FitzSimmons Drabbles & Ficlets Collection

Summary

Miscellaneous FS-centric drabbles & ficlets, mostly from various Tumblr prompt challenges. Mood, setting & rating may vary, will be given at the beginning of each 'chapter.'

Most recent chapters:
- Fitz & Simmons come out to each other as ace. set Academy era (or AU)

Notes

1x22 coda. (No prompt).
Canon-compatible. Set immediately after 1x22. Mild angst.
ft Nick Fury
Simmons' heels tapped the metal of the medbay stretcher scaffold as she let her legs swing. They softly meted out her impatience, urging the clock on the wall opposite to catch up.

Tink tink. Tink tink.

She stared at that clock as fingers prodded her knees, her wrists, her sides, her neck. They held her tongue down with a popstick and made her say 'ah'. They took her pulse and checked the function of her lungs, and the cold kiss of the stethoscope made her heart jump like it had done when she was a little girl, and had never had the sound of gunfire rush through her veins.

It was only when they shone the light in her eyes that she looked away from that clock. In a quiet, sympathetic voice – and with a step back, and a wave at the door, as if they knew she wasn’t really listening – they let her go. There was no medical reason why they should not have done so. After all, her vitals were fine, and she could see and speak and walk straight. But to Jemma, it still felt a bit like she was lying in that hyperbaric chamber.

In the hall outside, she caught sight of Fury. Like that one desperate, pressurized breath, she seized the urge to follow him, running to catch up only to almost run into him two steps around the corner.

Then there was Fitz, and it was like the water rushing in all over again.

The world roared into her ears, choking her senses. She swayed to a stop just behind Fury, and grabbed her own hand, desperate for something solid as her body relived the bone-crushing impact.

Mercifully, the sound quickly subsided into what it really was: the whirring and beeping of machines, and of people murmuring and bustling about as they patted down Fitz’ stark white bed sheets and dissipated from the room on the other side of the glass. The time she spent staring at his false-peaceful expression was measured by the even ticking of the heart monitor. It was a small comfort, but one which allowed Jemma to regain control of her breathing and take the final step forward, to stand beside a dead man.

“Did he do something stupid?” the Director asked, his voice as gruff as always.

Let me show you.

Tears stung her eyes. She resisted the urge to wipe them away. Fury nodded slowly, his face a combination of pride and anger.

“He’s one ‘a Coulson’s,” the Director muttered. “Course he did.”

Fury pushed forward, and the glass observation window swung away. Simmons slowly walked through the new doorway, half hoping that any second, Fitz would sit upright, and reveal in badly-timed taste that this whole thing had been a joke. Or at least a plan, like Fury’s death. But the heart monitor blipped on in unchanging, bleak subsistence, and the bruises from the water shone an ugly purple on Fitz’ ghostly skin.
“Sit down,” the Director ordered, and Jemma did so without the slightest check that there was a chair behind or under her.

They’d replaced the emergency sling with proper plaster. At least his arm would set properly. There shouldn’t be damage to his motor functions. Not within the limb itself, at least. Concussion and bruising to the brain couldn’t be ruled out. And the arachnoid cysts? One of them could have burst and flooded something. Simmons’ eyes flicked across the monitors surrounding her partner, but the doctors had removed any brain scans from sight. The readings she could see, on the surrounding monitors, blurred and disappeared as more tears threatened to blind her. These ones she had to wipe away with her sleeve – which was still damp, which made it worse.

“We’re arranging for a change of clothes,” Fury said. He lay a hand on her shoulder so that she shuffled in her seat to look at him. “Until then, Agent Simmons, you stay right here. The staff will get you anything you need. I’m gonna go speak to Coulson.”

Simmons nodded, and turned her attention back to Fitz as Fury walked back the direction they had come. All of a sudden though – pushing down the bruises and the pale face, the words and the damp clothes - the desire to know made her turn back.

“Director?” she called. He was out of sight, but it was Fury after all. “How long was he…”

No Fury. No one. Jemma sighed and turned back again.

“Oh, Fitz,” she breathed.

And for the first time ever, he couldn’t respond.
“Great, so…”

“Chai tea,” Simmons filled in, “and the sugariest, most chocolatey pastry they have. Preferably a donut, but I’m flexible. And get yerself something nice.” She tucked the money into his breast pocket and tapped it. Before she could pinch his cheek, Fitz pulled back, shaking his head.

“You really can’t. You shouldn’t. Do the voice.”

“Shut up and bring me sustenance, this biological cluster isn’t going to rapidly develop itself.”

“Again, yes it is.”

She glared, and extended two pinched fingers to retrieve her ten dollars. Fitz covered it with a hand and backed toward the doorway.

“Chocolate. Got it.”

“I’ll pick a movie and get changed…into something more comfortable.” She wagged her eyebrows at him and laughed, and Fitz rolled his eyes. He and Simmons. Wouldn’t everybody else here love to see that.

–

Fifteen minutes later, and Fitz was practically skipping back to her room. He was looking forward to getting out of the cold as quickly as possible, but more than that, he could hardly wait for the brainfreeze he was about to inflict on himself courtesy of the colossal peppermint-and-cream mess that was the holiday specialty he’d caved to as soon as he’d seen the signage. There were only so many opportunities, after all, to have peppermint, coffee and chocolate blended to perfection in the same beverage.

But when he turned down the path towards Jemma’s room, he very nearly sloshed his prized drink all over everything he was carrying.

Simmons had a first-floor room. One that hadn’t been used in a while. She didn’t mind it, because it was big, but its Internet connection wasn’t crash-hot, he’d had to fix the kitchen light, and – it was just occurring to him now, and apparently hadn’t occurred to her – the blinds in her bedroom were broken.

He stared for far longer than he should have. Fortunately, she was wearing underwear, or else he might not have ever forgiven himself. But it was engrained in his memory indefinitely that her bra and her…underpants…didn’t match. The top was blue and lacy. The bottom black and plain. Not that he was looking. But he remembered thinking, girls did that?
Simmons crossed her very neat room to her chest of drawers and drew out a loose t-shirt and a pair of flannel pants with butterflies on them, and suddenly Fitz remembered overhearing that apparently, one didn’t sleep in one’s bra.

He ran for the door as fast as he could manage, and took refuge in her living-room, until she emerged into it from her bedroom with a lazy yawn, pulling her hair into a rough pony-tail. Seeing his expression – and no doubt noticing that his skin had dropped a few shades below ‘pale’ – she frowned.

“You okay?”


She froze.

She glanced back out into her bedroom. Now that the lights were out, she could see straight outside.

“I need to get some curtains.”
By the time they stumbled back inside, their eyes were dry but their hearts heavy. The new members went their separate ways, leaving the original team who had served with Trip to collapse in the living room in silence – except for May, who continued to her own bunk, and Coulson, who headed upstairs to his office. Skye was almost tempted to shout at them, or at least roll her eyes. Of course they would disappear. Couldn’t they see that they were needed?

Skye pulled her knees up onto the couch, and hugged them. She was glad the urge to cry had passed, but not so glad for the anger that was now slowly eating through her sorrow.

Across the room, Fitz and Simmons were back in old rhythms, almost managing just one couch cushion between them, which made Skye feel at least a little better. But it didn’t stop the biting anger. Only Trip could have done that, at this point. She bit her lip, as if it would stop the thought, and pressed her face against her knees until it started to hurt. Then she got an idea.

She unravelled herself and stood up.

If Fitz was going to be honest, part of him – a larger part than he would have liked to admit – was enjoying the feeling of Simmons pressing herself into his side. It had been so long since he’d touched her, let alone held her close, that underneath his grief for Trip, his body was singing with it. Of course, it would have been better if she hadn’t been on the verge of tears, that was a given, but if they were going to be grief-stricken it might as well be together. Besides, if, after all this time, she still thought of him as her sanctuary, then he was going to hold onto that with all he had in this world.

Simmons was happy too, in a way. Happy that she was so choked up she couldn’t even try to explain her feelings, she just had to feel them. It was a rare moment when she did that, and Fitz had always been there. She was glad for his arms around her, and for the fact that she hadn’t had to fight to get them there. For all their miscommunication, they did understand each other: a paradox if ever there was one, and the cause of the greatest pain in her life right now, even as Fitz was the greatest comfort.

She pressed herself more against him, leaning further across, so that she was almost on his chest. She could feel his heartbeat, strong and steady in the midst of all this, and it made her smile. She felt tears coming back to her eyes, not so much for Trip this time, but for all they had lost between them.

Then, across the room, there was movement. She looked up. Skye had gotten up, and was walking across the room slowly, haltingly, as if she might be the next thing to crumble into dust and rubble. Simmons felt a pang of guilt, and bit her lip, but the next sounds out of the stereo made her laugh.
instead.

“Jitterbug.”

*click, click*

“You know this song?” Skye asked, smiling, though her eyes showed signs of tearing up again as well.

“I love this song,” Simmons whispered back, afraid to speak any louder, until Fitz dragged her out of her seat.

“Come on then,” he invited, holding his hands out. She laughed at his ridiculous, goofy expression. It was like looking back a year, two year, five years, her whole life with Fitz all at once. He knew she loved this song. In fact, he knew all the words to it, and he was probably about to start singing them, accent and all. And dancing. Dear Lord they could not dance to save their lives. Skye was never going to let them live this down.

Well, good, she needed a laugh.

Simmons took Fitz’ hand, and leapt into it. Focused on dredging her energy to dance, she didn’t notice Skye leave the room. If Fitz did, he showed no sign of it. He kept his eyes on Simmons. But their energetic, mock-80s dancing didn’t last long. They gravitated back towards each other, until they collided somewhere around the end of the first chorus, and their energy left them.

They slipped back onto the couch together, pulling their feet up after them like they used to do, except that this time, Fitz didn’t fight her elbow. She moved it anyway, but stopped him from lifting his arm off her. It was heavy, yes, but it was warm and she was tired, and Trip’s upbeat legacy had removed enough heaviness from her heart, for now, that she might actually get some sleep. Fitz seemed content enough with this plan: though she hadn’t voiced a word of it, she could feel his breathing slow. She smiled, and let hers fall in sync as she closed her eyes.

_Coz you’re my lady, I’m your fool,_
_Makes me crazy when you act so cruel._
_Com on baby, let’s not fight,_
_We’ll go dancing, everything will be alright._
Chapter Notes

Set some time post 2x12 (after the 'different' accusation & when Skye took herself to the isolated room).
Fitz & Simmons have a heated discussion about her departure.
Canon compat until that point. Angst, hurt/comfort.
Ward mention, suicide mention.

The tools cluttered on their tray as Simmons slammed it a little too hard onto the bench top. Through a tight jaw, eyes fixed on him, she addressed the others in the room.

“Garth, Ann, could you excuse us a minute?”

The two of them shared a glance and a mutter, and bustled obediently for the nearest exit. Fitz couldn’t blame them: he could all but see the frost rising from Simmons as she stared him down. He himself was a little intimidated – he’d seen her cold anger before, but never anything like this – yet he felt the iciness of the room melted before it reached him by a hot, bitter, burning sensation in his chest. He realised, with a wave of nausea, that what was inevitable had finally come to pass. Yet he didn’t follow the others to the exit. He deserved this chance and so did she. Even if it was like carving out their insides with melon ballers.

With considerable effort, he kept his eyes steady on Simmons’. Even when they teared up. Even when she blinked them clear, and debated in her mind whether or not she really wanted to cross this line.

“That’s not – fair,” she choked at last.

“Fair?” Fitz’ retort was half-hearted at first. He could see she was trying so hard not to break this – maybe not seeing just how broken it already was. “If you want to have a – ahhh conversation about what’s fair, how ‘bout we started with you leaving me and lying to me about it and – and – you betrayed me! You hurt me more than Ward ever –“

“Ward!” Simmons snapped. “You want to bring Ward into this? Ward killed a man I had to examine. Ward tricked and kidnapped Skye. Ward threw us – US, Fitz – out of a plane and WE nearly died and I lived because my best friend wanted to die for me. I had ONE MINUTE, Fitz!! You want to talk about fair? Think about everything you’ve felt in the last six months and try to even comprehend feeling that in one minute. And I came back. For all I knew, you were dead after that minute. In fact, you did die. My Fitz, did die!”

“I’m not dead! I’m right here!”

“But you’re different!”

Simmons threw her hands into the air. There was no better way to say it. He’d been saying it all this time, himself – which is what was keeping him silent, still, offended, awestruck.

“Different?” he stammered at last, venomously bitter. “Oh, is that all?! Because here I was thinking
I was sick and – and – and-

"You were sick!" Simmons objected. "You were asking for my help! Or don't you remember? I don't know what you learned while I was gone but when I was here you were begging me night and day to help you! I was trying my best!"

"And your best was to leave?"

"Yes!"

"Well did you have to lie to me about it? Was that your best too?"

"I lied so that you would think I was okay!"

"Weren't you?"

"I went undercover with no extraction plan, Fitz, of course I wasn't okay! And neither were you! And it killed me, it killed me to leave, but I had to! I couldn't make you better so I had to let you try by yourself!"

"But I don't want to be made better!"

"But you did! Before! Before you came to terms with it all! I didn't know-"

"You thought leaving me was going to make me better? What did you think was going to happen if you stayed?!"

"I THOUGHT YOU MIGHT KILL YOURSELF."

She had to stop there, to breathe heavy, to let some of that long-hardened fear bleed out of her bones and into the air. She'd hardly dared admit it to herself. It felt good to finally put it out there, and to revel in the fact that he was after all still standing here to argue with her. Softly, he objected –

"I would never do that."

She shook her head, blinking away tears.

"You did in the pod."

He said nothing. Nobody called them. No alarm started blaring to interrupt them. So after a few moments more of fragile silence, she went on.

"You...you were so upset, after that, and I couldn't do anything about it. You were horrible to yourself; acting, talking like you weren't worth anything, and you snapped at me every time I..."

Shaking, she inhaled deeply. Tears twisted her tone frightfully, but a wavering voice was something she’d never been afraid of in front of Fitz. At least they still had that between them. But how she wished – not for the first time since it had happened - he could have just wrapped his arms around her and made it all go away, if just for a moment.

"I – I needed you, Fitz," she continued. "I needed you to help me through losing you. Nine days, you were in that coma. I saw your brain scans and they just...killed me. I could imagine exactly what it would do to you. Your hands, your voice, I knew. I knew how much it would hurt. – how much it did hurt...After all that waiting, I thought it would be a relief to finally watch you wake up, to know that you were okay, but it was a nightmare. It was like watching you be tortured. And
all I wanted was to tell my best friend how much pain we were both in, and you weren’t there for me. And you weren't there to help me understand the new you, either. I've never felt so helpless in my life. I'm sorry."

The final words were soft, almost choked out. Her heart clenched as she watched his shaking hands fold and curl in front of his chest, vulnerable and sorry. She looked away, to the tray of tools she had brought in, but it seemed she had forgotten what she’d intended to do with them. She was just hiding her face.

Fitz took a few small, quiet, hesitant steps toward her. He contemplated reaching out, touching her shoulder. Her tears were burning him up on the inside now, but it was a healthier fire than his seething bitterness. It was cleansing, almost, but he could still hardly stand to see her cry. She hated crying. His fingers trembled, wanting to reach out to her, but that would mean they were done with the conversation, and he wasn’t. Not quite. Still, he tried to be gentle when he asked -

“Are you still going to…upgrade the ICERS?”

She took a deep breath, knowing the answer would hurt him but standing by it. He felt a sting of pride alongside the pain when his predicted answer came.

“Yes.”

Again, treading carefully – “Why?”

“They killed Trip.” Her tone was steady. “If we had better – I mean, stronger – weapons, maybe they wouldn’t have done.”

“You had a real gun and you didn’t kill Raina.”

“I hit her, though. A better shot than me might have been able to kill her. But now that we don’t have to kill her, or the others, I still want to be sure we can bring them in – and bring them down, if we have to.”

She let out a slow, even breath. Fitz’ hand finally reached out to rest on her shoulder. She stilled at his touch.

“It’s not your fault, you know. Trip,” he said. “And I still disagree with you, but I’m willing to help you. I want to make this work, Jemma – whatever ‘working’ means these days.”

She turned to face him, and smiled sadly.

“I signed your paperwork. You’re in the garage now.”

“If you ever need help in the lab – “

“I will.”

Tears beginning to stream again, she nodded and tried to turn away. Fitz stepped in then, pulling her to his chest, and was relieved when she wrapped her arms around him and pressed her teary cheek against him. He rested his head against hers. He could almost feel the red-hot, overworked cogs of her brain slow down as her breathing settled to match his. What a torture she had faced, to be alone and silent and suffering for all this time. Fitz held her tighter, and hoped that she knew she wasn’t alone any more.

Then he told her so.
A punch to the face. A hand over her broken nose, whip-cracking her head against the pavement. Skye stumbled backward, gun toppling out of her grasp as she grabbed her assailant’s collar and threw him sideways. The tunnel shuddered and she glanced up at the roof, wondering how long its roof might hold and how much earth might bury them both.

The air was crushed from her lungs when her attacker ran forward again, sweeping her into a tackle, throwing her against the wall, and pinning her there. She ducked a punch, twisted the arm of her attacker behind his back, and flipped him over. He rolled out from under a kick, nearly tripped her, got to his feet and ran at her again, only to disappear when she tried to twist him again.

She should have been expecting it, but she couldn’t turn fast enough when he appeared behind her. She only just dodged the knife and rolled him onto the floor, forced to fall with him as she wrestled the knife away. He had her back to the concrete, one hand at her throat, the other pinning her armed wrist above her head. Struggling to breathe as the world trembled and roared around them, she fought as best she could to keep the knife away from the advancing hand, come to claim what was his.

Then he fell flat against her, still. She screamed, fearing the tunnel was falling, and scrambled away from him, wielding the knife at a threat she couldn’t fight.

“Skye?” Simmons’ hair was wild. The gun seemed to flow from her hand as she lowered it expertly to her side. Dust swirled around her like a vision. Coulson stopped in the stairwell behind her. May edged past, running through the falling debris to Skye’s side.

“Breathe, Skye,” she insisted gently. Skye covered her ears. She swallowed her screams. She watched as the dust settled. Only a few of the bricks had dislodged from the walls. She’d totally overreacted.

Simmons, she thought. She must have totally scared Simmons. Heart jumping erratically, she looked back to the stairwell in time to see Fitz shove past Simmons, knocking her off the last step as he passed. He ran a few paces towards Skye, noticed the fallen Gifted, and May, and wheeled.

“What the HELL was that?!”

Fitz grabbed the gun from Simmons and threw it away. She baulked for a moment, then hung her head.

“Fitz – it isn’t what it looks like.”

“What does it look like?!” His eyes were sharp, burning cold.
“This wasn’t supposed to happen—”

“Damn right it wasn’t!”

“It’s an ICER!”

“He’s dead!”

“I didn’t mean it! It’s still experimental!”

“Exactly! You took experimental weaponry into the field, and you knew it could kill someone, and oh, guess what?”

“I was trying to help Skye!”

“You could have KILLED SKYE!”

Breathe, Simmons told herself. Breathe.

“Guys,” May growled, her hand on Skye’s back.

Unfazed, Simmons retaliated.

“Well fine! Next time she’s in danger I’ll just wait for you to get here, Mr Save The Day! If the only thing we’d had on hand was a real gun, or maybe a computer so you can press a button and do it, huh?”

“You’re one to talk about pressing buttons! You were the one who helped Hydra with their Obelisk quest! You were the one who they trusted to save Donnie! You’re the reason he’s dead!”

“And I’M THE REASON YOU’RE ALIVE!”

“Fat lot of good that would have done if I’d done anything to myself while you were at Hydra! Skye saved me. Not you.”

“Not—” The explosion of rage coiled back into Simmons like a dying star. Her eyes, sparkling with tears, turned into icy diamonds. “You have no idea.”

Skye peeled her hands from her ears and uncurled, curious and terrified, embracing the distraction, cruel as it was.

“Enlighten me.”

Fitz’ bitter sarcasm made Simmons’ next breathe rasp. Then, slowly, she explained.

“I hauled you up from the ocean on my last breath. I thought I was going to be pulling out a body but by some miracle your heart was still beating. For nine days your life hung in the balance and I thought about what I was going to tell your mother. How I was going to live the rest of my life knowing that I was the reason that her son – that you – were dead.

“And then you woke up, and it was like all my Christmases come at once. And then you opened your mouth, and... it was like none of my nightmares could ever compare.”

Taking a shaking breath, Simmons walked off her tension. She wiped her face with her hands. Tears started to spill down her cheeks.
“And instead of knowing I was the reason you were dead, I got to live with the knowledge that I was the reason you felt stupid, and worthless, and slow. I was the reason you hated to talk. You stopped – making jokes. You stopped nattering on about the damned monkeys. You stopped eating. And all that time you were looking at me like- like help me, Jemma, like I could save you from drowning and I couldn’t, I couldn’t, I...

I left. I told you I was going to see Mum and Dad because – I don’t know, I guess I didn’t want you to worry about me. I was the only one you talked to. You weren’t in a good space and we all wanted to protect you. That’s all I ever wanted. I didn’t mean to lie to you- well I did, I just didn’t know it would hurt you this much, I didn’t think you’d ever –I mean, how could you ever think I thought you stupid, Fitz? How could you think I’d leave you for that reason? After all the time we’ve been together? Do you think so little of me?”

His lips floundered for a reason, his eyes unable and unwilling to keep their coldness in the face of her shimmering plea.

“I thought…” It seemed so foolish looking at it now, with the truth so exposed before him. “I thought you were trying to save my feelings. You know how I can be.”

He smiled softly, trying to coax the same from her. She obliged, but only for a moment, before it crumbled under the weight of unspoken words.

“I was alone,” she choked. “You had Skye, you had Mack, you had May, looking out for you. I had no one. I didn’t even have my best friend in the whole world. I couldn’t talk to you – at Hydra I couldn’t even talk about you. I kept it all pressed down, thinking that if I just solved the problem, everything would be okay. But I can’t do it. I can’t solve the problem. I can’t fix this, Fitz.”

Then came, finally, the sob. Her hand flew to her mouth, trapping it.

“Jemma-“ He reached an arm toward her. She scanned the observers. Coulson, concerned, May, trying hard not to be readable and failing. Skye, violently sympathetic, tears streaming, no doubt only wishing she had the emotional control right now to offer the support Jemma needed.

“I have to go.”

She turned on her heels.

“Jem-“

She shoved past Coulson, cutting him off.

“No! Give me some space, please.”

It was all she trusted herself to say.

She ran.
Chapter Notes

Prompt: FitzSimmons + There’s loads of empty seats in this train and you chose to sit next to me AU
Academy era, UA if you squint? Fluff.
ft a distinct lack of chill by one Jemma Elizabeth Simmons

You might also be interested in Team Playground Drabbles & Ficlets (including Bus Kids & Shipper!Daisy fics)

Leopold Fitz was alone in a new city. He didn’t mind the new city part – he could do with a change of scenery, a fresh start. He especially liked the alone part. People were quiet here, un-intrusive. It was a nice place, but a big one. A seventeen-year-old super-genius engineer attending a secret college on dime of a family line of billionaire super-genius engineers could pass by quite unnoticed, most places around here. Even the tourist-y places, which, for Boston – at least, for super-genius engineers – included a self-guided tour of some of the greatest, most famous, highest-ranking academic institutions in the world.

He was an utter nerd. Obviously. But that had never stopped him before.

So Leopold Fitz, alone in a new city, sat by himself in the train carriage headed out to yet another. It was early winter, and snowing. Bostonians had an odd relationship with the cold. Fitz quite liked it. It reminded him of home. He wondered what his mother would say if she knew what he was doing over here, how much it meant to him that she’d sent him over. He made a mental note to email her some pictures. She probably wouldn’t understand the grin he was biting back at the thought of seeing a new set of stuffy old buildings, but she’d appreciate the thought. Plus, it wasn’t every day you got to tell people you knew someone who’d gone to MIT. However briefly.

The train stopped, and Fitz ran his eyes around the carriage again, fully conscious that he was sitting with his legs fairly spread either side of his backpack. It’s not like there wasn’t room, but still. His mother had drilled into him to check. As per the last three stops, nobody got on, so Fitz resumed looking out the window and waited for the gentle sway of the train to start up again.

Suddenly –

“Wait, wait!!”

A trench-coat the colour of old books burst through the doors as they close. A dark purple umbrella spat already-melting snow all over the carpet. A girl – a young woman, flicked the golden-brown hair from her eyes, straightened a few of the worst knots out, and pulled her beret-beanie – dark purple, like her umbrella - back into optimal position.

Then she dropped herself down in the seat right next to Fitz.

“Sorry about that,” she said, offering her colour-coordinated, gloved hand to be shaken. “I’m
Jemma Simmons.

“‘You’re English,” he said, dumbfounded.

“‘You’re Scottish.” She grinned, and he hoped she couldn’t see the blush he felt rise at the back of his neck as he realised how stupid he must have sounded.

“‘Call me Fitz,” he said, by way of an apology.

“‘Fitz.” She nodded, and looked forward, out the opposite window. For a moment, there was nothing but the sound of wheels on rails, and the occasional squeak. Then – “‘So Fitz. Do you go to school around here?”

“‘Yeah.”

“‘Where?”

“‘Um…” He’d visited four of them in the last two days, but none came to mind. Cursing himself, he explained: “‘It’s a Sci-Tech college. A bit obscure. You probably haven’t heard of it.”

She looked at him out of the corner of her eye, her smile sly and suspicious. Then some sort of realisation hit.

“‘Oh my…stars,” she choked out. “‘You’re Leopold Fitz. The Stark scholarship kid.”

The blush was up to his ears now.

“‘Yep. That’s me.”

“‘How old are you?”

“‘Seventeen.”

“‘When’s your birthday?”

“‘August 19th.”

“‘September 11th. Ha.”

Fitz frowned. Was that a victory pump she’d just done?

“‘What does…that have to do with anything?”

“‘Oh, nothing.” She shrugged.

“Okay.” He nodded slowly. Picking a fight with a stranger on a train, that was a new one. “‘What are you studying?”

“‘Bio-chem - majoring in Xeno-biology. You?”

“‘Tech engineering.”

“Obviously. Stark. Right.” Silence again, but she couldn’t let it stretch on for more than a few beats. “‘What’d you do to get the scholarship? Must’ve been good.”

“‘Kinda was.”
He opened his mouth to explain, just as the train announced Harvard’s stop. Simmons got up and shook her umbrella, but then turned back to Fitz.

“Aren’t you coming?”

He heaved his backpack onto one shoulder and followed her out onto the platform. She popped up her umbrella, holding it over both their heads against the gently swirling snow.

“What was it?” she interrogated.

“You really want to know. Honestly?”

“Yes!” She laughed. “Tell, tell. I’ll try to keep up.”

Fitz felt his heart lift. He very much liked being alone, true, but Simmons was so sharp and bright and warm he couldn’t help but smile. He could very much like, he decided, being around her.
It always starts like this.

“What’s going on? Where am I?”

They start to panic. They don’t know what’s happened to them. They don’t know what they are. Sometimes, they start to move things. That freaks them out. They usually disappear, and it takes weeks for them to find him again.

This one skips all of that.

“Hello.” She says, a little uncertain, her eyes not quite meeting his. “My name is Jemma Simmons. I think I might be dead.”

“How did it happen, if you don’t mind me asking?”

“I got sick.”

“It doesn’t have a name. It’s not a...not a recognised virus.”

He frowns. Many ghosts are evasive, but something about this one is off. She’s choosing strange things to be evasive about.

Okay,” he says, nevertheless, “so this is the part where I usually ask people if they’ve got any unfinished business. People they didn’t get to say goodbye to, secrets they didn’t share, that kinda
thing. Is there anything you can think of?"

She snorts. “I’m twenty-seven. There’s everything.”

He sees it hit her, so visible he can practically feel it.

“Oh God. I was twenty-seven.”

The kettle whistles. Cupboards shake. The tap turns on, gushing water. His coffee cup shatters in his hand.

“Woah, woah, okay. I know. I know. I’m so sorry. Take a breath – it honestly helps – your mind is used to human comfort methods. There we go. Deep breaths.”

“I’m sorry,” she whispers. “I just…I was going to do so much. I was close to a cure for this- this thing that killed me. And then I was going to travel.”

“Where to?”

She shrugs. “Anywhere. Everywhere. I wanted to see the world.”

She looks down and laughs, like it’s a foolish dream.

“Well. Where’s your research, then?”

She looks up. “What?”

“Your research. You said you wanted to cure this thing. We can. You can help me. And then we can see the world.”

“Are you sure? That seems like it could take an awfully long time. Wouldn’t other people – or, departed souls or what have you – need your services?”

“Nah.” His shrug is a little too emphatic. Toning it down, he adds, “I mean no, I don’t think so. I mean they might need me but there are others. They’ll be fine. First in, best dressed and all. Is it close, your lab? We can go right now, if you like.”

“Really? Thank you. That’s very kind. Again, I’m sorry about your kitchen.”

“Oh, don’t worry about that.” He throws his jacket over one arm and grabs his keys with the other hand. She’s already waiting outside.
Simmons has her own washer. Which is good, because half the stuff she comes home in, she really doesn’t want to have to explain to anyone who might frequent Laundromats or the apartment laundry complex downstairs. But it’s bad when it breaks, because that means waiting.

Ever the problem-solver, she puts aside her frustration and heads to the elevators with her basket. Fortunately, her washing is pretty tame this week. And it can’t be that bad, anyway.

She really really doesn’t love New York.

“Have you made friends?” She rolls her eyes at the memory. The boss from her internship company had been in town and they’d caught up for dinner the previous night. He was one of those chill mom-and-pop-family-business guys; a supporter of close relationships with his staff. He was one of the reasons she’d been able to stand pulling a year working where she did while she studied. He still did love to go on about her two PhDs. Two. Well technically, one and a half, she would correct him, but she honestly didn’t mind hearing about it. It was really hard to find friends who understood how important this was to her - and, if she was being frank, how brilliant she was. It’s not that she hated people or considered them below her, but she wasn’t sure she could fake actual, meaningful friendship that hard.

There are lots of people in New York, though. There's bound to be somebody suitable eventually, right?

The answer is interrupted by the ping of the elevator. Simmons goes to step off, but it’s not the right floor. A young man in a suit-shirt, tie, and hooded jumper shuffles into the elevator with his earphones in, offering her a shy smile before quickly turning his eyes away. He’s blushing. He thinks she’s attractive, Simmons realises, and she’s blushing too. She’s in a grey jumpsuit from her lab.

It’s then that she hears the song quietly pulsing from his earbuds. She bites her lip. Surely, scientifically, this means nothing. The chances of that one person liking that one song, happening across her the one time she’d ever come down this far in this lift, were small enough. The idea that he might also be somehow friend material was almost impossible.

But it’s always worth investigating.
Future Fic. Smut.

Chapter Summary

SMUT GUYS. THIS CHAP IS SMUT. Probably not great smut but this is just a warning.

Chapter Notes

Prompt: FS + Lab Sex
Future fic. Smut. T+/M-

“You’re breathing down my neck.”

“Sorry. I just miss being this close to you. We’ve got a lot to catch up on.”

“I didn’t say stop.”

His lips gently brush the back of her neck. Shivers are already running through her just from the sound of his voice. At his touch, they grow stronger. She sets the vial back on its stand and grabs the edge of the lab bench instead, her whole body reacting as he kisses further around her neck, pressing himself up against her, pressing her against the bench. She leans her head back, letting his kisses almost reach her trachea.

He holds her hair out of the way with the lightest of touches. He kisses and touches her gently, as if he is unaware of the way her lower body is trembling in the pressure between him and the bench, the way she’s almost rolling against him. Unaware of the way he’s lighting her skin on fire. But he’s not.

He begins to move down her neck, to her collarbone. He moves out to her shoulder, and her hot skin flushes cold. She turns, with dark, smoky eyes, and pulls his head down to her, so that the string of kisses only breaks for a moment.

She loves everything about this. She loves that he’s here, and that nothing’s going to take him away this time. She loves that she can tug on the lapels of his lab coat and get her fingers tangled in his hair. She loves that he’s hers, wholly and completely, and no sensation beyond her matters to him in this moment. She loves the heat, and the way that he presses harder as she drives against him, and starts to breathe hard, and whimper softly against her lips.

With her hands firmly dedicated to making sure neither of them come up for air, he moves his hands to her hips. He lifts her onto the bench, and she hiccups at the rush of air as they break apart. She leans down to kiss him again, but he smiles instead. She can’t tell if he’s being gentlemanly, or teasing her. She wants to squirm. His hands are busy. That’s what the smile is about.

First he plays with the skin around the top of her skirt. The flesh at her hips and belly. It’s soft. Sensitive. He sets it burning. She leans back on her arms, breathing as hard as he was. She’s
starting to whimper too. Her mouth, her lips, are dry and lonely. God, she wishes he’d kiss her again, but his face is too far away, and if she moves her hands to grab him, she’ll fall.

He just smiles.

His hands come upward from below, hitching her skirt and lab coat out of the way. Her eyes flutter closed, and she resists the urge to throw her head back. It’ll happen. His fingers skirt the edge of her underwear, asking, and she purrs her consent and nods. He slides the material out of the way. But he doesn’t pick her up off the bench. He doesn’t so much as touch her to suggest a change of angle that might suit him.

He just uses his tongue instead.

“Fitz!”

She gasps and splutters. She can feel him smiling. Oh, she rather likes this. She risks falling to hitch her skirt up higher, open her legs wider. Swaying for balance, she grabs the hair at the top of his head. It takes a long time – or so it feels to her – before he locks her fingers with hers and pries them away, and comes up for air.

He doesn’t leave her hanging for long, though, letting the fingers on his free hand continue where his tongue had started.

“How d’you feel, Doctor?” His voice is low.

Her head lolls back. She squeezes their joined hands. “Do. That again.”

He kisses her knee.

“Do that again.”

Nonchalantly, his fingers rub and pull and twist. He kisses her first knee again, then the other leg, a little higher up. Then his lips are gone for a moment.

She feels him lean in. His fingers reach deeper, driving the words from her tongue. She can only moan and gasp, and he kisses the sound of them away. They’re big, hungry kisses. She bites his lip and he bites back. His fingers drive deeper, sweep over her, curl and twist, finding the angles that make her shout nonsense. That make her scream his name.

“FITZ!”

The shock of it runs through her body and outward like an exploding star. Her back arches, her elbow gives way, and it’s only their joined hands that stop her falling too hard. Fitz gently lowers her, so that she’s horizontal against the bench, and panting.

“Did—” she stammers a few seconds later. “Did we just have sex in the lab?”

“Technically, legally, no,” Fitz says. “I checked.”
Future Fic. Fluff/humour

Chapter Notes

Future fic (written from the past). Fluff/humour. Light innuendo. K+/T.
Prompt: “Sir we know lab sex is against the rules but can you honestly blame us for doing it?”
FS + Coulson. (ft. Shipper!Skye)

You may also be interested in Team Playground Drabbles & Ficlets, including Bus Kids fic & lots more Shipper!Skye/Daisy

“Fitz. Simmons.”

They share a glance. Coulson’s always the first and last to call them Fitzsimmons. Not “Fitz. Simmons.”

“My office.”

The way his eyes run over the bench they’re standing at, tells them all they need to know. Hearts in their throats, they follow him.

“We are so fired,” Simmons whispers.

“They need us too much to fire us.”

“True. They do owe us for the box.”

“Yeah but I haven’t had a chance to fix the fifth grade laser yet.”

“You said you’d do that this morning!”

“There were pancakes! Besides, nobody was using it.”

“Fitz, that thing is worth millions of dollars and it’s out in my name.”

“Well then you shouldn’t have let us have sex near it.”

She elbows him as they step into Coulson’s office. “You’re lucky I didn’t turn it on instead of snap it off.”

Skye snorts with laughter.

“She meant the laser,” Fitz clarifies.

“Oh huh.”

Coulson clears his throat loudly.
“Fitzsimmons.”

“Sir.” Simmons turns and a grin stretches out on her face. One that Fitz has definitely seen before. Skye picks up a small bowl of what appears to be fruit, and peers over the top of it to watch.

“Certain…footage has come to my attention,” Coulson explains, his eyes switching from Simmons, to Fitz, and then staying on Simmons. That grin is a little off-putting.

“What footage is that, sir?” Simmons prods.

A blush begins to rise in Coulson’s cheeks. He soldiers through it. “Footage of…illicit activities. In the lab. Between the two of you.”

“I’m sure there’s a perfectly reasonable explanation,” she says. “Which day was this footage from?”

Skye quickly chokes a laugh, disguising it as a coughing fit. Coulson glances at her, then back, wishing he’d got May to do this.

“There were multiple occasions?”

“Oh, multiple multiple occasions.”

It’s the vocal equivalent of waggling an eyebrow, but Simmons keeps her face unchanged. Skye slips off her perch on the shelf and staggers for her footing. Coulson’s cheek twitches. He looks hesitantly over at Fitz and apparently, his suspicions are confirmed by the very conspicuous lack of blush. In fact if anything, he looks kind of proud about it.

“That…was…highly irresponsible of two…highly intelligent, highly respectable…”

Dammit, that grin still hasn’t disappeared. In fact, if anything, Simmons is edging closer to Fitz. How is that possible? They were practically touching when they walked in here.

“…Agents like yourselves,” Coulson finally gets out, “and I can’t believe that you would… desecrate your workspace in such a way.”

“Desecrate? Hardly. We were christening it.”

“Simmons wasn’t there initially, and then I left, and now that we’re together, it seemed appropriate.”

Coulson’s blush is turning an off yellow-green. “Right.”

“It’s a significant space and we spend a lot of time there,” Simmons explains.

“Yeah, like…you and Lola.” Fitz’ lips twitch with a grin.

“Excuse me?”

“You heard me. I will bet you good money you’ve had sex in Lola.”

Off side, Skye’s in another coughing fit. This one sounds real.

Coulson merely presses his lips together, almost glaring down his nose at them.

“Fine, just…fix what you break and delete the footage, alright?”
Canon Compat. Angst.

Post 2x19 (the one where Simmons attacks Ward & kills Bakshi).
Canon compatible. Angst.

His breath lightly steamed the cool lab air. He pinched his bad hand with his good one, though this time, both were equally shaky. His ageing cardigan was little comfort against the standard-issue pyjamas and the cold floor under his bare feet.

He’d been lying in bed for hours, tossing and turning, adjusting his covers, finnickity about sleep in a way that had almost never touched him before. He hadn’t been able to get her face out of his head. Unflinching. Unyeilding. As confident in this as she had been about most endeavours in her life, before the fear. But almost silent. When, Fitz had found himself thinking, had Simmons stopped talking?

And a small voice had whispered, around the same time you did?

It all came back to that day, he had realised. To those moments. Everything was tied together in a tapestry of betrayal, miscommunication, anger and pain. He’d put a few stitches in it himself, he was sure, but at two o’clock in the morning after the day they’d had, nothing had concerned him more than the colours Jemma was weaving in.

It’s our duty.

It’s the right thing to do.

For better or worse, she’d always been ambitious. Stubborn, and clever about it. Ruthless, even. But never like this.

It had swum in his head, battled by not Jemma, not her, she wouldn’t do this. He’d never win. Not with Jemma’s words ringing in his ears.

He didn’t make it.

It must have taken an hour – it felt like longer – but eventually his turbid mind had started making him dizzy, and the unpleasant memories that came with that feeling at had started making him nauseous. He’d thought, well I’m not getting back to sleep, and grabbed his cardigan and gone.

And now he was standing in the lab in bare feet, pacing before the case it had taken him five whole minutes to move from the shelf, to the bench. This wasn’t his lab anymore; he had hardly any right to poke around in here, especially given how he stood with Jemma at the moment. There were a lot of things they hadn’t fixed. This felt like a violation of her privacy. And in a cold way, too. Giving her no chance to explain herself. Knowing full well that he would jump to conclusions about whatever he found – and knowing he might be too terrified of what that was to be reasonable about it.

But it was three o’clock in the morning, and He didn’t make it.
“Okay.” He sighed. It seemed to prickle off the benches around him, glance off the innocuous silver case and taunt him. Nothing about this was okay, and if he opened the case and found what he was expecting, he really, honestly, didn’t know what he would do. This could be the last moment of okay Fitz ever had.

And he was spending it feeling like he was about to throw up.

He took a deep breath, closed his eyes, and pinched in the handles. It clicked open, and he raised the lid slowly, just barely able to open his eyes.

The case was full.

He let his breath out, and it shook his whole body. He let his hands fall loose and paced the floor. He hadn’t realised how sore his knees and the balls of his feet had become from standing so tense for so long.

But of course, there was a reason.

Breathing slowly in again, Fitz lifted the top layer of Splinter bombs and gingerly laid them aside. On the lower layer, there was an empty position. Exactly what he’d expected. And the world didn’t end. Fitz just took his sweet time staggering backward, and fell into a chair. He stared at the open crate, until a voice dared whisper,

_That doesn’t mean she used it._

He ran.

He ran across the base toward the loading bay. They’d left their bags in the Quinjet earlier, prioritising getting Mike and Skye’s friend to the Med Bay. He’d kept an eye on Simmons. He was pretty sure she hadn’t had a chance to come back here since then. If there was any condemning evidence – at least, that he would ever find, courtesy of the Hydra base having been flattened - it would be there. Possibly next to a photograph of them. Or a sandwich. Or-

He ran up the Quinjet’s ramp, and stopped cold.

“Simmons.”

She froze. Then, slowly, she turned. In her hands, she carried what appeared to be the case for an external hard drive. But the expression on her face confirmed what had kept Fitz up all night.

“It was the right thing to do,” she said.
Fitz tapped the breakfast counter with his free hand as he dug at his pancakes with the other.

“You’re up early,” Hunter remarked, pouring himself a cup of coffee and sliding into the seat opposite Fitz.

“More like late,” Fitz muttered.

“Woah. What’s bothering you?”

“Nothing.”

Hunter looked closer. Fitz, the antithesis of a morning person if he had a choice about it, was never particularly pleasant in the morning. This morning was different. His eyes were sparkling, despite the bags under them. He was smiling.

“Okay…” Hunter nodded slowly. “What’s up, then?”

“I’m going to do it. Today’s the day. I’m proposing to Jemma.”

“Are you sure you’ve only been up one night, mate? She’s on the other side of the country!”

“So I’ll video call her. I’ve got it all planned out. I’ve been thinking about what to say for weeks, it’s all organised I just never get to do it because people keep interrupting.”

“Um, yeah. People like AT&T.”

“I’m using SHIELD’s connection. It’s secure. Unless one of our devices break, we’re all good.”

“What if she misses the call?”

“I’ll try again.”

“What if she’s in public?”

“Please, Hunter. There’s a time difference. Even Jemma’s still inside at 6am.”

Fitz glanced over at the clock. It ticked toward 8am. Hunter narrowed his eyes.

“Well clean up first, alright? You look like you’ve been taking the GSCEs over again.”

“Yeah.” Fitz nodded. A little frantically.
“And, uh. Don’t drink anything else with caffeine in it for a few hours, alright?”

Hunter took the pot of coffee, and walked out of the kitchen. But he couldn’t help crack a smile. He was sure he’d been an approximately equal wreck when he’d proposed to Bobbi. The kid was in deep.

“Got homework or something, Hunter?” Skye’s eyes were locked on the pot of coffee. “Or already drunk the homework?”

“Alas, no homework of either variety,” Hunter explained. “Fitz is bouncing around the kitchen on the caffeine of love so I thought I’d remove any actual stimulants from his presence. Want some?”

“Sure. Cup’s in my room.”

He followed her, and poured her one of what would have to be many cups of coffee if they wanted to use this all up before it went cold. She watched the liquid into the mug with vaguely dazed eyes - a morning person by force of habit, not by choice.

“So, wait, what was that about Fitz and the caffeine of love?”

“Oh, he reckons he’s proposing to Simmons…” Hunter checked his watch. “Now.”

“Oh no.”

“What?”

“He does realise there’s a time difference, right?”

“Was quite excited about it, actually.”

“Oh no. Ohhh no. Oh this is bad. Oh this is going to be hilarious. I’ve gotta call Simmons.”

“What, why?”

Skye snorted and covered her mouth with her hand as she pulled out her cellphone and dialled.

―

Men and women in suits, pant-suits, business dresses and blazers buzzed around her. The smell of tea, coffee, mass-purchase biscuits and those little cucumber sandwiches was in the air. Mixed with a stuffy, less pleasant combination of old-book smell, old-carpet smell and cleaning materials. For approximately the forty-first time that morning, Simmons inhaled gratefully. She had truly missed academia.

She felt hands on her shoulders.

“Doctor Simmons, you’re on in five.”

“Oh of course, thank you.”

Her cell buzzed in her pocket. She pulled it out and saw Skye’s caller ID. Skye had replaced it with a picture of herself doing some dramatic pose, insisting that if Simmons ever dropped her phone, it would look awesome. Simmons smiled. How nice of Skye to wish her luck. But she’d never get her off the phone. She slipped it back away as the presenters called her name, and stepped up onto the stage.
She swiftly switched her device with the one plugged in, and pulled up her presentation without trouble. But then a small red symbol appeared in the corner.

“Oh,” she said, playing into it with an even, calm tone. Her heart started to race. Two of them in two minutes? Was something wrong? This was a little too late for a good luck call. “It’s Doctor Fitz. Excuse me, ladies and gentlemen, I’m afraid I have to take this. In my line of work one can’t be too careful. I’m so sorry for the disruption. On the upside for you, Doctor Fitz is rather brilliant.”

She smiled as they laughed it off, understanding. Most of them had probably been surprised they hadn’t come together in the first place. Preparing herself for – well, not even for the worst – she answered the call.

“Hello, Fitz.”

“Jemma. Good. I – um – I had a speech I just – now that I’m here I –”

“Now that you’re here. With me. In New York. What a nice surprise.” She smiled up at the audience, most of whom were looking at Fitz’ face on the big screen. Some of them were looking at her, confused. Some a little grumpy, waiting for her to get on with it. Oh, brilliant. She laughed nervously. Fitz looked completely fine. What was going on and why had she let herself interrupt her own conference presentation for this? She looked back down at the screen in her hands, praying that this wasn’t taking as long as it felt like it was taking.

“You…are…precious to me,” Fitz continued. “You always have been. And lately…I mean, especially…Um. Words clearly aren’t happening, I’m gonna let that go, when you get home I’ll give you my speech I just – I mean, I’m really sorry to do this over the internet and on the morning of your conference but I’ve been waiting for so long…”

Oh God.

She should stop him, shouldn’t she? Was he doing what she thought he was doing? Her heart fluttered in her chest.

“I love you. I love you, Jemma. That’s what this comes down to in the end. That’s what it always come down to, when I met you, when I followed you out here, when I gave you the oxygen, all of it. It was every different kind of love and it has been the greatest - you - have been the greatest thing in my life and I want to share another…another love with you.”

By now the whole audience had cottoned on. They were holding their breaths. A few of them had their hands over their mouths. Simmons forced her teeth together to stop her jaw from flapping. She could feel his words running through her like blood, making her bones quiver. She already had her answer on her tongue. She couldn’t breathe. She focused on the small screen. Fitz’ eyes were shining with tears. Oh God. She wished she could sit down.

“Jemma.” He pulled out a ring box from somewhere off-screen, and opened it to reveal a ring that sported a stone unlike any she’d ever seen. It was like a tiny galaxy, in a shining universe smaller than her pinky nail.

“Will you marry me?”

“Yes.” It’s closer to a squeak than a word, but the audience heard it. They erupted into applause. Fitz jumped back from his screen.

“What’s that? Is somebody there?”
“Oh, Fitz!”

Laughing, Simmons held up her screen in one hand, so that the camera took in the audience. With the other hand, she covered her mouth and nose, grinning impossibly wide. It was the first and last time Jemma Simmons ever cried on stage.
“But you killed someone, Jemma. You killed someone! Pre meditated! That’s not okay!”

“Okay?! Of course it’s not okay! No part of this is okay! Nothing about my life is currently ‘okay!’” She paced away from him, taking deep breaths until she calmed down enough to continue. “I didn’t mean for it to go this far. I didn’t ask for any of this. All I wanted was to travel and learn and do science…with you.”

She fixed her large, shimmering eyes on his, pleading for him to give her an answer that she hadn’t thought of yet. To have stooped so low as this, she surely must have tried everything.

“All this is about…me?” He didn’t have the mental capacity at that moment to be flattered or offended. There was only shock, and the mental note that he should have seen it coming.

“Not all,” Jemma corrected him. “But yes. You…mean a lot to me and you represent even more, and I know you’ve lost a lot, and I don’t mean to minimise that, but I’d lost so much before that day, when you were in the coma all I could think about was you waking up so we could get through this. We were going to fix it together. And then you…”

Simmons trailed off, blinking away tears. She could see it; see him standing next to her, shaking, on the verge of tears. Getting angry, then getting worse when he couldn’t explain his original anger, or express it without making somebody jump.

She stared into the blank space before her. The tears she had been blinking back started to slip out. She didn’t notice them. She was gone to the present.

What was she seeing, Fitz wondered - and God, how awful it must be to be seeing it alone?

He stood up, which appeared to bring her back. She wiped away the tears that had started to fall.

“Whatever you feel about your injury, Fitz,” she said, her voice strangled by tears. “Whatever it means. Whatever you want me to do or not to do about it – and I want to understand that, I want to learn, I want to change with you - But whatever happens from now on, it doesn’t change the fact that Ward took you from me that day. He took my best friend. My partner. My old life. I can never get that back, and that will never stop being his fault.”

Her voice broke. She bit her lip, and he watched her whole body tense up, as if she had to physically hold herself together.

“Oh, Jemma.”

It was all he could think to say. It was probably all that would have made it out of his mind and then his mouth in logical order. Instead, he wrapped her in his arms. She was so tense she was
shaking. *Shaking.* He pulled her tighter against him, hardly able to breathe with the weight of her suffering on his chest. How had she ever borne this load for so long?

“It’s going to be okay, Jemma. I’m so sorry. I’m so sorry.”

He was crying too, now, but at least she was no longer shaking.

Eventually, she wrapped her arms around him and started to sob.
Doctor Leopold Fitz was not the most enthusiastic socialite at the best of times. After a nine-hour flight, six hours in an airport, and an extra two-hour delay, with the time now approaching 4am body-clock time, he was entering Ugh. People terrority. Which was not ideal, given that he was currently filing onto yet another plane. He wasn’t sure whether hunger or fatigue was going to win out.

As he sat in his seat, he quickly began to think it might be fatigue for the gold.

Then she appeared.

“Hi, sorry, is this J?”

That’s what it says on the label, he wanted to say. Instead, he hummed and nodded.

“Oh, sorry, oops, let me just –“

She edged her bag into the overhead and squeezed past his knees to the window seat, looking out over the tarmac like an optimistic child. She fidgeted in her seat, adjusted the headrest, and frowned at the humble selection of reading material in the pocket in front of her.

Then she noticed him staring.

“I’m sorry,” she said, “I’m just used to flying business. Oh, that sounded awful, didn’t it? I just mean, I used to work for this big company, I’ve just switched to government. Much less glamorous. For us lab rats, at least. Sometimes it shows, I guess.”

“Lab rat. You’re a scientist?”

“You’re surprised?”

“Yes- I mean, no, it’s just- you’re the most beautiful scientist I’ve ever met.”

She blushed. Fitz realised he was both staring, and letting his jaw flap. And his brain, too, apparently.

“Oh. I’m sorry. God. That was awful. I’m so sorry. I’ve been plane-dazed for like, twelve hours. I didn’t mean anything by it. I mean, you are pretty but I didn’t mean pretty people can’t…be scientists…oh I’m going to tie myself in a knot here.”

“It’s alright, I get that a lot.” She offered her hand out to him. “It doesn’t help when I tell people I’m twenty two and I have two phDs.”

“Oh my.” The way she smiled told him he had exactly the reaction she’d been hoping for. “Um.
What fields?"

“Both biochemistry. I specialise in xenobiology. You?”

He laughed, and resisted the urge to scratch the back of his neck. “Ah, just the one phD. Engineering. Specialise in military engineering, but I don’t tell a lot of people that.”

“So you do meet a lot of scientists then?”

“Yes. A lot. On my way to meet some now.”

“Oh, are you going to the conference tomorrow?”

“I am. I’m presenting actually.”

“So am I!”

“Maybe we should split a cab, or whatever New Yorkers do?”

“It’s a date.”

“Okay so what’s your presentation on? Actually, what’s your name? Leo Fitz, by the way. Call me Fitz.”

“Simmons. Or Jemma. Either works. I’m presenting on snake species in Peru, with a particular focus on properties of their venom, like there’s this – ah, how familiar are you with organic toxins?”
Prompt: "This wasn’t meant to be a date, but we’ve had such a good time and now it’s 2 a.m. and I should really go home…"
Like-a-meet-cute-but-not AU. Fluff.

“Are you alright?”

Jemma frowned. Fitz shrugged, and uncurled slowly, reluctant to part his hands from his forearms.

“Y-yeah,” he explained, his teeth desperately trying to chatter. “Just cold, is all.”

“Oh! Well, have your jacket back,” Jemma insisted, shrugging out of it.

“No, you’ll freeze!” Fitz objected.

“It’s your jacket,” Simmons repeated, passing it to him. “It’s my own fault for not bringing one.”

Fitz couldn’t exactly disagree with that, but still, he couldn’t very well let her shiver in silence for the next…however long. He spread the jacket over both their shoulders, and they huddled closer together underneath it to make the best of it. Realising their new proximity – knees touching, noses close to it – both of them chuckled. Steam rose from their lips as their warm breath drifted into the night air.

“So,” Jemma offered, her teeth now chattering too. “Come here often?”

Fitz had been living in New York for a few months now, but he had not explored this area much. And sitting on a riverbank in the dark with a brilliant (and very, very pretty) fellow scholar from across the pond? No, he did not come here very often at all.

“Why, do you?”

Jemma smiled.

“It’s not exactly how I imagined my night going, no,” she explained. “I’m just in town for the conference. Academia!”

She gave a half-hearted wave of her fist, before quickly returning it to the relative warmth of their bodies. Fitz couldn’t help but smile at her ghostly-pale fingers, which were grey, almost blue, in the dim light. He reached over to her knees for them, and fortunately, any potentially unwanted romance in the moment was swiftly extinguished when he cursed and whipped his hands away, before asking with his eyes to resettle them.

“Your hands are freezing,” he informed her, as if she didn’t already know, as he tried to infuse them with as much warmth as he could manage.

“I know. It’s terrible.” Jemma blushed deeply, and tried to hide her face. She wished she’d brought her gloves, but his hands really were so mercifully warm, she couldn’t bring herself to pull away.
“So,” Fitz continued, after a long moment. “How do you imagine your night going?”

“Oh, you know…” Jemma shrugged. “Jet lag, room service. Sleep. Looking over the agenda for tomorrow.”

Fitz laughed.

“You actually read those things?”

“Yes, of course! How else would I know where to be, and when?”

“Read the room cards at break time?”

“The room cards!” Jemma scoffed. “You’ve been choosing between rooms this whole time? Fitz! I’d have thought you of all people would be interested in the presentations at Stark Towers. And the Planetarium! Honestly!”

“Stark Towers?!” Fitz jumped, trying to recall if he’d shoved a copy of the agenda in some pocket somewhere. “What?”

“There’s conferences all over the city,” Jemma explained. “I plan early because, well, it takes more than recess break to get around.”

“Damn.” Fitz sighed.

“It’s not too late,” she reassured him. “There’s still two days to go. There’s one tomorrow that looks at the multiverse theory, and oh! The potential for sci-fi style mutations in humans, that looks like fun too. You should come along!”

“Don’t mind if I do.” Fitz found his spirit lifting. “But…I don’t know much about biology. Relatively. Do you think I’ll be able to follow?”

“Of course! It’s quite simple really. They’ll be talking about an extension of mutation genes that already exist. Like…um…do you know what heterochromia is?”

“Something about different colours? Different eye colours!” Fitz jabbed a finger in the air, knocking his jacket off his shoulder.

“Yes, and--“ Jemma was distracted, trying to make sure the dead weight of Fitz’ end of the jacket didn’t drag hers down. She frowned. “Perhaps we should take this inside?”

Fitz looked around. He lived across town, and he still wasn’t quite ready to take the subway at this time of night…or rather, morning.

“Is there anywhere around here that’s still open?” he wondered.

“I’m staying at the hotel where the conference is,” Jemma offered. “We could just go there? I mean. If you’re okay with that.”

She seemed nervous all of a sudden, like she hadn’t realised until this moment that she could have been read as prepositioning him. Fitz shrugged, as much to reassure her as to reassure himself that he was not leaping at the opportunity to be invited up to her room, so much as at the chance to get out of the cold without taking the subway at dark-oclock.

“Sure,” he agreed. “But no funny business, missy.”
Jemma grinned, and stood up, and then cursed and stomped her foot in the muddy riverbank as the cold air rushed in to meet her now-bare shoulders.

“Hurry up!” she insisted, as Fitz seemed to be taking his sweet time standing and brushing off. Hearing her irritation, and seeing her obvious cold, Fitz dropped his teasing ruse, and put his jacket around them both again, with an arm around her shoulders, under the material, to hold it in place. As quickly as they could, navigating heels and height difference and their precarious connection via the jacket, they skittered across the street and back up the block toward the hotel.
Fluff. with some angst.

Chapter Notes

Fluff, with some angst. Mild T for innuendo (& the angst)
Canon compat + predictive S4.
Prompt: Simmons has a position very close to the new Director and privacy is difficult to come by.

“Fitz. I need you.”

No sooner had Fitz looked up from his bench, than Simmons had grabbed him by the collar and begun to drag him.

“What – um – I –“

His mind spun, mouth failing to catch up as she pulled him out of the lab, and down the corridors, with urgent intent. Part of his brain was working on where they were going, another part on what they were doing, because as far as he was concerned they hadn’t quite reached this level of openness yet, about their relationship or about sex. And she wasn’t leading them to a bedroom. Was he ready for this?

(The only answer he received from the Jemma in his head, was that the same part of his brain would be working on both of those problems, although the left anterior cingulate cortex was probably significantly more interested in the latter.)

Jemma shoved him through a doorway and he stumbled into a small space, between a cabinet and a wall. The janitor’s closet? His heart raced as she picked and grabbed at his tie and buttons, and between the physical sensation, and the confusion, he was so blissfully overwhelmed he could do nothing but reach for her and close his eyes and wait for his lips to be assaulted by hers.

But instead, she stopped.

“That should do it,” she panted, grinning. Fitz opened one eye, and then both, and she smiled briefly at his befuddlement before putting her hands on her hips, and taking a deep breath, flushing out the desirous ideas she’s inspired in her own mind, in favour of what she’d originally intended to say.

“It’s bloody impossible to get a moment alone,” she huffed, in explanation. “Not one second. He follows me around. All. The time. I’m pretty sure my computer and my phone have been bugged. Probably my room and the bathroom too. Tell the others not to contact me.”

Fitz nodded slowly as he took in her rush of words, and observed the way her eyes searched the room, as if there was something she’d forgotten.

“Are you okay?”

“Yeah. Sure. Me? Fine. Busy, that’s all…and a little worried, if I’m being honest.” Simmons shook her head, then looked up to meet his eyes. “I think it’s time we get the cure off-base. If we can’t do it soon, we have to destroy it.”
“Really?”

“It’s forced re-humanisation waiting to happen. And we don’t even know if it will cure established Inhumans or kill them, but I’m not putting anything past the Director. It’s too dangerous to have here. Can you get it out? Or May?”

“…I can try,” Fitz promised, and Simmons’ eyes pleaded for more than that. “I can do it. I’ll get Radcliffe to send me on some errand and I’ll…get it out somehow. Keep it…somewhere.”

He could think of nowhere secure enough, and really, no reason to keep it above and beyond the increasingly high risk it would end up in the wrong hands. Even Radcliffe, good-hearted though he may be, had his own, unpredictable agenda going on. Simmons was apparently realising the same thing, though, and she interrupted him voicing his hesitation, with her own.

“I think we should destroy it anyway. There’s too much information to smuggle out, and once one of us gets caught, a whole network could go down. You or I could get arrested, or worse. And that’s without getting anyone else involved.”

“We could still get arrested for destroying it, though,” Fitz posed; an extension of, rather than a disagreement with her train of thought.

“I don’t think he would arrest me for that, especially if we can fake it or lose it or something. Trying to walk out of here with an illicit file is much more incriminating than a lab accident. I’ll probably get fired, but I can handle that.”

Fitz studied her face intently. Though it was a fairly obvious choice at this point, sacrificing her integrity and the trust that had been bestowed upon her would probably weigh heavily on her shoulders. Simmons gritted her teeth together and strengthened her shoulders. Nothing could weigh as heavily as letting people be tortured and degraded by the science she so loved – and what good was professional integrity anyway, if it had to come at the cost of moral integrity?

“That’s what I’m going to do,” she decided. “I’m going to destroy it.”

“I’m glad we had this talk,” Fitz concluded, with a nod. “But, um, why the dishevelment?”

He nodded to his loose tie and tousled clothing.

“Because –” Simmons whispered, stepping closer.

Fitz never got to hear whatever reason – real or sensuously fictional – she was about to give him, because a loud fist hammered on the door.

“Jemma!” Mack called. “Director’s looking for you!”

In lieu of sighing, Simmons rolled her eyes in frustration. Through clenched teeth, she repeated:

“Not. One. *Second.*”
“Hand me that knife.”

“What?”

“That one. Left.”

She waves her hand, impatient. Fitz tries not to blush, though he can feel it on the back of his ears, as he passes it over to her. She huffs and mutters to herself something he can’t catch. It’s going to be a long year.

—

“Hand me that knife.”

He’s already got it out to her while he peers intently at his code, searching for the line that makes the robot break the pen instead of hold it. She takes it, and leans over his shoulder.

“Shouldn’t that have another greater-than?”

“Where?”

She points at it. Fitz glares at his rubber duck for having missed it.

—

“Hand me that knife.”

He doesn’t know how she does it. His heart’s going a mile a minute and she’s barely broken a sweat. Simulated bombs shake the room and lights flash. He passes her the knife and she cuts into the body. The scent of formaldehyde is overwhelming, eye-watering. He tries to hold his breath, and keeps his cocked pistol ready, standing over them, trying to keep his shoulders low and his arm loose enough that he won’t break it when he fires.

“Got it!”

“Oh God.” He drops his arms, takes the code from her body-fluid coated fingers and gags, but types it swiftly into the panel on the wall. The room stops rocking. The lights come up.

“Impressive teamwork, Fitzsimmons,” says the voice from the speaker. “You’re through to the next stage.”

—
“Hand me that knife.”

Her voice shakes this time. She doesn’t look at him. He holds the scalpel in her field of vision and she takes it from him and turns away, dropping it into the sink with all her other tools, and running the tap. She watches the water run off the scalpel, with Skye’s blood, down the drain.

Fitz stands behind her, heart in his throat. He puts his hand on her arm, and she leans back into him.

—

“Hand me that knife.”

She wedges the canister between her knees, takes the blade from him and busts the seal, swiftly inserting the piping to finalise the device. She can’t help but smile as she shows it to him. He smiles back. Aware of their impending, indefinite time limit, she quickly moves on to fix the device to the window. She doesn’t notice the sad shimmer in his eyes. She doesn’t see it coming.

—

“Hand me that knife.”

She smiles gently at him, and waits. He frowns at it, and slowly reaches his hand forward, trembling violently. She holds her breath as he fumbles it along the table and almost drops it off the edge. Her smile starts to sink. Then he picks it up, and her face lights up. He smiles at her. He hasn’t done that in so long, she’d hug him if he wasn’t holding a knife.

But then he drops it again, and it clutters to the floor between them.

“Damn.”

“It’s okay.”

“No, Jemma…” He rolls his eyes and walks away, pinching the bridge of his nose.

She picks up the scalpel and looks around, and he’s gone.

—

“Hand me that knife.”

“No.”

It hurts him to say it, but it hurts him even more to see the steel in her eyes. He can feel the desire to draw blood crackling off her like electricity.

“It’s mine,” she insists.

“It’s Trip’s,” he points out. “And Trip wouldn’t want it used like this.”

The glare she gives him is almost a snarl. He tucks the knife into his belt.

“Fitzsimmons?”

They turn in unison. Smile in unison. Pretend everything’s getting better, in unison.
“Hand me that knife.”

She’s never despised a sentence more in her life. She takes the blade from him and clenches a fist around it. She wishes there was anyone else here that she could fob this off to. Even Fitz. But his hands are shaking. And with good reason. She can feel the bile rising in her throat like in first year. She blinks back tears. If she’s going to do this, she’s going to do it right.

So help her God, she kneels beside Ward and cuts the bullet free.
Prompt: FS + the first time one of them utterly didn’t understand something from the other’s discipline and that person’s total inability to admit their lack of understanding.

Disclaimer: I have no idea how to science, this is 100% google searching. Academy era. Canon compat. Fluff.

Fitz frowned, and studied the contents of Simmons’ tray. It wasn’t empty, per se, but he could hardly see how a yoghurt and a small heap of fruit - and a tea, of course – were going to see her through the next four hours of classes. She probably had a muesli bar stashed somewhere for morning tea, but still.

“What?” Simmons challenged, noticing Fitz’ stare. Fitz shrugged.

“Nothing, just – don’t you get hungry? Or do you just have the stomach of a bird?”

Simmons scoffed. Fitz had mercifully elected for fruit today – on top of a sloppily arranged heap of pancakes that were about to start spilling maple syrup over the sides of his plate.

“Well, we can’t all have the metabolic turnover of NADP.”

“The National Atmospheric Deposition Program?” Fitz wondered, confused. Fortunately, Simmons had been momentarily distracted by an occurrence across the room, so when she turned back with an absent – “what? - Fitz shoved a forkful of pancakes into his mouth that was slightly too large, and shrugged apologetically for his inability to repeat himself. There was no way he could have been correct with the atmospheric program guess. He didn’t know much about metabolic anything but he was pretty sure an organism was required. Unless maybe she was being allegorical? Although usually she was fairly clear about that. Still, he couldn’t exactly say nothing.

“Yeah…well…” he stammered eventually, “you have the metabolic thing of…a racehorse. So…”

It was the fast metabolism that was the skinny one, right? He screwed up his face, trying to remember his tenth grade biology textbook, and Simmons laughed.

“Nice try, Fitz,” she credited, with a smile. “And you’re right, my metabolic rate is not that bad. But do you actually know what metabolic turnover is?”

Rate and turnover are different things?

“Sure I do,” Fitz lied, and shrugged. “The turnover…of the…metabolics…”

Fitz trailed off, grateful that two friends from Simmons’ class had bounded over and distracted her with some other concept he understood even less about, before he could get to “cell membrane” and “mitochondria” - which were, all of a sudden, the only remotely biology-related words he could remember.

He pulled the search window up on his tablet, but before he could reach the end of the word
‘metabolic’, Ben from Counterterrorism was waving him down.

“Fitz! Hey. I wanted to talk to you about the firewall code for Waller’s class – can I sit?”

Fitz closed his tablet and shuffled his tray and books aside to make space. Simmons was already deep in conversation with her friends, so aside from the likelihood of receiving a spoonful of yoghurt in the face from her oft-enthusiastic gestures, he didn’t have to worry about ignoring her. She smiled at him when he signaled that she didn’t have to loop him into her conversation anymore, and like that they were off.

“Good?” Ben checked, glancing between Fitz and Simmons in case he was interrupting.

“Yeah.” Fitz waved for him to continue. Beaming, Ben pulled out a hefty stack of coding on fax paper he’d printed out.

“So I’ve got it to eliminate the –“

“Sorry,” Fitz interrupted.

Ben frowned. Fitz was a genius, sure, but he couldn’t already have found a problem, could he? Ben quickly ran his eyes over the page he was holding up, just in case. He’d read it four times already this morning. There was no way –

“Sorry, Ben,” Fitz repeated. “Do you know what metabolic turnover is?”

Ben shrugged, mildly irritated at the lack of attention that was being paid to him and his rapidly approaching deadline.

“How fast you digest food, isn’t it?” he suggested. “Is it important?”

*Three hours*, he scolded with a glare. *Three hours.* Fitz shook his head, realizing the pressure that Ben must be under.

“No, of course, keep going.”

Ben did have an interesting problem. Not even a problem per se, but a limitation that he wanted to improve on, not just because he knew it would be picked up on, but also — in fact, mostly — because it was otherwise a hindrance to the quality of his product. It was lazy to leave it be. Fitz respected that, and held to it in his own work too, so he was happy to help, even though it meant working straight through morning tea on expanding the capabilities of the firewall. They worked until five minutes before deadline, at which point Ben practically flew off to hand it in and Fitz headed down to civil mechanics. Fifteen minutes into, he heard his stomach grumble, and found himself pondering the metabolism question once again.

This ponderance swiftly grew, and resulted in Simmons coming to find him several hours later in a room with a surprisingly clear floor (and a bed stacked half to the roof with laundry of a variety of cleanliness) and Fitz hunched over his tablet, surrounded by three open textbooks, and a shower of Post-It notes littered around the room.

“Fitz?”

Simmons pulled one of the nearest Post-its from the wall. It had an equation on it. The one beside it asked, ‘how is it different?’. Plucking them like flowers, Simmons followed them around the
wall to another equation, and another question, in a more emphatic script, underlined furiously, _HOW IS IT DIFFERENT?!_

“Is this about the metabolic turnover?” Simmons wondered. “It was a joke!”

Fitz rolled over into a dramatic spread-eagled pose on the floor. In a rasping, exhausted voice, he groaned.

_“I just don’t understand why you need two words.”_

Simmons shrugged.

“One’s for cells and one’s for organisms. That’s how I remember it.”

“What?” Fitz shook his head. “It can’t be that simple.”

“It’s not. It’s just how I remember it. For the purposes of the joke, though, it really doesn’t matter.”

Simmons offered to pull Fitz to his feet, and he let her struggle for a while, throwing himself around like a comical deadweight until she let go and he almost threw himself against the bed.

“NDAP is nicotinamide adenine dinucleotide phospate,” Simmons explained, in lieu of helping Fitz up as he helped himself. “It has a turnover of 0.1 seconds.”

“I know that,” Fitz retorted.

Simmons raised an eyebrow.

“Okay, I know that _now._” Fitz huffed and crossed his arms.

“And if you really want to know why I actually don’t eat pancakes in the morning all that often, it’s just because I prefer a light breakfast. I’d be perfectly happy to go eat a heap of them right now.”

“Really?” Fitz brightened up immediately. “Because I worked all through afternoon tea on this thing and I know a place that does all-day breakfast.”

Simmons bowed and gestured to the door, biting back her grin.

“Lead the way, good sir.”
“Fitz!” - she would have slapped his hand if it hadn’t risked contaminating the evidence, so she snatches it off him instead – “What are you doing?!”

“Wha- I?” Fitz stumbles aside, relinquishing his hold on both the evidence pincers, and the bag. He frowns as Simmons leaves his bag on the bench and reaches for another.

“Biological samples go in the clear bags! Always in the clear bags!”

“Why? We have to label everything anyway! It doesn’t make any sense.”

“It makes perfect sense! And it saves time.”

“Doesn’t save time if I’m always fishing around for a clear bag.”

She screws up her nose. “How do you store your evidence bags?”

Fitz turns his case toward her. There is a handful of red, blue and clear evidence bags, all folded together and shoved – albeit somewhat neatly, she grants – into the pocket in the lid.

“Well. That has got to change. Biological samples, in the clear bags. That’s that. Use mine if you’d prefer.”

She turns her attention back to properly bagging and labelling the evidence, and feels Fitz approach her shoulder. She bites her lip as she catches his lips moving, mimicking her under his breath.

“Why the clear bags?” he asks eventually.

She shrugs. “I’m a biochemist. Most of my samples are biological. Most of my bags are clear. So, clear bags.”

“Well most of my samples are mineral or tech,” Fitz protests. “So that’s not going to work.”

“So you’re worried about your bagging now? Stunning as it was?”

“Well there’s no point following half a system, is there?”

“Better than no system.”

“There is a system. It’s called words.”

“If you’re going to complain about my handwriting, you can’t-“

“I didn’t complain about your handwriting, I just asked if there was a compulsory course all bio students take to destroy their fine motor function.”
“My fine motor function is fine, thank you very much. Is there a course all Comms students take where they learn not to recognise colours?”

“Did you just call me Comms?”

Satisfied, Simmons grins. She drops the now-perfectly packaged sample into her case and lets him be outraged for a moment longer before proposing calmly:

“A compromise, then. Your samples can go in the clear bags. Mine can go in blue.”

“How is that a compromise? You’re just changing colours. That’s just confusing for both of us.”

“It’s not confusing at all. Plus, it uses words, just like you wanted.”

His eyes narrow at her irritatingly persistent grin.

“How?”

“C is for clear is for computer – or circuit, or component, or constructed,” Simmons explains. “B is for blue is for biological.”

“Makes sense. What’s red then?”

“Mineral, of course. R is for red is for rock.”

“Fine. Settled then. Now - T is for tea?”
this is the first canon compat fluff? wow that's tragic.
prompt: "presents"
set during the S3 hiatus; Simmons has a present for Fitz on his first day of work.
G/K+

“Fitz-“

“Mm.” Kissing his way up her neck, Fitz was too distracted to heed her half-hearted warning, until she pushed his hands back into his own lap.

“Fitz, the time!” she warned, leaning away so that her skin parted from his. Fitz’ eyes darted to the clock on the dressing table, just as 7:58 ticked over into 7:59. It took him a moment longer to realise what that meant.

“You have to go to work!” Simmons insisted, scooching off the bed and straightening her collar in the process. Fitz groaned and flopped backward, half tempted to fake a sick day just so that he didn’t have to move.

“Why is being an adult so hard?” he moaned, mostly to himself, since Simmons was rummaging around in the closet – probably for her own clothes, perhaps a jacket since she was already mostly dressed. Nevertheless, she was listening, of course.

“You’ve been an adult for ten years, Fitz,” she reminded him. “One would’ve thought you’d be used to it by now.”

“Eleven,” he corrected her. “Eleven years.”

“Right.” She snorted. “Stay there.”

Not that he’d been planning to move soon anyway, even though he knew he should. Fitz was glad for the excuse to wait.

While he waited, he pondered in silence. At first, he didn’t really see why Simmons liked to work away from home so much when she didn’t have to. She liked being around people, he supposed. He liked being around people too, as long as they were people he knew. He wasn’t quite prepared to acknowledge that the pit quietly hollowing itself out in his gut was because he was scared of his first day at a new job. He was 29 now, and a professional civil & mechanical engineer, not a kindergarten kid.

(But that didn’t stop him from laying it on thick when Simmons returned from the closet and sat back down on the bed. Professional engineers could still fake sickies, couldn’t they? Would a doctor note from a professional biochemist count?)

Fitz sighed and pouted, the picture of misery, and Simmons pouted back, and felt his forehead, though he could already tell she wasn’t buying it.
“Nice try,” she quipped, with a roll of her eyes. She bit her lip, smiling, and offered him something. A long, flat package, wrapped up with a bow. Fitz sat up a little, curious.

“Would this make it better?” she inquired.

Fitz checked her expression as she pushed the box toward him.

“Happy Birthday.” Simmons pressed it into his hands, smiling.

Fitz took the gift happily. He tore the wrapping away, letting it and the flimsy box drop away as he lifted a small heap of material from the scraps. Separating out the pile, he discovered it was three shirts – all long-sleeved, button up and cuffed; one deep maroon, one a dark, dusky purple, and one a light periwinkle blue, with tiny polka dots. He grinned.

“I love it. I love them all. Thank you.”

“Well, I love them on you, so...” Simmons hummed suggestively, but she couldn’t stop smiling at his endeared expression as she pulled out another package, matching the first but smaller and thinner.

“This one’s for your first day at work. Coulson suggested a darker one but I knew which shirt you’d choose.”

Fitz’ eyes narrowed in curiosity. He studied her, wondering how she could have known which one he’d chosen, already challenging her internally though he knew she was almost certainly correct.

The tie was light blue: just a little darker than periwinkle, enough to stand out as a solid marker against the pastel pattern.

“Who wears polka dots to work?” he critiqued, though indeed, she was right.

“You do,” Simmons stated, as smooth and confident as could be. “Especially when you’re happy. Patterns and colours.”

“And hideous combinations of the two.”

“Yes, well, I was hoping Bobbi had trained that out of you.”

“Oh, you can talk, missy,” Fitz huffed.

“I can,” Simmons retorted, puffing out her chest indignantly, “but what I should do is help you get dressed.”

“Oh, no thank you,” Fitz protested, gathering the shirts and tie and holding them out of reach, shielding them from her. “What you should do is leave the room or I’ll never end up looking decent. And then shove me out the door. With your eyes closed.”

“If my eyes are closed, how will I know when to shove you out the door?”

“Jemma!”

As requested, she left him to his own devices, and a few minutes later, she did shove him out the door – after another kiss, of course.
There was something humbling about having nothing, Fitz thought as he looked around the bare apartment. Something humbling, but not in a comforting way. It was a humbling that pressed at his heart, itching, prodding at him as though he could bat it away. It tickled his throat, teasing him, knowing that he'd never be able to – let alone dare – express the anxiety clawing at him where there should have been nothing but love, comfort and peace. Having nothing, Fitz thought, was overrated.

Of course, Fitz knew he did not truly have nothing. Between himself and Jemma they had a suitcase, two duffel bags, a mattress, and a kettle. And of course, he had Jemma herself, and she had him. And they both had a very dear, if currently elusive friend, who had bought them the apartment that could very well be the place of their dreams one day soon. In all, Fitz could be quite satisfied with that, but he had not lived in an apartment this big possibly ever, upon reflection, and the empty rooms and passages and the bare walls nagged at him. He and Jemma were supposed to be starting a life here and the emptiness, the overwhelming barrenness, mocked at his ability to ever build something out of this. Some life they could have, with nothing but a mattress and a kettle between them, and relying on a friend – and a homeless friend at that, albeit homeless by choice – to make their living space affordable.

Fitz paced in front of the counter slowly, massaging his hand as he tried to figure out whether he wanted to pull himself out of this spiral or dive in deeper in the hopes of solving it. Waiting for the kettle to boil, Jemma watched him from the kitchen, and hummed in concern. She hoped he was not lashing himself with guilt over the dent his medical bills had put in his – in their – life savings, which would have left this place out of reach if not for Daisy’s generosity. Then again, guilt-lashings were more her thing than his. Perhaps he simply felt incompetent, unable to provide for her as well as he felt he should. Their financial situations had always been different, and had been and gone again as an issue between them, but the holidays were a very money-conscious time… perhaps especially, Jemma realised, for somebody who had grown up as Fitz had.

Jemma bit her lip as she poured hot water over the teabags she had dropped into their mismatched mugs. She was never sure what to say to Fitz on the subject of money. She had always been generous with it, but even her generosity came from a place of privilege. That was not to say she had been raised on a silver spoon, exactly, and especially coming out to the States she had done her best to make it on her own, but she had done so with the knowledge in the back of her mind that if she had somehow ended up on the street one day, she could call home and have something – enough - wired over in an instant. For all Fitz’ mother loved him, she had never been able to provide that financial luxury. Having already lived without that safety net long enough, and worked through it, only to step out on the same limb again… It was no wonder he was stressed. But at least this time he was not alone. They could move back to base if things got too bad, or ask Daisy for leniency, or sell patents. They had options. And they had each other, so that they could share the burden and so that one could find the light when the other was in darkness.
“Fitz,” Jemma cooed, rounding the counter and approaching him. “We’re going to be okay.”

Fitz sighed, as if her words had lifted a great burden off his shoulders. He took the cup of tea she offered and curled around it, as if the emanating warmth could shield him from darker thoughts.

“[We know,” he agreed, apologetic. “It’s just so…big.”

“Yeah, but interdimensional portals, you know, that’s nothing.” Jemma snorted, and Fitz smiled a little.

“You know what I mean.”

Jemma nodded, conceding, but then asked:

“Do you believe what they say? You know, domesticity is the next great adventure and all that?”

“I hope not,” Fitz scoffed. “If home is your adventure, you’re doing something wrong. Adventure belongs out there. Home should be safe. Cozy.”

“Doesn’t that mean it’s tiny?” Jemma teased.

“We don’t need space, you and me.”

Jemma slid her steaming tea onto the counter as Fitz intertwined their free hands and drew her in. She stepped up to him as if they were about to dance. Or kiss. She smiled.

“I’ll tell you what’s going to be my next great domestic adventure,” she murmured, her pupils growing as the space and the light between them shrunk. She slowly raised herself up onto her toes, until she could feel the hairs at the back of Fitz’ neck begin to shiver. Then she finished:

“Wading through your knee-high pile of laundry every morning.”

She laughed; at first a victorious cackle – revenge at last for the picture of space – that quickly dissolved into a soft and pure sound of happiness. If a few dirty shirts on the floor were all she’d have to struggle with for the next few weeks, months, years – for the rest of her life, honestly – she’d be glad. And if she could rile Fitz up so that he was both blushing, and already concocting a witty reply, well, even better.

“Oh, ah, well,” he pointed out, gesturing over his shoulder at the kitchen. “I suppose my next great adventure will be trying not to poison myself with some slug liver or what have you that I find in the fridge, or on the counter, or –“

He cut himself off, listening to Jemma laugh again.

“Now it would be a shame to go and poison you after all this effort,” she remarked, “but I have to point out that slugs don’t actually have livers.”

Fitz opened his mouth to retort only to close it again, frown, and readjust.

“Wait, really?” he wondered instead.

“It’s true!”

Fitz raised his eyebrows skeptically, and Jemma insisted:

“Honestly, it is! They have a similar organ called a hepatopancreas. But no liver. Technically.”
"Oh, technically-"

"We could go find one right now, I’ll show you!"

Her eyes lit up. *It’s science, Fitz!* So he let her drag him to the door, only weakly protesting on the grounds of his squeamishness. Relentless and enthused, Jemma tugged him out the door and down the stairs, and though it was already dark they picked through the tiny yard of their building together with the flashlights on their phones, and wandered the surrounding streets with eyes on the pavement, plants, and dark damp fixtures like the underside of a mailbox, where they finally found one.

When they returned to the apartment, they were both surprised by and grateful for its warmth. Fitz even found that the anxiety around his heart did not flare so strongly this time, as the passages and rooms out of sight disappeared, to be filled another day, with new memories, new fortunes and new life. For now, he had Jemma and she had him, and between them, they had a chopping board and a set of pins, a magnifying glass, and two cups of tea going cold on the counter, to the tune of Jemma’s biology lesson as one question led into another, on and on into the night.
Chapter Notes

Too many shots of the alcoholic variety lead to FitzSimmons taking a metaphorical shot, which then leads to more of the alcoholic kind as old tricks and new friends meet.

Prompt: Shot
Ft. Academy! FitzSimmons, & current FitzSimmons + Daisy + Elena + Mack.

Take your mind off it, she’d said. It’ll be fun.

Fitz wasn’t the most social of people at the best of times. He found most other people annoying and he was sure they found him much the same. So it went without saying that going to the Boiler Room on a crowded Friday at the end of semester – when every man and his proverbial dog had exactly the same plan – was not at the top of his list of most enjoyable activities. He wouldn’t have minded cafeteria spaghetti bolognese, and a game of chess or trivial pursuit or video gaming into the night. Or even beer and Doctor Who. But for some reason’ he’d agreed; perhaps without much thought, or perhaps because he’d hoped that the grating inevitability that everyone who saw him or heard him speak would mimic him with a ridiculously exaggerated dialect, would drive out the thoughts of his most recent project.

Take your mind off it, she’d said.

Drown your sorrows, might have been more appropriate. Or perhaps, say goodbye to your A.

Fitz bounced his leg. Of course the professors wouldn’t have got around to grading it yet – he’d only handed it in not ten minutes ago – but he could picture them all standing around it, um-ing and ah-ing and trying to figure out what he was on about. His thoughts kept circling back to the image of all his teachers – even his fifth-grade D&T teacher – standing around in suits, swishing wine and frowning about him. Fitz sunk in his seat and was contemplating burying his head in the table when Simmons called out to him, making her way across the room with a tray of beers.

“Oh, chin up, it’s not that bad,” she said, with an edge of scolding as she passed his drinks across.

“Simmons. The firing mechanism collapsed. The firing mechanism. Do you know what that means? It means they’re going to press ‘go’ and nothing is going to happen.”

“Well maybe you shouldn’t have used such a corrosive metal.”

“Well maybe you should've mehmehmeh,” Fitz mimicked bitterly. He swiped one of his beers off the table and took a large gulp, trying to breathe through it. “I’m gonna need about 500 of these.”

“Not before dinner, you don’t.”

Simmons passed a fork and a steak knife, wrapped in a napkin, across the table.

“I wasn’t sure what you felt like so I went with burgers.”
“Who eats a burger with a knife?”

“People without articulated jaws!” Simmons’ eyes bulged. She’d seen the size of those burgers and the mere thought of attempting to fit the whole thing in her mouth at once gave her a toothache. Fitz scowled, determined to be grumpy at everything, and pulled the knife and fork apart until the napkin gave way around them.

“Well, thanks,” Fitz finally muttered, and dropped the knife between his fingers, so that the tip scraped against the table. He lifted the knife and moved it again, and dropped it between a different set of fingers, and eventually set up a rapid rhythm, the blade jumping around almost effortlessly. Even Simmons, who had initially opened her mouth to warn him about scratching the table, was a little more stunned than she might readily admit. She turned a notebook upside down and shoved it underneath instead, and Fitz grinned at the challenge, staring intently at his hands as if it was a race he was watching, not something he could control.

“Ah, shit!” he cried all of a sudden, and yanked his hand out of the way as the knife skittered out of his grip. Simmons – and a few surrounding strangers – applauded nonetheless.

“That was a good run!” one of them cheered, and his friends nodded and added their own murmurs of assent. A Cheshire grin spread across Simmons’ face.

“It was, wasn’t it? What say we make this a little more interesting?”

She pulled out a twenty-dollar note from her pocket and slapped it onto the table. Then, loudly, she proclaimed.

“Bet you can’t do that again!”

And the others joined in.

“Bet you can’t do it blindfolded!”

“Bet you can’t do it drunk!”

“Bet you can’t do it longer than I can!”

Soon enough, money was exchanging hands, and the game was established. The blindfold was out, because funnily enough nobody wanted to lose a hand or an eye, and as it turned out, nobody was actually prepared to challenge Fitz one on one. Instead, onlookers were gathering and sponsoring a line of shots so long they required a table of their own. Strangely enough, Fitz was feeling good. Was he leaning into it so that he didn’t have to think about his assignment? Maybe. But as long as that didn’t cost him a finger, he’d take it. And the massive, massive hangover he could already feel approaching in his near future.

“Okay, okay!” Simmons called, finally putting a stop to the collection and exchange of money and various bets. Their beers lay aside, forgotten in the thrill of the game, and Fitz could feel his heart thudding. A neutral third party kept his eyes on his watch, and the crowd waited with bated breath until he declared –

“Go!”

Fitz down the first shot, as agreed, and kept the knife moving. After twenty seconds or so, on prompt, he took another, and moved faster as his confidence grew. The third, fourth, fifth shots disappeared with only a stumble or two, and by the tenth he was going so fast he was spinning, but locked into a fluid pattern of gyroscope-like motion.
“It’s too fast!” someone whined. “He’s only four-shots drunk, not ten. Come back in fifteen minutes and then we’ll see what’s what.”

And maybe – almost definitely – it was the four or five shots that had already taken their effect, but Fitz’ answer to this was to down another four shots in quick succession. Simmons paled at the sight. Not only had he taken a big step up in drunkenness that would kick in any second now, but he had thrown off his rhythm, and the steady gyroscope was starting to sway.

“Woah- oh – wait- ow – no I’m –“ Fitz muttered. He tried not to slow down, but with out the reliability of motion he’d been holding onto, it suddenly seemed like he had forgotten where his fingers were.

“How long has he been going for?” Simmons wondered.

“I lost track.” The watcher shrugged. Simmons glared, but she could hardly blame him. Everyone else in the circle had been riveted, why not him?

Then Fitz swore loudly, and threw the steak knife angrily to the floor. Cheers and groans went up around the table and Fitz was torn between raising his hands into the air, and finding the nearest hospital.

“My hand, Jemmons,” he whined instead, choosing to ignore the crowd altogether. In fairness, it felt like he’d thrown the knife right through it, though really he had only nicked the skin. “My hand!”

“Water time, Fitzy-boy,” Simmons cooed back, and shoved a bottle of water across the table at him before turning back to the flurry of people collecting and exchanging bets. She collected what they were due and didn’t stay to watch the carnage, instead escorting Fitz to the next table over, now empty of its patrons and further from the din of the amused. Fitz had managed to drink half the bottle and now had his head resting against it, cheeks flushed and grinning.

“That was fun.”

“We made a hundred and nine dollars.”

“Mmm pay for all the shots?”

“They payed for all the shots!”

Fitz laughed.

“Free hangover!” Simmons cheered, not at all jealous. She made a note to spend some of that hundred and nine on a large box of aspirin and a greasy breakfast for Fitz the next day. For now, she waved over another two bottles of water, and sat across from him nursing her beer and eating her burger, waiting and drinking until she could be sure Fitz wouldn’t throw up on the way back to their dorms the way he almost did when someone clapped him on the shoulders.

“Good on you, man,” they said, and Fitz wasn’t sober enough to appreciate that they didn’t call him ladde. They seemed to notice this, and addressed Simmons instead.

“Seriously. That was awesome. Fourteen shots! And after an all-nighter too? The kid’s insane, aye? That’s specialist material there.”

And even better, Simmons noted, the compliments appeared to come from a specialist too. This was apparently especially important when recounting the next morning, while Fitz lay on the
couch with a cold cloth over his eyes and a large black coffee in his hand, groaning at Simmons gratingly perky voice as she sifted through pamphlets, guides and instruction booklets on the floor, apparently unfazed by the thought that he wasn’t actually paying much attention at all.

“I think we could do it!” she cried enthusiastically. “I really think we could! And look! You get to go all over the world, learn all these languages, work with all these specialists…ooh, Natasha Romanoff, Petra Cordova, Xai Ho Li…Honestly, Fitz, we’d be fools to pass this one up!”

“Mmmmmnnnnnn all right,” he groaned, “we’ll give it a shot.”

In that moment, he was more committed to the idea of getting Simmons off the topic, and hopefully off speaking altogether, than anything else. Even if she had taken his consent to be legitimate, he had fully expected them both to give up, or drop half-dead in training or the test. He was wrong on all counts and this led, years later, to him and Simmons – now more commonly known as Jemma – recounting the story in tandem, only to be interrupted by someone slapping a small glass down on the table in front of him.

“Proof!” Daisy demanded, meeting him with challenging eyes. Murmurs of interest swirled around the audience, and Fitz turned the shot glass slowly.

“I don’t know, Daisy, I haven’t done anything like this since before, y’know, the brain damage and everything.”

“Bull shit.” Daisy snorted. “You can build a bomb, you can play stupid drinking games.”

Fitz looked over to Jemma, who shrugged, but had a mischievous glint in her eye to give her away. Fitz sighed, and with a victorious grin, Elena disappeared to the kitchen and returned with a knife.

“Go on then,” Fitz grumbled, “pour.”

Daisy poured the bourbon with the eloquent twist of a seasoned bartender and grinned as she passed it back to him. Mack pulled his phone out and set up the stopwatch setting, and then declared –

“Go!”

And Fitz did. And, though he only had six shots just in case, he raised the knife in victory when he made it to five minutes without a single scratch or flinch.

“Braveheart reigns supreme!” Daisy declared.

“Oh, does he now?” Elena challenged, and slipped into the seat opposite Fitz. He handed over the knife and Elena slapped her empty glass onto the table.

“Pour!” she insisted, and Daisy did. Mack shook his head, still unsure what to make of Fitz’ surprising show of dexterity and endurance, and just as unsure what to expect from Elena.

“Ok, go!”

And she did. The knife moved so fast that human eyes – especially drunk ones – lost track of it within a few seconds, and within the minute, Fitz was ready to concede. He raised his bottle of water, and knocked it against the one Elena had just uncapped, and then they drank.
Jemma muted the television as Fitz stepped into the room. She picked absently at the buttons on the remote, as if observing their rubbery feeling could distract her from the gut-wrenching tumult of emotions that still plagued her. Fitz caught sight of the screen, anyway – a reporter, Nadeer, and then a still image of her brother.

“Is that him?” he asked. “The Inhuman you met?”

Jemma nodded.

“Daisy and I went to rescue him today, with Mace. We failed. I almost had him and now…” She gestured helplessly to the television screen, where the report had just been given of Vijay Nadeer’s death.

“They’re asking for ‘privacy,’” she huffed. “It was murder. It was blue bloody murder and she’s so – “

Jemma ground her teeth together. In fairness, the Senator had seemed legitimately upset – at least shaken – but the guilt and rage had built a toxic fire. It was too convenient, that Vijay had gone with someone that hated him so much, and had ended up dead. Had Nadeer talked him into it, or had she done it herself? Or had somebody else do it for her? Either way, Jemma was sure. It was murder. And she’d let it happen.

“It’s not your fault,” Fitz assured her, because he knew what she was thinking when that darkness clouded her eyes. “They did everything they could to keep him a secret from you and you still tried. You still gave him a chance.”

“I gave him a choice,” she said, as if that was a different matter entirely. “Maybe I shouldn’t have.”

Fitz sat down beside her and wrapped her in his arms.

“It’s not your fault,” he repeated. “You didn’t hold a gun to his head and you know you shouldn’t have.”

“Maybe he’d still be alive if I had.”

“Or maybe he’d have no-one left to trust in this world. If he went out, it was with the knowledge that somebody still believed in him. You were a positive last thought, I’m sure of that.”

Jemma huffed. It was nice to imagine she’d be thought of fondly, but she didn’t deserve it – and anyway, it was a poor comfort to be someone’s final thought of any kind. It left a bitter taste in her mouth. At least it was better than willing herself to throw up just to be rid of the guilt in her stomach.
“Want to have first shower?” Fitz offered. “You might have even had a worse day than I have. Nice to wash it off. I’ll be glad to be rid of it, honestly.”

Jemma pulled away enough to look at him. This time she really looked. He had a crusted line of blood running through his eyebrow, and a haggard expression. His eyes were a little reddened, like maybe he’d been crying. Jemma touched his cheek gingerly.

“Fitz-”

“It’s been a long day, Jemma,” he insisted wearily. “Lots of death and betrayal. Got thrown through a window. And Aida, she—” he worked his jaw, struggling to speak and hold back from tears at the same time. “Mack. He just…like she was a piece of metal.”

Jemma frowned in confusion.

“She…is a piece of metal,” she said, as gently as possible. Fitz stood up, shaking his head. He mimed a slicing motion with his hand.

“She’s dead,” he explained. “Mack…chopped her head off. Just. Shwmp. Just like that. She just wanted to live. I couldn’t – I should’ve – She didn’t even kill anyone. Except Nathanson, but… There must have been something I could’ve done. There must have. If I’d been faster, smarter, if I’d just…”

“Managed to outsmart the Darkhold?” Jemma put in. "Mysterious, apparently-demonic force from another realm?"

Gathering herself, she swept her legs underneath her and stood with a strength and grace that had been slowly draining out of her since setting foot in Nadeer’s house. She caught Fitz’ hands briefly and let them go again, soothing his fretting at the same time as she made space for herself in his arms. She pressed herself against his chest and waited until, a few seconds later, she felt his arms close around her.

“I’m sure it was a comfort to know someone believed in her,” Jemma murmured. “You’d be a pleasant last thought, I’m sure.”

Speaking the words aloud herself, Jemma began to feel their resonance. She dug her fingers into Fitz’ shirt, feeling herself choke up again. It was a hard reality to face, that they couldn’t save everybody, but it wasn’t so unreasonable really. In the end, they were just two people. Two people, wrapped in each others arms in the middle of their living room, as if together, they could hold up the sky.
“Fitz, I can explain.”

His heart was beating so loudly in his chest by this point that he was surprised he could even hear the words. He gritted his teeth, lowered his weapon, and stormed out of the room. His ears burned with the confirmation. He’d seen it coming, tried to bury it, and now –

I can explain.

Fitz stuck his gun back in his belt. The heady, swampy feeling of a panic attack was finally coming over him and he closed his eyes and breathed through it. There was nothing else to do. He reached for a doorframe, where he could see out a window. The garden was sparse and quiet, made of smooth stones and cacti. It kept him calm. As calm as he could be.

I can explain.

The others hustled Radcliffe out, past him, and Fitz ignored the Doctor’s pleas to be heard. He focused on the garden, smooth and steady and unobtrusive, until he felt Jemma lightly brush his arm.

“I’m okay,” he told her as he turned away from the window– always the first thing, in situations like these. Because they had ‘situations like these’.

Jemma clenched and unclenched her fists, pacing a few steps away with manic rather than anxious energy. Rather than trying to soothe herself with movement, it looked as though it was taking all her willpower to stay on this track, rather than go flinging off course like an unhinged carnival ride.

At Fitz’ assurance, Jemma nodded, but kept moving like she’d strangle Radcliffe if he was still in front of her. Or scratch the eyes out of whoever came too close.

“I’m sorry I lied,” Fitz said. He still wasn’t sure if he was on the list of people to be scratched – physically or metaphorically – and if so, he wanted to get off it as soon as he could, for both their sakes.

“Well, I hid it from you. It felt a lot like lying. I’m sorry but – I had to find out. I had to. I knew you’d try and stop me and…well, that’s all of it, really.”

“You should’ve trusted me,” she hissed, breath tight, still pacing. Then, “I wouldn’t have believed you.” Then, “I was right all along.”

“I should have insisted,” Fitz pressed.

“I should have insisted,” Jemma returned, stopping dead in her tracks and throwing her hands into
the air. “I knew Radcliffe was bad news right from the beginning. We all did. And you were off – off – fraternizing…being fraternized with and being taken advantage of! All this time!”

“Well, clearly we’re both stubborn as mules then,” Fitz concluded. “Though I did appreciate that little teeth-bearing moment in there.”

Jemma snarled, the fury she had felt in that moment returning.

“I’m not sure ripping Radcliffe to ribbons is necessary, though,” Fitz said. Then he sighed. His eyes were drawn back to the doorway through which Radcliffe had just been dragged, insisting that he still cared; that he’d cared this whole time, while weaving his deception.

“I think it’s just something in my nature,” Fitz mused, his voice gruff with years, with decades of hurt. “People just…they walk all over me. And I – “

His heart started beating louder again, thudding so that his whole field of vision seemed to move. Tears filled his eyes, stinging.

“Every time, Jemma,” he breathed. “Every single time I –“

She nodded: understanding, sorrowful, protective. She glanced around them and, finding no pressing duty calling to her, stepped in close to him. Then, as much as she could, being so many inches shorter than him, she cradled Fitz between her arms and her cheek, lovingly pressed against his arm. She felt the steady rise and fall of his breathing, and the heavy heartbeat, still a little faster than usual, but present and strong. It lulled the anger from her, the call for vicious protectiveness having finally been sated.

“I’m sorry this keeps happening to you,” she breathed. “I wish there was something I could do.”

Fitz smiled.

“You look out for me well enough,” he promised. “Going after Radcliffe like that. And Ward too, you know. And even Mack.”

Jemma blushed.

“I was jealous,” she confessed. “Of Mack. I thought I’d…been replaced.”

*I thought you needed replacing,* Fitz thought for a moment, but he shook his head. That’s passed now, and he’d been wrong. They both had.

“You were looking out, too,” Fitz assured her. “You know how I get, with my friends. ‘specially when I’m down. You just happened to be wrong about Mack. Although, don’t get me wrong, that is a fight I would love to see.”

Jemma smiled at last.

“Who do you think would win?”

She pulled back from his arm with a sly smile, and with the suave innocence of a man who knew what to say – and knew she knew it - Fitz promised,

“You, of course, my ferocious mountain lion.”

Jemma beamed, a preening expression.
“I’m going to have to think up some more of those aren’t I?” Fitz mused. “I thought you were going to smack me silly with that tablet for a second.”

“Never you,” Jemma insisted. “The tablet, maybe. You do arrange your desk well for the dramatic sweeping of objects.”

“You should try sweeping them sometime.”

He heard what he’d offered a moment after the words left his lips, and felt Jemma’s darkly amused chuckle rumble through her body.

“Get your mind out of the gutter,” he scolded. She made another sound, a disappointed hum.

“It is a little too dangerous in a lab, I think,” she reasoned. “But still. Food for thought?”

Thoughts and food and anything else really disappeared for a moment as she dragged a finger slowly down the lapel of Fitz’ jacket before she pulled away. For a second, he could think of nothing but following her and moved almost subconsciously toward the door, after her. Catching himself, he stopped, and smiled. His heart no longer felt so stuck in his chest; his mind no longer so crowded.

_Bloody miracle worker_, he thought, stepping outside onto the threshold to find her waiting in the last remaining vehicle, door opened to face him. He caught a soft smile – and she let him – before she chased it with a heavy roll of her eyes and an emphatic beckoning gesture.

“Hurry up, Fitz!”

“Cheeky beggar,” he cursed, and ran to catch up.
“You’re working late, ma’am,” Crawford remarked, amused but not surprised. Doctor Simmons looked over at her with a similar expression.

“So are you,” she pointed out. Crawford smirked.

“Well, I don’t have an incredibly attractive and romantic husband waiting at home for me.”

Doctor Simmons blinked at her. Crawford’s smirk drooped a little.

“Sorry, I just meant - You aren’t going home? I’d have thought you and Doctor Fitz would have something special planned. It’s your anniversary today, isn’t it?”

Doctor Simmons laughed.

“Oh! No. That’s next week. And I can assure you, unless the sky is falling down I will be out of here by 5:01 on that day.”

“So what are the chances of that?” Crawford teased, and Doctor Simmons grinned.

“About fifty-fifty I’d imagine.”

“That sounds about right,” Crawford agreed. “Well, sky falling in or no I think I have to get home before my eyes droop closed on the road. Happy anniversary for next week, I guess!”

“Thanks! But, um, where did you hear that it was today? Just out of interest?”

“Oh, the Director mentioned it. You’d think she’d be right, she’s pretty close to you guys, isn’t she?” Crawford shrugged. “Guess I could have misheard.”

“Possibly,” Doctor Simmons agreed. “Although you’re right, she is close to us… and it is possible that she and my husband dearest are planning something. You may have given me a foot-up in an epic romance battle for the ages, Doctor Crawford.”

How that woman’s cogs could still be turning with such fervor at this hour, after such a long day, both inspired and baffled Agent Crawford. She smiled and nodded, her eagerness to get home outweighing her desire to unfold the leads of the trail she had apparently just set her boss on.

“I’ll see you tomorrow, Doctor,” Doctor Simmons insisted. “Good work today.”

Crawford left grateful and Jemma Simmons cut her workday off just as it was going on ten hours, and snuck up to the Director’s office. It wasn’t really sneaking, of course; the night staff were
about, and she had plenty of forms of permission to be going up there, but there was always something a little secretive and exciting about visiting Daisy’s swanky office for private reasons. And she was sure that Daisy would still be there – for work, or for helping Fitz plan out the details of a beautiful and intimate evening, she would be there.

Jemma was almost disappointed when she found out it was work. Daisy let her in nonetheless.

“What can I do ya for?” Daisy offered. “Wine?”

“No thanks, I’m driving,” Jemma waved her off. “And I probably will head off soon, but ah, Crawford told me you said it was mine and Fitz’s anniversary today?”

“Oh yeah. I ran into her after the newbies’ fitness exams. Did she wish you happy anniversary from me?”

“She did,” Jemma said. “I just thought it was a little weird, that’s all. We’re going to see each other before next week, after all.”

“What does next week have to do with anything?”

Jemma frowned.

“Our anniversary. It’s next week.”

“No, it’s today.”

“No…it’s next week. Friday.”

Daisy shook her head.

“Babes. You got married on May 21st, I remember. That date is like. Burned into my brain forever.”

Jemma scoffed, but Daisy did not waver. Frown deepening, Jemma pulled her phone out of her pocket and put it on speaker.

“Jemma?” Fitz answered.

“Fitz,” Jemma greeted. “Are you at home?”

“Yeah, why?”

“What are you doing?”

“Am I on speaker?”

Daisy bit her lip and Jemma glared at her, and answered: “Yes.”

“Making dinner,” Fitz said – truthfully, probably, given the sound of crackling and bubbling in the background. “Why? Are you not coming home?”

“Yeah, I’m on my way,” Jemma explained, “just trying to get something settled. Our anniversary… it’s next Friday, right?”

“Yeah. 28th.”
“Funny thing, Daisy swears it’s today.”

“Well, she’s wrong. It’s always been the 28th.”

“Do you want to bet on that, Mr Fitz?” Daisy challenged. While Fitz and Jemma had been talking, she had been searching her photos and pulled one down from the wall of the moment after Fitz and Jemma’s first kiss as a married couple. Sunlight and confetti whirled around them and they were smiling at each other, and on the back, Jemma’s own hand had written 21st May 2018.

Fitz, of course, could not see this though, and so he accepted Daisy’s bet.

“Sure, bring it on,” he challenged. “2019, Seychelles. 2020, Paris. Then there was the year I built that bloody armchair, remember that? When was that? Ooh, 2021 we went a few days early to see the lunar eclipse. 2022 – we – hang on –“

On the other end of the line, the phone crinkled and rustled with the sound of rapidly turning pages. Then a pause. Then turned back.

“Have you got a photo album out?” Daisy checked.


“Hang on,” Fitz repeated. “I just pulled out our wedding one. Jemma, she’s right. It’s here in gigantic letters – look – one of us must have learnt calligraphy just to write this.”

Jemma’s phone buzzed, and a photograph came through of one of the scrapbook decorations, which read: 21st May 2018 in a larger, more elaborate font than on the photograph, but Jemma recognised her own hand. Still, her jaw dropped a little.

“How bizarre,” she remarked. “Why would we move it like that? Did something bad happen on the 21st?”

“I mean, probably,” Daisy remarked. “But bad things happen every other day around here, and if it was that traumatic, it probably would have come to mind.”

“Perhaps it was just more convenient that way. Can’t imagine why, now.”

“Time flies when you’re having fun,” Fitz put in. Jemma crooned silently and Daisy pretended to gag.

“Never change, you cheesy ass,” she praised him fondly. “Besides, it’s not like the date really matters, does it? Maybe May 28th is the date you two got your Hogwarts letters, or the day you first kissed, or the day you finally got the ring fitted. Maybe Fitz just got super excited and decided to have a one-week anniversary and you stuck with it!”

“Oh, ‘Fitz’ got excited did he?”

“Well, you did,” Jemma insisted. “Which…made for a very entertaining night for me.”

“And that’s where I’m going to pull the plug on this conversation,” Daisy interrupted. “But I am going to send your wife home to you very soon, Fitz, so if you want to take advantage of finding out you have two anniversary dates now, might I suggest some candles?”
Fitz watched the city pass him by. It didn’t look so different out here than he remembered from in there, except that it had rained recently, and the sun was coming out, so light was shining off everything. Ordinarily, perhaps, that would have given him some hope – a romantic notion, he knew – but today it just seemed to light up the stark greys of everything. Hard lines. Dreariness, even in the freshness of morning. Even in the wake of Daisy’s promise that he would not be left behind. Would he ever believe that, truly? Was there any hope left in the world after all?

Jemma watched Fitz. Words bubbled up in her chest and sank again. Maybe she should have said something like Daisy had, or when Daisy had. Maybe she should have done more to pick Fitz up, but it was hard to think what. She felt like she had never let him go. He only though she had. He could not see in his darkness, that she was still holding onto him. Even as tears of shame and unspeakable gratitude shone on his face, he refused to lean into her. To even look at her. He was in so much pain, and lost, and guilt-ridden, and grieving, and he hid himself in the corner; all but pressed against the window, as far away from her as he could get.

“Fitz.”

It didn’t feel like a favourite word. It felt like a plea. Like a last chance effort to reach him. It pulled his eyes to her face, and then he remembered he was not supposed to be looking at her, and dropped his gaze. But he’d turned, and now he picked at the fabric of the seat between them. Jemma drew breath, drew courage, and continued.

“Fitz, I –“

Damn tears pricked at her eyes. She blinked, sending them falling, and was glad that he was not looking. It would only hurt the both of them more. She wiped her eyes, firmly, scolding not herself but her tears. She was to get through this – rain, hail or shine. She was to bring them back from the brink of destruction and she was to do it without collapsing in on herself.

“Fitz. I know you’re going through a lot right now but I need you to hear me. Just hear me, okay?”

Without raising his eyes, Fitz nodded like a chagrined child.

“I am here with you. I mean, we’re all here with you, but I – I am too. I’m not going anywhere. You haven’t ruined anything between us. I want you to know that.”

Fitz was not convinced, but he nodded anyway. One day it would sink in. Jemma took another deep
breath, a shaking one, and crept her hand across the space between them. She lifted Fitz’s hand in
her own and knotted their fingers together.

“And I…” She struggled against the visions, against the memories, against the fear, toward that
nugget of hope she had felt when she’d first heard the words, even out of the wrong mouth. “I
know you have a question to ask me. And I want you to know that the answer is yes. My answer,
is… yes.”

The breath shuddered out of her chest. She wanted to close her eyes, to beg him. Say something.
She squeezed his hand instead.

Fitz watched their hands together, intertwined. Tears burned at his eyes. He could still hear Ophelia
screaming. But he remembered the question. It felt like a lifetime ago, drowned in so many
memories that he could not be sure which belonged where. He could remember finding the ring, in
an antique store, somewhere in… Barcelona? San Francisco? It was warm, that was all he could
remember. Warm, and sunny, and shining on this ring that he’d just seen and known. It was the
one. It was Jemma’s.

(Ophelia would have hated that ring.)

He couldn’t help it. His eyes found Jemma’s face again. He had to know, was this the question she
was answering?

Her eyes said it was. The heartbreak. The love in them.

“Yes,” she repeated softly.

Jemma reached out a hand for Fitz’s face. Then two. She cupped his cheeks in loving hands and
Fitz had not felt such a tender embrace. Not for a lifetime. Jemma’s fingers brushed over his
cheeks, wiping away his tears. She sighed and let them climb upward, into his hair. It was so much
softer than she remembered. She pulled him across the space between them, so that their foreheads
were almost touching, and this time he did not resist. Her touch drowned out the demons in his
mind, just for a while, and he only knew that here and now, this was right. Here and now, this was
more than he thought he could dream. Jemma coming back to him, and asking him to come back to
her, even after all she had seen of him. He could hardly speak.

“Jemma,” he croaked.

“Fitz.” She was not so desperate now. Her voice was calm and soothing. Her fingers gently stroked
his hair. “I know it’s going to take some time to come back from this, but I know we will. And you
can ask me today or tomorrow or next year and I will tell you yes. I am committed to you, ring or
no. In sickness and in health. And if the cosmos is determined to have it be sickness more often
than not, I can handle that. I love you. I don’t want this promise to be the end of the road. I want it
to be a step in us growing. So whether you want to dig yourself out of this before you ask, or you
want to jump out of this car right now and get a cab to City Hall… My answer is yes. I promised
myself I would tell you the next time I saw you. So here we are. But take your time, okay?”

He was not sure if he’d replied or nodded or what, but it was then that she kissed him.

It was a surprise, and Fitz caught his breath all of a sudden, and inhaled the smell of her. It was not
the most pleasant version, like when she’d just come out of the shower draped in the scents of her
favourite soaps and shampoos. It was not the most inspiring either; a Jemma at work, smelling of
crisp lemon-scented disinfectant and linen and steel. But it was Jemma. It was her sweat and blood
and tears. It was her, who’d crawled into hell - and found him in the role of the devil, no less - and
even so, had dragged him out again.

Her lips were soft and chapped and lingering, even as she released him. Fitz relished their taste. Their love. Once, he had believed he would never feel that again; that he would never be trusted with such a precious gift. But here he was. And here Jemma was, smiling a little as she held her olive branch out to him.

Hope.

“That’s better,” she breathed. “Now what say we have some breakfast?”
“Killing me softly?” Daisy muttered. “He’s not killing anything softly. Loudly and obnoxiously more like.”

“Oh, because that was the greatest rendition of Shout Out to My Ex the world has ever heard.” Jemma rolled her eyes, and sipped at her beer.

“Hey! I was venting,” Daisy retorted, her words drooping drunkenly. “That guy thinks he’s hot shit.”

“He is hot shit.”

Daisy huffed and returned to nursing her beer and misery for the next three minutes of terrible singing. Jemma smirked, and let her be, instead returning her attention to the singer on the poorly lit platform at the front of the room. It was true that his was far from the best singing that Jemma had ever heard – in fact, she was glad for the drinking affecting her hearing so that she didn’t have to experience it in all its ugly glory – but Leopold Fitz himself was not half bad. His cheekbones were a little daintier than she usually went for, and his skin pale and cheeks flushed, but he had a certain charm about him. He warbled along, lost in his own world, and raked his hands through soft curls Jemma wanted to touch. He arranged his lanky body on the bar stool as if he were still looking for his place in the world, and damn if Jemma was not a sucker for a little vulnerability. On top of it all, she already knew he was bright – as bright as anything, one of the smartest people in school – but he could be crotchety, stubborn and smug in class. Jemma tried not to hold that against him – after all, she could be all those things too – but the fact remained that this softer side completed a very attractive picture.

“Ooh, he made it!” Daisy cheered, straightening all of a sudden and slapping Jemma on the arm in excitement. “Will the real Hot Shit please stand up?”

Jemma rolled her eyes fondly as the object of Daisy’s attention – one Antoine Triplett – took to the stage. She could not deny Trip’s charm, and would not want to; he was smart, witty, charming, and kind, as well as impressively skilled at everything from home economics to debating to Varsity football. Jemma wished Daisy the best of luck wooing him, and usually, she quite enjoyed his vibrant performances, karaoke and otherwise. Tonight, though, she found herself in need of a quiet drink.

And if Fitz just so happened to need one too, then… what happy coincidence.

“Can I get you something?” Jemma asked.
Fitz looked at her, wide-eyed. “Sorry?”

“Buy you a beer?” Jemma rephrased, nodding at the bar. “For your performance.”

Fitz shook his head.

“Oh, no. I think it’s water time for me. That was…”

“Shocking?” Jemma supplied. “Abysmally embarrassing? An offence to the music industry?”

She’d been told she was not always tactful. Her fourth beer was certainly not helping with that, and she didn’t notice that Fitz pressing his lips together might have meant that he’d taken offence. (Or that, perhaps, he was overwhelmed that the woman he’d been dreaming of speaking to since the beginning of the year had come to him while he was so unprepared, and after having made such an immense fool of himself.) Instead, oblivious, Jemma ordered water and lemonade, and sat down with him at the bar. He kept his eyes averted from hers, playing with a pretzel while they waited. His fingers were long and nimble, and Jemma had long admired their skill, but usually from the perspective of a professional. A colleague. A fellow scientist. Now she was a girl in a bar, whose (admittedly few) inhibitions were still obstructed by an alcohol-infused cloud, and who was watching her crush hide from her after bearing his soul in the most terribly out-of-tune way possible. Now, watching his fingers, her mind couldn’t help but apply them to other uses. Curling through hers in a movie cinema. Brushing along her cheek on a cold winter’s day. Exploring other, less cold places, and bringing her soul to bare too.

“I think you’d make an attentive lover,” Jemma said.

Fitz spluttered, a few bits of pretzel spraying here and there before he gulped down half a glass of water and gasped for breath. He flushed pink all the way up to his ears, not just from the drink now, but from the image that had sprung to mind as soon as she’d spoken. Fitz scrambled out of his seat and slapped a few dollars from his pocket onto the counter. Trying to hide his head under his shoulders, and his crotch under a jacket that barely reached his hips, he high-tailed it out through the front door, leaving Jemma wondering what she had said wrong.

It took him another three weeks to strike up a conversation with her, in a more sober environment and with Jemma having schooled herself on more appropriate compliments. It went well, and there were many more conversations after that. And dates. And even a not entirely terrible karaoke rendition of *Pretty Woman*.

And then, one day, Fitz said: “I think it’s time that we test your hypothesis.”

(He whispered it in her ear, with his hands on her hips, and she was so drunk on his attention that she’d almost missed the reference.

She was happy, but not surprised, to be proven right.)
prompt: Future. For FitzSimmons Week 2017 on Tumblr.
in the future, FitzSimmons return to the Academy to commence its rebuild.
Angst/hurt/comfort.

Fitz’s breath caught as he stepped back onto the grounds of the old Academy. Dead, dry grass - still struggling to grow back after all this time – crunched under his feet. The remnants of buildings stretched out before him: some simply abandoned; others defaced with shattered windows and horrific graffiti; still others toppled and charred. Step by step, he followed Jemma through the ruins as if she led him on a string; her head down, silent, in mourning.

The air smelt… not so bad, Fitz thought. Part of him expected, at the sight, that it would smell of smoke and bodies and death, but it had been so long now that the golden glow of fall and the early rain had long since drowned that out. He could even smell coffee, from the cart that had set up in the corner of the quad, where a growing crowd was milling. This, at least, looked familiar.

(If one ignored the smashed and scattered statue of Peggy Carter that someone had covered with a white sheet.)

Without a word, Jemma led Fitz up to the dais. His attention was forced to the steps at his feet, and how bizarrely normal this all felt. For a moment, his mind jumped back – how long had it been? Nearly twenty years now? – to when he’d regularly stepped up on a similar stage to present all manner of things to the bright hearts and mind he shared these grounds with.

(For the first time in a long time, he wondered how many had been lost.)

“Fitz?”

Jemma’s voice – quiet, hesitant like a deer, and so unlike her – cracked through his reverie a little and Fitz looked toward her. She smiled weakly at him, her lips struggling not to quiver, and pointed over his shoulder.

“Could you get me some water, please?”

Fitz did, and when he returned, he found Jemma sitting on the edge of the dais, holding her head as if she had been overcome with dizziness. He passed her the water, and brushed back her hair, and she straightened a little, pulling herself together; determined to push through this with sheer force of will.

“Are you sure you’re ready for this?” Fitz asked. Jemma was prone to anxiety, but he had never known her to struggle so much with presentation. Of course, this was no ordinary presentation. The corners of her lips twitched, downwards, still trying to drag her toward tears, but she resisted.

“I came to visit after it happened, you know,“ she explained. “Right after the Fall. After the Pod. While you were still…” She shook her head. “It was so much worse then. There was- there was blood. And bodies. Our teachers, our students, they just—“
She made a gesture as if to say that they’d covered the ground, and sniffed, and her whole body trembled all of a sudden. Fitz grasped her hand, tightly, as tightly as he wished he could have the first time she saw the destruction here; so fresh, he could hardly imagine it. He yearned to embrace her properly, but he knew she would resist, so he simply held.

“Didn’t even find Weaver,” Jemma continued. “I thought she was dead until- you know, later. The level of brutality, Fitz, I’ve never seen anything like it. Not with my own eyes.”

Fitz hummed gently, assuringly, but his stomach churned. She’d seen a lot, and she was not prone to hyperbole.

“I wasn’t expecting t- to still be feeling it,” she explained. “But when I stepped up here, I don’t know… I felt this cold wind. It’s like we’re standing in a graveyard.”

“Well,” Fitz pointed out, “isn’t that why we’re here?”

Jemma tilted her head; studying him for a moment, thoughtfully. She drew a deep breath and looked around at the milling crowd; Coulson and May and Weaver and Hill, and a few more teachers and students that she’d forgotten the names of, or didn’t recognise anymore after so long. Fury, she hoped, and Steve Rogers would be here before the presentation itself. And Daisy, of course. Daisy would come too. From the ashes, they had risen – limply, at first, but they had. And they had struggled to rebuild their ranks with all their infrastructure and teachers and students cut out from under them. On that, Hydra had run a brutal – but brutally successful – campaign.

Or had they?

(Shethought of Turgeon, for a minute, and clenched her fist so strongly that it crumpled the water bottle. The people he had betrayed. The destruction with which he’d bought his freedom. A scalding hot flash of fury told her she did not regret what she’d done to him.)

Fitz, of course, had softer motives. More inspiring ones, about recovery and growth and looking toward the future.

But Jemma, who knew what it meant where patches of bright grass and new trees flourished – who knew that biologists would be able to find signs of what had happened here for thousands of years – who knew what had been attempted here, and that it had failed, felt an unbreakable, spiteful strength grow at her core. She held her chin high, and got to her feet, and this time when she climbed the dais steps, there was weight and purpose in her stride.

Fitz took a deep breath and followed, holding his reasons to himself but glad to see Jemma’s spark return. If he were being honest he was still reeling a little from a day so far seeped in solemnity, nostalgia, shock and mourning. The heart was willing to take the burden of this presentation of Jemma, but the body and the mind were still drifting somewhere else in space and time. To ground himself, he searched for familiarity, until he found Daisy – and not far behind her, none other than Steve Rogers – making her way through the crowd, greeting and handshaking and sharing in the pain and the hope that intermingled here.

And then he heard Jemma’s voice, and the silence that fell around them, as if the very school itself was waiting for her. Trusting her.

“If – If I may have your attention,” Jemma started. The crowd blinked up at her expectantly, and Jemma took a deep breath. This was the point she would make it or break it: forget everything and flee the stage, or step forward, into the light.
In the crowd, Weaver stood tall, as if reminding her to do so as well.

Daisy gave her the tiniest of smiles: a moment of encouragement amongst a heavy mood.

Fitz stepped closer in behind her, the weight of his presence steadying the dizzying air. She could reach out to him if she had to. None here would judge her too harshly. But it was enough to have him standing there - to have them all before her, reminders of their survival.

And just like that, the fear and the despair, the anger and the spite, and the pride and all the love she had for this place all blended into one. She was standing on a graveyard, yes, but she was also standing on the place that had been her home when she was homesick. That had been her inspiration. That had been her beginning, on a trajectory that she had never seen coming but that had led her to the life she led now; a life that she wouldn’t trade for the world – and she could say that for a fact.

So yes, she was standing on a place of death and destruction, but also – now – a place of infinite possibility. Whether one was to take the hard line, as she was inclined, to rub Shield’s cockroach-like survival in Hydra’s rapidly dwindling face… or whether they might be inclined to Fitz’s more wholesome messaging of moving forward in knowledge and peace… She could raise leaders here. As she was raised here, and as those before her were raised here.

She would raise heroes here.

Jemma cleared her throat and began again.

“My name is Jemma Simmons,” she said, “and I am an Agent of Shield.”
Fluff.

Chapter Notes

Prompt: Light
Jewish FitzSimmons celebrate their first Hannukah on the Bus. Set S1.

“Blu-Tack, as requested,” Jemma announced, nudging her way into Fitz’s room.

It was hardly a room really – more like a cabin, which she supposed was its technical name, given that this was a plane – but that was not so bad. It was cozy, especially with the handful of personal belongings that Fitz had brought along. As little room as she’d had in her case, Jemma was starting to wish that she’d brought along more. Instead, she studied Fitz’s collection: a photo frame, a Rubix cube, and a menorah barely larger than a pop tart lay on his bedsheets, awaiting his attention. While he busied himself setting up a miniature Tardis on his bookshelf, Jemma picked up the menorah and examined the handiwork of its arms, until Fitz turned back to her and saw what she was holding.

“I know we can’t light it in here,” he said, “but Mum gave it to me before I moved out here and I couldn’t just leave it behind.”

“No, I think it’s sweet,” Jemma assured him, and sighed wistfully. “I sort of wish I’d brought mine, actually. You know, this is going to be my first Hannukah without real flames? It’s kind of a shame really.”

“I’m sure we could get Coulson to stop off for a quick synagogue visit,” Fitz suggested. “I mean hey, we could probably fly this thing to Israel no questions asked.”

Jemma snorted. “We’re going to be busy, Fitz, I’m sure Coulson doesn’t want to waste the fuel to land and take-off eight days in a row. We’ll just have to set up a row of Bunsen burners in an isolation chamber or something. I’m sure we’ll figure it out.”

“Actually, I am working on a little something,” Fitz offered. “Still no real fire, unfortunately, but I think I’ll have it ready in time.”

“Assuming the world doesn’t blow up between now and then,” Jemma added.

“Pooh, pooh, pooh,” Fitz interrupted. “Don’t jinx it!”

“Ugh, Fitz,” Jemma snorted, and rolled her eyes. “Don’t be ridiculous.”

The world did come surprisingly close to blowing up after all – for them, anyway – but didn’t quite altogether tumble off a precipice. Nevertheless, Jemma was hidden away in her cabin, curled up with a book when Hannukah finally came and Fitz knocked on her door.

“Hey,” he greeted when she opened it, hands behind his back. Jemma frowned curiously.

“Hey,” she returned, and stepped aside to let him in. “What brings you to my humble abode at this
“It’s Hannukah!” Fitz reminded her, and revealed the hannukiyah that he had been carrying. It was a lot larger than his personal menorah – closer to the size of a pillow than a pop-tart – and Jemma noticed thin black wires dangling from it. Her frown depended.

“What are you doing?” she wondered. “You know when they say no open flames, they mean it, right? This is a pressurised cabin.”

“Simmons,” Fitz scoffed. “I have a degree in how not to blow up planes. I think I’ve got it covered.”

“I thought you hated being up here?” Jemma pointed out. “What happened to dreams of a nice safe, indoor, non-mobile lab?”

“Still the dream,” Fitz clarified. “But in the meantime, I have this. Where can I put it? My arm’s getting tired.”

Jemma cleared a space on her desk, and then watched Fitz as he set up the hannukiyah. The black wires, she now noticed, led from each arm downward where they congregated and attached to a fist-sized black box.

“Now, the artistry is a little rough,” Fitz excused, “I was short on time, because of the whole world-blowing-up and all, but here we are. All eight arms and this –” he waved the black box at Jemma – “is our shammash. Would you like to do the honours?”

Taking care that the cords were not tangled, Fitz took the box back to Jemma and handed it over. Jemma smiled. They had no fried food, no dreidel, no chocolate coins – although, that last one might be worth a double check in Coulson’s, Skye’s or Fitz’s secret stash – but they did have this: each other, and the light.

Jemma pressed the first button, and the leftmost ‘candle’ flickered to life.
At first, Jemma thinks she’s imagining it.

The way Fitz glances sometimes, a little frantic, over his shoulder or out the corner of his eye at nothing. The way he mutters to himself, words too quiet and mashed together for her to understand. The way he hums whenever there is silence, as if he’s trying to drown something out without making a sound louder than breathing.

It's when he starts bringing other people into it that she starts to believe it.

In the middle of a meeting he’ll nudge Mack and quietly ask: “Can you hear that?” He points in some direction, as if they should expect a sound, and there’s nothing out of the ordinary. He passes Skye in the hall, alarmed, and stops her. He asks: “Are you hurt?” and most of the time she says no, except when she says “only here, and here,” and shows him. He’ll be standing in the kitchen with May and turn green and say, “Can you see that?” She reassures him that the kitchen is clean, that his food looks good and safe to eat. It doesn’t always give him back his appetite. But it does make Jemma frown and wonder; what is he seeing, or expecting to see? What is this ritual the others seem to be in on, that she is apart from? Of course, some people answer, “see what?” “hear what?” to his questions and that seems to serve Fitz’s purpose, albeit in a less sensitive way, but still Jemma wonders – what purpose, exactly, is that? Why does it seem to be such a secret?

Why does she feel the need to study it all, instead of doing the most straightforward thing and simply asking Fitz himself?

They’ve come a long way since the pain of restarting when she’d come back, but there is still a lot they’re not telling each other. There is a difference in the way they move around each other now, like cogs that are missing teeth, and if she’s being honest Jemma knows that’s why she hasn’t raised it yet. She’s been happy to believe she’s making something out of nothing, seeing patterns that aren’t there, because if it’s really happening then it really matters. If it’s really happening then Fitz isn’t telling her about it for a reason and that reason, she suspects, is the same reason she hasn’t asked. They’re both trying to push forward, and not poke too much at the wounds they’ve left behind, for fear of making them fester. But if they’re really ever going to heal, they need to reach out to each other. He needs to tell her. She needs to listen. That – that is the pact they should have made, the minute she walked through the door, but neither of them had quite had the guts.

In fairness to them both though, they’d never really had the need before now. Working for communication is a new feeling, and a slow and sluggish one at that. The air is heavy with silences that once were effortlessly filled. Jemma waits at the kitchen counter, intentionally taking a long time to slog through her muesli, building up the courage to ask questions that once would have fallen – perhaps even a little too easily – from her lips. She watches Fitz make tea and decides to start with an easy one.
"Would you mind-?"

"Oh. Sure."

He’s avoiding her eyes as he sets up her cup and teabag next to his. He feels her question boring through him. But he also feels the inevitability of this moment. He used to tell Jemma everything; it was only a matter of time before this made it onto the list. He wonders how she’ll react – if she’ll want to fix him – if she’ll wonder why he needs other people to reality check him instead of somehow doing it himself. She’s always been a bit of a bootstrapper when it comes to mental health, even when it wears on her, like now. She’s frayed around the edges and he doesn’t want to put anything more on her, by telling her about this. She’ll probably assume it’s her fault, especially since it didn’t get really bad until she left. Then again, a little part of him longs for the ferocity of her protection. To have her fight his demons and feel safe. To show her afterward, after whatever she can fight is down, that he understands she only meant to love him when she left. Layers and layers and layers of thoughts and feelings wrap themselves around his silence and Fitz finds himself just as undecided as ever. The words to tell her are on the tip of his tongue, but with every passing second he feels them wavering, as any second now they’re going to fall back down his throat to their miserable safety.

But then.

“Tell me, Fitz, are you seeing things?”

The words spill out of her lips in a rush and her eyes are fixed on him as if she knows she’ll drop the subject if she lets herself look away. She asks as soon as she has her hands wrapped around the teacup, so that she has something to clench in her unbending anxiety, and soldier on.

“Hearing things?” she presses. “Hallucinating?”

“I – Y-Yeah.”

Whatever words he had are gone; lost in the face of her trembling voice, as if she’s almost as scared of this as he once was.

“It’s alright, really,” he offers. “Most of them aren’t too bad anymore.”

She nods a little, and reminds him of a rabbit. Has he only added to her fear? Had she perhaps not considered that some of his hallucinations had been gruesome, before? Or, is it just the shock and horror of having her suspicions to that effect confirmed?

“Some of them are even nice,” Fitz continues. “I hallucinated a tortoise in the lab the other day. Almost had me convinced we’d adopted one. Maybe we should.”

He wishes she would laugh. Smile, even. Do something to alleviate the quivering tension that refuses to disperse. At least her shock seems to be wearing off; there’s more alertness in her eyes and he can see her analysing, even as she blinks back tears.

“When-“ she ventures, and pauses to swallow. “When I came back and you asked if it was me. Was that because…”

“I saw you.” Fitz nods, confirming. “Used to see you quite a lot, actually, but she’s gone now. Since you came back.”

“Oh.” Jemma is unsure whether or not she should find this comforting. Fitz, if he’s being honest, feels much the same.
“You weren’t- You weren’t one of the bad ones, if that makes you feel any better,” Fitz explains. “I just missed you, and I guess my brain… made its own version of you. I still needed you, even when you left. ‘Specially when you left.”

He ducks his head. There’s not a word of a lie to what he’s saying, but the way the rage lashes up inside him at the memory of what it felt like to realise he’d been lied to, to realise she’d abandoned him, it makes him feel malicious. For a moment, he wants her to feel as bad as he felt, but he swallows it down. He’s sure, in one way or another, she already has.

“I’m sorry,” Jemma says softly.

“I know,” Fitz says. “I just wish you hadn’t.”

“Me too,” Jemma agrees. “I wish I’d trusted you.”

“It’s okay.” Fitz assures her. “I didn’t even really trust myself. That’s – that’s kinda what she was for. Keep an eye on the other hallucinations. Tell me to stop being a ninny when I got too paranoid or depressed. That sorta thing.”

“And you think… I do that now?” Jemma frowns, confused. Of course she’s been trying to help, but not successfully. Not so far.

Fitz shrugs. “It’s lots of things. You’re back. Mack’s helping me with stuff. I’m talking more to other, you know, real… real people. Trying not to let myself make up what they think about me in my head.”

“Well, that’s good.”

“Got better medication now too. It helps. Coulson said you did a lot of research to tell him what to look for, so, thanks.”

“Good, I’m glad. You’re welcome.” Jemma nods again. She thinks of saying something else but swallows it down until she realises that, here and now, they’re having one of the longest and most open conversations they’ve managed since Before. So she takes a deep breath and pulls the words slowly back up from their depths.

“You know I- I only wanted to help, Fitz. I didn’t know what you wanted, before. I didn’t mean to come on so strong. I just wanted you to get better. I wasn’t really willing to listen to what that meant for you and I’m sorry.”

“Thanks for saying that, Jemma.” Fitz nods. He can see the effort it’s taken to lay that out, and in response, he feels the bitterness, the lashing rage, leach away a little. “I’m sorry I- I wasn’t really patient with you either. I was so frustrated with myself and my problems I kinda expected you to read my mind sometimes. I guess I just thought…“

“That if we wanted it enough it would go back to the way it was before?”

Jemma tilts her head, and a soft and sympathetic smile touches her lips. It’s a sad smile, one that means letting go of something good, but Fitz finds himself mimicking it nonetheless.

“I know, I know we can’t do that,” he continues. “I don’t even really want that anymore. But I’m going to try to be more patient.”

“Okay. I’m going to listen more. To you, to Skye…”
“Thank you.”

Strangers bustle into the kitchen then, and Fitz and Simmons fall silent. But this time it’s not a silence of awkward hesitation, of failure and fear, of inadequacy and judgment. It’s a silence that speaks to a truth only they know, that pays tribute to the moment they’ve just shared and the fact that hungry strangers can’t invade it.

It’s a silence of healing, one step at a time.
Hurt/Comfort/Fluff.

Chapter Notes

Prompt: "dancing in the dark with you between my arms".
or; The second time they get married, it's even better than the first.

Set in the future (of the show, not like Lighthouse-future). Contains vague spoilers for 5x22. Sort of a fix-it fic, in the emotional rather than literal sense of the word.
Hurt/comfort/fluff. Rated G/T.

The second time they get married, it is even better than the first. Jemma could hardly have imagined it, but in hindsight it’s not difficult to see how: being out of the firing line, out of the pressure of saving the world, out of the string of nightmares that have plagued them for so long, it puts a spring in both their steps and allows them to take the time they need, to make this day all that they have wanted for so long. It’s no wonder it turns out all but perfect.

They keep their favourite parts from the first time around, of course, or at least variations on a theme. They get married at the edge of a brook at the back of a cottage in Perthshire, whose yard tumbles into their own little forest. Jemma waits by the water and May takes Coulson’s place, pride in her eyes. The dress is different, which is a bit of a shame, but Jemma sticks to the vintage cut, smiling at the thought of showing off her classic beauty. A bouquet of gardenia and hyacinth and lilac spills out over her hands, and tears prick at her eyes as she remembers lovingly weaving forget-me-nots into it by hand. This is, after all, for every version of Fitz. The one who is gone, and the one who is making his way down the makeshift aisle, in a proper tuxedo, with purple lilac in his lapel and his tie. It is the colour of first love, and it is the colour of the sky as the sun sets around them. It is the colour of all that Jemma wants in this world.

And it stays, as the evening rolls gently on. The yard becomes bathed in it as Mack does a reading and Daisy a little speech and as May introduces the formalities. They’re short and sweet but they take their time, as if tonight is their own private fairytale. Their escape, their reward for all that they’ve been through. To avoid tempting fate they dodge mentions of eternity, of time and space – anything but the classic in sickness and in health. Until death do us part.

They smile sadly at each other. Death has parted them, death has brought them together again. Death is woven into their story like its own golden thread. But it does not stop them. If anything, it makes them clasp each other’s hands a little tighter as those long-awaited words finally arrive.

I now declare you husband and wife.

They kiss, and their dearest friends in the universe are there to clap. Jemma throws the bouquet and of course, Elena catches it, and there’s much laughter and wolf whistling and heart-eyes to be had. Fitz acts like an old man, teasing Mack and Elena as if they are young lovers. Elena scoffs and Mack rolls his eyes and Jemma laughs as she watches them bicker and banter. Even May is smiling, looking on. Jemma glances about for Daisy, realising that her jibes haven’t cut into conversation for a few seconds now – and finds her, tramping back down the grassy hill in her matching lilac dress with speakers hoisted under her arm.

“Attention everyone!” she calls. “If the happy couple don’t mind me interrupting – you don’t, you
know you love it – I’d like to call them up to the dance floor for a little tradition that was rudely interrupted last time round. Welcome, everyone, to the very first dance of the one, the only, Mr and Mrs FitzSimmons.”

The laughter, the bickering dies down as everyone makes way for FitzSimmons. There is no official ‘floor’, but they find a space where they can dance. It’s nothing special, they haven’t rehearsed, just a simple snowball. A sigh of relief after a lifetime of trouble, as a warbling voice sings in the background of a pure, wholesome, everlasting love.

“You know,” Fitz muses quietly. “I asked Coulson if I should do it. Before all this. I wasn’t sure if it’d be…” He trails off. Appropriate? Worth it? He can barely think such thoughts, so light – for once – is the feeling in his heart.

“Coulson was there the first time too,” Jemma reminds him. “He said that symbols are important. Symbols of commitment. Symbols of hope. He- he even joked that he shouldn’t make too much of a speech in case… well, in case this happened, I suppose. It seems our bad luck is something of a running joke.”

“Well then,” Fitz returns, “so must our good luck. Right?”

He laces his fingers in between Jemma’s, the same ring on his finger. It’s a little different though, because inside both their bands they have an engraving, a tiny little symbol of eternity against their skin, each carved there by the other, to be a constant, private reminder. They hold up their hands, rings glinting soft and silver together in the light, and take a moment to pay tribute to the giants on whose shoulders they now stand. To their lost friends, to their trauma, to their own undying perseverance and love.

_Love._

They haven’t talked about the future, and for a moment it almost feels like they should. Like they are finally safe to make plans, so they should make as many as they can before the moment passes.

And then the desire passes, but the moment does not, and they realise what safety might actually be like. What it means. Taking time. It’s going to be a long lesson, they’re going to have to learn it over and over again, but as far as lessons go it’s not the worst.

Jemma could get used to this, she thinks, as Fitz pulls her closer and she lets her head fall against his chest. She closes her eyes, counting his heartbeat – it’s still fast, he’s still nervous, the poor sweet man – as she lets all other measures of time, of reality, stretch and bend around them. As they twirl together slowly, like falling autumn leaves into the night, she takes a deep breath of lilac scented air.

It smells like home.
Chapter 32

When Fitz arrived home to his and Simmons’ shared apartment, he was lost in his own world, his mind awash with thoughts of his projects, his future, the things that people were saying behind his back. Taking his attention in particular this afternoon was a particularly enthusiastic kiss between two of his classmates - and the raucous laughter, and bawdy comments, it had earned from the rest of his peers.

Fortunately, Fitz’s thoughts were quickly turned from that cringeworthy experience, when he noticed Simmons rugged up in the lounge, watching a movie. It was the middle of the afternoon, and it was not particularly cold, and yet she had a thick, fleecy purple blanket swathed around her like a nest. For a moment he thought she must have somebody else in there, but there was no-one. An empty teacup and a sole saucer dotted with biscuit crumbs lay abandoned on the coffee table, and Fitz frowned. The weather was beautiful, and Simmons had always preferred to take her tea outside. She wasn’t even watching a film for class, Fitz confirmed, as familiar dialogue triggered a recognition in his ears.

“Legally Blonde?” Fitz wondered, strolling into the room.

Simmons looked up at him with a sullen expression, and gestured vaguely at the television.

“I was in the mood for it. Did you want the telly?”

“No, it’s okay.”

Absently, Fitz came to sit by Simmons on the couch. He slung his bag off over his shoulder, and she scooped her blanket aside to make room. Fitz eyed the hand-knitted beanie she was wearing - purple, white, grey, and black, - and his unsettled feeling strengthened. Those were odd colours for a beanie… and odd at all to be wearing one in the middle of spring… and yet, he recognised it. Did she, perhaps, for the same reason?

“Why Legally Blonde?”

“I wanted a rom-com without the romance.”

“So… a comedy?”

“No. It’s more specific than that.”

Fitz stared flatly at her. He loved Legally Blonde as much as the next person, but surely something was either a rom com or it was not. And perhaps, on a different day, she would have taken him to task over his needlessly petulant challenge, but today she rolled her eyes and huffed, and summarised:
“I don’t know the official terminology. It’s a comfort film, okay?”

She locked her eyes firmly back on the screen, almost glaring at it, putting up a wall between herself and Fitz. It was not as if he, romantic sap that he was, could understand, right?

But Fitz’s observations were beginning to piece together. Simmons’ unusual behaviour. The colours of her beanie. Her choice of comfort movie - and her choice of words, to describe it. Alone, each little piece did not mean much, but together, it wasn’t nothing, and driving it all was this feeling... He wondered.

For a moment, the confession balanced on the end of his tongue. Simmons could be as cutting as she was firm when she didn’t believe in something. But this feeling...

Fitz cleared his throat, and let his eyes wander to the screen too as he slowly dipped his toe into The Conversation.

“You know… Brandy and Liam made out today. He asked her to the formal, I guess, and the whole class went wild. I was sort of sitting there like, ew, you know? I mean I’m happy you’re happy or whatever, sure, but did you have to stick your tongue all the way down her throat?”

Simmons snorted, trying and failing to laugh as she though she realised the bridge Fitz was trying to cross here. Fitz watched with bated breath as her fingers traced and plucked at a few threads on the blanket… as though summoning the courage to join him.

“I had sex today.”

Fitz blinked, not sure what to do with this information. Especially not when she said it in that tone. Not sad exactly, just a bit - sort of - tired? What was that? Oh, no, it wasn’t-

“It wasn’t my first time, or anything,” Simmons assured him. “And Ellis was perfectly well behaved, if not quite the gentleman. Nothing untoward happened. I just… I mean…”

She took a deep breath. The Coming Out breath. The words seemed to stick in her throat, and so Fitz stepped in with some words of his own.

“I’m ace,” he said, and Simmons sighed, the Coming Out breath bubbling into relieved - if slightly hysterical - laughter.

“So you understand!” she cried, a smile spreading across her face for a moment before it dampened again. “To be honest, it wasn’t the sex that bothered me, really. Poor Ellis was well up to the task and it was not a bad way to expend some energy this morning. It was after that, we were studying the pathology of sexual disorders today. Put quite the cloud over the whole experience, and some others besides. It got me thinking, and thinking got me spiralling, and well - here I am.”

Simmons gestured at the rug and the empty tea as if it betrayed much more of an unravelled disaster than Fitz would have guessed. He sighed in commiseration and gathered some of the blanket for himself, shuffling close enough to offer Simmons his arm. She cuddled into his side, pouting, and for a moment indulging in feeling sorry for herself.

“Well, personally, I’ve never had sex,” Fitz explained, “but the overthinking? That part I definitely understand.”

“You’ve never had sex?” Jemma wondered.

Fitz rolled his eyes. “Oh, don’t you start.”
“I’m sorry,” Simmons apologised, “I just didn’t picture you as - I don’t know. The Type.”

“The Type?” Fitz retorted. “Last week you called me a prude! ‘The biggest prude you’d ever heard’ were the words you used, I believe.”

“I believe I said you were the biggest prude I’d ever seen,” Simmons corrected him, “but you can be a prude and still like sex. I’d have thought you’d quite like it, in the right circumstances. Plan the perfect date. Light some candles. Show your lady you love her - that kind of thing. You may be a prude, but you’re certainly a romantic. Too romantic to be ace, or so I’d thought.”

“You want to talk about ace types?” Fitz challenged. “Ellis has got to be what, the fourth guy this Semester? I’d have never picked you for ace. You like sex too much.”

Simmons shrugged. “No more than anything else. I’d just as soon watch a quality film, or go on a hike, or something.”

“There we have it, then.”

“I guess we do.”

Fitz caught himself smiling as Simmons’ eyes lingered, her expression softening with this new shared understanding. He had known for a long time he’d found a kindred spirit in her, but apparently the universe wasn’t yet done with showing him all the ways they would fit with each other. Simmons was maybe even blushing a little, but she teased -

“So does this mean you’ll come on a hike with me?”

“Ha. Please.” Fitz scoffed, and reached for the remote. “I do like the sounds of watching a quality film though.”

“Hey, I’m watching this to the end!” Simmons insisted, trying to snatch the remote back and failing as Fitz’s long arm held it out of reach.

“I never said I was changing the disc,” he clarified smugly, pressing the back button a couple of times. “Where were we up to before I came in?”

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