Summary

A year after the events of "100", Aaron Hotchner is struggling to rebuild his life and find a balance between what he had and what he needs. David Rossi introduces him to a club, and a man, that may be able to help him do just that. Meanwhile, an Unsub targeting BDSM Dominants may put an end to things just as they're starting to come together.

Notes

This started as an idea of what type of person would Aaron Hotchner be able to submit to after Foyet. Unable to find a canon character that seemed to "fit" as a long term solution, an older OMC walked into my story and wouldn't take "no" for an answer. The rest just fell into place. Has several 'crossover' characters that aren't necessarily mentioned by name, but are hopefully recognizable. Also, please be aware that my view of Foyet’s attack on Hotch in “Nameless, Faceless” is a very DARK view that (reading from other comms) some others share. The revelations Aaron makes in the story about that attack are not meant to “kick
Aaron while he’s down” – but it is simply how I saw the canon scene play out. YMMV.

**Story Contains:** STRONG sexual content, consensual sadomasochistic (SM) play/sex including: flogging, single tail whip play, light breath play, voyeurism, bondage, canes, cock and ball bondage, toy/vibrator play, nipple play, chastity devices, biting, urethral sounds, consensual D/s relationships, consensual polyamorous relationships, and healthy BDSM play.

**Warnings:** EXTREME PTSD, PTSD flashbacks, Emotional trauma, disturbing imagery including torture/mentions of torture and injury, canon minor character death, case related death of a child, non-con and its aftermath discussed/dealt with. **PLEASE BE AWARE THAT THIS STORY DEALS WITH DARK AND POSSIBLY TRIGGERY ISSUES OF VIOLENCE AND ITS AFTERMATH!**

However, also rest assured that the maus is a Happy Ending Girl!

**Wonder!Betas:** Azure Chaos, giggling GG, and B. McCombs. This wouldn't be HALF as good without their input, comments, and support. All remaining mistakes are ALL mine!

*Translations of Irish Gaelic from here:  
a thaisce = my treasure  
Ta gra agam duit, a thaisce. = I love you, my treasure.  
Ta mo chrio istigh ionat. = My heart is within you.

*Quotes used are from: http://www.quotedb.com/ and http://the-iron-gate.com/quotes/

**Disclaimer:** Only Sir Patrick and the OC’s belong to me. The rest belong to their respective copyright holders. No money was made from this fic and no harm is intended. The Leaf is the brainchild of my wonderful Ma'am. Many thanks to Her for letting me borrow it for this story.

Now if i've not scared y'all off - enjoy.

ps - notes of the various "crossover characters" are listed in the end notes.

Rossi watched as his friend and boss slowly exited his office. Aaron Hotchner’s 6 foot 2 frame was stooped with something more than just fatigue, it was a bone deep weariness that was as much emotional as it was physical. Their last case hadn’t been an easy one on their young leader, but not because of the unsub. The local LEO’s had taken exception to the ‘FBI interlopers strong-arming into their case.’ It hadn’t been the BAU that had ‘strong-armed’ their way in, that had been the local field office and their eager to make a name for himself chief. But that hadn’t mattered to the locals and SSA Hotchner had been left to soothe the bruised egos while still attempting to work with his
team to help stop a killer. He’d managed admirably, but it had taken its toll. It wasn’t until they were on the plane back to Quantico that Dave had realized the other reason for Hotch’s quiet introspection; today would have been Hotch’s wedding anniversary.

Even though they’d been divorced, Aaron had still loved Haley deeply. Rossi, along with the rest of the team, had heard the admission of love and affection between Haley and Aaron just before her death and he knew the vibrant young woman’s death had nearly destroyed his friend. Luckily, there was Jack, and the team and Aaron’s sense of responsibility toward their job – otherwise Rossi doubted Aaron would have survived Foyet’s madness. However, this would be Aaron’s first anniversary since Haley’s death. Rossi knew how hard the anniversary had been when the couple had simply been divorced. How much harder must it be for him now?

“No, it’s alright, Jessica. Let him sleep. I’ll come by tomorrow morning to pick him up.”

Rossi listened to the one sided conversation, noting the way Hotch’s shoulders seemed to slump even further with whatever his former sister-in-law was saying. She’d been wonderful about taking care of Jack and being supportive of Aaron after Haley’s death. Rossi couldn’t help but wonder if the divorce would have happened at all if Jessica had been so supportive *before* hand, but even he had to admit that was a bit petty. Loving a profiler wasn’t easy, and he had the ex-wives to prove it. Loving the leader of the top Behavioral Analysis Units at Quantico was a thousand times worse. Add in a young child, and Rossi was quietly amazed the Hotchners had lasted as long as they had, quite honestly. Watching Aaron, and the team, after Haley’s death had been a bit of an eye-opener for Jessica Brooks, an eye-opener Rossi felt the young woman had sorely needed. She’d seen the team rally around Aaron as much as he’d let them, and a bit more. She’d seen how he’d tried to keep the horrors of what he’d experienced from touching Jack and the rest of Haley’s family. They’d all watched as Aaron had stoically taken the verbal lashing from Haley’s mother after the funeral, and had watched in amazement as Jessica had stepped in and backed her mother down. Rossi still didn’t know what had caused Jessica’s change of heart, but she’d been one of Aaron’s strongest supporters from that moment on.

“You’re right. I had forgotten about that.” Another pause as Aaron smiled ruefully. “No. He’s been looking forward to that party for two weeks, I’m not about to tell him he can’t go because his boring old dad misses him.” He chuckled, a tired, worn sound. “No. Honestly, it’s fine. I’ll pick him up from the party at 6pm. It’s at Joey’s house, right? Good. I remember where that is.” The quiet laugh this time was genuine and joyful. “Tell him in the morning that daddy said he cannot have chocolate cake for breakfast no matter what Uncle Sean said, especially if he’s going to be having birthday cake in the afternoon. And if my ne’er do well brother decides to quote Bill Cosby again, remind him that while I might not have brought him into this world, I could very easily take him out of it.” He laughed again, shaking his head. “I don’t understand what you see in that scapegrace, but then, I never understood what Haley saw in me either – so it must be the Hotchner charm.” The smile dimmed a bit, but didn’t completely fade as Aaron listed to what was being said. “Jess, I’m fine. Really. Just tired. I’ll be okay.” He sighed deeply, nodding as he listened. “Thank you. Now, go get some sleep. Jack will be up super early tomorrow and you’ll have to deal with the on-going ‘is it time to go yet?’ questions until it is. I don’t know how Joey’s folks are going to manage five hyped up six year olds for an entire day. I’ve faced down hardened criminals and the thought of a party like that scares the heck out of me.” His laugh was warm. “You too, Jess. Good night.”

Rossi watched as the smile faded the second the phone was disconnected. Aaron’s hand went to his forehead, rubbing absenty at his temple. Headache. Rossi thought back and realized that while Aaron *had* joined the team for dinner, he’d done little more than push the food around his plate, eating only enough to placate the team. Fine bunch of profilers they were. Rossi shook his head.

“While I appreciate the gesture of concern, Dave,” Hotch said without looking up, “I really am fine.”
Speaking of fine profilers. He stepped from the shadows he’d unintentionally been standing in. “You don’t look fine to me.”

Aaron looked up, giving him a wan smile. “I’ll *be* fine. Honestly.”

Rossi shook his head, meeting Aaron’s gaze easily. “You aren’t going home to an empty house tonight, Aaron. You’re going to come with me and actually *eat* the meal you order this time.” He chuckled as Aaron grimaced at being caught out, but didn’t protest. “And then we’ll talk about what happens after that. But one thing’s for certain, you’re not going home alone. End of discussion.”

Hotch blinked at the firm tone. He’d heard it before, just never directed at him that way. He could suddenly see Dave Rossi as the Dominant Aaron had recently learned he was, and it called to something he’d buried deep after Gideon’s departure. Part of him wanted to respond to that tone, wanted to give over his control to someone again. It would be so easy to release that need again, and he trusted Dave to know how to keep that part of him safe. But he knew he couldn’t, not now, and definitely not someone he worked with. It was easy to let the need out of the box, but he’d learned the hard way how difficult it was to put it back in again. But it was so very tempting to just… give in. He felt his resolve weaken ever so slightly and sighed. “Dave, I…”

“This is non-negotiable, Aaron. You’ve been running on a bare minimum of sleep while dealing with a bunch of overblown egos that should have known better than to get into a jurisdictional pissing contest while a killer was still on the loose. Add to that the date and the lack of a certain little boy waiting at home, and it’s a recipe for disaster. You and I both know that.” He kept his voice calm but firm, holding on to the control that Hotch was slowly giving over. Once more he cursed Jason Gideon for his sudden disappearance from the lives of the people who had come to rely on him. He held out his hand to the younger man. “I’m not going to let that happen, Aaron. Not when there’s something I can do to prevent it.”

Hotch unconsciously leaned towards the offered comfort before stopping himself and straightening. “Dinner,” he conceded. “Then we’ll see how things go.”

Dave smiled his approval. “Good man,” he praised, taking Aaron’s arm and leading him from the dimly lit offices.

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The small restaurant was more upscale than what Aaron normally chose but it was apparently one of Dave’s favorites. Haley would have loved it – the quiet, intimate atmosphere; the unobtrusive waitstaff in their pristine uniforms; the gourmand food served on elegant china and pre-matched with expensive wine on the menu, ‘just in case sir was having difficulty deciding’. Aaron, however, felt very much out of place even though he and Dave had been here a few times before. While he could easily traverse the social niceties with the best political sharks and bureau heads the FBI could offer, it had never come as easily to him as it had to Haley. She had been so outgoing, so beautiful… and she’d thrown it all away on a work-a-holic FBI agent who was more at home with the criminals than with his own peers; an FBI agent whose job had cost Haley her family, her home, and ultimately, her life.

“And this is why I wasn’t about to send you home alone.”

Aaron startled, looking sheepishly up at his dinner companion. “Sorry. I’m afraid I’m more tired than I thought.”

Dave leaned back and pinned his friend with a knowing stare. “You and I both know it’s more than that. It’s all right to be melancholy, Aaron, especially today. It’s the first anniversary you’ve had
“No. I was without her the one prior as well,” Aaron answered back defensively.

“You were divorced. There’s a big difference between divorced and deceased,” Rossi countered quietly. He watched as the now-familiar mask fell over Aaron’s face and silently cursed his own brusque nature. “Sorry,” he apologized. “That was uncalled for and needlessly cruel.”

Aaron’s eyes lowered and he smiled ruefully. “That doesn’t make it any less true.” He sighed then forced himself to meet his friend’s concerned gaze. “There are still times I wake up expecting her to be there.”

Dave reached across the space between them and laid a hand over Hotch’s. “That’s to be expected, Aaron. You loved her a great deal and she was taken from you far too soon. But she wouldn’t have wanted you to shut yourself off from the world like this. You don’t have to deal with this alone.”

Aaron shook his head. They’d had this discussion several times in the past few weeks, Dave reminding him that he needed to find some release for his emotions before they overwhelmed him. Once, he would have agreed. Now... now there was no one he could trust enough to let down those barriers with, at least, not enough to do any lasting good. Jason would have known how to handle him, how to give him that outlet and then put him back together again. But Jason was gone and Aaron was here and there were people relying on him to be strong: the team, Jessica, Jack. He couldn’t let himself fall apart for fear of never being able to pull himself together again. And as much as he appreciated Dave’s offer to take over the position that Jason had abandoned, he couldn’t. Not and still maintain his position as team lead over the other man. The dynamic would be too skewed and the last thing the team needed in a crisis was a Lead who was conflicted over what role he was to play. Granted, it had never happened with Gideon in the field, but he’d been stronger then, less scarred by life… by Foyet.

“I understand your reluctance about allowing me to fill Jason Gideon’s role,” Dave said almost gently. “But I think you need to find *someone*, Aaron. It isn’t healthy for you to be so alone in this.”

“It’s not like I can advertise for what I’m needing, Dave,” Aaron shot back bitterly.

“No, but you don’t need to.”

“Dave.”

“No, Hear me out,” Dave said evenly. “You were willing to fill out the paperwork for the club. You’ve been successfully vetted and invited to visit. So come with me and at least see what it has to offer. You might be surprised.”

Aaron pinched the bridge of his nose as the headache threatened once more. “I… I don’t know, Dave.”

“Aaron,” Rossi interrupted, “You trust me, right?”

Aaron looked up in surprise. “You know I do.”

“Then trust me in this. Come with me to the club tonight, just as a visitor. No pressure, just an opportunity to take a look around and see what you think of the place and the people.” He met Aaron’s eyes easily. “If you’re uncomfortable, we’ll leave.”

Aaron offered his friend a weary smile. It was a tempting offer. He and Jason had never played
publicly: they’d never felt the need to. What they had shared was more… private, a release of the terrors and tensions their jobs created. Haley had known, though she hadn’t understood beyond the fact that Jason could provide Aaron with a peace that she couldn’t. Then Jason had changed, drawing away from Aaron, from everyone, leaving more than just Aaron struggling to cope. Haley had tried to fill that void, and Aaron had tried to suppress the pain and uncertainty so he could be the man she’d married. But in the end, he’d lost her too. And now, here sat Dave Rossi, a man who’d seen him at his strongest, and his weakest, offering him a chance to recapture the peace he’d found with Jason. It was so damned tempting, tempting and absolutely terrifying.

“Dave I….”

Dave’s smile was far too knowledgeable and Aaron was reminded painfully of Jason and the way he’d been able to read Aaron’s need, often before Aaron even knew. “Trust me.”

Aaron knew it was time to at least try to move on. He nodded his assent to Dave, not trusting his voice.

Dave smiled. “Good man.”

Aaron tried to ignore the warmth the simple phrase sent through him. “So. Where do we go from here?” he asked to cover his embarrassment.

Dave’s smile went mysterious and Aaron was suddenly worried about what he’d just agreed to. He trusted Dave, he did. But he also knew the man had a love of the dramatic.

Dave fished a dark card out of his wallet and motioned for their waiter. The sharply dressed man’s eyes widened a bit as Dave held out the card. “Please inquire if the club proper is open for visitors this evening.” The man nodded sharply, his expression betraying nothing as he took the card and disappeared.

Aaron’s eyes narrowed as he studied Dave. “It’s here?” he asked quietly. “You were that sure you’d convince me?”

“No,” Dave answered honestly. “I had hoped you might be open to the idea, but I honestly brought you here because you seem to like the food and you needed a good meal.”

Aaron had the decency to blush at the gentle admonishment. “Fair enough. So, now what?”

“We wait for the answer to my inquiry and you finish your meal.” Dave looked pointedly at Aaron’s plate and raised an eyebrow in censure.

“Yes, mom,” Aaron shot back drily.

Dave simply laughed and toasted the younger man with his glass of water.

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Aaron wasn’t sure what he’d expected, but it wasn’t anything like this. The waiter had returned with Dave’s card and a simple nod. Dave had smiled and gone back to their conversation as if nothing had happened, but he deflected all Aaron’s questions until after Aaron had finished his meal – much to Aaron’s frustration. Dave had simply smirked and motioned for the check. The waiter took Dave’s card, but another man returned it. It took Aaron a moment to realize it was the maître d’. The older man had smiled and motioned for them to follow him. He’d led them to the elevator and Aaron watched as he withdrew a key from his inner pocket, a key attached securely to a chain with a head shaped like a stylized leaf. The man lifted a small panel to the side of the elevator buttons, inserted
the key into the revealed slot, and pressed the now lit button beside the keyhole. The elevator slid silently into motion.

After a few moments the elevator doors opened onto a simple but elegant hallway. With a silent nod to the maître d’, Dave urged Aaron out of the elevator and down the quiet hall. Aaron followed, taking in the warm wood paneling and deep green carpeting. Dave stopped in front of a dark green door and gave Aaron a reassuring smile before he opened it and walked inside.

The antechamber was well lit and welcoming, putting Aaron at ease, which he was sure was the point. A young woman looked up from her paperwork as they entered. “Master David!” she exclaimed, her smile lighting up as she caught sight of Dave. “I was so pleased to hear you’d be joining us tonight. We’ve missed you.”

Dave moved to the counter the young woman sat behind and took her offered hand, kissing the back of it with a gallant smile. “I’ve missed being here, but work…” He shrugged. “So, how is Mistress Jenny?”

The woman scowled. “Still on crutches. She apparently decided that she knew better than the doctor and decided she felt good enough to push it and managed to reinjure her knee. So,” she sighed. “Four more weeks on the crutches and they’ve put her back in the brace hoping that it’ll remind her she’s on restrictions. She’s been a grump ever since.”

Dave laughed as he handed over his ID and his gun and signed into the ledger the young woman held out to him. “Just remind her that until that knee heals she’ll be confined to the sidelines in the Pit.”

“Oh, she knows! That’s why she’s such a grump. We’ve trained two more pups since she last went puppy, and she’s itching to play again,” the young woman confided as she drew out a lock-box and placed Dave’s ID and gun inside. “So, will your guest be using your locker, or should I assign him one of his own?”

Dave turned. “Aaron? Do you mind simply using my locker? You’ll need to leave your ID, badge, and guns here, but they’ll be perfectly safe.”

“Oh,” the young woman exclaimed, “so this is your Aaron, then? I was hoping to get a chance to meet him.” Aaron’s eyes narrowed at the comment and the young woman smiled easily. “I’m on the vetting committee,” she explained, “and I was really looking forward to meeting you. You sound like a wonderful addition to the Leaf membership, which isn’t surprising with Master David as your sponsor.”

Dave stepped in, giving Aaron time to absorb all the information. “Angel,” he cautioned the young lady, “first off, he’s not ‘my Aaron’, we’re just friends. Second, he’s just here to get a feel for the club to see if he’s interested. He hasn’t decided on joining yet.”

“He will though,” Angel answered with a knowing smile. “If he’s come this far, he’ll find what he needs here.” She turned her attention to Aaron. “That’s what the Leaf is known for, sir, helping people find what they need.”

Aaron shrugged noncommittally as he handed over his ID and his guns. He felt a bit naked without at least his back-up piece, another of Foyet’s legacies, but he could understand the precaution. “I’ll share with Dave if that’s acceptable,” he finally said.

Angel smiled at him and placed his things in with Dave’s. She locked the metal ‘safe’ and handed the key to Dave, then grabbed a clipboard and handed it to Aaron. “You’ll need to just read through
this and sign it. It’s the club and dungeon rules and the waiver that you filled out with your
application, but management asks we keep one on file when guests actually accompany a member to
the club. Just for safety.”

Aaron took the papers and read through them carefully, his law background making it difficult for
him to *not* do so before signing off on a document. As he read, Angel turned her attention back to
Dave. “Master Walt is here with Ms. Vixen and Fox tonight.”

“Really? Have they moved back from Canada then?”

Angel’s blonde hair fluttered around her pretty face. “Un fortunately, no. Alexi is happily ensconced
in the wilds up there and they wouldn’t leave him behind now that they’ve finally convinced him
they’re serious about keeping him. Apparently Fox is in town for a teaching engagement, so Master
Walt and Ms. Vixen are going to try and calm him down before he has to face the classes. I’m sure
they’d be thrilled to see you, Sir. In fact, Master Walt asked if you were still in the area. They’ll be
scening in Room 4 if you’d like me to reserve an observation room for you and your guest. Or, if Mr.
Aaron would like a tour of the club instead, I could have one of the subs show him around while you
enjoy the show. There’s a good group in the Puppy Mosh tonight, not that I’m biased or anything,”
she added with a cheeky grin, “but they can be a bit… daunting at first if you’re not used to that. The
lounge is always a good place to meet the members and get an idea of who and what goes on
without the pressure of the scenes. The open dungeon is always interesting, and I think the secondary
dungeon is men only this evening.” She turned and consulted the small laptop beside her. “Yes. It’s
men only tonight and I think Gunny is here with his boy, and they’re always pretty to watch.”

“Not that you’re biased,” Dave teased.

Angel blushed. “You gush once about a Dom being a silver fox and they never let you forget it,” she
complained with a teasing scowl. “Just remember, I heard your comments about Gunny’s pretty little
goth girl, and you *know* how protective he is of her.”

Dave held up his hands in mock surrender. “Fair point.” He looked over at Aaron. “I think we’ll start
with an observation room. Master Walt is a good example of what the Leaf has to offer, so we’ll start
there. Aaron, that acceptable?”

Aaron looked up from his clipboard and nodded. “Acceptable.” He signed the last paper and handed
it over to Angel who held out a bright orange wristband.

“If you would hold out your right wrist please, Mr. Aaron.” She wrapped the band around his wrist,
securing it carefully. “Orange flagged on the right shows that tonight you’re not interested in
participating in anything. It’s something we do for our first time guests, but it’s also something that
members can elect to do so it doesn’t ‘mark’ you as a first timer,” she explained. “If you find that
you’d like to participate, you can come back here and I’ll change it out for you or just find one of the
Dungeon Monitors, they’re the ones in the orange waistcoats, and they can do it as well. They can
also replace the band if something happens and it comes off, or you decide that you want one back
on. Just make sure it’s on your *right* wrist, because left means you’re open to doing *anything*,”
she cautioned. She smiled at Aaron as she slid his papers into the file-box beside her. “Do you have
any questions?”

Aaron shook his head, uncertain what he’d even want to ask at this point.

Her smile turned understanding. “If you have any questions I’m sure Master David will be able to
answer them. But if not, I’m Mistress Jenny’s Angel. Ask any of the Monitors and they’ll get you
back here and I’ll try and answer them. Just relax and have fun. We’re a safe group and from what I
saw of your application, I really do think you’ll find what you’re looking for here.”
Aaron returned her smile. “Thank you, Miss Angel.”

She blushed and pointed them towards the inner door. “Welcome to the Leaf, Mr. Aaron. Enjoy your evening.”

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The inner door was green as well, only lighter and intricately carved. The upper section was dominated by a motif of three, intertwined, four point stars. The center star’s upper and lower points were elongated, stretching from just below the top edge of the door to level with the metal door handle. The two smaller stars sat at either end of those points. Half the size of the center star each was done in a lighter wood and carved with intricate scroll work that was only visible when you looked very closely at them (which Aaron took the time to do). Over the interlocking stars, however, was the image that caught Aaron’s attention the most (as it was designed to do, Aaron supposed, given the *name* of the establishment); a simple, stylized leaf, divided into three, unequal parts, each stained a slightly different shade of green. The leaf touched at least some part of each of the stars, and Aaron wondered if it were simply the artist’s depiction, or if there was symbolism to the image.

“The Virginia House was one of the original three US Leaf clubs,” Rossi answered the unasked question. “This is an homage to that beginning. When they finally had to replace the inner door, they asked for input from the members. Sir Roland designed it, Gunny carved it and Angel back there put on the finishing touches with the subtle colors.” Rossi grasped Aaron’s shoulder lightly. “Remember. One word and we leave, but I really do hope you’ll give it a chance.”

Aaron nodded. “I promise to keep an open mind.”

“That’s all I ask. So? Shall we?” Rossi didn’t wait for an answer, simply pulled open the door and walked inside, leaving Aaron little choice but to follow.

Again, the place wasn’t what Aaron had expected. This was no sleazy back room BDSM club, this was upscale, like the restaurant above. The place was well lit, clean, comfortable, and obviously discreet, judging by the ease with which the clientele interacted. Logically, he’d known it would be different than the run-down, less than savory places he’d seen in his work, but he found he’d been unconsciously braced for just that. He watched as Dave was greeted like an old friend by multiple people. It seemed that there was a very good *reason* Rossi had such in-depth knowledge of the BDSM lifestyle. Here he wasn’t the acclaimed lecturer on behavioral analysis and criminal profiling or the author of multiple books on the criminal, especially psychopathic, mind. Here he was ‘Master David’, a smiling, well respected and in charge dominant male.

Aaron unconsciously fell in step behind Dave and slightly to his right. Dave looked back at him once, but didn’t push. People would greet Dave first, their eyes flicking over to Aaron before returning to Dave, who simply smiled. Aaron could tell which members Dave held respect for, they were the only ones Dave introduced him to. He was introduced simply as ‘My friend Aaron’ and no one questioned further. As they moved around the club, Dave pointed out a certain couple here, or an interesting feature of the club there, and Aaron was surprised at the number of faces he recognized. He suddenly understood the need for leaving the IDs and weapons at the door. An unscrupulous person could live quite comfortably off the blackmail material he’d find here. Luckily, it seemed that The Leaf was very careful about who it let through its doors.

It wasn’t until Dave urged him to have a seat that he realized they’d entered, what had to be, an ‘observation room’. The room was small but comfortable and almost intimate in its furnishings – two overstuffed chairs, several large pillows on the floor, and a small table with a water pitcher, glasses and a basket filled with packets of various sizes and colors. The front wall was completely glass, and Aaron was fairly certain it was either one-way glass or darkly tinted on the other side, giving privacy
to those in the room. The glass wall looked down on an open room containing several pieces of bondage equipment and, at the moment, three individuals that Aaron assumed were Master Walt, Ms. Vixen, and Fox.

It appeared the scene had just started. The focal point of the room was a St. Andrew’s cross to which a slender, naked, young man was currently strapped. His dark hair was in complete disarray and his wide eyes followed the actions of the woman who was currently checking his wrist and ankle restraints. He tugged at them as well, earning himself a sharp slap to his bare hip. He stilled. The woman stood and Aaron understood why she was called Ms. Vixen. Her red hair was the color of a fox’s coat and looked just as silky. She was petite and dressed in a short black dress of what looked to be rubber or vinyl that clung to her like a second skin. She turned on her spiked heel and strode across the room to kneel gracefully before a man Aaron hadn’t noticed before, distracted as he was by the St. Andrew’s cross. [Memories of Gideon’s hands carefully securing him to the cool wood. Wrapping padded cuffs around his wrists and pressing against his back, trapping him, centering him.] He turned his attention to the third member of the group.

Master Walt was a huge, barrel chested man, dressed in leather pants, a leather Master’s cap and a white t-shirt that looked stretched to its limit by the man’s firm body. Aaron thought he looked familiar, but he couldn’t place from where. Not that it really mattered. He was clearly the one in control here and Aaron was curious about what the evening’s activities would entail. Master Walt reached out and stroked Ms. Vixen’s red hair, smiling down at the tiny woman. She raised her face and must have said something because the Master’s face split into a knowing grin and he nodded. The woman rose as gracefully as she had knelt and moved to a small table beside her Master. She studied the contents of the table carefully and then turned back to her Master. They conversed and Aaron wondered what the discussion was and if there was a way they could hear it. He could ask Dave, but it seemed disrespectful to interrupt the quiet of the moment. So he simply watched as the Master nodded and removed several floggers and a single-tail whip from the table and held them as Ms. Vixen returned the remaining items to a case hidden underneath the table.

The moment broken, Aaron rose and crossed to the table where Dave stood pouring himself a glass of water and idly perusing the contents of the small basket. It took Aaron’s brain a moment to realize the basket contained a variety of condoms, individual lube packets and cleansing wipes. He felt his cheeks heating as realized how the Observation Rooms were most likely employed. “Dave…”

Dave chuckled as he poured Aaron a glass of water and handed it over. “Don’t worry, Aaron,” he reassured. “I’m more a voyeur. You’re virtue is perfectly safe,” he added, teasing gently.

“I never doubted that,” Aaron shot back in exasperation. “But are you sure you want to… Would you rather watch the evening’s entertainment alone?”

Dave studied Aaron’s face, concerned. “Would you be more comfortable elsewhere?”

Aaron sighed, rubbing a tired hand over his face. “I… no. No I wouldn’t, but I don’t want to interfere with your enjoyment of the evening either.”

Dave rested a hand on Aaron’s shoulder and guided him back to the chairs. “Aaron. Take off your jacket and tie, sit down and just… watch.” He took the water glass, setting it aside and tugging lightly on the shoulder of Aaron’s suit jacket.

{Gideon’s hands easing the constriction of the tie from around his bruised throat, taking advantage of the darkness of the parking lot to run gentle fingers over injured skin.} Aaron pushed the memories aside and did as he was asked, taking off his tie and putting it in the pocket of his suit jacket before draping the jacket over the back of the chair.
Dave smiled at him and seemed poised to say something, but the sound of leather meeting skin drew their attention to the room below. Aaron was surprised to see it was Ms. Vixen wielding the flogger, not Master Walt. She moved with an easy grace, the tails of the flogger swinging and arching like an extension of her own arm. Fox tensed just before each blow fell, eyes locked defiantly on Ms. Vixen’s face. The blows were slow and precise, raising a touch of color to Fox’s chest, shoulders and outer thighs. Aaron watched the wordless byplay between the two, the defiance from Fox, the careful and steady strokes laid again and again by Ms. Vixen. The blows came harder, faster, but just as precise and Aaron had to admire her skill. He found himself leaning forward minutely, wanting, needing to see. He watched as Fox shifted ever so slightly, shoulders lifting into the strikes, hips tilting to offer more skin to target; but his eyes remained defiant. Aaron watched Ms. Vixen shake her head almost sadly as she finished with the first flogger.

She crossed back to Master Walt, head up, completely in control. Aaron waited to see her Master’s reaction to her demeanor, uncertain what to expect. He doubted Master Walt was used to having his authority challenged, and Ms. Vixen was clearly *not* intending to submit. When Master Walt’s hand came up, Aaron braced for a blow… that never fell. He watched, stunned, as instead Master Walt stroked the young woman’s hair and leaned in to kiss her cheek. Ms. Vixen seemed to relax into the touch, a move Aaron understood all too well – seeking and receiving comfort and strength. Then she pulled away, breathing deeply before holding out her hand, into which Master Walt placed another flogger. Ms. Vixen nodded and turned back to the man on the St. Andrew’s.

She stepped close, running the tails of the new flogger over Fox’s chest and down his sides. Even from their place in the observation room, Aaron and Dave could see the shivers that ran through the bound man’s body at the caress. Ms. Vixen stepped back, striking the flogger’s tails against her own leg twice, before starting to swing the flogger in a classic ‘figure eight’ throw. Fox’s eyes followed the movements and he seemed to relax into the bonds securing him to the St. Andrew’s. It seemed that was the signal Ms. Vixen had been waiting for as she shifted and brought the flogger down hard across Fox’s pectorals. This flogger left a deeper mark, quickly coming up red and vivid.

“Ah. So they *did* get the neoprene and buffalo hide flogger when they were last here,” Dave commented with a chuckle. “I wondered if they were the ones.” He turned to Aaron. “Fox has a thing for rubber and vinyl and at the last Faire one of the vendors had a flogger with a core of neoprene falls surrounded by rough cured buffalo hide. Thing had a hell of a bite, but Fox couldn’t take his eyes off it.” He turned back to the tableau before them. “Walt always was a pushover for that boy.”

“You’ve known them a long time?” Aaron asked uncertainly.

Dave nodded. “Long enough to know that none of them are people you’d want to cross.” He turned more fully towards Aaron. “Master Walt was my sponsor to the Leaf. He had his hands full with Fox and D… Vixen but he still had time to coach a stubborn old Dom like me. Fox is a hardwired sub with a defiant streak a mile wide, and I’ve honestly never figured out how Walt manages to keep him in line without killing the stubborn brat. Vixen is a talented switch, submitting to Walt with a grace that’s stunning and managing to still be Domme to Fox like she was born to it. She’s amazing, and from the looks of this, is advancing in her skills. I’ve never seen them play with Alexi – the boy is extremely private and won’t play publicly, which is fine. He’s devoted to Walt and Vixen and extremely protective of Fox. He’s the reason they had to replace the door.” He shook his head. “There was an… altercation in the entry room, a first time guest took exception to being asked to completely disarm before entering the club. Fox was in the wrong place at the wrong time and ended up walking in on it. Apparently the guest and Fox had a bit of… history and the guest took exception to Fox being allowed in but not him. He drew down on Fox.” Aaron’s eyes widened and Dave
chuckled. That had been his reaction too when Walt had told him about it. “Before security could stop it, Alexi stepped in. From what I was told, the guest ended up going *through* the door, his gun ended up in pieces, and the woman who’d sponsored him was cautioned to select her potential guests with more caution next time.”

Aaron nodded, mind trying to process the training it must take to do what Alexi had in defense of Fox. He looked down at the trio below; Master Walt and Alexi might have been military, but not Ms. Vixen and definitely not Fox. His eyes narrowed as he watched them through a profiler’s eyes. Fox was defiant, but trusted the two before him. Master Walt was used to being obeyed, but allowed Fox a bit more freedom than Aaron would have expected from a military man; a non-military connection rather than military then, or was it simply a carry-over from their dominant/submissive roles? Ms. Vixen most likely served as a buffer between the two headstrong men, softening the military rigidity while helping enforce rules and order. Quiet but strong in her convictions and easily able to hold her own with them, she still sought Master Walt’s approval and worked to give Fox whatever he needed, even as she worried she wouldn’t be able to. {Haley’s blonde hair falling around them as she settled over his prone form, laughing as she held his hands over his head and leaned in to kiss him. The feel of her soft curves pressing into his back as she tried to give him at least a bit of what he needed, what he refused to take from Gideon because of his vows to her. Haley’s soft voice in his ear as she held him after the latest nightmare, asking if she needed to call Gideon or if he would be all right.} Ms. Vixen helped keep them grounded and kept their diverse personalities from tearing the relationship apart. Aaron would love to see them interact with Alexi, wondering what role the apparently volatile man filled in the complex mix of personalities. Where did he fit in the dynamic and how much did he add to or rein in Fox’s defiance.

“Aaron, let it go.”

Aaron startled at Dave’s soft admonition.

“Turn off the profiler brain for a while and just be,” Dave ordered sympathetically. “I know it’s not always easy, but try. Sit back and enjoy the beauty of the moment and the energy between them. Don’t try and over-analyze it, just… watch.”

Aaron swallowed, looking away as he felt his cheeks heat at the older man’s words. “I… I’m trying.”

A warm hand settled on his shoulder, the fingers squeezing firmly for a brief moment before pulling away. “I know you are. But just… relax for a while.”

Aaron took a deep breath and tried to shut down the hyper-vigilant part of his brain that had been his unwelcome companion since Foyet had first threatened his family. He didn’t need to be as vigilant here. He was safe, Dave would make sure of that. Jack was safely with Jessica and the team were all home in their respective beds, safe and sound. {‘Is George a bad guy, Daddy?’, ‘Make sure he knows that you weren’t always so serious. Promise me.’ ‘I’m sorry, Aaron. I just can’t do this anymore.’ ‘You should have made a deal.’} Foyet was dead. His family, what was left of it, was safe. He could relax now, here. He drew in another deep breath, slower, deeper, letting it out in a calm, steady stream. He knew Dave was watching him closely, could feel the man’s eyes taking in every nuance of Aaron’s demeanor to gauge Aaron’s state of mind. “I’m fine, Dave. Honestly. It’s just… hard to shut it off some times.”

Dave nodded knowingly. “Just try, okay? That’s all I ask. And remember, any time it gets to be too much…”

“I know. Thank you.” He turned back to the scene and blinked at the number of red welts crossing Fox’s pale skin.
Ms. Vixen’s strikes were harder now, precise and frequent and placed with amazing skill. Fox moaned and writhed in his bonds, jerking forward with each hit. Two more sharp strikes and Ms. Vixen stepped back, her breathing nearly as ragged as Fox’s. Master Walt moved to stand behind her, pulling her back against his broad chest and leaning down to whisper in her ear. Aaron watched, enviously, as she melted into the older man. ‘Let it go, Aaron. I’ve got you.’ They spoke for a brief moment, eyes on Fox as he shivered in his bonds. Master Walt pressed a light kiss to Ms. Vixen’s auburn hair as he uncoiled and placed the final whip into her small but clearly capable hand. As Master Walt moved to stand behind the St. Andrew’s Cross, Ms. Vixen took a few, trial snaps of the whip. The supple, obviously well-loved single-tail cracked sharply in the confined space, making Fox and Aaron jump at the sound. {The loud report of the Reaper’s gun echoed in his head. His ears rang painfully even as he struggled to control his reactions, determined not to give Foyet what he wanted, Aaron’s fear.}

Dave’s hand was warm as it settled on his shoulder, pulling him from the past and grounding him in the moment. Aaron relaxed into the touch without a sound.

Ms. Vixen’s eyes were locked on Fox’s face as she cracked the whip. Master Walt pressed against the Cross’s center support and urged Fox’s head back, letting it rest on his shoulder. His lips moved as they pressed against Fox’s hair and Aaron wondered what he was saying to the younger man. ‘The hardest part is not passing out from the pain…’ The whip fell, striking beside Fox’s left nipple and making the bound man cry out sharply. Two more hits to each nipple left the man breathing shallowly and shaking in his Master’s arms. Aaron’s eyes narrowed as Master Walt’s hand snaked around Fox’s head, his large hand covering Fox’s mouth and nose, restricting the young man’s breathing. Aaron found himself shaking at the intensity of the moment.

“Still with me, Aaron?” Dave asked, his hand still a welcome weight on his shoulder. “We can leave if it’s too much, but I’ll tell you that this is typical for them. Fox had a kink for breath play and Walt is one of the best and safest there is.”

Aaron nodded, not sure which statement he was answering or acknowledging. He watched as Fox relaxed completely in his bonds, giving himself over to his partners’ care. Each strike of the whip took him further from himself. The pressure of his Master’s hand controlling his breathing, taking even that responsibility away from him, was obviously welcome, his body pressing up into the touch rather than fighting to get away. ‘Let go, Aaron. Trust me to catch you.’ The whip fell again and again as Master Walt tightened and released his grip until Fox was shaking and begging for release. Fox’s cock was hard and twitched with each crack of the whip, drawing Aaron’s eyes. When Master Walt tightened his grip, Fox’s hips thrust helplessly, seeking friction, seeking that final touch that would send him tipping over into oblivion. ‘That’s it, my beautiful boy. Just let go. Let it happen.’

Aaron shifted in his chair, his dress pants suddenly confining. Dave had to have noticed, but the older man thankfully said nothing.

A final crack of the whip and Fox’s body arched away from the St. Andrew’s, his muffled cry unnaturally loud to Aaron’s ears. Ms. Vixen laid the whip aside and moved to stand in front of Fox, wrapping her petite body against his whip-marked chest, heedless of the semen and blood and sweat. [Haley’s subtle perfume filling his senses as he curled into her embrace, holding her close and delighting in the comfort she offered. The scent of Haley’s perfume overwhelmed by the metallic stench of blood and cordite as he rocked her cooling body and apologized again and again for failing her when she needed him the most.] Aaron rose shakily from his chair and moved towards the door, trying to control the overwhelming swirl of emotions churning in his gut.

“Aaron?”

He waved off Dave’s concern as the room suddenly seemed horribly claustrophobic. “I’m sorry. I
Dave’s hands were once more on his shoulders and he fought the urge to strike out. “Easy.” Dave followed him to the door to the small room. “Left down the hallway, then second room on your right,” Dave said gently.

Aaron nodded, resisting the urge to remind Dave he was an adult who could take care of himself. His hands shook as he reached for the doorknob and he curled them into fists in frustration.

Dave opened the door for him, one hand still on Aaron’s shoulder. “Do you want me to come with…”

Aaron shook his head, struggling and wanting nothing more than to escape from Dave’s too knowing eyes.

Dave’s hand tightened on his shoulder, a tacit acknowledgment of Aaron’s wishes. “Fair enough. If you need me…” He let the offer trail off.

Aaron forced himself to turn back to Dave, letting the gratitude show in his eyes – though for the offer, or for not demanding Aaron stay and talk things out Aaron wasn’t entirely sure.

Dave nodded in understanding and smiled at Aaron. “If you’re not back in fifteen I’m going to come looking.”

The lightly teasing remark drew a hint of a smile from Aaron. “Thank you.” Aaron took another deep breath, struggling to draw his stoic mask back into place. ‘Why do you keep shutting me out, Aaron? I’m not some sheltered flower. I want to be there for you. For better or worse. Does that ring any bells, Aaron?’ He took the first shaky step out of the room, concentrating on putting one foot in front of the other as he sought out the sanctuary of the restroom to compose himself.

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There is no greater hell than to be a prisoner of fear – Ben Jonson

The restroom was blessedly empty when he entered and Aaron was absurdly grateful for the fact. Like the rest of the club, the restroom was clean and well lit. Urinals lined part of the far wall facing smoked mirror tiles that allowed the user a view of the room behind him. Two stalls took up the remainder of the wall, done in the same deep green as the primary entry door to the club, and both marked with handicapped accessible signs. Aaron was impressed. A counter on the other wall held three sinks overlooked by a long expanse of mirror, again, allowing a person facing it full view of the room behind him, something he’d come to value since his ordeal with the Reaper. He took a shuddering breath and rested his back against the wall as he worked to keep his breathing regular and slow. ‘Pain, blood, brown eyes boring down into his as he fought to stay conscious, fought back with words, the only weapon he had left. ‘Don’t speak. You lost a lot of blood. You’ll need your oxygen.’’ He lurched into the closest stall and vomited up dinner. His throat burned as everything came up until all that was left was acid and bile. Finally it stopped and he wiped his face with a handful of toilet paper. Reaching up with a shaking hand he flushed the stench away. He shifted, taking advantage of the large stall to settle his tall frame on the floor, his back against the cool tile of the wall. He hated this; hated that even this long after his death Foyet still had this level of effect on him.

He drew in several deep breaths, ignoring the tell-tale catch that he refused to call a suppressed sob, and levered himself to his feet. Dave had given him fifteen minutes, and he had no doubt the other man *would* come and track him down as threatened. The last thing he needed was Dave hovering
even more than he already was. He adjusted his shirt, scrubbed a hand over his face and left the safety of the stall. He moved to the sinks and was surprised by the flushed, haunted face that gazed back at him. He started the water and splashed some on his face, rubbing away the signs of his loss of control. He captured a double handful of the cool, clear liquid and carefully rinsed the taste out of his mouth. He wondered if he still had the mint in his jacket pocket, a secret gift from Jack that had been a surprisingly comforting talisman during the frustrating case.

“I’ve got some gum if you need, friend.”

Aaron started, eyes flashing up to the mirror. He’d been so distracted, someone had entered the room and he hadn’t even noticed. A young man dressed in blue jeans and a black t-shirt stood in front of the urinals, looking over his shoulder at Aaron. Aaron gripped the edge of the counter, fighting back the unnecessary panic.

“Sorry. Didn’t mean to startle you,” the young man said apologetically. The sound of a zipper was loud in the silence of the room. “I’ve not seen you here before,” the young man continued, moving to stand beside Aaron at the sinks. “I’m Paul.”

Aaron nodded, eyes down as he concentrated on scrubbing his hands under the warm water. “Nice to meet you,” he answered noncommittally. He could feel the young man’s eyes on him in the mirror but he kept his gaze averted, not wanting to engage with anyone until he was certain his control was firmly back in place. He added more soap to his hands and scrubbed them once more, needing to rid himself of the feel of sweat {blood} on them. He risked a quick glance at the man with the aid of the mirror and startled. Brown eyes behind wire-framed glasses were looking at him appraisingly. Short brown hair added an air of boyish innocence to the young man’s narrow face. {I should have known, shouldn’t have been fooled by the frightened victim act. Why was he the only one who survived? I could have stopped him then, before so many others had to die.} He dropped his eyes quickly, swallowing back the bile that rose as another face, older, more lined {insane, dangerous} superimposed itself over the young man’s. He scrubbed harder at his hands.

A strong hand captured his wrist.

“Easy there, friend,” the young man urged. “The hands work better with the skin still on them.”

{A sharp blade sliding beneath the skin, twisting, parting skin from connective tissue with surgical skill.}

“Where’s your Sir, boy?” the young man asked again, tone firm, commanding.

Aaron took a shuddering breath. “I don’t have one,” he admitted brokenly. {‘I’m sorry, Aaron. It’s just… too much. I can’t stay. You’ll find someone to take my place. You’ll manage just fine.’} The young man shifted and Aaron watched him warily in the mirror. The brown eyes were studying him, profiling him… looking for his soft, vulnerable places. {‘Will this change the way you profile?’} He dropped his eyes quickly, swallowing back the bile that rose as another face, older, more lined {insane, dangerous} superimposed itself over the young man’s. He scrubbed harder at his hands.

His breath was warm on Aaron’s neck, his body solid as he pressed more closely to Aaron’s back. Aaron fought to keep his breathing controlled. He was safe. {His darkened apartment, the feel of eyes on him. His own rug under his back as a madman drove a knife into him again and again and again.} Dave wouldn’t have brought him somewhere that wasn’t safe. {Haley and Jack – even after
everything, the bastard had found them. Nowhere was safe.) An arm wrapped around his waist, the hand resting on his ‘souvenirs’ from Foyet. “Please.” The body behind him pressed closer. He could feel the man’s erection against his ass and he gripped the sink’s edge tightly, fighting the urge to strike out. He dropped his head further, trying to shut out what was happening, what would happen. (Pain. Searing, tearing, burning. Held just on the edge of too much, denying him the peace of oblivion.)

“Relax,” the voice in his ear whispered. (‘Your body will go numb. And it goes in so much easier if you relax.’)

Aaron struck. He shoved back from the sink’s edge, using his body weight and the element of surprise to throw off his attacker. He couldn’t let him get that close again. He spun on his heel and faced his attacker who was slumped against the wall, stunned. His body trembled with suppressed ‘fight or flight’ responses as he waited to see what the man’s next attack would be. He wouldn’t let anyone else get hurt because of his failings. He’d keep them safe. He had to.

The man chuckled as he straightened. “I’m in to takedown as much as the next man, boy,” he said with a lascivious smile. “But not in a public bathroom and not without a hell of a lot of negotiation. Don’t care how handsome the orange banded boy is, I won’t risk misunderstandings.”

Aaron stared at him in confusion. “I don’t understand.”

The young man’s smile was knowing in a way that frightened Aaron. “If you want it rough, that’s fine. But not here. We take it somewhere safe and we talk first.” He stalked across the room as he spoke, slowly backing Aaron against the bathroom wall. “Don’t care how eager you are, handsome. I’m not gonna risk doing something that’s going to come back and bite either of us in the ass.” He reached out and cupped Aaron’s crotch, squeezing carefully, massaging the traitorous flesh. “But there are other things we can do in the meantime.”

Aaron shoved, hard, sending the man tumbling. Unfortunately, he fell between Aaron and the door and was already struggling to his feet.

“What the hell, boy?” the man growled. “A simple ‘yellow’ would have done it. You didn’t have to shove me.”

Aaron backed further into the corner, eyes darting as he looked for ways out or things he could use as a weapon to escape.

“Hey. Handsome?” the man’s eyes were studying his face intently now. “Easy. Talk to me. What’s going on here? I thought we were on the same page.”

Aaron struggled to slow his breathing. (‘You’ll need your breath.’) He felt his body starting to rebel again, but knew there was nothing left. He fell to his knees, curling in on himself in an effort not to retch. He was vaguely aware of a flurry of movement and yelling, but he was too focused on not passing out to give it much thought. He should be paying attention. He had to keep them safe. (‘I’ll keep you safe. I’ll protect and cherish you… til death do us part.’ The blue dress was, had been, her favorite and she looked so beautiful in it. It made her skin look like porcelain and her blue eyes glow. He wouldn’t have been able to give it away, nor would he be able to look at it again without missing her. The dress, a picture of how she did her make-up normally, her favorite gold and sapphire jewelry set, an anniversary present from better days. He clutched the box to his chest and sobbed, glad that Jack wasn’t home to witness his weakness.) Warm hands settled on his shoulders, shaking him slightly but he just curled tighter around himself. He couldn’t do this. He couldn’t face any more.

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“Monitor! I need a monitor over here!”

Patrick heard the call and rushed towards the men’s room on the observation level. The young dom was one he knew, one of Master Payton’s charges, Paul, Saul, something. He was generally pretty level headed in a crisis, but right now the young man looked positively wrecked. “Calm down. Calm down,” he urged as he reached the young dom. “What’s going on?”

“I don’t know! We were chatting and it seemed to be going really well. I think he was interested in some takedown play, but the more we talked the… stranger he starting acting. So I thought maybe we could do something else to… take the edge off, you know? And he went nuts. He shoved me and then backed himself into a corner and just… freaked out.”

Patrick nodded, motioning over two of the watching security team. “This section’s closed until I say otherwise.” The two nodded and positioned themselves beside the door. Patrick motioned for the young dom to follow him and he headed in to see if he could figure out what the hell had happened. There were nights he *hated* being head of security.

He didn’t see the man at first. He looked to the dom who pointed out the man curled in on himself in the corner farthest from the door. “What’s his name?”

“I don’t know. We didn’t get that far.”

Patrick just barely resisted the urge to roll his eyes at the young man. “Stay put and stay quiet,” he ordered. He approached the other man carefully and crouched down before him. “Are you all right, sir?” he asked gently. There was no response. He tried again. “Sir? My name is Patrick, I’m with security. Are you all right?” Again, the man remained silent. He reached out and placed a cautious hand on the man’s shoulder and shook. “Sir?” The large body curled in on itself even tighter and Patrick knew they had a serious problem. He turned back to the young dom. “Tell the two outside I need Dr. Trevor here immediately and for quiet room three to be set up with a standard shock and aftercare set,” he ordered. He didn’t wait to see if he was obeyed, turning his attention back to the still huddled man. “Can you tell me who you’re here with, boy?” he asked quietly, his hand moving from the man’s shoulder to his dark hair. He stroked the hair in slow, soothing motions, watching for signs the man had even heard him. There were none. He sighed. “There’s a doctor coming but it would help him a great deal if he knew what was wrong,” he tried. A shiver passed through the curled form and Patrick moved cautiously closer. “None of that now,” he chided with a smile. “Dr. Trevor is safe and gentle. Wouldn’t be working here if he wasn’t.” He let his hand move lower, rubbing the broad back through the high-quality shirt. “But I’ll need to tell him what to call you, at least. Would you trust me with that much?”

A sharp rap on the door made Patrick look up. Max’s head poked around the door. “Sir? There’s a Master here who believes the man you’re working with may be his charge. May he enter?”

Patrick suppressed another eye-roll. Max still seemed in awe of him even after four months of working together and no matter what Patrick did, the boy remained horribly formal with him. He nodded but placed himself between the man on the floor and the entering Master. He relaxed as he realized who the Master in question was. “Should have known he’d be one o’ yours, David,” he said with a teasing grin. “He moved back and wasn’t surprised by the exclamation of alarm or the way David hurried to the young man’s side.

“What the hell happened?” Dave growled at Patrick. “Aaron? Aaron. Come on, talk to me.”

Patrick watched as the man, Aaron, slowly uncurled. Dazed brown eyes looked around the room until coming to rest on David. David smiled, reaching out and cupping the side of the handsome face turned so trustingly towards him. Patrick’s heart ached as he read the confusion, and then horror that
flashed through the caramel colored eyes before they closed. When the eyes opened again, the emotions were firmly shut away, the gaze blank and scarily controlled. Patrick wanted to find the bastard responsible for teaching Aaron that reaction and show him how a real dominant looked after a submissive, because he’d obviously had no idea what he was doing. David looked up and smiled ruefully at the look on Patrick’s face and Patrick knew they’d be talking later.

“Back with me now, Aaron?” Dave asked.

“Sorry,” was the shaky but guarded reply.

“Nothing to be sorry for,” Dave responded easily. “But I think they’re going to want to look you over before we head home.” Aaron scowled but nodded. “Good man,” Dave praised. “Now… I’m betting that Patrick over there has a room set up for us already, and I can guarantee it’s more comfortable than this floor. Heck, anything’s better than the floor for these old bones,” he added with a grin as he eased himself out of the crouch he was in. He offered his hand to Aaron who, after a moment’s hesitation, took it and allowed himself to be helped to his feet. Dave turned to Patrick.

“Which quiet room, and can we get something sent up, juice at least?”

“Number three, and there should be a standard aftercare kit in there by the time we get there,” Patrick said. “Take your boy that direction and I’ll bring Trevor along as soon as he gets here.” Dave nodded and urged Aaron out the door with him. Patrick watched them go and wondered just what the hell had happened… and if David was any better at sharing than he used to be.

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Patrick knocked on the office door and waited for Mistress’ voice before entering. He was seething and he knew it. He stopped and took a few deep breaths before closing the door behind him and turning to face the young dom and his sponsor. Master Payton sat before the Mistress’ desk, clearly unhappy with the young man kneeling at his feet. The young dom didn’t move even as Master Payton rose and faced Patrick. Patrick nodded in acknowledgement before turning his attention to the beautiful woman sitting calmly behind the desk, watching the men with interest.

“How is Mr. Aaron?” Mistress asked evenly. Patrick could tell by the hardness in her ice-blue eyes and the oh-so-calm half-smile on her perfectly painted lips that she was *far* from pleased by the evening’s excitement.

“Trevor cleared him. He’s good except for some residual adrenalin shakes and an extreme case of embarrassment,” Patrick reported. “Though I don’t know he has anything to be embarrassed about. Master David is with him just until the mild sedative Trevor gave him takes hold, then he’ll join us. They’ve asked to be allowed the use of the Quiet Room for the night and I told them it wouldn’t be a problem.” He met the Mistress’ eyes easily even though he’d overstepped his authority just a touch. She could take it from his check for all he cared. He didn’t want that boy facing whatever demons he was fighting alone or where there wasn’t help nearby.

“Very good,” Mistress answered, motioning for Patrick to take a seat. “I have heard Paul’s version of what happened and now I would like to hear your impressions of what you found.”

Patrick nodded and gave his brief impressions of what he’d found when he’d entered the restroom. He was still upset about the state Mr. Aaron had been in when he’d arrived. It had been a very long time since he’d seen a submissive so lost in his own fear, and he said as much to Mistress.

“He never safe worded,” Paul defended from his place at his mentor’s knee. “He never even said no.
If he had I’d have stopped instantly.” The obviously upset junior dominant turned pleading eyes on his mentor. “You know I would never push that. Even though he was flagging orange, I never would have pushed.”

“He was flagging orange right, boy,” Patrick growled. “You should’na been approaching him at all.”

Brown eyes locked on his face. “No, sir. He was flagging orange left. I saw it.” He turned to Mistress. “I swear, Ma’am, his wristband was on the left.”

“It should’na have mattered what wrist it was on,” Patrick countered. “Everything about that boy’s body language said no and if ye’d been thinking with yer head instead a yer dick you’d have realized it before he ended up curled in on himself and needing ta be sedated,” he snapped. His accent thickened with his anger and he wasn’t surprised when Mistress shot him a warning look at his tone.

The hesitant knock on the half-open door broke the tension and Mistress called for Master David to enter. David greeted both Mistress and Master Payton as he settled into the seat in front of the large wooden desk. He nodded to Patrick before turning to look at Paul. “When did you see Aaron’s wristband?” he asked, making it clear he’d overheard the angry exchange.

“I…” Paul hesitated clearly thrown by the question. He thought for a long moment before answering. “I noticed it when he was washing out his mouth. I offered him some gum figuring he was trying to… well. That he was trying to cleanse his tastebuds,” he answered hesitantly. “I couldn’t help but notice the flash of orange and when I realized what wrist it was on, I’ll admit it made him even more attractive. Not that he needed help in that area,” he finished with a rueful grin.

“Did you see it directly, or…”

“I caught a glimpse of it in the mirror before his sleeve covered it again,” Paul answered easily. “And it was on his left wrist. I’d swear to it.”

Master Payton looked up at Master David, eyes widening as he realized what the other Master was proposing. It took Patrick a bit longer to piece it together, but when he did he had to groan. David’s look at the sound told him he was right. This had all been a horrible misunderstanding.

Mistress sighed. “Paul, did you see the wristband directly at any time?”

“No, Mistress. But I know what I saw.”

Master David looked at Mistress. “Aaron asked me to tell you that it was his fault. He admits to not being able to safe word due to his panicked state. Neither of us realized how the evening would affect him, or he would not have been alone. For that, I accept responsibility. Aaron asks that the young man not be held responsible for something that was not, in the end, his fault.”

Mistress smiled, nodding at Master David’s words. “I will take Mr. Aaron’s requests to heart as I consider what actions will be taken on his behalf.” She turned her blue eyes on Paul. “Do you understand what your first mistake was, young man?” she asked gently.

“I was not aware enough of the submissive’s body language?” he answered, clearly uncertain of the answer.

Mistress shook her head. “That was, indeed, *one* of your mistakes,” she agreed. “It was not, however, the first. Mr. Aaron’s wristband was on his right wrist, which is a flag for ‘not interested’ and you did not heed that request.”

“But it was on the left!” Paul protested. “I saw it!”
Master Payton’s hand closed on the young man’s shoulder. “No, Paul. It wasn’t. Not if you saw it in the mirror.”

Master David could tell the young man still didn’t understand. He looked to Mistress and gestured toward the ornate mirror on her wall. He rose and positioned himself so he was facing the mirror. “Paul,” he called gently. “I want you to stand and look at me like you did Aaron, and tell me which hand my House ring is on.”

Paul rose and stood at Master David’s side, glancing at Master David’s reflection. The ornate House ring with its deep blue stone flashed in the light. Paul nodded, and turned to face Master David. “It’s on your right hand,” he answered confidently. Then Master David turned and held out his hands, and Paul’s face clouded in confusion. The ring was on the Master’s left hand. “I don’t understand.”

Master David smiled kindly. “It’s an optics issue. Mirrors show things backwards, but they don’t… flip sides like you’d expect.” He held up his left hand. “Watch the ring, not the reflection.” Paul did, still not understanding. “When you look at my reflection, what hand does the ring appear to be on?” Paul stared at the reflection, eyes narrowing. He looked from Master David, to the reflection, then stopped and turned from the mirror, clearly trying to reconcile what he was seeing.

“If I go by the reflection, and mentally turn you, well, your reflection, away from the mirror… the ring is on the wrong hand,” he said. “I don’t understand.”

“The reflection doesn’t turn like you’re thinking it does,” Master David explained. “What you’re seeing is the *mirror* of the actual figure, which is backwards from what you’d expect. That ‘turn’ is what you’d have if you were on the other side of the mirror.”

They all watched as Paul worked the concept through several times. Then, they all saw him pale and knew he understood what had happened. He quickly went to knee before his Mentor. “Master, I am so sorry. I have been completely in the wrong. My mistake has harmed a man and I submit myself to any punishment you, Mr. Aaron’s sponsor, Mistress and Sir Patrick feel is appropriate.”

Master Payton looked at Mistress and Master David before looking back at his clearly upset charge. “You know the punishment I have given you so far. You are not to approach any submissive without either myself, Sir Patrick or Master Roland with you for the next three months. This is to help reinforce the skills you have and hopefully prevent such misunderstandings in the future.”

Paul nodded.

Master David shook his head. “I believe you’ve learned your lesson already,” he told the young man. “And so does Aaron. So we are satisfied.”

Sir Patrick scowled but knew that Master David was correct. The boy had meant no harm, it had been a series of miscommunications and his punishment from his own mentor would assist in the reinforcing the skills he’d need to further develop. “I’m satisfied if they are,” he admitted, though with some reluctance.

Mistress nodded then turned to the young man in question. “Along with your own Master’s punishment, I have an additional charge for you. You will spend the next three months in service to House Obsidian. They are assisting in the relocation of a submissive who has escaped an abusive partner. He has distant relatives here, but is reluctant to approach them because of his previous actions due to said partner. He will need a friend here to help him acclimate to his new environment. He spent a great deal of time in your home city of Las Vegas, and I had planned to approach your Master already regarding the situation to see if you would be willing to act as a contact for him. I believe a closer connection might assist both you and he in your… difficulties. You will meet with
Lady Bella next Wednesday at 7pm here in this office. She will begin to instruct you on how best to help this young submissive learn the difference between the relationship he is leaving and a healthy BDSM relationship. The rest, I believe will be well within your skills to achieve.” She smiled reassuringly at Paul. “You are a good man, Paul, and will make an excellent Sir someday. I honestly believe that. However, there are still things you need to learn.”

The young man nodded in earnest.

Mistress turned her eyes to the other men in the room. “If that is acceptable to all present.” They all nodded. “Good. Then I bid you good night, gentlemen. Master David, if you or Mr. Aaron have need of anything, do not hesitate to ask. Sir Patrick, please accompany Master David back to his rooms and make sure all is in order. Then your time is your own,” she added with a knowing smile.

Patrick nodded and gladly followed his friend from the room.

The next day started far too early for Patrick’s taste. He and David had talked late into the night, catching up and reminiscing about old times and he’d opted for sleeping on the couch rather than heading back to his apartment upstairs. The crick in his neck reminded him he wasn’t a young man anymore, but it had been worth it. The alarm on his phone woke him for his morning rounds and he silenced it quickly, not wanting to disturb the other occupants of the room. He stretched languidly, shifting the blankets off his body as he struggled to full wakefulness.

“There’s coffee and danish on the table,” a quiet voice said from the shadows. “They’re really quite good if you’d care for some.”

Patrick sat up, stretching to release the knots in his back. He scrubbed a hand over his face briskly, noting absently that it was nearly time to trim his beard again, then turned to look at the man he’d only met briefly last night. “Andi makes some damned fine pastry,” he agreed. “I’m Patrick,” he said by way of introduction.

The other man nodded. “Dave told me we had company. I’m Aaron, but then, you already know that,” he finished with a sigh. “I’m very sorry for the trouble last night.”

Patrick shook his head. “Wasn’t any trouble, really, just a miscommunication. It’s been sorted.” He joined Aaron at the small table and helped himself to a large cup of coffee and one of Andi’s apricot danishes. “I hope you’ll give us another chance before you decide to never set foot in the Leaf again.”

Aaron chuckled ruefully. “I’ve already agreed to that,” he admitted. “Besides, the… miscommunication wasn’t that young man’s fault, it was mine. I should have safe worded, or at least said no.”

Patrick could hear the self-recrimination in Aaron’s voice. “Wasn’t like you expected to have something trigger you like that, though. So it’s no more your fault that it was his,” he countered evenly. “And if he’d been paying attention to your body language and such, he’d have realized something was wrong before it got that out of hand.”

Aaron conceded the point, but offered no further comment. He still felt three different kinds of fool for not realizing what was happening sooner. He was a profiler, for pities sake. He knew the symptoms of PTSD and how easily it could be triggered at high stress times. He’d worked through some of it with the counselor the Bureau had insisted he see after Foyet’s first attack and then again after Haley’s death. He knew the signs and should have warned Dave when he realized how
unsettled he was.

“Stop beating yourself up for being human,” Patrick chided. “Things like this happen sometimes. They’ll catch you off guard and cut your knees right out from under you at the worst possible moment. What matters is how you manage to get your feet back under you again.”

Aaron gave a breathless laugh. “What matters is not taking others down with you when you fall.”

Patrick shook his head. “With that outlook, it’s n’wonder ya struggled so. Ya don’ have to struggle to yer feet on yer own, boy. That’s what friends are for. Friends, colleagues, lovers. They’re there te help pick ya back up again. Which is what David is trying te help ya to do. Problem is, yer fight’n not only yer demons, but yer angels as well.”

“Liam Patrick it never fails to amaze me how, after 25 years of living in the US – not to mention living with Ruui’s family – you still sound like you just got off the boat from County Donegal when you get upset.” Dave joined them at the table, snagging a large cup of coffee and a muffin. “I see you two have met and managed not to kill each other immediately. I’d call that a success. You both look like you’ve at least gotten a little sleep. Again, that’s good. But, I also know that someone has morning rounds and someone else is probably anxious to get home so he can tidy up a bit before having to go retrieve a sugar and birthday party hyped six year old.”

Patrick scowled at David. “And you are still as cheerful as ever first thing in the morning,” he countered, smiling when David shrugged unrepentantly. “And ya know very well it’s just Patrick now. I gave up Liam for lent and never picked up the habit again,” he joked. “But you’re right, I do have morning rounds.” He swallowed the last of his coffee and turned to fold the blanket he’d used the night before.

“Don’t worry about that,” Aaron said softly. “I’ll take care of it.”

Patrick met the younger man’s eyes, studying him. He enjoyed the light blush that colored the tanned cheeks. “Thank ya, boy,” he said deliberately, barely keeping the smile in check as the blush deepened and the man dropped his eyes submissively. “I look forward to seeing ya again, Aaron, under better circumstances though.” The boy nodded but didn’t look up. “Now, get that scoundrel to get ya home so ye’r ready for that lit’l one. Birthdays tend to make ‘em ten times more hyper than ye’r expecting, and ye’ll need ye’r wits about ya.” He turned to David. “Take care o’ him, my friend. And don’t be such a stranger, come for dinner. Sunni would love te see ya.”

Dave nodded. “Call me next week,” he offered giving Patrick the number.

“It really was a pleasure meeting you, Aaron,” Patrick said once more to the silent man still sitting at the table. And with that, he was gone.

When a friend is in trouble, don’t annoy him by asking if there is anything you can do.
Think up something appropriate and do it. – Edgar Watson Howe

“Agent Rossi? There’s a Mr. Zakaria here to see you.”

Dave smiled. “Send him up. I’m expecting him.” He hung up the phone and checked his watch, wondering when the time had gotten away from him. Oh yes, paperwork. It took forever, he looked at the remaining stack of reports in his inbox, they never seemed to end. He signed off on the report he’d just finished and headed to Aaron’s office with it. He tapped on the doorframe and stuck his
head in. “Aaron. You are going with me to lunch.”

Aaron didn’t even bother looking up. “I’m working through lunch,” he protested. “I’m behind after taking yesterday off for Jack’s soccer game and if I want to get home on time tonight I’ll need to stay.”

Dave settled into the chair in front of Aaron’s desk. “The paperwork will still be there, Aaron. Besides, if you don’t eat, how can you chastise Spencer for not doing so?”

Aaron shot Dave a dark look. “Dirty pool, Dave. Spencer needs to eat because he’s too thin and doesn’t take care of himself. Missing a few meals isn’t going to adversely effect…”

“Don’t make me call in the big guns,” he threatened with a grin, hand already going to his pocket for his cell.

“You wouldn’t.”

“I’ve got her on speed-dial just for situations like this,” Dave confirmed. “And I’m not afraid to call her. She’d probably even get Jack involved.”

Aaron couldn’t help but laugh at the comically threatening look on Dave’s face. “Fine. Don’t call Jessica, I’ll join you for lunch. But you’re buying since you bullied me into it.”

Dave smiled. “Deal.” He watched as Aaron pushed aside the file he’d been working on and grabbed his jacket. “Good man.” He waited until Aaron had followed him out of the office and closed the door before springing the next surprise on him. “Oh. We’re going to be joined by an old friend of mine, Mr. Zakaria. He was married to one of my favorite editors. Ran into him a couple of weeks ago and we’ve been trying to arrange lunch...”

“Dave.”

Dave held up his hands in mock surrender. “Just lunch. That’s all this is. I swear. I think you’ll enjoy yourself. If nothing else, you can find out how much of an arrogant ass I was about the editing of my first book,” he added with a grin.

Aaron shook his head. Dave meant well, he honestly did. But after his breakdown at the Leaf, it had become painfully clear to Aaron that even thinking about pursuing the type of relationship he’d had with Gideon was a bad idea. He’d made the mistake of telling that to Dave, and the older man had spent the ensuing weeks trying to convince him otherwise. Luckily, Aaron had responsibilities; Jack, the team, paperwork. At least, that’s what he kept telling himself – though thoughts of a solid, masculine chest and a heavy Irish brogue had been invading his dreams a bit more than he was comfortable with recently. He shook his head at the thought. Patrick had probably already forgotten about him except as an incident to put down in *his* paperwork. Thankfully, Dave had confined his arguments to the theoretical and, unlike Jessica, had not attempted to ‘match-make’ him with anyone, yet.

Voices from the bull-pen caught his attention. Prentiss, JJ, Spencer… and another masculine voice that was familiar but he couldn’t place why. He looked towards the sound of conversation and laughter, caught by the powerfully built man chatting with the team. His back was towards the stairs, but Aaron could tell a great deal just from that. The man was fit, broad shoulders tapered to a trim waist, both accentuated by the expensively tailored suit coat. Confident, upper-middle class if not a bit higher, aging but doing so with dignity. He was a redhead, the copper curls clipped neat and short, a silver-white blaze on the right side being the only real indication of age. His stance spoke of someone comfortable and self-assured, his body loose and relaxed even among the bustle and noise
of the office – and the presence of so many armed federal agents.

“No way. That cannot be your actual last name,” Prentiss said with a smile.

“It is. Made legal eighteen years ago and the family still claims me,” the stranger answered, laughter tingeing his voice. “I can call my sister-in-law and have her confirm it if ya like. Sunni loves doing that the first time people meet me.”

The accent settled over him like a warm blanket. Now he knew why the man, and the voice, seemed so familiar. He turned to Dave. “Mr. Zakaria?”

At his name the man turned and looked up at them, his handsome, bearded face breaking into an easy grin. “Liam Patrick Zakaria,” he confirmed. “But please, call me Patrick. And you must be Agent Hotchner. David has told me a great deal about you.”

Aaron shot a dark look at Dave, who deftly ignored it in favor of greeting Patrick. “I see you’re confounding the natives again.”

“Well, if someone would have warned me I’d be facing the third degree I’d have bought my bodyguards with me. In fact, Sunni and Avani are even in town this week working on some fancy dinner thing for Wahid’s company,” he added with a fond smile. “I’m having dinner with them tomorrow night. You’re more that welcome to come along, David.”

Dave shook his head. “Sorry. I have plans tomorrow.”

“You’re just worried that Sunni’s goin’ to try and set you up with one o’ her friends again,” Patrick teased.

“Because that’s worked so well the other four times she’s done it,” Dave shot back with an indulgent shake of his head. “You’d think she’d learn that our tastes aren’t anything alike.”

“Well,” Patrick said with a wink at Prentiss and JJ. “She did get a bit closer with that dancer…”

“NO. We are *not* talking about Fereydoun here.”

Prentiss and JJ looked at each other and grinned. “There is *so* a story there,” Prentiss said with a gleeful look towards Dave.

“Oh, aye, there’s a dandy story,” Patrick said with a sparkle in his green eyes. “And I’ll be happy to share it with you lovelies if you’d be so kind as to join us for lunch.” He turned to Spencer. “And that includes you as well, Mr. Lovely,” he said with a mischievous smile. Spencer blushed nearly as red as his tie.

“Rein it in, lover boy or I’ll tell Sunni you’re back on the market and having trouble finding the right type of guy,” Dave all but growled as he moved to Spencer’s side, standing a bit closer than normal.

Patrick raised an eyebrow, but said nothing. He turned to Aaron who had watched the exchange with interest. “So, Agent Hotchner, shall we make it a team outing then?”

Aaron chuckled as five pairs of eyes all but pleaded with him to say yes. “I think I can clear that with the boss,” he said with a resigned smile.

“Good man,” Patrick praised, eyes locked on Aaron’s causing a shiver to run through the Special Agent. Patrick held the gaze easily, letting Aaron know the group invitation was to put *him* at ease, and Aaron was glad of it. He nodded his thanks to the older man which earned him a soft smile.
before Patrick turned back to the girls. He offered his arm to Prentiss who took it with a giggling smile.

“A scholar and a gentleman,” she said as they exited the room towards the elevators. “Be still my heart.”

“I do try,” he answered as he pressed the elevator button.

“So,” Prentiss asked conspiratorially. “Fereydoun?”

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Pretty much all the honest truth-telling there is in the world is done by children. – Oliver Wendell Holmes

“Daddy! Did you ‘member your toofbrush?”

“Yes,” Aaron answered with a smile. “I remembered my *tooth*brush,” he corrected his son gently.

Jessica leaned in the doorway and watched with a grin as her nephew ‘helped’ his father pack.

“Jack,” she called, smiling at Aaron, “I think your dad knows how to pack.”

The boy turned big brown eyes on her and she had to struggle not to laugh at the serious expression on his youthful face. “But this is his first play-date and he might forget somefing. Like his jammies or his favorite blanket.” He turned the same expression onto his father. “Do you have a favorite blanket, daddy?”

“No. I don’t think I do.”

“You could use mine if you want,” Jack said earnestly, eyes bright.

Aaron did chuckle at that, reaching out to ruffle the boy’s light brown hair. “Thanks, buddy. But I think I’ll be fine.” Jack didn’t look convinced, but contented himself with watching carefully as his father packed his overnight bag. Aaron honestly wasn’t sure what he thought about telling Jack his overnight with Sir Patrick at the Leaf was a ‘play-date’ – but Jess had reassured him it was the easiest way to explain it. He wouldn’t lie to Jack and tell him it was work related, but his six year old didn’t need to know he was going to an exclusive BDSM club to see if he and the dominant he’d been in negotiation with for a month actually clicked well enough to try for something more. Angel had actually suggested the idea and Jessica, once Aaron had worked up the nerve to broach the subject with her, had agreed. She’d even volunteered to watch Jack for the weekend so Aaron didn’t have to worry.

“Hey, Champ,” Jessica said, seeing the minute change in Aaron as his overactive brain once again kicked into overdrive. “Why don’t you go see if you can find your dad a small friend to keep him company while he’s gone?”

Jack turned from where he was studying his father’s bag to roll his eyes at his aunt. “Aunt Jess, he doesn’t need anyfing, he’s going on a *play*-date,” he said seriously, as if that explained everything.

“Well, maybe you could go look anyway?” she tried.

Jack studied her for a long moment, looking so like his father that Jessica had to smile. “You want to talk to daddy,” he said with a sigh. He crawled off the bed and walked to the door. “If you want grown-up talk with daddy, it’s okay. Uncle Sean told me all ‘bout grown-up talk and that it makes grown-ups silly sometimes.” He gave his aunt a big smile. “I’ll go play with my cars, Aunt Jess, so
you can talk to daddy ‘bout me.” He skipped out of the room and both adults stood in stunned silence until they heard his door close.

“I’m going to kill Sean,” Aaron said evenly.

Jessica shook her head. “I’ll see him first, so I’ll do it for you.” She met Aaron’s eyes and smiled. “I do *not* envy you his teen years.” Aaron’s eyes widened in panic and Jessica moved to sit beside him on the bed. She took his hand in hers. “You’ll do fine, Aaron. You’re *doing* fine,” she reassured. “And, while we’re on that subject there’s nothing wrong with taking some time for you.” She took a deep, steadying breath. “In fact, I think it would do you good to spend a weekend with your… friend.” She couldn’t meet his eyes as she continued. “In the last month I’ve seen the guy my sister talked about all the time; the one who smiled and laughed and did his best to be there for his family.” She laughed at her own stubborn foolishness. “Haley always said you were something special even if I couldn’t see it. I blamed you, and your… and Gideon, for how things fell apart.”

“I wasn’t sleeping with him,” Aaron said quietly, remembering the last argument they’d had just after Haley had left when Jessica had come to retrieve some of Haley’s things. Jessica’s accusations about his ‘affair’ with Gideon had hurt even more with Gideon’s abandonment still such an open wound. “What we did was never about sex.”

“That’s what Haley said,” she admitted. “And she really let me have it when I told her what I’d said to you.” She finally looked up at Aaron, surprised to find his eyes moist with unshed tears. “She said that he gave you what she couldn’t. An escape from the darkness of a job she could never really understand.” She squeezed Aaron’s hand. “I still don’t get it, but I can see the difference in you since you’ve found this new person. You’re happier and more… at peace.” She sighed and offered him a small smile. “Haley would approve,” she told him, unsurprised when a tear made its way down his cheek. “And I do too. Happy is a good look for you.”

Aaron was too choked up to speak and settled for wrapping his arms around her and hugging her tightly. He’d been worried what Jess would think about his burgeoning relationship with a man. He’d been up-front with her, as he’d been with Haley about Jason. Sometimes, the job just became too much and he needed a way to let it all go, to give up control to someone else. Jason had understood what it meant to be just a day too late to save someone, what it was like to send your team – your friends – into danger. He also understood how keeping it locked down as tightly as Aaron did, even for the best of reasons, was a sure way to lose your mind. He’d given Aaron a release, a catharsis that purged the darkness and let him come home to Haley free of the ‘profiler’ that saw duplicity and danger everywhere. When Jason had left, it had been twice as hard to turn off that part of himself. He’d had to be strong for the team, strong for Reid who’d looked up to Jason even more than he himself had. He’d had to lock the submissive and fragile side of himself firmly away so he could be the in-control leader his team had needed. In the process he’d driven away his lights in the darkness, his wife and son. To hear that Haley had understood, at least a little, helped more than Jessica would probably ever know. “Thank you,” he finally managed to whisper as her arms hugged him tightly.

She broke the hug and wiped the tears from her own face. “Okay. Weepy, girly moment over. Promise,” she said with a grin. “I still don’t entirely understand it, but if it helps you and makes you happy, I’m not going to complain. Just… be careful, okay?” She could feel the blush rising in her cheeks as she remembered the stilted and hesitant conversation two nights ago when Aaron attempted to explain what was going on. “And remember, you’re to call tomorrow at 10:30am to let me know everything’s still okay. You can let me know then if you’re going to be staying longer.” She gave him a knowing smile. “I vote that unless he’s a complete dud, stay longer.”

Aaron could feel his own cheeks heating at the look she shot him. “That’s it. You and Jack are
*grounded* from spending time with my brother. He’s a horrible influence,” he said with a chuckle.

“Nah. Sean had nothing to do with this. It’s *all* me. Haley was the good sister,” she said easily, the familiar response falling from her tongue.

Aaron’s hand was warm where it settled on her shoulder. “I’d say you were both pretty good.”

Jessica bumped shoulders with her… friend, and grinned. “Get busy packing or you’re going to be late.”

Aaron nodded and did just that.

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**Intimacy is based on shared vulnerability...**

nothing deepens intimacy like the experiences that we share when we feel flayed, with our skins off, scared and vulnerable, and our partner is there with us, willing to share in the scary stuff.

-- Dossie Easton & Catherine A. Liszt

Soft, black cord wrapped around his bare thigh, Sir’s fingers resting against his skin to keep the cords from binding too tightly. With each wrap, he could feel himself relaxing, centering. Three wraps of the doubled cotton rope formed a secure ‘cuff’ on his right thigh, which Sir then knotted in place, tugging it sharply to test its strength. Sir’s hand traveled down the back of his thigh, a finger teasing at the sensitive skin behind his knee before moving on. His lower leg was lifted just enough to allow more rope to be wrapped around his calf. He balanced precariously on his knee for a moment as the second rope cuff was knotted into place and two leg bindings were brought together, leaving his leg in an enforced kneeling position. He shifted, testing his range of movement as Sir laced the bindings together. Sir’s hand impacted with his ass cheeks in warning.

“Stay still, boy,” Sir growled, tugging on the rope in warning.

He complied, closing his eyes as he felt the short length between the two secured. The long, trailing tails Sir had left were pulled to the side and secured to the quick-release clamp that hooked into the eye-bolt on the side of the mat.

Warm hands settled on his shoulders, steadying him. Sir leaned close, His cotton t-shirt warm and soft against his bare skin. “You’re doing so well, boy,” Sir praised.

Another layer of stress and fear fell away with the quiet words. He sighed and smiled as the process was repeated on his left leg, the limb carefully bound and secured. Sir’s hands urged him into a more stable kneel, his shins flat against the soft surface of the bondage mat. The trailing ends were adjusted a bit more, pulling his legs wider, leaving him open and displayed for Sir’s pleasure.

“Do you have any idea how tempting you are, boy?” Sir asked, His large hands touching, caressing, claiming with each heated pass. “Could leave you just like this, sit here and enjoy the way you open so easily for me.”

He shivered at the words. He wanted, *needed* more than just to be admired. He needed the promised touch, the promised bite of pain and the welcome release it gave. He whimpered but refused to beg. He was stronger than that. He wouldn’t give in that easily, not yet. He needed to show that he could take what Sir was offering, that he was strong enough to hold out until Sir gave him permission.

“You’re thinking again,” Sir chided, muscled body pressing against his back.
The scrape of beard against his neck was new, but welcome. He tilted his head to allow Sir better access to his neck, to his body. Strong arms wrapped around his torso, fingers seeking out his nipples and pinching them sharply. He gasped and leaned into Sir’s supporting hold.

“I’ll give you what you need, boy. Ya need te trust me wi’ that. Can ya do that for me?”

He nodded, not trusting his voice.

“Good boy.” Sir’s lips pressed against his cheek in a gentle kiss. He went through their agreed upon safewords once more. “Red is stop, yellow is slow down, blue is warning for an emotional issue that we’ll need to stop and address before going on. Do ya understand, boy?”

He nodded again, feeling his body relaxing further.

“Lean forward and hold yer arms out in front of ya.”

He struggled to comply, but his bound legs hampered his movements. Sir’s strong arms closed around him and eased him forward until his chest rested flat on a raised, padded support. He turned his head, getting comfortable even as his bound legs and tense back protested the stretch. Sir’s hands were there before the muscles could cramp, massaging and relaxing him. Another layer of control slowly drifted away, and he sighed in contentment.

More rope wrapped around him, encasing first one wrist and then the other. Again the trailing ends were secured to the edge of the bondage mat, pinning him in place. He was far more comfortable than he expected to be.

“Good boy,” Sir breathed into his ear. “Such a beautiful canvas.” His hands ran in slow, gentle circles over the bare expanse of back, tracing muscles and tension knots and bone. “Ready for the next step, boy?”

He nodded.

“No. Need to hear ya say it, boy. Need to know ye’re still with me.”

“Yes, Sir,” he managed, mind already drifting and relaxing into the moment. Sir’s warmth moved away, but in his relaxed state, it wasn’t a problem. He knew Sir would take care of him. Sir had promised.

The soft tails of a flogger caressed his back once more. Before the ropes, there had been the thud of a flogger against his back, warming the skin and loosening the muscles. Now, that wonderful sensation was back, only somehow more intense. Sir started slowly, careful, light strikes against his shoulders and ass, rhythmic and even and calming. He felt himself drift further. With each strike, another stressor fell, another mask broke and dropped away, slowly stripping him bare for his Sir. The blows came faster, harder, the rhythm changing just enough to keep him guessing. Unable to anticipate when the next blow would fall, unable to move to try and influence where it would land, he could only… accept.

The last of the tension melted from his body, leaving him totally relaxed and open for Sir’s attention.

“That’s it, boy.” Sir’s voice was whiskey rough and provided a soothing counterpoint to the thud of the flogger. “Give yourself over to me. Let me take care of you.”

Another heavy thud and the warm falls stilled against his back, the weight a comforting reminder he wasn’t alone.
“Ready for more, boy?”

“Yes, Sir,” he breathed.

A thin, cool line rested against his flogger-warmed skin for just a moment. The Lexan cane; thin, flexible, sting rather than thud. Not one of his favorites, but not something he couldn’t handle.

“Six strikes, boy. Only six, and I’ll count them for ya,” Sir said evenly, His accent thick and seductive. “Ye’re to think why ye’re here. Why ye’ve given yerself te me. And ye’re to let it go. Each strike is one more reason fallin’ away, one more touch o’ healing and forgiveness.”

All the while Sir talked, the cool of the cane tip traced over his back and ass and thighs. He understood the words, but wasn’t sure he could do it, wasn’t sure he was close enough to let go that far. His breathing came quicker as fear of failing his Sir crashed into his chest. What if he couldn’t do what Sir wanted? What if it wasn’t enough? Would Sir leave as well? He had to… A sharp slap to his ass brought him back to the now, to Sir.

“Ye’re fine, boy, ye’ll *be* fine no matter what happens.” Sir rubbed His hand over the heated handprint. “Just feel.”

The first blow of the cane was sharp and sudden and unexpected. It hit his flogger-sensitized ass, landing across both cheeks and making him jerk in his bonds.

“One,” Sir’s voice sounding in the following silence.

The next strike was just above the first, fast and hard and followed immediately by the third. “Two and Three. Half-way there, boy.”

He struggled as the blows made themselves known, sharp lines of fire that made him press his hips forward in a vain attempt to escape the sting. Sir waited, allowing him to struggle in his bonds as the heat rose. Sir’s palm wiped over the marks, sending a new spike of sensation screaming down the nerve endings. He whimpered at the building sensations, his breath coming in ragged gasps.

“Three more.”

Sir’s hand rested on the small of his back, stilling him further. The whistle of the cane made him tense and the impact with the sensitive skin where his ass-cheeks met his thighs made him moan.

“Four. Two more, boy. Breathe.”

He tried to do as he was told but the heat and sting of the four cane strikes had him pulling at the bonds, struggling against the pain and his own need. The next blow was to his ass again, angling across the first three strikes, doubling the sting. He couldn’t stop the pained exclamation.

“Five. One more. Stay with me, boy. Ye’re doin’ so well.”

The last blow felt three times harder than the others and it drove the breath from his lungs and left him writhing against the ropes as he tried to breathe through and process the pain. He could do this. He could.

“Let go,” Sir whispered in his ear. “Ye’re safe. Let me catch ya.”

His head shook in denial. He was close, *so* close, but the final mask stayed firmly in place. “Need…” He wasn’t sure what he needed, he just knew he needed something… more. Sir pressed a gentle kiss to his temple, fingers smoothing back his sweat-damp hair.
“I’ll give ya what ya need, boy,” Sir promised. He moved to the end of the bondage mat, one hand always in contact with his boy’s damp skin. Sir tugged on the ropes attached to the eyebolts, shortening each in turn until the willing body was fully open to Him.

His cock was already hard, weeping pre-come, but it wasn’t enough. He needed something more to tumble him over the edge and he trusted Sir to give that to him. Cool, hard, smooth plastic ran over his skin. He relaxed, his legs unconsciously spreading just a bit wider, wanting what Sir was offering. The tip of the device teased over his balls, sliding against the shaft of his cock, a barely there touch that he tried to press into only to growl in frustration when Sir pulled even that little contact away.

“Soon, boy,” Sir soothed.

The smooth device repeated its path over his skin and he arched his hips back as much as he could, silently begging for more. Sir stilled the device, leaving it resting against the delicate skin of his balls. A quiet buzz filled the silence and his body arched as Sir pressed the vibrator more firmly against his skin. He panted and struggled, the relentless sensation running over the path the device had traced just moments before, only this time, the nerves quivered under the sensual assault. The vibe ran over his cock, teasing until he felt he was about to fly apart. He whimpered. “Please.”

The vibrator was removed and he shivered, uncertain what to expect next. He tried to calm his breathing, listening, waiting, wondering what Sir has planned. The hum of the device never stilled and he struggled in the restraints, trying to see what was happening just out of his line of sight. Sir’s hand returned, resting in the middle of his back, rubbing slow circles on the sweat damp skin.

“Relax, boy. I’ll not leave ya unsatisfied.” Sir’s voice was husky, His accent heavy and exotic… and unbelievably soothing.

He did as Sir said, relaxing in his bonds and trusting Sir to take care of him. The vibrator returned, its firm tip now slick with lube. It teased at the sensitive skin behind his balls, sliding up and back until it was pressed against his anus. He tilted his hips upward, offering himself to his Sir’s touch. Sir’s chuckle was positively wicked as the vibrator was drawn back until only the barest touch teased at the nerve rich skin. “Please,” he begged, the last barriers cracked, broken by need. “Please, Sir.”

He was rewarded with a firmer touch, the hard vibe pressing against the slicked skin. He shifted back as much as he could and this time, the vibe wasn’t withdrawn and its narrow tip breached his body. He stilled, shaking with need and uncertainty and want. “Sir,” he gasped, needing direction as his world swirled around him in nearly overwhelming sensation.

“Let go, boy,” came the gentle response. “Ye’re safe here.”

He cried out as the last resistance faded and his body opened to Sir’s touch. He relaxed completely and the vibe slowly sank into his welcoming body. He shook as his body seemed to burn up from the inside out, the vibrations hitting his prostate again and again until he screamed out his release. Even as his body spilled over the sweat slick bondage mat, Sir continued to thrust the vibrator in and out of his body in slow, deliberate movements. He shook at the sensory overload, his hands clutching at empty air, his toes curling as his body writhed in its bonds. “Yellow. Please, Sir. Yellow,” he gasped out. “No more. No more.”

The vibrations stopped but his shaking continued. Sir eased the vibrator from his body, taking a moment to caress sweat-slick skin. He whimpered, leaning into the touch as best he could while still bound. Sir’s body was solid against his as the quick release knots were tugged loose and his hands came free. He pulled them in close to his chest, wrapping them around himself as he tried to keep from breaking apart. A low, continuous keening reached his ears and it took him a moment to realize
it was coming from him. He shook harder. His legs were freed and he curled in tighter, trapping the release knots that held his legs bent and curled.

“Boy? I need to release yer legs now.”

He shook his head frantically, whimpering. Strong arms wrapped around him, drawing him off the support frame and into Sir’s embrace. He relaxed, burying his face into the curve of Sir’s neck even as Sir eased them both down onto the soft safety of the bondage mat. He was shifted around onto his side, taking the weight off his still bound legs and settling him more firmly against Sir’s solid chest. Sir’s hands were gentle as they carded through his hair and smoothed down his back in long, slow strokes.

“I’ve got ya, boy. Let it go.” Sir’s lips pressed against his hair. “I’ve got ya. Let it go.”

Only then did the tears come, slowly at first, building to body shaking sobs. Jason, Haley, Elle, Jack… all the ones he’d failed slid past his mind’s eye. “I’m sorry,” he breathed against Sir’s cotton clad shoulder. “I’m so sorry.” Victims’ faces, innocent lives taken in horrible, unbelievably vicious ways. Law enforcement personnel who looked to them, to *him* to find the monsters before they struck again, looking for someone to blame when the profile doesn’t find them an unsub fast enough to keep another victim from dying. Family who blamed him for the horror visited on the sweetest woman he’d ever known. An innocent child looking to him and asking why mommy wasn’t coming home. Each face, each failure, poured out in the cleansing tears.

Sir’s arms held him tight as the storm of emotion wracked him with grief and pain and anger. Sir said nothing, simply holding tight and offering silent comfort and understanding. His solid body rocked them, his hands stroked over tense muscles and worked to release knots of pain and self-recrimination. He never left, never judged, simply held on and didn’t let go. Finally the emotional storm was spent. He collapsed against Sir’s broad chest, minute tremors traveling through his limbs as he sought out the steady beat of Sir’s heart.

“I need te unbind yer legs, boy,” Sir whispered against his hair. “Don’t want te move, but I’ll not have ya hurt by staying bound too long.”

He reluctantly agreed, relaxing his grip around Sir just enough for Sir to sit up and see to his bindings. Large, solid hands carefully undid the rope cuffs, massaging the muscles and straightening the shaky limbs. The tender care threatened to bring the tears again, but Sir’s rumbling voice praising and soothing him kept the edge of hysteria out of his reactions. He floated, body slightly disconnected from his mind as the endorphins flooded his overloaded system. He vaguely felt a soft blanket laid over him and Sir’s warmth settle beside him. He was pulled against Sir’s chest and it took him a long moment to realize that the cotton shirt was gone and it was Sir’s warm skin under his cheek. He nuzzled the older man’s chest, smiling as copper and silver hair tickled at his face.

“Thank you,” he whispered.

Lips pressed against his forehead. “Ye’re welcome, Aaron. Sleep now. I’ve got ya.”

“Safe call…”

“Aye. Ten-thirty tomorrow mornin’ we’ll call yer girl. Now, just relax,” Patrick soothed. “The room is ours for the weekend, and we’ll have enough time for talkin’ later.” He settled Aaron more firmly
Aaron nodded, his arms reaching out and wrapping around Patrick’s solid chest. He burrowed into the warm embrace, letting Sir Patrick’s rhythmic heartbeat chase away the last of the lingering fears. He pressed a sleepy kiss to the skin beneath him. “Definitely not a dud,” he slurred as sleep finally tugged him under.

Patrick chuckled, uncertain how to take the murmured comment, but pleased by the content and relaxed tone. He tightened his hold on the younger man, loving the feel of his long body pressed so close against his. “Rest, my Aaron. I’m here. You’re safe.”

Monday came far too soon for Aaron’s liking, but he entered the office with a much lighter heart and a definite spring in his step. His time with Sir Patrick had been a stunning success and he’d come home late Sunday afternoon to a home cooked meal and an excited six year old who wanted to know if he’d “enjoyed his first play-date”. Aaron could honestly answer that he had… and that he planned to do it again sometime. The evening had been spent playing Jack’s favorite board game and watching ‘just one more episode’ of Bugs Bunny before Jack fell asleep and had to be carried to bed. He smiled at the memory as he waited for the elevator to arrive.

“Well,” an amused and familiar voice said from behind him. “Somebody had a good weekend.”

He turned and studied Derek Morgan’s smiling face. He nodded, offering the younger agent a small but genuine half-smile. “Yes. Yes someone did.”

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It's the submissives that show to others what type of Dom owns them. – Anonymous

“Hey, Irish.”

Aaron looked up from the paperwork he was organizing for Patrick. He smiled at the familiar face approaching followed by a young man Aaron didn’t know. “Paul.” He nodded in greeting. Since the incident five months previous, he and Paul had overcome their initial difficulties and Aaron found the young dominant reminded him surprisingly of Sean. He placed the finished lists in the folder and gave Paul his full attention. “What can I do for you?” he asked.

Paul motioned to the chair opposite Aaron, silently asking permission to join him. Aaron nodded his assent and Paul urged the other young man into the chair. He turned back to Aaron. “Was wondering where your Sir was. Wanted to introduce someone to both of you.”

“He’s in a meeting with Mistress,” Aaron told him. “Something about having to rearrange the next class because the presenter wasn’t available.” He wasn’t sure exactly what had happened, but he knew Patrick hadn’t been pleased by the news. He’d handed off the security and dungeon monitor schedules to Aaron to compile and had been in a closed door meeting with Mistress for the last hour.

“Oh, so that’s what Daddy L was talking about.”

Aaron looked at Paul for explanation.

“Daddy L was talking with Master Payton about a friend of his being knifed and left for dead up in New York,” Paul told him. “He was attacked last week outside a play party where he was presenting his class on knife play. Considering that’s what the next class here was supposed to be, I’m betting it’s the same guy. Apparently, he was hurt pretty bad, they were worried he wouldn’t make it. He
pulled through but they haven’t found anything on who did it.”

Aaron’s eyes narrowed. If it was a hate crime, no wonder Sir was so upset. He knew the presenter personally and had been looking forward to seeing him. He looked at his watch. “Sir shouldn’t be too much longer if you’d like to sit and wait,” he offered, “or I could tell him you’re looking for him when he’s done with Mistress.”

“We can wait,” Paul answered with an easy smile. “Long as we’re not keeping you from what you’re supposed to be doing. Don’t want to get you in trouble.”

“You won’t,” Aaron reassured. “Besides, it’s quiet.”

Paul nodded and settled into a chair beside the quiet young man. “Micah,” he introduced, “this is Irish. You have any trouble, he’s even safer than a monitor. You find him and stick with him. Nobody messes with Sir Patrick’s boy and besides, he’s a good guy.” The young man nodded, green eyes wide as he studied Aaron.

Aaron chuckled, shaking his head at Paul’s description of him. “It’s nice to meet you, Micah.”

The young man smiled shyly. “Thank you.” He paused and Aaron waited, seeing there was something the young man wanted to ask. He had the same look Spencer got when he was perplexed by some pop-culture reference. “Why are you called Irish?” he finally asked quietly.

Aaron chuckled. “Honestly. I have no idea. You’d have to ask Paul considering he’s the one that started it.”

Paul had the decency to blush. “Well, we can’t very well call you ‘Ireland’ like your Sir does.” He gave Aaron a cheeky smile. “Cause as good looking as you are, you are no supermodel.”

Aaron was confused. “He doesn’t call me Ireland.”

Paul rolled his eyes. “Erin, as in Erin go Bragh? He calls you that all the time.” He grinned. “Master Payton says it’s probably because he’s finally found a little piece of home. He’s more relaxed since you’ve been around, Irish. You’re good for each other.”

It was Aaron’s turn to blush. “… I’m not sure what to say to that,” he finally admitted. He wasn’t sure that he had much to do with Patrick’s relaxation, but he did his best to help his Sir out where he could. “But, I should tell you that he’s not calling me ‘Ireland’, he’s calling me by my first name. It’s just his accent that makes it sound like ‘Erin’.”

Paul looked perplexed for a moment then chuckled. “Well, I’m still calling you Irish because ‘Aaron’ just sounds weird now.”

Aaron shook his head, chuckling along with the younger man. He didn’t mind the nickname, and it made sense now that it had been explained. He had a feeling Sir would get a chuckle out of the explanation as well.

“I thought a Dom wasn’t supposed to talk to another Dom’s sub without permission?” Micah asked timidly, eyes flashing up to Paul nervously before darting back to the table.

Paul looked at Aaron helplessly and Aaron took pity on the young dominant. “Paul’s one of the four Dominants who’s been given blanket permission to talk to me without asking Sir first,” he explained with a reassuring smile. “We’re also in a lower protocol so some of those rules are a bit more… lax. Otherwise, you’re completely correct, a sub can talk to another sub but a dominant should ask permission of the sub’s dominant or sponsor first.”
“Giving lessons, boy?” a gruff, accented voice asked from behind him.

Aaron smiled even as Micah seemed to curl in on himself, trying to make himself smaller. “Micah. It’s all right,” he said gently. “That’s my Sir, Sir Patrick. He’s head of security here.” If he wasn’t sure before, he was now. Micah had to be the submissive from Vegas that Angel had told him about, the one who’d been so badly abused by his dominant. Warm hands settled on his shoulders and he leaned back against his Sir’s solid warmth. He handed back the folder for his Sir to look at. “I have the rosters you asked for, Sir. I think they’ll be workable but you’ll want to double check with Mistress Jenny about the pup-mosh on Sunday to see if she’d like an extra monitor with Joshua the Younger out of town.”

Patrick nodded, moving around to joint them at the table. “Fair enough.” He studied the pages, nodding his approval. “Looks good, boy.” He brushed a kiss over Aaron’s cheek. “Well done.”

Aaron felt his cheeks warming at the praise. “Thank you, Sir.” He looked at the two younger men across from them. Paul was grinning openly, most likely still congratulating himself for ‘getting the two of them together’ while Micah was watching the pair of them with something akin to awe. “Sir,” Aaron began. “Paul was waiting to speak with you.”

Patrick turned his attention to the young dominant. “What can I do for you, Paul?”

Aaron settled back, watching as his Sir put both young men at ease. Watching Micah relax as he spoke with Patrick made Aaron realize how lucky he’d truly been. He wasn’t convinced he’d had as much to do with Sir’s relaxation as Patrick had with his, but he hoped Sir got at least half as much benefit from their relationship as he did. Unselfconsciously, he leaned against his Sir’s side, relaxing for the first time in a very long time.

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I am your servant. I shall not be free.
You will protect me; you will keep me safe; you will guard me.
You will keep me sound; you will protect me from every demon.
-- Ancient Egyptian woman's slave contract

“Clear!” Aaron shouted as he finished the quick scan of the room he was in. He moved to the next, careful not to put himself in Derek’s way as the younger agent covered him as they moved through the house. He rounded the corner and the smell of cordite and blood was nearly overpowering. He motioned to Derek and then cautiously edged around the sofa, dreading what he was going to find. He dropped to his knees beside the young mother and felt for any sign of life, even though he was certain she was already dead. Her blonde hair was matted with blood, the small entrance wound belying the damage of the exit wound and the blood that stained the furniture behind her. He looked at Derek and shook his head. They’d been too late.

“We still need to find her daughter,” he told Derek, rising on slightly unsteady legs. “Maybe we were wrong. Maybe he didn’t find her.” He knew it was a false hope, but after the hell of the last few days he needed to hold on to it at least a little longer. Derek nodded, allowing him the fleeting comfort. They continued their search with a grim determination. The next room in the small house obviously belonged to the victim’s little girl. Soft pink walls were decorated with fairies and rainbows and a large plaque that declared it “Emma’s Room”. Nothing seemed out of place. No telltale signs of struggle or flecks of blood. They cautiously opened the closet and checked under the bed, finding nothing. Perhaps Emma had been gone when the unsub had broken in and killed her mother. Aaron fervently hoped so.

“We’ve found something.”
Aaron bowed his head at the broken call from Prentiss. He nodded to Derek. They moved through the now cleared scene to where Prentiss stood beside a large cabinet. The ornate wooden cabinet seemed to be a coat closet of some kind, but instead of coats, it now held the still body of a little girl. Her pale, blue tinged skin highlighted the smattering of freckles across her nose. Her short, light brown hair was a tangle of curls and blood. She’d been covered with a pink blanket that read, ‘Mommy’s Princess’ and a stuffed unicorn toy had been placed on her still chest. If not for the blood, she might be sleeping.

Aaron turned away, struggling to keep control. His phone rang. “Hotchner,” he growled, moving out of the way of the in-coming forensics team.

“We got him,” Dave Rossi’s voice said into his ear. “Garcia’s information led us right to him.”

“Not before he got to Rhonda Summers and her little girl.”

“Damn it.” He sighed. “But we’ve got him, Aaron. He’s not going to hurt anyone else.”

“Tell that to Rhonda and Emma’s family.” He hung up before Dave could reply, knowing he was too close to it to feel anything other than tired.

“Boss?”

He turned to meet Derek’s concerned gaze. “They got him. It’s over. Let’s let the forensics people do their jobs so they can make sure this sticks.” He turned on his heel and stalked from the house, needing to get away from the overwhelming scents of blood and death/failure.

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Patrick studied the stoic face of his boy as he waited for the traffic light to change. When he’d gotten the call from David he’d been skeptical. He would have assumed Aaron would want to go straight home to his little boy after what he’d seen. Apparently, that was part of the problem. Jack was away with his grandparents and Aaron was hesitant to cut short his son’s time with them. So, Patrick had taken some personal time, met Dave and Aaron outside the Hoover building and claimed his boy for the weekend. He had a simple meal waiting for them at his apartment and plans to work his boy into exhaustion and hopeful keep his demons at bay. He reached across the space between them, catching the back of his boy’s neck in a tight grip. He smiled as Aaron shivered and went pliant under his touch. “Good boy,” he praised. “I’ll take care of ya,” he promised, his thumb massaging the tense tendons of Aaron’s neck. “Trust me.”

Aaron rolled his head, resting his cheek against Patrick’s arm and closing his eyes. “I do,” he whispered. “Thank you.”

He tightened his grip minutely, shaking his boy reassuringly. “Ye’re welcome.” He released his hold as the light changed but kept his hand resting against the warm skin, knowing they both could use the contact.

The remainder of the trip was spent in silence, the soft music from the radio the only sound in the truck’s cab. Patrick pulled into the underground, secure parking garage, maneuvering the sleek truck into its assigned parking spot. He cupped Aaron’s cheek gently. “We’re here, boy. Grab your go bag and follow,” he ordered firmly. His boy was nearly on autopilot and Patrick was well aware of it. Right now, Aaron needed to be simply Patrick’s precious boy and leave SSA Hotchner behind for a while. He knew it wasn’t easy for the other man, especially when things went bad on the job. But Patrick had learned a trick or three in their seven months together that helped with that transition, and he had the feeling he’d be using every one of them this weekend to give his boy what he needed.
He shut and locked the truck then headed toward the elevator. He had no doubt his boy was following. They waited for the elevator in silence. When the car arrived Patrick preceded his boy into the empty elevator, but it was Aaron who pushed the button for the correct floor. While Aaron had only been to the apartment twice, once with David and once on his own for dinner, he’d committed the floor and apartment number to memory, in case he ever needed Patrick. Patrick had given Aaron his direct number, the code for the secure outer door, and blanket permission to come to the apartment at any time, even if it was just to escape from the world for a while.

Patrick rubbed a soothing hand over his boy’s shoulders as the car made its slow, smooth ascent to the upper floors where Patrick, and several other Leaf employee’s, lived. The apartments provided a steady income for the Leaf apart from the club proper. They also provided a nice perk for those full time employees that needed to be close to the club to best do their jobs, like the Head of Security. He was glad of the close proximity now. While there weren’t any available rooms in the dungeon tonight, they were close enough that he could easily take Aaron down tomorrow and make use of the Leaf’s facilities. For tonight, he’d use his own small play room in the apartment. It would be the first time he and Aaron had played there, and he was honestly looking forward to it. While the Leaf facilities were wonderful, there was something so much more… intimate about scening in your own private quarters. He couldn’t wait to see Aaron stretched out on his bed, sated and relaxed and waiting for his Sir to join him for sleep. He leaned close and pressed a chaste kiss to Aaron’s cheek just as the elevator signaled their floor. Aaron sighed and gave him a tired smile.

“Nearly there, boy,” Patrick reassured. “There’s food waiting and a shower with yer name on it if ya want.”

Aaron nodded. “Please.”

It wouldn’t be an easy weekend, but Patrick *would* get his boy through this.

He tried to relax into the restraints. The lambskin lining of the wide leather cuffs was soft against his wrists even as he tugged against the restraints. His mind was swirling, a mass of conflicting emotions and impulses and he no idea how to explain it to Sir. *{Gideon had known. He’d known all too well and it had driven him away. It had driven them all away.}* He shook his head, trying to clear it, trying to find the quiet that danced just out of reach. *{Is that part of my profile? Don’t show fear?}* His breath caught at the terrifying voice and he ruthlessly shoved it back.

“Easy, boy,” Sir soothed, His hands moving slowly over too tense muscles. Sir would help shut off his brain. Sir would help him forget the image of a child, curled into a too small space, so still and quiet. *{I worked the case with you, daddy.} Sir would help wipe out the disgust caused by a three-time loser who decided to kill a woman rather than face her in court on a harassment charge. A man who raped and terrorized women for kicks *{You should have made the deal.}* yet showed honest remorse about the death of a little girl who was visiting mommy for a week while daddy, who would normally have had her, was at a conference out of town. *{And what happens when your ‘work’ comes after you again? I won’t let you take my grandson like you took my daughter!}*

The sharp sting of Sir’s dragon tongue whip jolted him out of the distressing thoughts. He sighed as the pain sank into his skin, into his blood, shoving out the horrors of the last few days. *{Few Years,}* He felt himself relaxing as the tiny, dual tips of the whip bit into his back. He shivered at the burning ache they left in their wake. He concentrated on the sensation, the skill with which Sir wielded the whip. *{Not to brag, but I’m sort of an expert.}* He shivered, his mind lost in memories of sharper,
more debilitating pain. His breath came in shallow, measured gasps, working to process the pain while not letting his tormentor know how much agony he was in. [Don’t let him see it. He enjoys the control, the knowledge that he’s breaking your control over something as basic as your own body.] He stilled, fingers searching out anything to grab on to, to focus on as he fought the need to cry out, to beg for the burning pain to end. ['Does this feel impotent to you?'] He bit his lip, the taste of blood secondary to the centering sensation of a pain *he* could control. [Stay still. Don’t talk back. Draw attention away from Sean as much as possible. Don’t comment on what you’ve seen, on what you know. Keep it hidden.]

He startled as a large, masculine hand settled heavily on his shoulder. [Too close, too dangerous. He couldn’t do it anymore, he had to get away. {'After I finish you, I’m gonna find that little bastard son of yours and I’m gonna show him both of his dead parents and I’m gonna tell him that it was all your fault…' your fault, your fault.] The thought of someone else being hurt because of his actions [Haley, Jack, Sean, so many others] stilled him where he stood. He let himself go limp in the restraints [Relax. It goes in so much easier if you relax.] willing to take whatever was necessary to save them. [Penance for his sin of arrogance… and his failures.]

He was surprised when the restraints were released, stumbling a bit when their support was taken away. Strong arms caught him, cradling him to a warm, solid chest. He whimpered, unable to control the shaking in his limbs even as he was eased to the floor. The arms never let go of him, but he didn’t feel trapped, not like before. He felt… protected, cherished. He turned his tear stained face into the heat of his protector’s neck, his arms curling tentatively around the man’s broad chest. Whispers slowly filtered into his exhausted brain.


He relaxed against Sir, the past slowly fading under the trickle of heavily accented words. He placed a tentative kiss to Sir’s neck and was rewarded with a tightening of the arms that held him. He could feel Sir’s pulse under his lips, the reassuring thrum of life. He closed his eyes, letting the soothing feelings fill his senses as exhaustion finally overwhelmed him.

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“Care to tell me what that was all about then?” Patrick asked him the next morning.

He’d known the questions would be coming, he just wasn’t sure how to answer them. He shrugged as noncommittally as he could. “I think the case just hit a little too close to home,” he said, not exactly lying. “I couldn’t… I couldn’t shut it down.”

Patrick’s hand was warm against his bare shoulders. “Nothing to be sorry for, Aaron. Was just worried.”

He nodded. “Didn’t mean to. I… I should have expected that was at least a possibility. We’ve talked about… Foyet.” He silently cursed the stumble over the name. “And then finding that little girl… it could have been Jack. It so easily could have been Jack.” He looked up into understanding green eyes. “It was all a little too close last night. I couldn’t… I couldn’t shut it down.”

Lips were pressed against his temple and he welcomed the distraction. “All right,” Patrick said, all calm control. “What do ye need from me te help ye wi’ this?”

Aaron smiled. “You’re already doing it.” He sighed and relaxed back against Patrick’s warmth. “I think I just need a day being… ‘Irish’. A chance to let everything go and not have to be SSA Hotchner for a while.”
“We can do that.” His fingers carded through Aaron’s sleep tousled hair. “How do you feel about helping with some paperwork?”

Aaron groaned. “If I’d known that was how I was going to spend my weekend, I’d have stayed at work,” he said with a teasing grin.

Patrick’s eyes darkened until they matched the emerald stone in his lone earring. “Ah, but ye wouldn’t be getting the same compensation for helping with it at work as ye will here.” He kissed Aaron, claiming the younger man’s lips. “And the fringe benefits are amazing.”

Aaron chuckled a bit breathlessly as his Sir pulled away. “Good point. Where do we start?”

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The day had been exactly what Aaron needed. He’d spent the morning by Sir’s side, looking over and organizing reports and schedules. They’d had lunch with Mistress, a wonderful woman with a wicked sense of humor that Aaron enjoyed listening to. She and Sir had then spent the next two hours going over reports and the daily minutia of running an upscale and very exclusive BDSM club. Aaron had spent the time sitting at Sir’s feet, leaning against Patrick’s thigh and all but purring as the older man absentely stroked his hair. He’d been nearly asleep when Mistress’ husky laughter and a gentle tug on his hair brought him back to himself. He’d looked up into Sir’s smiling face and blushed as he realized just how relaxed he’d been. He was drawn into a tender kiss that erased the embarrassment and replaced it with a low level arousal that Sir seemed to delight in causing.

Dinner had been a simple meal of finger-foods, fed to him by Sir as He talked with several other dominants about an upcoming event at the Leaf. He’d concentrated on Sir’s touch, carefully tuning out the conversation going on at the table above him. If it was something he needed to be involved in, Sir would make sure he knew. Dinner had ended and he and Sir had retired back to Sir’s apartment. They’d talked about what had happened the night before, about what Aaron thought might have triggered the incident. He wasn’t even certain himself why the activities had affected him so badly when they normally helped him leave the job behind. They hadn’t done anything he and Sir hadn’t done in the dungeon rooms at the Leaf, so Aaron was at a loss. To hopefully head off another distressing scene, Sir vetoed using the standing restraints. Instead, he stripped Aaron and laid him out on the bed.

“Want you to be able to see me, boy,” he told Aaron as he secured Aaron’s ankles and wrists in the padded restraints. “Want you to know who’s taking care of you, who’s touching you.” He ran his warm hands up Aaron’s wide spread legs, teasing the bound man’s inner thighs and firming genitals. “And,” he added with a grin, “It’ll be a damned site easier to make sure you don’t hurt yourself if you decide to go limp on me again.” He ran his tongue over Aaron’s cock, sucking it into the heat of his mouth… and effectively silencing any retort Aaron might have tried to make.

Aaron relaxed into the sensations. His times with Jason had never been sexual. They’d simply been a cathartic arrangement that allowed Aaron the chance to let go of the stress he bottled up in order to do his job well. The sessions were sensual, intense, fulfilling, but Haley had provided the cleansing sexual release afterwards. Haley had been able to give him that, the emotional and physical connection that Jason had to keep at a distance. While Jason had been his dominant, Haley had been his lover and strength. In Patrick, Aaron had found both; a dominant who could break down his walls and grant him the release he needed, and a lover who could tenderly rebuild him, shoring up the walls without letting him close himself off completely. It wasn’t perfect. It wasn’t without its issues and problems. But it was more than Aaron had dared hope for that night seven months ago when Dave brought him to the Leaf for the first time.

Narrow cord was carefully wrapped around his balls, pulling them down, keeping him from coming
Another cord was wrapped around his now hard cock, encasing it in a tormenting cocoon of cool silk that left only the flared crown uncovered and available for Sir’s tormenting touch. A calloused finger teased at the nerve rich flesh, circling the slit, caressing the underside of the ridge; just enough to tease, but nothing else. He shivered at the sensation, relaxing further.

“One o’ these days I’m gonna fill this tempting little opening,” Sir said conversationally as he tapped at the tip of Aaron’s cock. “Slide a sound in that virgin hole and fuck it long and slow until ye’re whirring and beggin’ for more.”

Aaron whimpered.

“Or maybe I’ll have Roland design a plug for it,” he continued, his fingers moving from the cockhead to the bound shaft. “Something to show ya belong te me. Take ya out in naught but a gates of hell and a pretty bit o’ emerald that flashes in the lights.” He chuckled as Aaron’s cock twitched in his hand. “Ah. Ya like that, do ya, boy? Like the idea of being marked as mine so everyone can see.”

[‘Every time you look in the mirror, Agent Hotchner, you’ll see me.’] Aaron could only nod, eyes firmly locked on Sir’s hands and what they were doing to torment him. Broad shoulders, a bare chest covered in silvering copper chest hair, an auburn beard and deep green eyes. He focused on the differences, holding on to Sir’s distinctive image to drive out the unwelcome voice.

Sir’s eyes narrowed as he looked at Aaron. “What’s ye’re safeword, boy?”

“Blue.” Even as he said it, something in him knew it wasn’t entirely correct, but… it *was* correct. He pushed aside the confusion, trusting that even if it wasn’t always correct, it was enough that Sir would understand what was needed.

Sir’s hand cupped Aaron’s cheek. “Look at me, boy? Was that yer answer or a safeword of its own?”

Aaron blinked, confused by the question. He turned to nuzzle Sir’s hand, needing more. “Blue for stopping,” he whispered into Sir’s palm. “Yellow to slow down. Please, Sir,” he breathed against the damp skin. “Green. Please. I need this, need you.”

Sir’s mouth was gentle on his and the kiss seemed to stretch on and on. Sir’s body pressed against his side, grounding him, keeping him safe. Sir’s hands began a slow exploration of his body, tugging at nipples, tracing muscles stretched tight by the restraints. He arched into the touches, whimpering at each building sensation. Sir’s fingers pinched at his nipples, making him gasp and tug at his restraints.

“Easy, boy.”

He worked to control his responses, not wanting it to end too soon. [‘They won’t know anything’s wrong for hours yet and I’m going to enjoy every second of it.’] He locked eyes with Patrick. “Please.”

Patrick… Sir nodded, understanding the plea. His fingers returned to peaked nipples, rolling them between work-calloused fingers. “Should I have these pierced?” he pondered aloud. “Or would that be too much for ya in yer work. Don’t want to cause trouble while ya do such an important job.” [‘Will this change the way you profile, Agent Hotchner?’] “Maybe just a set of weighted clamps for ya te wear here or in the Leaf. Weights that shift and tug with every step as ya follow me while I carry out my own duties. How long do ya think ya could handle that, boy? Would ya be willing to try that for me?”
He arched into the tugging grip as much as his bonds would let him, the burn making him whimper and pant. “Yes, Sir,” he finally managed.

“Good boy,” Sir praised, releasing the abused nipples and leaning in to suckle and lick away the sting.

Slowly, the talented mouth moved down his chest, leaving a trail of damp, biting kisses over the smooth scarred skin. He wrapped his hands around the cords connected to the restraints, fingers brushing lightly over quick release clamps, reassuring himself exactly where they were. He wouldn’t need them. Sir would take care of him, he only had to trust in Sir’s skill. Sir’s kisses moved slowly downward, past the most damning scar to the hypersensitive skin where leg met torso. Sir laved the crease lovingly, smiling at each new sound coaxed from his throat. He spread his legs wider, hips arching upwards, silently begging. Sir didn’t make him wait, broad hands lifting just a touch more, spreading his cheeks and running a hot stripe up the delicate skin from anus to balls. His toes curled as he shook in response. The touch was repeated again and again until he was all but sobbing for release, his cock hard and leaking in its restraints.

“Breathe, boy,” Sir urged. ‘You’ll need your oxygen.’

He sucked in several deep breaths, concentrating of the feel of Sir’s body against his; the feel of Sir’s solid warmth shifting up his body to stroke his sweaty face. Sir shifted, moving to straddle his boy’s hips and grind into the bound cock. Chest hair teased his nipples as Sir leaned close, blanketing him protectively. “Please,” he breathed, brown eyes locked with Sir’s green ones. He could feel Sir’s cock against his abdomen, hard and slicked. Sir chuckled, shifting to thrust slowly between the press of their two bodies.

‘Will this change the way you profile?’ He shivered and concentrated harder on the pleasurable sensations Sir was flooding his body with. Sir’s cock shifted, sliding over the farthest of the abdominal wounds. The warmth of pre-come blood made him blanch and tug at the restraints.

The movements stopped. He waited for his tormentor’s next move. ‘Does this feel impotent to you?’ The slide of a sharp blade, the twist as the wound is opened further… the horrifying burn as something thicker and hotter than a knife is thrust deep into the wound. ‘The hardest part is not passing out from the pain, but I’ll forgive you this time, Agent Hotchner. It’s not like I have anywhere else to be.’ The pain left him gasping for air, unable to do more than clench his jaw to not give the bastard the satisfaction of his pain. Hands closed around his wrists and it seemed to free something in him. He tugged at the restraints, moving the little amount he could. He tugged harder. He could do this. He *had* to do this. For Haley, for Jack, for the team and all the other victims. He felt something pop in his wrist and he wondered if it would be enough to get free of the cuffs. He redoubled his efforts.

“RED, boy!”

{Red turning to black, staining the light colored walls. The castoff as he hit again and again, feeling the delicate bones break beneath his fists.} He pulled harder at the cuffs and felt them break away. He struck out, surprised to find his ankles free and to hear the startled oof as his knee connected with the walking nightmare. He rolled, coming to a controlled crouch on the floor, eyes scanning the room for anything he could use as a weapon. Large hands grabbed at him and he kicked out instinctively. The hands tightened, pulling him upright and shoving him against a nearby wall. The man’s solid body pressed him tight to the wall, his feet knocking Aaron’s further apart, keeping him off balance. He continued to struggle until the man grabbed his left arm and wrenched it back, putting Aaron in a very effective arm lock. Warm breath gusted past his ear and it took him a long moment to realize the sounds were words.
“Stop it, Aaron! Stop fightin’ me before ya hurt yerself even worse!”

Aaron’s breath came in short gasps as he struggled to make sense of what was happening.

“Ye’re safe, boy. I swear, ye’re safe. Just calm down. Talk to me. What’s goin’ on in that daft head o’ yers?”

“Scars,” he whispered, all fight going out of him.

The body behind him relaxed, though while the grip on his arm loosened, he wasn’t completely released. “Back wi’ me now, then?”

Aaron nodded, his body starting to shake as shock set in. He allowed himself to be led back to the bed and sank gratefully down on to the edge of the mattress. He wrapped his arms around himself, unable to meet Patrick’s concerned gaze.

“Ya should know by now that yer scars aren’t somethin’ te be ashamed of, boy,” he soothed, his hands hovering over Aaron’s thighs. “I need to unbind ya, boy.”

Aaron nodded, spreading his legs slightly for the other man. His erection was long gone, even the bindings unable to maintain it. He shivered harder. Once the bindings were removed a soft blanket was wrapped around him. He gripped it tightly, covering his damaged {dirty, hideous} torso. Patrick resumed his place between Aaron’s spread thighs, his hands absently petting the blanket that covered Aaron’s legs. He didn’t utter a word, simply sat and watched Aaron’s pale face.

“He… Foyet did more than stab me,” he admitted, voice little more than a broken whisper. “They… the hospital thought the semen in the wound was from him ejaculating on my stomach… but…” His eyes lock with Patrick’s. “I… they don’t know. They didn’t… I didn’t… I couldn’t…” His breath was coming faster and shallower, all pretense of control gone as he admitted for the first time just how deeply George Foyet had destroyed him.

Patrick slowly rose and joined his boy on the bed. He drew Aaron into his arms, holding the younger man close as he shook apart – and not in the way he’d hoped would happen tonight. “Ya didn’t tell ‘em differently. Any of them.”

Aaron shook his head, tears finally falling from tightly closed brown eyes. “Oh, Aaron.” He tightened his hold on his boy, hoping the gesture was enough to reassure Aaron that this changed nothing between them, not the way Aaron feared. Once again, the strong frame seemed to shatter in his arms, curling in on itself. He shifted them until he was braced against the headboard and then pulled Aaron to him. “Ye’ve done nothing wrong, boy. There’s nothing for ya te be ashamed of.” The shaking intensified and Patrick held on tighter.

“It hurt,” Aaron admitted. “Worse than being shot, worse than being stabbed… it was like being branded from the inside out.” His breath was slower but more ragged.

Patrick could see his boy slipping further and further into his horrifying memories. “Aaron. Ye’re safe here. Stay with me.”

“I’ll destroy you too,” he answered absently. “I destroyed Gideon. I destroyed Haley and my marriage. I nearly destroyed the team.” His eyes lost focus, staring off into some distant spot that Patrick couldn’t see. “I’m tainted, Patrick,” he said tiredly. “Get away while you can.”

Patrick knew this was more than he could counter. His boy’s eyes were glazed, his face pale. Shock. Deep, traumatic shock. More so than he could deal with on his own. “Not goin’ anywhere, boy,” he
reassured. “But I need to make a phone call, is that all right?”

Aaron nodded listlessly, eyes once more locked on some distant point Patrick didn’t see.

Patrick reached for the bedside phone, dialing the number by heart. “Trevor? It’s Patrick Zakaria. I need ya at my apartment, now. My boy…” he trailed off, looking at the too still submissive. “Something’s happened and I need yer help.” He nodded even though the Leaf’s attending physician couldn’t see him. “Thank ya, Trev. Ya might also alert Huang from Obsidian. I think this may be something we need him for as well.”

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The insistent ringing of the phone pulled him reluctantly from his slumber. They were off duty. He had another… He looked at the clock and cursed as he saw the time. A call at 4am on a Sunday… MONDAY morning never boded well. He grabbed the phone. “Rossi.”

“Where the hell is the bastard that hurt my boy?”

Dave blinked at Patrick’s dark and dangerous tone. “Which one?” he asked warily. “We come across a lot of bastards in our line of work.” The unamused silence told him just how deadly serious Patrick was. “I really do need more details, Patrick.”

“The bastard that dared to leave his marks on what’s mine.”

Rossi sighed in relief. At least he wouldn’t have to worry about tracing a suspicious death back to Patrick. “He’s dead. Aaron killed him to protect his son.”

“Then where’s he buried so I can go and piss on his damned grave?”

Despite the gravity of the situation, David felt like laughing at the comment. “That I don’t know, and even if I did, I wouldn’t tell you. Talk to me, Liam Patrick. What’s happened to Aaron?”

“He had a flashback to what the bastard did to him.” Patrick sighed, his weariness evident in his tone. “He dislocated his right wrist struggling. Should have known something was off when he chose ‘blue’ as his safe-word rather than ‘red’. Blue is his safe-word for emotional triggers. I should have known,” the comments trailed off.

“You’re not omnipotent, my friend,” David reassured.

“Trevor had to sedate him, David.” The Irishman’s voice broke on the words. “He wasn’t hysterical. He was actually closer to catatonic, which was even worse. Trevor thought it was best to give him at least one dreamless night.” The pause this time was longer, as if Patrick was debating his next words. “I need a favor, David,” he finally admitted.

“You concentrate on Aaron. I was suspecting something like this would happen sooner or later, to be honest.” He gave a short, mirthless laugh. “I’ll call you once I’ve gotten things arranged.”

“Thank ya, David. I owe ya one.”
“You don’t owe me anything,” he told his friend firmly. “Just take care of Aaron.”

Aaron grimaced at the nonsense worksheet that George Huang had insisted he complete. Huang was skilled and easy to talk to, something that Aaron appreciated even as he cursed the man’s too insightful nature. If nothing else, Huang’s insight had provided a reasonable explanation of why Aaron had reacted so violently to the scenes in Patrick’s apartment. Always before, their scenes had taken place in the anonymous and neutral rooms of the club, separated from the ‘reality’ of their day-to-day existence. For Aaron, it had been an unconscious buffer that he’d lost when they’d scened in Patrick’s home. The simple touches of ‘home’ that would normally have been soothing, had instead thrown Aaron back to the night he’d been attacked in his own home by Foyet. Then, Patrick had pinned him down, leaving him helpless and at Patrick’s mercy, something Aaron normally loved. Unfortunately, the helplessness had been too reminiscent of his time in Foyet’s hands and Aaron had been unable to fight the memories any longer.

Foyet’s attack had left more emotional and mental marks on Aaron than even he had realized. The compartmentalization that served him so well on the job, had sabotaged him off it. He remembered Haley once saying that she could tell when a case had been particularly bad because he’d come home silent and distant and then, after a few hours, would be back to himself. She’d never ask about those cases, saying she’d understood that Aaron needed to keep his distance from them to keep himself safe. Aaron realized, while talking with Dr. Huang, that it was one of the reasons Haley had not had a problem with Gideon – she’d thought he’d opened up to Gideon about those cases, about the pain and hurt and fear. But he hadn’t, he’d simply learned to lock it away and let it out in small doses in his sessions with Gideon until he could control it. Then Gideon had gone, taking with him even that small amount of release, and Aaron had locked those things down even tighter. Patrick had unknowingly opened those gates at a time when Aaron’s mind had already been replaying the horror of Foyet’s attacks. The accumulated pain, recriminations and emotions that Aaron had locked away so tightly in order to keep functioning after Foyet’s death had burst forth in an overwhelming flood.

So, now here Aaron sat with a sheet of idiotic questions about his ‘feelings’, trying to work past his own long-ingrained reticence about sharing those ‘feelings’ with anyone. Even after only two days of working with the personable psychiatrist Aaron knew he couldn’t bluff his way past the man: Huang was used to working with cops and stoic patients. He wouldn’t be able to convince Huang everything was fine like he had the department-mandated psychologist. He’d have to answer honestly, even when he didn’t want to, which meant being honest with himself as well. The thought worried him, but he knew Huang was right: he needed to learn how to deal with these things, not just shove them aside, if he wanted to stay sane. He sighed and picked up the abandoned pen, trying to approach the paper as he would an incident report at the office – facts, distance, and then a look at the emotional toll. His hand shook slightly, but he ignored it. He wasn’t going to take another of the damned anxiety pills. He didn’t need them and he couldn’t afford to get too reliant on them. He shifted on the soft cushion, fervently wishing Patrick was here, but his Sir had a job to do and that didn’t include babysitting his submissive 24/7.

The sound of a door opening drew Aaron from his thoughts. He took a deep breath, knowing it would be Patrick but unable to stop the momentary spike of worry as his hyper-vigilance flared again. He shook his head at his own foolishness. He’d gotten past this months ago… or thought he had at least. He sighed. This was simply reaffirmation that he needed to face his fears and emotional responses, not repress them. He rubbed carefully at the bridge of his nose, willing the threatening headache away. Patrick’s rich laughter soothed his nerves better than the anxiety pills ever could. He tuned into his Sir’s conversation, the lack of audible response suggested that Aaron was getting half of a very pleasant phone conversation.
“Of course you can, young man,” Sir said as he rounded the corner into the main room. He smiled at Aaron and settled onto the couch behind his naked submissive. “I think he’d love to speak with you.” He ran his fingers through Aaron’s hair absently as he listened to the caller. He laughed again. “You’re not interrupting anything. Promise. Hold on and I’ll get your da for you.”

Aaron startled as he realized just who Patrick was talking to. His eyes widened as Sir held out the cellphone to him. He shook his head, suddenly uncertain. Patrick’s hand settled on his shoulder as he leaned close to whisper in Aaron’s ear. “It’s all right, Aaron. Talk to yer boy. Nothing’s changed there. He’s just concerned about his da and excited about getting to talk to him.”

Aaron nodded slowly then took the phone. He took a steadying breath. “Hey, buddy,” he said into the phone.

“Daddy!” came the enthusiastic response. “Mister Patrick said you wouldn’t mind me calling you while you were on your play-date. I miss you, daddy.”

Aaron smiled, throat tight. “Miss you too, buddy.”

“Aunt Jess called Gamma and said you were kinda homesick and Gamma said that I should call you.” The little boy giggled. “It’s okay to be homesick, daddy. You told me that. But Mr. Patrick sounds really cool and Gamma and pa-pa and I are having a lot of fun and Aunt Jess is spending all her time with Uncle Sean.” Aaron could hear the eye-roll at the last comment and chuckled. “But if you need me, I can come home. You’re more ‘portant than Mickey.”

Aaron felt his eyes tear as his little boy offered to give up Mickey Mouse to come home and take care of his ‘homesick’ dad. “That’s okay, buddy. Mr. Patrick is taking good care of me,” he reassured, leaning back against said man’s legs. “Besides, you’re supposed to get Uncle Spencer a pair of Mickey ears, remember?”

“Oh… and I wanna get a Tinkerbell wand for Aunt Penny and something for little Henry and a Dopey for Uncle Sean.”

Aaron laughed. “That sounds wonderful. But remember to get things for you too.”

“Daddy. That’s what Gamma buys,” he answered back easily, all childish certainty.

“Jack,” Aaron started to scold.

“She said so, Daddy. If I see something I want,” Jack said seriously, obviously reciting something he’d been told several times, “I tell her or pa-pa and I tell them why I want it and if it’s not too ‘spensive I sometimes get it. And *no* fits if they say no.”

Aaron nodded. “Exactly. No fits.” When had his little boy gotten so grown up?

“Daddy. What should I get for Mister Patrick?” he asked just as seriously. “I don’t know what he’d want but he sounds really nice and he’s taking care of you while I’m with Gamma and pa-pa. And… Do I get to meet him, Daddy? I like his voice even if he sounds kinda funny.”

“We’ll see, buddy. And I don’t know what he’d want from Disney World.” He looked up at Sir.

Patrick smirked at the blush on his boy’s face and wondered what the sharp little boy on the other end of the line had asked. He’d find out later. “I’ve always been rather fond of Tramp from Lady and the Tramp,” he said, just loud enough to hopefully be overheard.

Aaron started to repeat the comment but was interrupted by a “cool!” from his son.
“I bet pa-pa knows ‘sactly where to find him ‘cause he likes Tramp too! Is that okay, Daddy?”

“That’s fine, Jack,” he reassured. “Just remember to mind your grandparents and have fun so you can tell me all about it when you get home.”

“Okay, Daddy. OH. Gamma wants to talk to you too. Love you, Daddy.”

“Love you too, buddy. See you soon.” Aaron braced himself for whatever Haley’s mother was going to throw at him. He wasn’t going to keep them from Jack, but he really didn’t want to have to justify his life to the woman.

“Aaron?”

Her voice was far more hesitant than he remembered. “Yes, ma’am. I’m here.”

“Jessica told us that something had… brought back painful memories for you,” she began hesitantly. “I… I just want to say that, anything you need, we’ll try and provide.” She sighed. “After the horrible things I said…”

“We were all hurting, Mrs. Brooks,” he reassured, eyes once more brimming with tears. “Grief makes us all do and say things we regret.”

“Thank you, Aaron.” There was a long pause and Aaron wondered if the older woman had decided it was too much effort to continue the conversation. “We… We can extend our vacation for another few days if it would help you and your… friend. Or, Jessica has offered to keep Jack too. We don’t want you worrying about that. He’s a joy to take care of. Respectful, full of life and smiles… so much like Haley that it’s… it’s almost like having her around all over again.”

The tears fell now, silent but cleansing. Sir’s hand stroked his hair. “He’s the only thing that keeps me going some days,” he admitted.

“And you didn’t have to share him with us,” Haley’s mother admitted. “Especially after… everything. I know that. You’re a good man, Aaron Hotchner,” she said firmly. “Don’t ever doubt that! You’ll get through this and we’ll help any way we can.”

“Thank you,” he whispered brokenly.

“Jack, come say goodbye to your father and let him know we’ll call again soon,” Aaron heard his former mother-in-law say.

Again the phone changed hands and a familiar little voice took over. “Bye, daddy. Can I call you after we go to Disney?”

“Sure, buddy. Call me after you go to Disney. You can tell me all about what you found, okay?” He looked up at his Sir for confirmation, getting a smiling nod in return.

“Kay, daddy. Be good for Mr. Patrick.”

Aaron laughed. “I will. You be good too.”

“I will. Night, daddy. Sweet dreams.”

“Thank you, buddy. You too. Good night.” He waited until his son ended the call before hanging up himself. He leaned against Sir’s leg, clutching the phone to his chest. He relaxed into Sir’s caressing touch, soaking up the offered comfort as he looked at the papers still sitting on the coffee table before
him. He pressed a kiss to Sir’s denim covered knee, handed back the phone and started filling out the worksheet once more. He still wasn’t sure it would help, but he owed it to those who cared about him to at least try.

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Scars remind us where we’ve been. They don’t have to dictate where we’re going – Dave Rossi

Aaron stood at his Sir’s right shoulder and did his best not to fidget. The leather pants fit like a second skin. The chastity device, a thin leather undergarment that covered Aaron’s caged cock and held the small butt-plug firmly in place, while not uncomfortable was a sensation he’d yet to get completely used to. But all that paled in comparison to the emotional discomfort caused by the simple leather X-harness that Sir had chosen for him to wear. The black leather straps did nothing to hide the scars left on his torso by Foyet, but it did allow Sir easy access to his skin. He wasn’t sure that the pleasure of the one outweighed the distress of the other, but it wasn’t his decision. He’d given that right to Sir and he trusted Sir not to abuse it - though it wasn’t easy.

He watched, profiler’s eyes looking for potential problems that might need Sir’s attention. It was a long shot, but Sir had asked him to be extra vigilant tonight in response to two recent attacks on members of the community. The dominants in question weren’t members of the Leaf, but they were members of the community as a whole, and as Aaron was learning, the community looked after its own. So he followed Sir and kept his eyes and ears open for anything out of the ordinary, catching snips of conversations and glimpses of interactions, ready to alert Sir to any potential problems.

“Have you heard the latest Bella Voce pod-cast? That woman could read the phone book to me and I *swear* I’d be in heaven!”

“Yes, I am interested. However, my slave has a say in who I bring to my bed and I’ll not betray that trust.”

“Did you hear ‘Master’ Dragon finally got taken down? Seems one of his poor unsuspecting subs was a bit more than he could handle. She fought back and put him in the hospital. About time someone put *him* there considering how many subs he’s put there without a second thought. Gotta *love* karma!”

Aaron made a mental note to ask Sir about ‘Master Dragon’ later. He needed to make sure it wasn’t something they should look into further.

“Are you *sure* I can’t interest you in something a bit… stronger?”

Aaron focused on the purred invitation. The male in question was young with spiked hair and makeup rimmed eyes. The woman he was speaking to watched with a bemused and predatory smile. She reached out and stroked the boy’s sharp cheekbone. “Oh, baby boy. I’d eat you up in two bites,” she growled, chuckling huskily when the boy shivered.

“Please?”

Aaron watched as the pair engaged in a silent stare-down. The woman’s long fingers tightened in the boy’s hair, pulling his head back so she could lean down and whisper in his multi-pierced ear. The boy flushed deeply, relaxing against the woman’s leg in submission. Aaron lightly brushed fingers over Sir’s arm, waiting patiently to be acknowledged. Green eyes turned to him questioningly. He silently pointed out the pair he’d been watching. Sir smiled. He leaned in close and breathed in Aaron’s ear. “They’re a couple, Aaron. Mistress Anna indulges her boy in the occasional role-play scene. Shouldn’t be too involved beyond the play setup,” he reassured.
Aaron nodded, relaxing at the information. The evening continued uneventfully and Aaron found himself relaxing into his role as Sir’s boy. It had been a week and a half since his break-down and Dr. Huang had given the all clear for Aaron to return to work the following Monday. He still wasn’t sure how Dave, Patrick and Dr. Huang had arranged things, but he’d been assured that Chief Strauss had been supportive of the time away and that he’d been granted leave until cleared by his doctor to return. Dr. Huang’s daily sessions with Aaron had honestly helped a great deal. However, Dr. Huang had to return to New York and so had introduced Aaron to a local therapist that worked heavily with Obsidian House to continue his sessions with. Aaron had met the woman and was comfortable with her, but he still wasn’t sure it was necessary. Dr. Sayers dealt heavily with male rape victims, and while Aaron would concede that Foyet’s attack had been an ‘unwanted sexual advance’, he still had difficulty putting it in the same category as some of the rape victims he’d dealt with in his line of work. Sir, and both doctors, had disagreed. Aaron, at Sir’s insistence, had set his first appointment for early the next week and he would be seeing Dr. Sayers once a week until they felt he was back on steady footing. He wasn’t looking forward to it, but Sir was correct, it was something he needed to do, at least for now.

While he’d been with Patrick he’d gotten more comfortable with the scars on his body, and with his body in general. It was hard *not* to when forced to remain completely naked for eleven days, except when outside the apartment. He wasn’t particularly body shy: he kept fit and knew he received his fair share of appreciative looks. However, since Foyet… the scars were something he preferred to keep hidden, from his team, from his lovers, from himself. They were, to him, badges of failure, a failure that had cost too many lives. Sir and Dr. Huang were working on that with him. Luckily, Sir was a very demonstrative man and praised his boy’s body as often as possible. The casual touches, the more deliberate caresses, all helped Aaron more than Sir probably even knew. Tonight was a trial run of sorts to see how he reacted to having his scars exposed to people outside the safety of Patrick’s apartment. Jack was coming home tomorrow night and while Aaron was looking forward to seeing his son, he wouldn’t hesitate to have Jess or JJ watch Jack if Aaron was still having unexpected flashbacks. His son’s safety came first.

He missed Jack. He’d spoken with the little boy daily, calling before bedtime to hear all the wonderful things Jack and his grandparents had explored on their ‘adventures’. Once the boy’s excitement slowed, Aaron would tell Jack a bedtime story, his voice soft and low, soothing. He’d listen for Jack’s breathing to change, knowing Mrs. Brooks would be there to hang up the phone and tuck Jack in afterwards, then he’d wish his son sweet dreams, hang up the phone and curl into Patrick’s arms to be held. Patrick had insisted on the daily phone calls, knowing the connection would do both Jack *and* Aaron good. He’d also gotten to know Jack a bit better through the phone calls, an unexpected plus. Jack had *insisted* on talking with Patrick at least every other phone call, pestering his father mercilessly until allowed to talk to ‘Daddy’s silly friend’. Patrick was absolutely enchanted by the little boy, which pleased Aaron immensely. Jack was a large part of his life, as was his job, and the fact that Patrick accepted both made Aaron hopeful about the future of their relationship, both inside and outside the club.

Finally, Sir was finished with his security duties for the night. He handed off his radio and filled his replacement in on the few possible situations she might want to keep an eye on. The woman rolled her eyes. “Go on and get out of here, you old reprobate. You have a boy who’s been on his best behavior all evening and deserves a reward, which I’m sure you have well in hand,” she added with a knowing grin. Sir simply smiled, nodded to her and walked away, trusting Aaron to follow.

Aaron knew Sir had plans for him this evening, but he was uncertain exactly what. He trusted Sir completely, but was worried they’d find he was unable to give himself over completely. Sir had told him to simply relax, that no matter what he was able to give, it would be enough. But Aaron wanted the night’s activities to be perfect for Sir, a repayment of all he’d been given so far. He followed Sir down to one of the private suites, kneeling just inside the door and working to center himself so he
could give Sir his complete submission.

Strong fingers gently lifted his chin. “You’re trying too hard, Aaron. Just let go and trust me to give
you what you need.”

He nodded. “Yes, Sir.”

He was rewarded with a deep, heated kiss. “Good boy. Now, up.”

Aaron stood slowly, back pressed to the wall to add stability that his shaky legs couldn’t. Sir’s hands
were warm as they unbuckled the leather harness. He made short work of the simple straps, dropping
them to the floor in a tidy tumble. His hands caressed Aaron’s skin, massaging the tense muscles
until Aaron was once more relaxed under his hands. His hands cupped Aaron’s face, drawing him
forward for another slow, lingering kiss. Aaron relaxed even further, feeling the fears slowly drift
away.

“Such a good boy,” Sir breathed. His warm hands moved down Aaron’s neck, over his shoulders.
Flat palms ghosted over firm pectorals, coming to rest over quickly hardening nipples. “Oh yes.
These would be so beautiful pierced, boy,” he breathed. “But not now. Maybe never,” he admitted.
“But I do look forward to seeing them clipped tight fer me.” Sir stepped away and Aaron felt
momentarily bereft, missing the touch even as he worried over what was coming next. He leaned his
head back against the wall, breathing deep and trying to maintain the calm he’d found under Sir’s
hand. He could hear Sir off to the side, looking through the items He’d laid out earlier, items He’d
not let His boy even see. Part of him said he should be terrified, should be looking for a ways out of
the situation. The other part of him knew he could trust his Sir completely. He pushed aside the
‘profiler’ and sank further into the peace offered by being simply ‘Sir’s’. He felt the last of the
tension ease.

“I think ye’ll look good in these, Aaron,” Sir said, holding a pair of scroll-type nipple clamps up so
Aaron could see them.

The metal was cool as Sir pressed it to his chest. Aaron could feel the way the metal bars surrounded
his nipple. Sir’s fingers pinched the flesh slightly, pulling the tip further forward, giving the clamp
something to close around. The screws turned, drawing the two flat metal plates tighter around the
nipple. Aaron breathed slowly as the small plates compressed the sensitive flesh more and more with
each turn. His breath grew more ragged with each carefully timed twist. He tried to control the
shivers of anticipation as the clamp’s bite went from tight to just this side of painful before stilling.
Sir’s palm settled once more against his, now clamped, nipple, warming the abused flesh.

“Just a little more, boy,” Sir promised. His tongue grazed the peaked tip and Aaron arched up into
the caress with a muffled groan. The clamp was given one more turn, settling it tight against Aaron’s
nipple and making him writhe.

He whimpered as a line of cold fell against his chest, trailing from the heat of the clamped nipple. He
opened eyes he hadn’t realized he’d closed, finding Sir watching him carefully. He looked down and
realized a chain hung from the bottom of the clamp, and from it, dangled the second clamp.

“Still with me, boy?” Sir asked, concern evident in His tone.

Aaron nodded, relaxing into the sensations. Sir smiled, leaned in and claimed a slow, tender kiss.

“One more if ye’re ready.”

He nodded again. The second clamp was lifted and placed around his other nipple, the tug of the
connecting chain causing a delicious spark of sensation along his nerve endings. He arched into Sir’s touch, turning himself over to Sir’s care. He was rewarded with another kiss and the press of Sir’s body against his own.

The chain between the clamps warmed quickly against his skin. Sir attached a second chain to the center of the first, leaving it dangling down the midline of his chest. He shivered as the swing of the new chain pulled lightly on the clamps. Sir’s chuckle sent a different sort of shiver through him. Sir’s skilled fingers made short work of his leather pants and boots, stripping them off with minimal fuss, leaving him in just the clamps and the chastity belt. The belt was removed as well, Sir’s fingers taking a moment to tease at sensitive skin, cupping his stretched balls, massaging the thin skin of his perineum. He couldn’t stop his hips from arching forward in need.

Sir caught his hips, leaning forward and blowing warm breath across his metal and leather encased cock. “Soon. But not yet.”

He whimpered. Sir’s teasing fingers moved further back, tapping the base of the butt plug and sending an unexpected jolt of sensation through him. The damn thing vibrated. Sir’s breathy chuckle was delicious torture across his bound cock. The vibration increased in speed and the plug was shifted, adjusted until its tip was firmly seated against his prostate. His body arched forward, seeking Sir’s touch, Sir’s centering calm, as sensation after sensation built in maddening waves while the bindings kept him from finding release.

“Easy, boy,” Sir growled, rising from His crouch to look in His boy’s eyes. “I’ll give ya what ya need.”

He relaxed, his body wracked with overloading sensations. A sharp tug on the chains connected to the clamps had him crying out in wordless need. Sir kept the pull on the chain constant, using it to draw him away from the wall. He followed on unsteady legs, willingly going where Sir led. He was turned and backed against the ‘X’ of a Saint Andrew’s cross. The leather was cool against his back and he relaxed into its support. Sir urged his legs apart, securing his ankles to the base of the cross with softly padded cuffs. Sir’s tongue traced obscene trails up his inner thighs and across his balls as He worked. Fingers eased back the vibrations of the plug, leaving him filled, but not so close to losing control. A soft litany of accented words filled the space between them and he drifted on the cadence of them, uncertain of their exact meaning but knowing he was safe here. Leather belts closed around his thighs, opening him further for Sir’s touch and pinning him against the solid bulk of the x-frame. An open mouthed kiss was bestowed on each hip, turning from a light pressure to the welcome ache of a marking bite as he clutched at the leather-covered wood above him.

Sir’s tongue soothed the bites, His beard a delicious torment against leather bound flesh. His hands fluttered uncertainly, torn between clutching at the supporting frame and reaching down to urge Sir closer to his aching cock. The choice was soon taken from him.

Sir rose and pressed His still clothed body against His boy’s. His hips ground against His boy’s bound cock eliciting a needy whine. “Something ya need, boy?” Sir asked, His erection clear beneath His denim.


Sir rewarded him with a slow, sensual kiss. “Hands over yer head, a thaisce.”

He raised his hands as Sir directed, holding them steady as Sir secured them in the upper cuffs. The position forced his chest out, pulling on the chain between his nipples. Sir tugged on the leading chain, doubling the aching spike of pleasure-pain. He wrapped his fingers around the chain that
attached the cuffs to the cross and simply held on, giving himself over to Sir’s touch. Work-
roughened hands slid over his skin, caressing, exploring, teasing. He let the sensations lap at his
awareness, focusing on the feel of the restraints, the sound of Sir’s voice, the feeling of safety. Hands
slide over his chest and he sighed at the gentle touch. Fingers traced oddly numb spots on his skin, the
sensation there then gone, then there again. It took his pleasure-overloaded mind far too long to
realize what the numb spots were, his scars. He tried to shift away from the hands as they moved
down his body, but Sir would have none of it. A sharp tug on the leading chain had him arching
away from the cross.

“Ye’re mine, boy,” Sir growled, chain pulled tight and body pressed close to Aaron’s. “Not his.
Mine!” He sank his teeth into Aaron’s shoulder, sucking hard on the thin flesh as Aaron struggled to
relax into the knowledge. The bite released and Sir’s voice was husky in Aaron’s ear. “Ya fought
him and won before, a thaisce. Don’t let the bastard win now. Not w’en ye’re so close.”

He locked eyes with his Sir. “I…”

“Let go, Aaron,” Patrick urged gently. “Ya know I’ll catch ya.”

Aaron took a deep breath and… surrendered.

“Beautiful,” Sir breathed in his ear. Lips claimed his, Sir’s tongue plundering his mouth, Sir’s hands
tangled in his hair holding him still. “Ye’ve no idea how handsome ya are when ya let go, do ya,
boy? Ye’re perfection itself as ya fall fer me, trusting me te catch ya. Proud o’ ya, boy.”

He shivered at the passionate words, the affectionate tone… and the need that spiked through him as
they washed over him. Sir’s kisses slowed, and trailed lower. Down his jaw, his throat, pausing to
lap at the dark mark He’d left moments before. Clamped nipples were laved with a wicked tongue
making him hiss and arch. Then lower still to scars that he wished he could hide, but that Sir
wouldn’t allow him to. He still felt tainted, unclean, unworthy of Sir’s tender attention. Sir’s fingers
touched the edge of *The Scar*, drawing his attention to the very place he wished most to avoid. Too
much pain, too much humiliation, too many memories.

“This is as much mine as the rest o’ ya, a thaisce,” Sir said evenly. “Ya survived, boy. That’s what’s
important.” He rested His palm over the scar. “It’s a part of ya, nothin’ more. Don’t let it define who
ya are.”

Sir’s eyes locked with his, and he watched as Sir sank slowly to His knees. The green eyes held him
fast, he couldn’t have looked away if he wanted to, as Sir’s tongue extended and lapped around the
silvery scar tissue. The heat of Sir’s tongue seared through him, through the layers of shame and fear
and pain that still lingered in the scar. He shook in his bonds, mind still fighting the instinctive need
to hide, to fight. Sir’s hands held him fast, His lips continuing the intimate absolution.

He whimpered but stilled. The hands moved lower, cupping his bound cock and balls. His legs
threatened to buckle as deft fingers drifted further back and restarted the mind-melting vibrations that
centered on his prostate. “Please,” he begged, voice raw with need.

Sir’s breath ghosted over his damp skin. “Soon. Hold on for me, boy,” He ordered.

He braced himself for whatever was to come. He trusted Sir. He knew Sir would take care of him,
*had* taken care of him. Then the pressure surrounding his cock and balls released with a sharp
snap. He would have come if not for Sir’s hand tugging on his balls, backing off the need at least for
the moment. Then the mouth was back at The Scar, nipping at the edges, blowing air over the damp
skin. He struggled, writhing in his bonds as Sir worked him to a frenzy of need.
“Come for me, a thaisce.”

The quiet order, the buzz of the vibrator, the release of his tightening balls all paled in comparison to the tender kiss placed at the lower edge of The Scar. His body seized as orgasm crashed through him, leaving him insensate and limp in his bonds.

He was aware of three things when he came back to himself. He was lying down on a soft, comfortable bed. He’d been cleaned of the sweat and semen that had doubtlessly been covering his body. He was still naked, but only the butt plug remained in place.

“Welcome back.”

He turned his head and blinked muzzily at his Sir who smiled at him in amusement.

“Well, partially back at least,” He teased before leaning in for a kiss.

He became aware of two more things, Sir was naked, and Sir was still hard. He reached out a trembling hand for the thick, erect cock, brushing his fingers over the warm flesh.

Sir shivered before removing the hand from His cock. “Only if ya want te, boy,” He reassured. “And if ye’re willin’, I’d very much like to fuck ye’re tempting arse.”

He spread his legs in invitation, smiling at his Sir. It had been a while since he’d been taken that way, but he found himself quite looking forward to giving that to his Sir. He shivered as a gentle hand smoothed slowly up and down his inner thigh before detouring to the base of the butt-plug. Sir played with the silicone toy, drawing it in and out of his body several times, twisting the base so the tip of the plug tormented his prostate.

He arched his hips upward, wanting, needing more. The toy was carefully removed and he was pulled up higher into Sir’s lap. A pillow was placed under his back and he watched in dazed wonder as Sir rolled a condom over His erection and slicked Himself with lube. Green eyes locked with his as Sir shifted and placed the head of His cock against the relaxed muscle. Sir held his eyes as He slid slowly into the welcoming body.

Sir set a hard, demanding rhythm, hips pistoning as He sought his own completion. Deep, forceful thrusts shook the bed, Sir’s fingers leaving finger-shaped bruises on his hips. For his part, he arched up to meet the punishing thrusts as best he could in his exhausted state. He reached up and stroked the handsome face, fingers caressing Sir’s beard and carding through His red and silver hair. Sir turned into the touch, kissing the offered palm. He smiled, content even as a familiar warmth built within him once again.

“Can ya give me one more?” He breathed into the caressing palm. “Let me see ya writhing beneath me as I come?”

“Don’t know,” he answered breathlessly, even as his body jumped at the idea.

“Try for me.”

That was all it took. His body threatened to shake apart even as he tried to control his reactions. Each thrust drove a broken gasp or groan from his lips. Each withdrawal had him arching and reaching for Sir. Sir’s growls and endearments faded to nothing more than a buzz of accented desire and need. Sir’s hand curled around his cock and pumped, urging him higher and higher until he screamed out his second orgasm of the night and collapsed back onto the bed, body wracked by aftershocks. Sir continued His thrusting, drawing out the orgasm as long as He could, before He too, had to succumb to His need. He was terrifyingly quiet when He came, His eyes locked with His boy’s, His fingers
clamped tight around trembling thighs.

He leaned against His boy’s shoulder, struggling to regain His breath. He pressed a gentle kiss to the boy’s flushed cheek as He caught hold of the condom and withdrew. He silenced the muttered protest with a second kiss. “I’ll be right back, a thaisce. Rest.”

He nodded, eyes already drifting closed. Lips pressed against his forehead and he heard Sir’s voice whisper against his skin.

“Ta gra agam duit, a thaisce.”

He didn’t understand the words, but the tenderness of the tone followed him into his dreams.

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Justice cannot be for one side alone, but must be for both. - Eleanor Roosevelt

Aaron Hotchner was not a happy man as he walked back into the BAU offices after an overly long and highly frustrating budgetary meeting. He couldn’t help but wonder just how well some of the bureaucrats would manage in the field without the support of the positions they dismissed as ‘unnecessary overhead’. Two and a half hours of discussion, complaints, justifications and flat out arguments later, he’d managed to convince the bureaucrats that most of the cuts they’d recommended would be detrimental to the overall efficiency of the unit. Unfortunately, the headache that had been threatening the night before had moved in with a vengeance fifteen minutes into the meeting and he was quite ready to pry out his own eyes with a letter opener if it would stop the throbbing. Luckily, the team was currently between cases and he knew there were some wonderfully effective painkillers in his desk. He just had to get to them before Chief Strauss discovered he’d returned and demanded he give his report to her immediately.

He was passing Rossi’s office when a familiar Irish brogue caught his attention. He stopped, brow furrowing as he struggled to remember if he’d had plans with Patrick today. He didn’t believe so, but the pounding headache made him question his memory.

“Because they’d be ever so receptive te this,” Patrick’s voice growled, brogue so thick Aaron had to work to understand it. “Couldn’t happen te a more deserving bunch of abusers and ne’er do wells. Maybe one o’ their victims finally got fed up and struck back. Ya know that’s the kind o’ crap they’ll level at the boy. He’s been through enough trauma. He doesn’t need te be traumatized by the system as well.”

“Patrick,” David’s voice was calm, placating. “I know you’re frustrated but, this isn’t something we can do anything about.”

“Then who the bloody hell *can*, David?!” Patrick shouted. Aaron flinched at the tone. “Walter suggested I come te ya because he doesn’t have the connections he used te, but thought ya might. This boy is the third reported attack in three months. And those are just the ones I know of because of me position at the club. Surely there’s somethin’ or even some*one* ya can recommend who’d listen.”

Aaron tapped on the doorframe of Dave’s office, nudging the door open a bit further to peer inside at the two men. “Is everything okay?” he asked hesitantly, his eyes looking over both men critically. Dave was as calmly collected as always, his eyes studying Patrick, looking for ways to diffuse the other man’s obvious anger. Patrick, on the other hand, was… rough. His red and silver hair was disheveled as if he’d been running his hands through it repeatedly. His beard was in need of a trim, something that rarely happened, which spoke to how distracted Patrick was, and apparently had been
for several days. In place of the suit he normally wore when coming to see either David or Aaron at the BAU, he wore faded jeans and a well-worn gray t-shirt that stretched over his muscular chest and shoulders like a second skin. Green eyes settled on him and Aaron wondered if he should retrieve the pain pills for both of them. Patrick looked exhausted. He entered the office and quietly closed the door behind him. He nodded at Rossi before moving to Patrick’s side and laying a comforting hand on the older man’s shoulder.

Patrick leaned into the touch, the simple gesture confirming that Patrick was even more stressed than Aaron had initially thought. He caressed the side of the strong neck with his thumb, earning him a soft, pleased smile. He settled into an empty chair and looked between the two men. “So, tell me what’s happened and let’s see if we can find a way to help.”

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Aaron sat back, his mind already trying to piece together a profile from the little bit of information he had. Three respected dominants, all male, attacked in the last three months, threatened, beaten, and in the first two cases, blackmailed after the fact. The MO was the same in each case, the dominant was drugged, taken to a secluded location (each time a different location from what Patrick and his team could gather), then, over the course of two days, was systematically beaten by an unseen assailant with various SM implements that had been modified to do maximum damage, until he was again drugged and dumped in some out of the way back alley. Luckily, all three victims had been found before they died of their injuries. The latest victim, Paul, the young dominant from the Leaf, had nearly been killed by his attacker and there was some question if he would ever walk again. The only connection Patrick and his team could find was they were all dominants who’d recently taken on a new submissive, but none of them came from the same clubs, same backgrounds or even sought the same types of submissives.

The Community was worried. Patrick had been made aware of the situation because he was the head of security for one of the most exclusive BDSM clubs in the area. The Leaf had heightened security, instituted club to car escorts, and made sure that all members were made aware of the dangers now lurking in the fringes of their lifestyle. Several other clubs that catered to their lifestyle had done the same, the consensus being that just because this person was attacking male dominants now, didn’t mean others weren’t at risk.

“Have any of the victims gone to the police?”

Patrick sighed. “No. One of the men had a run in with the cops a few years back when a neighbor called in a noise complaint when he and his wife were scening. They nearly lost their children over it. After that experience, he won’t even think about approaching the police. The other… I don’t know, but I doubt it. Paul might, only because he has to. The others were found and maintained their injuries were muggings or something similar. Paul’s injuries are severe enough I don’t think the police will be so easily dissuaded to drop it at that.”

“So there’s no chance of the police asking for assistance, because they don’t know there’s an issue,” Dave said in exasperation.

“There are other ways to approach this,” Aaron said, mind already trying to see if there were connections that could be made. “Have there been other attacks in other areas?”

“Not that I’ve heard of. But then, depending on where it happened and who it happened to, there’s no guarantee I would have heard about it,” Patrick admitted.

“There must be some way to cross reference these types of attacks,” Aaron mused. “See if there were similar attacks in other areas. Maybe if we can find more of a pattern.”
“I could talk to the members of Obsidian House,” Patrick offered. “They generally work with community members in abuse situations, but they hear a lot of what’s going on in the communities and they have members all over the country. If any group could find that information, it would be them.”

“It’s a place to start at least,” Aaron agreed. “Beyond that, I don’t know if we can be of much help.”

“Ye’ve helped more than ya know, Aaron,” he said softly, taking and squeezing his boy’s hand. “Thank ya.”

Aaron smiled, cheeks heating slightly at the praise. “You’re welcome… Sir.”

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The next two weeks were a nightmare for Aaron and the BAU team; back-to-back consults across the country from each other. Luckily, both cases turned out well. In one, the kidnapped little girl was found, unharmed and happy when her abductor’s estranged husband called the tip line. He’d been horrified to learn that the woman had kidnapped the child thinking it was a way she could win him back and save their marriage. The woman was now receiving mental health treatment and the child had been returned to her frantic parents. The second case took them to Oregon and ended with Morgan on crutches and an unsub learning the hard way never to insult or underestimate a female federal agent. Morgan had spent the majority of the flight home teasing Emily about her mean right hook while she threatened to show Garcia the video of his ungraceful slide down a hillside if he didn’t stop. Aaron thought about stepping in, but the smiles and laughter that accompanied each threat convinced him to let it slide. Though he did throw in the expected scowl and raised eyebrow, just to keep them from worrying about him.

His cell chirped with a text just before they touched down in Virginia. He smiled as Patrick’s name appeared on the screen. He opened the text, curious as to what his Sir could want.

‘Have info. OHouse fnd something, don’t knw if can use. Meet?’

While this was important, Aaron was tired and wanted to see his son. ‘Lunch tomorrow?’ he texted. ‘Just home. Jack, Shower & bed in future.’ He hit send, hoping Sir would understand.

‘Noon,’ came the quick reply. ‘My treat. Hug the tree frog for me.’

Aaron couldn’t help the chuckle as he read the text. Jack had come back from a trip to the zoo with Uncle Sean and Aunt Jessica with a brightly colored stuffed frog and a new obsession with poison tree frogs. Patrick had been amused by the boy’s enthusiasm and had sent Jack several books on the tiny amphibians and had, in the process, become Jack’s favorite ‘new uncle’. He’d insisted Aaron invite ‘Uncle Patrick’ to dinner, and had helped make the frog shaped cookies they’d enjoyed for dessert. After dinner he’d climbed unselfconsciously into Patrick’s lap, handed him one of the books and asked to be read to. Aaron had been surprised but pleased. Patrick had been stunned. And Jack had fallen asleep in Patrick’s lap halfway through the story. Jack had been ‘tree frog’ ever since, much to the little boy’s delight. It was just one more way that Patrick had slipped so easily into his life. Aaron wondered if he should worry, but decided he was too tired, and too content, to do so.

“That’s an intriguing smile.”

Aaron felt his cheeks heat at JJ’s gentle teasing.

“It’s a good look for you,” she continued. “Good news?” she asked, pointing to the phone in Aaron’s hand.
“Mixed news,” he admitted. “Meeting tomorrow for lunch with Patrick.” He ignored JJ’s knowing smile. “To discuss a possible situation that may require our assistance.”

JJ’s expression turned serious. “Why would Mr. Zakaria be bringing us information rather than a law enforcement group?” she asked.

“It may be nothing, and the group he represents is… reluctant to trust law enforcement,” he told her quietly. “So, he asked David and I to take a look at things and see if there’s anything we might, unofficially, be able to suggest before he goes to the police.”

JJ nodded. “If you’d like another set of eyes,” she offered.

“You just want a chance to ogle the poor man again,” Derek teased sleepily from his seat opposite them.

“You know. I’m sure I can convince Emily to share that video,” JJ shot back, neither confirming nor denying the allegation. The good-natured teasing began again, other members of the team joining in even as Aaron texted back his agreement to Patrick’s offer.

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“Seriously?” Garcia studied JJ intently, looking for any sign the other woman was teasing her.

“Seriously. Slid down the hill on his oh so attractive backside, flailing all the way,” JJ confirmed with a smirk, waving a forkful of salad at the agent in question. “And Prentiss just happened to catch the majority of it with her phone.”

“Because she was too busy laughing to even try and help,” Derek growled from his chair where he sat with his ‘severely sprained ankle’ elevated in a secondary chair as he ate his lunch.

“It wasn’t like you were in any danger, Morgan,” Prentiss defended, pointing at him with her chopsticks. “And you’re the one that decided to go all mountain man even after the local guys warned you it was slippery.”

“We needed to check the area and I still say I saw something down there,” Morgan protested.

“Well, there wasn’t anything found after they hauled your complaining carcass back ‘up’ the hill.” She turned amused eyes to the two blonde women watching the playful exchange and winked. “You’d have thought he’d been mauled by the way he fussed about his *pants* of all things.”

“Hey,” he cautioned. “Those were my favorite slacks and a gift from my momma, and they were ruined. I had a right to be upset. Besides,” he added with self-deprecating grin, “it kept me from contemplating how I’d just undermined *any* respect those guys had for me by sliding down a hill on my butt.”

They all shared in the good-natured laughter, relieved that Morgan hadn’t been seriously injured.

“Actually,” Reid interjected between bites of his lunch, “the local LEOs seemed to really warm up to you after that. I think it made you more… human and less ‘FBI’ in their eyes.”

“Did you just imply I’m not human, boy genius?” Morgan shot back.

Reid’s brow furrowed in confusion. “No. I only meant that, in general, most local law enforcement personnel view any Federal intervention, even ones they’ve specifically requested, as a threat. That threat extends to the FBI personnel who come to assist. Add to your ‘threat’ status your charisma and
dominant personality and you come across as very… intimidating to some. So an incident that allows the local officers a chance to see you as something less than perfect while not interfering with the case is actually a benefit. Especially if you show that you’ve got a sense of humor about the incident.”

“So see, Morgan,” Prentiss added with a grin, “You should slide down hills on your posterior more often.”

Morgan rolled his eyes and threw a carrot stick at her, which she caught and bit into with a deliberate show of teeth.

“Cold!” Morgan teased, eliciting more laughter and good-natured teasing around the break room table.

“Good, you’re all here.”

Garcia turned at the sound of Hotch’s voice from behind her. He was flanked by Agent Rossi and an older man she hadn’t met before. The newcomer was a touch shorter than both Hotch and Rossi but made up for it by sheer presence, even without saying a word. He was broad-shouldered and a touch on the stocky side but his suit was beautifully tailored and fit his compact frame to perfection. It was obviously not off the rack – or cheap. His short red hair and beard were both liberally dusted with silver that added a sense of age that was countered by the youthful gleam in his green eyes as he watched the gathered team. The eyes settled on her and she felt her cheeks heat as he winked at her.

“Patrick, I believe you know everyone here except Garcia,” Hotch said to the older man. “Penelope Garcia, this is Patrick Zakaria. Patrick, this is the computer expert I was telling you about.” He held out a file to her and she took it automatically. “You’re actually the first one I needed to speak with, Garcia. I need you to check over the information here and see if you can find out anything further on the cases or people involved.” He turned away from her and back to his guest. “Not that I don’t trust your sources, Patrick,” he assured the other man, “but corroboration from a recognized FBI source will only add to the weight of the request. And if anyone can find further information on those cases, it’s Garcia.”

“Actually, Sir,” she reluctantly interrupted. “I won’t be able to.”

Hotch turned back to her, eyes narrowing. “Excuse me?”

“I won’t be able to find additional information on these incidents,” she repeated, motioning to the file she held.

“And why not?” he asked, dangerously calm.

“Because this is all the information there was,” she said quietly. She looked at Mr. Zakaria. “I’m assuming you’re Sir Patrick?” she asked. At his nod she held out her hand, the small obsidian signet ring prominent on her little finger. “Lady Bella, House Obsidian.”

Sir Patrick took her hand, smiling. “Finally, a beautiful face to go with the amazing voice,” he greeted, raising her hand to his lips and brushing a light kiss across her knuckles. “It’s a pleasure to meet you, my dear.”

She turned back to Hotch who was staring at her in surprise. “I’m the one who ran the initial searches. Not on FBI time or with FBI resources of course, I learned my lesson on that!” she hurriedly clarified. “But even with all the House contacts and information sources, that’s all I could find, Sir.”
Hotch nodded. “Then we’ll go with this for the briefing then, and I’ll have you fill everyone in as you are the most familiar with the information.” He looked at the team. “This case is a bit unusual because it was brought to us by a concerned minority group that is reluctant to trust the police in the best of circumstances, and this is definitely *not* the best of circumstances. Mr. Zakaria is here as a representative of several leading groups within this subculture and is the one who approached Agent Rossi and myself for advice. Since the crimes in question have crossed state lines, the FBI has jurisdiction however, we may be working closely with several NYPD divisions, DC Metro, the Electronic Terrorism and Exploitation Task Force, and other entities as we uncover more about the unsub.”

“Wow,” Derek breathed, leaning back in his chair, “That’s a lot of cross-jurisdictional headaches. What group are we talking about here, Hotch?”

“The BDSM and Leather communities,” Garcia answered for their boss, eyes watching the other team members to gauge their reactions to the information not only about the case, but about her as well.

Derek blinked in surprise, looking from Garcia to Mr. Zakaria to Hotch and back again. “BDSM? The whole bondage and dominatrix scene? Baby girl you and I are gonna have a long talk after this is over,” he said, pointing a finger at Garcia. “You’ve been holding out on me.”

“No I haven’t,” she purred back at him in the voice she normally reserved for her Bella Voce podcasts, “you just decided not to take me up on the offers.” Her dark, sensual chuckle at Derek’s confused expression made several people in the room shiver in anticipation of what that voice could do. “But that’s neither here nor there,” she continued, voice relaxing back into the bright, cheerful ‘Garcia’ they were all used to. “Right now we have someone on the loose attacking dominant men in the community and leaving them to die. That’s the important thing right now. The last young man to get hurt was a friend of mine and he didn’t deserve what happened to him and I’d really like for you guys to find and stop this person before someone else gets hurt.”

Hotch smiled at the determined tech. “You heard the lady. Fifteen minutes in the conference room.”

The team gathered in the conference room with time to spare. Hotch was surprised when Patrick entered with Garcia. He started to question her when she caught his expression.

“He’s worked with House Obsidian before and is familiar with the Community,” she explained confidently. “He might notice something that we’ve missed and since the information in the files is from House records and not confidential FBI files, I didn’t think including him would violate any regulations.” She ended less confidently than she’d started, but she held Hotch’s gaze the entire time.

Aaron looked from the tech to Patrick and back again then nodded. “Very good.” He ushered Patrick to a chair and settled in beside him. “The floor is yours, Garcia.”

She nodded, a faint blush staining her cheeks as she handed out the folders with the information she’d managed to gather. “Okay. First off, most of the information in these files is *not* from police sources… except the initial mugging reports. Luckily, the House network saw some possible connections cropping up and started keeping an eye on things, but they didn’t have all the information either so it wasn’t until Sir Patrick made the official request and they asked me to do some digging and rumor chasing that the connections became pretty scarily obvious. Secondly, some of what’s here is rumor and speculation and the dominants involved won’t give any more information even when asked by House members they’re comfortable with. Some of the older Obsidian members think there might be some blackmail or threatening going on, but we can’t prove
“Whoa. Slow down, baby girl,” Derek said gently. “Breathe. Let’s back up, okay. Who or what is House Obsidian and why would our victims go to them and not the police?”

Garcia took a deep breath and visibly relaxed, calming herself and starting again. “House Obsidian is an international group of likeminded BDSM, Leather and Alternative Lifestyle enthusiasts who work to educate people about the reality of those lifestyles. We also have an... underground network of sorts for people within the lifestyles who are looking for ways out of abusive relationships. We help them escape abusive situations, help them find housing, medical and mental health assistance that’s lifestyle friendly, and anything else that can help them start fresh and learn the difference between abusive and healthy relationships. We also keep track of lifestyle friendly professionals in the area, lawyers, doctors, that kind of thing and we unofficially track incidences of injury or reports of malicious or dangerous behavior within the communities to, kind of keep an eye on possible issues.”

“So you’re a policing organization?” Prentiss asked.

“No,” Garcia answered quickly. “While we do offer... advocacy and assistance if someone wants to go to the police we don’t have any ‘official authority’ within the communities. That whole ‘power corrupts’ thing has come into play *way* too often for the House to be comfortable with that role. We just... try and offer support and advice and a safe place for people in the lifestyle. We encourage victims to go to the police if a situation warrants it, but since that’s not always an option for one reason or another, we try and find other options for the parties involved. Since the House is known as a ‘safe space’ for everyone, regardless of role within the scene, House members generally get a lot of information that others wouldn’t. While the House doesn’t officially investigate anything, we do assist with information gathering if requested and will give an opinion of what we find.” She shrugged. “Like now.”

She gestured to the folders. “Sir Patrick approached House Obsidian two weeks ago asking us about three attacks on members of the local community. He also suggested searching outside the local areas and that was an amazing call. Beyond finding the ‘in’ the FBI needed to officially investigate, it also identified a threat to three separate communities that the House could then notify local groups to be on the alert for.” She nodded to Patrick. “So, thank you, Sir.”

Patrick nodded back, smiling in encouragement.

“That’s the good news. The bad news is there is someone targeting male dominants in three very active communities and the victims aren’t likely to come forward. There have been nine attacks in as many months in three different states; five here in Virginia, three in New York and one in DC. Two are primarily internet based dominants, and total slimeballs, btw, while the remaining seven were attacked at clubs where members of the BDSM and Leather communities go. So this person knows the community, or at least where to find members of the community.”

“How do we know they’re all connected?” Derek asked as he flipped through the images and statistics in the folder. “There’s a range of ages, different socio-economic levels, different looks, even the types of clubs they frequented are different.”

“As are their styles of play and kink, and the submissives they seem to look for,” Rossi added. He looked up at Garcia. “It seems the only things they really have in common are they’re dominant Caucasian men at least nominally involved in the BDSM lifestyle.”

“Ahh. That’s what I thought too,” Garcia admitted. “At first.” She settled back in the chair and studied the people around the table. “Then I started digging in the House files, informal reports of dominant misconduct, submissives who’d come to the House for assistance, things that community and House
members had looked in to. And that’s where the connection came in. Unfortunately, it’s not something that could be used in a court of law even if you could get the victims to come forward.”

She changed the slide and images of the men from the folder displayed. “All of the men in question had, at some point, been involved in allegations of misconduct or abuse.”

The slides changed until two men remained on the screen. “These are our two internet slimeballs,” she pointed to a blond haired, slender, non-descript looking man. “Dwight Gaertner, age 44, resident of Virginia and less than nice when it came to dealing with the sweet young, and I stress the young part, things he met online as ‘Lord Darkness,’” she rolled her eyes. “He appears to be our first victim. He was found by his sister in early July in his trailer, beaten to a bloody pulp and barely alive. He’d been physically and sexually assaulted and all he could remember was that the ‘date’ he’d set up with a girl he’d met online went sideways and he’d been jumped by a big guy and beaten up over the course of two days.” She held up a finger to forestall the question she knew was coming. “Yes, I did try and trace the woman in question but the ISP addy was to an internet café that doesn’t log its users and the profile in question was completely bogus. Mr. Gaertner did not give a description beyond, ‘big, dark haired, and brutal’ and as he committed suicide a month after the attack, there’s no chance to even try and find out more.”

“Internet slimeball number two, and victim number six,” she pointed to the man with long, stringy brown hair and a scraggy beard and mustache. “Delmar Small, aka ‘Master Dragon of House Landfall’, age 45 and resident of our own lovely state, unfortunately. He was found by one of his submissives the day before Thanksgiving when she came over to start preparing his Thanksgiving meal for him. Of all the victims, he was, until this last attack, the worst injured. He spent nearly a month in the hospital recovering from his injuries and it wasn’t pretty. Same story as with Mr. Gaertner, he’d set up a meet with a woman he met online who claimed she was looking to be ‘his thing to use as Master wishes’ – and instead he was met by a big guy who seemed to take great delight in ‘humiliation, degradation and sadistic non-consensual acts’.”

She clicked off the slides and turned back to the team. “The rest of the victims are generally men of good standing in the Community. Only one, Reginald Vandermark, victim number two, would be considered a ‘risk’ by most people in the community. And he’s just a jerk who lies about being single then promises all kinds of things just so he can get pretty submissives to do kinky things with him.”

She pointed to the folder in front of her. “The victims talk about being possibly drugged, attacked, taken somewhere they’re not familiar with where they’re kept blindfolded so they can’t see their attackers. They’re beaten and sometimes worse, then drugged again and dumped somewhere out of the way where they have to work to be found.” She shivered. “The last victim, Paul, is a sweet kid who may never walk again because of some of the damage to his back. He was left in a warehouse district behind a building that looked abandoned, but had luckily just been leased. The owner happened to come by to check his property and found Paul. If he hadn’t, Paul most likely would have died there. We need to find this guy and stop him before he succeeds in killing someone.”

“We will, Baby Girl,” Derek reassured. He studied the file. “It says here that three of the victims were blackmailed about a month after the attack. Does that hold for all of the victims?”

“I don’t know,” Garcia answered resignedly. “Because of some of the reactions the victims had after the fact, there’s suspicion that there was blackmail involved, but there’s nothing I can find to confirm or deny it. If they are being blackmailed, it’s not for a great deal of money or over a prolonged time, at least not that I can find. Which is saying something,” she added with a rueful smile. “But, some of these victims, I’m betting, would go a long way to keep their kinks, and knowledge of what happened to them during the attack, quiet.”

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Patrick sat and watched the team work. His boy, correction, SSA Hotchner, was an amazing leader, offering quiet suggestions and meaningful praise that spurred his team on. Watching him work, Patrick would have pegged him as a skilled and well-trained dominant, not the sweet, attentive submissive Patrick knew him to be. It was interesting to see this side of Aaron. He listened as the team discussed victimology and worked up a profile of the type of ‘unsub’ that fit the parameters they had. He knew some of the names being discussed, Kevin Drexel – a fairly new dominant to the area and quite skilled at takedowns and heavy scenes, Trevor Nilan – a family man who’d had problems with child services after a nosy neighbor decided that Trevor’s lifestyle was an ‘issue’, and of course Sid Hammerback from New York who, apparently, was an ME for the NYPD, that would explain his skill with a scalpel at least. Sid and Trevor had reported their attacks and the blackmail attempts to the authorities and refused to pay, but so far, the investigations had turned up very little.

He was beginning to feel useless when Agent Prentiss asked about something he *could* help with.

“What the hell makes these kinds of marks?” she asked, studying a picture of some of Trevor’s injuries.

“May I?” he asked, holding out his hand. He studied the image for a moment, taking in the marks. His eyes widened. “Oh bloody hell,” he breathed. “Those are supposed to be for show.” He looked at Emily. “That’s from a ‘mind fuck flogger’ that’s shown up just recently in the local area. It’s made from strips of… plastic office floor mat with the securing points facing outward.” He pointed out the bloody lines to the side of the deep punctures. “From these gashes, I’d say the sides of the falls have been filed as well, bringing them to a sharper edge.” He leaned back, stunned. “I’ve heard of those floggers being used as… window dressing. I’ve heard of them being used lightly. But this… this was used at full strength by someone who was strong and wanted to hurt the other person. It might even have been weighted to give that depth of puncture. And to do that over the kidneys and the backs of the knees and the upper back and neck? That’s just… asking for your sub to be permanently injured.”

“Would it be distinctive?” she asked, searching through the images. “Could you tell if a flogger of that type was specifically the one used to do this?”

He thought for a moment. “Possibly?” he answered hesitantly. “I don’t think most in the community would carry something like that, at least not and actually use it.”

She turned and looked at the other members of the team. “Well, at least we might be able to tie the weapon to the unsub. All of the victims have those marks.”

“It’s something at least,” Rossi added.

“Has anyone noticed that, with the exception of two, the attacks occurred on the first Friday of the month?” Agent Reid asked. He turned to Patrick. “Is there a significance to that time of the month?”

Penny answered. “Most clubs have some sort of ‘thing’ on the first Friday. Locally, it’s often a night for newbies to come and check out the scene, meet people, see if it’s something they might like to get involved with.”

Reid nodded. “So a newcomer wouldn’t stand out on those nights. In fact, they’d be welcomed with open arms.”

“Well, as much as any unknown person is within the community,” Patrick added. “We’re a suspicious lot as a rule. And a big man, big enough to take down some of these men? He would stand out enough to be remembered, especially if people started getting hurt when he was at the clubs.”
“Wait,” Derek interjected, thumbing through his file quickly. “Didn’t Hammerback say something about a woman being attacked in an alley by the guy who attacked him?”

“Yes,” Aaron confirmed, eyes narrowing as he followed the younger agent’s thoughts. “Are you thinking a pair of unsubs?”

“It would explain things,” Derek said. “A ‘young woman of average build’, a woman met online. What if our unsub is using a female submissive as bait to get these guys complacent enough that he can attack them? It would explain how these vigilant straight guys could be drugged without realizing it. They were distracted by a pretty newbie looking for information on their community, and possibly on their particular kinks.”

“Doesn’t explain our last victim, though,” JJ countered. “According to this, Paul’s gay.”

“Gay, but not narrow,” Garcia said with a grin. “He’s become very good at working with newcomers. I’ve been really proud of how far he’s come in such a short time.” At the confused looks she explained. “There was an incident about nine months ago. Paul misread a situation that led to a panic by a new submissive. He was ‘put on probation’ and assigned to work with House Obsidian. I got to work with him on a ‘relocation due to abuse’ case and Paul was amazingly skilled at putting the submissive at ease. So when his probation was done, I had him apprenticed to the House Relocation and Information person so he could learn how to officially deal with those new to the community or looking for information about the community. He’s done amazingly well with both men and women. If she seemed new and curious…”

Patrick nodded his own understanding. It seemed his relationship with Aaron wasn’t the only positive thing that came out of that incident. He’d seen Paul work with newcomers and if there had been someone new, looking lost but interested, Paul wouldn’t have hesitated to approach her. He continued to listen as the team commented on Sid and Lord Dragon’s attacks and why they didn’t fit the patterns. The consensus was that Sid’s refusal to pay the blackmail had prompted not only the moving up of the next attack, but also the viciousness of the attack on Lord Dragon. Following that logic, Trevor’s refusal to pay probably led to the severity of Paul’s beating (not that he’d ever tell Sid or Trevor that). He followed the conversation with interest, enjoying watching these amazing men and women as they plied their craft. David was a born leader like Aaron, but seemed to favor the young Dr. Reid, challenging and praising the younger man in equal measure. Patrick wondered if his old friend was even aware he was doing it – or the way Dr. Reid responded to it. He watched the pair and realized he wasn’t the only one, Ms. Prentiss and Lady Bella were watching them as well, sharing small, knowing smiles when neither man was looking. He’d have to ask Aaron his thoughts on the matter when they were alone. He already knew David was fond and protective of Dr. Reid, but he wasn’t sure if it went beyond that.

Dr. Reid was an enigma. Insanely smart, able to see patterns and motives with an ease that left Patrick stunned time and again, but also a bit naïve about certain aspects of human interaction. Book knowledge he had. Practical experience, Patrick would hazard to guess, was a bit lacking. Agent Morgan made up for Dr. Reid’s innocence with a grasp of the intricacies of human interaction that would do a dominant proud. He drew information out of Lady Bella – out of Penny Garcia – that Patrick was certain she didn’t even know she knew. They’d found other commonalities between the victims, specific clubs that were targeted, a time frame between attack and blackmail and next attack, as well as indications that blackmail was indeed a factor in all the attacks. Odd amounts but specific timeframes sent to specific accounts. Accounts registered to one Greg Duggin. The name tugged at Patrick’s memory for some reason, but he couldn’t place why.

“Garcia. Can you find us a picture of Mr. Duggin?” Rossi asked, clearly having the same reaction Patrick was.
The rapid clicking of keys filled the quiet of the room. “Bingo.” A picture of a large man with dark, curly hair and a half-sneer filled the screen. “Mr. Gregory Duggin, age 41, resident of Newark, New Jersey, history of domestic battery, petty theft, drugs and known online as ‘sexyBearStud69’. *Real* classy.”

“Gregor,” David and Patrick breathed at nearly the same moment.

“I take it you both know this man?” Aaron asked calmly.

“He’s known as ‘Gregor’ and has a skill with whips, floggers, crops, and a taste for heavy impact play,” David supplied. “And he’s been banned from about 40 different clubs and dungeons in a four state area. If he’s involved, this just got even more complicated.”

“How do you know this guy?” Derek asked.

Rossi just smirked. “I had the pleasure of helping Patrick throw him out of a reception for one of my books after Gregor decided that Ruui’s sister was just playing ‘hard to get’. He’d been one of the ones I’d interviewed for my book ‘Sexual Sadism and the Reality of BDSM’. He’s a real piece of work, especially when it comes to his attitudes about women and their place in the Community. He’s one of those ‘dominants’ that give the rest of us a bad name.”

Patrick startled at the comment, wondering if David’s outing of himself as a member of the Community was deliberate or unintentional. Judging from David’s reaction to the sudden silence around the table, he’d have to say it was unintentional.

“Am I the *only* one here not involved in the kinky stuff?” Derek asked with a long suffering (and teasing) look at Reid.

The younger man blinked. “Do you mean currently, or just in general?” he asked with a straight, innocent face.

Prentiss choked on her coffee. JJ and Garcia giggled, though whether at the look on Derek Morgan’s face or the mild look on Dr. Reid’s face, Patrick wasn’t certain. Aaron just smiled and Rossi’s ‘quizzical’ eyebrow nearly mated with his hairline. Patrick watched as Reid caught David’s scrutiny and blushed. Well, that was certainly interesting. He made a mental note to talk with his boy about the implications for both men if they chose to act on such an attraction. Sunita wasn’t the *only* Zakaria with a tendency to match-make, and if anyone deserved to be happy, it was David Rossi.

“Okay, people,” Aaron interjected, drawing them back to task. “So, we have a sadistic male dominant and a submissive female who is possibly being used as a lure. We need to find out more about the woman in question. We need to talk to the two victims who were willing to talk to the police, Mr. Hammerback and Mr. Nilan, see if there is anything else they can remember about the young woman. Derek, you and Emily talk with Mr. Nilan. Dave, you and Reid see what you can find out from Mr. Hammerback. Garcia, I want everything you can find on Mr. Duggin and any new submissives he’s been associated with in the last nine months. Something triggered these attacks and we need to see if we can find what it was. JJ, I’d like for you, Patrick and I to continue looking through the reports to see if there’s some connection we’re missing. We need to determine how the unsub choose their victims before they strike again, which, if they continue with their current pattern, will be next Friday.” He looked at his team. “We’re on the clock. Good luck.”

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Saturday was a day of breakthroughs and planning. The conversations with both Sid Hammerback and Trevor Nilan had helped them adjust their opinions of the woman’s role in the attacks. While she
was obviously submissive to Gregor, she had fully participated in the attacks on the men.

She had landed several vicious kicks to Sid’s kidneys while going on about how he, ‘wouldn’t get away with what he’d done to Sylvie’. Garcia had traced the name to a disgruntled submissive who had been spreading rumors about Sid mistreating her. When asked about the accusations, he’d very plainly stated that she was upset because he’d refused to scene with her. She’d been “higher than a kite” when she’d approached him and he refused to apologize for his decision. “Impaired consent isn’t real consent,” he’d told Reid. “And I won’t play with *anyone* who can’t consent. If she wants to say that makes me a ‘stuck-up, self-righteous, holier-than-thou asshole’, she’s welcome to her opinion. But I won’t take those chances with a submissive who’s put herself and her body in my hands – it’s too precious a gift to risk seriously damaging it just because the giver doesn’t value it enough.” He blushed lightly, rubbing a hand absently over the back of his long neck. “Not that I have an opinion on the subject, mind you.”

“Of course not,” Rossi said with a knowing smile. “But as dominants, part of our job is to look out for the submissives in our care,” he confirmed, eyes glancing over at Reid. “Even if they’re only there for one session.”

“Exactly,” Sid confirmed. “Like the young woman I’d demo’ed with before the attack. We’d only met a few days before, but we’d spent as much time as possible discussing limits and safety and comfort levels, even though I’d probably never scene with her outside the demo. Just because it’s short term doesn’t mean you should take it for granted.”

The story with Trevor Nilan was similar. Unlike Sid Hammerback, who’d been attacked in an alley, Mr. Nilan had been drugged at a small club where he’d been acting as a ‘greeter’ for his local group. He remembered the young woman in question, average build, plain, quiet and clearly submissive. She’d all but blended into the background for most of the evening, only approaching him towards the end of the night to ask about the group and its activities. He wasn’t sure when she’d drugged him, but the effects had begun as he’d headed to his car. He’d awakened blindfolded and cold in an echoing space, stretched over a padded bench of some kind. The next day and half were a blur of pain and humiliation at the hands of his *two* captors. While the man had been physically violent, the woman had taken delight in berating him for his offenses towards his submissives. She’d hissed that he’d know what it was like to be ‘degraded’ by someone who ‘held all the power’. He still wasn’t sure what the woman was referring to, as the only submissives he had were his wife of fifteen years and the young woman who’d approached them about mentoring under them a few months before the attack. He’d never ‘degraded’ a submissive in his life and didn’t intend to start. Yes, he and his subs played hard and Sammy, the young sub, had specifically approached him and Amber because of their skills in takedowns and more ‘physical’ play, but he’d never abuse a submissive the way his attacker accused him of doing.

“That’s why I refused to pay the blackmail,” he told Derek. “I have nothing to be ashamed of, Agent Morgan, and I wasn’t about to let some violent and misinformed idiots make me think I did. Amber and Sammy and everyone that matters know who and what I am, and they know I’m a man of integrity. The rest of the world can go hang for all I care.”

Their comments led to the next break.

“Mama, answer me something,” Derek asked Garcia as the team gathered for a working supper. “How common is it for a dominant to take on a new submissive?”

Penny grinned wickedly. “Are you offering, sweet cheeks?” At his playfully censuring gesture she became all business. “Depends on the dominant. Some take new submissives all the time, either to mentor or just play with short term. Others don’t officially take on submissives at all, preferring to
just ‘play’ as the opportunities strike, and still others will find a submissive and that’s it, they’re exclusive and won’t even entertain the idea of taking on someone else.” She studied the handsome agent. “Why?”

He put down his sandwich. “Okay. We know that Nilan, Hammerback and Paul Stephans were all working with submissives who were fairly new to them. You said that Vandermark and Small were known for trolling for new submissives all the time. What are the odds that the other dominants were also either looking for or had just found new submissives?”

Garcia’s hands flew over the keys of her laptop. “I don’t know about the others, but Gaertner was always looking for new young things online and his profile reflected that. There’s nothing in the rumor mill about the others. Oh wait, Fullbright, the poor guy visiting from Michigan who was attacked? He was apparently seen chatting up someone else’s submissive at the club he was later attacked outside of:”

“Kevin Drexel just moved into the area,” Patrick offered. “Sir Roland was introducing him around, so he’d fit into the category of ‘looking for a submissive’, and pretty much everyone knew it.”

“And our female unsub is focusing on how the victims are ‘mistreating’ their submissives,” Rossi said, following Morgan’s logic line. “So… she’s seeing herself as an avenging angel or maybe a guardian angel, protecting other submissives from dominants she feels are ‘risks’?”

“Would make sense,” Derek confirmed.

“But, the majority of the dominants in question,” Reid interjected, “were cleared of any allegations of misconduct.”

“It’s easier to live up to a good reputation than live *down* a bad one,” Garcia said ruefully. “I’ve seen good people nearly ruined by a rumor of misconduct. That’s the blessing and the curse of the Community, reputation is the cornerstone of how the Community sees and deals with you. Once that reputation’s been called into question, it can be hell to come back from.”

“And there’ll always be someone out there who’ll believe the worst, regardless of what evidence they’re given to the contrary,” Patrick added, accent thickening. “There are still those that think I was only with Ruui for his money, even after all this time.”

Rossi’s hand squeezed Patrick’s shoulder. “Well, at least we’ve got one more piece of the puzzle. So, Gregor and his partner are targeting dominant, Caucasian males who are at least rumored to have issues with how they treat their submissives, and who have recently taken or are looking to take on, a new submissive. It’s a start.”

“And I’m still working on tracking down Greg Duggin,” Garcia added, clearly disgruntled that she’d been unable to do so already. “The second he tries to access any of his accounts, use his cell phone or log on to his computer I’ll have him.”

“Baby girl, it’s not your fault he went off the grid,” Derek reassured.

“He’s most likely put everything in his partner’s name,” Aaron said gently. “You’ll find him.”

She smiled at the praise.

“But,” Aaron stated, looking around at the whole team. “We’ll come back to it tomorrow. I know it’s Sunday, but we’re close, and our unsubs will be on the lookout for a new target in six days time. We’ll meet back here tomorrow morning at 9am. Go home, get some sleep so we can come at things fresh tomorrow.”
The team didn’t need to be told twice and soon only Aaron, Patrick and David remained. Patrick rested a hand on his boy’s shoulder. “Orders go for the boss as well, Aaron,” he ordered softly. “Tree frog’s waiting for his da. Go home, boy.”

Aaron took a deep breath and looked over at his lover, his Sir. “Would you and David like to come over for a bit?” He hated that he sounded so… juvenile, but he honestly wasn’t sure how to ask. “Dave, Jack would love to see you, if nothing else to show you his newest book and,” he offered Patrick a small smile, “he’s been asking when ‘Uncle Patrick’ was coming to visit again.”

Rossi checked his watch before nodding. “I’ve missed Jack. Throw in a cup of your special coffee and you’ve got yourself a deal, Aaron.”

Patrick nodded. “Sounds like an ideal plan, Aaron. Lead on.”

Nine A.M. found not only the team, but Patrick Zakaria as well, gathered in the conference room. Aaron had raised an eyebrow at his Sir’s presence until Rossi admitted that he had brought Patrick in with him. He and Patrick had spent the evening discussing the case and possible options for stopping Gregor and had an idea that they felt might just bring both Gregor and his partner out into the open. Aaron’s stomach dropped at the look that passed between the two men. He wasn’t going to like their plan, he could already feel it.

Rossi settled back in his chair and addressed the team. “We know Gregor and his partner are targeting male dominants and seem to be focusing on the local community now. What we need is a way to draw their attention away from unsuspecting victims and towards targets that know what’s happening and have a way in place to stop them.” He paused and looked over at Patrick before continuing. “Patrick and I have a bit of inside knowledge about Gregor that we can turn to our advantage. He’s a narrow-minded, narcissist who already has a grudge against Patrick and me. He won’t have forgotten it, even after all this time, I can guarantee it. All we need to do is draw his partner’s attention to us so that she’ll draw *his* attention to us, and he’ll happily do the rest.”

“If he’s got such a grudge against you, why hasn’t he come after you both before now?” Emily asked.

“He didn’t have a chance to,” Patrick answered. “David and I, when we play, play at a very exclusive venue where someone like Gregor wouldn’t get past the door.”

“Wouldn’t he smell a trap if you suddenly changed that pattern?” Reid’s eyes studied the two older men intently, clearly attempting to puzzle something out as he spoke. “Even if he’s highly focused to the point of obsession with the two of you, the skill and organization he’s shown in both controlling his submissive and carrying out his attacks, indicates a high level of self-control and discipline.”

“Not necessarily,” Aaron interjected. “Depending on the relationship between himself and his submissive partner, he could simply be drawing her attention to his targets and letting her organize the attacks for him to carry out. Her need to please and secure praise from her Dominant could be strong enough to override any hesitations she may have about the acts themselves. And if she honestly does see herself as a ‘protector’ of fellow submissives, it wouldn’t be difficult for a charismatic person to convince her of the ‘rightness’ of her actions. But, we won’t know until we find her if that’s what’s actually happening in this instance,” he clarified.

Garcia finally spoke up. “I did find a few possible bits of helpful intelligence last night,” she said hesitantly.
“I thought the order to go home was quite clear, Garcia,” Aaron chided gently.

“I did!” she countered. “The FBI files wouldn’t have given me what I was needing anyway,” she said with a grin. “I had to go deeper – the sub-network,” she added conspiratorially. “I’m seen as an honorary member even though I’m a domme. Anyway. Eleven months ago Gregory Duggin, aka Gregor, aka Master G, aka lameslimeballsexname at losercreep dot com, found a new submissive. She fits the description we’ve gotten from several witnesses; shy, mousy, scared of her own shadow most of the time, average build and looks and good at fading into the background. People remember her precisely because she’s so unremarkable and is with a jerk like Duggin who tends to go for busty and flashy if he’s taking them out in public. However, because she’s so shy and keeps to herself, most of my sources don’t know much about her beyond the fact she goes by the name ‘Rose’. Which would be helpful except everyone’s pretty sure that’s just her scene name and do you have any idea how many ‘Rose’s’ there are just in the local BDSM community? But, I worked some of my incredible ninja-master level hack… computer goddess skills,” she corrected with a blush, “and I found four ‘Rose’s’ that fit our submissive’s description who also have some type of connection or history with Mr. Duggin.”

She pressed a few buttons on her keyboard and pictures of four women appeared on the screen. “Contestant number one: Dana ‘Rose’ Green, age 42, divorced mother of one, and former live-in of Mr. Duggin. They were together for several years before she apparently decided she’d had enough of being slapped around and left him. She recently moved back to the area and was asking at one of the clubs if Duggin was still around. There’s no accounting for taste. Contestant number two: Janey ‘Rose’ Radel, age 38, single, trained under Luther and Dianna Horner until Mrs. Horner’s death February of last year. She’d apparently been approached by Mr. Duggin shortly after that and had seemed interested until Mr. Horner warned her away from Duggin. She seems to have left the scene after that and I’m still looking for a recent address. Number three: Patricia ‘Rose’ Nordenthal, age 44, single and wild about ‘bad boys’ according to my sources. She apparently came on hard and heavy to Mr. Duggin last year at a fundraiser her club sponsored. He turned her down flat, but she was persistent enough to manage a one-night stand several weeks later that she bragged about to several club members. She’s been off the grid since then, no one’s seen her and some are worried that Duggin may have done something to her. I’ve got search programs going but nothing so far. And finally, contestant number four and the one most of the subs I talked to seemed to think would be capable of doing violence if crossed: Sally ‘Rose’ Ormiston, age 45, divorced, former military, with a long memory for perceived slights and a mean streak that would make a hard core sadist think twice. She and Duggin met at a play party about a year and a half ago while she was still married. They hit it off and two months later she’d left her husband for Duggin. They’ve been on again, off again lovers and play partners ever since. Last known address was in Rhode Island, but I haven’t been able to verify if it’s current or not.”

Aaron nodded. “Okay. Keep trying to track them down. Morgan, I’d like you and JJ to assist Garcia in her searches. The sooner we can find these women, the sooner we can find Duggin. Emily, I’d like you and Dave to contact Mr. Hammerback and Mr. Nilan and see if any of these are the woman they met the night of their attacks. Reid, I want you to look through the cases again and see if there are any other connections there that we might be missing.” The team members nodded and left, all but Dave and Patrick. Aaron studied them for a long moment before speaking. “I know what you’re thinking, and in the end you may be correct,” he admitted. “Giving the unsub a tempting target is a good idea and would give us a bit of an advantage. However, there are still too many unknown variables for me to be comfortable sending the two of you in as bait, especially since one of you,” he looked sternly at Patrick, “is a civilian.”

Patrick studied Aaron quietly. “I may be a civilian, Aaron,” he admitted, “but I’m head of security for the Leaf, Virginia House. I’ve served in the military and held my own in street brawls since before your young Agent Reid was born. I know how to protect myself, I fit your ‘victimology
Aaron sighed. “I know that and I appreciate what you and Dave are suggesting. But I’m not ready to play that card just yet, not when there are other avenues to explore first.” Aaron met his Sir’s eyes easily. “And I’m not doing this simply because of our relationship,” he added. “I’d do the same with any civilian liaison working with my team.”

Patrick nodded his understanding. “Very well. Then what can I do to help?”

Aaron didn’t like it, not one bit. Aside from the fact that Patrick was his dominant, the fact he was seriously considering putting a civilian, even a skilled one, in the line of fire like this rankled. But, they were running out of options. Gregor was still off the grid. Hammerback and Nilan had chosen two different women from the line-up, and both were dead ends. Nilan had chosen Sally Ormiston, who was currently incarcerated for manslaughter and had been for the last year and a half. Hammerback had thought that Janey Radel “might” have been the woman he’d seen but was uncertain. Ms. Radel had been found and was living a quiet life in rural Virginia. She hadn’t seen Mr. Duggin since Mr. Horner had warned her of Duggin’s reputation and in fact, she was no longer even in the lifestyle. She did offer them phone number for Mr. Duggin that he’d given her when they’d met but the number was disconnected. However it had given them an address to check that hadn’t been on Garcia’s lists, unfortunately it had been abandoned for quite a while judging by the dust. Dana Green and Patricia Nordenthal still hadn’t been found, though a cousin of Ms. Green had spoken to her in the last month and she’d still been in the local area.

It was Wednesday night and they were no closer to finding Gregor or his accomplice than they had been on Sunday, and they were running out of time. Dave had approached him again about the plan, outlining it further; how they’d meet somewhere that Gregor or his submissive might see them without causing suspicion, how they could make sure to capture the unsub’s attention, and how they’d play things once the unsubs revealed themselves. He had joined Dave and Patrick at the restaurant adjacent to the Leaf for dinner, where they’d talked about the plan and reassured Aaron they had contingency plans on top of contingency plans to keep them both safe if allowed to carry out their sting. Aaron had reluctantly agreed. They’d inform the team Thursday morning and start setting the stage that evening so hopefully the unsub would focus on them Friday night. Aaron wasn’t happy, but he could see no other options if they wanted to stop the unsubs before they killed someone.

They said their goodnights, Dave heading to the Leaf to meet with Mistress and a few others that would assist in the ‘rumor mill’ aspect of the plan. Aaron called home to check in with Jessica and Jack, smiling as he followed Patrick to his apartment. He told his son good night, thanked Jessica once more for staying with Jack before saying good night to her as well. He turned to his Sir with a relaxed smile. “I’m to tell you good night and that you owe a certain young man a story the next time you come over because he did all his chores and ate his vegetables without too much complaining.” He pinned his Sir with a stern look. “You do realize you’ve created a monster, don’t you?”

Patrick wrapped his arms around his boy, pulling him into a tight hug. “Probably. But it’s hard not to give in to that little boy’s brown eyes,” he admitted. “A bit like his da in that respect.”

Aaron chuckled and leaned into Patrick’s secure embrace. “I still don’t like this, Patrick. I don’t like you or Dave being in the line of fire. I’m head of the unit, if anyone should be going in with Dave it should be me.”

Patrick leaned back and looked in Aaron’s eyes. “You know that wouldn’t work, boy. ‘Irish’ is known by too many people now. You couldn’t shift to ‘dominant’ so quickly, people would know
and talk. And all it would take is one person saying the wrong thing at the wrong time and it would all be for naught.” He cupped his boy’s cheek. “We’ll be fine,” he reassured. “We’ll have people watching our backs and we know, for the most part, who and what we’re looking for.” He drew Aaron forward for a slow, gentle kiss. “I’m not leaving you, Aaron. I’m helping keep others in the community safe. It’s part of what a Dominant does.”

Aaron reluctantly nodded. “That doesn’t mean I have to like it,” he added petulantly.

Patrick smiled, taking Aaron’s hand and leading him silently through the apartment and into the bedroom. “Strip and lay on the bed,” Patrick ordered, pressing a quick kiss to Aaron’s lips as he left to make sure the apartment was secure.

Aaron didn’t have to be told twice. He needed to reconnect with Patrick before the older man put himself in danger, and he had a feeling Patrick needed it as well. He stripped quickly and efficiently, hanging his suit in the closet with care. He settled onto the bed as he’d been told, the comforter cool against his bare skin. He relaxed, burying his face in Patrick’s pillow and sinking into the calm he found when he was here with Patrick. Here SSA Hotchner was a part of him he stripped off with his suit. Here he was simply Aaron.

He tensed slightly at the sound of footsteps until Patrick’s hand settled against the small of his back. “Just me, Aaron. It’s safe.”

“Sorry,” he breathed into the pillow, flushing at the tension he knew Patrick could feel under his hand.

“Nothing to be sorry for, Aaron,” Patrick reassured. “I know better than to do that to you. I should have said something as I came in.” He forestalled Aaron’s protests with a sharp smack to Aaron’s bare ass. “We’ll get there, boy. Sayers and Huang both said it would take time, and we both know it’s harder for you when you’re deep in a case like this.” He leaned over his boy, kissing his way up Aaron’s spine. “Proud of you, boy,” he breathed against Aaron’s neck. “Very proud.”

Aaron felt a bit of the tension leave his body. He’d been worried about crossing his Sir, about telling him no, but he knew it was what needed to be done. He’d had to be SSA Hotchner first, and he was glad to know Patrick understood that. “Thank you,” he whispered, voice rougher than he’d expected.

Patrick’s hands began to work at the hard knots in Aaron’s back and shoulders. Aaron moaned in pained bliss and tried to relax into the firm touch. Patrick kept up the tender assault, working the tension out of tight muscles, leaving his boy relaxed and pliant on the bed. “I want you, Aaron.”

“You have me, Sir,” came the immediate reply.

Patrick urged Aaron over onto his back, pleased to note his lover’s arousal. “No, a thaisce,” he said gently, his hand cupping Aaron’s face. “Not as your Sir. I want…” he paused, uncertain how to explain his needs to this amazing young man. “I need…” again the words failed him.

Aaron turned his head, kissing Patrick’s palm. “Patrick.” He reached out and caressed the bearded face. “You have me in whatever way you need me,” he reassured. He wrapped his hand around the back of Patrick’s strong neck and drew him down for a long, intense kiss. “Tonight, it’s Aaron and Patrick in this bed, not Sir and Irish.”

“You’re an amazing man, Aaron Hotchner,” Patrick said as he shifted to straddle his young lover. He stretched out over the younger man, chest to chest, his chin in the crook of Aaron’s neck. “Want to feel you in me, Aaron. Want to go in and talk to your team tomorrow feeling tonight each time I shift and move.” As he spoke he reached out and fumbled in the nightstand drawer for the lube. “Are
Aaron nodded, eyes locked on Patrick’s face even as he held his own fingers out for the slick coolness of the lubricant. He rubbed his fingers together, coating them, warming the lube before shifting his Sir, his *lover* forward just enough that he could reach behind Patrick and slowly work his body open. He started slow, enjoying the way Patrick shivered and moved with each thrust and withdrawal.

“You’re so handsome like this,” Aaron purred as he added a second finger, pressing deep into Patrick’s tight heat. “Your eyes are nearly emerald, your pupils blown from pleasure.” He shifted position, earning a disgruntled look from his lover as he withdrew his fingers to do so. He slid them back in quickly, relishing the gasp and moan he received as he did so. “You’re as much mine as I’m yours, aren’t you?” he said, the sudden realization making him pause. He met Patrick’s green eyes and the faint blush on his lover’s face told him he was correct. It was a heady and terrifying feeling. “I won’t abuse that,” he promised, curling his fingers and seeking out Patrick’s prostate. His lover gasped and clenched around his fingers.

Patrick pressed down into each thrust, driving Aaron’s fingers deeper, urging him on. Soon it wasn’t enough for either of them and Patrick pulled Aaron up, into his embrace. He wrapped his arms around Aaron’s shoulders and his legs around Aaron’s hips. He ground against Aaron’s erection, loving the heavy heat of it against his own and the way Aaron shivered at the touch. He took more lube and wrapped his hand around both their cocks as he leaned in for a deep, messy kiss. He savored the way Aaron responded to his touch, his long hands clutching at Patrick’s ass, his hips thrusting up into Patrick’s grip. With a deep chuckle, Patrick released his hold and pressed forward, urging Aaron back down onto the bed. He knelt over his lover with a wicked smile, shifting himself so the tip of Aaron’s now lubed cock rested against his entrance. He eased back without a word, eyes locked with Aaron’s, and let gravity do the work. He sighed as his body opened for his lover and he slid down Aaron’s cock until he rested against Aaron’s hips. Aaron’s hands dug into his skin as they both adjusted to the intensity of the connection between them. They both held perfectly still, just savoring the intimacy of the moment until Patrick smirked and rolled his hips.

Aaron thrust up slightly, earning a delighted sigh and a tantalizing whimper. He repeated the action, a touch harder, and Patrick moaned shifting to rest his hands against Aaron’s chest. They established a hard and fast rhythm, both knowing they wouldn’t last as long as either of them would like. Aaron reached out and grasped his lover’s weeping cock, stroking it in time with his thrusts, overwhelming his Sir, his lover, his Patrick. Patrick’s eyes slid closed and his breathing was punctuated with gasps and moans and curses aimed at his lover’s tormenting control. Aaron thrust harder. He studied Patrick’s face then wrapped his arms around the other man, drawing him down to rest against Aaron’s chest. With a quick and surprisingly strong shift of his body, he flipped them so Patrick was beneath him. Before he could ask if it was okay, Patrick’s legs wrapped around his hips and urged him on.

Aaron complied.

The lovemaking was hot and primal and unlike anything they’d done before. Aaron felt the powerful surge of need building and redoubled his efforts. He shifted his hips, smiling as Patrick gasped and clutched at him. He angled his thrusts to hit Patrick’s prostate on every other thrust, loving the way Patrick’s eyes seemed to lose their focus with each pass. He was so close, so very close. Patrick dragged him down for a kiss, crying out into Aaron’s mouth as the shift in position changed the angle of Aaron’s thrusts yet again.

The older man’s limbs tightened around Aaron’s body. “Please,” he begged, “please”.
Aaron’s thrusts lost their rhythm at the needful whine and Patrick seemed to revel in the abandon. He thrust hard and fast, body aching for release even as he held off for his lover’s pleasure.

Patrick slid a hand between them and stroked his own cock roughly. Aaron pounded into his lover, matching each movement as best he could until Patrick arched up with a yell, his come spilling over his hand to coat both their stomachs. Aaron’s sight grayed out for the briefest of moments as Patrick’s orgasm triggered his own. He spilled himself into his lover’s welcoming body, Patrick’s aftershocks milking the last of Aaron’s orgasm from him as well. Aaron collapsed against Patrick’s chest, his breath coming in ragged gasps. Patrick petted him gently, his hand caressing up and down Aaron’s sweaty back.

Patrick rolled them so he lay against Aaron’s side. He licked and nuzzled at Aaron’s chest, nipping at the flushed skin. Aaron sighed. Patrick bit down a bit harder, capturing skin between his teeth and sucking. Aaron moaned and shifted beneath him, his cock twitching even as sated as he was. Patrick worried at the skin over Aaron’s heart, leaving a dark and distinct love bite on the warm skin. “Mine,” he breathed over the damp flesh.

“Yours,” Aaron agreed drowsily.

Patrick shifted off his young lover’s body, padding unsteadily to the bathroom to clean up. He returned with a damp washcloth and carefully wiped down his boy. He shifted his drowsing lover until he was under the blankets rather than on top of them and then joined him. He smiled as Aaron immediately shifted position, his head coming to rest on Patrick’s chest, listening to his heartbeat. He combed his fingers though the sweat-damp hair. “Sleep, Aaron,” he urged. “We’re safe.”

Aaron snuggled closer, his arms tight around his lover, and did just that.

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Submission depends on the individual’s ability to align his will with that of the dominant and use his intelligence to fulfill her wishes gracefully and efficiently. – Christina Abernathy

“Okay, explain to me again *why* this isn’t going to sound suspicious to our unsub?” Derek said, pinning Rossi with a scowl.

Rossi took a calming breath. “Because Mrs. B doesn’t go to the Leaf without her subs and she’s ‘here on business without them’ but still wanted to meet up with friends.”

“So we’re involving yet another civilian?” Derek sounded as frustrated as Aaron felt.

“Not technically,” Rossi hedged. “Her husband is FBI and she’s assisted him on stings before. He even offered to send some of his team to help out with this, but we didn’t think there’d be time to bring someone up to speed in so short a time. And his primary agents don’t fit the victim profile. So, we’re keeping this in-house.” He tapped the folder in front of him. “Patrick and I will meet with Mistress and Mrs. B at The Other Side tonight for drinks and to catch up. It’s one of two bars that are within the geographic profile, that meet the profile criteria and that Gregor has been known to frequent. So, we’re counting on either Gregor or his accomplice to be there and hear enough to take the bait.”

“And if they don’t,” Prentiss asked the question they’d all refused to voice.

Aaron answered as best he could. “Then we watch for the next victim to surface, see what we’ve missed in our profiles and try again.” He studied his team intently before finally finding the words he needed. “I’m not any happier about this plan than all of you are,” he reassured them. “But, at the
moment we’re out of options. The Community is too skittish to formally accept police assistance, but the local LEOs have been told what is going on and that the BAU has been asked in to assist the community. A few of the officers have come forward after the fact and revealed their own involvement in the community but are unable to ‘formally’ assist for fear of losing their jobs. They will, however, be assisting unofficially as much as they can.” He looked back at Rossi before taking over addressing the team. “David and Mr. Zakaria will be setting themselves up as bait. Our job will be to watch their backs and move in before anyone gets hurt or taken. We have one known factor and one unknown factor, and we all know the dangers posed by those unknowns. But the severity of the attacks is escalating and the chance of these unsubs killing someone grows with each new attack. We need to stop them before that happens.”

Rossi looked around the table. “We’ll set the stage Thursday night, putting it out there that I’ve taken on a new submissive and will be bringing that submissive to the First Friday event as a way to ‘introduce’ my new sub to the community to see if said sub is really interested in the lifestyle. There are only two bars that haven’t been scenes of attacks. On Friday, I’ll be at one of those bars while Patrick is at the other. Because of the attacks, most of the ‘lifestyle’ clubs have discontinued their ‘first Friday meet and greets’ which will help us as it narrows down the possible areas for attack.”

Derek narrowed his eyes. “So who are you taking in as your ‘new sub’ on Friday then?” he asked. “Please tell me it’s not another civilian.”

Rossi shrugged. “We’re working on that. Mrs. B offered her boy, but, even if we could get him here, I don’t think he could manage the right ‘vulnerable and in need of protecting’ air that we think our unsubs are looking for. He’s a good actor, but I don’t think he’s that good.”

“I’m willing to give it a shot,” Emily said hesitantly. “I could definitely do the ‘newbie’ aspect.”

“Yes,” Rossi said with a smile. “But there are two problems with that offer. One, while I think you could manage the submissive role, I don’t think you’d come across as vulnerable enough to catch the unsub’s attention and two, it’s pretty well known in the community that when I take a submissive, I take a *male* submissive.”

“Oh,” Emily said, eyes wide. “I didn’t realize.”

Rossi chuckled. “Most don’t. So, we’re still discussing who could go in as my sub.”

“I could do it.”

Everyone turned and looked at Reid, who blushed but didn’t flinch from the stunned and curious gazes.

“I could,” he reiterated. “I know enough about the BDSM and Leather communities to navigate the social mores and hierarchy while still being obviously new to the whole thing. I’m naturally curious which would come through in my behavior without conscious thought, a plus when working undercover. I’m male, obviously. And, if the reactions of most of the women who meet me is any indication, my ‘vulnerable and in need of protecting air’ is pretty strong. So, I meet all the criteria while still being a federal agent who knows the profile and can take care of himself.” He locked eyes with Rossi almost daring the older man to contradict him.

Rossi looked as if he was about to protest. “He has a point,” Aaron said reasonably.

Rossi sighed, knowing he’d been out maneuvered. Reid’s name *had* come up as a possibility, but he’d vetoed it. He’d protested that he hadn’t wanted to put the young man in an uncomfortable and dangerous situation. In reality, he hadn’t been sure how he’d react to Reid in the role of his
submissive, a role that had teased his dreams ever since he’d met the young man. The boy was a temptation, and Rossi had never been very good at resisting temptation. It appeared, however, the team knew better than he did. “If you’re certain you’re comfortable with it,” he cautioned Reid.

“I am,” Reid answered without hesitation. “I trust you.”

Aaron nodded. “Alright then, that’s settled. Dave, do you need him with you tonight?”

Rossi shook his head. “No. It’s a ‘dominants only’ dinner to keep the submissives safe, just in case Gregor decided to break pattern.”

“Okay,” Derek said. “We’ve got Rossi’s submissive, what about Zakaria’s? Won’t he need one as well?”

Patrick shook his head. “No. I’ve just recently taken a submissive,” he said, carefully avoiding looking at Aaron. “And the community knows it. Unfortunately, his job is dangerous and difficult enough without the added stress of being involved in this. So,” he did look at Aaron then, “I’ve decided to keep him out of this, for his, and my, piece of mind.”

Aaron nodded, silently acknowledging his Sir’s decision. If need be, he was willing to out himself to his team, but apparently, Patrick felt it was not something he needed to do now. He would maintain his role of SSA Hotchner and do his best to keep both Patrick and the others safe. “Fair enough,” he answered before turning back to the team. “We need to get Patrick and David outfitted for tonight and Garcia, we’ll need something for tomorrow night as well; an unobtrusive tracking and listening device that won’t be easily spotted in some of their more… revealing clothing. I’ll leave that to the four of you. Spencer, you’re with them, obviously. You and David will need to work out your story so that it’s seamless enough to fool our subs. I have a feeling Gregor’s partner is the one we’ll need to convince. We’ll meet back here tomorrow morning to finalize things. Good luck.”

He watched the team file out to attend to their various tasks. JJ, Prentiss and Morgan left in a comfortable knot of conversation, going over ways to continue their search for more information on Gregor’s partner before the following evening. Garcia, Spencer and David all chatted easily as they left for, he assumed, Garcia’s office to work up backstories and solidify plans. That left Patrick, who stood beside the door calmly watching him. “Is there something more, Mr. Zakaria?” he asked evenly, eyes questioning.

“I’d like to take you to dinner when this is all over,” he said, just as evenly. “A… Thank you of sorts for all you’ve done for the community by taking this case seriously.”

“How could I not?”

“Easily,” Patrick answered without hesitation. “You’re a good man, Aaron Hotchner,” he said seriously. “Never doubt that.” He nodded then turned on his heel and followed after Garcia and the others.

Aaron smiled as he realized that his Sir had just managed to tell him so many things, ‘Thank you, I trust you. I’m proud of you.’ without putting either of them at risk. He smiled softly, gathering his things to return to his office. It was going to be a long two days, but they would manage. They always did.

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Friday evening was overcast and damp, but the bars still filled with people. Patrick looked around the club, watching the newcomers and the old familiar faces as they milled about, drinking, chatting,
catching up. It was relaxing, but he keenly felt the absence of his boy by his side. The small transmitter that Lady Bella had fitted him with was as unobtrusive as she’d claimed it would be, but it was a temptation. He knew his boy was listening on the other end. Aaron and Emily manned the van covering him, while JJ and Derek manned the other. He had a feeling that Agent Prentiss wouldn’t be too upset if he began flirting outrageously with her boss. However, he knew the consequences for embarrassing his boy wouldn’t be worth the momentary satisfaction of making him squirm, especially since he wouldn’t be able to see the effects of the aural seduction.

He scanned the crowd as the door opened and admitted a few more patrons. He recognized two fellow dominants and lifted a glass in their direction. They nodded in return before weaving through the crowd to the bar where they joined him. He made small talk as best he could. Asking a few carefully pointed questions about the attacks and what the others might have gathered from their own observation, he found that, like so many he’d already spoken with, they knew nothing beyond what had been discussed in the clubs or that they’d seen in the papers, what little there had been.

He hoped David and Spencer were having an easier time at the other bar. He’d been amused by the looks both men had received when they’d shown up that evening to be fitted with their own tracking devices. David had settled on a pair of well-worn and supple leather pants, black boots, a white t-shirt and a leather vest. His Master’s cap was settled over his dark hair and added to the look of danger about the older man. Spencer had foregone his normal, fade into the background clothing. Well-polished black leather boots, tight, well-worn blue jeans, a tight black t-shirt – the boy had turned quite a few heads though it had taken Garcia a while to find a place to secure the bugs that didn’t affect the lay of Spencer’s clothing. Patrick couldn’t help but wonder if the outfit had been Spencer’s idea, or David’s. He knew the two men had spoken, at length, the night before when he and David had returned from the ‘set up’ dinner. He only hoped they’d both finally found what they were looking for in each other. He took a sip of his bottled water. They both deserved to be happy.

Something had him turning toward the door and he startled to see his boy, minus his jacket and tie and with two shirt buttons undone. He watched as Aaron crossed the bar towards him, smiling easily. Patrick quirked an eyebrow, but opened his arms to accept his boy’s embrace all the same. Aaron’s lips grazed his ear.

“They got them,” he whispered, relaxing into the welcome hold. “Gregor tried to ambush Dave and ‘Rose’ was waiting in the car. We got them both.” He pulled back smiling at his Sir’s pleased expression. He stole a long drink from his Sir’s water. “I need to go,” he said reluctantly, leaning into Patrick’s arms. “Paperwork, booking, all the minutia they conveniently forget about on the procedural shows,” he said with a chuckle. “ Probably won’t be done until late.”

Patrick nodded. He flicked his eyes to the where the mike lay hidden in his clothing. He wanted to offer to meet Aaron later, to hold his boy after everything was over. But he wouldn’t endanger his boy’s position, even though he doubted that Emily would be all that surprised *or* all that upset. The decision was taken from him when his boy leaned close and kissed him.

“I told her,” Aaron admitted softly. “Expect the third degree next time we go to lunch with her.”

Patrick chuckled. “As long as she doesn’t threaten to shoot me,” he said with a wink at Aaron, “I think I can handle that.” He reached out and buried his fingers in his boy’s hair, gripping the soft strands tightly and pulling the unresisting man in for a deep, heated kiss. Reluctantly he drew back. “Go do your job. I’ll stick here until close and then head to the apartment. Join me when you’re done. And Miss Emily,” he said to their unseen voyeur, “no teasing my boy where it might cause him problems. I have a paddle and know how to use it. Agent or no,” he finished with a low growl. “Ask Aaron if ya doubt it.”
Aaron’s brown eyes were wide as he studied Patrick, but Patrick merely kissed him once more. “Go on now,” he urged. “I’ll see ya later.”

“Yes, Sir,” Aaron responded, then straightened, pulling out of his Sir’s arms. SSA Hotchner nodded at Patrick and left without a backward glance.

“I told you,” Patricia “Rose” Nordenthal reiterated once more, “I don’t know anything about blackmail or kidnapping or torture or anything you’re accusing me of.” She pinned Rossi with a frustrated stare. “Greg called me last week saying he wanted to see me.” She shrugged. “I know I should have been suspicious given how he treated me last time, but... well. He’s... sexy and dangerous and handsome and,” she rolled her eyes at Rossi’s disbelieving look. “Look, I know he’s a bit of a misogynistic bastard at times, but he’s good in the sack *and* the playroom. Besides, I was lonely. So I figured, ‘what the hell’.”

“A *bit* misogynistic?” the profiler said, stunned at the woman’s attitude. “He’s in there blaming you for everything, Patricia.”

“But I didn’t *do* anything!” she protested. “How can he accuse me of doing something I don’t know anything about? I’ve been out of the country for the last few months. I can give you my itinerary, the names of the people I was traveling with, whatever you need. I haven’t done anything *wrong*.”

Rossi pushed a legal pad over to her. “Write down everything,” he ordered. “Names, contact information, anything you can think of that *might* convince me that you didn’t have something to do with this.”

In the observation room Aaron turned and looked at Spencer. “I believe her.”

Spencer nodded, arms wrapped around his slender torso. “But she was the woman waiting in the car when Gregor grabbed Rossi. She had the engine running and, while she sounded surprised, she still took off when he told her to.”

“Could she have just been following orders?”

Spencer shrugged. “Possibly. I... I don’t know.”

Aaron laid a hand on Spencer’s shoulder. “It’s alright, Reid. You did very well tonight. You stuck to the plan and let Derek and JJ and the others know what was happening.”

“If I’d been paying more attention,” Spencer grumbled.

“If you’d been paying more attention, Gregor might have decided Dave was too dangerous a subject to try for tonight,” he countered, “and might have gone for someone else.”

Spencer nodded, unconvincing, but attempting to believe what Aaron was telling him.

“Shall we see how Derek and Emily are doing with our other guest?” Aaron asked with a smirk. He’d been unsurprised by Duggin’s reactions to the two agents in question. He’d made lewd comments to Prentiss and completely dismissed Morgan. Aaron was anxious to see just how long Duggin would last under their combined skills. They turned to the second interrogation room, bringing up the sound to listen in.

Duggin was sprawled in a chair, sneering at Morgan. “You’ve got nothing,” he drawled. “If you did,
you’d have booked me already. Besides, *if* I’d *hypothetically* had something to do with these crimes you’re talking about,” he added slowly, “it’s only as an interested observer. If you knew how crazy that c*nt is, you’d be giving a medal to the dom who redirected her.” He leaned his head back, closing his eyes.

“And just why would we do a stupid thing like that?” Emily asked, distain evident in her tone.

“Because if someone hadn’t done it,” Duggin answered, leaning his arms on the table and leering at Emily. “You’d be hip deep in bodies by now. Provided she didn’t get herself killed first. Psychotic cow.”

Derek and Emily exchanged looks. “Sounds like she’s the dangerous one, then,” Derek said smoothly. “Told you this idiot wasn’t smart enough to pull off all those attacks,” he said to Prentiss. “We’re wasting our time here. We should be looking at his accomplice. She’s the one with the brains.”

“Whatever,” Duggin muttered.

Emily chuckled, looking at Derek who was slowly levering himself up with his crutches, leaning on them more heavily than he really needed to. “There’s a well thought out response,” she drawled, shaking her head.

Derek nodded his agreement. “Did you expect anything else?” he said as he made his way carefully toward the door.

Emily let her eyes roam over the handcuffed man, her expression changing from contempt to pity. “No,” she finally answered, tone thick with contempt. Her eyes locked with Duggin’s “Not really. Only good response he probably knows how to give involves his fists, and I’m betting even those aren’t anything to get excited about.”

Duggin lunged forward, handcuff chains rattling as he fought against them, trying to reach Emily. “Why don’t you come closer and find out, sweetheart,” Duggin snarled. “They were good enough to keep that bitch in line.”

Derek’s crutch shot out, pushing Duggin back into the chair. “Sit Down!” he ordered.

Duggin fell heavily back into the chair, eyes still on Emily. “I could have snapped her neck when she pulled her little stunt with me. She wasn’t quick enough. Apparently I wasn’t as stupid as the first two she took out. I tasted the damned drugs in my drink and didn’t finish it. Should have seen her face when I grabbed her hair and fought back.” He licked his lips at the memory. “Didn’t take long for her to figure out who the boss was. Betting you’d put up more of a fight.” He leered at Emily. “Take more than four or five hits to teach you to mind, but that’s okay I like ‘em spirited.”

Emily gave him her sweetest, deadliest smile. “I’d break you in two seconds flat,” she said sweetly.

Duggin snorted. “Yeah. That’s what she thought too.” He shifted in the chair, slumping as nonchalantly as his restraints allowed. “She thought she was so smart. But I broke her of that little fantasy, stupid little c…”

“Watch your mouth, Duggin,” Derek snapped, eyes dark.

“cow,” Duggin finished with a deliberate smirk. “Then she decided to get uppity again tonight, challenging me instead of doing what she was told. She won’t do that again, not if she knows what’s good for her.”
Derek looked at Emily. They’d both seen the woman brought in with Duggin. She hadn’t had a mark on her, and given Duggin’s manner and history, the woman he was talking with wasn’t so lucky. Patricia Nordenthal may have been the woman with him this evening, but she wasn’t his partner in the attacks.

Patrick walked Sadie to her car, wishing her good night and safe journeys as she started her car. He took a deep breath of the night air, looking up at the stars as he relaxed in the quiet. A sound to his left had him instantly on alert. He shifted slightly, allowing himself a view of the area while still appearing to be studying the sky. He brought his hands to his lower back, arching slightly as if working out a bit of tension and checking that his gun was in easy reach with the back holster open and out of the way should he need to act quickly. While he was certain his boy had the right man, there were still plenty of other dangers in the shadows and it paid to be careful.

He sighed as if tired before turning so he could scan said shadows as he headed back to the bar. It wasn’t the most graceful cover he’d ever managed, but something about the situation made the hair on the back of his neck stand on end. A flash of movement caught his attention. He stilled, watching carefully, ready to defend himself if needed. A bedraggled young woman shyly stepped to the edge of the shadows. Her brown hair covered her face in tangled disarray. Her short skirt was stained and the white man’s dress shirt she wore was torn and hung loosely on her small frame. She looked around, shrinking back against the wall as she spotted Patrick, her arms wrapping protectively around herself.


“Help me, please,” she said softly. “I don’t… I don’t know where to go that he won’t find me.”

Patrick smiled reassuringly. “Ye’re safe,” he reiterated. “My name’s Patrick. I have friends over there,” he pointed to the well-lit bar behind him. “We’ll help if we can.” He held out a hand to her.

“What’s yer name, girl?”

She took the offered hand. “Thank you,” she whispered. She looked up at him and smiled shyly, the light catching the dark bruising on her face and the half-healed split in her lower lip. “I’m Janey Horner,” she said softly, looking up at him with wide, green eyes.

“Well, Janey,” he said gently. “It’s a pleasure to meet you. Will you come with me, then?” he asked. “Get yer injuries looked to at least?”

“I don’t know,” she said, voice shaking as she looked between Patrick and the light coming from the bar.

He stepped closer to her. “Ye’re safe, Janey. If you want, I can go and get one of the ladies to come talk to ya, if it would make ya more comfortable.”

“Please?” she whispered. “I just… I just don’t…”

“It’s all right, girl,” he soothed. “Just wait here and I’ll go get Naomi. She’s a gentle soul,” he said as he turned towards the bar.

His eyes widened as something sharp stabbed into his side, followed by a burning sensation. He turned back towards Janey and the word slipped out of focus for a second before clearing. He looked into her concerned eyes.

“Are you feeling okay, Mr. Zakaria?” she asked.
Something about the question made him uncomfortable and he tried to turn back to the bar, urgent to return to its safety.

Small but surprisingly strong hands drew him deeper into the darkness. He blinked and shook his head trying to clear it. The world spun and he had to lean against the wall for support. Janey’s slender shoulder pressed into his side, supporting him, shoving him towards something… a car? He was unceremoniously pushed into the trunk, legs and arms forced into the cramped confines before he was covered with a rough blanket. Janey leaned over him, lips twisted in a dark parody of a smile. “Who are you?” he asked again, voice rough, groggy.

The young woman reached out and ran her fingers through his curls. “I told you. I’m Janey Horner.” Her fingers twisted in hair, tugging his head back sharply. “But most just call me Rose.”

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*It is always in the midst, in the epicenter, of your troubles that you find serenity.* – Antoine de Saint-Exupery

“Come on. Come on. Pick up,” Aaron muttered into the phone.

“You’ve reached Patrick Zakaria. I can’t take your call right now…”

Aaron hung up the phone before the voice mail message finished. He’d left one message already and had hoped that maybe Patrick just hadn’t gotten to it in time to take the first call. He took a deep, steadying breath. Just because Patrick wasn’t answering his phone didn’t mean something had happened to him. “Garcia? Do you have the number for…” He didn’t even have to finish his question before the blonde tech handed him a piece of paper with the number of the bar Patrick should be at scrawled across it. “Thank you.”

She squeezed his arm in reassurance before her attention snapped back to the call she was on, no longer on hold.

Aaron dialed the number, tuning out the sounds of Garcia’s conversation and the low hum of her work stations.

“Blue Moon Tavern. Sean speaking.”

“Sean,” he relaxed, recognizing the voice as one of the older doms Patrick had introduced him to at the Leaf. “It’s Irish. Is Patrick still there?” There was a long pause on the other end of the phone and Aaron did his best to be patient.

“Nope. Sorry, boy. He apparently left after walking Sadie to her car. No one’s seen him since.” The bartender paused. “Have you tried his apartment?”

“When did he leave?” Aaron asked ignoring the comment, knowing Dave was doing that even as he made his own calls.

Sean hummed, obviously running through things in his head. “Must have been about fifteen minutes or so after you breezed in and breezed back out again,” he finally answered. “Funny that. Thought he’d planned to stay ‘til last call, but he must have decided against it.”

Aaron checked his watch and cursed. He’d been gone at least two hours then. “Is his car still outside?”

“I don’t know,” Sean answered. “Irish, what’s going on, boy? What’s got you so worried?”
“Please. Is his car still there?” He could hear the bartender telling someone to go check the parking lot.

“What’s going on?” Sean asked again, tone firm.

“Patrick may be in danger,” he said, trying to keep his voice calm. “I need to know who he left with and if he took his own car.”

“Hang on.” Muffled voices sounded through the receiver for several moments then Sean’s voice returned. “Irish. His car’s still in the lot but no one’s seen him since he walked out with Sadie. The boys are gonna take a quick walk around the bar, see if they see anything.”

“Tell them to be careful,” Aaron cautioned. “And to not touch anything. I’ll be there in fifteen.”

He, Prentiss, and a select team of forensic techs arrived in ten. Sean already had the surveillance tape up and ready for them when they walked in, and it gave them their first possible lead. Emily recognized a four door sedan that pulled into the lot as one she’d seen when she and Rossi had gone to interview a possible suspect earlier.

“The stuffed leopard in the back window is a bit on the distinctive side,” she admitted when asked. “It’s bright pink. Not something you forget easily. That’s Jane Radel’s car.”

Aaron dialed Garcia and soon she was watching with them via a computer link and working her computer magic to find them anything they could use. They watched the sedan disappear into the shadows at the back edge of the club parking lot, just at the edge of the camera’s range. The driver of the sedan didn’t go into the bar. In fact, they couldn’t even be sure who was in the driver’s seat. The shadows were just too deep. But it was obvious the driver was waiting for something, or someone.

They watched as Patrick walked an older woman to her car then lingered in the parking lot. Finally, he moved towards the shadows, clearly talking to someone the camera couldn’t see. Finally a second figure stepped forward. She kept her face turned away from the surveillance cameras, but they could see just enough to positively identify the woman Patrick was talking to… Jane Radel.

They watched as Patrick turned away from her and started back towards the bar, only to jerk and turn around abruptly. Aaron tensed as Patrick shook his head and took a step away from the unsub. He watched as the unsub took an unresisting Patrick by the arm and led him deeper into the shadows. A few minutes later, the sedan drove away with only one person inside, at least that they could see.

“Prentiss, have the techs search that area thoroughly for any kind of syringes or devices that could be used to introduce drugs into a person’s system,” Aaron ordered. “She could have used a weapon to make him follow her, but her MO so far has been chemical incapacitation.”

“On it,” the agent said.

“Garcia,” Hotch all but growled into the phone. “Did you get all that? I need you to double check everything we have on Jane Radel. We must have missed something. Have Derek lean on Duggin again, see what he knows about the first two victims he mentioned.” He took a steadying breath. “And have you had any luck getting a trace on Patrick’s tracking device?”

“Already double and triple checking it, mon capitan,” the tech reassured him. “Derek is working *his* magic as we speak, and the tracker… is faint, but active and has stopped at… the outskirts of Jane Radel’s farm. Which makes a *ton* of sense considering her nearest neighbor is like, five miles away and the place itself is huge and surrounded by trees and privacy fence. She’d have plenty of
privacy should she need it. Easy enough to get someone there and keep them for several days without anyone noticing. Derek’s… seeing if it’s familiar to our resident creepoid.”

He smiled at the tech’s tone and the amount of menace it held if you knew her. “Thank you, Garcia. Keep digging and let us know what you and Derek find out. Prentiss and I will check out Radel’s farm. Have Dave check with Mistress at the Leaf while he’s checking the apartment, just to make sure Patrick didn’t show up there. I doubt that’s the case because he would have checked in by now, but we need to make sure.” He was headed out the door as he gave his curt orders. “We’ll be in touch.”

“Be careful, Sir,” she said softly. “I don’t want to have to explain to Sir Patrick how I failed to keep his boy safe.”

He couldn’t help but smile at the gentle admonishment, though he shouldn’t have been surprised considering Lady Bella’s reputation of being very protective of submissives. His steps faltered as the implications of her comment worked past his determination to find Patrick. “How?” he paused, fingers pinching the bridge of his nose. “No,” he conceded, “how doesn’t matter,” he told her gently, aware she was waiting for his reaction. “Just…”

“Lady Bella knows how to keep secrets,” she reassured. “Concentrate on finding your Sir and remember to be careful.”

“Yes, Ma’am,” he answered honestly. “Besides,” he teased gently, “if anything happens to me, he’ll know exactly who to blame. And it won’t be you.” Her chuckle was warm and soothing and Aaron basked in it as he settled in behind the wheel of the SUV. “Call when you have something.” Prentiss settled in beside him without a word, buckling her seatbelt and nodding as he hung up the phone and started the engine. They had found their secondary unsub. Aaron just prayed that they hadn’t found her too late.

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“Talk to me, PG,” Emily said as she answered the phone. “You’re on speaker.”

“Okay,” the tech began, “The car in question does not, actually, belong to Jane Radel. It’s registered to Luther and Diana Horner, who were, according to my sources, Ms. Radel’s mentors in the community until Diana passed unexpectedly in February of last year.”

“How did she die, Garcia?” Aaron asked, mind already adding the new information to the profile building in his head.

“She died from a previously undiagnosed heart defect,” Garcia relayed. “She was,” there was a pause and they could hear the sound of fingers on keys, “a lot younger than her husband, but appeared to be very happy. They went out of town for a romantic Valentine’s day retreat and everything seemed fine,” she read. “Then, according to her husband she came down with what they thought was the flu, tired, achy, etc. They didn’t think much of it because one of the people they’d played with over the weekend had been recovering from a cold. Three days later, he woke up but she didn’t.”

“He requested an autopsy even before the police told him it was necessary,” she continued. “There was an investigation, of course, but they found that she had a weakness in the inner wall of one of the chambers of her heart and it had developed a slow leak that finally ruptured the morning she died.” Garcia paused, again there was the sound of fingers on computer keys. “According to my House sources, Luther took it really hard even though he’d done nothing wrong. BUT, Jane apparently spent several months trying to get the House to take another look at Diana’s death, saying
that Luther had to be somehow responsible.

“Even the House said he’d done nothing wrong, but the constant accusations apparently got to be too much for him.” More key strokes. “He left town in his RV, something he and Diana normally did during the spring and summer, two months after her funeral. Huh, that’s strange.”

“What’s strange?” Emily asked.

“No one’s seen or heard from him since then,” Garcia said. Keystrokes, more rapid this time. “And other than a few, short emails early on, there’s *nothing*. No credit card transactions, no letters or phone calls, nada.”

“I think we may have found one of our two victims,” Emily said, looking over at Hotch.

“Get forensics out to the Horner home,” Aaron ordered. “I know it’s a long shot after so long, but there may still be something there to tell us if Mr. Horner is still alive or if something happened to him.”

“On it,” the tech promised. “And, another thing, the Obsidian House rep that talked to her at the time, made a recommendation that Jane seek grief counseling, but there’s no indication she ever did.”

“Thanks, Garcia,” Aaron praised. “Has Derek gotten anything out of Duggin about Radel’s place and where on the grounds she might be holding a new victim?”

“OH. Yeah. There’s an outbuilding on the western most edge of the property,” she relayed. “It’s the farthest from any neighbors and from the roads. There’s a ‘playroom’ at the back behind a heavy door. That’s where she’d most likely be keeping him.”

Aaron’s hands were white-knuckled around the steering wheel. “Have local authorities and an ambulance ready should we need,” he said, straining for the even tone he normally managed.

“Will do, sir,” she promised. “And I’ll make sure they’re some of ‘our’ people if at all possible.”

“Thank you, Penelope,” he answered, grateful for her thoughtfulness.

“We look out for our own,” she said softly. “In more ways than one. Get him back, Aaron.”

“Yes, Ma’am,” he answered, acknowledging the firm, commanding tone in her voice. “I will.”

“*We* will,” Emily interrupted, eyes narrowing at Aaron. “And we’ll let you know when we have him back,” she promised Garcia. “If you find out anything else, keep us apprised. And with that, we’re nearly there,” she said with a small, half-grin. “We’ll check in when we have him back.”

“You’d better!” Garcia scolded. “Be safe.”

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The outbuilding in question was easy to find… with Garcia’s help and Duggin’s directions. Surrounded by trees and with a path nearly hidden by artistically cut hedge and a half-painted fence, the building was, indeed, well secluded. But the sedan was there, the trunk open and empty – except for Patrick’s watch and a wadded up blanket. Aaron handed the keys to Emily, sending her back to the main gate to lead the others in while he headed in to try and negotiate with their unsub. She only agreed to go on the condition he keep a comm open to Garcia, who would contact her if he needed assistance.
He agreed, putting in the offered ear-piece and opening the connection to Garcia before drawing his gun and making his way carefully into the outbuilding. The door opened easily on silent hinges, revealing a long, pristine corridor that was at odds with the mildly rundown look of the outside of the building. He made his way down the corridor, listening with each step, trying to determine where Patrick and the unsub were. The sound of leather striking flesh was abominably loud in the too silent atmosphere, but it led Aaron down the hallway to a set of four doors, one of which was ajar. He carefully positioned himself to see into the room without being seen.

Aaron stilled, eyes taking in the scene before him. Jane Radel, the unsub, stood at the far side of the small room, a long, thin cane in her hands, studying the nude form of her victim. Patrick was bound to a modified spanking horse, his wrists and ankles raw from fighting the hemp ropes that held him. His back was a mass of red welts, some still bleeding, and the backs of his thighs weren’t much better.

Aaron swallowed against the rush of anger and self-loathing that washed over him. He’d failed in his promise to keep his Sir safe, just as he’d failed Haley and Jack. [‘It’s acceptable to feel, Aaron. In fact, acknowledging those emotions can keep them from controlling you later on.’] Dr. Huang’s calm, even voice echoed in his head and Aaron found himself nodding absently at the valuable advice. This wasn’t the time for recriminations, it was the time for action. He could do this, he was trained for this. Hell, he’d written the damned textbook on handling these situations. Right now, Patrick needed SSA Hotchner, the time for them as Sir and sub would come later, when all this was over. He could do this. He *had* to do this, the alternative was unthinkable.

“Garcia?” he whispered as he tapped open the comm.

“Here, mon capitan,” the perky tech answered immediately.

“I’ve found them,” he told her quietly. “And we’ll need that ambulance when everything is over. It’s not as bad as it could be,” he reassured her quickly as she gasped, “but it’s not pretty.” He took a deep, steadying breath. “Keep this line open and monitored.”

“My fingers are at your disposal, Sir.”

Aaron took another deep steadying breath, settling his FBI training around him like a well-worn suit. “Jane Radel?” he called out, pleased when the pacing figure stilled. “This is SSA Aaron Hotchner of the FBI.”

“GO AWAY!”

He closed his eyes at the shouted warning. “I’m afraid I can’t do that Ms. Radel. Not while you still have Mr. Zakaria.”

“You don’t understand what he’s done,” she called back, voice tight with emotion.

Aaron took the chance, slowly pushing the door further open but not stepping into the room just yet. “Then explain it to me,” he answered her calmly. “Explain to me what Mr. Zakaria has done.”

She startled at his appearance, stepping back and placing her captive between herself and Aaron. “You wouldn’t understand.”

“I might understand better than you think,” he said gently, moving a step closer, keeping his actions and tone as non-threatening as possible while keeping his gun trained on her. “This is about his involvement in the BDSM community as a dominant.”

“He’s not a good dominant,” she interrupted sharply. “He’s an abuser. He uses his submissives.
Takes their money and leaves them when they need him the most. His last submissive, the one whose name he stole… he left him in the hospital to die all alone and in pain.”

“Ya don’ know a thing, ya daft *bitch*!” Patrick growled, accent thick and dark with anger and pain. “Ruui was my life! The damned bigot of a doctor *made* me leave. Sent bleeding security to drag me from me boy’s side as he lay dying!” He struggled wildly against the ropes that held him.

“Because you were abusing him!” the woman yelled back.

“No! I’d never ha’ hurt him. Never!”

“Patrick!” Aaron’s voice snapped firmly. “ Enough.” He turned his attention back to the unsub.

“Jane. I know Mr. Zakaria. He’d never hurt a submissive under his care.”

“Damn right he wouldn’t!” Garcia’s voice hissed in his ear. “Rooshad Zakaria died of cancer,” she said softly, not wanting to break Aaron’s concentration but knowing the information might help him counter the woman’s insane accusations. “Patrick stayed with him through everything. One of the doctor’s took exception to their lifestyle and had Patrick bodily removed from the hospital until Rooshad’s family had the *doctor* removed and listed Patrick as ‘family’. It’s kind of a local legend because Mr. Zakaria is pretty old school and even Patrick was stunned by the support.”

Aaron kept his face carefully blank as he listened to both Garcia’s information and the snarling venom of the unsub’s continued accusations.

“You’re wrong.” She asserted. “I did my research. I’m really good at research,” she added earnestly. “He thought he hid it, but I know. We know, the submissives. We look out for each other and we talk and keep each other safe,” her voice had taken on an almost fanatical air the more she spoke. “He’s not a good man,” she said in an oddly conspiratorial whisper, eyes flicking back to her bound captive.

Aaron moved another step closer. “Why isn’t he a good man, Jane?” he prompted, drawing her attention back to him.

She tilted her head as she studied Aaron intently. “He used him,” she said evenly. “He took that poor submissive’s money and his name and then left him.” She looked between Aaron and Patrick. “He left horrible bruises and bites on the poor man. He didn’t even stop when his sub was hospitalized.” Without warning the cane shot out again, landing with a sharp crack across Patrick’s already damaged back.

Aaron flinched at sound and the pained grunt Patrick made as it fell. He forced down the bile as he watched the newest mark well-up with blood.

“He wanted a mark they couldn’t take off him,” Patrick said brokenly, his eyes seeking out Aaron’s, his words more for Aaron than for the unsub. “He couldn’t wear his collar because of all the tests and tubes and invasive procedures. He begged me to mark him, to give him something to hold on to when I couldn’t be there. How could I tell him no?”

“You’re lying!” Jane yelled, the cane rising and falling in quick, brutal succession. “You’re lying and they *knew*! They covered it up, just like they did for Luther. But you won’t hurt anyone else. I won’t let you and I won’t let them cover it up again either!” She savaged Patrick’s already injured back and legs, coming dangerously close to areas where she could do serious damage to the bound and writhing man.

“Jane!” Aaron shouted over the nauseating sound of the cane hitting flesh. “Stop,” he ordered. Her
eyes flickered over to him again, as if she’d forgotten that he was there. She landed two more savage blows on Patrick’s restrained body and Aaron was worried by the slack stillness in the muscular form. Jane eyed the gun in his hand with distaste but did as he ordered.

“Back up’s arrived, Sir,” Garcia’s voice whispered in his ear. “They’ll be outside in five. Coming in silent, but ready. They’ll await your signal.”

“Thank you,” he sighed, letting Garcia know he understood even as Jane nodded her head in acknowledgment.

“Who covered it up, Jane?” Aaron asked softly, wanting to redirect her from her anger filled attacks against Patrick.

“Not until you put the gun away,” she said uneasily.

Aaron weighed his options. Backup was outside and he needed to get her away from Patrick. “I’m putting my gun away,” he said for Garcia’s benefit as he matched actions to words. “Now, who covered things up?” he asked again.

“The other dominants,” she answered easily. “The ones in power. They look out for each other, you see. They have to,” she told him. “We’re disposable to them,” she said, moving away from Patrick as she explained. “But I’m going to change that. I’m going to send a message by taking down the ones that they let get away, the ones they covered for.” Her eyes locked with Aaron’s. “Gregor. Gregor didn’t understand, but that’s okay. In the end, he’ll be taught a lesson too. He thinks he’s untouchable, just like the others, but he’ll be dealt with too,” she added with a knowing smile.

“They always think we’re powerless,” she continued when Aaron didn’t interrupt. “But they’re wrong and I’m teaching them that. I’m going to show them just how wrong they are. Do you understand?”

“Explain it to me, Jane,” Aaron coaxed, moving towards her, drawing her closer to him and away from Patrick’s bleeding body. “Help me understand.”

She warmed to her apparently appreciative audience. “Take this one,” she said, pointing to Patrick. “He got away with hurting one submissive and he’s decided to do it again. He found a new submissive, ‘rescued’ him from that horrid boy that Gregor found, only to turn around and hurt him even worse.” Her eyes were wide, sincere. “He kept the poor man locked away for over a week, punishing him for his defiance in that hellish club the dominants keep such tight control of.”

Aaron blanched as he realized just what, and who, she was talking about. “They think they can cover it all up,” she continued, unaware of Aaron’s discomfort, “but word gets out sooner or later.” She nodded knowingly. “Gregor said it was too easy, too much of a coincidence to have heard about it when we did. He swore it had to be a trap and refused to help me. But I still managed. I found him and caught him and now… now he’ll know what his submissive went through.” She moved closer to Aaron. “He’ll suffer and he’ll beg, but it won’t do *him* any good. He’ll get the same mercy he showed that poor submissive. And when it’s all done, he’ll be left outside that hateful place as a warning. They’ll all think twice about letting other dominants abuse the submissives in their care.” She laid a hand on Aaron’s arm. “And that submissive won’t have to be afraid anymore.”

Aaron gave her a slight smile, watching her relax her guard even more. “Now, Garcia!” he ordered as he grabbed Jane’s hand and quickly worked to subdue her. He could hear backup crashing through the door, announcing themselves as Jane screamed out her rage and struggled against his hold. He pinned her, pressing her against the wall. “Things aren’t always what they seem, Ms. Radel,” he growled in her ear. “I’m the submissive Patrick supposedly ‘held’ for a week,” he hissed
relishing the feel of her stilling beneath him in shock, “and I’m not afraid anymore because *he* took care of me.”

“Hotch?”

He leaned back from the stunned woman. “HERE!” he called to Prentiss. “I need the EMT’s.” Footsteps and voices filled the room and Aaron’s eyes flicked over to the unconscious Patrick. He fought the urge to simply knock the woman unconscious and go to his Sir. He didn’t, but the temptation was strong as he watched the EMT’s swarm around Patrick, blocking his view of the injured man.

Strong hands took control of a strangely passive Jane Radel and Aaron didn’t honestly care if the devil himself had taken her. He moved to Patrick’s side, careful to stay out of the way of the emergency personnel as they cut the restraints and eased the limp and bleeding form onto a stretcher. Patrick didn’t stir. The EMT’s readied Patrick for transport to the waiting ambulance, and Aaron desperately wanted to go with them, to be by Patrick’s side. Unfortunately he had a duty at the scene.

A familiar hand settled on his shoulder and he turned to look at Rossi questioningly. “We’ve got this, Aaron,” the other man reassured. “Go with him. We’ll need to get his statement when he comes to.”

Aaron smiled at the thin excuse, but took it anyway, following the stretcher and his unconscious Sir out of the nightmarish building and into the waiting ambulance.

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_The family you come from isn’t as important as the family you’re going to have._ - Ring Lardner

Aaron watched Patrick sleep. The older man lay carefully propped to keep pressure off his injured back while not putting additional stress on his cracked ribs and relocated shoulder and left ankle. He’d been damned lucky. The injuries, while painful, were relatively minor compared to what the unsub could inflict. In addition to the vicious cane strikes that Aaron had witnessed, Jane Radel had apparently used a thick metal rod to beat the bound and drugged Patrick as well. According to the emergency room doctor, had her blows been two inches over, she could have broken Patrick’s back like she had Paul’s.

The thing that haunted Aaron the most as he studied his sleeping Sir, however, was the knowledge that the attacks on Paul and Patrick were both his fault.

His panic attack at the Leaf had led to Jane Radel’s fixation on the two dominants. In her troubled mind, she had been working to protect *him*, to avenge wrongs done to him by ‘unscrupulous dominants’. Logically, he knew the attacks weren’t his fault, but emotionally… it was difficult *not* to see himself as the catalyst for both men being hurt. It was something he was going to have to come to terms with, and soon, before it ‘impacted his ability to function in a healthy emotional and psychological manner’. He sighed, brought out his PDA and made a note to contact Dr. Sayers for an appointment and possibly put in a call to George Huang just for good measure. He wasn’t going to let another unsub control him and interfere with his relationship with Patrick. He’d learned that lesson the hard way, and Jane Radel wasn’t worth losing the peace he’d found with his Sir.

He put away his PDA and reached out to take Patrick’s hand. Aaron gently ran his fingers over the edge of the white dressing covering the abrasions caused by Patrick’s struggles against the hemp she’d bound him with. He absently cataloged the differences between the cool, rough dressing and the warmth of Patrick’s skin, warmth that reminded him Patrick was still alive. He suppressed a shudder at the thought, memories of Haley’s cold skin haunting him.
“Such a troubled look in one so young,” a soft, heavily accented, feminine voice said from the doorway.

Aaron turned, eyes narrowed and hand dropping quickly from where it had been stroking Patrick’s skin (not from shame, but for ease of access to his back-up piece if needed). He relaxed as he took in the small, dusky-skinned woman watching them both with a sad, gentle smile. He’d seen her picture before, in Patrick’s apartment. This was Dipti Zakaria; Rooshad Zakaria’s mother and the closest thing to a mother Patrick would claim. Her long, dark blue, heavily embroidered dress skimmed over her slender, barely five foot frame, and was belted with a bright, multi-hued scarf. Her steel gray hair was pulled back into a thick braid that fell past her shoulders, but rather than being severe, it seemed to simply add to her quiet charm. Her lined face was testament to her years, but her step was sure and her brown eyes sparkled with vitality. She returned Aaron’s gaze easily, standing silently in the doorway until Aaron relaxed back in the chair. “Mrs. Zakaria?” he asked, just to be certain.

She nodded, her smile brightening. “Call me Dipti,” she urged. “And you are our Patrick’s Aaron.”

“Yes, Ma’am,” he answered even as he rose from the chair to offer it to her.

“Sit, child,” the tiny woman scolded kindly. “It is right that your face be the first thing he sees when he awakes.”

Aaron could feel his cheeks heat at the words.

Dipti’s light laughter danced around the quiet room. She moved to Aaron’s side, her eyes studying the still figure on the bed. Her smile faltered a bit as she took in the bandages and bruises. She reached out a surprisingly steady hand and caressed Patrick’s bearded cheek. “[Sweet boy,]” she whispered in her native tongue, “[what have you done to yourself this time?]”

Aaron didn’t understand the whispered words, but their concern was clear. “He’s going to be fine,” he reassured, both for her and for himself.

“Thank you,” the woman answered eyes still on Patrick. “And you, Aaron, how are you fairing?”

The question stunned him. He’d not been the one attacked, the one beaten. “I… I’m fine, Ma’am.”

She turned to study him. After several long, uncomfortable minutes, she reached out and cupped his face in her hands. She leaned forward and pressed a soft, motherly kiss to his forehead. “[So like Ruui,]” she breathed, her kind exasperation clear in the melodic words. “Patrick is not the only one hurt by this,” she explained. “What affects him, affects you. That is the way of the heart.” She brushed her fingers through his hair. “So I ask again, Aaron. How are you fairing?”

He closed his eyes, chuckling wryly as he got his first taste of why Patrick referred to her as ‘Hurricane Dipti’. “I’m… managing,” he admitted. “Knowing he’s going to be okay helps.”

She patted the side of his face. “He’s always been a fighter, especially when he has something he loves to fight for.”

Aaron’s hand unconsciously came up to rest over the mark Patrick had left on his skin (had it really only been two nights ago?).

Dipti smiled at the gesture. “It is easier with the reassurance, yes? So much more… calming than a ring that can be removed or a piece of paper that can be burned.” Aaron looked at her in confusion. “The mark,” she said with an understanding smile. “Patrick would mark Ruui that way as well. He claimed it was a way to keep himself close to Ruui’s heart when he couldn’t be there himself. Ruui carried his mark to his final rest.” She met Aaron’s eyes. “It is good that Patrick has found another he
wishes to mark in such a way. He has been alone too long.”

The unexpected mark made so much more sense now. It was Patrick’s way of making sure a part of him stayed with Aaron as they headed into the dangerous sting. But did it also mean the depth of commitment that Dipti seemed to think it did?

“Sunni and Griffin will be so pleased,” Dipti continued, unaware of the effect of her words on Aaron. “Of all the family, they have been the most concerned for Patrick. Sunni because she is the ‘older sister’ and Griffin because he is so close to his uncle.” She grinned at Aaron. “But Pravin and I shall hold off the Zakaria tribe until both of you are well rested,” she promised.

Aaron blinked. “Please. I’m sure they’ll all want to see him. I wouldn’t want to…”

“Aaron,” she interrupted gently. “I have, aside from Patrick, a daughter and son-in-law, four grandchildren and their spouses, five great-grandchildren who range in age from twenty-two to five, and one great, great granddaughter who was born last week. They are boisterous and overwhelming at the best of times. Now, as they will all wish to check on Patrick’s health and, more importantly, meet the newest additions to the family, they will be twice as overwhelming. I would not do that to you, Aaron. You will have enough to worry about keeping that one from overdoing,” she said with a knowing smile. “Though, I will admit I am looking forward to meeting my newest grandson. Patrick says that your Jack is nearly the same age as Nicholas’ twins.”

At Aaron’s stunned silence, Dipti paused, looking from Aaron’s surprised face to Patrick’s still form. “Oh.” She took a deep breath. “Forgive me, Aaron,” she said ruefully, “I fear I have misspoken. I had assumed when Patrick came to ask our blessing that he would talk with you soon after.”

“Your blessing?” Aaron asked, clearly confused.

Dipti smiled, shaking her head. “The foolish boy feared we would turn our backs on him if he found love after Ruui.” She reached out and squeezed Patrick’s arm. “He did not seem to realize what Pravin meant when he claimed Patrick as his son. Why would a family turn their back on a son simply for finding love again?” She turned and looked at Aaron. “Please try and act surprised when he finally speaks to you about this?”

Stunned, Aaron could only nod. There would be no need to act.

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“Hotchner,” Aaron answered, juggling his cell and his son.

“Good news,” Rossi declared, not bothering with formalities. “Jane Radel finally confessed to everything and then some. Between that and the blood evidence on the various BDSM implements found at the scene, she and Gregor are going away for a very long time.”

Aaron paused in buckling Jack into his car seat. After three weeks of interviews, evidence gathering, DNA testing, psychological evaluations and legal jockeying, this damned case was finally coming to a close. Aaron couldn’t help the sigh of relief at the thought. Now maybe they could all get on with their lives. Then the rest of Rossi’s statement sank in. “Wait,” he said, eyes narrowing, “And then some?” he asked in confusion.

“Yeah. Apparently Gregor *was* her third victim. The first guy she accidentally overdosed when she drugged him but since he had known heart problems and it looked like a heart attack, it was ruled natural causes.” Rossi chuckled mirthlessly. “Apparently, since he was known for being a bit of an ass who didn’t look after himself, no one looked too closely at his death.”
Aaron nodded, shifting back to finish settling Jack in, only to find that the little boy already had the straps in place and secured. He smiled at his son, ruffling his soft hair.

“Since nothing happened after three months, she took it as a sign,” Rossi continued. “Remember the Horner family? Well, she blamed Luther Horner for his wife’s death and decided she’d been chosen to ‘make him pay’ for it.” He paused. “We’re searching the area she says she dumped the body. We found the RV, but no body.”

“How did she manage to move them?” Aaron asked after closing the door to the car. “She’s not a big woman.”

“She used a lift,” Rossi answered. “She used to do home health care and had a mobile lift that was small enough to store in the back of her car. She’d bring it out, put it together, wrap the straps around the unconscious victim and hook them to the lift. The lift did the work, she just had to roll them into the room and lower them into the restraints so she and Gregor could do what they wanted.”

“God,” Aaron breathed, stunned by the brutal efficiency of the pair. “Are they going to try and plead diminished capacity?”

“No,” Dave assured. “Though she may not have a choice. Listening to her, I don’t know if they can honestly say she fits the legal definition of ‘sane.’” He sighed. “She honestly thought she was doing the right thing, Aaron. Gregor was in it for the money and the chance to brutalize others. She felt she was saving people.”

Aaron settled into the driver’s seat. “As long as she’s off the streets, that’s what matters.”

“That’s going to happen, it’s just a matter of where she ends up serving the time.” There was a long pause as Aaron started the car. “So? Off to rescue Patrick?”

“Yeah,” Aaron answered with a smile. “They’re letting him out today and Dipti asked Jack and I to go pick him up. He’ll be staying with us for the next week or two and then, if he’s doing well, they’ll clear him to return to work and he’ll head back to his apartment.”

“Ah. Keeping him away from temptation?” Rossi teased.

“Yes. Both Pravin and Mis,” he stopped, remembering the very alert little ears in the back seat. “and Patrick’s boss suggested it. He is apparently known for not taking his ordered down time.”

“Oh yeah!” Rossi agreed whole-heartedly. “He’s almost as bad as his sub where that’s concerned.”

Aaron could feel his cheeks heat at the gentle rebuke. “Pot meet kettle,” he shot back. Dave’s laughter was soothing, even over the phone line. “Okay. We need to get moving.”

“Sure thing. You need anything?”

Aaron thought for a moment. “I don’t think so. Dipti and Sunni were going to bring over food later and I’ve got everything else well stocked.”

“Okay. If you need anything, call me. Oh, and tell Spencer, who should be with your Sir, that he needs to be at my place by 6pm.”

“I’ll call if I think of anything,” he promised. “and is there something I should know about you and Spencer?” Rossi’s silence told him more than he really wanted to know about his subordinates. He sighed. “As long as it doesn’t interfere with the job or your interactions at work,” he said firmly, “and you’re careful around Strauss, we’re good. Hurt him, and I’ll let Garcia loose on you.”
“Fair enough,” Rossi acquiesced. “But I think I’d be more worried about Derek and Emily. They carry guns and can actually hit the broad side of a barn.”

“You’ve never seen Garcia angry, have you?” Aaron countered. “She’s the one you should be scared of. Trust me.” Aaron smiled as Rossi chuckled. “Anyway. We really do need to get moving. Talk to you once we’re settled.” They said their goodbyes, including a shouted ‘bye Uncle Dave’ from the back seat, and Aaron hung up the phone. “Ready to go, buddy?” He asked, looking back at his son.

“Yep.”

Aaron smiled and put the car in gear, heading out to the hospital and Patrick.

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**The love we give away is the only love we keep – Elbert Hubbard**

“Irish! Get a move on!” Paul called from the foyer. “We’ll both be in deep sh,” he quickly changed the word as Jessica walked out of the back bedroom with Jack trailing after her. “trouble, if we don’t get moving.”

Jack giggled. “Paul almost said a bad word, daddy,” the little boy called out. “Does he have to put money in the jar?”

“No.” Aaron said from behind his sister-in-law. “Because he stopped before he finished it.”

Paul chuckled. “Thanks man,” he said with a grin. “I still haven’t gotten the hang of getting to my change in this thing.” He patted the side of his new motorized wheelchair. “I know Micah put it in a pouch on here somewhere, but I never can remember where!”

“Job security,” Jessica said deadpan, even as she leaned down to press a kiss to Paul’s cheek. “Tell Micah I’ll pick him up at 8am on Monday. We’ll need to be at the shop by 8:30 but it’s close to you two.”

Paul nodded. “Will do, and thanks again for offering. That van is going to be a godsend now.”

“No problem.” She ruffled Jack’s hair. “Okay, kiddo. Grab your bag and let’s get moving. Uncle Sean is waiting very impatiently downstairs and Nick and Dana are meeting us at the zoo.” The little boy let out a cheerful whoop and rushed off to his bedroom.

“Jack!” Aaron called out sharply. “No running in the house!” The sound of little footsteps slowed and the three adults shared knowing grins. “Thank you and Sean for taking him this weekend.”

“No problem,” she reassured him. “You know we love having him, and Annie and Greg are just sweethearts. Besides, with Nick and Dana there, we’ll outnumber them four to three. The adults just *might* have a chance at wearing them out before they wear *us* out.”

Aaron shook his head in amusement. He was pleased that she and Patrick’s nephew and his family had hit it off so well. The twins, Annie and Greg, were a year younger than Jack and the three had become nearly inseparable since they’d met in the hospital while visiting ‘Uncle Patrick’. In the month since Patrick’s release from the hospital, the families had grown closer. Dipti had been right, the whole Zakaria ‘tribe’ were a bit overwhelming at first, but in a good way. They had accepted Aaron and Jack easily, welcoming them with smiles and embarrassing stories about each other over large and boisterous meals. Dipti had also adopted most of the BAU team, claiming they all became family when they kept her sons (and hadn’t that caused Aaron’s heart to flip, sons – plural) safe. It
was not uncommon to come back from a bad case and be greeted by an invitation to a home-cooked meal once they were rested, or to find pastries waiting for them as they got back to the offices. Dipti claimed it was a way to keep her busy now that all her children were gone. Patrick said it was just how Dipti was.

Quick footsteps were the only warning Aaron got before a little torpedo barreled into his leg, arms wrapping tight.

“Bye, Daddy!” the little boy sing-songed. “Hug Uncle Patrick for me and tell Uncle Spencer that he needs to be good or I won’t share my new science book with him.” The little whirlwind released him and grabbed Jess’ hand, tugging her towards the door. “Come *on* Aunt Jess.”

Paul quickly shifted out of the way as Jess and Jack headed out the door, both waiving their goodbyes. The door closed behind them and Aaron chuckled. “I think I just came in second to a zoo.”

“Nope. To a zoo and two kids his own age, that’s not quite as bad,” Paul said with a grin. “Now. Come on. We need to get downstairs before your Sir sends up Lady Bella. And trust me, that is *not* a lady you want to piss off.”

Aaron chuckled, laying a hand on Paul’s shoulder. “My friend, you have no idea.”

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He wasn’t sure just what he expected as he entered the small side room his Sir had reserved for them, but it wasn’t this. Sir stood in the middle of a ring of people. Some he knew, others he didn’t. Mistress stood beside Sir, a champagne flute in one hand, Her girl’s leash in the other. Master Walt was deep in conversation with Sir, Ms. Vixen at His side while Fox and a handsome man that he assumed was the elusive Alexi knelt at their feet. Paul, Micah and Master Payton sat in one corner talking with two young men he didn’t know, but who looked vaguely familiar. Master David, Lady Bella and Master David’s boy rounded out the gathering, but didn’t bring him any closer to understanding why they were all there.

He felt incredibly exposed as he paused at the doorway, uncertain what Sir was expecting from him. He’d dressed in the clothing Sir had left for him in the changing room. The supple leather pants clung to his legs like a second skin. The hated chest harness left his scarred body bare for any who cared to look, and while he’d long since ceased to see the scars as marks of failure, he was still uncomfortable exposing them so openly. The note left with the clothing had said to dress and join Sir here once he was ready. It hadn’t said anything about the others.

Master David was the first to spot him, shooting him a bright, welcoming smile. This brought both Lady Bella and Master David’s boy’s attention to him and he could feel his cheeks heating under their combined regard. He dropped his eyes to the floor, waiting. Footsteps approached and Sir’s boots stopped in front of him. He didn’t… couldn’t move and waited for Sir’s command to give him some indication of what was expected of him. Gentle fingers caught his chin and lifted his face until he could meet Sir’s eyes.

“Relax, boy,” Sir ordered softly, His thumb brushing a calming caress over tightly compressed lips. “These are our family, a thaisce. I’ve asked them to bear witness to something tonight before I take ya back to one o’ the private rooms and keep ya there until we have te return te the apartment te get Jack.”

He felt his knees go weak at the heated promise in the words. “please.”
Sir’s dark chuckle shivered over his skin. “Soon. First things first, though.” He stepped back, face stern, commanding. “Follow.”

The sharp tone broke through any reservations he had. Sir would never put him in danger. He followed willingly, stopping as Sir did, eyes down and body relaxed. He was vaguely aware of the others forming a loose circle around them, but he put them from his mind and concentrated on Sir.

“Kneel.”

He lowered himself to the floor at Sir’s feet, dropping into the modified kneel that Sir had taught him. He relaxed as Sir’s strong hand settled on his bowed head, stroking his hair.

“As ya all know,” Sir began, “Aaron and I have been together fer some time now. And in that time we’ve weathered some frantic and dangerous waters. I’m very proud of my boy and the way he’s represented not only me, but himself. He’s proven himself resourceful, loyal, loving, and has become very precious te me. Tonight, I wish to make it clear te everyone, including my boy, just what my Aaron means te me.” Again, strong fingers lifted his chin. “Look at me, boy.”

He opened his eyes and met his Sir’s emerald ones in confusion. Sir smiled reassuringly at him and he relaxed.

“Aaron. Ye’ve given yerself te me freely time and again. Ye’ve served me, allowed me te take care o’ you, and have taken care of me when I was at my most troublesome.”

He chuckled, remembering how hard it had been for his Sir as He’d recovered from His injuries.

“We have spoken of our relationship a great deal in the last month and believe it is time te mark ya more formally as Mine.”

His hand went to the bite mark over his heart that Sir had refreshed just that morning. The mild ache as his fingers pressed against the dark bruise made him smile. He wasn’t sure how Sir could mark him more thoroughly, but assumed Sir would explain soon.

“Chin up, boy.” Sir held out His hand and Master David stepped forward and placed something in Sir’s palm. Sir brought the object closer and he felt his breath catch in his throat. It was a collar. Deep green leather, nearly the color of Sir’s eyes in the throes of passion, backed an intricate chain woven in silver and black. The chain was caught behind a small silver D-ring in the center of the collar and ended at the locking clasps at either end of the leather. The lock for the clasps was a solid looking key-lock with the key in the lock but tethered by a simple, braided leather cord. To either side of the D-ring, half way between the ring and the end clasps sat square cut emeralds in silver settings. The stones caught the light and made them sparkle with an inner brilliance that reminded him of Sir’s eyes when He laughed. “Aaron,” Sir said quietly, “will ya do me the honor of taking my collar?”

He swallowed, overcome. He finally managed to nod his acceptance, his voice caught behind the lump in his throat.

Sir smiled and pressed a reassuring kiss to his forehead before carefully fastening the collar around his throat. Sir’s hands lingered after the lock clicked closed, resting against his neck. “Proud o’ ya, boy,” He whispered. “Stand with me and accept their congratulations, then the time is ours.”

He rose as gracefully as he could on shaking knees. Sir’s arm wrapped around his waist and they stood and accepted the handshakes and congratulations of the people gathered. Master David and Lady Bella both hugged him. The two young men he didn’t know were introduced as Sir’s nephew Griffin and his husband Ben. The young men welcomed him to the family and said they looked
forward to dinner with them soon. Finally, Mistress gave them Her congratulations and ushered everyone out. The silence was welcome and he leaned into Sir’s embrace.

“This is just the beginning, a thaisce,” Sir whispered. “But we’ll discuss that later. Now, now is for us.” Sir kissed him, claiming his mouth, demanding his submission – which he willingly gave. Sir took his hand and led him from the room, down the hall, and into one of the private suites, closing the door behind them.

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Patrick took his time undressing his boy, savoring each shiver, each sigh as he ran his fingers over Aaron’s skin. The harness went first, Patrick’s sure fingers making short work of the buckles and drawing it off of his boy’s broad shoulders. He rewarded Aaron’s patience with a lingering kiss. He repeated the pattern with Aaron’s boots, and the leather pants, and finally, his boy’s underwear – leaving his boy naked save for Patrick’s collar.

He hooked his finger through the D-ring at the front of the collar and led his boy to the suspended sex-swing this particular suite offered. He watched his boy’s brown eyes widen as he took in the collection of wide straps and padded restraints that hung by heavy chain from the ceiling. “Trust me, a thaisce,” he whispered.

“I already do, Sir,” was the immediate answer.

Again, he rewarded his boy with a deep, heated kiss. “In to the swing,” he ordered. He helped his boy settle into the swaying harness, positioning his long body so it was supported by the wide strips of leather and cloth. Long arms were settled in comfortable restraints. Strong legs were spread wide and wrapped in leather at thigh, knee, calf and ankle, comfortably held and easily moved. With a few, gentle pulls, Aaron was completely exposed, his body open and available for whatever his Sir had planned.

And Patrick most definitely had a plan.

He started slowly, his work-rough hands rubbing and massaging Aaron’s thighs, ass, hips, stomach, whatever Sir could reach from his position between his boy’s legs. Even as Aaron sighed and tried to arch up for a more intimate touch, Patrick’s hands moved away from his boy’s cock. He massaged Aaron’s balls, strong fingers pressing behind them, onto the perineum, stroking, fondling until Aaron’s cock was dark and weeping with need. He swept his fingers over the crown of his boy’s cock, gathering up the pre-come carefully. In one swift move he deep-throated his boy’s cock as he pressed his slicked finger into his boy’s welcoming body. He massaged his boy’s prostate, his body braced as Aaron’s movements sent the swing gently swaying. Three firm strokes to the bundle of nerves, a long, hard draw on the heated flesh in his mouth, and he was rewarded with his boy’s release. He swallowed the thick, slightly bitter fluid, making Aaron whimper and try to draw away.

He released his boy’s cock and carefully slid his finger free. Aaron’s confused gaze made him smile. “Trust me. We’re nowhere near done, a thaisce. But I needed ya more… relaxed, fer what I’ve got planned.”

He ran a teasing finger over Aaron’s lax genitals. “Remember how I once told ya I’d fill this sweet, virgin hole, boy?” The lax cock twitched as Aaron moaned. “Tonight I’m going te do just that. Gonna send ya flying, boy.”

He turned and retrieved a small box that he set on Aaron’s flat stomach, balancing it there with a challenging smile. “Good boy,” he praised as Aaron stilled in his bonds. He opened the box, letting Aaron see its contents. Eight silver rods rested on burgundy velvet. Each rod had a delicate double
curve, looking like an elongated ‘s’ and they varied in size from a few millimeters to the size of
Patrick’s thumb. Patrick pulled the smallest rod from the box and coated it with thick lube from a
small packet Aaron hadn’t seen him open. “Sterile lube,” Patrick said as he smoothed it over the
smaller end of the rod. He carefully lifted Aaron’s cock, rubbing the cold metal over the slit in the
head.

Aaron tensed at the unusual sensation, his movements causing the swing to rock gently, nearly
upsetting the box still balanced on his stomach. Patrick caught the box, releasing Aaron’s cock in the
process, and carefully moved it to the floor. He stood and studied his boy carefully. “What are yer
safe words, a thaise?”

“Red for stop,” Aaron recited, eyes closing as he relaxed into the familiar safety net of words.
“Yellow for slow down, blue for emotional distress issues, green for continue.”

“Good boy,” he praised. “Which do ya feel now?”

Aaron thought carefully, his eyes glued to the silver implement in his Sir’s hand. “Green, Sir,” he
breathed as he watched his Sir’s face. “But… slowly?”

“Oh a thaise,” Patrick soothed. “Slow and gentle. I’d not hurt ya fer the world.” He pressed a kiss
to Aaron’s thigh, taking a moment to rub his bearded face over the sensitive skin. He watched as
Aaron relaxed bit by bit, sinking deeper into his submission. Finally, he began again. His touch was
careful, tender, as he gripped Aaron’s cock. He fit the lubed sound against the tiny hole, tracing the
opening, sliding the tip around the outer edge of the slit, teasing and lubricating it at the same time.
As his boy relaxed, he slid the sound into the hole, letting just the barest bit of metal breach the
tender passage. Aaron tensed beneath his hands and he held very still. The swaying of the swing as
Aaron shivered pressed the sound just a bit deeper.

Aaron moaned.

Patrick waited until Aaron stilled before easing the sound just a bit deeper. He massaged his boy’s
cock as he loosely held the sound and let gravity pull the metal slowly down, deeper into the virgin
passage.

Aaron’s breath caught and his hands clutched at the leather restraints.

“Ye’re doin’ so well, Aaron.” He carefully shifted the sound, holding it and moving it in and out of
Aaron’s cock with minute movements that had Aaron keening even as he struggled to hold still. He
fucked his boy for long moments, enjoying the way Aaron’s cock slowly firmed around the metal as
he rhythmically squeezed the tender flesh and moved the sound. He leaned in and licked up the
underside of Aaron’s cock making his boy arch in the restraints. He moved with the resultant
swinging. He made sure the sound was secure, the top of the sound being too large to slide fully
down the shaft, and retrieved another item from the box.

The item looked like the other sound, only larger and not as curved. Patrick ran the chilled metal over
Aaron’s perineum and twisted the base. It started to vibrate. The focused, intense vibrations echoed
through Aaron’s body, teasing at his prostate, resonating through the metal of the sound. Patrick held
the vibrator still, watching his boy as he twitched and whimpered. He braced himself against the
back of Aaron’s thigh, his furred chest pressed tight against the sensitive skin. He wrapped one
strong arm around the thigh and took hold of the sound once more.

He started a slow, torturous rhythm of thrust and pull with the sound as he moved the vibrator from
perineum to ball sac and up the shaft of Aaron’s cock. He teased at the underside of the crown,
feeling the way Aaron’s thigh muscles tensed and twitched as he rode the sensations. Reversing the
path of the vibrator, he teased the shaft, then the balls, watching as the sac tightened. Aaron was close. He ghosted the metal tip over Aaron’s perineum and then just a bit further, running the hard metal over the nerve rich folds of Aaron’s anus. Aaron cried out, his cock leaking around the sound. Patrick bit Aaron’s thigh, sucking a dark, red love-bite onto the pale skin. “Are ya ready? Are ya ready te give this up te me as well?”

A broken ‘please’ was his only answer… and the only answer he needed. He pressed the vibrator hard against the thin skin of Aaron’s perineum as he withdrew the sound with a skilled twist of the wrist. “Then come fer me, a thaisce,” he ordered.

Aaron screamed out his pleasure as his body spasmed, arching in the restraints and sending him swaying, adding to the overwhelming mix of new and old sensations. Sir’s voice, praising and soothing and urging him on, combined with the new and intense pleasure of the sounding and the concentrated sensation of the pin-point vibrator. It was too much, overloading his pleasure centers until he shattered. Aaron went slack in the swing, body still twitching with aftershocks, face a study of contented bliss.

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He came aware slowly, his body languid in the swing.

“Back with me then?” Sir’s voice asked, heavy with amusement and lust.

He sighed, shifting in the supporting straps and making the swing sway gently.

Sir groaned, His hands tightening around the straps, controlling the swing’s movements. “Easy, boy,” he growled, “or this’ll be over before it’s even begun.”

It took a minute for his pleasure-dulled senses to realize what his Sir was saying. Sir’s hips were pressed tight against his ass, His still hard cock stretching his relaxed hole. He turned wide eyes on his Sir who smiled and rocked the swing lightly. He hissed as he realized what Sir was doing. Sir was using the sway of the swing to fuck him. He tried to affect the momentum only to find himself completely without purchase and unable to do more than twist his hips or tighten his internal muscles to add to Sir’s sensations. Sir kept His green eyes fixed on his face as He kept the rhythm slow, driving Himself deep with each new thrust.

He could feel the ache of it building but knew there was no chance he’d come again so soon. But he could give his body over to his Sir, submitting completely to his Sir’s pleasure. “Please, Sir,” he sighed, body relaxing into the restraints of the swing. “Please.”

It seemed to be the signal Sir had been waiting for. He grabbed his hips and pulled their bodies together sharply, fighting the movement of the swing for several thrusts until the momentum shifted, adjusting to the new, powerful thrusts.

He felt like he was burning from the inside out, pleasure building to nearly painful levels as he watched Sir reach for His own release. His cock twitched, trying to respond, but there was nothing left. Nothing left but the sunburst warmth of Sir’s touch, of Sir’s need. A need he was fulfilling. “Love you,” he whispered, uncertain if he wished for Sir to hear it or not.

Sir’s green eyes darkened further. “Ta mo chrío istigh ionat,” He responded, voice rough, breathing ragged. Sir slammed forward one last time, arms tightening to keep them joined as He roared His release, hips jerking, fingers leaving deep bruises behind as they clenched tight. “Aaron,” He sighed. “My sweet, sweet Aaron.” He rested His forehead on one of the straps, regaining His breath. “Mine,” He rumbled, hands soothing over sweat damp skin.
“Yours,” he answered in kind.

Moving from the swing to the large bed wasn’t nearly as graceful or as romantic as either of them had hoped, but they managed (with some unintended bruises and a great deal of laughter). Patrick took his time cleaning his boy, delighting in the way Aaron relaxed under his hands. The dark of the collar against Aaron’s skin, the knowledge that this amazing man had accepted it, was a thrill all of its own. But there was more he wanted, more he hoped to ask of the man now lying heavy in his arms. But not at the moment, not when the emotions were so close to the surface, when his boy was still floating on the powerful waves of submission.

“You’re thinking too hard,” Aaron said quietly, his long fingers carding through Patrick’s graying chest hair absently. “What’s wrong?”

“Nothing,” Patrick reassured him, pressing a soft kiss to Aaron’s sweat-damp hair. “Everything’s fine.”

Aaron tilted his head back to study his too quiet Sir. “Um hum,” he replied noncommittally. “Tell me in the morning?” he pressed.

Patrick smiled. “In the morning, over breakfast,” he promised. “Now sleep, a thaisce. All is well.”

Morning came all too early for Aaron. His body ached in the most pleasant way, reminding him of the delightful activities of the night before. His hand went to his new collar, fingers running over it reverently as if uncertain it was real. It was. He stretched, reaching out for Patrick, only to find the bed not only empty, but cold. He sat up carefully, body protesting slightly. He ignored the twinges and looked around the elegant suite for his Sir, who was nowhere to be seen.

Eyes narrowing, he eased from the bed, worried for Patrick even as his profiler instincts told him that they were safe here at the Leaf. “Patrick?” he called out hesitantly.

“Here, Aaron,” a voice called from behind a screen he’d not noticed before. Not bothering with clothing, he joined his Sir in what turned out to be a small kitchen complete with a charming breakfast nook that was set for two. Patrick sat at the table, coffee cup and pastry already in front of him. “Andi sent her best for us this morning, but I thought you’d do better with a bit more sleep.”

Aaron smiled and went to kneel by his Sir’s side.

Patrick stopped him with a hand on his arm. “In the chair this morning, Aaron,” Patrick said softly. “I need you here as Aaron for a moment, not as my Irish.”

Aaron was suddenly worried. Had he done something wrong last night? Had he overstepped some boundary he didn’t even know was there?

“No. No, a thaisce,” Patrick reassured, rising from his seat and pulling Aaron into his arms. “It’s nothing like that. I swear it’s not.” He kissed his pensive lover, holding him until the stiff body relaxed against him. “Ruui always said I was absolute rubbish at these things,” he admitted as he urged Aaron down into a chair. “Let me start again. Last night I promised we’d talk this morning and that’s what I intend to do, I’m just not sure exactly where to start.” He pulled his chair close to Aaron’s so he could hold the younger man’s hand.

“When Ruui and I made things official,” he began, “Ruui had to all but beat me over the head to
make me realize what it was I really wanted. We had ten wonderful years before the damned cancer took him from me. His death taught me something valuable – we never know how long we have or when it might all be taken from us.” He took a deep breath, releasing it slowly. “And the damned pushy bastard made me promise him that I’d not waste the rest of me life grieving over him, but that I’d find a handsome, worthy young man and make that young man as happy as I’d made him.” He chuckled. “Don’t know as I did all that much to make him happy, but I promised him I’d try.”

He squeezed Aaron’s hand. “I hadn’t found anyone who lived up to my Ruui’s memory. He was one of a kind, he was. But David reminded me of something when we were planning and plotting how te get ya to agree to lettin’ me help with yer plan. He reminded me that Ruui wasn’t perfect. He could be a right pissy bastard when he wanted te be and his sulk would put Nick’s twins to shame.” He laughed. “He was human, flawed and wonderful and priceless, and I’d not have changed a second of what we shared. But… it’s hard for anyone to live up to an idolized memory,” he admitted softly.

“Until you.”

Aaron blinked at the revelation.

“Just hear me out before I lose me nerve, boy,” he pleaded. “Let your Sir make a right fool of himself before ya make up yer mind. I’ve seen ya face down yer worst demons. I’ve seen ya lead yer team with a skill that any dom would be proud of. And I’ve seen ya lost in yer passions. Ye’re amazing, boy. And I think Ruui would approve – I know I do.” He let go of Aaron’s hand and reached into his robe pocket. He took another deep breath and brought out a small, velvet box.

“I don’t know if I can make ya as happy as I apparently made Ruui,” he said with a wry smile. “But I’d like the chance to try.” He opened the box, revealing a silver key and a simple silver band set with a tasteful, square cut emerald that matched the ones on his collar. “Move in wi’ me. Love me and let me love you and that amazing little boy 24/7. Let me help take care of ya both as well as ya take care o’ me when wearing me collar – or out of it.”

He looked down at his hands, uncertain he wanted to see what was in Aaron’s eyes at that moment, worried about losing his nerve. “The apartment building is secure, in fact, we’ve got several people living here with a security clearance ya wouldn’t believe, so ya know it would be safe. It’s not directly connected to the Leaf even though a lot of the people from the Leaf live there – so it’s not like Jack would be exposed to the Lifestyle unexpectedly. Mistress and her husband live four doors down and have three kids, the middle one being right around Jack’s age and the Zakaria clan come by all the time, so he’d not lack playmates. And… well, I’d really like to have ya with me.”

Aaron had to free his hand from Patrick’s deathgrip. He then placed a warm finger against his Sir’s lips. “I work crazy hours. Jack can be a real handful, trust me. You’ve only seen him on his best behavior. I can be a real work-a-holic and sometimes I can’t shake the rough cases and the emotions come home with me. I lost Halley to this job, and I promise to try and do better, but it may take some time to break those old habits. That said, are you really sure you want to do this?”

“Positive,” Patrick answered without hesitation.

“Good,” Aaron said with a grin. “Because Jack’s been constantly asking *why* you couldn’t live with us all the time since you made me so happy.” He chuckled.

“Knew I liked that boy,” Patrick admitted with a broad smile.

Aaron laughed, then held out his left hand. He shivered as Patrick slipped the ring on him. Something seemed to ‘click’ inside as the ring settled into place, the emerald sparkling in the dim
light. He looked up at Patrick and graced him with a small smile. “I love you, Liam Patrick Zakaria,” he said formally.

Patrick returned the smile. “And I, you, a thaisce. And I you.”

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*Where thou art, that is home.* – Emily Dickinson

**Epilog – Four and a half months later**

“DA!” Jack yelled as Patrick came through the door at Jessica’s. The little boy ran to the older man, wrapping himself around the solid form. “Why are you picking me up? I thought daddy was picking me up tonight. We’re s’pose to go costume shopping tonight.”

Patrick smiled down at the little boy. “Your daddy and everyone are running a little late so I came to pick ya up. Is that okay? I mean. I could leave ya here if ye’d rather wait,” he teased, winking at Jessica over the little boy’s head.


“And we will,” he promised. “But, yer aunt JJ called and said the team could *really* use some little kid laughter when they got home. So, Will’s bringing Henry. I’m bringing a certain little tree frog,” he tapped Jack’s nose teasingly, making the boy giggle. “And Nick is bringing the twins.”

Jack’s wide smile got even wider. “Really?!?” He stopped, his expression going serious as he seemed to ponder the situation. “Can we go costume shopping with Greg and Annie?” he asked.

“We can see.”

“And you and Aunt Penny and Uncle Sean’ll help, right. Cause you all know the coolest outfits and,” he paused, eyes glancing around furtively. “daddy’s not so good with picking costumes,” he whispered. “OH, and we have to get somethin’ for daddy’s birthday!”

He and Jessica exchanged fond smiles. “We can do that,” he promised. “Now, go get yer stuff so we can meet the team when they get in.”

Jack smiled brightly. “Yes, Sir!” he said sharply, turning and walking quickly back to get his things.

As Patrick watched the little boy go, he couldn’t help but marvel at the domesticity he’d found and how, after so long, he’d once again found home.

**End Notes**

in order of appearance

*X-files*

Master Walt = Walter Skinner, Ms. Vixen = Dana Scully, Fox = Fox Mulder, and Alexi = Alex Krycek

*NCIS*
Gunny = Leroy Jethro Gibbs, his boy = Anthony "Tony" DiNozzo, his "pretty little Goth Girl" = Abby Sciuto

*CSI: Vegas* (hinted at but not directly mentioned)
House Obsidian members that helped Micha out - Greg Sanders and Gil Grissom, Lady Heather

*Law and Order: Special Victims Unit*
George Huang - psychologist from LO:SVU

*CSI: New York*
Sid Hammerback - Medical Examiner CSI:NY

*White Collar*
Mrs. B = Elizabeth Burke, her FBI husband (and one of her boys) = Peter Burke, her other boy = Neal Caffrey

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