitate to kill me once I've turned."

For a moment Hotch didn't think he could say the words, even though he knew he had to, that he would ask the same for himself if the situation were reversed.

"I promise," he finally forced out from behind clenched teeth.

Gideon nodded, apparently knowing better than to ask Reid, too.

"Alright then, let's kills some vampires."

xxx

Seth wasn't thinking.

He was simply giving in to instinct, fighting with all he had, a bloody table leg as his weapon. It felt like a relief, just giving up restraint, being able to get out all of his pent up fury and pain in an appropriate fashion. These monsters he wasn't worried about breaking.
For a while he was so caught up in the fight that he didn't think about anything else- until during a brief moment of respite after having staked one vampire, he caught sight of Spencer fighting across the room and his focus immediately shifted again. He didn't feel freed anymore then, but anxious, afraid –two emotions so foreign to him that it scared him even more.

Still he couldn't help it, seeing the kid in midst of all this very real danger, surrounded by bloodthirsty monsters, about to get eaten alive by his good as dead-colleague.

What the hell is he doing standing so close to that guy-?

Seth ground his teeth. He was by no means in the situation to get distracted, to look anywhere but at the monsters lunging for him over and over again, trying to get a hold of him –and yet he kept glancing back at the remaining agents a couple of feet away, barely suppressing the urge to yell at them to get away from the old guy already.

He cursed inwardly as he fended off another attack, swiftly rolling off to the side. Here they were, almost done with all the original vampires after they had sacrificed so much –and now the kid was about to get himself killed through misplaced loyalty. The thought had his heart racing with a sickening intensity he couldn't shake.

Fine, he decided. If they couldn't make themselves act rationally he would do it for them. He quickly assessed the situation. There were four vampires left, three of them cornering the FBI agents. Ok. He could deal with that. He would not watch Spencer die after everything.

He didn't care if he had to knock both him and Hotchner out to do it. No, he would get the kid out of here alive and if it was the last thing he did.

Seth readjusted his grip on the table leg, already stalking in their direction, ready to finish them off the remaining vampires from behind. He had made two steps when his path was blocked by the remaining vampire.

Santanico Pandemonium.

Of course.

Seth scoffed, far beyond the point of where he could be scared or intimidated. All he felt was the adrenaline pumping through him, practically making him itch to stake her, too. He felt a new spark of hatred at remembering she had caused his brother's death and suddenly he couldn't wait to kill her, almost glad that no one else had gotten the chance to yet. He'd just have to do it fast –before Spencer got hurt.

The vampire princess was grinning at him devilishly, victoriously, even now that most of her followers were dead and gone, completely confident that she would win anyway.

"Alone at last," she sneered, teeth gleaming in the dim light as she stalked towards him.

"You're in my way, bitch."

That was all the provocation needed.

The smile fading from her face, she morphed into an ugly monster once more, throwing herself at him with an unearthly snarl. She knocked him to the ground, falling on top of him, hands around his throat in mid-fall already.

Seth groaned and grabbed her wrists in self defense, gasping for air as he tried to pry them of his
neck, finding she was much too strong. He kicked at her, but she weighed much more than her slight figure suggested, easily keeping him down.

"Now you're just making it too easy," she laughed at him, squeezing more tightly and cutting off his air.

Seth knew his time was running out, Spencer's time was running out, so he gripped his stake more tightly, burying it deeply into her side. The vampire screamed in pain, ripping the stake out of her body and throwing it to the side.

Seth used her momentary distraction to roll them over, throw her off and get away from her, hastily looking around for a better weapon. Where the hell was a gun when he needed one…?

"Not so fast!" A steely hand wrapped around his ankle, pulling him back harshly.

Santanico got to her feet, looking mad with seething hatred as she began dragging him after her towards the bathroom.

"You just wait what I've got for you," she promised darkly, snickering.

"Motherf-" There was nothing but dust to hold onto as Seth was dragged across the floor, past the dead and the still living agents and he knew he didn't have much time to come up with a plan. He could have called for help but he seriously doubted one of the agents would have come, except for the kid maybe…who he didn't want anywhere near this monster.

He made a split decision as he bumped into the dead woman's body, pulled past her lifeless face; something was gleaming golden around her neck and he grabbed it swiftly, ripping it off her as he was dragged farther away.

Santancio let him go once they were in the bathroom, going to retrieve something from a cabinet by the wall. Seth struggled to his feet as quickly as possible, standing straight even though his head was spinning. He wasn't eager to simply wait and find out what she was planning. He was pretty sure it involved pain…revenge still. It didn't matter, it wouldn't get to that.

He took a deep breath, letting what would have been fear for anyone else turn into the old familiar thrill; this was nothing but the usual game of hunter and prey, of victim and villain. This he knew, he had been living this way all his life. What did he care that she was a vampire?

The rules were the same. Her or him.

"You know it's amusing really," Santanico mused, her back still turned to him as she smiled down at something in her hands. "Seeing you struggle to get out of our lair, you're so hopeless…when your salvation was so close all this time."

She tilted her head up, teeth gleaming in the dirty mirror as she sneered at Seth. When she turned around he saw she was holding a whip, caressing it mockingly with her claw-like fingers.

Painful revenge, indeed.

He didn't so much as blink, waiting for her to continue. If she was convinced it would be of no use to him, she might give away something relevant.

"Do you want to know how to get out of here? Do you want a last shred of hope?" she laughed maliciously, cracking the whip on her palm. "I think it will make destroying you all the more delicious."
Seth didn't reply, steeping backwards towards the shower as she closed in, savoring her moment.

"The exit is just outside this room, straight ahead. You were so close. But now," she smiled mockingly, "now you're going to die."

She lifted her arm, lasing out viciously and Seth jumped to the side at the last second, the whip hissing as it hit the wall. His hand shot up as he fumbled with the shower head, reaching for his last weapon.

Santanico watched him, bemused by his useless attempts to fight back.

"You won't get it off the wall. It's screwed on too tightly."

With that, she jumped at him again, grabbing for him so she could restrain him, hold him still. Seth let her, using the momentum to spin them both around, pushing her against the wall with a force that would have broken a normal person bones. As it was, she merely sneered at him, rearranging her neck was a sickening crack.

"Is that all you got?" she taunted.

"No," Seth replied, a cold smile suddenly spreading over his features. She blinked, disturbed by the sudden change.

Before she could process the change though, Seth had reached around her, turning on the shower, letting the water fall on both of their shoulders and heads. Santanico scoffed at his seemingly futilely attempt, about to laugh when her skin suddenly began to sizzle and disintegrate.

"What did you do?" she hissed, immediately writhing in pain. She jerked away but Seth held her with all his strength, keeping her under the water.

"Surprise, bitch." he hissed.

She threw her head up to look at the shower, shrieking in fury when she caught sight of the necklace wrapped around the showerhead, a crucifix dangling down from it, blessing the water raining down on them.

This time it was Seth who grinned at her, holding on tightly even as her flesh was seared, showing her bones.

"Have a fun trip to hell," he scowled.

And that was it. With a bloodcurdling scream she completely disintegrated, falling to the floor in pieces. Seth quickly stepped back, just in time before her remains went up in flames.

Taking a deep breath, he looked down at the drain as the last traces of his nightmare were washed away. Disgusted, he washed pieces of her flesh off of his hands, nodding in grim satisfaction.

"That was for Richie," he told the empty room, finally able to think half way clearly again.

He'd done it. He'd revenged his little brother.

His moment of peace lasted for about seven seconds. That was how long it took for an all too familiar scream to pierce the silence surrounding him, fear hitting him right in the gut.

Reid.
Adrenaline suddenly spiking up again, reminding him that there was something left worth protecting after all, he spun around and ran back to the main room, praying that it wasn't too late yet.

xxx

10 Minutes earlier:

It didn't even feel like it as happening to him anymore.

It was like one of those nightmares in which you had no control over the situation, separated from your body to watch from above. Except that Reid was connected to his body, glued to reality by the aching of every fiber of his body, the dizziness, the racing of his heart.

His pulse was rushing in his ears, sweat dripping off his temples, making his hands slippery along with the blood that covered them. It was hard to think straight and he didn't want to try, hoping to somehow block out the picture of Elle's dead eyes on top of everything else that was weighing him down already.

It was just too much; he could feel his body, his strength fading, his brain ready to shut off.

But he couldn't let that happen, not in this situation; he had to help Hotch and Gideon.

It seemed like forever that they were fighting with everything they had, hopeless but encouraged in the knowledge that they were still a team and not alone. Somehow they killed the remaining vampires with united efforts.

Once the last monster had gone up in flames, Reid sunk to his knees, trying to catch his breath, to stop from shaking.

They had actually done it. It was over.

Hotch came up next to him, clutching his shoulder, his hands trembling but hard. He pulled him back to his feet, making sure he didn't fall again.

"You okay?" he asked, giving a disturbing picture with blood and goo splattered over his neck and face.

Reid nodded, breathlessly. He didn't care that all of them would probably need extensive counseling after this—all that counted was that they'd made it. Hotch didn't seem to share his relief though, looking miserable still and it took Reid a moment to remember that not all was good yet. Slowly, reluctantly, they both turned towards Gideon who was standing with his back to them.

"Gideon?" Reid asked tonelessly, frightened as he stared at his mentor's turned back.

Gideon was oddly still and Reid felt his heart sink, praying against better knowledge that he too was okay, that all they would have to do now was fetch Seth and find an exit.

He cringed, feeling tears spring to his eyes when Gideon turned around, his face that of a demon.

"No..." he whimpered, staring disbelievingly at the monster that was eyeing them hungrily.

Up until a minute ago, Gideon had protected them with his life—and now he looked like he was just waiting to go for their throats himself. Despite the immediate fear Gideon's appearance caused in him, he took a step forward, desperately looking for any sign that his mentor was still there. But Gideon just bared his teeth, yellow eyes fixated on his throat with a hungry expression. He started
walking towards them, claws extended in their direction.

Hotch caught Reid's arm, pulling him back before he could get any closer. His fingers dug into the crook of Reid's elbow painfully and a side glance showed the conflict on his boss' face. For a brief moment, Reid felt a shred of relief, sure that his boss would know what to do, how to help the three of them.

He was sure his heart missed a beat when instead Hotch ground his teeth together, aiming his gun at Gideon. Horror-struck, Reid stared at the older profiler, unable to process that this was actually happening. "Hotch, what-?"

"He's not Gideon anymore," Hotch insisted, aiming at his former colleague who was now dangerously close. "He made me swear I'd do this."

Reid stared at his ashen face as he tightened his finger on the trigger, paralyzed for a second. Then though, he reacted on instinct. Just as Hotch was about to shoot, he slung both arms around his gun arm at the last second, using his momentum to redirect a shot which would have hit Gideon in the heart.

"No! Hotch, he is Gideon! You can't!" he cried out, holding on for dear life as Hotch tried to shake him off.

He couldn't let Hotch kill Gideon! Never! They had to find another way!

"Reid, let go!" Hotch demanded hotly, only to have his order ignored.

They were both so busy wrestling that Gideon was forgotten for a moment, long enough for the newborn vampire to come much too close to them, ready to kill. At the last second, Hotch looked up to see claws reaching for Reid and pushed the younger man out of the way. Reid lost his balance and landed in a heap on the ground, struggling back to his feet just in time to see his former mentor morph completely, seizing Hotch with inhuman strength before he could get his gun back up and sink his teeth into the man's neck.

Reid's scream was drowned out by Hotch's, the unit chief jerking in pain as his skin was cut open.

For a moment everything seemed frozen, but then, with surprising strength Hotch managed to throw the vampire off of him, sending him sprawling to the ground. He clutched his bleeding neck, face distorted in pain, betrayal and rage. The vampire didn't have the time to get back up, because this time Hotch's bullets didn't miss their aim. Almost manically, he emptied the clip, killing it after all.

Silence followed, nothing but the echoes of their screams hovering like fog over the ground. Reid felt like he was under water, numb as he stared at the vampire that had once been Gideon but which now looked like the monster it really was. He was sure he was going to throw up and quickly looked away –looking at Hotch though, realizing that what had just happened to him was his fault was much worse still.

Hotch looked at his empty gun for a moment before letting it drop to the ground mindlessly. He staggered a bit but remained standing, continuing to press a hand to his wound.

"Reid," he eventually said quietly, disturbingly calm. With what looked like some effort he walked over to Reid, falling to his knees in front of him, a large hand clutching at his shoulder.

Reid shuddered at the touch; he found himself wishing Hotch would yell, or scream or curse, anything but this, this blatant affirmation that there was no point in yelling anymore. He couldn't look at Hotch, at the blood that covered him, marking his certain demise. But Hotch wouldn't let him look
away, grabbing his chin to make him meet his eyes.

"Reid," he repeated, urgently now. "Reid, you have to do something for me. Find the exit. Get home…and please…tell Jack and Haley I love them."

Reid pressed his eyes shut in agony, tears falling down his cheeks. He was sure he would choke on his tears. This couldn't be happening.

"No, no, Hotch," he all but begged, shaking his head frantically, "You can tell them yourself. Hotch, you will!"

"I'm sorry," Hotch said, eyes dark as he grabbed Reid's wrist, squeezing it tightly.

Then, before Reid had any time to process what was happening, he embraced him tightly with a quick motion, pressing their bodies together. It wasn't until he felt Hotch's pained gasp against his neck, felt his body shudder violently that he became aware of the feeling of warm liquid flowing over his hands, through his clenched fingers trapped between their torsos.

He pulled back, staring down at the knife he hadn't been aware he was still clutching and which was now buried to the hilt in his boss' heart.
Seth stormed back into the main room to find that the fight here was over as well.

There was nothing left but scattered ashes and stains that made the floor look like a painting by Jackson Pollock. There were only two people left, next to each other on the ground, unmoving. He caught sight of a shock of light brown locks, and his heart clenched, the panic he'd not even felt fighting Santanico suddenly setting in after all.

Spencer.

He forced himself to look closer instead of just running up to him mindlessly, sending a silent prayer to heaven when he saw Spencer move minimally, proof that he was alive.

The young man was kneeling on the floor, cowering over the still form of his clearly lifeless boss. His bony fingers were wrapped around Hotchner's hand so tightly that the knuckles had turned white and he was shaking uncontrollably, tears flowing down his face ceaselessly. He seemed almost catatonic, only his lips moving to form words he couldn't hear.

“What if I fell to the floor
Could't take this anymore
What would you do?”

Seth caught sight of the bite mark on the dead agent's neck, realizing what must have happened. He didn't spend more than a second pondering Hotchner, immediately scared that Spencer might have been bitten as well. His eyes hastily scanned the kid for any similar marks, quickly scared again - but his position didn't exactly make it easy. Before he could weigh the pros and cons of approaching the youth now, his instincts won out and he ran up to him, grabbing his shoulders to turn him around.

Spencer didn't even flinch, apathetic as he let himself be moved around. He seemed to stare right through Seth, his eyes rimmed red and unblinking. Seth cursed quietly, trying to get a better picture of the amount of damage done.

"Kid," he insisted, bringing Spencer's chin up to examine his neck and face, "did he bite you?"

There was no reaction, just more silent tears.

Seth gritted his teeth; he recognized an acute stress reaction - shock - when he saw also knew that as inconvenient as this was right now, he could do nothing but wait for the kid to snap out of his daze by himself.

Realizing he was on his own, he began trying to assess the damage through all the blood and goo and torn clothes. It was hard to tell if there were any new wounds, at least like this. In the end he realized there was no point.

He got up, pulling Spencer to his feet hastily, holding him upright and half leading half carrying him back into the bathroom. In that moment he was glad he hadn't bothered to turn off the shower yet, because he had no hand free to do so now. Without wasting any more time he pulled Spencer under the water, tightening his grip when the young man's legs sagged beneath him again.

Spencer held on to him instinctively, gasping as water unexpectedly hit his face. He blinked rapidly, looking dazed and disoriented, but at least like he was trying to snap out of it.
Seth kept one arm wrapped around his waist, holding his light weight up while the other helped washing off all the blood and dirt covering his skin. He held his breath in apprehension as he watched it run down his arms and cheeks in crimson rivers, making it look like he was crying bloody tears.

His heart missed a beat at the sight of deep cuts on his chest until he remembered that Richard had caused those hours ago. Apart from that, everything seemed fine, nothing but the cuts and bruises that had already been there before the attack.

Seth let out a breath he hadn't realized he'd held, all but crushing the other to his chest in relief before he knew what he was doing. Spencer sank against his chest, shallow breath ghosting over his neck, poor but tangible proof that at least he was still alive, still with him.

Seth knew that this non-reaction was definitely reason to worry, yet he couldn't help indulging in the feel of the warm body against his until his heart stopped racing. God, he had known he cared about the kid...but he hadn't been this scared since the night he and Richie had to flee their foster parent's house.

Eventually, he took a deep breath and forced himself to back off some, finally calming down enough to really look at Spencer's mental condition. He was still shaking like a leaf, seeming terribly frail as he held him. And he still had that same vacant, broken look upon him that made Seth sure he'd finally been pushed past his limits. He hated it, wanted it to go away.

Carefully, he brushed his fingers over a pale, wet cheek, then his temple, smoothing strands of wet hair out of the kid's face. He didn't know what to do, how to fix this -and just like the times this had happened before it made him feel terribly helpless and weak, plainly said scaring the shit out of him.

"Kid," he tried again to get a reaction, "Spencer. Hey, can you hear me?"

He had to try a couple of times, barely stopping himself from shaking him up physically- but eventually Spencer blinked, his eyes finally focusing on Seth's face.

"Seth?" he whispered, sounding completely disoriented for a moment, like he had realized only now who was standing in front of him. His eyes flickered with a multitude of emotions, some that surprised Seth and some that he'd rather not decipher.

He barely found the time to feel relief over him coming out of his daze when Spencer's expression suddenly turned to one of agonized rage.

For a moment they stood there, Reid weakly hitting his chest and whispering the names of his dead friends into his shoulder, clearly long beyond any sort of control or reason. Seth just held on, silent. There was nothing to say.

xxx

Reid had never thought that pain like this could exist, that anything could surpass physical torture this
completely.

His mind kept flashing back to all he'd gone through, all he'd lost over and over. It was too much, too intense, too real, like it was still happening. He wished it would stop already and if only because his brain finally shattered. He just wanted it to stop.

Blood and screams and tears and more blood…

Morgan, shot.

Elle turning into a monster and attacking Gideon.

The team turning on each other, falling apart at the seams.

Hotch killing Gideon after Reid had caused him to get bitten. His boss' sacrifice, the family that would never see him again.

All of them dead.

For him, because of him.

And yet here he was alive and well –with Seth of all people holding him. Seth, who had brought him into all of this in the first place. He should want to hit him again, to hurt him as much as possible for what he'd done -but in that moment the strong arms pressing him to a warm chest were the only thing holding him on the edge of sanity and with his own grip slipping further by the second he couldn't help but cling to Seth with all his might.

Reid would have laughed hadn't he been sure that he would choke on his tears if he did. It would have come out sounding completely hysterical too, if not crazy –but then, he wasn't so sure he wasn't anymore.

His fingers clenched painfully tight in Seth's jacket, as he gasped for air. He felt like he was drowning.

Why was he alive? Everybody else was dead. He shouldn't still be standing here just as Seth shouldn't be here, holding him. This was just ridiculous, it wasn't right…it wasn't supposed to end with the two of them left...

That combination, it didn't make sense on any level. And yet, here they were, like some twisted joke of fate.

Swallowing yet another sob, he pulled his head back from Seth's chest, trying to make out the man's face from behind tears. As always, two images seemed to bleed into each other, two sides of the same man, one attracting, the other repelling.

Memories of their encounter in the bathroom not too long ago flashed across his mind, reminding him vividly of his betrayal…but also of the way he had felt, the way his mind had been blank during those seconds…despite everything.

What wouldn't he give right now for that oblivion, for those horrible mental images to fade, for the screams in his ears to fade…?

His fingers moved before his brain could fully catch up, curling around Seth's neck. He didn't take the time to think any further before he leaned in, sealing their lips, pressing them together desperately.
Seth drew in a sharp breath, fingers curling tightly around his upper arms. Seconds later he pushed him back, looking almost shocked.

"What the-?" Seth stared at him with dark, burning eyes. His lips were pressed into a tight line but Reid could see a flash of what he'd seen before in his eyes, still alive and kicking despite everything they'd gone through. He refused to think about just how deep Seth's obsession or whatever it was had to run for him to still react this way under the circumstances, couldn't then he would have to think about how risky and stupid what he was doing was, because he couldn't let himself be scared right now. He needed-

He knew it was crazy and self-destructive, making everything so much worse –but he was willing to live with that, to give Seth the last bit of his sanity if in turn he could make the pain and the voices and the memory flashes stop for just a short while like he had before.

It wouldn't be a hard push, he could see that. Seth wanted this. Badly. He'd barely stopped himself before and only because Reid had practically begged him to. Now, he wouldn't. He had no reason to anymore.

*What if I wanted to break
Laugh it all off in your face
What would you do?

You said you wanted more
What are you waiting for?
I'm not running from you

Come break me down*

Reid stared up at Seth, clearly seeing the conflict in his eyes, doubt and desire fighting with each other. He didn't wait any longer. They were already chest to chest, inches between their faces, so he didn't have to do much. He tightened his grip around Seth's neck, standing on tiptoes as he kissed him again, more urgently this time.

He wasn't surprised when he received no more protests, lips moving against his almost instantly, seeking more. Large, warm hands curled around his face, his neck and the next moment he found himself with his back to the wall, Seth seizing control of the kiss, of him.

Reid gasped as the little breath he had left was knocked out of him at the impact, instinctively tensing up for a second -but then he just let it happen, reminding himself that he needed this.

Somewhere deep down old instincts reminded him that not two hours ago he had been to scared of Seth to let him do this –with good reason – enforcing his stress reaction to a level that was almost physically painful. He pressed his eyes shut, trying to breathe through the panic lurking at the edges of his consciousness.

So what if he got hurt? He deserved much worse –plus, he didn't think it could get any worse.

Either way, he could only hope that it would somehow make everything else go away. That was all that mattered. He let his body go limp.

Not that anything else would have even been noticed.

Just like before, Seth was holding him tightly, kissing him with a vigor and urgency like he was afraid to lose him at any second. His large body felt restrictive as he pressed him into the wall, rendering him immobile. Reid let his eyes flutter shut, concentrating on nothing but the water running
over his face and Seth's insistent lips upon his.

Please, please, make it go away…

xxx

Seth was sure that the kid had now completely, officially lost his mind. It took him a moment to come to this conclusion of course, the same time it took for his head to start working again after Reid kissed him.

It took him completely by surprise. One second Spencer had been a cursing, crying mess in his arms, the next he was still half of that –but kissing him. His first instinct, as always was to grab on to him and pull him in, desire gripping him instantly. Then his brain caught up and he realized that this was just wrong on any level, that Spencer wouldn't… not in his right mind…

He tore himself away reluctantly, the last of his rational mind allowing for him to get out half of a questioning phrase before Spencer cut him off again with yet another kiss, thin arms slung tightly around his neck, pulling him in. His mind went blank then, all doubts dissipating. His hand came up of its own accord, curling around the side of Spencer's neck as he pulled the young man closer, dazed by the way he was clinging to him, initiating contact.

He didn't know how long it was before he came to his senses again. Maybe it was the smell of blood that still hung in the air, or the salt he could taste on the kid's lips –whichever, he finally managed to find the strength to actually pull away long enough to say something.

Spencer struggled once more but Seth pinned him to the wall by his shoulders, keeping him still with familiar ease. Then he stared down at the kid, trying to make a sense of what was happening as long as he could still think straight. With the shower still running it was hard to tell whether it was water or tears wetting the kid's cheeks, but his quivering lips and broken expression were enough to know.

Seth felt his chest clench, as he saw the evidence of what he'd basically already known. Whatever this was…it was profoundly wrong and he need to stop it. Spencer had no reason to be any more open to this than an hour ago, less if anything. Whatever the reason for his actions, it was wrong, so, so wrong, and he needed to stop. Right now.

But by god, it was so hard, now more than ever, with Spencer clinging to him, wanting h-

No. He didn't want this. At least he wouldn't if he still were any degree of sane right now. This, whatever it was –it definitely didn't count as consent.

Spencer squirmed against his grip again, trying to get away from the wall. Seth pushed him back.

"Stop," he demanded, scared to hear that his voice was lacking any of the conviction he'd aimed for. Damn it, damn that boy. What was he thinking? Seth had barely enough self control not to maul him as it was. This wasn't helping.

"Please," Spencer's fingers trembled as they wrapped around his neck, cool in contrast to the water raining down on them. His voice was close to breaking, hoarse from all the screaming and crying, almost desperately pressing closer to him, molding their bodies together.

The word went straight to Seth's groin, leaving him breathless.

Not right, he doesn't mean it…

Seth closed his eyes, trying desperately to stay collected…
He failed miserably.

Ten seconds, that was how long he made it.

Then, his reason finally waved him goodbye. His grip on the youth's chin tightened as he bent his head, all but crushing their mouths together in overwhelming desire. Spencer opened his mouth without protest, letting him in instantly. After that, there wasn't much room for guilt or doubt in Seth's mind anymore. He was still running so high on adrenaline, and Spencer felt so good, so right in his arms, he'd wanted this for so long...needed him so badly...

He didn't want to keep thinking about why the kid was suddenly acting this way, or admit to himself that it had to be the stress reaction, or something worse even...

Fuck the situation, fuck ethics.

He was done fighting this.

He kept one strong arm circled around the boy as he kissed him fiercely, pressing closer, trying to get more and more, hands buried in vast strands of hair, tracing his face, his neck, his collarbone...everything he'd ever wanted...just right there in front of him, how was he supposed to resist? Spencer still wasn't fighting him, not exactly active but pliant, just letting him take.

Seth pulled back, pressing lighter kisses to a sharp angled jaw before tugging at Spencer's hair and laying his throat bare once more to press his mouth to the pale skin there. Spencer gasped at the feel of lips and teeth worrying his sensitive skin, his fingers clutching at Seth's suit, spurring him even more. Feeling the slender body pressed against him shiver was enough to send heat cursing through Seth's veins once more, the sensation incredibly in its intensity, wiping his brain.

He let his free hand stroke down Spencer's side, slide under what remained of his shirt. His fingers found soft, taunt skin, begging to be explored. He brushed his fingers over a flat stomach, drawing another soft gasp from Spencer, before he let it wander higher. He kept his face buried in the tempting neck bared for him, kissing and nibbling at the silken skin and reveling in the soft moans his ministrations drew from the youth in his arms.

The nagging feeling in the pit of his stomach began to die down slowly but surely, dulled by the obvious signs of pleasure he saw. It was fine, he wasn't hurting him - he was enjoying it.

Unable to hold back any longer, he pushed his hips up into Spencer's, eliciting a moan from both of them. Encouraged, he ground their midriffs together more insistently, building up a rhythm and almost immediately getting tangible results. Seth growled quietly as his passion rose, urging him on. He could feel the young agent's need matching his own, demanding release, unsteady breaths in his ears, soft whimpers...

He moved his hand down, coming to rest on Spencer's belt.

He froze when the kid jumped, his breath catching in his throat as he suddenly tensed. It was enough for him to get distracted, to flash back to Richard and his own fears of becoming like him. He stilled, fighting the urge to just go on, take what he really needed-

But...Spencer...

"Tell me to stop," he gasped, trying desperately to sound more controlled than he really was, "Tell me now."

He made himself look into the kid's eyes, hoping it would help to remain frozen in his position as he
waited. They were wide and spooked, his breaths fast and shallow as he stared at him, ghostly pale except for two bright red spots over his cheek bones…

He didn't say a single word. Just stared at him with that same worrying intensity as before, eyes shining and unfocussed, glazed over. He seemed to be silently pleading, but Seth couldn't tell what for, if it was to be let go or to be grabbed again…Maybe even Spencer didn't know…

Seth's body made the decision for the both of them. He did the best he could, carefully combing his fingers through the soft locks under his hand as he looked into Spencer's eyes, hoping that his were at least somewhat reassuring…

He didn't break eye contact as he opened Spencer's belt along with the buttons of his jeans, quickly slipping one hand inside his pants, not giving him any more time to worry. Sure enough, Spencer jumped at the touch, and then his eyes fluttered closed, fear fading from his features to be replaced by pleasure. Seth leaned in to kiss a moan from his lips as his mouth fell slack, gladly continuing his ministrations until he felt the kid relax in his arms, tension falling off him. Soon enough he was moving against him, kissing him back with breathtaking intensity. It took what only felt like moments for Seth to be almost painfully hard, seeing Spencer come undone like this under his hands almost too much to take.

He kissed him again, unable to hold back, then he pulled back to look at him, taking in the mesmerizing sight of his flushed face, head fallen back against the tiles behind him, panting. His wet hair fell in curls around his face, making him look like he was wearing a halo.

"God, you're beautiful." he heard himself whisper, unable to stop himself.

He couldn't tell if Spencer had actually heard, unable to wait long enough to find out as he crushed their mouths together again, craving that touch, that intoxicating taste…

He fumbled with his own pants, prying them open and pulling them down, taking Spencer's with them in the same motion. Not losing any time he hooked one arm under one knee, pulling the kid's leg up so it was circling his hip. He felt Spencer's breath catch at the sudden motion, then again at the feeling of skin rubbing against skin, of Seth's hand pressing into his flesh. Seth groaned, white flashing behind his closed eyelids. He couldn't wait any longer. He had to finally have him, all of him…feel him…

He was hesitating though: a part of him was afraid. Of destroying even more than he already had, of hurting Spencer even worse, mentally, physically…consent issues aside, this constellation was hardly ideal for sex, considering their surroundings and lack of necessities. Plus, he had no idea if the kid had even done this before, if he wasn't in for an unpleasant surprise.

One way to find out.

He experimentally moved two fingers, still wet with water, sliding them down Spencer's spine and lower. Again he thought he felt Spencer tense against him, but he didn't try to move away so he continued, progressing carefully, probing, pushing into him slowly. Spencer hissed at the intrusion, clenching around him. Seth brushed his mouth over his temple, a wordless promise, then he kept moving, stretching, scissoring. It wasn't long before he crooked his fingers, and Spencer jerked in his arms, gasping breathlessly as he pressed against him.

Spurred, Seth repeated the action, all the while grinding their hips together, reveling in the sight of the kid's mouth flying open in sharp gasps, losing control in the most tantalizing way. He found himself trembling with excitement as he pulled his fingers back, hooking both arms under the his knees and pulling them up around his waist.
Spencer yelped in surprise as he lost the ground under his feet, clinging tightly to the taller man. Seth kept him steady, supporting some of his weight by pressing him harder against the wall as he adjusted, bringing them into the right position. At first, he moved slowly, pulling the younger man down onto him as gently as possible—but even like that it was not easy. Spencer hissed in pain at the intrusion, eyes squeezed shut tightly and teeth clenched as he struggled to adjust. Seth paused, urging him to breathe.

"Relax," he tried to calm him down, fighting to stay still in his position despite the pleasure exploding behind his eyes. He buried his face in the crook of Spencer's neck, pressing a reassuring kiss to his shoulder. "I've got you."

Spencer let out a shaky laugh that sounded strangely like a sob, but he didn't reply, didn't move. He merely dug his nails into Seth's shoulders when he moved again, holding on so tightly it actually hurt while he tired to catch his breath through clenched teeth.

He didn't look good, Seth thought somewhere in the back of his mind, or comfortable, or relaxed. To be honest, it looked like the current pain was just overshadowing the earlier one.

He opened his mouth to say something but then Spencer moved against him, and the feeling of tight muscles clenching around him was enough to let Seth forget about his doubts. He rocked his hips, gasping at the sensation, felt all control slipping out of his hands as ecstasy cursed through his veins, his fingers clenched around the younger man's hipbones.

xxx

Reid couldn't quite keep from crying out when Seth started to move in earnest, pain flaring up his spine. He gritted his teeth together tightly, making sure no sound would leave his mouth. His mind was blissfully blank, nothing but his immediate sensations filling his head, blocking out everything but Seth, Seth, Seth.

He couldn't help but be surprised at the other's efforts to be gentle with him, unable to even remember asking for that. He wouldn't have complained either way as long as something overshadowed rational thought, over stimulating him—but slowly, but surely the tearing pain inside him lost its edge, blending with spikes of pleasure as Seth kept moving. Soon, he was so high he wasn't sure he'd ever come down. He didn't realize he must've been babbling until Seth gripped his hips tighter, pressing a deep kiss to his lips.

"Say it again," Seth demanded, eyes dark with lust as he kissed him deeply, picking up the pace.

"Wha-?" Reid blinked, unable to follow, to think clearly at all by now.

"My name. Say it again."

Reid felt himself freeze for the blink of an eye as he stared into Seth's dark eyes, stunned beyond words. Had he actually…?

Something akin to panic, misery, made his heart clench for a moment when until now he'd been so blissfully numb to all pain and doubt and fear. The sensation was erased when Seth pushed into him again, making him see stars.

What did it matter really? He was far too deep, too far gone…there would be no coming back from this, he realized. It was too late.

He closed his eyes, acutely aware of Seth's body, hand and lips everywhere, surrounding him, keeping him high and grounded at the same time. There was nothing left to hold on to—and so he
just let go.

"Seth." He heard himself gasp, voice breaking at a particularly rough thrust shaking him up, little jolts of shock travelling through his limbs. He pressed himself closer to Seth instinctively, shuddering as he looked into the man's eyes which were burning with an intensity he'd never seen before. A split second later he was already being pulled down by his neck, Seth kissing him fervently.

Reid let him, not thinking any further. He let himself fall completely, not caring if anyone would catch him.

For that tiny moment all else ceased to exist. No vampires, no death, no pain.

No past, no memories. Just the present.

All that was real to him were the pain in his back were his bruises pressed against the wall and the heat surging through his body where Seth touched him.
Chapter 22

Epilogue

Even half conscious as he was, Reid was sure that something didn't feel quite right.

It wasn't the ache that seemed to be present in every inch of his body, or the feeling of utter exhaustion trying to pull him back under, into the darkness.

It was warmth.

Brilliant light shining into his face, a mild breeze ruffling his hair and clothes. He was outside, he realized.

Reid blinked, cringing when the sudden brightness hurt his eyes, sending a splitting headache through his brain. He struggled back into consciousness bit by frazzled bit, trying to orientate. It wasn't easy with his head buzzing like a bee hive, thoughts sticky like honey.

He shifted and reached out, felt sand underneath his fingers. Sand…?

He tried to move but his limbs didn't seem to want to cooperate and he sank back down; instead he tried to listen to his surroundings, to get an idea of what was happening. At first he only heard the wind but after a while he could make out the sounds of something, someone moving close by, walking and moving things around.

Reid groaned as he tried to sit up again, his voice sounding foreign to his ears. The steps halted, then approached. A shadow fell over his face seconds later, fingers pressed to his neck as if to feel his pulse.

Reid's eyes fluttered open and he blinked, looking into a handsome, tanned face with eyes that were almost black, looking down at him with concern.

"You okay?" the man asked, looking slightly wary, guarded even for some reason as he waited for him to answer. He seemed familiar…

Reid tried focusing once more, but found that the memories seemed to slip through his fingers as he tried holding on to them to get a look. All there was were faint shapes and colors, voices calling things he couldn't understand, eyes looking at him that he knew but couldn't place.

For some reason, he suddenly felt scared, a chill creeping up his spine despite the sun and he shook his head to chase the rising images away. He didn't want to be scared.

He struggled to sit up, and almost immediately there were hands on his back, supporting him. A hand brushed over his temple, a gesture that felt unexpected but familiar enough that he didn't move away, just looked up at him with questioning eyes.

"Scared me there, kid," the man said, crease lines on his forehead undermining his words. "Can you stand?"

Reid wasn't sure he could but tried anyways.

He was barely on his feet when his vision faded for what seemed like only a second but when he blinked again, he was pressed to the guy's chest, strong arms holding him upright.
"I'm fine," he murmured, not feeling like it though.

His head was still spinning and he was confused about his whereabouts – about everything to be precise. He knew that he was missing some answers but every time he tried to reach for them his head ache just worsened and he felt more like sleeping.

Trying to focus, he looked around, eyes widening when he realized they were standing in the desert, on the roadside of what looked like a bar to be precise. On the roadside of a bar that was currently going up in flames to be very precise.

He squinted, realizing the fire was just adding to the brightness and turned away. He didn't want to look anymore.

"They're not gonna fucking bother anyone else," the guy next to him said cryptically, sounding like Reid should know what he was talking about. He was holding a lighter in one hand, a bitter smirk on his face.

Slowly, Reid nodded, somehow sure that this bar burning was a good thing. What he didn't know was why he felt the urge to run back inside, felt this pull like there was something in there he still needed to get…

He groaned softly, pressing a hand over his eyes. The arms around his waist disappeared, wandering to his upper arms and when Reid looked up black eyes were watching him worryingly.

"I'm gonna need you to say something here," the man said, a brief shadow that looked like discomfort or guilt maybe flashing over his face as his voice dropped, "Anything."

Reid felt a shiver at the intent gaze he was being subjected to, flinching when a memory fragment hit him out of nowhere. The same guy, holding him by his arms, only it was dark and cold around them, pain in his eyes.

‘Why are you so quiet? Say something.’

He blinked, trying to put it into context when the next fragment found him. Another wall, lips pressed to his in the throes of passion.

‘My name. Say it.’

He shuddered, feeling his face heating up as he blinked but the face in front of him remained the same.

"Seth," he whispered, the name coming to him automatically.

The man – Seth – nodded, looking worried now as he reached out almost hesitantly, grabbing hold of his chin and examining his face. Reid let him, feeling reassured in the knowledge that Seth apparently knew him well, that they were close. A calloused thumb brushed over his cheek bone and he leaned into the touch tiredly, seeking any sort of support.

"My head…hurts," he admitted quietly, face crunching up in discomfort, "I…everything hurts…"

Seth was quiet for a long moment, his expression carefully guarded, then he nodded silently.

"The heat," he said offhandedly, "let's get you out of the sun, the car is right over there."

The arm found its way back around his waist and Reid let himself be ushered over to where a couple
of cars were parked. There were two black SUVs, a red truck and a grey Plymouth but no one else insight. Seth lead him over to the Plymouth, opening the passenger door for him and helping him sit on it sideways, his legs hanging out the door. Sitting up suddenly seemed extremely exhausting and he sunk against the seat, resting his cheek on the head rest to fight the dizziness.

"Hold on, I'll be right back."

With that Seth turned around, walking over to one of the SUVs and opening first the trunk, then the backdoor.

When he came back it was with a large black briefcase under one arm, and an assembly of other things on the other. He opened the back door, throwing what looked like a blanket, some files, handcuffs and a holstered Glock 17 into it before slamming the door back shut and walking around to the driver's side, getting in.

Reid barely had time to worry about the last item, or about how he knew so exactly which kind of weapon it was when something cold touched his cheek and he jumped in surprise. Seth handed him a bottle of water.

"Drink something, it might be a while before we stop again."

He turned around, buckling up and starting the car with an assertiveness that left no room for questions. Reid wrecked his brain, trying to remember coming here with Seth in this car, travelling anywhere really -but he came up blank.

He blinked tiredly, too drowsy to keep thinking.

Seth seemed to know who he was, who they were and he seemed calm enough so he guessed everything was probably under control...but why couldn't he remember? And why was he in this condition while Seth was this calm? It didn't seem to fit.

He looked over at Seth, only now noticing that his black suit was torn and dusty, dark stains coating the fabric. A a closer look the man looked pretty battered as well, just not nearly as shaken...

With enormous effort it seemed, he lifted his own hands, finding them stained in dark brown, along with the remains of a T-Shirt that clung to his body in shreds.

"What...happened-?" he managed to form the words after a long moment, trying to focus on his hands but his eye lids kept drooping, incredibly heavy somehow. "Where are we...going?"

Seth didn't say anything for a long moment. Then he turned his head to look at him. His dark eyes held an intensity that made Reid shudder involuntarily, a black torrent pulling him under.

"Away, baby. Far, far away."

He turned back towards the street before Reid could make any sense of his expression or his words. Finally losing to his muddled thought processes, Reid sank back into the seat boneless, the words echoing in his mind without catching on. He tried to focus but it was just too hard.

He closed his eyes as Seth turned on the radio, the quiet, melancholy voices of a vaguely familiar song the last thing he heard before he drifted off into unconsciousness again.

1

*Staring at the loss
Looking for the cause
And never really sure

I can tell you why
People go insane
I can show you how
You could do the same

Shapes of every size
Move behind my eyes
Doors inside my head
Bolted from within
Every drop of flame
Lights a candle in
Memory of the one
Who lived inside my skin

x

Once upon a time
I was of the mind to lay your burden down
And leave you where you stood
You believed I could
You'd seen it done before

But now all that is gone
Over with and done
And never to return*

I

THE END

xxx

Thank you for reading! Please check out the sequel!

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