Predation

by hiddenlongings

Summary

The BAU is hot on the trail of a violent serial killer. In a small town another body has been found and the only help that they expect the local law enforcement to provide is office space and a shoddy wifi connection. But Sheriff Ellison is far from the small town man they were expecting and soon the hunt for the killer becomes far too personal.
Hello all. Just a friendly warning the only police procedure that I know comes from TV shows and is thus probably laughably wrong wrong wrong. I am aware of this but I really hope you'll bear with me.

‘The Sentinel’ and ‘Criminal Minds’ are two very different kinds of crime dramas and trying to make them both fit in the same world was a challenge and a pleasure. This means that both of the universes have been bent (But not broken!) a little and they should be regarded as AU’s of their respective worlds.

‘The Sentinel’ veers off of its’ original course around the second season and never looks back. ‘Criminal Minds’ can probably be considered canon up to the point of Season 3 and doesn’t leap too far into the unknown. It would be super helpful if you had seen at least a couple of episodes from each show but hopefully I’ve explained everything enough that it’s not completely necessary.

Another warning is that this story has taken me over four years to complete so if you see any continuity errors please message me so that I can fix them. If you notice a difference in the way I write I can only hope that it is for the better.

If you have any questions feel free to PM me and I’ll try to answer them.

Let the insanity begin!

End A/N
Jim hadn’t even been on duty; all the man had wanted to do was relax on one of his rare days off. Maybe pick up some Wonderburger out of sight of his health conscious roommate. He had just stepped out of his apartment when his sensitive ears picked up the normally calm voice of the college kid that worked at the gas station two blocks down the street. The light tenor was anything but calm at this point.

“Come on now,” the twenty year old said shakily. “Nobody needs to get hurt, let the girl go.”

“Where’s the rest of it? Where’s the rest of the money? I need it man.” The voice was nervous and shaky. Jim didn’t even have the satisfaction of knowing if the wannabe robber was going through withdrawal symptoms that were likely to make him snap.

“We only keep a hundred bucks in the register man, and the safe is on a security timer. It won’t open up for anybody until midnight; there isn’t any more money. Please just let her go, she hasn’t done anything to you.

Jim’s face went from relaxed calm to the focused gaze of a predator as he started trotting down the street. The gas station only took a minute or so to get to, even on foot, but if he didn’t want to spook the obviously scared kid he’d have to come in through the back room.

Pulling his cell phone out of his pocket, Jim dialed 911 quickly. Raising the phone to his ear, Jim gave the responding officer all of the information that he knew. Not wanting to risk having something happen to the hostage if he waited, Jim ignored the command that he stay well clear of the situation.

As the stand off continued the robber would get more and more stressed and if Jim didn’t provide a distraction soon somebody was likely to end up dead.

So far the girl hadn’t said anything, but as he got closer and closer to the gas station, Jim started to pick up her sobbing breaths. She was gasping desperately. Trying to stay still while she was held hostage with some sort of weapon. When he got close enough Jim picked up a rapid-fire fourth heartbeat.

Jim cursed under his breath and picked up speed, the woman was pregnant.

When he finally reached the back entry into the gas station Jim slipped through the unlocked door silently and entered into the small storage area where the cleaning supplies and trash were kept.

Stepping out of the storeroom and into the back part of the store, Jim slipped silently down the aisles. Crouching low to keep his head beneath the shelves and away from the bubble mirror. He had to get as close as possible without being seen.

Jim’s first sight of the robber was of a slender back. A glint of metal peeked through the space between the tall man’s shoulder and the young woman’s shivering head.

The glimpse was enough for Jim to recognize a small handgun, the gas station attendants eyes widened when he caught sight of the man he recognized as the cop who lived down the street.

Breaking into a sprint Jim bulldozed towards the stranger as quickly as he could.

Catching the change in expression, the man turned on his heel, just in time for his chin to meet Jim’s rock hard fist. The punch was vicious enough that he released his already loosened grip on the young, heavily pregnant woman. Who had the presence of mind to scramble out the door as quickly as she could, the gas attendant hard on her heels.
Jim hoped they'd get as far from the gas station as possible, because dazed or not the kid in front of him was high enough on adrenaline that the blow hadn't managed to knock him out and his grip was as tight as ever on the butt of the small gun. If he managed to kill Jim there was no telling what the man would do.

Shaking his throbbing head like a stunned grizzly the man attempted to regain his bearings. Jim didn’t give him the chance. With a flying tackle Jim managed to knock the younger man off of his feet, they grappled on the floor for several tense moments. Jim scrabbled desperately for the gun, fingers slipping off the sweat slick metal as he tried to keep the furiously struggling man underneath him.

He managed to keep the gun from pointing at his head, but even as he grabbed the skinny wrist in a desperate attempt to twist the gun out of his hand, the younger mans fingers tightened spasmodically on the trigger and the gun went off with a crack.

Directly into the top of Jim’s right kneecap.

Jim’s vision receded to near blackness as the pain of the injury hit him like a lightning bolt. The kid managed to slide out from under Jim as he writhed in pain unable to concentrate on anything else. The kids’ eyes were wide and frightened as he caught sight of the damage that he had caused.

Blood and cartilage were splattered across the floor and Jim’s knee was a gory ruin. Dropping the gun like it had bitten him, the kid turned again, though whether to make a run for it or to call for help would remain a mystery. He ran out of the door directly into the waiting arms of two uniformed cops.

His broken babbling was garbled but they had seen enough of the inside of the gas station to know that an ambulance needed to be called immediately.

While his partner cuffed the now sobbing young man, the other cop ran into the station hoping that he’d be able to at least slow down the bleeding until the ambulance arrived.

Kneeling at the fallen mans’ side, the middle-aged cop tried to see where the bullet had entered the guys body. When he caught sight of the pale face, the cops’ eyes bulged in shocked recognition.

“Jesus Christ. Ellison?”

Hearing the vaguely familiar voice Jim wanted to uncurl from his fetal position but the sudden respite of backup arriving was too much and he released his hold on consciousness, greeting the painless dark with relief.

The first thing Jim heard as he regained consciousness was the slow beeping of the heart rate monitor, but he quickly shoved that into the background and wrapped every sense he could muster around the most soothing sound in the world.

His partner was sleeping in the uncomfortable looking chair next to his bed. Long curly hair lay in unwashed knots around the beloved face, tension filled even in sleep. Jim thought he had never been so happy to see Blair’s face.

Jesus how long had he been out? Shifting his weight, to try and get closer to his sleeping roommate, Jim felt the curious numbness of his body that meant he was on heavy-duty painkillers.

Eyes widening in panic, Jim scrabbled with uncooperative fingers to pull the blanket off of his legs. The sight that met his eyes made him give an unconscious sob of distress.
His leg was at least still there, the doctors hadn’t been forced to amputate, but Jim could see even through the inches of bandages and cast around his leg that his kneecap wasn’t whole. A feeling of emptiness seemed to erupt in Jim’s soul. His job was gone; his duties as a Sentinel of the Great City were beyond him.

The only reason he hadn't eaten his gun the moment he had been released from the hospital was even now bouncing into his office.

Blair Sandburg had lived a life that promoted a high tolerance for change, as well as quick decision-making. Stepping into the loft and seeing his friend with the muzzle of a gun between his lips, Blair made the quickest of his life.

He didn't yell or try to wrench the weapon away from Jim, instead --

Blair gently closed the door behind him. Not moving any closer to his overwrought partner settled gently onto the floor in a cross legged position that wouldn't give him enough time to regain his feet if Jim pulled the trigger.

Silent tears rolled down Jim's cheeks as he realized that if he wanted to take his own life he would have to do it in front of the man he had loved for what seemed like an eternity.

Blair watched him steadily for nearly a minute before finally speaking.

"I never took you for a coward."

Jim flinched violently but still couldn't make himself meet the steady blue of his partner’s gaze, but he refused to remove the gun from his mouth.

"I think your one of the bravest men I've ever met. Always willing to put your life on the line in defense of others. Just because you can no longer perform your duties, as a Cascade Police Officer does not mean that your usefulness has ended. You are still a Sentinel."

This statement finally pulled the muzzle away from direct contact with Jim's lips though it was still pointed steadily at his head.

"A lot of fucking good that did me, huh Blair? I Sentinel of the Great City managed to get shot in the knee while trying to take down a scared kid with a gun. He should have shot me in the head, the end result is likely going to be the same."

"Bullshit man, I don't know if you've noticed or not but you still breathing means that kid is still breathing, because if he had killed you I don't think he would have made it out of that situation alive. The only way to help people, to protect them, is to keep breathing. If that's not enough to stop you maybe this will if you kill yourself I won't make it."

"Blair..."

"NO, Jim, hear me, I will not make it! I wouldn't want to, I've never been as brave, as strong as you."

Blair buried his face in his hands, muffled sobs hitting Jim's sensitive ears like gunshots.

Finally placing the gun on the end table, his hand reluctantly parting from the handle, Jim dragged himself out of the wheelchair that he would be confined to for at least another six months before he could even attempt to walk.
Letting his injured leg drag painfully behind him, he finally reached his Guide’s side.

Before he could even touch Blair, Jim found himself flat on his back, with Blair straddling his hips and snarling angrily into his face.

"You can't leave me. You can't. Not before...before I tell you..."

"Tell me what Blair? " Jim's body was shaking both from pain and from the shock of having his apathy so abruptly stolen from him, but if anyone could pull him away from his own selfishness it was the smaller man pinning him to the ground.

All it would take was a single blow and Jim knew he could be freed from the desperate grip, but he had a feeling that he had hurt Blair more than enough in the last few months. It was time to quit striking out at the man who could brighten even his worst days with a single smile and murmured comfort.

Blair leaned down, tucking his head underneath Jim's chin. He inhaled deeply trying desperately to ingrain the warm woody scent into his memory.

Jim slowly relaxed into Blair's loosening grip, which had gone from restraining to protecting.

"I love you, Jim."

Only a Sentinel would have heard the double thump that Blair's heart made as he relinquished the secret he had held in his heart for the past six months as he learned how to balance all of the facets of his life.

He had ceased working on the dissertation, and now that Jim was going to be physically impaired for life, Blair had every intention of leaving Rainier behind.

He did so not because he felt pity for Jim, but because of his growing desire to protect the man from anything that could possibly harm him. Although he admitted that sometimes his presence alone was enough to get the big man shot at.

His test subject, his Holy Grail, was a man and nothing more. Sure he could be larger than life, but he wasn't immortal or invincible. All he was, was Jim.

A man who absolutely believed that food put in Tupperware should be color coded by date. A man who desperately needed to get away from the city that had taken everything from him, even as he tried to shore up it's defenses in a never ending battle.

Jim had thought that he was well past the point of being stunned into silence by his partner and in fact it only took him about thirty seconds to come up with the proper response.

"...The hell? Blair"

Well maybe proper was taking it several levels too far. Luckily Blair spoke several languages including Ellison and was able to read the hope underneath the frozen shock and answer the unasked questions that piled up behind his immobile tongue.

"I love you. Jim Ellison because your perfect for me. You're a neat freak. I'm a slob. You keep your emotions locked down until they explode." This said with a meaningful glance at the forgotten gun. "Whereas I have, as you have said before, absolutely no shame and have been known to throw inappropriate emotions about at funerals. We balance each other out. You cannot tell me that we aren't perfect for each other because I know it."
With those final words Blair sealed his lips against Jim's. For one terrifying instant Jim was frozen as his mind scrambled to catch up with this latest shock to his system, and then with a strangled growl he latched onto Blair's hair with both hands, twining his fingers through the silky strands that exploded off his partners head.

He forgot about the gun, he forgot about his leg, hell he forgot his name for the next twenty minutes. But he never forgot Blair Sandburg. His guide.

Exhaling deeply Jim pulled himself from the memory and smiled gently at his excitable lover.

The man who had given up everything for him, he deserved better but had chosen Jim.

Even now light seemed to shine from his eyes, as he chattered about one of his high school seniors.

The moment was broken as Connor's heartbeat suddenly skyrocketed and Jim was out the door before the deputy had hung up the phone, Sandburg directly on his heels.

"Sheriff, Silvia Summers’ boy has just been found in a ditch across from Mary’s Diner, he's dead sir."

Kiln and Stillson's attention snapped into focus as they waited to hear what their orders were.

"Alright, Connor, head over to the crime scene and put up some tape a hundred yards around the body in all directions. Leave the scene alone until I get there. Kiln, I need you to tell Ms. Summer what has happened to her son, she can identify her son's body officially later. Try to keep her calm and see about any enemies they might have had. If she’s up to it bring her to the station. Stillson, I need you to question whoever found the body as well as all of the diner's customers and then help Connor guard the crime scene."

As he calmly ordered the deputies to their respective tasks he seemed to gain inches in height and power to his voice. Giving the deputies a rare glimpse at the man he had been before his debilitating injury, and even as they quickly left, all three remembered the man they had met two years ago.

The previous sheriff had been a fixture in the town for his entire life. Born and raised in Madison, he had finally collapsed from heart failure during his fiftieth year as a police officer. The town council had thought it best to bring some new blood into the police department and had been delighted to receive Ellison's resume despite his injury.

All three of the deputies had been ready to deal with an arrogant city cop, who would override their ideas and treat them like morons, someone who hadn't been able to hack big city crimes and had fled for the hills. Instead they got Jim Ellison.

Before he came through the door they had heard the off-balance sound of two heavy-duty boots and a cane. As well as a much lighter set of feet matching the stride.

With the sun at his back all they could see for a moment was the silhouette of a tall, broad shouldered man leaning heavily on a cane.

When he came through the door they saw a gaunt face with blunt features, a slightly receding hairline, shockingly blue eyes, and deep grooves running down his face from a long lasting agony.

Although his frame was still powerful he had obviously lost at least fifty pounds, judging by the drape of the, now too big, shirt.

They were barely given a chance to focus on their new sheriff before a tornado in human form swept
into the room, snatched the best chair from the sheriff’s desk and placed it behind Ellison, before gently shoving the much bigger man into it.

Who scowled but made no true protest to the treatment as though he expected it, even though it bemused him.

Just as quickly as he had entered the room the curly haired man whirled out of it, pausing only long enough to accept the gentle pat from the new sheriff.

"I am Jim Ellison, I am your new sheriff. That was Hurricane Blair, aka Blair Sandburg. He will be a part time deputy and a full time teacher at the high school."

Faces started to stiffen into anger before he continued.

"I have never run a squad room or lived in a small town. So I’d say I have a lot to learn. Teach me."

Over the ensuing months, the three had watched him gain weight and muscle but the only time any form of happiness or humor came to his perpetually scowling face was when he was in the presence of his partner.

As he used his cane less and less the deputies had also begun to see the sheer physical presence of their new leader.

He had stepped into the middle of a bar brawl and after knocking a pair of heads together had halted the fight in its tracks. Most of the fighters had tried to slink away from the glower he had directed at them. None of the deputies would ever forget seeing six of the roughest men in town following the sheriff in a ragged line towards the jail.

Connor had, had the other two stifling guffaws when he muttered, "Ugliest bunch of ducklings I ever saw."

Sandburg was just as capable of controlling any situations that could arise; he always seemed to be in the middle of things during the truly spectacular moments.

Six inches shorter than his partner, in his own way Sandburg was more intense than Ellison. Once something gained his complete attention not much could sway the man from reaching whatever goal he had set for himself.

His eyes could pin both errant citizens and students to the floor as he brought all of his intelligence to bear on whatever wrongdoing they were participating in.

Although the pair was often separated by their respective jobs, when they were together and striving for a single goal, mountains would pick up and move aside for them.

Whenever they went on a camping trip, the three deputies would eagerly await their boss’s return, if Ellison didn’t share all of the fiascos, Blair was sure to.

But even as the months turned into years they knew almost nothing personal about them. Jim turned their offers of food and beer down gently, and Blair while friendly and perfectly capable of talking for hours was in his way as private as his partner.

The three of them had met for dinner and discussed the pair after they had lived in the town for several months and had shown no signs of leaving.

Eating at Mary’s Diner the three deputies munched quietly, Mary’s cherry pie deserved a moment of
silence. When they were finished it was Kiln who finally broke the silence.

“Have all of us read his file?”

Nods all around.

“What did ya’ll make of it?”

Connor spoke up this time; “He and Blair were local hero’s in Cascade until Ellison’s injury forced him to retire from the Major Crimes Unit.”

“Sandburg started the whole rise to glory thing though, Ellison was good but with Sandburg they became the best.”

“What did Sandburg do that was so amazing?” asked Kiln.

“Nobody could figure it out apparently, they had an almost 100% success rate, but while Sandburg helped other Departments they were never able to match the success again. In fact if anyone but Ellison took him into the field it was almost guaranteed that something spectacularly crazy happened. The man’s file has warning labels for god’s sake!”

“Yeah, well we’ve all seen how Blair attracts trouble.” added Stillson, “Ya’ll hear about last week. All he does is go to the bakery by himself and somehow he ends up on the school roof, holding a Cocker Spaniel and trying to keep from being killed by an ex-felon with a frozen salmon.”

“How is Rascal doing?”

“Great my niece really loves him.”

Connor brought the group back on target, “Okay but aside from what’s in the file what do we know?”

“Nothing,” huffed Stillson. “You start talking to Blair determined to ask him where he grew up and five minutes later you find yourself explaining why your own mother painted your bedroom paisley.”

“What!??”

“Personal example.” Sniffed Stillson.

“And who would be brave enough to ask the sheriff a personal question…other than Blair?”

The entire group flinched, when they tried to picture their new sheriff’s reaction to their nosiness.

As they headed out the door, Kiln’s puzzled voice asked. “How would your mother even paint paisley?”

Although the pair never verbally laid anything out, the deputies and the other town’s people assumed they were partners in every sense of the word.

At public events many found it amusing to listen to the pair as the normally taciturn sheriff cracked a sly joke or two at his partner’s expense.

Finally the deputies left the diner for home, their questions remained unanswered and they would probably remain that way for the foreseeable future.

The three went their separate ways, confident that they were each going where they could do the
most good.

After they had left the parking lot, Jim turned towards his patiently waiting lover and tried to hide the fierce excitement that raced through him, easier to hide it than explain it.

But with Blair he couldn’t do the first and didn’t have to do the second.

Blair led the way to his truck and offered him a casual shoulder to grab so he could easily pull himself into the cab without straining his leg.

It went without question that with such a major crime Blair’s part time status as a deputy became full time. The fact that it was thanksgiving vacation for him meant that he didn’t have to ask for time off of work, but he would have to hold off on writing several papers he had been meaning to publish for the past couple of months.
The expletive that Special Agent David Rossi let loose when he saw the broken body of Jason Summers was foul, creative, and nearly silent, no use freaking out the local LEO’s. Jason was the fifth murdered teenager in the last year and the kills were coming progressively closer together. The BAU had been chasing this killer for the last two weeks without success as they tried to find the killer of a boy several counties over.

Deputy Stillson gave him a sidelong look but otherwise didn’t move an inch. Two of the small town’s deputies had taken control of the crime scene with outward aplomb and had stopped any of the agents from entering the crime scene.

“The Sheriff doesn’t like his crime scenes disturbed by anyone.”

The man was apparently scarier than either their badges or their threats. The deputies tilted their heads in unison and seemed to straighten an extra inch as the powerful growl of a large truck came into hearing range beyond a small hill.

Sounded like the boss was coming.

When the blue truck came over the hill Rossi couldn’t see through the tinted windows so he waited impatiently for his first glimpse of Sheriff Ellison.

Both of his eyebrows inched towards his hairline when a short sturdy man climbed down from the passenger side and jogged to the drivers side, letting a well muscled arm grip his shoulder and lever the body attached to it to the ground.

Tall, good-looking, and not bothering to hide a nasty limp, Sheriff Ellison’s presence seemed to fill the surrounding area.

His shorter helper revealed himself to be another deputy although his curly ponytail set him at visual odds with the other three’s neatly trimmed hair. His uniform wasn’t as well worn as the others either, so he was either a new comer (unlikely considering how closely he was sticking to the Sheriff’s side) or he was not a full time deputy.

He seemed to be muttering to himself although Ellison’s tilted head suggested he heard it just fine.

The sheriff focused only briefly on the BAU before ducking underneath the tape, the curly haired man walked up to Hotchner, unerringly picking out the leader of their group, all the while keeping a cautious eye on the sheriff.

The friendly smile and outstretched hand marked him as the probable liaison officer between the two law enforcement groups.

“ ‘lo folks, I’m Deputy Sandburg, you’ve met Connor and Stillson that’s Sheriff Ellison, and you’ll meet Deputy Kiln once we get to the station. Right Jim?”

The question remained unanswered except for an abrupt nod but it seemed to pull the sheriff from a momentary daze.

Rossi’s face remained blank as he studied the interaction between the two men. Ellison was the elder
of the two, but Rossi was willing to bet that what Sandburg wanted, Sandburg got.

That momentary daze looked like some sort of neurological problem that Sandburg was well used to dealing with and it didn’t seem to lessen Ellison’s efficiency, possibly related to the nasty knee injury he had obviously sustained.

Even now he was carefully canvassing the crime scene, snapping photographs with a digital camera and then placing small objects into plastic evidence bags.

The sheriff’s nose was faintly wrinkled in disgust as though he had caught a whiff of some disgusting odor. Rossi discretely sniffed the air himself but the body was fresh enough, the only scent he could pick up was the very faint scent of cooked meat. It was hardly strong enough to warrant the sheriff’s reaction to it even though he was closer to the body than the others.

Without looking up, Ellison reached a kerchief-covered hand towards the hem of the boy’s t-shirt. Pulling it up far enough to reveal the source of the scent, Ellison snapped a photo of what he had revealed before quickly pulling away from the boy’s mangled belly.

Rossi’s thoughts were interrupted by Hotchner’s own introduction of their group.

“This is Special Agent’s Rossi, Prentiss, and Morgan, Doctor Reid, and I’m Special Agent Hotchner. Our press liaison Jennifer Jareau, J.J., is already heading over to your department.”

Rossi had a hard time restraining a small smile when he heard a grumble from the direction of the ditch.

“F.B.I…great.”

“Whoa man, really?”

Sandburg’s attention had pulled away from Hotchner and was focused primarily on Reid.

“You’re the Doctor Reid. Man I totally read one of your papers. ‘The Failure of Psychological Techniques on Sociopaths in the United States.’ “

“Sandburg.”

This time Rossi couldn’t restrain his grin; it seemed the pair made sure that neither of them was distracted from the outside world.

“Oh sorry, wait so you’re saying that Jason was killed by a serial killer?”

“Jason?”

“Yeah I have-- had him in one of my classes this semester at the local high school.” Sandburg’s face tightened momentarily with grief but quickly smoothed itself back to professional calmness.

Without missing a beat in his dialogue Sandburg headed over to the ditch and offered his shoulder again to the struggling sheriff who was trying to get out of the ditch without embarrassing himself too much.

“Well now that Jim’s inspected the crime scene, your welcome to do what ever is necessary.”

“Why did you have to go in first sheriff? We know how to act in a crime scene.”

“I don’t doubt it, sir.”
The voice was as deep as Rossi expected with a snarl hidden behind the polite words as the man struggled up the incline against both gravity and the pain of his injury.

Pointedly ignoring the offered shoulder even as he lost the battle to get up the incline, Ellison’s face tightened with hidden embarrassment.

“But you need to see how the serial killer works, I was just grabbing what he left behind. Yes, you can see it once we return to the department.”

When it became obvious that the sheriff was at an impasse, he would neither accept the shoulder and he couldn’t get out of the ditch on his own, Sandburg actually got behind the much larger man and pushed.

“Sandburg!?!?”

“Ellison is your pride really worth the time.”

“No.”

The sullen tone had Rossi hiding another grin; at least the sheriff wasn’t unaware of how foolish his behavior was.

Struggling to keep his balance after the less than gentle push, Ellison nodded stiffly towards the waiting group of agents before heading back towards his truck.

Several baggies of evidence clutched in one hand while the other tried unobtrusively to rub at the obviously painful injury to his knee.

Rossi was willing to bet that the sheriff wouldn’t have done even that unless the injury was enough to lay most men out flat.

He could recognize stoic ex-military from a mile away, and he was betting on Special Forces at least.

Ellison picked up a toolbox from the bed of the truck and after initialing each one placed the evidence bags in the bottom, and the digital camera in a pouch attached to the inner side of the toolbox.

The town was isolated enough and its usual crimes petty enough that it was doubtful they had any sort of crime scene analysts within a days drive of the area, but Rossi was willing to bet that either Ellison or Sandburg had contacts inside of the State Laboratory. Hopefully they’d be analyzed within the next couple of days.

It was definitely going to be an interesting case, and not just because of the killers choice in victims. Young, handsome athletes all of them big enough that taking them down in a physical confrontation was a risky move.

Working with the local law enforcement was going to be interesting as well; it was an easy assumption on Rossi’s part that they weren’t going to be able to run roughshod over the sheriff. He’d have to call Garcia to get Ellison’s story; Rossi knew that it had to be a doozy.

It took them another hour and a half of studying the body before the BAU members grudgingly gave up the crime scene to a nervous looking and very young medical examiner.

It was just like all of the others.
The grass was apparently undisturbed except for a line into the ditch and a circle around the body. The unsub apparently carefully laid his victims out into the position that he had chosen for them before doing a 360 that let him get one last full view before he went on his way.

The body was also much the same and he had stayed true to his M.O. The branding was just the final degradation. All five boys had been roughly tied at some point. All of their limbs tied together in front of them; leaving their backs free of any sort of obstacles.

The beating that must have followed soon after the abduction was restrained to mostly the buttocks and upper thighs though their were signs that the unsub had used some sort of instrument to hit the boys with electric shocks, particularly to the groin and inside of the thighs.

Their suffering was finally ended when the unsub put a neat pinprick into the jugular and inserting a bubble of air.

Death was not pleasant, but at least the heart attack was quick.

Ellison and Sandburg had both headed back into town.

Sandburg was going to meet up with J.J. and between the two of them they would have the vast majority of both departments paperwork completed before the other members of the BAU could set foot inside the small police department.

Ellison apparently was going to go through the evidence he had gathered. Rossi was also sure that the man needed to get off of his feet before he collapsed.

Stillson and Connor had waited patiently as the group had gone over every inch of the crime scene. There wasn’t much to see. The body had probably been placed gently into the ditch, rather than thrown, new clothes carefully placed on the boy postmortem.

The same type of clothes had been placed on the other four victims, a black t-shirt and a pair of dark blue jeans, no underwear, no socks or shoes. And the killer had remained true to form in other ways.

Underneath the t-shirt, five small neatly branded lines of Latin crossed the boy’s torso, bending with the body and clearly legible. The words were burned on Jason Summers as they had been on the other four boys.

haec finis Priami fatorum, hic exitus illum
sorte tuli Troiam incensam et prolapsa videntum
Pergama, tot quondam populis terrisque superbum
Regnatorum Asiae: iacet ingens litore truncus,
Avulsumque uermis caput et sine nomine corpus

The only irregularity was a small burn after the word corpus that appeared to be a small defect in the metal that had been placed against the skin. Evidence that the unsub used the same branding iron again and again.

CRIMINALMINDSTHESENTINELCRIMINALMINDSTHESENTINEL

Silvia Summer’s usually serene face had been ravaged by tears, as she sat in the small sheriff’s office, she mopped uselessly at her face with the back of her hand. She had no intention of going anywhere until all of her questions were answered.

A tentative knock on the front door of her house brought Silvia’s attention away from the biscuit dough she had been cutting into rounds. Graying hair pulled back in a rough bun was pale with flour
and her face and apron were streaked in more of the same.

Opening the door Silvia came face-to-face with Deputy Isak Kiln. “Isak. What a surprise. Is there something I can do for you?” Silvia had known Isak since the day he was born, one of the hazards of living in a small town. And she knew that white line his mouth had tightened into did not bode well for whatever information he needed to give to her.

“Is Jason in some sort of trouble?” Silvia’s voice turned shrill, “Has he been injured? When can I see him?”

“Mrs. Summers, I’m sorry…”

“No…” the broken whisper cut off the pale deputy even as he grabbed Silvia around the waist to keep her from collapsing to the ground.

Silvia managed to regain her feet, although she leaned heavily on Isak’s shoulder struggling to contain the upwelling of grief that had nearly knocked her flat with its suddenness.

“How did he die?”

“Mrs. Summer’s I can’t tell you I haven’t been to the crime scene yet.”

“Crime scene?” Kiln winced as Silvia simultaneously tightened her grip to a near chokehold and all of the blood that had remained in her head, headed elsewhere.

Seeing, Kiln struggle to drag air in past the now too-tight collar, Silvia forced herself to release her grip. Heading towards the kitchen, she threw her apron over a chair, and turned off the stove.

Turning on her heel, she marched back into the front entryway, past Deputy Kiln and headed directly to his waiting car. If he couldn’t answer her questions, by God she’d find somebody who could.

Kiln kept an eye on Mrs. Summers as he drove them over to the police station. Tears streamed steadily down her face, but other than that her face was expressionless.

When they got to the station, Silvia headed directly towards Sheriff Ellison’s office, ignoring a slender blonde stranger. She closed the door gently behind her, but Kiln was willing to bet that she wouldn’t be leaving that room any time soon.

Ellison was going to have a field day over this one. He hated having anybody in his office when he wasn’t there, Silvia Summers might have been one of the small town’s matriarchs, but Ellison had never been a man who bent to social or political pressures, not even for a grieving mother.

Kiln walked over to the strange woman, offering his hand. “Deputy Isak Kiln ma’am, how can I help you?”

“I’m Supervisory Special Agent Jennifer Jareau, Media Liaison for the Behavioral Analysis Unit. We were called in by the state authorities when the third boy was found.”

“Third, you mean Jason is the fourth victim?”
“Fifth.”

J.J.’s attention was pulled away when she heard the door open. Turning around she came face to face with a curly-haired man in his late thirties, his long hair pulled back into a tight ponytail, his face held a friendly if strained grin as he bounced over to her with his hand outstretched.

“Deputy Blair Sandburg, you’re SSA Jareau?” J.J. nodded assent, she turned to greet the man who had come through the door behind Deputy Sandburg. The surly looking sheriff was already heading towards his office, hands clinched into fists as he fought the obvious pain his left leg was causing him.

Sandburg brought her attention back to him quickly, “Okay then, you’ll need a place to work and we have a conference room that will probably have everything you need. Follow me.”

J.J was barely able to keep up with the swiftly moving deputy. “The Sheriff isn’t much for conversation I take it.”

The strained smile disappeared completely from Blair’s mouth.

“You’ll meet Sheriff Ellison later.”

Jim barely managed to restrain a wince when he stepped through the front door, behind Blair. He could practically feel Mrs. Summers’ grief resonate through the air.

Silently motioning a watchful Kiln over, Jim handed him the small box of evidence. “Put this in the evidence locker, and try to keep Blair from overloading SSA Jareau.”

Kiln’s smile was faint but real, “Yes, sir.”

Jim had to mentally brace himself before he opened the door to his office. When he opened the door, Silvia Summers looked up from the chair she was sitting in and fixed him with as steely a gaze as she could muster.

“Hello Mrs. Summers.”

“Sheriff Ellison.”

Jim limped around the desk as fast as he could, he needed to sit down before he fell down, but he also needed to keep as much space as possible between the two of them. He lowered himself gingerly into his chair, while Silvia’s eyes followed his every pained movement with impatience.

Her grief felt like it was physically pressing down on all of his senses. Her tears, salty, her heart drumming an erratic rhythm that worried him, and her body trembling even as she struggled to restrain all of the emotions that wanted to unleash themselves on her newest target.

“What happened to my boy, Sheriff?”

Silvia Summers had always believed the sheriff to be a cold man. His face harsh and unflinching in almost any situation, she had never seen him hesitate in his duty.

“I don’t know any of the specifics, but the information we have gathered thus far from the F.B.I is that your son is the latest victim of a serial murderer.”

If his voice hadn’t cracked near the end of the sentence Silvia would have thought him as unmoved as usual. But the wavering tone and his inability to meet her eyes kept her from recoiling at his blunt
“Did he, suffer?” Her own voice lacked any kind of strength as she fought to speak around the tightness in her chest, but she managed to keep her hands placed quietly in her lap.

“I don’t believe so, but we’ll need a medical examiner to know for sure.”

Silvia’s face had aged a decade over the past hour, and just as she opened her mouth to try and force more answers from the grim Sheriff her vision began to swim and a cold sweat broke out across her body.

Jim’s senses heard Silvia’s heart flutter erratically in her chest, as she tried desperately to catch her breath.

Grabbing the phone on his desk, Jim quickly dialed 911 and barely waited for the phone to pick up.

“Yes, this is Sheriff Jim Ellison, I need an ambulance at the police department as soon as possible. I have a middle-aged woman approximately forty-five to fifty having a heart attack.”
CRIMINALMINDSTHESENTINELCRIMINALMINDSTHESENTINELCRIMINAL

Blair was used to talking non-stop about nothing, a defense mechanism that he had learned from years at the knees of family psychiatrists and his own mother.

As he helped Jareau set up the rather rickety whiteboard, Blair had to bite his tongue to keep from chattering at her; just because he was nervous and upset was no reason to talk her ear off.

Kiln trailed in behind him after locking up the evidence and started to help Sandburg with the finicky item. Jareau gracefully ceded ground to the deputy while she pulled out her phone.

Forcing himself to concentrate on setting up the board and trying to gather as much information from Kiln as possible, Sandburg hoped that he wasn’t bothering the preoccupied woman he had led into the room.

His non-response to her question made him uncomfortable, but really what could he say?

Jim didn’t talk he communicated it had taken him a good five years to pick up the subtle language that was Jim.

Jim didn’t verbally apologize for a fight; he cleaned the dishes and picked up any dropped towels without comment for at least a week, maybe two if it was a particularly bad fight.

If a friend died, he didn’t try to fumble his way through meaningless words, instead he let his presence comfort, his body acting as a shield against the world.

Jareau had moved into a corner out of the two men’s way and had already started to make calls to the local newspapers and stations. But with the ease of long practice, she had only part of her attention focused on the myriad of calls she had to make.

The two men worked quietly, politely trying to keep from interrupting her phone calls. J.J.’s focus was mainly on the shorter man. Sandburg seemed something of a whirling dervish, with Kiln barely able to keep up with his quiet stream of rapid-fire conversation and bouncing stride.

As she closed her cell-phone on the last call that she would need to make for a while J.J.’s ears picked up the sound of a swiftly approaching ambulance siren.

Both Kiln’s and Sandburg’s heads swiveled towards the door, but with a single glance, Sandburg made sure that Kiln stayed in the meeting room, as he jogged out the door towards the sheriff’s office.

J.J. was right behind him, just as the medic’s came through the door. They charged through the open doorway, stopping when they reached the middle-aged woman that J.J. had seen as she came into the police department for the first time.

The sheriff had lead her out of the small office that had his name printed across the frosted glass but he looked like he was scarily close to dropping the woman who’s arm was wrapped around his shoulder so that she could stay upright.

The paramedics gently disentangled the older woman from Ellison and placed her gently on the stretcher that they had rolled in with them. They left the building quickly one of them wrapping a
blood pressure cuff around her arm as they ran out the door.

Sandburg glanced after the woman briefly but he seemed much more concerned about reaching the sheriff who seemed to be tottering on his injured knee. The sheriff’s threatening demeanor had devolved into a scarily expressionless mask, his eyes fixed on a far-distant point. As though all of his attention was focused elsewhere.

Sandburg gently grabbed Ellison’s forearm and lead him back to the comfortable looking chair in his office as quickly as he could. When Sandburg shoved down gently on Ellison’s shoulder, Ellison basically fell into the plush confines though his face remained stony.

J.J. had to fight to keep her eyebrows level as the deputy leaned into the larger man’s space, placed a firm hand on his upper back, and began to rub gently.

An all-over shudder seemed to knock the man from whatever had taken hold of him, and his face changed, for a moment almost achingly sweet as he leaned into Sandburg’s touch; before he once more regained his cold alertness.

Before she could focus her gaze somewhere else, the sheriff’s eyes caught and held her in place, daring her to say anything about what had just happened.

J.J. finally allowed her eyebrow’s to rise, before she turned her head to meet Rossi’s questioning eyes as he came through the door moments after the woman was wheeled out of it.

Jerrold her head in the direction of the meeting room, J.J. added a mental note to ask Rossi’s opinion on the two men.

She had no doubt that it would be enlightening.

THESENTINELCRIMINALMINDSTHESENTINELCRIMINALMINDS

When the main area of the police station was clear of people, Blair reluctantly let his hand slide off of Jim’s back, so that he could close the door, just in case anybody came in unexpectedly, before turning back to Jim.

Sliding to his knees in front of his lover, Blair clasped the beloved face worriedly.

“Jim are you going to be okay? Two zones in one day is so not cool man.”

Jim dragged Blair into his arms, burying his face in the crook of the younger man’s neck. Inhaling deeply trying to remove the sense memory of hearing Mrs. Summers’ heart going from an erratic beat to the ugly slurping noise that meant something had given way.

Blair’s own slow and steady heart, pounded on reassuring and strong. As always Blair seemed to know exactly what he needed before he did. He tipped his head to the side, offering one of the most scent rich areas of his body up for his Sentinel.

Slowly Jim calmed as the combination of Blair’s steady heartbeat and spicy scent let him relax into the mindset he needed to keep working on the murder investigation of a young man he had known, had liked.

He had to stay strong for this town, his tribe. Jim knew that he couldn’t afford to lose his self-control, that if he did he’d be worse than useless to these people who depended on him. Five minutes later, he felt steady enough to pull away from the easy comfort of his lover’s arms.
Blair only let Jim partially withdraw before he tipped his head forward and gently bumped his forehead with his partner’s. Their eyes locked together for a short eternity before Blair reluctantly released him.

“I have to go finish helping Jareau set up the conference room Jim. Are you going to be okay?”

Jim’s eyes crinkled in that special smile that he gifted to no one else and Blair, taking that as a yes, reluctantly regained his feet. As he walked out the door, Blair tossed Jim an orange prescription bottle; closing the door swiftly enough that Jim didn’t have a chance to protest the medication.

Grudgingly opening the bottle, he popped two of the large pain pills without water, and with a grimace of distaste for the acrid aftertaste. Leaning back in his chair, Jim allowed his throbbing knee to stretch out in an effort to release some of the tension that had left his entire leg feeling as though someone had pounded it with a sledgehammer.

It had taken him years to get comfortable with the idea that when his leg hurt as badly as it did now it was best if he didn’t interact with anyone other than Blair, and didn’t attempt to do any sort of work. The last conversation he had had while masking his pain behind a stoic mask had resulted in a young man bursting into tears.

His hands shook so much from the pain that his normally bold pen strokes turned into wobbly chicken scratch that not even Sandburg could decipher. Best to just wait twenty minutes, and let the worst of the pain ebb into a dull throb that he could work around.

While he waited for the pain medication to kick in, Jim contemplated the half-a-dozen small baggies of evidence that he had collected at the crime scene. They were all everyday items that weren’t out of place in the middle of a ditch located directly by the only major highway in the county; every single one of them had been handled by either Jason or by his killer.

Madison, unlike Cascade had a small enough population that while Jim couldn’t consciously identify each person individually by scent alone, he could tell whether or not the scent a person left behind belonged in Madison.

The killer’s scent was completely new to him so he wasn’t from anywhere in the immediate area. Jim couldn’t decide whether this was a good thing or not.

On the one hand, it meant that while they would still have to be questioned as potential witnesses, none of the locals had killed the young football player.

On the other hand it meant that Jim was almost as in the dark on who had killed the five young men as the F.B.I was.

But scent alone was enough for him to imprint on. The instant that scent came within his range, Jim new that an internal alarm of sorts would go off in his head, these scent memories had two categories. The first held close friends and loved ones, Blair and Simon basically.

The other however held the scents of those that Jim needed to defend his territory against. Namely, Brackett, Alex, and Naomi (although Blair would never know that Jim had put his mother in this category if Jim had anything to say about it).

This new scent was added to the other four, a scent he would never forget now. Coppery blood and diesel fuel mixed with an undercurrent of cooked meat. No this one would stay on his mind until the killer was either captured or killed, his tribes lives depended on it.

CRIMINALMINDSTHESENTINELCRIMINALMINDSTHESENTINEL
When Rossi heard the light knock on the door, he put the file he was reading down with a sigh. He was almost certain he knew who was at his door at nearly midnight.

His suspicions were confirmed when he opened the door and silently motioned for J.J. to come in. If J.J.’s patience was so thin that she couldn’t even wait until morning, when the two usually met for a quiet breakfast as the early risers of the team; than she was even more curious about the strange men that they had met that day then he was.

Wordlessly he let her in, and headed back towards the bed to gather up the two files that Garcia had faxed him earlier that night.

“I assume that you’re here to ask me my impressions Ellison and Sandburg.”

J.J. stiffly nodded her assent and she reached out towards the thicker of the two files. When she flipped it open her eyebrows rose in surprise and she looked up at Rossi for an explanation.

“Even Garcia wasn’t able to get a hold of the unvarnished truth about Sheriff Jim Ellison. These files were the best she could do.”

“A lot of these things are blacked out, it’s nearly unreadable.”

“It seems that before he was Sheriff he was a big city cop and before that an Army Ranger.”

J.J. tapped the file against her lip her eyes unfocused as she tried to bring up a vague memory.

“Wasn’t he on a couple of magazine issues? I didn’t recognize him at first because he’s changed so much since the pictures were taken.”

Rossi nodded, “Yes, he was MIA presumed dead in Peru. The rest of his unit didn’t survive the helicopter crash. When he was finally found he had been in Peru for eighteen months. After he recovered, he was given an honorable discharge from the Army and he joined the Cascade Police Force first Vice and then Major Crime Division. Nothing too strange happens until all of a sudden a young grad student named Blair Sandburg becomes a ride-a-long and Ellison’s arrest and conviction rate goes through the roof.”

J.J. scanned the file as Rossi gave her the quick summary, eyes catching on several interesting facts.

“Good grief Rossi, how many times was Sandburg kidnapped?”

“Five or six, that’s not the most interesting part, flip to the second to last page.”

J.J. followed Rossi’s order and scanned the page quickly before her blue eyes flew up to meet Rossi’s.

“He and Sandburg have been living with each other for over ten years? How the hell were they still partners in Major Crimes?”

“There are still a lot of questions unanswered. There’s no doubt that these two are more than capable of doing their jobs, but there’s something off about both of them, and I don’t mean their living arrangements. I think they’re hiding something, and whatever it is I don’t want it to interfere with the investigation.”

Rossi described the moment when Sandburg had been forced to call out to the sheriff to break him out of the trance that he had seemingly been under. J.J responded with her own memory of the backrub that had drawn Ellison out of another of his ‘moments’.

“They could be a sign of brain trauma, or maybe Ellison is reacting to something else. I’ve got an
idea, I’m not sure how viable it is but I think we really should look at them more closely. The first question that needs to be asked,” Rossi said. “Is why did Sandburg start riding along in the first place?”

“Well from the looks of it he was planning on doing a dissertation on ‘closed societies’ and he picked a modern setting, a police department, to study.”

“Yeah, but in the year and a half that he worked there before Ellison was injured he held back from putting anything to paper. At least that’s what it looks like here. If he were writing a dissertation he would have needed to work on it with his advisor. Nothing like that seems to have happened and he actually missed out on some pretty important opportunities because he insisted on staying in Cascade.” Rossi leaned closer to the folders pointing the pertinent information out to J.J.

“So you think that the dissertation was just an excuse?”

“Exactly.”

“So why would someone want to tag along with a police officer, and a better question why would Ellison let him tag along for such a long time?”

“Well what if they had found something in each other that they couldn’t find in their other relationships? Sandburg seems to be the dominant partner in their relationship so what if he was looking for a man like Ellison. A man who could get him close to serial killers and who would let him be in control of their relationship.”

“Are you implying that Sandburg might have something to do with these murders?”

“Look,” Rossi said, “It seems like a longshot until you look a little closer at Sandburg’s schedule for the past year. All of these murders happened during school breaks. All of them happened within 100 miles of this town. We also know that the killer is breaking down so it would make sense that they would happen closer and closer to home. Hell he was this last kids’ teacher. You can’t get much closer than that unless you’re looking at family.”

“And your alternate reason for Ellison’s odd reactions is what?”

“Drugs. If Sandburg’s managed to slip something to Ellison, maybe in the guise of giving him new pain pills it might cause him to become more pliable. Might make him zone out occasionally because his body is fighting the fog of drugs.”

When J.J. slipped out of Rossi’s room nearly an hour later, the pair was determined to discover just what secrets the pair was hiding. They couldn’t afford to let the men keep them.

THESENTINELCRIMINALMINDSTHESENTINELCRIMINALMINDS

Jim groaned softly, his head swirled with a mixture of pleasure and pain while Sandburg’s gentle hands cleverly manipulated his knee.

Easing cramped muscles and allowing his lover to stretch his leg out fully for the first time in hours, Blair’s gaze was focused but he kept up a low level murmur trying to keep Jim from zoning on touch.

Blair finished the massage with a loving kiss to the tender flesh before he pulled himself up to his lover’s side and snuggled into the welcoming crook between Jim’s arm and his ribcage.

The stress of the day had left Jim exhausted. So he only managed a single sleepy kiss before he
allowed himself to fall asleep. His knee for once free of the pain that seemed to constantly drag at
him.

Blair felt when Jim fell asleep, his arm curving heavily over his shoulder and his breathing evening
out to long relaxed sighs. His brain was too jittery to join his lover in somnolence any time soon.

His memories of the crime scene, as well as the photo’s that Jim had taken were racing through his
mind. He wanted nothing more than to turn his mind off but that had never been a talent within his
possession.

The agents from the BAU would have to be watched closely. Blair had seen the speculative glances
between Rossi and Jareau. He was willing to bet that all of the agents were damned good at ferreting
out truths, even ones that they had no business looking into.

Well he may not have gotten his doctorate but Blair Sandburg was no fool. Thanks to his traveling
youth and adventures, both around the world and in Cascade, Blair was perfectly capable of picking
up on body language. And the day he met somebody that he couldn’t throw off a verbal trail was the
day he’d turn in his shaman credentials.

Met with stony silence on one side and rambling nonsensical conversation on the other, he hoped
that these strangers would just give up, and focus on the case.

But Blair had a horrible feeling that they weren’t used to losing any more than he was. Hopefully
they weren’t as stubborn though. He and Jim had managed to build up a life here, a life that they
enjoyed. But he could and would grab Jim and leave if it looked like the agents were going to do
anything stupid.

Decision made, Blair allowed himself to relax into the warm embrace of his lover and seconds later
he fell asleep.

The world was blue.

Blair raced through the forest, part of his mind noticed that he wasn’t wearing any shoes; he wasn’t
wearing much of anything. But his skin had been lovingly painted. His body felt much younger and
although he kept trim and muscular with daily runs in the real world, in this world he somehow knew
that he was the twenty-eight that he had been when he had first found out that he was the Shaman of
the Great City.

Crimson and ashy black drawn onto his face, drew his normally affable features into a grim
representation of a skull, though less in form and more in feel.

The fierce war paint continued down his arms and torso becoming more and more abstract as it
wound its way sinuously down his body to the tops of his feet.

In his right hand a thick rod of wood was gripped tightly, black and grey fur was tied in to intricate
braids just above his fingers.

Footprints as well as vague representations of panthers and wolves ran around the staff, and at its
very end a bulbous head smeared with a substance that shimmered in the shadowy heat of the jungle.

Both the Shaman and the Warrior were represented. Blair was as much one as the other, though he
took to the role of Warrior reluctantly, more willing to back up his far more aggressive partner in the
fighting aspect of protecting the tribe.

But just because he was reluctant didn’t mean that if provoked he wouldn’t be a dangerous enemy.
The mask would have looked almost comical. A costume donned by a reluctant participant, or it would have been, if Blair’s face wasn’t drawn into a tight snarl, his eyes flashing and glaring from the deep shadows the dark paint created.

The forest, the jungle was familiar to the separate parts of himself. The man, the Shaman, and the Warrior knew where they were, and why they were there. They were all enraged and afraid.

Blair could hear the screaming panther, its desperation apparent, an unbearable rising crescendo of painful cries.

So he ran desperately, following the sound, veering away from the clearly marked path to flash through thick underbrush. Taking shortcut after shortcut as the sounds became louder and more desperate the closer he came to them.

The wolf ran just ahead of him, over the years that he and Jim had been together Blair had only seen the wolf a handful of times. But as their relationship both as Guide and Sentinel and as lovers had grown the wolf had grown as well.

One of the largest of his kind that Blair had ever seen, his shoulder came up to above Blair’s waist and the growls that the wolf continuously spat out of his own snarling mouth were deep and terrible.

He was leading the way towards the cries and neither of them paused when they came into the clearing.

Enqueri was laying on the ground, his cries growing softer as he weakened in the grip of the lion that had a firm grip in his soft underbelly. Weak paws swiped feebly at the man-eater still trying to defend himself even as he faded towards death.

The lion was large, but his pelt was dull, as though something had happened to the spirit that it represented and there was a raw patch of flesh on the hip that appeared to have some sort of knot on it as though an old injury had healed badly. Still the size advantage was obvious, and although the torn up ground gave evidence to the vicious fight that had taken place in the clearing it was clear that the panther had been overwhelmed by the sheer size of the big cat.

Blair never stopped moving, he never gave the lion a chance to relinquish its deadly grip, holding the staff in a two-handed grasp he brought the heavy head of the weapon down on the creatures head as hard as he could and the wolf grabbed hold of the lion’s throat, directly under the jaw where the mane was thinnest. The force of the blow ripped the creature away crushing the skull, while the wolf’s gnashing teeth deprived him of oxygen.

Even as the lion gasped for air, it watched Jim hungrily as though reveling in the fact that he had taken the panther with it. Even now the panthers internal organs were bulging from the horrific gash that the lion’s teeth had left in his belly.

But Blair wouldn’t give him the satisfaction. Gentle hands smoothed over the wounds, healing them slowly. He didn’t need herbs to remove infection or sutures to close gashes all he needed was the power that the blue world provided him readily.

As the final wound closed, the lion died with a growling whimper that the two lovers ignored.

Quickly Enqueri’s form separated into two, becoming a huge panther and the younger Jim who had spent time in Peru. Pulling Jim close and kissing him, at first gently, reverently, in thanks and then as his strength returned more and more heatedly Blair barely paid any attention to the two romping creatures that circled them joyfully.
All he wanted to do was stay with this man forever.

Blair awoke with a gasp, lurching upright in bed, his long hair clinging to his damp forehead with sweat. He pulled it away with his shaking hands, yanking on the long strands until the pain of it gave him something else to focus on.

The comforting weight of Jim’s arm came around Blair’s shoulders, as he was pulled back towards his prone lover. Crossing his arms, Blair stared into Jim’s face, his eyes adjusted enough to the darkness that he was able to see that Jim’s eyes were opened and his mouth was firmed into a taught line that said that the vision had not been Blair’s alone.

“He’s coming closer, Chief.”

“Is he…”

“No, spirit animal or not, this guy isn’t a Sentinel. But we have to be careful, I don’t want that vision coming true.”

“We’ll just have to make sure it doesn’t then.”

Blair’s voice was a low rumble that Jim felt all the way through his body. Stress and fear deepening his voice and turning it into a throaty growl that pulled Jim towards something violent.

Using that voice Blair could get Jim to do anything, kill anyone, and he wouldn’t give it a second thought. Damaged or not this Sentinel would protect his Guide from the rabid killer loose in their midst. By whatever means necessary.

Shaking away his thoughts of bloodlust, Jim gently drew Blair on top of him, until the smaller man was sprawled across his chest, his legs straddling Jim’s hips.

Neither of them was hard but Jim needed as much physical contact as he could get at the moment. The small warm body of his lover was better than any blanket or dream catcher. After several minutes of cuddling, Jim buried his face in Blair’s neck, inhaling deeply, trying to read the nuances of Blair’s scent.

There was the sharp tang of adrenaline though it was fading fast as Blair melted onto him like wax, and the increasingly strong scent of a Guide who was growing aroused.

Shifting his hips so they caressed Blair’s, Jim slowly ratcheted up the speed coaxing his Guide to join him until Blair was rutting dreamily against his lover.

Soothed by the strong arms surrounding him and the familiar sensation of desire although neither of them was up for anything more intense then what they were currently doing Blair let himself relax sprawl on top of Jim’s chest even as the bigger man continued to thrust.

When release came to Blair it was more gentle warmth than anything else. Jim shuddered beneath him, arms tightening convulsively around Blair as he reached his own release. When Jim’s arms finally loosened Blair slipped automatically towards the side of the bed that wasn’t cradling his lover’s damaged knee and regained his feet.

He slipped into the bathroom of their small house, quickly dampening a washcloth with warm water, and returned to Jim’s side.

His Sentinel’s eyes were heavy and satiated, any remaining anger or pain was lost in the haze of the endorphins that had flooded his body at his release.
Blair smiled, as he wiped down a nearly asleep Jim, scrubbed himself clean with a lot less care before taking the dirty washcloth to the laundry hamper.

Rejoining Jim in their large bed, Blair allowed himself to lie sprawled across Jim’s chest, tucking his head down on the hollow created between Jim’s shoulder and collarbone.

When Jim’s hand began to stroke his back Blair felt himself slump everything loosening within him. The heat of the broad hand was something that he would never get enough of at it continued its well worn path in the slow circle that Blair had come to cherish, a feeling that not only left him feeling safe but also loved.

Both of them were asleep within moments, and if they had dreams neither of them remembered them in the morning.
The next morning, Rossi slipped into the small conference room that had been set aside for their use, not surprised to see that Reid had arrived ahead of him and was already starting to put up a timeline for the murders, complete with photo’s of the victims, before and after, and a map which had the different locations marked with too many red dots.

What was a surprise to Rossi however was Sandburg’s quiet presence in the corner of the small room. Wearing a pair of reading glasses he was intently studying the file on the first victim, a young tennis star named Clark Jamison.

Rossi knew that Jamison and Summers were both tall, athletic boys with dark hair and eyes, both of them were senior’s in high school and both of them had been found dead in a ditch in their hometowns with new clothing and fresh brands placed on their stomachs soon after their deaths.

They had had different home lives though, Summer’s raised by his single mother and Jamison had been the middle child of a large brood of children raised primarily by their eldest sister.

The only similarities that the boys seemed to truly have were their appearances, ages and the fact that they lived in a small town. So they knew what type the unsub was looking for and they knew that he liked to kill them the same way every time. Everything after that was based purely on past example which while useful never really gave the whole story.

Reid was sticking his translation of the branded text up on the board now and Sandburg shut the folder to go and take a look at it.

haec finis Priami fatorum, hic exitus illum
sorte tulit Troiam incensam et prolapsa videntum
Pergama, tot quondam populis terrisque superbam
Regnatorem Asiae. iacet ingens litore truncus,
Avulsumque umeris caput et sine nomine corpus

This is the end of the fate of Priam, this end took him away by fate seeing Troy burned and slip away arrogant over so many people and lands once the king of Asia. The huge body lies on the shore headless and without a name.

Vergil: Aeneid, Book 2, lines 554-558

“Well, mark that as a book I’m never going to enjoy reading again.” Muttered Sandburg, he stood up pulling off the glasses and putting them in his breast pocket; before he leaned in closer to the picture of Summer’s torso, eyes flicking over the image of burned flesh without a hint of revulsion. The only emotion that Rossi could see was a sort of cold interest.

“Hm. Seems strange for young boys to be equated with King Priam.”

Reid’s response to the veiled question was as quick as Rossi thought it would be.

“Not really, they were all very popular, in a sense kings of their high school, and when he kills them he’s removing them from their position of power.”

“But it doesn’t really follow, whatever he’s done to them, it doesn’t seem to include anything except
them. None of their friends or family is hurt and the high schools are left alone so none of their ‘kingdoms’ have slipped away from their sight. Plus it’s a pretty big discrepancy that the boys aren’t decapitated.”

“You’re taking a too literal close-reading from the text,” Reid explained patiently. “Not everything has to match up word for word, and in truth this is all just well-trained speculation. For all we know the only reason that our unsub is using this text is because it holds some deeper meaning that only he gets from it.”

“But this does tell us something about the…unsub.” Rossi noted the hesitation on the abbreviation but he was too busy focusing on the way the younger man was studying the images in front of him to take it for more than simple unfamiliarity with the word.

“What’s that?” Reid’s eager question rolled over Rossi as he stared intently at the other man trying to get a reading off of the young deputy.

Although Sandburg easily kept his face free from any sort of emotion besides mild interest and academic curiosity, his shoulders were tensed into a knotted threatening mass.

He wasn’t a large man but at the moment Blair Sandburg was studying this unsub’s work as though he were readying himself for a battle that he had no intentions of losing; and lack of social graces aside Rossi had no doubt that Reid wasn’t the intended target of this focused malevolence.

Something had changed overnight within Sandburg; Rossi wasn’t sure he liked it.

Movement out of the corner of his eye brought Rossi’s head around towards the door. Ellison’s hulking body came through the door his own eyes had lost the glaze of pain that had dulled them yesterday and he moved with a fluidity that Rossi was surprised at.

Even his limp was noticeably reduced, though whether it was because he was well rested or the injury was partially psychosomatic was impossible to tell.

“Chief, evidence has been routed through to the State Forensic Laboratory, should be back in a couple of days.”

“Do you have the photo’s printed out of the evidence that you found at the crime scene?”

“Yeah, here.”

Ellison tossed a small packet of photos towards Sandburg who deftly caught it before shuffling through the photos, separating them into three piles that Rossi edged closer to see.

The first pile was only a couple of photos but the pictures showed a couple of small pieces of cloth the thread that made it unraveling and the color barely visible against the green grass that they had fallen on top of; Rossi was amazed that Ellison had even managed to see the lightly dyed threads against their verdant backdrop.

The second pile was something of a mystery to Rossi, the photo’s that had been put their (all ten of them) were obviously of the area surrounding the body but he just couldn’t see what had made those specific areas worth taking photos of.

Nothing seemed to be out of place, nothing had been dropped there before the pictures had been taken. So how Sandburg knew why they should be grouped together was yet another mystery to add to the already substantial grouping that Rossi and Jareau were compiling.
The third pile was composed completely of pictures of the body with the photograph of the ritualistic branding shuffled carefully to the bottom of the stack. Sandburg dropped all but one of those photos before carefully bringing it closer to his face squinting even in the bright light to bring into focus a detail that had caught his eye.

Rossi had to restrain a smirk when Ellison sighed deeply before rooting around in his partner’s breast pocket and pulling out the pair of glasses that Sandburg had stuffed in their, which were snatched from his hands with an irritated grunt.

Slipping them on Sandburg’s eyes focused on whatever had caught his attention and he gave another grunt, this time of surprise.

“Huh!”

Ellison mumbled in apparent agreement at whatever Sandburg’s eyes had found before he turned back towards the whiteboard and pulling one of the black markers out of it’s groove began to sketch a strange symbol on it.

Morgan and Hotch walked through the door together, and Ellison stopped sketching for a moment and twitched his nose as though trying to get past a sudden strong smell before he continued with his drawing.

He had been at it for a couple of minutes before Rossi finally allowed his curiosity to get the better of him and walked closer to the Sheriff.

CRIMINALMINDSTHESENTINELCRIMINALMINDSTHESENTINEL

Hotch nodded a greeting to the rest of the team, but his eyes were focused steadily on the slow reveal that was happening in front of him.

He hadn’t meant to oversleep this morning and had in fact gotten up at his usual time, but a quick phone call to Haley had turned into a long one. Her sweet voice chattering about Jack and his ever growing personality making him want to stay warm and cozy in his hotel bed surrounded by his wife and son’s voices.

He wrenched his mind away from that morning as he paced closer to the drawing that Sheriff Ellison was sketching on the whiteboard.

Although he looked at it closely the only thing that Hotch could make out of the intricate lines that were being drawn was the outline of an eye.

When Ellison finally backed away from the board the BAU team could see a stylized representation of a lion.

The swooping lines, and graceful curves were filled with an alien grace, as the lion tried to climb down the whiteboard.

“All right.” Said Morgan, “I’ll bite. What is it?”

“It’s the image that was branded into the skin after the quote.” Ellison’s face calm but Hotch could see the fire burning behind the ice.

“How can you tell? It’s barely legible on the skin itself and it has to be even worse in a photo.”

“I recognized the tail. Your right the rest of the lion has been shifted and changed but this is what the
unsub is pulling from.”

“What’s it from?”

“Mainly a temple in Peru that a small native tribe uses for its religious ceremonies. But they use the symbol on a lot of their religiously important artifacts.”

“They don’t have lions in Peru.”

“Actually” piped up Reid. “Peru is native to a small population of Mountain Lions.”

“Fine smart guy, they don’t have those kinds of lions. What you’ve drawn looks more like an African Lion.

“The temple has depictions of animals from all over the world,” Sandburg interjected. “It’s still unknown how the native tribes are able to create such true to life depictions of animals that don’t even live on the same continent.”

“And it means?”

“That depends. If it’s depicted in a group of lions, it simply means a leader. Somebody who rules the tribe and protects it from whatever comes to pass. The fact that this lion is by itself would mean, to the Chopec at least, that there are three different ways of looking at it. If it’s a young lion, he hasn’t been able to prove himself worthy of leading a tribe yet. Another option is that it’s an older lion that is still important to the tribe but isn’t capable of leading anymore and as such is looked at as a source of wisdom.”

“What’s the third meaning?” Hotch’s voice was strained as he teetered on some pivotal point that would change the course of the investigation.

“He’s mentally unfit. Something has happened and he has proven himself unworthy of leading the tribe and as such he has been chased away. Now I don’t know whether the unsub knows all of this but if he considers himself an unproven lion then perhaps he is taking out other young lions that he expects are going to take away his leadership he might be attempting to usurp their position as king of their tribe.”

“I’m not sure I follow.”

Jim sighed as he looked at the group of people crammed into the too small office.

“He’s probably in his late teen’s early twenties and he’s either spent time in Peru or studied it extensively.”

“All right I’ll go along with that but there’s something important that that doesn’t cover. All of the boys were of similar builds, same hair color, same eye color, and popular. There’s very little doubt that our unsub is ritualistically killing the same person over and over again. He’s probably working his way up to killing the actual person that started the whole thing.”

“Considering,” Blair said, “that the kills have been occurring in increasing frequency he must be coming to the end of his training period so that he can go after whoever did this to him in the first place. Why wouldn’t he just go after the original person though?”

“Maybe he did,” Reid interjected. “The original person could have been the first intended victim; something happened and the unsub failed to kill him so he had to go on to other targets.”
“That would account for the picture he has of himself as an overthrown ruler. He attempted to kill or overthrow a very popular boy in his high school, something happened and his plan failed. After that he broke free of whatever was binding him to a single place, maybe he graduated, and he started to look for new victims that he could pretend were his original enemy. After he regained his confidence by killing the others, he might go back to whoever he was originally going to kill.” Hotchner added.

“That would mean that we should look up boys who fit the general description of our victims and who were assaulted but managed to get away from their attacker.”

“Ah” Sandburg made a cut motion with his hand. “Not so fast. I’m willing to bet that this assault never got into the papers. I mean you’ve probably already kind of skimmed the surrounding area looking for this kind of similarity and haven’t found anything. You need different search parameters; and I think I can give you a few.”

“I know just the girl to ask.” Morgan said even as he pulled out his cell phone and hit speed dial 2 and speaker. The phone rang once before it was picked up with a click.

“Hello my chocolate Adonis how can I help you today?” The voice was a bright chirrup that made Blair hide a smile and even loosened some of the frown lines that seemed to perpetually ring Jim’s mouth.

“Garcia, you’re on speakerphone say hello to Sheriff Ellison and Deputy Sandburg.”

“Oh. Hi. Sorry about that. Anywho what can I do for ya?”

“I need you to work some computer magic Garcia. We need you to look up anyone who fits the description that Deputy Sandburg gives you.”

“Ready and waiting.”

“Okay eighteen to twenty-two year old male with brown hair and eyes who lives in Washington. Prom King of his high school. Lives in a town of less than 8,000 people. Family owns or works at a cattle ranch.”

“Okay, I’m searching now.”

Sandburg stared back steadily at Hotchner’s questioning glance.

“None of the towns that the boys have been killed in have been over 8,000 people. He’s more comfortable in a small town or rural setting. All of the victims were Prom King.”

“And the cattle ranch?”

“The branding iron. My bet is that when we find the killer we’ll find that he was branded at some point, probably a prank gone wrong.”

“Wait a minute.” Rossi started to protest but was cut off by Garcia.

“Got it! Ten matches.”

“Okay let’s narrow this down.” Sandburg was pacing rapidly as he tried to think. “Did any of those towns have any other teens of a similar age die in an accident?”

“Ummm. Yes! A seventeen-year-old boy was killed when a herd of cattle spooked and trampled him and his friend barely managed to get away in time. Ouch that cannot be a good way to go.”
“Whose farm was it on?”

“Waterbrook farm. Teenage boy’s name is Blake Waterbrook and it was his friend Gregory Thompson that was killed.”

An image appeared on the screen of the phone and Morgan turned it towards the group in front of him to show them the picture that Garcia had just sent him.

“Now this picture is from his junior year of high school so it’s about three years old. He dropped out after his friends death and ran away from home so we don’t have a more recent pic sorry guys.”

“That’s fine Baby Doll good work. Talk to you later.”

“Later.”

The boy in the picture stared out at the world with a wide white smile on his face. His browns eyes shined happily and his hair was kept just a little to long and curled a bit at the ends. In short, he looked a hell of a lot like all of the boys that had been killed during the unsubs spree.

CRIMINALMINDSTHESENTINEL

Blake Waterbrook pulled gingerly on the handcuffs that kept him attached to the table, watching with interest as the metal cut deeply into the pale skin turning it red and then white as he kept up the pressure.

Jim studied the young man through the glass, his eyes narrowed in thought.

The scent was wrong. It was all wrong.

Blake Waterbrook had probably looked like the boys that had been killed; five years and fifty pounds ago.

Scraggly dark hair hung around his face in clumps, some of it so entangled that there was more dirt than hair in the mats that hung around his neck. Eyes that were sunken into deep hollows stared out dully from a face that looked more like a skull than a living person.

The only sign of life, besides the deep pants that the man inhaled through his gaping mouth, was the sweat that dripped down his face. The sweat darkened his torn black shirt, which was ringed in white circles of dried salt from previous sweats.

The blood that pounded madly through him smelled sickeningly like death. Whatever Waterbrook had put into his veins was going to kill the boy sooner rather than later. Inhaling deeply Jim tried to parse out the individual scents.

Past the overwhelming scent of the drug, there was sweat, algae coated mud long dried to dust, and diesel oil.

The diesel oil was cut with something that Ellison thought might have been blood but it was too diluted for even his senses pick it out for sure and another much stronger scent.

Jim inhaled deeply feeling his nostrils flair as he tried to figure out what he had smelled. When his brain finally connected the dots Jim released the dial on his sense of smell with a disgusted huff.

Not the killer then, but he knew him, knew him very well.
But he needed to make sure that the BAU knew that and it couldn’t be based solely on scent. Not if he wanted to gain any traction.

“He’s not the one.”

Blair held up a hand and looked nervously at the slightly ajar door, shutting it quickly before motioning for Jim to go on.

“He doesn’t have the right smell. I would have noticed. Hell he would have left a trail in the air at the crime scenes.”

“What do you mean?”

“He’s caught up in something, meth I think, and it’s gotten into his bones and internal organs that sickening rotting from the inside out is just not something that the killer has.”

“Great so we’re back to square one. You know except not, because we can’t exactly explain this to the Feebs out there. That puts us in the negatives Jim and I don’t like it one little bit.”

“He’s been in intimate sexual contact with the killer Sandburg.”

“What”

“I can smell the semen from here, it’s the killers.”

“Great, another thing that we can’t prove or even point out to them.”

“They’re not idiots Blair,” Jim said quietly. “Let’s watch them pull this guy apart and see what they find.”

“But,” Blair’s protest was cut off as most of the team entered.

Hotch smiled blandly at the pair of men in front of him.

“We decided that it would be best if Reid and Rossi started the interrogation. We’re going to create a situation where it appears that Rossi is very dominant and Reid is very submissive.”

“I’m already seeing a problem here.” Jim interrupted smoothly, watching the pair of men enter the interrogation room quietly. “This guy’s addiction means that none of these kids would have gone near him. Plus he doesn’t even have a GED so I can’t see him using Latin as a part of his calling card.”

“I agree with you Sheriff but we think something else is going on here.”

“What?”

“We think that Waterbrook is an accomplice to the killer. The weaker of the pair in the relationship. If we can set Rossi up as another pack leader we might be able to get something out of him.”

“How is that…” Blair began to protest.

Hotch gestured for silence and pointed towards the glass.

Reid and Rossi had settled down across from Waterbrook and were waiting patiently for him to look up from the handcuffs that had so fascinated him.

Blake looked at him jittering in his skin to the point that the metal chair that he was sitting in rattled against the concrete floor of the small grey room.

“I’m fine. What am I doing here? I didn’t do anything wrong. I want a lawyer.”

“Slow down,” Reid said. “You’ll be fine. If you really want a lawyer we’ll get you one right away.”

“Are you sure you want to do that Blake?” asked Rossi kindly. “We really just want to ask you a few questions. You’re not in any trouble and a lawyer will mean that you’ll probably be here for a couple more hours.”

Blake perked up and he looked between both men hopefully.

“I just answer your questions and you’ll let me go?”

“That depends Blake. We really want to hear the truth. If you answer all of our questions fully and to the best of your ability I’ll see what I can do about getting you released after we’re done. If you don’t want to answer a question just tell us and we won’t consider it a lie. If we do catch you in lie I’m going to repeat the question and if you lie again I’ll leave. Do you understand?”

Blake shook his head hesitantly before asking. “Can I have some pop then? I am kind of thirsty.”

“Sure,” soothed Rossi and he turned and jerked his head at Reid who startled backward like a long legged colt. “You heard him go get him some pop.”

“I really think Hotch would prefer…”

“Can it. Get some pop for him and I’ll take a coffee two sugars no cream.”

Reid looked at Rossi for a moment with liquid eyes before he scurried out of the room.

“Like I said,” Rossi continued smoothly keeping an arrogant eye on the man in front of him. “Just answer a couple of questions and you’re out.”

“What!” Blair turned on Hotchner. His eyes narrowed and his lips pressed into a thin white line. “You’re just going to let go of the only connection we have to the killer of five boys? Just like that?” Blair snapped his fingers sharply.

“Deputy Sandburg.” Hotchner’s voice was forbidding.

Sandburg ignored the tone and the words as he leaned in to the taller man’s space.

“You may think we’re some stupid country bumpkins who can’t tell up from down just because we don’t know your terminology but I tell you this SSA Hotchner, if you let that boy go I can almost guarantee another dead body in a ditch; and that body unlike any of the others is going to be there because of you.”

“We have no reason to believe that the unsub will change his pattern, true he might speed up a little if he thinks that we are catching up to him but he would have done that eventually anyways. He’s going to spiral and I’d rather that be sooner than later because if he does have a mental break it’s likely to make him sloppy. Sloppy enough that he might make a mistake.”

“We’re well aware of your knowledge of and experience with serial killers. But…” Chimed in
Jim straightened abruptly, eyes narrowed in fury. “You read our files?”

Hotch raised an eyebrow in displeased surprise and J.J. knew that she was going to hear about this later in private. She shook off the uncomfortable thought and stood her ground against the abrupt aggression from the formerly passive man.

“Yes of course, we like to keep track of all of the people that we are going to work with so that we know what skills…” Jareau trailed off as Jim shook his head at her, his head tilted slightly to the side as though straining to hear some light noise that nobody else was aware of.

“No. You’re lying. That’s not S.O.P. not for the BAU and not for you.”

“Quiet all of you.” Morgan effectively silenced the small room with an irritated rumble. “Looks like Reid’s back with the pop.”

Sandburg and Ellison pulled away from the confrontation and watched the scene in front of them, anger practically sizzling off of their respective skins.

Reid slid into the interrogation room shutting the door with his back because his hands were filled with the beverages that Rossi had ordered him to get. His wide mouth was drawn down in an unhappy frown and he placed the cups in front of both men instead of letting them be taken from his hands.

Waterbrook studied both men carefully even through the manic high that his drug of choice had given him. After several sips of pop a decision had apparently ground it’s way through the rusted gears of his mind and he turned away from Reid as though he no longer existed and focused all of his attention on Rossi.

A sickly smiled twisted across Waterbrook’s face and he leaned forward to attest to his willingness to listen.

Rossi smiled approvingly for a moment at the younger man and started to ask him questions in a quiet voice that thrummed through the room soothingly.

The only reason that Jim didn’t zone on the warm growl was because of the fleeting contact that his guide initiated bringing him back into the present moment and allowing him to focus on what Rossi was actually saying.

“...Last night?”

“I was at a truck stop.” Waterbrook said, “They’ve got cheap food and I’d managed to bum a couple of bucks.”

“What did you eat?”

“Pancakes.”

“Were you by yourself?”

“N...Yes.”

Rossi stopped, his pleased smile disintegrated from his face and transformed into a disgusted sneer.

“That’s one lie Blake. I won’t tolerate another. Were you by yourself?”
“No.”

“Good.”

“Who were you with?”

“I don’t want to say.”

“That’s fine. Where did you sleep?”

“By a river. I like the way it sounds.”
Chapter 5

Later that night the BAU had exchanged terse goodbyes with Ellison and Sandburg and congregated in the closest restaurant that they could find.

Waterbrook had been let loose with a stern warning from Rossi not to go too far.

Small towns weren’t exactly known for their wide and varied nightlife but the BAU was used to finding some of the more popular restaurants that were open late. The small diner let them shove a couple of larger tables together to give them enough room.

The late hour meant that they had at least a modicum of privacy and J.J. could feel the heat of Hotch’s gaze as she poked at her Caesar Salad.

“When did you read their files J.J.?”

“Last night. There were a couple of moments that made me question their suitability as assistance in this investigation. When I went to visit Rossi, he had their files and we discussed what they meant for this investigation.”

“The fact that neither of you brought this to my attention, is something that we will need to discuss, in depth at a later time. However, if you both think something’s fishy I want to hear your thoughts on them sooner rather than later.”

“It’s nothing specific that I can point out. Just a large number of anomalies that add up to something worrisome.”

Rossi jumped in at that point.

“I saw moments of inattention on Ellison’s part. Not all the time but enough that it looked like he might be trying to shake off some sort of interference with his system.”

“I saw Sandburg throw him a bottle of pills right after Ellison pulled himself from another one.”

“So you’re thinking Sandburg’s been giving him pills to do what control him?”

“Something like that sir.”

Rossi pulled the small stack of files from his briefcase, spreading across the table in front of Hotch’s plate of meatloaf.

“If you look at Sandburg’s history, constant traveling, inconstant parental contact, paired with a
higher than average I.Q. things start to look fishy. He jumped so many grades it would have been hard for him not to be a social outcast. Plus a lot of that traveling was to Peru. He’s been there a couple of times, both times with Ellison.”

“He’s in his thirties now. Why would he have just now started to play out these fantasies?”

“That’s just it. Before now he’s been working in Major Crimes with Ellison. He’s got constant access to the kind of power that he revels in. He might not be the one actually ruining powerful peoples lives but he is one of the reasons for it. That used to be enough for him until Ellison goes and gets himself shot in the leg.”

J.J. jumped in this time.

“Suddenly he’s out in the boonies with a man that instead of acting as his personal muscle has to be taken care of. His position as a man is compromised as he goes from being a Detective’s partner to a high school teacher and part-time deputy.”

“So why doesn’t he just kill Ellison and then find someone new to latch on to?” Morgan breaks in.

J.J. bit her lip and flipped through the file aimlessly before her eyes widen as she gleans a small speck of previously ignored information from it.

“Because, Ellison’s the big finish. Says here that he was Prom King his Senior year of High School. Sandburg’s working up to killing his partner by going for kids that physically remind him of the Sheriff in some way.”

The world was blue, and the Sentinel was by his side.

This time Shaman and Sentinel raced side by side after the dog that leapt ahead of them just out of their reach.

When all three of them burst into a clearing the lion was waiting for them along with something else. Both men stopped in their tracks at the force of the pressure that was keeping them from the dog and the lion.

The Shaman watched helplessly as the dog slunk away from them. The mangy fur and torn arms identified it as Waterbrook's spirit guide, and a poor specimen it made as it belly-crawled towards the lion that awaited it in the shadows.

If anything the injury to the lion’s hip looked worse than it had before. Frozen by some external force the Shaman and the Sentinel could only watch as the lion soundly beat the dog. Swiping dinner plate sized paws down on unresisting shoulders and back, until the dog stiffened and fell in its' death throws.

Neither of the men made a sound as they watched the pathetic animal fall to the earth with a dull thud that reverberated through their skulls. The lion snarled at them before fleeing into the
underbrush; only after all sounds of its’ passage had ceased were the pair released from what had been holding them back.

Shaman raced to the animal’s side but no matter how he pulled none of the energy that flowed so freely in the blue world was able to heal the dogs’ wounds; its’ death inevitable and unchangeable.

When the Sentinel tried to enter the woods in pursuit of the killer he was driven back by that same unknowable force. Pacing the perimeter of the clearing the panther and the wolf were just as helpless as their human counterparts, their snarls and growls of displeasure spoke of their frustration.

All of them were helpless.

Suddenly the lion crashed back into the clearing behind them huge body aimed directly at Shaman, rearing up on his hind legs the lion swept slashing claws towards the smaller man who flinched back from the massive blow.

The wolf launched itself at the larger predator as it swept ever closer Shaman’s breath caught in his throat.

He was too far away. He’d never...

BANG! BANG! BANG!

Blair threw himself out of the warm cocoon of blankets that had been wrapped around the both of them. His alarm clock brightly told him that it was just past 3 in the morning. He was peripherally aware that Jim had scrabbled out of the bed quickly, clutching the gun he kept under his pillow tightly.

The loud persistent knocking rang through the house and Blair looked through the peephole with peeved impatience as he tried to make out who was at their door at such a horrible hour.

The anxious face that met his gaze made Blair snarl and fling open the door, making Connor startle backwards at the abrupt movement.

“He’s dead isn’t he?” Demanded Blair, eyes narrowed into blurry fury and hair a halo of flyaway’s and curls.

“How did you...? Nope. Never mind. Yeah Blake’s body was found a couple of miles out of town. Stripped naked and with a broken neck.”

“Huh.” Grunted Jim as he limped into sight, ignoring the wide eyes of his subordinate as the Deputy took in the sight of his boss wearing nothing but a pair of boxers and a gun. “Killer must not have liked it that he was in our custody.”

“Get back to town Connor, we’ll be right behind you.”

“They said to bring you with me immediately to the crime scene.”

“Fine.” Snarled Blair still infuriated at being pulled from the blue vision so abruptly. “Can we at least put some goddamn pants on first, or do you think the great and powerful BAU would like us to show up dressed like this?”

“Oh they were actually pretty insistent that only the Sheriff should come.”
Blair didn’t even bother responding to that. Turning on his heel, Blair marched back into the darkened house, shoulders stiff with frustration and his curly hair bristling from out of his head with bed head and fury.

The eyes that Ellison turned on Connor were less than pleased as well and the younger man had a difficult time keeping himself from kicking at the ground like an errant five year old.

“They didn’t want any of the other deputies in the crime scene either sir.”

“Wait here. I’ll be out in a moment.”

Connor winced as the door was shut in his face with a sharp rap. He really hadn’t wanted to bother the Sheriff, especially this late at night. Hotchner had insisted that he grab him without calling ahead of time and had been very insistent that Sandburg was not to come along. Jesus, they weren’t likely to let this go anytime soon. He had a hell of a lot of late shifts to look forward to probably.

Jim stomped into his boots irritably and threw on a button up without bothering with an undershirt. His jeans were old and paint spattered but it was too late to worry about professional dress.

The older man sat down on the bed and began to gently stroke his lover’s puff of hair.

“I’m sorry Chief. All the plans of mice and men ain’t got nothing when the great F.B.I. comes out to waggle their dick’s in a size contest.”

Blair propped himself up on an elbow and looked over his shoulder at Jim who’s hand never stopped stroking.

“So you think they’re just trying to show us who has the power?”

“I think they’re pissed that my deputies kept them away from Jason’s body at first. I think they don’t like that we’re not taking their information as gospel.”

Blair sighed as he tried to release some of the anger that had flooded his system.

“I guess I can see that.”

Jim smiled softly before leaning in to leave a lingering dry kiss on his lover’s forehead.

“I’ll see you in the morning Blair. Try to get some sleep. I love you.”

“Love you too.”

Hotchner didn’t even need to see the Sheriff to realize he was pissed. The truck came to a screeching halt that made him wince. Ellison had to hop awkwardly down on one leg to exit the truck but he did it violently. The slamming door and less than professional work attire were another couple of clues.

Ellison’s face nearly made him start backing up as the larger man limped over towards him. The older man had no bonhomie in his eyes and he looked ready to tear heads from shoulders.
“What’d we tell you Special Agent Hotchner? We argue until we’re blue in the face against your course of action. You ignore us. The body of our only lead and possible suspect is killed almost immediately after release. And what do you do? You further alienate us by sending nearly the entire department away like fucking toddlers to go twiddle their thumbs.”

“That’s not why we sent the deputies away Sheriff. We need to talk to you about Waterbrook and we need to keep the information quiet.”

“None of my deputies are going to go squealing to the press.”

“We need you to look at Waterbrook’s body Ellison. It’s important.”

Hotchner could almost see the way the man boxed up the rage that had been steaming out his ears as his eyes went cold and alert.

“I thought the unsub broke his neck.”

“See for yourself.”

Ellison stiffly pulled himself underneath the crime scene tape and caught a flashlight that Morgan threw in his direction.

Stepping closer to the stiffening corpse Hotchner could see the moment the Sheriff caught sight of what had been cut into the young man’s soft belly.

Now that the lion has killed the dog he will eat the wolf and through this consumption he will learn to Guide and become what he always should have been.

The cuts were messy, sloppily sliced into the skin with a knife and they turned Ellison a doughy gray that aged him twenty years in an instant.

He spun on his heels and nearly ran out of the crime scene. Hotchner had to lunge forward to catch the Sheriff when Ellison stumbled on a tree root nearly face planting him on the ground.

“Whoa Ellison. What’s wrong?”

“He’s going after Sandburg.”

“Who is?”

“The killer.”

Morgan had to throw his weight in with Hotchner’s to stop Ellison from bulldozing over the smaller man and launching himself into his truck.

“Did Sandburg leave the house this evening?”

“Course he runs a few miles every night.”

“How long was he gone would you say?”

“I don’t know an hour. What does it matter? I’ve got to get back to him.”

“Why do you think the killer is after Sandburg?”

“Sandburg’s the wolf.”
Ellison stiffened even more as his eyes began to track something that wasn’t visible to the two F.B.I. agents before his struggles became more frantic.

“Has he been acting any differently than usual?”

Tearing his eyes free of whatever had captured his attention Ellison looked at Hotchner with an expression perilously close to feral.

“What did you do?”

“Rossi and Reid are on their way to your house. They need to have a talk with your partner while we go over the crime scene with you.”

“Tell them that the killer is already there. He’s after Sandburg.”

Hotchner bit his lip briefly before he replied.

“We think the killer has been here all along. We’ve got reason to believe that you’re his final intended victim.”

Incomprehension was washed away by fury as Ellison realized what they were saying.

“Sandburg is not the unsub!”

“We don’t know for sure, but the evidence has been piling up and Waterbrooks death clinches it.”

“Why the hell did you bring me out here then?”

Morgan pulled a pair of handcuffs free of his belt as he paced closer to the older man.

“We needed to get you free of him so that he wouldn’t be able to hurt you or hold you hostage.”

“You’re all lunatics.”

“Just hold still Ellison, we’ll do this as quickly as possible.”

Ellison flung his hand out, pointing at that same spot of nothingness.

“He’s in trouble we have to...” All of a sudden Ellison’s eyes widened and he flung his head around as though he had lost sight of something.

“No. Where is he?”

“Ellison,” Hotchner ordered. “Focus on me.”

Ellison looked at the Agent as though seeing him for the first time. Then he slammed his elbow hard into Morgan’s face, Ellison brought his hands up and fisted Hotchner’s collar before he pulled the smaller man completely off of his feet and directly into his face.

“None of you morons are going to stop me!”

Morgan scrambled to his feet, blood running freely from his broken nose as he tackled the older man from a crouch, slamming into Ellison’s already weak leg and bringing him down with a howl of pain.

Ellison fought tooth and nail against them, his lame leg the only thing keeping him from thrashing
them into submission.

Finally Hotchner managed to pull free of the vicious pile and unholstering his gun he brought the butt of his gun down onto Ellison’s forehead, knocking him unconscious.

Wiping blood that had dribbled down from his nose to past his chin with his shirt, Morgan looked at the older Agent wide eyed.

“Jesus Christ. What the Hell was that?”

“They’ve been together for how many years? Well over a decade. Who knows what kind of hooks Sandburg’s dug into the Sheriff’s psyche, not to mention drugs in his system. You saw him he was clearly hallucinating, everything was turning on its’ head in his mind. So he had to turn Sandburg into the victim. If Sandburg wasn’t the victim, then everything was a lie and all of those years weren’t what he thought they were.”

Morgan leaned down and with a grunt of effort turned Ellison onto his stomach so he could handcuff the man’s wrists behind his back.

“We’re going to have a hell of a time getting him back to the Station and keeping him in a cell. The man punches like a mule kicks.”

Rossi and Reid stepped out of their SUV quietly. They had been careful to turn their lights off before they had turned on to the driveway to ensure that Sandburg had no way of knowing that they were coming.

Reid’s steps sped up as he caught sight of something worrisome. Turning to look at Rossi he nodded when the older man gestured for him to go around back. He jogged swiftly around the corner of the house while Rossi stepped up onto the porch.

The front door’s screen door had been practically torn off of its hinges and it hung drunkenly with a corner resting on the porch. The wooden door was ajar.

Getting closer Rossi could see a smear of liquid on the porch’s dark stain. Crouching down on one knee Rossi dabbed a bit onto his finger and brought it up to his nose to sniff.

Blood.

Quickly entering the front door, Rossi brought his gun up as he worked his way through the bottom floor.

When he met Reid at the bottom of the staircase they began to work their way up the stairs.

“Looks like a back window was broken so someone could get in quietly.”

“Probably exited through the front door.” Rossi agreed.

Each room was quickly cleared until they were faced with the master bedrooms.
Both of them came in heads swiveling and eyes alert as they took in the devastation.

It looked like a small bust had been used to bludgeon someone. Long brown curly hair, sticky with blood, still clung to one of its sharp corners.

The thick quilt had a spray of blood on it and there was evidence of a brief violent struggle from the fallen glass of water to the cracked bookshelf which had spewed its contents across the floor like so much literary carnage.

Blair Sandburg was nowhere to be seen.
The light hurts.

Even through closed eyelids it hits Jim like liquid fire dripping into his skull and sloshing around.

Jim turned his head away from the ceiling, letting it loll dispiritedly on the rough fabric of the cheap pillow and worked hard to keep his breath even and his face blandly free of pain as he contemplated his circumstances.

The wolf had been frantic, nearly spinning around the clearing as it tried to lead him back towards home, the panther had been just as insistent bounding forwards and running through him. Leaving a strange furry cold that had just made him more desperate. So he might have lost his temper a little when it became clear that the BAU wasn’t going to let him go anywhere.

Honestly government officials were just more trouble than they were worth. Next time they had to deal with suits from the government Jim was going to bring this up to Blair. Yet another reason to try and avoid them no matter the costs, and just forget about being helpful and polite.

Jim didn’t bother opening his eyes, it was obvious that they had locked him up in the sole cell that the small police station boasted. No matter how well they cleaned it, it always smelled faintly of urine and desperation.

Four heartbeats thrummed arhythmically from the meeting room and Jim let his hearing slide down a few notches so he could understand what they were saying rather than listen to their bodily functions.

Morgan was talking, his low deep voice sounding a little strangled.

Thanks, thought Jim a little smugly, to the broken nose that he had given the guy.

“...Breaking down like that seems atypical. He’s obviously a tough guy but his immediate overreaction, not to mention the hallucinations, means that on some level he was probably aware of
what Sandburg was doing and he purposefully blocked it out.”

“Plus we’ve got no idea what kind of drugs and mind games Sandburg’s been toying with.”

Jim finally opened his eyes when he rolled them in exasperation.

What was Blair, a supervillain?

Pulling himself upright, Jim had to wrap one arm around his waist to try and convince his stomach to quit roiling.

Jim let his other hand poke gingerly at the rising bump he could feel on his forehead where he’d been pistol whipped.

The shrill tone of a cell phone brought his mental grumblings back towards the meeting room as Hotchner set his phone on speaker.

It was Reid.

“Sandburg’s gone. It looks like someone knocked him out with a book weight and dragged him out of here.”

“What!”

Hotchner passed on Reid’s news to the rest of the team, and Jim could almost feel the full body wince as he politely explained what Reid and Rossi had found at the house.

Jim heaved himself to his feet and stumbled towards the cell door only to fall to his knees as

The world turned blue...
Sentinel dove fruitlessly through the jungle’s dense underbrush, trying desperately to follow the trail that the lion had left behind when it had fled the clearing, taking Shaman with him. The Sentinel’s breath was labored in his panic and the panther’s ribs were bellowing along with his.

He couldn’t remember leaving the clearing.

Couldn’t remember where the wolf and his mate were. All he could do was search for...something.

Skidding to a stop Sentinel leaned down close as his pupils and nostrils flared as he tried to take in the information that had halted him.

The lion’s paw prints were here. Long and scraping as though he had dug in his haunches and launched himself forward. Something had made him abandon any attempts to hide himself. The wolf prints that abruptly appeared and then disappeared just as quickly leaving a smear of blood telling the tale.

Sentinel dove onto the trail, only to come up short as something grabbed his ankles and brought him crashing to the ground.

He looked down in confusion and let loose a scream of rage when he realized that he had been shackled.

The metal bands clasped tightly around his ankles and held him firmly trapped within the deep of the jungle.

Pulling and clawing at them the Sentinel struggled and fought, but even his strength was nothing against the metal.

Finally Sentinel collapsed into the loamy soil, a wave of his hand sending the panther on. He let his mind settle deep into his guide and soon he was seeing the world through the big cats’ eyes.

The black animal ran swiftly through the trees, eyes finding the slight traces of passage without slowing. When he bound into the clearing he didn’t even pause before he threw himself into the Shaman’s chest, joining the wolf there deep enough that they would be able to keep clear of whatever power had ensnared the man.
The Sentinel’s mind abandoned the panther and he dove in to Shaman, feeling the warm welcome moments before the blue began to fade from his vision.

They opened their eyes.

Blair’s eyes slowly blinked open, before quickly squeezing shut again. The glare from the naked light bulb that shown above him sending his head into throbbing fits as he slowly regained consciousness.

When he managed to reopen them, he was able take in the small cell-like room that he had been placed in.

Sturdy, thick pipes ran along the walls and the walls were painted a soft blue, that had peeled away in spots to reveal some sort of brownish orange underlayer.

The only thing that broke up the monotony of color and pipe was the small speaker system that was huddled near the low slung ceiling.

Blair gently flung one of his arms across his eyes as he heaved a deep sigh.

Great he’d been kidnapped again and it looked like he was in the underbelly of a high school.

A low whine made him pull his arm away from his face and turned to look in the direction of the sound and came nose to snout with an anxious wolf that looked as worried as an animal could without eyebrows.

It licked him gently, incorporeal tongue easing the ache that the vicious blow to his head had left him with.

He’d been slowly heading back towards sleep, still fuming at the high-handedness of the BAU when the bedroom door slamming open brought him to his feet as a tall slender figure bowled into him, clenched fists battering at him and knocking him backwards into the bookshelf with a sickening crack.
The broken wood slid down sending books and knickknacks to the ground. The man, his eyes wide and showing red around the edges from broken capillaries, grabbed at the first thing that would fall into his hands and managed to whack Blair in the head with something.

It had smashed into his skull, and after a flash of pain the world faded completely to black.

He could feel the Sentinel in his head shifting through those memories, another new trick that he would have to test once he got out of this situation.

Is that what we’re calling forcible abduction now?

Shut up Jim.

Let me use your eyes.

Blair didn’t know how he managed it but something in his brain seemed to shift and suddenly his eyes were flicking around the room without his conscious direction.

Test the door.

As soon as I can stand without vomiting I will.

Blair!

Look I’ve been kidnapped a fair number of times. Generally when they are capable of snatching me they’re capable of remembering to lock a door.

Blair was still participating in the mental argument as he pushed himself upright. Letting the slow graying swirl of blood rushing to his head abate before he risked climbing to his feet.

The wave of nausea made him nearly double over and one of Blair’s arms wrapped around his belly
while his other hand went up to steady his head as it throbbed sickeningly with his own heartbeat.

Just as he had suspected the door was firmly locked and the hinges must have been on the other side.

Well thats one idea down. Any other ideas?

If I forcibly maim the entire BAU that would be bad right?

Right.

All right, bit hard to do anyways. They’ve locked me in my own damn cell.

What?

They thought you were the serial killer. Twisting and drugging the poor wee Sheriff for all these many years for your own amusement.

Where did they get their degrees?

No where reputable I’m sure.

Blair leaned against the inconvenient door and looked around the small room, eyes desperately roving around for any other sort of exit.

The pipes were still there.

The speaker.

An air duct.
Blair paused, his eyes resting thoughtfully on the square metal duct.

We might wait on that one. I’m not sure it could bear your weight.

So what am I supposed to do twiddle my thumbs until some crazy so and so bursts in here to monologue at me.

...Maybe I could get the BAU to find you, they know you’re missing now. Went into our house and found the bookend you’d been bashed with.

Oh great, the marble horse ones I suppose. I’ve always hated those things.

They were a gift from my father.

You hate them too. They are so gone when I get out of here.

Fine. Look I have to get back to my body no telling what the suits are going to do if they find me still unconscious.

What do you mean still?

They may have pistol whipped me.

Oh yeah well I may have to ruin them professionally when I’m done here.

The feeling that swept through Blair was like a warm breath of Jim as the older man retreated from his mind.

Blair slid to the ground, using the wall to slow his descent. He cradled his head in his hands and tried to think.
“Hello, Guide Sandburg.”

The sudden blast of noise made Blair recoil from the door and he ducked into a corner.

The low raspy tones strummed out of the speaker above his head, and now that he was looking at it a little more closely he could see the small red light that probably indicated some sort of video camera.

“It’s so nice to see you up and about.”

Fucking serial killers.

Wait. Guide Sandburg?

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Hotchner slipped out of the small conference room, he needed to check on Ellison to see if he had regained consciousness yet. If he was still out they’d have to see about getting him to a hospital.

He breathed a deep sigh of relief when he saw that Ellison was sitting upright on the floor, leaning back against the small cot.

His undamaged leg was bent up while the other stretched out long in front of him, he had both of his arms leaning back against the bed and the expression on his face as he caught sight of Hotchner was just short of murderous.

“After we retrieve Blair and catch this serial killer I will have every last one of you fired if I have anything to say about it.”

“Presented with the evidence we were given it was a fair assessment that although it didn’t pan out was still well within our bounds.”

“Screw you. Let me out of here, I need to find Blair.”
The soft sound of heels clicking brought Hotch’s head around as J.J. walked up behind him and tossed something to Ellison.

The Sheriff snatched the small bag out of the air and looked at the frozen corn with disgust before he pressed it against his forehead.

“How did you know that Sandburg was in danger?” J.J.’s question was quiet; Hotchner had seen how much she had paled at the news of Sandburg’s kidnapping. He’d have to talk to her. No need to let one mistake shatter all of her confidence.

Ellison snarled low at them before he heaved himself to his feet using one arm and one leg to pull his bulk up with surprising ease.

“The wolf has always been a kind of spirit animal for Blair. The killer brought him up in the brand on Waterbrooks stomach.”

“That seems a little esoteric. Why would the unsub use that terminology?”

“To make a private point. The message wasn’t meant for the BAU, it was meant for me.”

J.J. raised a blonde eyebrow.

“Really. Why would the unsub suddenly change his M.O. from young popular High school boys to an early thirties police officer to get to you?”

“I haven’t the foggiest.” Jim lied blandly.

“So of what use do you think…”

“Oh we’re not even going into this. Release me right now or I add wrongful imprisonment to the list of charges my lawyers are going to throw at you.”
Hotchner looked at him blandly for a moment before pursing his lips thoughtfully.

“I don’t think we will. It seems to me that we might have had this backward. It seems like Sandburg gave up a lot to come live here with you and now you're putting a lot of effort into figuring out where Sandburg is without even questioning why.”

Ellison’s face went flat.

“What are you trying to imply?”

“Simply that maybe Waterbrook outlived his usefulness as an accomplice and Sandburg might have as well.”

“What! So now you think I’m the killer?”

Hotchner let his eyes drift over the tall man in front of him.

“I don’t know. But I am suspicious enough of Sandburg’s convenient disappearance that I’m willing to detain you for the full 72 hours.”

“Deputy Connor saw Blair with me fifteen minutes before I arrived at the crime scene. Are you also saying that I have an entire criminal enterprise that goes around killing themselves off at my slightest whim?”

“I don’t know Sheriff Ellison. It seems unlikely but I’ve learned to trust my gut. Which is telling me quite strongly right now that you are hiding something, something big, from all of us.”

Ellison’s eyes narrowed and his face went ugly.

“You’re incompetence is going to get Blair killed.”

“I prefer to be careful and I want to make sure that Sandburg comes home safely. I think this situation calls for caution.”
“You’re paranoid and delusional if you think that I would ever hurt Blair. I love him.”

Hotchner’s smile was bitter as he looked at Ellison.

“Lover’s are the first suspects for a reason Ellison. If I find out that you’re behind these murders I’ll do my damnedest to get you the death penalty.”

Ellison stalked closer to the cell bars, his lamed leg dragging slightly as he fought against the pain that throbbed through it.

“If he’s dead. You won’t have to.”

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A/N Bit short I know but I wanted to get this up since I had some people begging for more. Which I really really appreciate by the way! Love seeing your comments.
Jim had barely made it to the cell bars when Hotchner laid a hand threateningly on his holster.

“The rest of the BAU is going to find Sandburg. It would really help if you told us where he was. You do that and maybe we take the death penalty off of the table.”

Jim slammed one of his broad shoulders into the bars, making the bars rattle with a sharp chatter that made the Jareau leap backwards like a scalded cat.

“If I get my hands on any of you after this debacle it’s not going to be pretty. All of you are so focused on Sandburg and I that you’re cutting off your nose to spite your face.”

Jareau straightened her suit coat out as she tried to recover from the unexpected violence.

“We are exploring other avenues; but we’ve got more and more evidence gathering up behind us that puts you and your lover square in the middle of all of this slaughter.”

“Cutting and pasting evidence so it fits your idea of what happened isn’t police work, it’s laziness.”

Hotchner shook his head.

“We’re just wasting our time here. He’s obviously not going to be of any help, Jareau stay here and keep an eye on him.”

Morgan wandered in when Hotchner called for him.

“Morgan if I told you to go to the hospital would you?”
“No way.”

“Fine, once you’ve stopped the bleeding head over to the Sheriff’s house.”

“Oh great you’re going to add breaking and entering to your rap sheet.” Jim snarled.

“The door was wide open and there’s evidence of a violent altercation we’re just looking to see if Sandburg is anywhere in the house.”

“And if you stumble over anything else well that’s just serendipity.”

“I’m afraid waiting for a Judge’s court order is going to have to wait until morning and Blair might not have that kind of time. All that we are going to do is look for signs of where Blair might have gone. I’m heading back to the fresh crime scene, Prentiss called and said she’s got some State Troopers and the coroner there now so she’ll be heading back here now that we’ve got it secured.”

Jim dragged himself back to the cot, making sure that he favored his wounded leg more than he actually needed to.

Hotchner pulled out his phone and pressed his most recent call to explain the change in plans to Reid and Rossi as he strode out of the room.

As the group dispersed leaving the steel eyed blonde as his only guard Jim’s mind gnawed at a plan.

It was a terrible one and it made him uncomfortable just thinking about it.

If things worked out the way he planned, he and Blair would have to disappear. Go even further off of the map than a small town in Washington.

If the BAU ripped apart their home it would only be a matter of time before some alphabet soup government agency got a hold of Blair’s research on Sentinels. The two men would probably end up back in Peru welcomed by the Chopec and kept far from the rest of the world.
Not really the way they had planned to live their lives.

But he would have Blair and that was all that really mattered at this point.

He would have to make it fast though, Prentiss was coming back and he recognized a steel spine when he saw one.

The BAU was full of tough customers but he had to make it work.

“May I have my pain pills please?” Jim didn’t have to fight to put a sullen tone into his words.

Jareau looked at him narrowed eyed for several moments.

“We’re still not sure if Sandburg has been giving you non-prescription drugs instead of your pain pills.”

“I’ve had the same pills since I left the hospital. The pharmacist showed me their identifying features. Now unless you want to see a grown man vomit from pain I would really like my pills. Now!”

Jareau hesitated for a couple of nerve jangling moments before she slipped into Jim’s office and sorted through the usual mess of pencils and paperclips in the shallow center drawer before she came up with the small bottle of pills.

Jim started to get to his feet but J.J. put up a quelling hand.

“Don’t come any closer to the bars. I’m going to put the pills down and roll them to you.”

Jim sighed deeply before he nodded his acceptance of the terms.

J.J. crouched down to drop the bottle and gently roll it towards the large man, she kept her eyes on him until the last possible second.
She quickly glanced down to make sure that the bottle would head in his general direction and the sudden blur of movement was all of the inadequate warning she had.

Ellison had lunged off of the bed using his unmaimed leg to launch himself across the small room and he snaked both thick arms through the bars and wrapped one forearm around the blonde’s delicate throat while his other hand grabbed her handgun from its holster.

J.J.’s fingers clawed desperately drawing blood and inflicting deep scratches that Jim ignored as he tightened his grip, holding her up until she went completely limp.

He could hear the way her respiration changed as she lost consciousness completely. He held her for several long seconds longer just in case she was a talented actress before he gently lowered the much smaller woman to the ground.

A paperclip and some concentration on his fingertips had the lock to the cell picked open in no time and he dragged Jareau to the cot.

After Jim set Jareau on the bed, he tilted her head to the side so she wouldn’t aspirate if the pain of her throat made her vomit when she woke up.

Jim took her handgun with him, locking her into the cell and mangling the lock enough that a regular key wouldn’t work on it but it was still sturdy enough to stand up to pressure.

He tucked her gun into his jeans and went to the small locker room so that he could grab his own personal weapon that the BAU had kept in the gun safe. He ignored the rifles that remained and entered his office pulling a wicked K-Bar knife out of a hidden corner and clipped it and its holster to his belt.

The Sentinel headed towards the backdoor his single minded pursuit of his mate already filling his mind to the exclusion of all else.

Jim pulled free for a moment as he swept by the cell and grabbed the small bottle.

He popped two into his mouth and dry swallowed them.
The less distraction the better and that final chore finished the Sentinel slipped away from civilization and into the night.

Reid pocketed his phone after Hotchner ended the call. His expression was grim.

“Apparently Ellison broke Morgan’s nose in the altercation when they took him into custody. Hotch had to pistol whip the guy before he would quit fighting.”

Rossi whistled long and low at the thought.

“That must have been one hell of a fight.”

“Apparently the guy was having ‘hallucinations’ about Sandburg being kidnapped.” Reid said creating air quotes with his hands as he said hallucinations. “As soon as he saw the new brand on Waterbrooks stomach he just lost it. Now Hotchner’s thinking this could have been an elaborate plot by Ellison to lay the blame on Sandburg for his own misdeeds.”

Rossi tilted his head and raised an eyebrow.

“That seems a little convoluted.”

“He says we need to look around and try and figure out where Blair could have gone; whether he was dragged out of here or if it was just an elaborate plot.” Reid continued, doggedly ignoring the interjection.

“That’s a lot of effort to go through.”

“Ellison and Sandburg are intelligent and quick thinking. If this was a grand scheme they would have probably had a wide variety of escape routes planned out in advance just in case anything like this happened.”
Reid shrugged and began to walk through the crime scene again looking for any stray blood spatter or out of place knick knacks.

Rossi sighed deeply before he began to shuffle through the books that had fallen to the ground from the broken bookshelf.

He restlessly scanned the room for a moment, uncomfortable with what they were doing but unable to put a name to the uneasiness that he felt.

His eyes caught on an irregularity in the wall that was behind the bed. The long stretch of wall was covered in a colorful woven blanket that had different jungle scenes interspersed throughout.

A slight bulge near the center made him stand up, eyes narrowing as he studied the strange anomaly.

He eased his way onto the King sized bed, careful to keep his boots off of the stained fabric and desperately trying to keep from touching any of the blood spatter.

A gentle pull to the fabric proved that it had been strung up on a rod that allowed it to be pulled aside easily, the tapestry serving as a curtain for a recessed book shelf that had not been damaged in the ruckus.

It was a little over halfway filled with thick binders.

Each binder had a similar title. Rossi’s eyes scanned over them, silently reading.

‘The Sentinel by Blair Sandburg’ was the most illuminating title, the rest seemed to be simple one word titles that were self explanatory to their author. ‘Allergies’ so on and so forth until he got to a plastic binder that wasn’t quite as stuffed as its compatriots.

Reid came over and read over the older man’s shoulder.

“It seems like a strange place to hide anything. Easily accessible and although a bedroom is a very private place it’s certainly not the last place someone would look. So I’d say these are personal rather than something that they desperately wanted to keep hidden.”
Rossi reached for the first binder and opened it. His eyes widening as he read the neatly typed page in front of him.

every niggling question that he had had about Ellison were answered in a moment. Reid leaned over his shoulder and scanned both pages in moments, eyes tightening as he digested their contents.

Rossi looked at the younger man and saw agreement in his eyes.

“They’re both delusional.”

Reid nodded as he pointed at a handwritten addition that was apparently Ellison’s addition to the madness in front of them.

“If it’s a shared delusion this would explain everything. Why they went through all of this trouble to keep it a secret. Why they killed those boys.”

“It still begs the question of where Sandburg is exactly.”

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“You’re not as pretty as your pictures.”

Blair wondered idly if he could somehow vibrate his molecules in such a way that he could just mold himself into the brick wall behind him.

Hey it worked for the Flash, why not him?

“I mean they’re mostly from the nineties, but I didn’t think you’d be so old.”

“Hey!” Blair protested weakly.
The voice was still raspy but as he listened to it, the mechanical quality of it became clear. The man was using some sort of synthesizer to change his voice.

“I guess it doesn’t really matter. I read your papers.”

The abrupt subject change wasn’t enough to make Blair flinch again. This was shaping up to be a hell of a lot like some of his other kidnappings.

“I’ve written a lot of papers. You’re going to have to be more specific.”

“Don’t be a moron. You know what papers I mean, Guide Sandburg.”

“You keep talking around them; something makes me think you’ve only read a summary.”

“Now you’re just trying to upset me. Well it won’t work.”

“What did Waterbrook do that did work?”

“He’s not important.”

Blair looked directly at the red dot making sure that his captor could see the way that he rolled his eyes.

“You were sleeping with him and then you killed him. I’d say he’s at least a little important.”

“Did your Sentinel tell you that? What else did he say?”

Blair turned away from the camera and snuggled back into his corner.
“How did you ever convince a Sentinel that you were a good enough Guide for him? I saw him before he was lamed and he was really something. Too good for a puny little nothing like you. All you had to offer him was your ass and some stupid genetic tether.”

Blair yawned pointedly letting his head sag back against the cool bricks, hoping they’d help to ease what remained of the ache.

“You want to ignore me? That’s fine. I used this on the boys but I figure it’d work on you just as well as it would on a latent Sentinel.”

The single naked bulb above Blair’s head sputtered and then died leaving him drenched in total darkness.

Blair jumped as the world went dark except for the small malevolent eye of the video camera.

“You thought those teenagers you snatched were Sentinels?”

Blair kept his voice even and slow, he absolutely refused to be terrorized though he’d admit the sudden lack of light had worked like a charm.

“They could’ve been. I was checking to see if they were. Just because I lost my original Sentinel doesn’t mean that I couldn’t get a new one.”

“What do you mean you ‘lost’ your original Sentinel?”

“He died.”

“Are you talking about Gregory Thompson?”

“So what if I am. It was all Blake’s fault. I should have gotten rid of him a long time ago.”

“So why didn’t you?”
The voice didn’t respond instead Blair heard a low hiss as some sort of pressurized gas erupted from the pipe that had been deliberately perforated prodigiously that Jim’s scan had apparently missed.

Blair scrabbled desperately at the door and when that refused to give way he lunged towards the air duct his fingers plucking uselessly at the steel grid that covered the small opening.

Blair took small breaths trying desperately to minimize whatever the airborne toxins effect on his lungs, it was no use. Blair collapsed to the ground again his eyes wide and panicked as he could see the world turning blue. The blue was all wrong...and then it was all right.

Everything was alright.

Blair lay passively on the ground, the only movement his pupils constricting as the room was once more brightly lit by the naked bulb.

The door opened and a slim figure walked into the room but Blair couldn’t focus on it he was calm and everything was fine.

The young man walked closer to him and knelt at his head, his fingers slowly stroking through the mess of curls on Blair’s head.

His voice was a soft whisper that made Blair purr and lean his head back into the caress as he listened to the words without comprehension.

“Mother wouldn’t have liked it and I always hated proving her right. She called me Cain and told me I was set for Hell when I told her what actually happened at the farm.”

Yes. Blair thought muzzily. As long as he kept petting him everything would be fine.

Everything was alright.
A/N: Gah, so many people to keep track of, so little knowledge of SOP. On a completely different note I was actually trying to make this story NOT creepy. I do believe I failed. In my defense serial killers are inherently creepy.
Chapter 8

When Prentiss strode through the door of the police station the first thing she saw was a thoroughly mussed, thoroughly pissed J.J. leaning against the metal bars of the cell.

She stopped so suddenly she nearly tripped over her own feet.

“What happened?”

“Ellison managed to get a hold of me thanks to some very gifted acting on his part. He choked me unconscious and then managed to get out of the cell. First thing I remember after trying to give him his pain medication was waking up on that truly uncomfortable cot.”

Emily’s eyebrows flew towards her hairline as she listened to J.J.’s raspy recitation. The speech was punctuated with pauses as the blonde swallowed against the pain of her throat.

“From the way you and Rossi were discussing the man I’m more surprised that you survived the encounter than anything else.”

J.J. shrugged.

“At this point I’m not sure what to think. Part of me wants to think he didn’t want to kill a federal agent or a woman. Another part of me is wondering whether he just wanted to get the hell out of here to save his lover with as few casualties as possible.”

“Where’s the key?”

“Doesn’t matter, look what he did to the lock.”

Prentiss wandered closer and peered closely at the twisted piece of metal.

The man had somehow managed to flatten the locking mechanism without ruining the integrity of the bolt.
“Well that’s a talent.”

“Without a doubt.”

“Your gun?”

“He’s got it I think.”

“Hotch is gonna have your ass.”

“Don’t think I don’t know that.”

Prentiss stood back up and looked at Jareau’s inflamed throat.

“Jesus what’d he do to you?”

“I was crouching to roll the pills to him and he managed to launch himself off the bed.” Jareau broke off with a round of rasping coughs as the words irritated her throat.

Emily leaned closer.

“No handprints so probably got his arms around your neck and cut off oxygen just long enough to cause unconsciousness but not long enough for any permanent damage.”

J.J. nodded as she poked a hand gingerly at her throat.

“Well he was Special Forces so I guess it’s no surprise that he learned how to do that. I’m gonna call an ambulance for you and then Hotchner.”
J.J. shook her head no.

“I’ll just drive to the E.R. no need to bring more people into this.”

“Bullshit you can’t drive.”

“No choice, I need to see a doctor obviously but you need to stick around here in case something else happens.”

“I meant that literally J.J. you’re locked in and I can’t get you out Rescue Services or the closest thing to it in this podunk town is probably your best bet.”

J.J. sighed and leaned her forehead against the cool metal of the bars.

“Fine bring it on what’s one more embarrassment.”

“That’s the spirit.”

Emily pulled her cellphone out of her pocket and dialed the fire station that was located the next town over.

“Hi. Do you have anyone who knows anything about locks?”

Reid flipped rapidly through the first book of ‘The Sentinel by Blair Sandburg’. Rossi was reading through the last book much more slowly.

They had finished inspecting the house for anything they might have missed and now they were studying the series of books in the hopes that something in the fantastical account would lend them a clue as to their suspects whereabouts.
Rossi spoke up breaking the silence.

“Their delusion has grown from what I can tell. Sandburg started out attempting to keep to anthropological language but as they spiraled down the rabbit hole and they got to know each other it gets more and more personal.”

“They created their own fantasy land where everything is couched in terms of shoring up the delusion. Letting Ellison go into the crime scene first let him look for any evidence they might have accidentally left behind and use his ‘senses’.” Reid replied without looking up from his reading.

“I agree that the delusions are getting stronger and stronger but everything in these books is nonviolent. They see themselves as protectors of the ‘tribe’ so why would they start killing young boys?”

“I guess we have to look at it another way. How are the boys a threat to the tribe? Why are they worth killing?”

“They were popular boys. No arrests or dropped charges. No hints of any sort of problems in their home lives. We’ve gone over all of this, the only thing that all of the boys have in common is being popular enough to become Prom King.”

Reid frowned as he paged to a new chapter.

“Ellison’s allergic reactions seem to be pretty extreme. I know for certain that Summers at least has a medical history that dealt pretty comprehensively with allergies.”

Rossi pulled his phone out of his pocket and flipped the screen to his email, pulling up the latest boys file.

“Looks like he had a pretty strong peanut allergy. Nothing too unusual.”

Reid shut the book and looked at Rossi.

“I’m pretty sure all of the boys had something similar. A strong allergy to a common household item;
the fact that all of them had allergies wasn’t too important to us because Doctors are catching more and more these days.”

“Meaning.”

“If the boys had a strong allergy to something that Ellison himself was allergic too they might infer from that, that the boy was going to become a Sentinel. Strong leadership qualities are also prized in their idea of what a Sentinel is, so nerdy weaklings that have allergies would be beneath their notice. But big strong boys that are popular and smart are a threat. They’ve both been emasculated by Ellison’s injury, they want to keep the patch of territory that they’ve claimed as their own. The only way to keep it is to ensure that no other Sentinel shows up.”

“So you think that in trying to defend their delusion from interlopers they started killing boys.”

“It all fits. Plus the brand that they leave on the boys skin is a personal reminder for them. King Priam wound up with a ruined kingdom and no head because he couldn’t defend himself against a younger warrior.”

Rossi nodded slowly as he listened to the younger man before he interjected his own opinion.

“We need to talk to both of them about these binders. It doesn’t look like they are going to be much help finding them now that they’re on the run; but once we get a court warrant we’ll need to grab these and give them all a thorough reading to make sure that we can get the full picture. Now however we’ll need to put these away and maybe take a closer look outside.”

Reid reluctantly placed the binder back into the shelf where he had found it.

Rossi put his back into its original position as well before he turned towards the bedroom door.

He nearly plowed into Reid who had stopped dead in his tracks. The younger man was studying a framed photo that had been slanted on the right night stand so that a person laying on his side would see it first thing in the morning from the bed.

Ellison was sprawled wide on a small couch his arms flung out to either side encompassing nearly the entire length of of the back. His head was flung back in laughter, his eyes were crinkled into good natured slits and his lips were wide enough to carve deep lines in both of his cheeks. Sandburg
was standing behind his partner his arms were draped over Ellison’s shoulders as he hugged him from behind. His head was nestled next to Ellison’s, wild curly hair obscuring most of his face as he pressed a kiss to the older man’s cheek.

They looked joyous.

Rossi sighed.

“Looks like that picture was taken before they moved out here.”

“Kind of makes me wonder what would have happened if Ellison had never been shot.” Reid murmured.

“They probably would have broken down eventually; it just happened more suddenly because of the injury.”

“Still.” Reid’s voice stayed low.

“It’s a real shame.”

Blair lay curled on his side as he reveled in the fingers that stroked through his hair. The vast majority of his brain was riding the wave of whatever drugs were racing through his system. Everything was calm and peaceful and nice except for a single corner of his brain.

Guide was raging against the intoxication and the touch from the other.

The serial killer, Gregory Thompson’s younger brother presumably, was there. Boy killer. Defiler of the Tribe. A mangy lion unfit for leadership but desperate for power.

The boy was murmuring to him. Telling him everything, trying to grind salt into wounds because he thought he had already won.
He thought he could be a guide?

He thought he could take Jim from him?

They’d just see about that.

Guide slid down the connection as foggy and weak as it was because of the drugs and he slipped into the Sentinel’s mind.

‘He’s drugged us.’

Sentinel froze in his tracks, he had been trekking through the dark streets of the town, avoiding the pools of light from the street lights when he had felt the Guide enter his mind.

‘Symptoms?’

‘Can’t move. Thinking’s pretty difficult for most of the conscious brain. Sense of well-being.’

‘Why would he do it?’

‘It’s Gregory Thompson’s younger brother. He killed Thompson. Thinks his brother was his Sentinel and he was a Guide. Been looking for physical matches for Sentinels. When they don’t match up he kills them.’

‘Why kidnap you?’

‘Knows I’m a Guide, wants me to die so that you can be his Sentinel. But he’d need to break our bond so he’s going to draw you into his web and disorient your senses.’

‘He’s monologuing isn’t he.’
'Don’t they all?'

Guide could feel the connection growing tenuous as the drugs effects dug deeper into his system.

‘You need to tell the BAU. They won’t believe you but you need to convince them.’

Sentinel hesitated.

‘That might be...difficult.’

‘Why?’

‘I may have made a bit of a jailbreak.’

‘...’

‘In my defense I only throttled Jareau a little bit and they weren’t listening to a word I was saying.’

‘You should have gone along with them and tried to get them to come to the school.’

‘Yes my sudden capitulation wouldn’t have looked guilty at all.’

‘Less guilty than assault.’

'What do you want me to do? I can't exactly bend space and time and make a different decision.'

‘I swear to every and any God Ellison, if I wasn’t drugged up to my eyeballs I would throttle YOU a little bit.’

'Your being kidnapped and present only in my mind puts a bit of a damper on that as well.'
'I'd make it work. Somehow someway. I'd make it work.'

A/N: I have to say I have never enjoyed reading books where the character pov is divided by chapter; I get lazy and I only read the chapters that are from my fav characters pov. I also tend to write from one (or if I’m feeling really adventurous two) points of view in any given fic. So the fact that I am writing this multi-perspective monster of a fic is actually a pretty big stretch outside of my comfort zone. Yay for personal development I guess.

Hope everything was understandable and that everyone is enjoying this fic!
Chapter 9

Jim didn’t appreciate feeling like a stray dog in his own town but as he strode down the street he steered clear of lamps and porch lights. He was damn sure that his beloved truck was still near the crime scene; and even more sure that trying to get it was an exercise in stupidity. He had no way of getting a hold of any of the BAU that wouldn’t end with his arrest and perhaps another beating so he’d just have to think of something.

Jim’s head tilted as he heard the distant sound of one of the SUV’s that the BAU had driven into town in. Dialing up his hearing a couple more notches he could hear the sound of Morgan muttering nasally to himself.

“No, no Morgan you need to go back to Ellison and Sandburg’s house. Now that a man that’s got at least 50 pounds and a couple of inches on every single one of us has escaped from a jail cell and choked a woman half his size unconscious is loose we need you to go to the last place he’ll probably be. This is bullshit. Reid and Rossi can handle themselves. I should be out looking for that asshole.”

The smile that spread across Jim’s face would have made Blair facepalm and everyone else flinch backwards.

In a night of terrible plans this one was going to take the cake.

Jim had taken pains over the years that he had been living in this town to mentally map out every corner of it and he could almost visualize the route that the FBI agent was taking to get to his house and if he booked it he’d be able to cut the younger man off.

Turning on his heels the Sentinel bolted into a darkened alley dodging piles of refuse and trying desperately to ignore the heavy throbbing that was radiating up and down from his knee.

The pain pills had definitely taken the edge off but running was not a good idea.

He slid around the corner of a building too quickly and tumbled to the ground, rolling and cursing, before he managed to regain his feet and keep running.

Well at least the scraped elbow and streaks of garbage would add some verisimilitude to his plan.

His lungs were bellowing hard when he finally reached the street corner he had been heading towards and he could hear the approaching sound of the SUV without the benefit of his enhanced senses. Ah, just in time then.

Jim crouched low, trying to keep from silhouetting himself against the bright lights of the street lamps. When Morgan turned the corner Jim bolted across the single pool of light, favoring his leg obviously and hoping desperately that Morgan will take the bait.

Screeching brakes and a shouted curse brings a wry smile to Jim’s face. Good he’s been spotted, of course now he has to manage to trick a trained FBI agent who would be expecting just that sort of thing from him. Apparently Jareau had spread the word to her coworkers about what had happened so he’d need to have Morgan chase him for a while before he let the younger man catch him.

With the way his lungs were burning it might not even be much of a race at this point. This would be perfect though, if he could manage it Morgan would be at his mercy and he could call up that sweet voiced woman who had helped them with research and background checks. She had sounded more than friendly and he was sure that he could make her go against her better judgement if he had her
Morgan parked the SUV as quickly as he could before he bolted after the larger man, pulling his gun from its holster while he lengthened his stride.

“Freeze, Ellison! FBI!”

Ellison seemed to stumble a little as though surprised that he had been spotted before he took off at a dead sprint.

The dark was encompassing enough that Morgan could barely see Ellison’s shadow but the brief glimpse he had caught of the sheriff had been enough to tell him a hell of a lot.

The man’s shirt was soaked with sweat and grimed with streaks of dirt and blood from an apparently bleeding arm. The blow that he had given the older man when they had brought him in would probably have left him with a concussion. All signs pointed in his favor but Morgan’s eyes narrowed in thought even as he kept running. Ellison had tricked Jareau and Morgan had all the respect in the world for the blonde’s ability to see through all kinds of bullshit. He needed to be careful and he needed to do this right.

Ellison’s light colored shirt made him a little bit easier to follow and Morgan tried to keep his eyes on that slightly paler streak of darkness in front of him. As they bolted down the streets Morgan began to slowly catch up to the older man, inching his way closer and closer until he finally felt like he was close enough to chance a tackle.

As Morgan lowered his shoulders and prepared for the tackle Ellison stopped so quickly that his feet skidded slightly and he spun on his heels before he bulldozed into Morgan with enough strength to knock all of the air from his lungs.

Morgan’s gun went skidding across the sidewalk and into a nearby storm drain a sickening clatter the only sign of where it had disappeared to as the two men wrestled for control. Morgan’s face was screwed tight with effort and he could see the way that Ellison’s face was growing pale from pain and exhaustion as they heaved against each other. He pressed back against the sidewalk and tried to throw the older man off, Ellison’s extra weight made it a nearly impossible proposition.

Ellison finally seemed to give way and Morgan tried to press forward and gain the upperhand. Ellison grappled and gained a firm grip on the younger man’s dress shirt before he slammed the agent backwards onto the cement with a crack as his head hit the ground.

Morgan shook his head hard as he tried to clear the stars from his vision and managed to land a solid blow to a ribcage that felt like nothing so much as lightly padded stone. One of his flailing feet managed another blow to Ellison’s damaged knee and the sheriff fell backwards with a howl.

Both men got to their feet and circled each other eyeing their opponent with fierce eyes and lips pulled back in threatening grimaces. Ellison lowered his head and looked up at Morgan with blazing fury from under a heavy brow ridge before he lunged forwards.

“God.” Jim moaned morosely as he punched Morgan in the face hard enough to knock the man to his ass. “Blair’s going to make me go through some serious meditation after all of this.” Morgan got to his feet and was quickly brought to his knees with a swift kick to a kidney. “I am enjoying this way too much.”

“You son of a bitch!”
Jim smiled fiercely before he wrenched the gun from the small of his back and used it to club the younger man across the temple. Morgan dropped to the ground with a heavy thud as he lost consciousness.

“Hah! Karma’s a bitch.”

Penelope Garcia was absolutely not falling asleep at her desk. She had dug up everything she could find on Sheriff Ellison and his partner Sandburg and had been left twiddling her thumbs and worrying about what would happen if they couldn’t catch the psychotic pair. And so maybe the investigation had kept her at her post for more hours than she wanted to think about. And so maybe her head had been bobbing a bit as she fought against the exhaustion. She needed to stay here so that she could help out her friends if they had anything at all that they needed from her.

When her phone began to ring she jerked fully awake and fumbled for the speakerphone button her face brightening as she caught sight of Derek’s name on the Caller I.D.

“Garcia’s house of all knowledge. What can I do for you sweets?”

“Hello Ms. Garcia.” Said someone who was decidedly NOT Morgan. “You can do quite a lot for me.”

Penelope’s eyes widened in shock and fear.

“Who the hell is this? How did you get Derek’s phone?”

“My name is Sheriff Jim Ellison. As to how I got his phone Say hello Agent Morgan.”

“You piece of shi…”

Penelope gasped as Derek’s familiar voice was cut off. “Well that was pretty easy once I got Agent Morgan.”

Garcia’s mouth fell open and her eyes narrowed with fury.

“What…? You…? Don’t you dare hurt him.”

“I wouldn’t dream of it. Just so long as you help me out. If you lie to me or try to get a hold of lover boy’s team before I say I’ll have to hurt him. With the way all of your co-workers have been ignoring and belittling my sanity it won’t even bother me too much.”

Penelope’s mouth tightened as she struggled to regain control of herself and she mopped up a couple of stray tears that had started to trace down her face.

“What do you need?”

“The answer to one question. It’s even an easy one.”

“Okay?”

“What high school did Gregory Thompson’s younger brother go to?”

One of Garcia’s eyebrows went up towards her hairline at the unexpected question but she quickly queried the computer for that information.
“It looks like Ian Thompson went to Waverly High School, he graduated a couple of years ago.”

“Wonderful.” Ellison purred. “Now here’s what’s going to happen. I’m going to take Morgan as well as Morgan’s SUV and we are going to head over to that high school. After I hang up with you I would really appreciate it if you would tell your boss exactly where I am.”

“Why are you telling them where you’re going to be?” Garcia smacked her hand across her mouth and closed her eyes tight as the words popped out against her will. Stupid. Stupid. Stupid.

Ellison’s chuckle was low and pained.

“Because, I am going after the man who killed all of those boys and proceeded to take my lover away from me. I don’t really care if they come because they believe me or if they come because they think my delusion is telling me this. But they do need to come.”

“O...Okay.” Garcia’s voice quavered and Ellison’s tone softened.

“I really am going to try and not hurt Morgan, Ms. Garcia. I know he’s just trying to do his job and I respect that. Hopefully I can return him to you with nothing worse than a concussion and a broken nose.”

“I appreciate that.” Garcia said just before she registered the dead air of an ended phone call.

Her fingers shook as she desperately pushed the speed dial that would put her into contact with Hotch.

“Agent Hotchner.”

“Hotch.” Garcia’s voice was garbled and slow as she struggled to hold back the tears that wanted to fall.

“Garcia? What’s wrong? Has something happened?”

“Sheriff Ellison’s kidnapped Derek.”

“What?”

“He called using Derek’s phone.”

“Phone numbers can be faked.”

“I heard him. I heard Derek. It sounds like Ellison managed to knock him out long enough to tie him up.”

“What did he want?”

“All he wanted to know is where Gregory Thompson’s younger brother went to high school.”

“Did you tell him?”

“Hotch.” Penelope pressed her eyes hard into the heels of her palms. “I had to. He threatened to hurt Derek.”

“I can understand that. Where is he going?”

“Waverly High School. It looks like it’s a couple of towns over. No more than a forty-five minute
drive. It’s right in the middle of all of the murders. It would be the perfect hub.”

“Any idea why he wanted that information?”

“He said that he was going to find the unsub and get his lover back. He was still insisting that neither of them was the serial killer. But he did say that he didn’t care why you came. Whether you believed him or thought he was crazy. He insisted that he would be there with Morgan.”

“Okay Garcia. You need to stay calm. We’ll do our best to get Morgan back.”

“Just…be careful. If Ellison is telling the truth about not being the unsub. There’s no telling what could happen.”

“Garcia. He broke out of jail, strangling J.J. in the process, before he kidnapped Morgan he’s dangerous and obviously diving deeper into his delusion.”

“If this unsub had your wife, Aaron Hotchner, I would think you would do anything to get her back too. Don’t you put on blinkers and tell me this is the only way the case can go. We don’t have all the information and if your insistence and blockheadedness gets Morgan killed I will quit so fast my heels will leave smoke trails. I will also tell every higher up I can get a hold of exactly how your actions brought about a tragedy that could have been avoided.”

Penelope hung up the phone with a sharp press to the end call button before she burrowed her face into crossed arms on her desk and started to cry with hitching sobs.
Blair’s eyes flickered open again as he felt the soft pressure of Ian’s fingertips draw away from his
hair. He could feel his body fighting instinctually against the effects of the drug. Guide’s may not
have had the same sort of superior senses that their Sentinels possessed but years of meditation and
self-control meant that Blair was way above average when it came to controlling his body.

Jim was on his way. Probably with some sort of insane plan that he hoped and prayed would work
but if could get Ian down before than all the better. It would be a change if he could for once get an
advantage against a kidnapper and he really hoped that maybe if the obviously deranged boy was
unconscious when the cavalry, so to speak, arrived there was a good chance he wouldn’t be killed.

The fact that meant he wouldn’t be able to hurt Jim either was also a very big bonus that Blair wasn’t
unsselfish enough to ignore. Plus he kind of wanted to give the little asshole a spanking.

He still feels like the world is miles away and that rush of feel good is pulsing through him in waves
that leaves him noodle limp and with a raging hardon that leaves him feeling vaguely embarrassed.

The light blaring in his eyes meant that Ian could see him and vice versa. The long slender body
isn’t much past boyhood even though his handsome face has already twisted into something mean
and venomous.

Really, Blair pondered, he looked like nothing like a lion. More an ill-tempered little viper; all lean
sinew and hissing spitting mouth.

Well a snake with a mop of blonde hair and big brown eyes. Blair still couldn’t move his limbs but
he found after a bit of shifting of his jaw he manages to start speaking in the slow soft tone that he
uses to bring Jim out of his zones and to bring all eyes on him in an unruly classroom.

“Why would you want to hurt me Mr. Thompson?”

The boys eyes flair wide before he leans forward with a snarl.

“I deserve a Sentinel. I did everything right. I read all your papers and I made sure. I made sure that
Gregory could trust me.”

Blair had to restrain a light snort. He had a feeling that the boy in front of him, Guide?, had
manipulated his older brother. There was something rotten through the soul about the boy in front of
him.

“So because you lost yours you think it only right that you take mine?”

“You obviously couldn’t take care of him. Look at him, let out to pasture with a ruined leg because
you weren’t around to protect him.”

“Just because Jim is a Sentinel, that doesn’t make him yours kid.” Blair swallowed raggedly against
what felt like cotton in his throat as he fought to keep talking.

“Every Guide has one Sentinel and every Sentinel has one Guide. We can’t mix and match them.”
The boy snorted hard.

“Bullshit. You just aren’t willing to work with anyone else because you think you love Ellison. I
tried the others. Sensory deprivation and chemical persuasion and that meant nothing because they weren’t real Sentinels but they still bonded to me. They were still mine.”

“Brainwashing isn’t the same thing as bonding kid. It’s genetics and it’s spiritual. Have you even met your spirit animal?”

“My what? Oh please I’ve had enough stalling.” The kid got up and started to walk towards the door. “It doesn’t matter anyways everything’s prepared for him. Once I’ve figured out what makes him a Sentinel I’ll get myself a better model and you can both rot.”

Blair rolled to his feet as the younger man turned his back ignoring the tugging lassitude that pulled at his limbs and launched himself at his kidnapper.

As he slammed into the slim body he could feel his mind click and wrench at the same time and he felt the world begin to turn...

The world was blue.

But they were both still in the small cell that Thompson had locked him in. The kid’s eyes were wide and fearful as he took in the blue tint of the world and the sudden changes that had taken place in the man in front of him.

Shaman had an implacable grip on his throat with one hand the macabre skull that was painted across his face grinning vacantly at the imposter.

As Shaman snarled and started to speak it seemed to Ian that the man had two sets of teeth and he cowered back into the cold ground behind him.

“You think to punish us for your mistakes little boy?”

A rumbling growl made Ian’s eyes dart to the side and caught sight of the bared fangs of a wolf who was ripping into the mangy body of a slender young lion. He could almost feel his soul start to come apart along with the big cat.

Shaman shook him like a ragdoll, bringing his attention back to the older man straddling his chest. Shaman’s other hand brought his staff up and pushed it into Ian’s forcefully bared jaw rapping his head into the brick.

“You!?”

“What...t...f...fuck.” Ian manages to rasp out around the twin pressure of hand and staff.

“Your ignorance is a sign of unworthiness little boy. Any Guide worth his scratch would know this place and know it well.”

The lion’s final feeble snarl rang through the brick room, a death knell that seemed to reverberate through Ian’s twisted soul and leave an empty nothingness in its place.

Shaman stood up slowly and towered over Thompson’s cowering form for several long moments. His eyes swept the small room that they were trapped in and his mouth tipped into a frown.

“You cage yourself in the past Ian Thompson.”

The boy kicked out trying desperately to knock his opponent to the ground. Shaman’s foot snapped
out and down, driving the futile blow back into the earth.

Shaman reached down and grabbed the blonde mop of hair and wrenched Ian to his feet. A still pool of water appeared in front of them and the older man pulled the quaking child towards the sheen.

“In this world we may see only the truth. Our inner selves revealed to the spirit world and bare for all to see. What do you see Ian Thompson when you look into my face?”

“Freak.” Ian spat out his hands desperately clawing at the sturdy grip in his hair and still fighting.

“No.” The older man said. “Here I am Shaman. Guide. One step behind my Sentinel and always present.”

“Ellison’s not here.”

A rumbling purr made Ian cower back into the dubious protection of Shaman’s side.

The black jaguar rippled out of the shadows and began to delicately lap at the pool of water, sending rippling aftershocks through its calm surface.

“My Sentinel is always with me.” Shaman said his icy voice showing the first sign of thaw as he caught sight of the healthy cat in front of him.

“Now.” Shaman pulled the boy away from him and shoved him towards the pool. His blue eyes hidden in the deep pits created by the paint left his face a grinning mask once more. “Look upon yourself in the mirror of this world and see what you have made of yourself.”

Jim can feel the pain medication wearing off as he clicks the cellphone shut with a snap. Another dose so soon after the first would be enough to screw up every sense he’s got though, he can’t risk it. Eyes flicking to look into the backseat at Morgan’s snarling face Jim raised an eyebrow.

“Don’t suppose there’s any aspirin in the glove compartment?”

It takes several deep breaths but Ellison can practically see Morgan cage his rage and manfully pull an expression of calm across his face.

“There’s a kit in the trunk. Should have some.”

Jim hums thoughtfully before shaking his head.

“Nah. Can’t waste any more time. Your girlfriend managed to get me the information I needed and we should get there in forty-five minutes or so. If your coworkers aren’t already waiting for me I can grab some then.”

“She’s just a friend.” Morgan’s expression flashed with something mean that made Jim smirk a little.

“Yeah. No. Sweet talking each other is one thing, you two are something else. I can smell the pheromones.”

Jim inhaled deeply as though mocking the younger man. He could smell the fear and rage that coursed through the agent’s body and he could smell the faint tang of blood where Morgan was fighting against the cord that he was tied tightly with.
“Why do you care?” Morgan’s face was creased with honest confusion but Jim could also see the faint signs of straining muscle and sawing hands as the younger man tried desperately to free himself from the rope that he had bound him with.

Jim shrugged as he snatched up an open water bottle from the cup holder. He twisted off the cap one handed and took a suspicious sniff of its contents before he emptied it down his parched throat.

“I know what you think of me. You think I’m some sort of psycho out to kill little boys for no good reason, you’re wrong, but that’s still what you think of me. But whatever you may think I have no intention of killing you or hurting you anymore than necessary.”

“Necessary?”

“I’ll defend myself and Blair against all comers don’t mistake me, you and your team are out to get us. All of you are twisting the evidence until it fits, twisting your profile because you’re desperate to stop a kid killer. Desperation and fear makes you stupid.”

Morgan opened his mouth to respond when suddenly his phone began to ring from the spot that Jim had thrown it in the front seat.

Ellison tossed the now empty water bottle, showing off a little as it landed neatly in the small trash can that was strapped into the backseat behind him, before he picked up the phone.

“Hmm.” He said reading the phone’s screen for a moment before he flipped it open. “Ellison.”

“Sheriff.”

“Ah, Supervisory Special Agent Hotchner I take it Ms. Garcia has given you the specifics.”

“Yes. Would you be willing to wait outside so that we can try and apprehend the unsub peacefully?”

“Not on your life. We’re well on our way and I’ll expect all of you to catch up. Little Mr. Thompson’s got some explaining to do and if Blair hasn’t already kicked his ass up one hallway and down another I’ll be sure to have the pleasure.”

“Ellison!”

“Bye bye.”

Ellison clicked the phone shut with a satisfying snap and tossed it back to the seat. He ignored it when it began to ring again almost immediately.

“How.” Morgan spat blood indelicately into the trash can before he continued. “How do you know the kids name?”

Jim smiled a little meanly as he glanced back at the younger man. Still hogtied. Still attempting to get free. Still failing, although he’d probably have to retie the knots pretty soon.

“Not that this is going to improve your perception of my mental stability, but Blair told me so.”

Morgan inhaled deeply and Jim could almost see him assimilate this new data into that bald head of his. God only knows what he thought but the man was obviously smart enough to bite his tongue and hold back any sort of naysaying.

Wouldn’t want to upset the lunatic after all.
Chapter 11

The world was blue.

Shaman kicked the boys knees out from under him and tightened his staff around the thin chest one hand on either side; holding it in place as he forced Ian to see his reflection.

Ian’s scream was weak and high and although he thrashed mightily there was no escaping Shaman’s implacable grip. His arms were firmly locked to his side and his feet found no purchase on the slick brick floor. There was no escaping the sight in front of him and Ian Thompson his body, lost all of its violent frenzy and seemed to collapse in on itself.

Dried blood was smeared liberally around his mouth, a shakily applied lipstick that congealed and browned even as it dripped and spread.

His fingers and arms were coated in more of the same as though he had dipped his limbs up to elbow and knees into the sticky red liquid, leaving it there to stain his golden skin a rusty red.

His clothes are ragged and stained, more hole than whole, the remnants of an old school uniform. They hung off of his thin limbs and strained around his bloated belly.

He was a living, breathing, walking, talking corpse. His handsome features were gone and all he could see was the specter of death which loomed over his shoulder and stoutly forced him to see his own reflection.

“You see what you have become Ian Thompson?”

“It’s your fault.” Ian snarled as he shut his eyes against the sight in front of him.

“You killed my lion. You killed me.”

“You spirit is not changed, you are merely seeing it for the first time.”

“Liar.” The boy began to struggle again and this time Shaman released him easily letting the slim form fall with a splash, shattering the mirrored pool and leaving the boy to frantically try and wipe the blood from his face and arms.

The dried crust didn’t move no matter how hard he scrubbed and slowly Ian grew more and more frantic. He slapped two open hands into the warm water making it swirl and froth. As Ian finally stopped moving he was on his hands and knees, almost up to his chest in the room temperature pool which stilled unnaturally quickly and soon became a smooth mirror again marred only by the slight sway of his limbs which sent out tiny ripples.

“Our spirit animals are a reflection of our gifts.” Blair said quietly. “People who have a spirit animal generally have a gift that requires some sort of guidance. There appearance reflects whether or not you are listening to and following them. You were a guide. The death of your spirit animal is a death of that gift. Our physical appearance is changed in this plane of existence as well. They are both reflections of what we are but they are not our physical bodies, merely our spiritual selves.”

Ian’s eyes were clenched tightly shut as he shook his head back and forth, denial and frustration.
His fingers spasmodically opened and closed as though seeking something to hold onto some finger hold to dig on to as he fell off of the cliff of self denial and landed with a crash of broken hopes and dreams onto the unforgiving ground below.

When Ian began to cry it was nothing more than a rasped sob. Tears slipped past the dam of his eyelids and began to flood down his cheeks in snaking streams.

The salty liquid began to clear the reddish brown blood from around his mouth and soon droplets of this tear/blood mixture began to stain the water crimson red.

“Please.” Ian garbled at last. His body racked with sobs and all of his limbs shaking and threatening to give on him.

Shaman gently dragged the slender boy from the water. Ian collapsed as soon as he had reached dry brick and he curled in on himself and shook against all of the emotions that had welled up in his body to fill the spots that his spirit animal, which had housed all of his rage and frustrated hopes for the future.

Shaman felt a vague pity for the wreck in front of him. A vision of a possible future if he had lost his own Sentinel.

Shaman could hear the vague sound of the real world begin to intrude as the blue began to fade from the world. He heard a door open and turned…

Blair’s eyes were wide and wet as he took in Jim’s own warm blue eyes as he smiled at him gently from the door. Blair stepped over Ian Thompson’s body which lay in a collapsed heap on the floor. The boy was still sobbing but Blair couldn't hear him. All of his attention was focused on the man in front of him and Blair didn't stop walking until he his entire body was smashed up against Jim's body. His Sentinel's warm massive arms enfolded him gently and Blair let his own breath catch briefly in a breathy little sob before he buried his face into the warm space where neck and shoulder met.

Blair’s voice was less than a whisper but Jim heard him clear as a bell.

"You would not believe how good it is to see you man."

"I might." Jim rumbled back, his smile reserved to a single corner of his mouth.

Blair pulled back suddenly. Eyes wide and panicked as he looked at Ellison's eyes again this time looking for dilation or redness before he began to sweep his hands over his lovers body, searching for injury or irritation.

"Don't worry love. I saw his traps coming a mile away."

Blair's shoulders slowly loosened with a sigh before he snuggled back up against Jim's broad chest.

"Are we about to be interrupted by a seriously pissed pack of BAU agents any time soon?"

"Yep. Might take'em a couple of minutes to untie Morgan from the backseat of his car though. I think we're safe for a couple more minutes."

"You tied him up and took his car?" Blair's voice started to rise until the end of the sentence ended in a shriek of disbelief. "Along with the fucking jailbreak what other laws have you broken?"

Jim looked thoughtful as he counted on his fingers behind Blair's back.
"Well, I assaulted Morgan and Hotchener before the uh jailbreak. Choked Jareau unconscious while escaping from said jail. Assaulted Morgan again. Took his car. Took him."

Blair was slowly pounding his head on one of Jim's broad shoulders as he fought another scream that wanted to come out. As his head impacted again and he rolled his forehead back and forth against the warm soft fabric he could feel Jim tense up again.

"Did you at least disable the traps that Thompson here set for his experiments."

"Yes."

"You don't sound too sure."

"As long as they take the same route I did they won't run into any traps."

"But there are multiple paths that they could take which might have also been booby trapped."

"That's the long and short of it."

"Jim!"

"Calm down. There's only one way. They should be perfectly safe."

Jim let out a little huff of breath so that Blair could pretend that his blind punch to the older man's ribs had actually had an effect. Decent of him really.

"You don't want to hit me."

"I really do."

"Nope." Jim's voice popped on the 'p' and his face deepened into a real grin for the first time in days. He held up a small box of what proved to be cd's

"Oh great you found his music collection. Let me guess, "Best of Death Row: The Final Words of Serial Killers".

"He left notes and video detailing all of the experiments that he performed on each of the boys he kidnapped. Each kid had a notebook and a dvd."

"That's great." Blair's voice lacked any enthusiasm. "Now instead of death row you'll get twenty to life. At least they might allow conjugal visits at this point."

Jim's head cocked as he tilted an ear towards the ceiling and strained as he heard a car door slam open in the distance.

"They found Morgan."

Rossi's eyes were firmly planted on the road as he and Reid tore out of the gravel driveway and headed towards the address that Hotch had texted to them. Reid was sitting next to him his fingers tightly curled around themselves and his legs as he pulled his knees nearly up to his ears. The quick phone conversation had been nearly monosyllabic but the essence had been passed along. Morgan had been kidnapped. Kidnapped by a man who had no rational explanation for his behavior and yet had managed to live a high functioning social and working life. The numbers weren't adding up so
Reid ran them again. Adding different variables. Mixing and matching. Trying to find the pattern. The reason.

"Oh my god."

"What?"

"Let's look at this a different way."

Rossi's eyebrows rose incredulously but he nodded.

"The books we found in Sandburg and Ellison's place are obviously signs of delusion."

"Yes."

"Sandburg had a paper that he had had published in college in one of the books. It referenced Sentinel's as well."

"Long before Sandburg had met Ellison."

Reid nodded wildly but continued.

"But it was published."

Rossi's eyebrows rose as he butted in.

"Meaning someone else could have read it."

"And attached meaning to it. Magnifying the loss of a brother into the loss of a life partner and a Sentinel."

"So he tried to find a new one."

"But it wasn't working. None of them were what he wanted. So he took someone that let him lure his Sentinel to him without having to physically fight him."

Rossi bit his lips and focused on the road ahead of him even as his mind sparked along with Reid's.

"He knew Sandburg was in trouble because Waterbrook had the new inscription burned into his belly."

"Now that the lion has killed the dog he will eat the wolf and through this consumption he will learn to Guide and become what he always should have been."

"So it was a ransom note. If Sandburg was the wolf than that was basically a death threat. Ellison recognized it but he couldn't tell us about the delusion that he and Sandburg shared because he thought we'd blow him off and be even more sure that he was guilty."

"So he did everything he could to get to Sandburg without killing. He's been very careful not to kill any of us."

Rossi stepped harder on the gas.

"Call Hotch."
Reid and Rossi hadn't been far behind the others so they all peeled into the nearly vacant high school parking lot at approximately the same time. Hotchner had drawn his gun and pointed for Rossi to circle around the FBI issued SUV the other way. The two men stalked closer and closer until they could hear the steady thump of Morgan's feet as he doggedly kicked at the door.

Hotch leaned in close and quickly flung the door open before he sprang back gun raised again to shoot.

Morgan's face was contorted around a cloth gag that had been used by sacrificing someone's shirt. The silky blue material probably meant it was one of J.J.'s and Hotch had to restrain an irrational giggle as he pulled it free of Morgan's mouth.

"Where is he?"

" Barely stuck around long enough to gag me. He ran into the school like a bat out of hell."

"Psychosomatic or fake leg injury then."

Morgan shook his head in a vehement no even as he offered his bound wrists up to Rossi’s pocket knife.

"No way. Bat out of hell yes, but he was still visibly favoring his leg."

Morgan tried to stand and staggered as blood rushed back to his legs and he had to hold onto the door with a tight grip to keep his feet.

"That man can tie a hell of a knot." Morgan almost began to rub his wrists to try and bring feeling back to his hands but the deep grooves that were cut into his skin forced him to stop.

Reid strode up and hit the trunk release on the SUV so that he could pull the first aid kit from the back.

"Thanks kid." Morgan refocused on Hotch as Reid started to gently wrap the older man's wrists.

"Hotch that dude was not right in the head. He said something about Sandburg telling him that Ian Thompson had kidnapped him."

Reid stopped dead. His suddenly nerveless fingers nearly dropping the white bandages that he was using to wrap Morgan's wrists. His scrambled and managed to save them from an ignominious end.

"Ah you managed to miss that conversation."

Morgan looked from face to face his own clouded with confusion.

"What conversation?"

As the BAU converged on the small room, led by a flickering trail of bare light bulbs, all of them took a deep breath. Hotch took the lead and showed his fingers to his teammates.

3...2...1.

They slammed into the small room and fanned out so that they all had free lines of fire.

Thompson was still sobbing quietly on the floor in one of the rooms corners. His eyes were bleary
and unfocused. He hadn't even flinched at the dramatic entrance.

Sandburg's face was buried between Ellison's neck and shoulder as the pair sat curled together on the other side of the cell. Ellison's bad leg was sprawled out in a straight line, monstrously swollen. Blair was sitting between his lovers legs and had his own limbs wound around Ellison's waist and shoulders. The glare that Jim leveled at all of them was at once furious and bleakly amused.

"We surrender."

Flying home a couple of days later Hotch leaned his head back against the airplane's comfortable seats.

Ian Thompson had been a broken mess when he had been dragged into a secure jail cell a couple of towns over, Madison's was still missing it's door. The evidence against him was overwhelming. He'd be given either Life or the Death Sentence depending on the judge. Sandburg and Ellison had both been dragged to the hospital. Given fluids to help wipe out the remnants of a mind altering drug and heavily dosed with painkillers respectively.

The entire team had ultimately refused to levy charges against the men.

A shared delusion did not a serial killing pair make.

His blinkered vision bothered him more than he wanted to admit. He had been doing this for a long time. Maybe longer than he should have. If every sign of mental illness brought this about he wasn't sure if he could trust his own judgment.

Hotch breathed out long and slow as he tried to wrangle his mind into submission.

No. He wasn't going to give up. Give this up. The work they did was important. He just needed to learn from his mistakes and become a better profiler.

As his head began to slide to the side he slipped into slumber.

It is not because the truth is too difficult to see that we make mistakes...we make mistakes because the easiest and most comfortable course for us is to seek insight where it accords with our emotions - especially selfish ones.

Alexander Solzhenitsyn

FIN

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