



FCLP -- Field Carrier Landing Practice is also known as doing “touch and go’s”, or “bouncing” by the pilots. Every navy F/A-18 Pilot who ever landed on an aircraft carrier had to be pretty damn close to letter perfect. Getting it wrong on the ship could be fatal; hence, many practice

sessions on an airfield prior to the real thing. Hit the runway in exactly the right spot. Don't stop. Take off. Go around and do it again. Lt. Cameron Bradshaw gunned it and climbed out for the next pass. He glanced at his watch. 13:14. He had three more to do. With a little luck, he'd be done by maybe 1400. Beneath him, he noticed highway 264 had barely any traffic. Then again, early afternoon was between rush hours. The large divided highway ran from Norfolk to the oceanfront of Virginia Beach.

His focus was drifting. Yesterday had been filled with meetings. Over at Naval Operations Base, he'd endured fourteen people all crammed around a conference table. Two men from Naval Intelligence were couriering a highly experimental missile prototype from DC to White Sands. They were fourteen hours late for a check-in, but it was still uncertain if they were compromised, in danger or already dead. And that was part of his job. The weird part of his job. His split-life: part-time pilot, part-time "finder." Okay, to be more honest -- psychic.

He and hundreds of other government employees had been through a battery of screening tests. Tests he now knew were for psychic talents. He had always been good at finding things and people, illogically good. It was just a thing he did. The same thing that made him antsy in crowds over long periods of time. The same thing that made handshakes and slaps on the back uncomfortable. So he was recruited -- by Division P.

Division P, the black ops group of psychics on the government payroll. Not a team per se, not even a group exactly. They were an organization. If you passed the screening process, and less than 0.1% did, you were sent on for more testing. Each round was harder, with a near 100% failure rate. They only recruited a handful of people each year. He still wasn't sure what made him stand out among the rest. They had trained him and he was assigned. Nearly all the Division P people juggled two jobs: a normal average government career linked job, and then the job they did for Division P.

So, he had sat in the meeting, listening to the bigwigs hashing through all the available data. Someone had provided him with a bare bones personnel file for the two men and two personal items -- a wristwatch and a set of keys. These items might facilitate his search skills. In the end, a decision was made to wait a while longer. Apparently some very sensitive issues were at stake, and he was simply told that he was on stand-by.

"304, your state" said the LSO over the radio. The LSO was the Landing Safety Officer. His function during these practices was basically to "grade" your landing. No sugar coating for landing grades, a nice pass was graded as "OK." Hell, a perfect pass was an "OK underline."

"304 ... Hornet ball... 4.3," replied Bradshaw as he rolled his plane into the groove, that last half mile of the approach on the runway centerline.

"304... Come left." Bradshaw dipped his left wing, adjusting his angle of attack. Back to meatball and lineup. The F/A-18 hit the runway with the usual slightly bone jarring impact. Kicking the jet back into full power, he hurtled down past the arresting gear and took off again.

Over the radio he heard the LSO, “304, watch the settle on lineup in close.” Well, shit, thought Bradshaw, another fair pass, he was definitely letting the thoughts of the previous day get in the way of his concentration. Anything less than an “OK” was heading in the direction of what even a civilian would probably call a pretty crappy landing. He would have to make sure the last two were letter perfect.

The last pass was a full stop; he taxied in the direction of the hangar and parked his jet on the line outside, alongside ten others. Unstrapping, he had one main goal in mind -- get on his motorcycle and get off the base, Oceana Naval Air Station. He needed to get away from people. Maybe he’d head toward the beach. But all that would have to wait for at least an hour, because next on the agenda was sitting through the debrief. Oh, the infinite joys of protocol, procedure and the infamous LSO debrief.

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A short man with dark hair graying at the temples slid into the black BMW. He handed a slip of paper to the driver. It had the words Hell Dogs Squadron and two names on it.

“They’re considering sending one of the Division P people out looking for it,” the older man said. “One of these two men is the operative.”

“Which one?” asked the powerfully built man behind the wheel.

“We don’t know.”

“All right. It’ll be dealt with,” the driver replied.

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One hip replacement: check. One ACL repair: check. Rounds: check. Office hours: check. Orthopedic surgeon, Dr. Mason Flynn, was on his way home from work. It had been a long day, especially since it had started at five am and was now five pm. Chalk up yet another twelve hour work day. Nothing had gone particularly badly, it was just the grind. He had tomorrow off. Amazing. Maybe he’d go running on the beach, weather permitting and all that. Traffic was mercifully light on Shore Drive. He lived on the north end of the beach.

The tourist season was still a few weeks away. By the time Memorial Day passed, traffic would be much worse. There was a red light ahead. He pulled up behind a motorcycle, waiting on the light. When the light changed to green, the motorcycle began to pull away. And his world suddenly went into slow motion.

He saw the glint of reflected sunlight off the windshield of a pickup truck, speeding toward the intersection. His brain insisted that it was going to brake to a halt any second. It didn’t. It blew straight through the intersection and plowed into the motorcycle, sending both bike and rider cartwheeling across the intersection. And then the truck pulled out of the half spin it was in and

kept right on going. Mason was bolting out of the car before he even realized it, sprinting toward the rider.

The motorcyclist was sprawled limply on the pavement, on his side. Even from yards away, Mason could tell the man's leg was broken. Legs weren't supposed to bend a hand span below the knee. Mason fell to his knees beside the man and carefully slid his fingers under the lower edge of his helmet, seeking a pulse. He found it: weak and fast. He dug his cell phone out of his pocket and dialed 911.

"I need an ambulance on Shore Drive near Sandalwood Road. Hit and run. A pickup truck struck a motorcycle. He's in pretty bad shape. My name is Dr. Mason Flynn. I'm a surgeon at Norfolk General. You might want to consider sending Nightingale." Nightingale was the Hampton Roads area air ambulance, used frequently for the transport of critically injured patients.

He gave a few more bits of information to the dispatcher while he ran his hands along the rider's body. Blood was rapidly staining the road where the broken bones on the man's lower leg had ripped through both skin and the fabric of his jeans. Mason yanked off his dress shirt and wadded it up, pressing it firmly against the wound. That should slow the blood loss a bit. The man moaned as he began to regain consciousness, writhing weakly in pain.

"Easy. Don't be moving around. An ambulance is on the way," he said. He eased the face shield of the helmet up one-handed so he could see his patient's face. The rider's eyes fluttered open, but he looked hopelessly disoriented and his face scrunched in agony. Mason took one of the man's hands in his and squeezed. The thin black leather gloves he wore had been torn and bloodied by his impact with the road.

"Help's coming. Just stick with me," said Mason, trying to reassure the guy. He let go of the man's fingers and unzipped the leather jacket. The coat was scuffed and ripped but that meant less skin and tissue damage to its wearer. One less problem to deal with. He felt carefully across the motorcyclist's chest and his fingers encountered the faint ridge of dog tags, beneath thin t-shirt fabric. This guy was military. It figured, given the area. The largest navy base on the planet was less than ten miles away. And that didn't even count the handful of other bases scattered through the Hampton Roads area. Skimming his hand lightly down the soldier's side, he heard a whimpering moan as he crossed one side of the man's rib cage.

"Sorry. Bear with me. I'm a doctor. I'm trying to figure out how badly you're hurt," Mason apologized. He reached around beneath the jacket to run a gentle finger down the man's spine. No obvious depressions. Not that that meant the guy was necessarily free of spinal cord damage. The rider moaned a little and clutched at Mason's arm, eyes squeezing shut.

"I know you're in a lot of pain. Just try to keep as still as possible. ... My name's Mason. What's yours?" he coaxed. Keeping the man focused on some questions would be helpful. The cyclist opened his eyes and met Mason's gaze.

"C-c -cam," he whispered. "Lieutenant Cameron Bradshaw...." His eyelids were squeezing shut again. Mason wished he had some idea how long it would take the ambulance. The blood from

the leg injury was soaking the fabric of the shirt pressed against it. He was going to have to do something or this guy probably wasn't going to make it. Something he was probably going to regret. He touched his fingers to the man's cheek, and slid the other up under Cam's T-shirt.

"Look at me Cam. I need you to focus on me. We're going to spend a few minutes checking to see what else is damaged besides your leg. You have to talk to me, okay?"

"Yeah...."

"Top down then." And he mentally crossed his fingers that he could stabilize Cam's heart and breathing while he did the rest at the same time.

"Head first." Mason blinked slowly and extended his healing Talent, seeking head trauma. He mentally traced lightly across the top of Cam's head, and down the back of his skull. The man was rattled, disoriented, and in a lot of pain, but thank the god that invented helmets, there didn't appear to be anything major there, just a bit of a concussion. But Cam was going into shock. Not good. Mason concentrated on his other hand for a moment, reinforcing his patient's pulse a little. "How bad does your head hurt? A little? A lot?"

"A little."

"Wiggle your fingers for me. Just your fingers, nothing else," said Mason. Cam managed to waggle the fingers of his left hand. "Other hand too." That one barely moved, but then again, the shoulder it was attached to seemed damaged. Mason plunged his healing sense toward the shoulder. The scapula was cracked, not badly, but enough to trigger the beginnings of the inflammation response. His first impression seemed to be holding true, though, there was probably no serious spinal damage. He threw his senses wide open and ran a quick "systems check" of the man's vitals. Not good, and Cam was fading into unconsciousness again.

"Try to focus on your breathing for a minute," Mason said, one hand sliding cautiously across the skin of Cam's chest. He detected a couple of cracked ribs and there was internal bleeding, too. "Can you do that?"

"Uh-huh." It was as much a groan as a response. Mason cursed under his breath and focused his Talent on the bleeding. He had to get a handle on that. There was a damaged spleen, bruised kidneys, and some lesser damage to the liver. Cam was slipping, literally dying beneath his hands. Mason "reached out" and, getting a grip on the faltering life force, forcibly yanked it toward him. He poured out a vast amount of energy through his hands, feeling spleen and liver lacerations beginning to mend, feeling the texture of this man's essence within his grip. Was he defying death by doing this? Damn straight. Nobody was going to die on his shift if he could prevent it. He blinked hard and shook his head. The amount of energy he was putting out was leaving dizziness in its wake. Keep going, Cam's not out of danger yet, he told himself. He turned his attention to the leg. He wasn't going to be able to fix the broken bone, not out here on the highway, but the bleeding he could do something about.

In the background, Flynn heard a couple of cars slowing to a stop. Traffic was beginning to back up a little as the morbidly curious stopped to gawk.

He adjusted the hand he was using to keep pressure on the open wound and turned half his attention back to keeping Cam conscious.

“Talk to me, Cam. Tell me where you work.”

“Oceana.”

“You a pilot?”

“Uh-huh.”

Mason let his Talent seal one blood vessel at a time, slowly, carefully “What do you fly?”

“F/A-18.”

“Sounds like fun.”

“Your hands.....” Cam whispered.

“Don’t worry. I’m here. You’re not alone. I’m just trying to stop the bleeding.”

“They’re hot.”

“Hmmm? What’s hot?” Truthfully Mason was only half listening to his patient, too busy trying to juggle keeping Cam stable and slow the blood loss at the same time.

“Your hands.... You’re psi....” Cam mumbled.

Oh, that caught Mason’s attention. How did Cam know? How could he know? Cam’s breath hitched weakly and Mason could feel the body beneath his hands still trying to shut down. In the distance, he thought he could hear a siren.

“I’m just a doctor, trying to make sure you hang on till the ambulance gets here.” Mason glanced at the leg. The blood flow had slowed to a bare trickle. He lifted his hand and brushed it along Cam’s face, trying to calm the man. He was mystified. No one had ever made the connection between what they might feel and the reason behind it.

“Look at me, Cam. I know it hurts a lot. Just try to breathe slow and steady,” he said.

Cam’s gaze slowly met his. Beautiful deep blue-grey eyes. Mason felt like he had been sucker punched as another mind brushed lightly across his. Oh fuck. That’s how the guy knew. He was psi, too. And then the touch fell away. There was just too much pain to sustain the contact.

Mason realized he had left a smear of blood across Cam's cheek by touching him with blood stained fingers. It was one of those meaningless, irrelevant thoughts that cropped up when stress took over. He was going to have to leave the rest of it until he could get Cam to the OR. So, he turned his Talent back to keeping Cam reasonably stable. The pilot was still in deep shock.

"M c-cold... hands so... warm," Cam muttered.

"Yeah, I know. You're in shock. I think I hear the siren. We'll get you warm soon," he said soothingly, and poured more energy into Cam's body. "You know, this is your lucky day. I could have been just some bank clerk on my way home. But I happen to be an orthopedic surgeon. And I'm going to make sure you get put back together just fine."

"Tell Div'n P 'll help..." he mumbled.

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The pain came in waves. Cam wasn't sure if the excruciating surges were in time with his pulse or his breathing. Not that it mattered. His hearing seemed to be fading in and out. No, maybe that was the approaching sirens. The electric thrum of warmth from the hands touching him was all that was holding the chilly terrifying darkness at bay. The man was psi. Nothing else produced that sensation, maybe short of sticking your finger in a light socket. Light. Lights. Red lights. His awareness was drifting, but he could hear the throaty rumble of the fire truck. Oh, that's for me, he thought.

"Cam, look at me," said the doctor. Cam strained to focus his eyes on the face above him. "The EMTs are here. There's going to be a lot of stuff going on. Try to stick with us."

One set of hands gripped his neck and jaw while his helmet was pulled off with one slow motion. Someone else was putting a cervical collar on him and slitting his jacket up the sleeve. There was a squeeze from a blood pressure cuff. A sharp prick in his arm drew his attention for a moment

"We're going to put you on a backboard. Try to take deep breaths. This is probably going to hurt," said one of the paramedics. Cam felt many hands touching him, lifting him, easing him onto his back. A tide of agony swept through him and his vision grayed out.

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"Hey Cam, open your eyes. The hard part's done. You're on the back board. The rest won't hurt so bad," Mason said. He brushed a careful finger along the pilot's cheek. Cam's face contorted in a grimace as he drew in a tortured breath. One of the paramedics placed an oxygen mask over his face. Mason hoped that would ease his breathing a little.

"I'm going to the hospital with him," Mason said. This was followed by a hard swallow that only intensified the icy knot developing in his stomach. He was borderline terrified of flying, but if he didn't go... he wasn't sure Lt. Bradshaw was going to survive.

“Okay. Is that your car?” asked the paramedics, jerking a thumb in the direction of his royal blue Mustang.

“Oh, yeah. I guess I should pull it off the road,” Mason realized. He looked down at his patient. “Hang tight. I’ll be back in a couple minutes.” As he pulled his car off onto the shoulder and locked it, he could hear the thup-thup of the chopper of the distance. Walking back in the direction of his patient he spared a moment to glance at the badly mangled hulk of the motorcycle. A number of pieces lay strewn across the pavement.

While they waited for the chopper, he stood beside the navy man lying on the stretcher. He took hold of Cam’s hand again, squeezing his fingers. The man looked somehow relieved that Mason had returned. Physical contact was a necessity for the healing part of his Talent. Mason took a deep breath and pushed energy through the link. The Lieutenant had started deteriorating again while he’d been moving the car. But then he had been peripherally aware of that even without touching Cam. Mason knew that once he was connected this strongly to someone he was healing, it could take hours before he stopped feeling their presence. It was yet another reason why he seldom did this sort of thing. But fuck it all, he’d just have to suck it up and deal with the consequences. He’d had a few people die under his hands over the past decade, and it had been traumatic, way, way more shattering than an average normal surgeon ever experienced. He wasn’t going to let it happen this time. The chopper landed and there was another spate of activity as Cam was loaded in and Mason climbed in beside him.

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The downwash from the rotors blew across Cam’s body as he lay on the stretcher. Despite the fact he was covered by a blanket, it made him feel even colder. A shiver ran through him and the motion triggered another clench of pain. He gulped at the oxygen flowing across his face. The doctor was still holding his hand. His riding glove been pulled off and he could feel the warm skin of the other man’s palm against his own. That thrumming heat was flowing into his body, holding the pain at bay just a little. It would be nice not to die alone. He had always thought he’d get shot out of the sky. His pulse pounded a little harder. He didn’t want to die. Fuck, he was only thirty one.

His body was jolted again as the stretcher slid into the helicopter. More pain. The healer said something to him, but the sound was drowned by the noise. He tried to focus on the man’s face. The guy’s face was calm, but through the link of their hands, Cam felt a deep worry. He could sense emotions, they helped with the “finding” thing, but actual thoughts tended to elude him.

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The chopper lifted off and headed for the hospital. Mason knelt on the floor of the chopper beside Cam, talking to him. He was fading in and out of the edge of consciousness, his fingers clutching Mason’s tightly. He was obviously scared and confused and in extreme pain. Mason’s left hand stroked through Cam’s short hair.



Getting him to the hospital and up to the OR was Mason's primary goal. Hopefully the trauma surgeon on duty would be ready. But Mason worried. Every time he let go of Cam's hand, his breathing became erratic and his pulse wavered. Mason stroked his thumb across Cam's fingers, talking to him.

"Hey, Cam, don't fade out on me. Tell me where you were headed on your motorcycle," he prompted.

"Base."

"Where had you been?"

"Beach."

"Shore Drive's kind of the wrong direction to get back to Oceana."

"Takin' long way... just riding..."

The helicopter settled on the landing pad. Cam sucked in a shallow breath of pain as the jolt from landing shook his body.

"Hang tight, man, you're almost there," Mason reassured him.

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In the ER, Mason gave the trauma surgeon a quick heads up on what he suspected while the rest of Cam's clothing was cut off and X-rays were taken. Another orthopedic surgeon was called to deal with the broken leg. Mason almost insisted that he would scrub-in and help put this guy back together, and then thought the better of it. He had put out so much energy trying to make sure Cam hung on that his muscles were beginning to shake in exhaustion. That kind of fatigue was apt to make him sloppy in the OR. He was relieved when the orthopedic guy on call turned out to be Steve Villetti, one of the other partners in his practice. Villetti was a short muscular man with jet black hair and a dark complexion. He gave Mason a hairy eyeball look when he hurried into the ER.

"Mas'! You look like shit! You okay?" Villetti gestured at Mason's blood stained clothing.

"Yeah, I'm fine. I was the first one on the scene. Fuck, I watched this poor guy get hit by a pickup truck that ran the red light," said Mason, running a hand back through his hair. That probably wasn't a brilliant maneuver considering the dried blood on his fingers, but he really didn't care at that point.

"They done with X-rays?" asked Villetti.

“Being developed right now. I’m pretty sure he’s got a tibial plateau fracture and the fibula’s probably cracked in a couple places, too. Oh, and it’s an open one.” He held up his bloodstained hand in support of the information.

“Guess there’s going to be some hardware involved in putting it all back together,” speculated Villetti.

“Oh yeah. And this guy’s a navy pilot, so even if the fracture pattern didn’t already suggest it, I think an Ilizarov would be a good idea.” An Ilizarov device often went by the slang term of “dinosaur cast”. It was a rod and steel ring system drilled directly into the bones and bolted together on the outside of the limb. It was incredibly useful for severe and open breaks, no traditional plaster or fiberglass involved.

“Mmm, let me look at the X-rays first, but I think I’ll probably agree,” replied Villetti. “You going home?”

“No... I... I think I’m going to hang around until you and the trauma guy are done. I think I’d sleep better knowing this guy made it through surgery,” Mason admitted. Villetti nodded and headed toward the OR.

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Mason headed for the locker room. The plan: shower away the blood, scrounge a set of clean scrubs, and hit the cafeteria for food. If he lay down, he’d probably sleep for twelve hours, he was that tired. But he was also still very worried about Cameron.

He scrubbed the dried blood out from under his fingernails and stood under the water letting it hit him across the back of his neck. If he concentrated, he could still detect Cam’s presence, distant, faint, but still alive. Hopefully, Cam would stay that way.

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Mason lingered over a second cup of truly mediocre coffee in the hospital cafeteria. He had eaten and felt a little less wiped out now, but the exhaustion was still lingering in the background. When he finally let himself crash, there was going to be big time sleeping involved. He glanced at his watch for probably the fortieth time, mentally trying to estimate how long it would take for the surgery. Two hours had crawled by. They might be getting done about now if there weren’t any nasty, unforeseen complications. He drained the last the coffee and headed in the direction of OR.

Villetti and the trauma surgeon, a guy by the name of Craig Stephenson, were stripping off gowns and gloves as Mason reached the OR.

“So, give me a play by play. How’d it go?” Mason prompted.

“Partial splenectomy, and repaired a few liver lacerations. I noticed one of his kidneys was bruised and I was expecting worse bleeding there, but he lucked out,” said the trauma surgeon.

“What about the leg? And did any other major breaks show up?” Mason asked Villetti.

“The usual screws and plates on the leg. And yeah, I did the external fixation especially since the tibia had come through the skin. You did an awesome job controlling the bleeding and all out there in the field. I’m almost surprised this guy didn’t bleed out on the road. Oh, and there’s a couple of hair cracks along his right scapula. Nothing that needed fixing, they’ll heal in four to six weeks, I suspect.”

Mason gave himself an internal thank-you to his healing Talent

“Is he in ICU?” Mason asked.

“Yep. We went through six units of blood, and even so, his B.P.’s running kind of low,” replied Stephenson.

“Do you mind if I go have a look at him?” asked Mason.

“Not at all. I think he was one lucky bastard to have someone with medical training see the accident happen. It’s gotta be a bit of system shock to you to actually see something like that happen.”

“It was. Seriously. I kept thinking the truck was gonna stop. Even after it hit him, it kept on going. I hope the police find him and throw the book at him.”

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Mason walked into the ICU cubicle. Cameron Bradshaw lay under a sheet that had been pulled up to mid-chest. All the usual lines and tubes protruded from his body, IV’s, EKG lines, catheter, drainage and the oxygen mask that covered the lower part of his face. His skin had that gray-white pallor that the critically ill often seemed to get. Mason grabbed a stool from the corner and sat down next to Cam, chart open in one hand. But he wasn’t really reading the chart. He reached out and touched a couple of fingers to Cam’s wrist. He let his extra senses do a hasty scan to check and see if anything jumped out at him that the other surgeons hadn’t picked up. Nothing immediately drew his attention, but then he didn’t really have the time for a full and complete exam if he didn’t want to draw unwanted attention.

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One of the ICU nurses walked into the cubicle to check on her patient.

“Hey, Dr. Flynn. You don’t usually hang around waiting for them to come round,” said the nurse. “If you want we can page you when he does.”

“That’s okay. I’ll stay. Technically speaking, I’m off duty.”

“Something specific about this one? Well, besides the fact he’s in ICU.”

“Yeah, I guess you could say that.”

“Something we need to watch for ?”

“No... no... I... I saw the pickup truck hit him. I held him together while we waited on the ambulance. I suppose I’m a bit wierded out by the whole thing.”

“Wow, that’s kind of epic,” said the nurse. Mason gave her a half-smile and nodded.

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Dim sounds broke through the darkness. And pain. Cam clawed his way back toward consciousness. His breath sounded harsh and airy and every inhalation brought a dull, tight wave of agony. He needed to get away from the pain, needed to move, needed to run, but his body refused to cooperate. Even his eyelids were pressed shut by a leaden weight. Move your fingers. Move your God damn fingers, he raged at himself, and panic began to set in.

A staccato beeping noise was getting louder. He made a concerted effort to clench his fist. If he could just move, maybe the pain would die down. Somebody’s fingers scooped up his hand and squeezed it. The hand was warm and reassuring. He felt a wondrous soft thrum of energy flowing into his hand and through his body, easing the pain. Someone was talking: male voice and then a female voice. The words made no sense, just noise. The pain dropped back a fraction at a time. Breathing was easier and that beeping thing was slowing. Heart rate, he slowly realized, the beeping sound was in sync with his pulse.

“...might need... Setting... morphine pump... breakthrough...” Certain words from the male voice actually began to make some kind of vague sense. Well, at least they were real words. He finally managed to force his eyes open. It didn’t help much. Most of what he saw was a white blur. And he was cold. Meat locker, his brain supplied helpfully. That didn’t make sense.

“Cam?” Someone said his name: the male voice.

“Cam? Can you look at me?” Something touched his right temple. Turn your head, you moron, look at the person talking to you. You need to know who the hell they are, he told himself. His head rolled a little in the direction of the touch. A man. That man. The one who’d talked to him while he was dying. The one’d who held some of the pain back. Did that mean he was dead now? That didn’t make sense either.

“Cam. You’re in the hospital. You had a motorcycle accident,” the man said. Cam’s entire body jerked, and pain mixed with the images that washed through him. Helicopter, impact, shiny, weightlessness, sirens, wheel above him, pain. “It’s okay. It’s okay. You’re alive. You’re safe. There are people taking care of you.” The words faded toward meaningless sounds for a

moment, before starting to register again. He felt his fingers tighten slightly around the other man's hand. Even though the information only half made sense, the warm buzz of energy was a lifeline.

"Ok, I gave him a bolus of six and reset the baseline to ten an hour," said the female voice.

"Good. I think the internal injuries in combination with the broken bones are just pegging his pain limits." Cam's vision cleared enough that he could look at the man again, but the mental fog of the morphine sucked away his comprehension of the situation. He slid back into unconsciousness.

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Mason held Cameron Bradshaw's hand as he waited for the heavy dose of morphine to hit Cam's system. To the nurse, he was certain it looked like he was being incredibly kind and supportive to the patient. In reality, he was squashing down as much of the rampant pain Cam was experiencing as possible, while he waited for the narcotic to do its job. If he hadn't been so dead exhausted, he probably could have blocked it entirely, but some was better than none.

The beep of the EKG settled into a slow, steady rhythm as Cam slipped into unconsciousness. The tense, weak hold Cameron's hand had on his own relaxed into limpness and Cam's breathing eased into something gentler. Mason's thumb stroked across the back of the slack hand. There was nothing else he could do right now.

Mason practically stumbled out the door of ICU. He pulled his cell phone out and called a taxi. His car was still parked on Shore Dr. He'd have to retrieve it sometime tomorrow.

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Cam woke several times during the night. It had to be night; the lights above him were dim, even if the level of background noise didn't seem to alter. Night, hospital, pain, that much he managed to fully comprehend, everything else seemed tangled. Sometimes he saw a nurse, touching him, checking on him, often he was alone. There were other people, too many people, some of those were in pain, and some were dying. He could feel their presences. His psychic shielding was gone, nothing was protecting him from the minds of those around him. It was a horribly garbled, distracting confusion that only seemed to fuel his pain. Sometimes the pain lessened, and it was somehow tied to the presence of the nurse. It took him three tries to make the connection that she was probably giving him something to dull the agony. Sometimes he slept. Sometimes he drifted. If he had had enough energy, he would have screamed.

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Dr. Mason Flynn slept for twelve hours. Lying sprawled across the bed, squinting in the direction of the clock, he really wasn't surprised. It had probably been at least a couple years since he put out that much energy for healing. He wasn't supposed to work today, but a little internal voice,

that probably ought to go by the name ‘conscience’ kept telling him that he needed to check on Cameron.

Shower, shave, breakfast. Mason stuffed his ID badge in his pocket and called a cab, again. He needed to retrieve his car from where he’d left it.

There was actually some paperwork he needed to do at the hospital, though nothing pressing. He probably ought to stop by to check on Maggie, the seventy eight year old woman he’d done the hip replacement on the day before, too. Then he could swing by the ICU and check on Cameron.

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The executive officer of the Hell Dogs Strike Fighter Squadron, Rochester, stood in the ICU cubicle looking down at the pilot under his command. He had received a five am phone call from a CACO notifying him that one of his men had been airlifted to Norfolk General after a serious motorcycle accident the previous night. Lt. Cameron Bradshaw had a brother listed as next-of-kin. Rochester had left two messages on an answering machine already, without any response. He looked down at the man lying in the ICU bed. Wires, tubes, monitors, hardware... sweet mother of God, Bradshaw looked absolutely awful. One of the hospital staff had read him what sounded like a horrendous number of injuries. Damaged spleen, lacerated liver, cracked ribs, cracked shoulder blade, shattered lower right leg. He wondered if his pilot would ever recover enough to fly again.

A nurse came into the cubicle. She started checking vitals and monitors. Rochester glanced at her in silence.

“You can talk to him, sir. Even if he’s asleep, a familiar voice can be comforting,” she said. He nodded, but had to wrack his brain for something to say.

“Um... Bradshaw... This is Commander Rochester. I... We... The squadron would like you to know that we’re all worried about you,” said Rochester. He shoved his hands in his pockets, and stood in silence for another few minutes, uncertain if he should stay or go.

Another man walked in and looked directly at the nurse. He was wearing a dark suit and tie with his sunglasses dangling from the breast pocket of his jacket. Rochester decided his appearance basically screamed “fed.”

“Ms. Ringold?” the man said to the nurse, peering at her name tag.

“Yes?”

“Daniel Valentine. Federal Agent. Division P. I need the name of Bradshaw’s attending physician,” he said as he flashed his ID. The nurse carefully eyeballed the proffered ID.

“Dr. Steven Villetti,” she said. Rochester watched the agent with considerable interest. He knew that Lt. Bradshaw had an additional duty commitment. Bradshaw’s personnel file was red-

flagged with it. Division P was some sort of covert ops thing. Bradshaw only ever got pulled away from his normal duties on rare occasions, but when it happened, there was no warning, no explanation afterward, and Division P orders superseded anything else Bradshaw might have been slated to do.

“I’m Bradshaw’s XO, Commander Rochester. Did his accident have something to do with Division P?” Rochester said. The man gave him a level gaze.

“No. It didn’t,” was the reply. Geezus, that struck Rochester as plausible denial if he’d ever heard it. “Ms. Ringold,” the man continued, “How do I get in touch with Dr. Villetti? And can you tell me what the Lieutenant’s current status is?”

The nurse looked at the agent with something that approached suspicion.

“He’s been upgraded from critical to serious condition. Dr. Villetti’s office number can be obtained from the information desk in the front lobby,” she said.

Rochester smiled to himself a little. The nurse had told the man almost nothing.

“Are you planning on having him transferred?” Rochester fished.

“Doubtful. My superiors are just assuring that he’s being adequately cared for.” With that, the agent walked out of the cubicle.

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It was almost mid-morning by the time Mason made it to the ICU. He stood at the nurses’ station for a long moment, staring at the pilot from the raised platform in the center of the complex. Cam had dark hair, in the military haircut, currently with skin pale enough to nearly match the sheets. And the guy was gorgeous. Well, in as much as anyone could be in ICU. Why the hell hadn’t he noticed that before? Maybe ‘cause I was too busy trying to keep him alive, Mason mentally kicked himself. Cam’s eyes were open and he was vaguely watching the activity going on in the area.

Mason picked up Cam’s chart and glanced through it. His vitals had stabilized out pretty well. He appeared to have had a fairly quiet night after the massive trauma his body had been through. Mason walked into the cubicle. Cam turned his head to look at Mason. His eyes focused a little more as he seemed to recognize Mason, but there was still a heavy glaze of pain mixed with the drugs.

“I don’t even know your name,” Cam said hoarsely. Mason smiled.

“I did actually tell you but I’m sure you don’t remember. I’m Dr. Flynn.”

“Got a first name ?”

“Mason,” he replied. “You’re looking a little bit better. A little less like death warmed over.”

“Still hurts like hell. One of the nurses seems to think I was very lucky not to be dead.”

“I tend to agree. It was definite luck to have a doctor in the car behind you. Not so lucky to get plowed into by the pickup,” commented Mason. Cam looked at him for a long moment.

“I only remember pieces of that,” he said slowly.

“I’m not surprised. I think I should have a look at the fixation.” Mason eased the blankets away from Cam’s leg. His lower leg was heavily bandaged where the plates had been put in. Metal bars ran down both sides of his leg, from a little above the knee down to the ankle. Metal pins threaded through bone secured the bars to steel circles.

“What’s with all the hardware?” Cam asked. “When I actually got around to looking at it, I thought I would see a cast.”

“It’s called an external fixation. But, most people tend to refer to it as a dinosaur cast, because it looks like the bars they use to put dinosaur skeletons together in a museum.”

“Yeah, I guess it does.”

“You’re unfortunately going to be in it for eight to ten weeks or so. It promotes stronger healing. It’ll let you get to physical therapy a whole lot sooner. And -- number one advantage -- you get to take a shower a few days from now.”

“Ten weeks?”

“The bones were broken in eight places. It’s going to take some healing time.”

“How long am I going to spend in here?”

“In ICU or in the hospital?” Mason asked.

“Both, I guess.”

“If everything’s calm, for the rest of the day. They may send you up to a regular room tonight. Then three, maybe, four days till you’re out. Followed by therapy three times a week for the next couple of months.”

“Just great.”

“I know. It’s not going to be easy.”

Cameron suddenly looked thoroughly exhausted. The hand without the IV in it fiddled listlessly with the blanket and he stared blankly at the wall.



Mason gazed at him. Cam had that lost little boy look. Oh God, it was about to break his heart. Mason just wanted to wrap his arms around the guy and hold him and comfort him and tell him he would heal. And maybe kiss the guy senseless. Oh damn, don't go there. What was wrong with him? He'd had hundreds of patients, who ranged in age from toddlers to nearly a hundred years old, from every race and every social stratum, including his fair share of really buff delicious athletics types, eye candy for the gay man that he was. And he gave himself another mental kick in the head, because he suddenly realized Cam was in pain.

Mason laid a hand on Cam's, trying to assess just how bad it was. It was definitely ramping up in the direction of grit-your-teeth level.

"Did the nurse show you how to activate the PCA?"

"Huh?"

"No, I guess not. Never mind. We'll worry about that later." Mason realized that Cam was still too incoherent to really make use of the function on the morphine pump that would allow him to receive a small dose of the painkiller on his command by pushing a button that lay on the bed beside him. His conscious attention span was too short at the moment. Mason rubbed his thumb against the skin of Cam's wrist, sending Cam a soothing flow of energy, damping down the pain. While he was at it, he focused on a minute amount of active healing, further repairing the injuries to the spleen and liver.

Cam's eyes widened a little and he stared at Mason. Mason felt a fumbling brush of presence against his thoughts. It was raw and vaguely desperate.

"You're psi. You're a healer," Cam whispered. Mason suddenly had the desire to bolt and run far away. No one could know. The ramifications were too high. He'd spend the rest of his life locked in some lab, running through a metaphorical maze. But it was obvious that Cameron Bradshaw had something extra in his mental wiring, too. How much did he understand it? The number of other psi that Mason had run across in his life could be counted on his fingers, and the majority of those tended to fall in the "new age/fringe culture" category.

"I can't talk about it. Not here... not now," Mason murmured. Cam nodded a little.

"Got it," he whispered. "Maybe later." Cam's eyes were drifting shut. Mason stood beside the bed for several more minutes. He picked up the button that triggered a dose of morphine and pushed it. When he left in a few minutes, it would keep Cam asleep for a while after he stopped actively blocking Cam's pain.

Something nagged at him. Why wasn't the usual pain control regimen working very well? Was the pilot a drug user? Long term substance abuse could lead to extremely elevated narcotic tolerance. But none of the information he had gathered from touching Cam seemed to support that idea. He had read a couple of papers on endorphin production and narcotic tolerance. The guy was a pilot, who flew jets for a living, if that didn't classify as an adrenaline junkie, nothing

did. The other option was that there was something deeply damaged by the accident, that wasn't presenting any other symptoms. With his healing talent he might be able to track it down, but it would take time, significantly more time than five or ten minutes of standing by Cam's bed. Then again, people had different pain thresholds; he'd seen a few professional athletes in tears from a simple fracture and some little old ladies who were absolutely tougher than nails. Mason stood chewing his lip, watching Cam slowly fall asleep. He had already done so very much more for this patient than any since med school. Why did it seem so insufficient?

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It must be doctor visit day, Cam thought. He blinked wearily as he watched Dr. Villetti leave. The trauma surgeon whose name, he had totally forgotten now, had been by in the morning. Mason Flynn was next, and then the orthopedic surgeon who had fixed his leg. The nurse had mentioned that his XO had also been by, while he was asleep. Only Mason Flynn had been outright pleasant and had lingered for more than the necessary three minutes to check charts and ask a question or two. Mason had taken away the pain for awhile. Cam was still trying to wrap his head around that one. Based on his training time with Division P, he remembered some commentary that healers were the rarest of all psychic talents. And of those, most had limited skill. There was exactly one at Division P who was the full, real deal. Peter Vithoulkas. Cam had only met the guy once. Vithoulkas was one of the few who actually lived at the Suffolk based complex. He didn't do field work, and didn't have a "day job" like most other Division P operatives.

The nurse came through again. Cam rolled his head a little to look at her.

"How're you doing, honey?" she asked.

"Okay. M' thirsty," he whispered.

"I can get you some ice chips. Does that sound like a good thing?"

"Yeah."

"I'll be back in a minute then," she said and vanished briefly. She returned with a cup in her hand and gave him a little bit of ice at a time. "You have family?" she asked.

"A brother."

"I just wondered. One of the other nurses said a couple of men came by to see you. Guys in uniform. I guess they were people you work with."

"Squadron guys."

"I suppose. You were asleep. They only stayed for a few minutes."

“I keep fading out,” murmured Cam. It was frustrating to only be able to hold onto a set of thoughts for a few minutes.

“It’ll get better. Your body’s been through a rough time.” She patted his hand and he was ambushed by her flicker of interest. She thought he was really cute. It was flattering, but it was also uncomfortable to be that aware of someone else’s feelings. What the hell had happened to the shielding that he had learned at Division P? Had it been damaged along with his body? In frustration his muscles clenched. Oh fuck. Bad idea. He sucked in a sharp breath of agony.

“Guess it’s time to top up your meds,” the nurse said and proceeded to fiddle with his IV. In another minute, he felt consciousness beginning to slide away.

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A quick stop by the ICU confirmed that Cameron Bradshaw had been moved to a regular room. Mason hadn’t managed to pry himself away from regular work commitments until the end of the day. Five minutes, he told himself. Five minutes for a quick check on Bradshaw to make sure things were going okay. He wondered if he was being obsessive about the whole situation. The man wasn’t really even his patient. It had to be the whole combination: watching the accident happen, keeping Cameron alive, the apparently mutual awareness that they both bore psi talents. All of it tangled together into intense curiosity mixed with concern and a touch of attraction. Just how lame was that? The poor guy was recovering from nearly lethal injuries and here he was idly wondering about trying to date the pilot. Pilot. Military. Oh yeah, like that was going to happen.

Mason jogged down the stairs to the other floor and walked up the hall toward Cam’s room. He opened up his senses to the faint hint of connection that still lingered between them. A knot formed in his stomach. There was something wrong. His steps became a little more hurried. He forced himself to open the door slowly.

Inside, a nurse stood at the bedside. She had curly blond hair and a very shapely body. She held a cloth in one hand; the other hand lay against Cam’s side trying to gently restrain him. He was struggling to push her away.

“Honey, you need to hold still. We have to do this. You need to have a bath,” she softly reprimanded him.

“No, no please... no.” Cam was whimpering. The nurse looked up at the open door. She looked somewhere between embarrassed and faintly annoyed at the appearance of a doctor.

“I have orders to give him a bath. I’m afraid he’s being rather uncooperative,” she said carefully.

“Mmm, I need to have a look at the fixation anyway. I’ll finish for you,” said Mason.

The nurse looked positively startled. Doctors seldom stooped to do such mundane things for patients, but then again Mason Flynn knew he already had a reputation for being far more hands on than most surgeons.

“It’s no problem. I can finish when you’re done,” she offered. Her hand was still on Cam, firmly holding him mostly motionless, and being this close, Mason could tell the man was nearing outright hysteria.

“It may take a while. I also need to discuss PT options with him. I’ll finish,” said Mason evenly with a tone that left no room for discussion. She nodded and laid the cloth on the open package of bathing supplies and walked out, not shutting the door. Mason glared slightly at her departing back. It must have been a tiny and deliberate objection. The door was never left open if a patient was being bathed. He walked over and pushed it shut.

He turned his attention back to Cam. The pilot was curled on his side, eyes squeezed shut, not quite hyperventilating. Mason walked over to the bed and bent down a little.

“Cameron? Cam?” he spoke softly. “She’s gone.” Cam’s eyes opened slowly and gave a look of guarded fear. He relaxed somewhat when he saw Mason. “Did she hurt you?” Mason asked.

“N-not ...physically,” Cam mumbled. Mason wasn’t so sure.

“Can I touch you?” he asked.

“Yeah.”

Mason laid his fingertips on Cam’s arm. There was some physical pain, not a huge amount. He could tell there was still a very heavy load of narcotics in Cam’s body. The discomfort that bordered on terror seemed to have come from the touch of the nurse. It had flooded Cam with adrenaline and somewhat overwhelmed his nervous system. Mason could feel the pounding heart rate finally beginning to slow a little. He stroked a thumb across Cam’s skin, mentally soothingly the jangled nerves back a little toward normal.

There was a gentle flit of Cameron’s mind against his own. Raw, uncomfortable, as if Cam were trying to both hide and peek at the same time. Mason looked at him for a long moment. There was something missing, almost as if Cam was as mentally naked as he was physically. Defenses, Mason realized. Although his encounters with other psi had been few, he realized that he was used to noticing a sort of mental defense system. Even regular people had very light ones, Cam had none.

“The people who trained me called it shielding,” whispered Cam with a shaky breath.

Mason’s eyebrows rose. He was slightly surprised at the comment. “Are you a telepath?” Mason asked.

“Not exactly; it’s complicated.” Cam didn’t offer any more. Mason was aware there was more: much, much more.

“Do you, um, usually have shielding?” he asked. God, this was a freaking awkward conversation.

“Yeah, I do. But not since the accident.”

“Do you think that means it was damaged? You only had a minor concussion. Thank God for good helmets.”

“I don’t know.”

“Maybe as the rest of your injuries heal?” Mason suggested.

“Maybe.” They both lapsed into silence.

Mason realized his own hand was still on Cam’s arm. There was no indication his own touch was causing any sort of discomfort.

“You’re not hurting me,” Cam said. “She... I know it wasn’t her fault. It just...” he was fumbling for words.

“It’s okay. I sort of get it. I wasn’t just distracting her. I do want to have a look at your leg. And I can finish cleaning you up, if that’s better for you.”

Cam gave him a somewhat pleading look. “Not her,” he whispered.

Mason nodded. He spent a couple of minutes checking all the pin sites that were drilled into Cam’s leg. They were seeping just a little, but showed no sign of infection. Then he turned his attention to the stack of cloths. Judging from the way the sheets were arranged, the nurse had only made it partway down Cam’s torso. As he reached for one of the cloths, he noticed a syringe and vial of morphine under the edge of the package. Weird, he supposed she meant to top of the PCA pump when she was done.

Mason folded the sheet down to Cam’s hips, and began to gently work his way down across Cam’s stomach. The incision made to fix Cam’s internal injuries was covered by a dressing. Mason carefully removed it and examined the line of staples. The skin was beginning to heal. He grazed a fingertip along the incision, directing some energy toward it and the repaired organs underneath. Cam’s breath hitched just a little.

“You okay?” Mason asked.

“Yeah. I can just feel the warmth...” he sort of trailed off.

Mason gave Cam a half smile. He redressed the wound and continued his task. There were massive bruises down Cam's side where the ribs were cracked, and along his hip, up his back where the scapula was slightly broken and all along one wrist. As Mason's hands skimmed carefully along the battered body, he touched the damage as lightly as feasible, actively suppressing any pain he might be causing as he went.

He glanced at the setting on the morphine pump. It was high, very high. And that brought his thoughts back to why Cam's pain was so poorly controlled. At some point, he was probably going to have to find out why. He suspected there had to be a reason.

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Cam could feel Mason's hands on his skin. Mason was gentle and efficient, but then again maybe anything felt better than that nurse. He supposed in actuality it wasn't her fault. It was just that her touch was like sandpaper on sunburn and it made him want to crawl away. And crawling would be about the extent of his movement, because he could barely even sit up unassisted. He wasn't used to being helpless. He wasn't used to having people touch him much either.

"Guess I won't get to take a shower any time soon," said Cam.

"Not for at least a few more days. They feed you yet?"

"Ice chips and juice."

"They'll probably bring you Jell-O and soup for dinner."

"Eww."

"Yeah well, gotta make sure you can handle liquids before they bring you solid food," Mason smiled at him a little. "You tired?" Cam nodded. "Your body still has an awful lot of recovery to do. You want me to help you get to sleep?"

Cam thought about it for a moment. It wasn't like he had anything better to do, and he still basically felt like shit. He nodded again. Mason's hand cupped the side of his neck, thumb stroking softly across the pulse point. Cam fought reflexively against his leaden eyelids for a moment. The touch was almost a caress. The thought drifted through Cam's head that maybe he should somehow object to the slight intimacy of the motion, but it was the most caring gesture he had felt since the accident. It shouldn't matter that it came from another man.

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Mason managed to swing by to see Cam for about five minutes each of the following the days, wedged in between his usual responsibilities. He couldn't decide if it was the lingering hint of connection due to his healing talent, or innate weirdness of actually seeing the accident, or the deep curiosity about Cam's own psi talents, that drew him to keep tabs on the pilot. On Friday, he noticed that Villetti had discharged Cameron, with orders for a follow up visit to the office on

Monday. Well, at least he'd be able to have a peek at the pilot's progress by snagging a look at records while he was at work.

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Friday, they let him go home. Over the past three days, Cam had managed to decipher that the narcotics they were giving him were somehow tied to the whole lack of shielding issue. The morphine pump had been removed and they had started giving him tablets instead. He spit one of them out when the nurse's back was turned. The incredible pain in his leg had started creeping back within an hour, but the usual shielding that he had been trained to do had also begun a tentative comeback. What a bitch of a trade off, teeth gritting pain in his shattered leg or that sandpaper inside his brain feeling that made him want to either scream or hit something.

His roommate, Keith Haverty, came to pick him up from the hospital. Keith was another pilot in his squadron, and they shared an apartment not too far from the base. All the people, who had been reluctant to visit him in the hospital, were suddenly descending upon him to have a peek and see that he was still alive and ask for all the gruesome details. Guys from the squadron showed up at random intervals to chat. He decided the pain was easier to cope with than the psi issues and threw the bottle of Demerol in his nightstand drawer. It was a very rough weekend. Monday wasn't much better.

Being nowhere near capable of walking, much less driving, Cam had to rely on Keith to give him a lift to Dr. Villetti's office. His roommate helped him out of the car and into the wheelchair.

"You've got your cell, right?" asked Haverty.

"Yeah."

"Okay, gimme a call when you're done. I'll swing back by and pick you up."

"Okay," replied Cam and watched the other pilot depart.

Once Cam finally got to the exam room, a nurse took his blood pressure and pulse. She made a face but made no comment, and then she left him to wait. Villetti sailed in after a while.

"Mr. Bradshaw. How're you doing?"

"Okay, I guess."

"Let me have a look at your leg and then we'll start thinking about scheduling some physical therapy." He gave Cam a hand to get up on the exam table and frowned a little when Cam sucked in a harsh breath. "Still hurting pretty bad?"

"Uh, yeah," Cam managed to choke out. Villetti glanced at the chart.

“Says you’ve been taking Demerol. Maybe we should switch you over to Percocet. Might work better.” Villetti was examining his leg and then did a brief check on his shoulder blade. “Might hold off on the PT until Friday. Mmm, I forgot my scrip pad; I’ll be back in a couple of minutes.” With that he charged out the door.

Cam felt sort of dazed. Although he didn’t really intend to admit to not taking the painkillers he had been given, he had hoped to maybe get a suggestion or two on alternatives. It didn’t seem like he was actually going to get a chance to even ask a question. Villetti darted back in a moment later and handed him a prescription slip.

“Here, try these. Might work better. Get the front desk to set you up for a PT assessment on Friday,” the surgeon said and was gone.

Cam felt like he’d been buzzed by one of the jets he usually flew. He was still sitting on the exam table and wasn’t even entirely sure he could get back to the wheelchair without falling on his face. The door was still hanging open.

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Mason walked up the hallway between exam rooms, reading a chart from his previous patient. He made a few notes. A nurse named Tyra cruised by.

“Dr. Flynn, Ernie Riebold is waiting in four,” she said.

“Okay, thanks,” Mason said absently. As he walked past the open door to exam room three, a familiar face caught his attention. Cameron Bradshaw was sliding off the exam table, gripping it tightly with one hand, attempting to ease himself into the wheelchair in front of him. His face was a white mask of pain and he looked like he was about fall. Mason dropped the folder in his hands and lunged forward to grab Cam.

“Hey, easy! You should have asked someone to help,” he snapped, wrapping both arms around the other man. Cam floundered against Mason, trying to regain his balance. “It’s ok, I’ve got you.” Mason assured him and gently lowered him into the wheelchair.

Mason dropped to one knee in front of Cameron. His face was gray-white and filmed in sweat. Mason took hold of his wrist. His heart rate was racing and Mason had to swallow hard to choke down the pain radiating from Cam. A part of his brain wondered if Cam was going to scream or just pass out. The latter seemed more likely. Mason slammed a set of pain blocks in place and placed his other hand against Cam’s chest to make sure he didn’t fall out of the wheelchair.

“Cam, just breathe slowly,” he said evenly. Cam’s face was still ash pale. Mason closed his eyes for a moment and calmed Cam’s racing heart a little. Behind him, Tyra came halfway into the room.

“Mr. Bradshaw... Oh God!” she gasped.



“Tyra, tell Mr. Riebold he’ll have to wait a few minutes. I have a patient emergency,” said Mason. “Then bring me a blanket and ten mg of Fentanyl.”

The nurse left hastily. Cam’s eyes opened slowly and he gave Mason a completely dazed look.

“You gonna pass out on me?” asked Mason.

“Huh-uh,” Cam mumbled, gulping air.

Mason put a firm hand on Cam’s chest. He could have forced the issue and boosted Cam’s crashing blood pressure, but that was a risky thing. Tyra came back, looking slightly scared.

“Help me get him back up on the exam table. I want him flat,” Mason ordered.

They lifted Cam onto the table and Mason jabbed the syringe containing the Fentanyl into Cam’s hip. Tyra spread the blanket over the stricken man.

“Did Villetti leave him without bothering to tell anyone to help him off the table?” snarled Mason.

“I d-don’t know,” said Tyra.

“I’m gonna rip him a new one,” said Mason. Steve Villetti might be an excellent surgeon, but he could sometimes be an arrogant asshole with conscious patients. Some of the color was beginning to return to Cam’s face. “I need to go deal with Ernie Riebold. Stay with him. Do not leave him alone. I should be back in less than ten minutes.”

Mason walked down the hallway cursing under his breath.

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The moment Mason Flynn’s hand left his body, the pain began surging again, but not as badly. Cam knew that whatever had been injected into his hip had been a narcotic painkiller. His psychic shielding had started to fade within a minute or two. But fuck, at this point he didn’t care. His foot had hit the floor as he had tried to slide off the exam table. What had already been teeth gritting pain had instantly turned into blinding agony. Then trying to catch himself had strained his barely healing cracked ribs and damaged shoulder. He would have ended up as a sobbing heap on the floor, if Mason hadn’t showed up. Jesus Christ, the guy had timing.

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It did take nearly ten minutes for Mason to see Ernie Riebold. He was an eighty-one year old man who had undergone a hip replacement a few months earlier. Riebold was making slow but steady progress. On the way back up the hallway, Mason grabbed Bradshaw’s file from the to-be-billed pile. He looked at Villetti’s brief, cryptic notes. Pin site healing adequate, change in meds for pain, scheduling for PT to be initiated. Then he looked at the initial vitals taken by the

nurse. Heart rate close to one hundred, blood pressure significantly elevated. Signs that pain was severe and uncontrolled. Arrogant rat bastard. Switching meds without even bothering to consider looking for the source of the problem was sloppy medicine.

Mason walked back into the exam room where Cam was. Tyra was standing beside the table, keeping a careful eye on the patient.

"I'll take it from here," said Mason. He shut the door behind her as she left. He leaned his hip against the table and gazed down at Cam. The guy looked like absolute shit. He looked like he hadn't slept in days and had lost even more weight since leaving the hospital.

"You know, if the pain meds that Villetti prescribed when you left the hospital weren't cutting it, you could have called the answering service over the weekend." Mason laid a hand on Cam's arm. He could sense a moderate amount of lingering pain despite the Fentanyl. Cam stared at the ceiling for several seconds.

"I stopped taking them," Cam whispered.

Mason drew a breath to berate the man for sheer stupidity then changed his mind. "Why?" he asked. Nobody wanted that kind of pain. It was incapacitating.

"I figured out it rips down my shields," Cam murmured. His eyes met Mason's only for a moment.

Mason finally understood a little. Cam had traded one form of pain for another. "You sure about that?" Mason asked.

"Whatever you gave me a few minutes ago is dissolving them. I think it's anything narcotic. They more or less came back once I was home and stopped taking the stuff."

"Okay, at least I get your reasons, but... You can't do this. Your blood pressure is way too high, your pulse rate is up and you are stressing your body. It can *kill* you. Give you a stroke, cause a heart attack. The human body doesn't cope with that kind of pain without a very high price." Cam looked at him in silence. "I'm guessing you haven't been eating or sleeping much?"

"Not much." Cam looked a bit guilty.

"Who's taking care of you?"

Cam looked vaguely mystified at the question. "My room mate. And some of my squadron guys. They've been kind of dropping by, helping make sure I can get up and dressed and just general stuff."

"Preparing food for you?"

"If I ask them to."

“But basically not making sure you eat or sleep or anything like that.”

“No, guess not,” Cam whispered.

Mason rubbed fingers across his eyes. He had a limited number of choices. He could send Cam back to the hospital, but that came with a set of very specific and unusual problems apparently. He could try to arrange for some sort of in home care, but that sort of thing usually took a number of days. Or he could do it himself. Would Cam go for that? Even a few hours, to make he sure he actually ate and slept, would help.

“No girlfriend?”

“Not since the last one dumped me.” That was accompanied by an eye roll.

“How ‘bout I drag you home with me and kick your butt about taking care of yourself?” suggested Mason. Cam looked very uncertain, but equally desperate. “I can turn off the pain for a while without the drugs,” Mason said.

“Okay.”

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Cam called Keith while Mason drove. He told Keith he was going to a friend’s house for dinner and not to worry about picking him up.

He held his breath for a moment as Mason helped him out of the car and into the wheelchair. He was expecting pain, but apparently the doctor was holding it back. Mason had a small ranch style house on 63<sup>rd</sup> Street, a couple of blocks from the oceanfront of Virginia Beach. This end of the beach was a couple of miles past the resort strip with its accompanying boardwalk.

Inside the house, Mason pushed the wheelchair into the kitchen and began digging in cabinets.

“What have you eaten today?” Mason asked.

“Uh, coffee, some cereal, an apple, some popcorn... I guess that’s about it,” said Cam, not elaborating that he hadn’t managed to choke down more than a few mouthfuls of anything. The pain caused some sort of nausea response.

“No protein, very little calcium. Your broken bones and all the other damage are not going to heal without supplies to build new bone and muscle. You ever do the protein shake thing?”

“No, I don’t like raw eggs.”

“No eggs. Milk, whey protein, yogurt and strawberries if you like them.”

“Strawberries are okay,” replied Cam. He watched Mason throwing ingredients into the blender. After a few minutes, he was handed a tall glass of the thick liquid. Mason pulled out a kitchen chair and turned it backward and sat down behind Cam. He laid a hand on Cam’s shoulder, thumb on the nape of his neck. It was like magic. The pain only partially masked by the drugs just evaporated.

“Drink. I can do many things, but replacing the nutrient molecules in your body isn’t one of them,” said Mason softly. Cam began to drink. “Does it irritate your, um, psychic stuff when I touch you?”

“No. Definitely not.”

“Because I’m sort of the same?”

“That I don’t know. Maybe.” He drained the rest of the glass and rested his elbow on the arm of the wheelchair. Without the unrelenting agony, sheer exhaustion was over whelming him.

“You need sleep,” said Mason.

“Unh, yeah.”

“But we need to, maybe that should be I, need to have a try at figuring out why your pain is so bad. Yes, you have a number of broken bones and some organ damage, but the pain in your leg is way out of proportion. Fentanyl should have you in happy happy lala land, not be just barely making it tolerable. Level with me, do you use drugs?”

“You mean like illegal stuff?” Cam twisted his head a little to glance at Mason. The question was annoying, but he supposed it was a valid one. “No way. I only even average a couple of beers a week. The guys in the squadron think I’m way too straight laced.”

“Okay. Sorry, I needed to ask. That leaves the possible reasons at -- you have a low pain threshold, which doesn’t really seem to be the case, or there’s some underlying problem. Now that we’re not at the hospital, if you’re up for it I can have a go at looking for it.”

Cam could feel Mason’s thumb rubbing gently along the back of his neck. It was a subtle motion, deliciously comforting and he wanted it to keep going. That was odd. He shouldn’t want that touch so badly. He shook his head a little to clear it.

“What does looking for it involve?” he asked.

“Mostly you just being still and being willing to let my hands do the walking, so to speak. Everything I do is touch oriented.” Mason scooted his chair around to the side so Cam could see him easier. There was something he wasn’t saying, that much Cam could sense. It was something embarrassing, personal, and Cam could feel a hint of desire. Say what? Desire. From the man facing him. Oh.

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Mason saw the comprehension register. If Cam hadn't been psychic, Mason probably could have bluffed his way through the process. No need for the patient to know the doctor was gay. But the level of concentration and the complete dropping of his own defenses to find the hidden damage, would almost inevitably allow his thoughts to bleed through. He was attracted to Cam, broken body and all. How much was a by-product of the healing he already done and how much was just lust, was highly debatable.

"I'm gay and I'm attracted to you. If I do this, that won't be a secret. I'm pretty sure you'd notice. If this is going to creep you out, we'll try to figure out some other way," he blurted out.

A hint of a smile tugged at Cam's mouth. "I'm straight, but I'm open-minded. It doesn't bother me," replied Cam.

"It would be easiest to have you strip down to your underwear and lie on the bed. I know that sounds way fishy, but I can't do this standing up and clothing makes it... more difficult." Mason could feel his face flushing with embarrassment. God, it sounded like he was trying to seduce the guy, and much as a little part of his libido liked entertaining that thought, that really wasn't the idea.

"You gave me a bath in the hospital. There isn't an inch of me you haven't seen, so you know I'm still pretty much a complete wreck." Cam smiled a little.

"You sure you're okay with this?" Mason pressed.

"Yeah, it's fine."

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Mason pushed the wheelchair back to the bedroom and carefully helped Cam undress. He was easing Cam's T-shirt up over his head, taking great care not to pull his damaged shoulder too much. Cam was sitting on the edge of the bed. He looked up at Mason. There was an unspoken gratitude in his eyes.

"You didn't ask your roommate to help you dress or undress, did you?" Mason asked.

"No. I asked him to get some stuff out of the drawer for me. We're buds, but..." It was apparently Cam's turn to look embarrassed.

"Uh-huh. You can martyr yourself later. This week you need to be an invalid and let your body try to play catch-up," said Mason.

He pulled Cam to his feet long enough to push his jeans down over his hips, before lowering him back down. The side seam of the jeans had been slit from hem to knee to accommodate the bulky metal rods of the fixation.

Mason had Cam stretch out on the bed and blocked him up on his side with a couple of pillows. The horrendous bruising had begun to yellow at the edges, combined with the scars and scabbing, stripped almost naked, Cam definitely had a sort of death camp survivor look. Mason kicked off his own shoes and sat on the bed behind Cam.

“Just try to relax. If you fall asleep, that’s fine. This is probably going to take quite a while. I’m going to start with the back of your neck. Sometimes leg pain actually starts somewhere else. I just want to make sure I don’t miss anything,” Mason explained.

“Okay. Do whatever you need to,” replied Cam.

Within minutes, fatigue had overpowered Cam and he drifted to sleep. It took half an hour just to find the problem. One of the peroneal nerves that ran down Cam’s lower leg had been damaged, badly. Not severed, more like filleted. It was probably a by-product of the multiple breaks in the nearby bone. It wouldn’t have been obvious during the repair surgery, not without a microscope. On its own, healing would probably take months, maybe even a couple years. Nerves were notoriously hard to heal. There was no way Cam would be able to tolerate the kind of pain it generated for that length of time. In a normal patient, long term high dose narcotics would be the best option. Mason decided he needed to do what he could to accelerate that process.

This would probably take a number of days. He spent the next hour and half delicately pouring energy into Cam’s body. This was a finesse job, not unlike microsurgery. Exhausted by the process, he eventually lay down next to Cam. He made sure one hand lay draped over Cam’s hip.

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Warmth. Comforting delicious warmth. The pain in his leg and chest and shoulder was only a dull annoying ache. A pulse beat slow and steady beneath his cheek. Huh? His head was cradled on someone’s shoulder, his uninjured leg draped over strong thighs, his arm flung across a hard chest. Cam dragged his leaden eyelids open. Mason. Oh Christ, he was in bed with Mason, all snuggled up to him like a lover. He was in bed with another guy. He couldn’t do this, he was military. He could get kicked out. And. oh God, the pain level was low enough that waking up didn’t make him want to just slit his own throat to get away from it.

Last night Mason had bullied him into eating a little, undressed him, and coaxed him to sleep. He had fallen to sleep lulled by the thrum of warm energy imparted by Mason’s hand on his skin. This was just so wrong, wasn’t it? He thought about rolling away and shifted a little, preparing to do so. Mason’s hand stroked down his spine and the pain dwindled to almost nothing. His eyelids drooped and his body went slack as exhaustion pulled him under again.

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Mason woke slowly and a smile curved his lips. Cam was cuddled up tight to his side, asleep. Thank God. The guy was running on empty, exhausted. Several days of what must have been unrelenting pain, stressing an already traumatized body was bad news. Yesterday he had been

about ready to smack the guy up beside the head for stupidly believing that he could manage to get through this by sheer willpower.

He twisted his head a little to glance at the clock. Six fifteen. Technically, he should be getting up for work fairly soon, but he was beat. He had woken numerous times in the night, making sure his hands stayed in contact with Cam, holding the pain at bay. Active healing took more concentration and energy. Simply damping down the pain to a background level, he could manage even half asleep. Even so, he was dead tired. He almost never used his sick days. Hadn't Tyra been ragging on him just last week that he had forty-one on the books, and maybe he should go spend a month in Europe?

He groped for cell phone he had tossed on the nightstand and pressed the numbers to dial the office.

"This is Mason. I'm taking a personal day. I feel like shit." That part was at least halfway true. "Get Steve and Mark to cover for me. Reschedule anything that's just follow up stuff. I'll call you later." He thumbed off the phone and tossed it back on the nightstand.

Cam let out a vague noise. He glanced down at the pilot. Cam's face was still far too pale and dark shadows lingered beneath his eyes. One night of halfway decent sleep could only help so much. Mason stretched a little and yawned. He had put out an awful lot of energy himself, last night. Did he look like he'd been on an all night bender? Mmm, maybe. More sleep.

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The sunshine was showing bright under the edge of the curtains in the bedroom when Cam woke again. He was still wrapped halfway over top Mason. He rolled carefully away and forced himself upright. His shoulder and chest still ached, but not quite as intensely. He set his foot on the floor. Before Villetti had discharged him from the hospital, the doctor had told him he was allowed to walk on his broken leg a little, enough to get in and out of the wheelchair and such. In practice, it was abject agony. He clenched his teeth and pushed himself to his feet, putting most of his weight on his good leg to lever himself into the wheelchair. It was only a dozen feet or so to the bathroom from there.

By the time he returned to the bedroom, the pain had returned pretty damn close to its usual level, making his stomach clench in nausea from the sheer strength of it. Mason was sitting up on the bed. He apparently had never bothered to undress any further than taking off his shoes and socks and untucking his shirt. His hair was tousled and he looked immensely tired.

"I see you're still trying to bull your way through," he said. "You could've woken me up to help you."

"Yeah, well... you managed to allow me to sleep all night. I figured I could give you a few more minutes," said Cam. Mason just glared at him. "Don't you have to go to work?"

"I called in sick." Now Cam felt guilty. He reached down to pick up his jeans off the floor, and had to swallow hard against the wave of agony the extra pressure on his leg caused. Mason crawled across the bed and grabbed his hand.

"You aren't going anywhere, so you don't need clothes yet," he said. Cam was panting slightly with the small exertion. Mason's hand wrapped around his wrist and the pain died back to an ache. The abrupt cessation caused his muscles to go almost limp with relief. "You're getting back into bed. You're going to eat *something* for breakfast, in bed and then I will *help* you get dressed."

Cam let out a slow breath and nodded. "Did you ever figure out what the problem with my leg is, or does it classify as one of those -- no idea -- things?"

"You have nerve damage. It's called the peroneal nerve. It runs down the center of your leg."

"Can you fix it?"

"Yeah, I think so. I made a little bit of progress last night. Fixing nerves is tough going. They resist and if I screw it up, I could make things worse. It'll take time. Lots of time." Mason tightened the grip on his wrist and helped him to stand long enough to get out of the wheelchair and sit on the bed.

Mason went off to do something about breakfast. Cam leaned back against a pillow jammed up by the headboard. He noticed that if he was absolutely still, the pain was bearable. That was an improvement.

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Mason fired up the coffee pot and blearily pulled eggs out of the refrigerator. Protein, calcium, and some carbs, his brain suggested for Cam. The caffeine was mostly for himself.

He carried a plate containing eggs and toast and a glass of milk back to the bedroom. Cam was still sitting up. He had picked up a magazine from the floor near the bed and was looking at a set of moderately gruesome pictures.

"Does *Frontiers in Orthopedic Surgery* qualify as light bedtime reading?" he asked. Mason grinned a little.

"I'm not exactly the type to keep *Playboy* under the bed," he said. Cam had the grace to grimace a little. "Eat. I'm going to take a shower," Mason said as he walked toward the bathroom.

When he came out, Cam was poking idly at the food on the plate. He had eaten very little. Mason dressed in a pair of jeans and a T-shirt and sat down on the edge of the bed.

"I will feed you if I have to," he said. It was a thinly veiled threat.



“It makes me feel like I’m going to puke,” muttered Cam.

“That’s a side effect of the pain,” replied Mason. He put his hand on Cam’s leg and damped down the torture. He could feel the pounding rhythm of Cam’s heart beat under the skin. “Now eat. Afterward we’ll get you dressed and go back to your place to pick up some clothes and your meds and stuff.”

“I don’t want the pain killers. If there are people around, they make me feel like I’m both schizophrenic and stoned!”

“Does ‘people’ include me?”

“No.”

“Good. Then here’s the plan. I have to touch you to do this.” Mason gestured to his hand on Cam’s leg. “Much as I don’t mind holding your hand, there’s feasibility issues involved. You need to take enough meds that the pain doesn’t overwhelm you when I stop touching you. Your body is still trying to do the off the scale stress response thing. The more I can I heal the damaged nerve, the less meds you’ll need. But it’s going to take time.” He watched Cam nibble a little at the food on the plate. He wanted to wrap both arms around Cam and hold him and assure him that things would improve.

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Cam’s eyes flickered from the plate up to Mason. He was picking up notes of deep worry mixed with heavy, anguished desire to offer comfort. The doctor wanted to offer more than just his fingers on the skin of Cam’s leg. Damn, it was overwhelming to be the focus of all that intensity, somehow awe-inspiring to be on the receiving end of that kind of care. Cam drank a little of the milk, cursing internally at his own mental argument. It wasn’t like he hadn’t ever touched other men. He wasn’t quite as dead straight as he had implied. There had been a little experimenting.

He set the glass on the table beside the bed and looked at Mason. He took hold of the Mason’s hand and laced his fingers between the long tapered ones and met Mason’s eyes.

“Kiss me,” he whispered.

Mason raised an eyebrow. “Thought you said you didn’t do guys,” Mason replied.

“I ... have messed around a couple times. I’m military, so it was seriously on the sly and nowhere on base,” Cam blurted out. Keep going, be honest, he told himself. “I jerked off a guy I knew at a party. I wanted to watch his face. I swapped blowjobs with someone in a bathroom at a club. I didn’t even ever find out his name.” Cam could feel his face flame with embarrassment. “I like women. I really do, but I...” He had to swallow hard again. “I’ve never kissed a guy.”

Mason gave a slight snort of amusement. Cam relaxed a fraction. At least Mason had a sense of humor. Cam watched Mason’s eyes and wondered what it would be like to watch him come.

“You sure that’s what you want?” Mason asked.

“Yeah, I am,” responded Cam.

Mason scooted forward and leaned in toward Cam’s face. Cam could feel Mason’s breath ghosting softly on his skin, lips hovering an inch from his own. Then Mason’s mouth pressed softly against his. He felt warmth, caring, the prickle of beard stubble, and the underlying sensation of Mason’s energy signature. It started out very chastely. Then he could feel the tip of Mason’s tongue tracing along his lower lip and he opened his mouth, wanting to taste Mason. His hand fisted into the hair at the back of Mason’s head, holding the man close, as his mouth was softly plundered and their tongues dueled and explored. They slowly pulled apart. Cam was amazed. He’d kissed a few women who were good at it. Very good. Somehow it wasn’t even the male-female difference that intrigued him and revved his engine in ways he hadn’t thought possible. It was the person. It was Mason. Did that make gender irrelevant?

He had once had what had come across as a very hypothetical and slightly twisted conversation with one of the people who trained him at Division P. The woman had postulated that for most psi, gender was a non-issue in the game of attraction and compatibility. Identity was key. And when you found the right person, be it for an emotional relationship or a working one, male or female was merely an issue of plumbing. It had seemed like one of those weird no-answer type arguments at the time. Now he wasn’t so sure, especially since half the blood in his body seemed to rushing south toward his groin.

He could feel Mason’s pulse racing where Mason’s wrist was pressed along the side of his neck. His fingers were still tangled in the doctor’s hair. Mason’s face pulled back far enough to focus his eyes on Cam’s face.

“That satisfy your curiosity?” he asked. His voice was a low husky whisper.

“Uh ... yeah,” Cam managed to get out.

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Mason drew a long shuddering breath. The kiss had affected him far more than he’d thought it would. His jeans felt way too tight, and he could still taste Cam on his lips. Cam’s request had thrown him. As had the admission that Cam had fooled around just a little with some other guys. Most hetero guys would sooner die than admit they had ever even so much as looked at another man. Okay, get a grip, he told himself, it was kiss. There were more important issues at hand.

“Let’s get you dressed, and go by your place,” Mason said. Cam gave him a somewhat questioning look. “And then showered and medicated and let me have another go at working on the nerve damage.”

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Mason drove toward Chick's beach, a subdivision of Virginia Beach. Cam said he shared an apartment there with another pilot. In the parking lot, Mason helped him into the wheelchair.

"Never thought I'd be so amazingly glad, I have a ground floor apartment," Cam said.

"Definitely makes things easier." Cam unlocked the door and Mason pushed him inside. They made it about three feet into the room, when the smell hit Mason like a slap. Blood. Fresh blood.

Then he saw it. In the middle of the den area, a man lay sprawled on a light colored sofa. He lay with his arms splayed wide, eyes staring sightlessly, blood soaking his T-shirt. A horrific wound gaped open across his throat.

Mason forced himself to walk toward the man. If there was even the slightest chance he was still alive... He touched a hand to the wrist nearest him. The skin had already started cooling and there was no sensation of life at all. He brushed his fingers down over the open eyes, closing the lids, a tiny gesture of dignity. Then he realized perhaps he shouldn't have. Forensics and all that. Belatedly he looked back at Cam. He was absolutely frozen in the chair. Mason wasn't even sure Cam was breathing. He had to get the guy out of there. He hurried back to Cam and pushed him out the apartment door, pulling it shut behind him. He yanked his cell phone from his pocket and dialed 911.

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A herd of police, EMS and technicians flowed in and out of the apartment doorway. Cam was attempting to answer the questions put to him by a detective. Yes, he lived here. No, he hadn't been there since yesterday. He hadn't seen Keith since the previous afternoon. He had talked to Keith on the phone around five thirty, to tell his room mate that he was going to dinner with a friend and didn't need to be picked up. No, he hadn't argued with Keith. No, he didn't know of anyone who would specifically want to harm his roommate.

He glanced across the sidewalk to the edge of the parking lot. Mason was apparently getting the third degree from another detective.

"Mr. Bradshaw, are you able to stand?" the detective facing him asked.

"Yes."

"Can you walk?"

"About two steps in a pinch."

"I'd like you to stand so one of my tech's can examine your clothes for blood." Cam glared slightly at the detective. They couldn't possibly believe he had anything to do with Keith's death, could they? He slowly hauled himself to his feet, balancing primarily on his good leg. A technician in a coverall came over and proceeded to check him over. He had to turn a little and

the shuffling step put pressure on his injured leg. A bolt of agony shot up through him and he sucked in a sharp breath. In another minute, he was sweating with the pain.

“Ok, you can sit,” said the tech and Cam sank back into the wheelchair, but sitting did very little to abate the pain.

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Mason observed Cam while answering his own interrogator. The detective had seemed only grudgingly willing to believe that Mason had touched the dead man for the purpose of confirming he was dead. He had quite cooperatively displayed that he had a trace of blood on one finger from the touch. He was questioned in detail about his movements over the past day.

“And your purpose for coming to the apartment was?” the detective prompted.

“To get clean clothes and medication for Cameron. Speaking of which, look at him. He’s in a *lot* of pain. He needs the meds. He’s only been out of the hospital for a four days, and his leg is broken in eight places. Can you please send someone inside to get the medication?”

“I’ll look into it. Stay right where you are,” said the detective, and he turned to talk to an officer. Mason frowned and leaned against his car. A few dozen feet away, he could see Cam. His face was white and slicked with sweat. He was rocking and twisting slightly in the wheelchair, lips pressed together. Forget his healing talents, as a doctor this was an unacceptable situation.

“Hey,” he called to the detective. The man swiveled back to look at him.

“Yes?”

“If you don’t send someone to get his meds soon, you’re going to be transporting him to the hospital,” Mason said with heat.

“Great. Lewis, go find Mr. Bradshaw’s medicine.” The officer went into the apartment. He came out several minutes later with a number of prescription bottles and boxes in his hands. He handed it to the detective, commenting, “It’s all narcotic sort of stuff.”

“Yes, it is!” snapped Mason. “Lieutenant Bradshaw has a shattered lower leg, broken ribs, a broken shoulder blade and recently had surgery for internal injuries! Advil and Tylenol are NOT going to cut it!”

“What exactly am I supposed to give him?” asked Lewis. The question seemed to be directed at the detective.

“That,” said Mason pointing at a narrow box labeled Actiq -- Transmucosal Fentanyl Citrate.

“Isn’t that that ‘perco-pop’ thing?” asked the officer suspiciously.

“Yes it is. Note it has been prescribed by a licensed physician for a man with severe pain!” Mason was pissed. This was dragging on forever and in the background he could see Cam rocking in absolute torture. Mason was about ready to punch someone out.

“Okay, give it to him,” the detective said.

Lewis walked to Cam and handed him the box. Cam looked sort of blank as he took it. His fingers fumbled with the cardboard. The box had never been opened before.

“Please. Let me help him,” Mason pleaded, trying to reign in his anger. The detective glared at him, and then finally nodded.

Mason hurried toward Cam and dropped to one knee in front of him. Cam looked at him with glazed eyes.

“Here, let me,” Mason said softly and quickly peeled the box and the inner package open. “Open your mouth,” he said and put a thumb against Cam’s lower lip to encourage him. The intensity of the pain washed through the skin contact and Mason had to take a deep breath to steady his hands. “It goes between your gums and the inside of your cheek, so the drug soaks through into your bloodstream. Okay?” Cam nodded slightly. He had clearly passed any point of true comprehension. Mason pushed the stick that had a cough drop looking block on the end of it into Cam’s mouth. It should only be a few minutes before it started to take effect.

What Mason really wanted to do was take both of Cam’s hands and slam down the blocks he could place between his friend and the pain. But any strange instant response by Cam would raise too many questions. The best he could do was to scale back the agony just a little while he waited on the drug to kick in. His fingers rested against Cam’s wrist and he glanced at his watch, both checking Cam’s pulse and taking advantage of the touch.

The minutes ticked by as people flowed around them. Cam’s head jerked up as a stretcher bearing a black body bag was brought out.

“I’m sorry,” said Mason. “I guess you were friends.”

“Yeah, we got along. Not something I’m very good at,” mumbled Cam. His heart rate had finally slowed to something closer to normal.

Another half an hour trickled by before the police were willing to let Mason and Cam leave. This was accompanied by terse instructions that sounded suspiciously like “don’t leave town.” Mason ground his teeth as he drove away. He wondered if it was worth filing an official complaint against the police for their harsh treatment of the injured Cameron.

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Cam stared out the window of the car, but all he saw was Keith’s bloody body flopped on the sofa, throat slit. Keith wasn’t family, but he had been a friend. Cam couldn’t even begin to

fathom who might have done such a thing. The TV and the iPod dock hadn't been touched, so robbery had apparently not been a motive. All his narcotic prescriptions had been similarly untouched.

Back near the oceanfront, Mason helped him out of the car and into the house, grabbing a duffle bag of clothes. Thank God Mason was rational enough to have demanded that he needed to get some clothing for Cam. There was no way he could stay in that apartment, even if it hadn't been declared off limits as a crime scene.

"Earth to Cameron. Which do you want first, food or sleep?" asked Mason. Cam snapped back to awareness, realizing that Mason had probably been trying to get his attention for at least a minute. He was sitting on the sofa, more comfortable than the wheelchair, with his hands clenched against the upholstery.

"Oh, um, just something to drink," he answered. His brain was fogged over from the stuff that Mason had given him. He understood the reason; he loathed the side effects. His shielding had dropped back to nil. He was thankful that Mason was the only other person in the house.

Mason returned a few minutes later with a plastic bottle in his hand. The label read Ensure. Wasn't that the stuff they gave elderly people? Shit, right at the moment he felt about five hundred years old.

"You need the protein and the other stuff. Don't complain," Mason said.

Cam merely nodded. It was too much trouble to object. He forced himself to drink it. It wasn't as nasty as he thought it would be. Mason sat down beside him.

"Do you want to talk about it?" he asked.

"No," was Cam's flat reply. He wanted to forget it. He wanted to scrub the image out of his head. "Distract me," he said. Mason picked up the remote to the TV and turned it on and handed it him.

"Surf away. And while you're at it, put your leg in my lap." What the fuck? Cam looked at him in incomprehension, then glanced at the metal bars encasing his lower leg. Oh yeah, the healing thing. God, the drugs were making his brain into mush. He twisted sideways on the sofa and set his leg across Mason's thighs. Mason pushed the fabric of the jeans off to one side, as it was split up the seam, and slid his fingers in between the metal support struts. Cam felt the warm buzz of energy creeping along his skin and into the muscles.

Cam set the TV to CNN and dropped the remote in his lap. Somewhere in California there was a wildfire. Wall Street was doing normal things. Some female celebrity had given birth. It wasn't holding his attention. He looked at Mason. The doctor's eyes were closed, his lower lip between his teeth. He was obviously focused on the tiny motions of his fingers.

He wanted that mouth against his own. The kiss had been amazing. Mason was admittedly gay. That gave Cam pause. That probably meant he'd done things Cam hadn't: intense things, intimate things. Cam swallowed hard. He was an adult. He had a fairly good idea what two male bodies together were capable of. Was that something he wanted? No. Yes. Maybe? He knew two gay guys on the base. One he knew from a party where the man had blurted out that he didn't do women, and then promptly shut the hell up. The other was a trace more up front. Off base one time, he had been seen kissing another man. When asked about it, he had acknowledged it but been no more forthcoming. "Don't ask, don't tell" sort of worked, but not exactly. It all depended on who you served with and just how homophobic they were.

On the TV, the commentator started discussing a murder that had occurred in New York, and Cam flashed on the vision of Keith dead staring face and the gaping wound in his throat and...

Mason's hand closed around his wrist.

"You okay?" Mason asked. Cam shook his head trying to dislodge the image. "Maybe the news is not such a good idea," said Mason, picking up the remote and changing the channel to some miscellaneous sitcom.

"Just turn it off," muttered Cam. He squeezed his eyes shut for a long moment, then opened them again. Mason was looking at him with concern. They sat immobile in an awkward silence.

Cam slowly reached out his hand and brushed his fingers along Mason's cheek. Mason hadn't shaved today, but then again neither had Cam. It was odd to feel the rough texture of someone else's beard. Cam traced down the line of the other man's jaw, and then across his mouth. The contrast of the softness of his lips was alluring. And Cam knew what that mouth felt like against his own. He met Mason's eyes. Mason's pupils were dilated and Cam realized that if he sorted through the fog of the meds he could feel hints of desire. Mason was very still.

Cam stuck his hand behind himself and pushed, scooting forward so his butt was against Mason's thigh and his knees flexed over Mason's legs. His hands clasped Mason's face and Cam kissed him. It was aggressive and needy and the angle was awkward. He pushed his tongue against Mason's teeth and Mason's mouth opened. Cam swiped his tongue along his partner's, sucking on his lower lip, nipping at the side of his mouth.

He twisted, trying to wind his arms around Mason's body and the motion sent a spasm of pain wrenching through his partially healed ribs. He sagged against Mason with a frustrated snarl and punched the back of the sofa with his fist. Mason had begun to damp down the pain almost as soon as it started, which left an odd echo effect. Cam's body tensed, subconsciously expecting the pain to flood through him in a second wave.

Mason's hand was cupped around his neck, the other arm carefully placed around his back, supporting him slightly.

"If you're that intent on distraction, the bed would be a hell of a lot more comfortable for you," said Mason. "If you're sure that's what you want..."

Cam leaned back, lying with his back flat on the sofa cushions. He scrubbed his hand down over his face.

“I don’t know what the fuck I want,” he growled. “How ‘bout lack of pain! How ‘bout being able to walk ! Or maybe for Keith to not be dead!” His hands were clenched into fists and he crossed his arms over his chest, breathing hard, eyes screwed shut.

“Trying on the first and second ones. And I’m so sorry about Keith,” Mason replied softly.

“Shit, I didn’t mean to imply... If you weren’t taking care of me, I’d be back in the hospital doped to the eyeballs, and then trying to figure out the nerve damage thing, right?”

“Probably.”

“Thank you... Really. I owe you a hell of a lot.” Cam opened his eyes and stared at the ceiling. He struggled into a sitting position again. “Take me to bed,” he said. Mason’s eyes narrowed a little.

“Cam, offering yourself up is not what I’m looking for,” he said.

Cam gave him a lopsided smile. “Being altruistic has nothing to do with it. I want to stop seeing his dead body and the couch all covered in blood. I want a distraction, even if it’s only for a few minutes.”

Mason regarded him for a long moment. “Okay.”

Cam slowly swiveled around to place his feet on the floor, and pushed himself to his feet. He sank into the wheelchair. “I will be so fucking glad when I can walk more than two steps,” he griped

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In the bedroom, Cam leaned against the headboard. Mason crawled onto the bed next to him. Mason gave Cam a questioning look, then said, “So were you planning on picking up where you left off?”

“Yeah, that was kind of my intention,” Cam replied. He reached for Mason somewhat tentatively. Their mouths met... carefully. A soft brush of lips. Little nibbles. Mason’s thumb traced along Cam’s cheekbone. It was a caress. Cam’s breath hitched. His few previous experiences had been hard and aggressive fumbles, all about getting off as fast as possible. He’d failed to realize two guys could do slow.

He slid his hand up under Mason’s T-shirt. His palm against warm skin, he could feel the thrum of his energy.



“Are you turned on?” he mumbled against Mason’s mouth.

“Getting there,” Mason said. His teeth grazed at the corner of Cam’s mouth.

Cam snickered. “Not exactly what I meant. I meant your healing stuff.”

Mason pulled back a little and studied Cam’s face. “Yes. Unless I actively suppress it, it responds automatically at a real base level to anything I perceive as pain or injury.”

“Me and my messed up body.”

“Yeah.”

“I can feel it .”

“Mmm, good.”

Cam’s other hand joined the first under the fabric of Mason’s T-shirt. He could feel the smooth resilience of muscles beneath the skin. Mason reached backward and grabbed a handful of the shirt and pulled it off over his head, dropping it over the edge of the bed. Cam’s hand skimmed down across Mason’s bare chest to the crotch of his jeans. Mason was very definitely turned on, in more ways than one. He could feel the hard length underneath the material.

His own response didn’t seem to be anywhere near as dramatic. Yeah, he was about half hard, but it didn’t seem to be heading in the direction of finishing the idea. In frustration, he grabbed Mason’s hand and pulled it against his own groin. Mason’s fingers stroked him lightly. It felt good, very good, nothing changed. God, had he broken something down there? A thread of panic coursed through him.

“Cam. Look at me,” Mason said gently. Cam glanced at Mason’s face. “You’re okay. You’ve barely been eating or sleeping. There’s still a hefty load of Fentanyl in your system from a couple of hours ago. And you are stressed to the max. Your body’s overwhelmed. It’ll come back. It might take a couple more days, but believe me it’s okay.”

Cam sucked in a shaky breath and blew it back out. “You sure?”

“Yeah, I’m sure.” Mason’s voice was calm and rational and Cam could feel the trickle of caring concern everywhere they touched.

“I want to get *you* off,” Cam said.

“It’s okay. I’m fine.”

“Mason, I want to. I want to watch you. I want to do it for more than mere curiosity. I want to do it for someone who actually gives a crap about me.” He watched the internal debate reflected in

Mason's eyes. Mason still had some obvious reservations about whether there was an element of "debt owed" involved.

"Okay," Mason said slowly.

Cam's hands returned to their original pursuit, tracing the planes of Mason's chest. He pressed his face to the side of Mason's neck and nipped carefully at the skin. Mason groaned a little. Cam pushed Mason flat onto the bed and brushed his lips along Mason's collar bone, across to the hollow at the base of the warm throat, and down the center line of his chest. It was an exploration. The fine curls of dark chest hair trailing toward the waistband of Mason's jeans were wiry soft against his fingertips. There was something slightly weird about exploring another man's body this way, and yet it was unmistakably arousing.

He pressed his palm against the bulge in Mason's jeans and his partner squirmed slightly. He watched the way Mason's lips parted slightly as he drew in a deep breath and then closed as he swallowed. Cam twisted a little to bring his head back up toward Mason's, and looked down into his face. His pupils were blown wide. Cam smiled a little and stroked his hand down across Mason's crotch again. Mason squirmed under the pressure. Cam raised his hand and slipped it inside the front of Mason's jeans, wiggling his fingers under the band of Mason's briefs. He could feel a trace of slickness over the tip and heat of the hard cock on his hand. And the steady subtle buzz of energy from Mason. He pulled his hand out. Mason gave him a quizzical and wary look.

"I need two hands for the fly," Cam said. Mason grinned a little. It took a moment to pull down the zipper and push down Mason's clothing a few inches. His erection bobbed, hard and tight against the lower edge of his stomach. Cam's hand closed around it and stroked him. Mason groaned again and bucked slightly into the motion.

Cam eyes flickered between the hard length in his hand and Mason's face. The slightly flushed skin, the pant of breath between Mason's lips and the stronger thrum of energy told him Mason was very definitely enjoying this. Cam drew the tip of his tongue across a nipple and Mason shivered beneath him, clenching his hands into the sheets. Cam continued the slow pace, pausing a moment to drag his palm across the now leaking tip of Mason's cock. Mason's breath was going ragged and he thrust shallowly into every stroke. Cam was entranced. To watch Mason come undone under his touch was amazing.

"Unh... God... close... Cam." The last syllable was a heavy moan and Mason came hard in spurts that splattered across his stomach and Cam's hand. Cam could feel the bright wash of ecstasy crash through him like sticking all his fingers in an electrical socket. It was adrenaline and lust and a head rush all tangled together. Mason sagged bonelessly on the bed, struggling to breathe evenly.

"Wow," Mason gasped.

Cam kissed him, thoroughly enjoying the soft energy after burn that bled from Mason's skin.

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Mason cupped his hand against the back of Cam's head, deepening the kiss. It had been a while since any hands other than his own had touched him. He didn't really "do" casual. It certainly wasn't like he was looking for undying love and permanent commitment, but... There really had to be some emotion, something more than just satisfying an itch. And there was an awful lot of emotion charging through the man in his arms. Passion probably topped the list, but there was also wonder and curiosity and uncertainty.

They finally parted, mostly for lack of oxygen. Mason stared up into Cam's face. There was so much intensity in those blue-gray eyes. Cam's body was pressed along his side, and he could feel the bolts and rods from the metal fixation lightly jammed against his own leg. Cam's uninjured leg was draped halfway over his and he was grinding himself on Mason's hip. Mason curled his hand around the curve of Cam's behind, pulling Cam in a little tighter.

"Looks like the rest of my body finally got it in gear," Cam said, with a bit of a smirk. Mason hooked a finger through one of Cam's belt loops and tugged a little.

"We could get rid of these," Mason proposed. He didn't want to push too hard. There was still an underlying hesitancy in the pilot. Cam's breath hitched a little unevenly.

"I, uh, I'd need a little help," replied Cam.

"I can do that." Mason sat up and eased Cam's jeans off and shimmied out of his own. Lying back down beside Cam, he wrapped an arm carefully around Cam's waist. "Tell me what you want?" he whispered. Cam looked at him, pupils blown, lips parted. "Hands? Mouth? Both? Something different?"

"B-both? God I don't care. Just *do something!*" Cam pleaded.

Mason gave a light snort of amusement.

"You sound awfully desperate for a supposedly straight guy," Mason said. His thumb brushed lightly along Cam's hipbone. He could sense the raw want. His fingers gripped Cam's hard length and he stroked Cam as he began to kiss the man again. He pushed his tongue into Cam's mouth, devouring him. Cam's hand clenched in the hair at the back of Mason's head.

Mason could feel the tickle of tension from Cam's mind as his body ached for release. His heart rate climbed as he thrust into the firm grip of Mason's hand. His breath was an irregular pant. Mason ran his mouth down Cam's body, pausing to suck on a nipple. Cam let out a whimpering moan. Mason continued on down along his lover's ribs, with light grazes of teeth and sucks at skin. Cam was rocking harder into Mason's stroking hand. Mason could feel the build-up. He scooted a little further down the bed. The tip of the cock in his hand was damp and slick. He opened his mouth and licked across the moisture. Cam's breathing became a gasp and Mason deep throat him.

“Ohgodohgodohgod!” Cam half screamed as the climax tore through him. His body arched up off the bed. Mason quickly slid his arms under Cam’s back, holding him as tightly as he dared while the final spasms of the orgasm dwindled away. He held the pain down to an echo that zinged its way through his lover’s nervous system like the after image of fireworks.

A couple of minutes passed before Cam opened his eyes.

“I’m gonna seriously regret that later aren’t I?” Cam whispered.

“Maybe,” replied Mason. He gave Cam a soft smile.

His lover’s body sagged heavy and limp in his arms, and he withdrew an arm to brush sweat damp hair back off Cam’s forehead. It was obvious that the exertions had thoroughly exhausted Cam. Mason could feel his own fatigue warring with the need to keep his partner’s pain at bay. He sat up long enough to pull the blankets over them, and then gently folded Cam in his arms, cradling Cam’s head against his shoulder.

He could do this. He could catch a little more sleep and let his healing talent run on a sort of low level autopilot again. It wouldn’t speed the healing of the damaged nerve, but truthfully, he was more worried about Cam’s mental state right at this moment.

Nose buried in the warm sweaty male scent of Cam’s hair, Mason let his hand trace slow circles on Cam’s skin as they both drifted into sleep.

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Showering involved a plastic chair swiped from Mason’s patio and quite a bit of assistance from Mason himself. Afterward, Cam decided it was the best he had felt physically since the accident. Well, barring the really intimate stuff with Mason. He was still trying to sort out how he felt about that. The military had some definite opinions *against* same sex relationships. If he pursued this, it would take an extreme amount of discretion and restraint to prevent it from destroying his career. Could he do that? He didn’t know. He wasn’t even sure exactly what Mason wanted out of this. It was obvious he cared, a lot. But how much of that was a product of being both a doctor and a healer?

In the kitchen, Mason was throwing together some dinner. Cam sat with his wheelchair pulled up to the table, idly trying to force his brain to focus on the Sodoku puzzle in the newspaper.

The sound of the doorbell broke the silence.

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Mason opened the door. A blond man in a dark suit was standing on the doorstep. The first thought that jumped to mind was -- police.

“I’m looking for Lieutenant Cameron Bradshaw,” the man said.

“And you are?” asked Mason. His tone was polite but wary. Cam didn’t really need another round with the police only a handful of hours after the last one. The man flipped open an ID.

“Federal agent, Division P. My name is Daniel Valentine,” he replied.

Behind Mason, there was a slight noise, wheels on wood. Cam had pushed his wheelchair out of the kitchen.

“Danny? What are you doing here?” Cam demanded.

“You know this guy?” asked Mason.

“Yeah, I do. We’ve done some work together,” Cam said. Mason stepped back and motioned for the agent to come in. “So, back to the first part, what are you doing here?”

“Looking for you. You’re in danger.”

“Why?”

“Division P ops.”

“I haven’t done anything for you guys for like two months.”

“Yeah, you have. Or at least you started to. The meeting on the 18<sup>th</sup>.”

“That was a do nothing, hold your breath while we try to get our collective bureaucratic asses in gear non-event.”

“Apparently that’s how it started out.”

“Why do I *not* like the sound of that?”

“We’re pretty sure you were targeted for your involvement. The accident most likely wasn’t. Neither was Lieutenant Commander Haverty,” finished Valentine.

All the blood drained from Cam’s face. Mason quickly laid a hand on Cam’s shoulder wondering if Cam was about to pass out.

“Oh fuck. They thought he was me?” Cam whispered.

“Possibly. The details are still under investigation.”

“Oh God!” Cam hugged his arms around his body and hunched forward.

“You need to come to the compound until we sort this out. If those people realize you’re our guy there’s a really good bet, they’ll try to finish the job.”

“Uh, okay. It’s not like I’m busy flying at the moment,” Cam said. He glanced up at Mason. Mason could see the grief stricken misery in Cam’s eyes. “Can you grab my bag?” Cam asked.

Mason brushed his thumb very slightly along the side of Cam’s neck. There was no fear emanating from the Navy man, just stress and raw guilt.

“Okay,” replied Mason and walked toward the bedroom. Who exactly was Division P? It sounded very black ops. He picked up Cam’s duffle bag and saw the sneakers lying beside the bed. He was still trying to wrap his brain around what Valentine had said. The motorcycle accident that Mason had watched happen had possibly been intentional? Keith Haverty, Cam’s friend and room mate, had probably been murdered because someone thought he was Cam? Mason’s gut promptly tied itself in a hard knot. This Valentine guy was implying that someone was actively out to kill Cam. Mason flashed back to kneeling beside the motorcyclist, holding him together, keeping him alive until the EMS people could get there. If he hadn’t been there, Cam would already be dead.

With shaking hands, he picked up the sneakers, then walked slowly back down the hall where the other two men waited. He laid the sneakers in Cam’s lap. Valentine held out his hand for the bag.

“Can you give me a couple of minutes with him,” Cam asked Valentine.

“Yeah. Official secrets act, remember?” Valentine said. Cam nodded. “If you could please bring him out to the car when you’re done,” Valentine said to Mason, and then walked out the door.

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Cam looked up at Mason. The man radiated a wary concern laced with tension.

“I know you have questions. Fuck, I have questions, too. This is suddenly all pointing toward an op going very bad,” Cam said. He ran his hands back through his hair. “I’m not just a pilot. I also work for Division P. It’s a kind of part-time, when they need you sort of gig.”

“Will they protect you?”

“Yeah. I’m guessing Danny’s going to take me out to the complex in Suffolk. I shouldn’t be saying anything more but... Division P is what essentially amounts to a group of psi. Recruited from government employees, trained by them and then farmed out on specific assignments.” Mason gave him a look with one raised eyebrow. “Yeah I know, it sounds very... off the wall.”

“You do... psi stuff for them?” asked Mason.

“Yeah, now and then. If you ever think about quitting the orthopedic practice, they would welcome you with open arms.”

“And spend the rest of my life locked in a cage, getting poked and prodded.”

“No. Do I look like I spend my life being a lab rat? Okay, there are some down sides, but probably not the ones you would think.”

“Did you volunteer for this?”

“I was recruited.”

“Conscripted?”

“No. I was already in the Navy when they screened me. It was an opportunity to do something very unique.”

“What exactly do you do for them?”

“Find things, and people. That’s really all I can tell you, and that probably ten times more than they would want me to.”

“Will they take care of you? Help you dress, make sure you eat, do something to manage your pain?”

“If they’ve taken the trouble to actually send someone to collect me, I suspect I’ll have round the clock company for a while.”

“That’s not what I asked.”

“I... I don’t know. I guess so,” Cam said.

Mason dropped to a knee in front of him and wrapped his hand around Cam’s. “You need someone to kick your butt, and you need someone to take care of you. It’s probably going to be a couple weeks until you can do it yourself.”

Cam didn’t need his extra senses to see the pure worry in Mason’s face.

“I’ll call you in a couple days, and let you know how things are going.” Cam’s chest hurt and it had nothing to do with his injuries. He had given Mason as much of an explanation as he dared. Probably way more than he should have. He didn’t really want to leave, but if what Danny had said was true, staying might put Mason in danger.

He watched Mason nod, expression tight. Cam wanted to beg Mason to kiss him, but that would probably make things even more awkward.

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Mason stood on the front step of his house and watched the car drive away. His arms were crossed on his chest and he felt like it was hard to breathe. He sat down on the concrete with his back against the front door.

Was he watching this man walk out his life? It wasn't like they exactly had a relationship. A handful of mini-conversations in the hospital, a pair of days spent mostly taking care of Cam's broken body. So why the hell did he feel like someone had torn a chunk of his soul away? Shit, he'd had a few lovers over the years. Those relationships had lasted from a few weeks to nearly a year. The breakups had ranged from just drifting apart to one memorable screaming match. Even that one didn't feel like this. Cam had said he would call, but Mason wasn't going to hold his breath on that one.

He slowly picked himself up off the ground and walked back inside.

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The short man with the graying hair walked down the concrete of the boardwalk. He glanced at the beach and ocean beyond. The surface of the ocean was getting a little choppy despite the pleasant warmth of the setting sun behind him. It probably meant a storm was brewing out to sea.

He walked toward the tall heavily muscled man who leaned on the railing, facing the ocean. There was a Styrofoam coffee cup in his hand.

"Bradshaw's out of the hospital," said the taller man.

"I heard."

"Does it make a difference?"

"Yes. He was seen with a person of interest. It would appear that he's the one we originally suspected."

"Is he pursuing the item?"

"I don't know."

"Is he accessible?"

"No."

"Suggestions?"

"Bradshaw was also seen at the home of an orthopedic surgeon."

"Professional interest?"



“Perhaps. They may be friends.”

“Do you think this surgeon guy is P?”

“I don’t know. It seems unlikely, but I’d like someone to keep an eye on him.”

“Consider it done.” His fingers fiddled with his coffee cup.

The older man stared out at the water. “I’ll be in touch,” he said and walked away. There was a great deal at stake. Buyers were expressing interest in the missile prototype. One courier had been dealt with, the other bought. The missile was currently in a secure but very awkward location. If Bradshaw was sent after the item, the whole plan would go to hell in a basket mighty fast. However, at the moment everything was in a holding pattern

They were playing a waiting game.

Hell Dogs Squadron: Touch and Go

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