



TGIF. Dr. Mason Flynn flipped the light switch and shut the front door of his house behind him. It was seven P.M., and he had been going pretty much non-stop since before six that morning. This was one of those days when he wondered why the hell orthopedic surgery had sounded like such an incredible career choice. At least he wasn't on call this weekend. Wandering into the kitchen, he noticed that the coffeemaker carafe was sitting on the burner. He could've sworn

he'd left it in the sink, since it was beginning to develop brown scum on the inside. The intention had been to put it in the dishwasher tonight. He pulled it off the burner and put it in the sink. Maybe he had only *intended* to do it, and just spaced on the actual doing.

He snagged a beer out of the refrigerator and walked back out into the den. Maybe there was something remotely interesting on TV. He could use a good distraction right now. Distraction. God, the word alone brought a whole set of images with it. Cameron Bradshaw, the Navy pilot whose life he'd saved, the man who he was hopelessly attracted to, the man who had shared his bed, both literally and figuratively.

Mason sank onto the sofa and took a long drink of the beer in his hand. Had it really only been three days since that government agent guy had come to retrieve Cameron? The agent had more or less said that Cam's motorcycle accident had been a murder attempt, and that the death of his roommate had essentially been a sequel. Christ, that was a scary set of thoughts.

The surgeon looked down at his hands. Healer's hands, and not just by the fact there was an M.D. after his name. He was psi. His grandmother had called it "touched by the Lady." Yeah, capital "L" there. His paternal grandmother had lived in Louisiana and he had spent exactly one unforgettable summer there. That was the summer right after he had watched his German shepherd get struck by a car. He had picked her up in his arms and, sobbing over her broken, barely-alive body, had "willed" her back to be okay again. She had miraculously recovered. He had then promptly passed out and ended up spending the next seven hours unconscious in a hospital. Afterward, his father had informed him that he would be spending his summer vacation with Grandma Flynn.

His parents had driven him all the way to Louisiana and told him they would pick him up the weekend before his freshman year in high school. End of explanation. And they drove away.

Grandma Flynn had been both sympathetic and mightily pissed that his parents had been so closed mouthed about the reason for the extended visit. And then she explained. She herself was "touched by the Lady," known to some of the people in the area as a faith healer and to others as "that witch." In practice, she was a healer like him, and she taught him amazing things. He hoped for a return visit the following summer, but she had died. He grieved, not only for the loss of the grandmother he had come to adore, but also for the rest of the knowledge he would never learn from her.

Mason's thoughts circled back to Cam again. How was he coping? Was he taking the pain meds and dealing with the lack of shielding or was he slowly killing himself trying to deal with the pain on his own? If only Mason had had more time. He had only really begun the repair on the nerve damage in Cam's shattered leg. If Grandma Flynn could have taught him more, maybe he would be more adept at that sort of thing. Everything he did these days in terms of healing was trial and error; self taught fumbling until he figured out what seemed to work. Mason wanted to hold Cam and keep his pain at bay and offer him comfort, but that was all just a hopelessly romantic delusion.

Mason hadn't heard a single word from Cam in three days. Obviously, whatever had happened between them was just a passing thing based on trauma, shock and desperation.

Mason slugged back some more of the beer, and reached for the TV remote. It wasn't on the coffee table. He glanced across the sofa cushions. Nothing. He usually chucked it on the table, so where was the stupid thing? He finally saw it, sitting on top of the bulky entertainment center across the room. Huh? Weird. He set the beer bottle on the table and walked over to get it. A framed photo of himself with an old med school buddy was sitting directly in front of the CD rack on the top of the cabinet. It was right in the way of grabbing any of the CDs out. That was just one too many subtly weird things out of place.

He began walking through the house, flipping on lights as he went. His TV was obviously still there, as was his computer, stereo equipment, and a set of Waterford crystal tumblers on a shelf along with a bottle of brandy. There was nothing to really even suggest he had been robbed, because nothing seemed to be missing. Well, unless you counted his watch, but he wasn't sure he hadn't left it in his locker at the hospital after surgery. Maybe he was just flat out losing his mind, over-tired or something.

He rubbed his hand down over his face. This was just sort of creeping him out. He took a second tour of the house. There were a couple of extra things that drew his attention. The plastic box where he stuffed his unpaid bills was sitting on top of an ink pen, and his bed was made with the sheets tucked under a whole lot further than he ever did it. Oh yeah, that would fly real well. Yes officer, somebody broke into my house and secretly remade my bed. He needed more beer, job stress or something was apparently making him crack up.

Lieutenant Cameron Bradshaw clomped across the floor on his crutches. The tan wall-to-wall carpeting muffled the sound. The quarters that he had been assigned had all the ambience of a motel room. A bed, a nightstand and dresser in bland medium brown wood occupied a bedroom. A sofa, TV, desk, and coffee table finished out the second room of the suite. A little kitchenette was tucked into one corner. He had been on the Division P compound grounds for three days now.

Division P was the black ops group of psychics on the government payroll. Not a team per se, not even a group exactly -- it was more 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, a near 100% failure rate. They only recruited a handful of people per year. Cam 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.

A couple hours of each of the past three days had been spent under the careful care of Peter Vithoukas, the healer. A quiet reserved but incredibly Talented psi, Vithoukas performed impossible logic defying tasks on a near daily basis. In just this short amount of time, Cam's cracked shoulder blade and broken ribs were healed enough to stand up to a little use of crutches.

The shattered bones in his leg were going to take more time.

He sat on the chair in front of the desk and picked up the bottle of goop he was supposed to drink. A creation of Peter's; it was a concentrated amalgam of calcium compounds and proteins to provide the building blocks for repairing his broken bones. It tasted like chalk stirred into glue, thinly disguised with a chocolate flavor. He choked down another couple of mouthfuls. This was shortly going to be followed a handful of meds: 1600 mg of ibuprofen, one Tylenol III, a muscle relaxant, and some odd new drug that affected some sort of pain perception thing in the brain. Again, this wondrous mish-mash of drugs was something that Peter had created, the object being adequate pain control and minimal psi shielding interference from the narcotics. It worked okay and was only supposed to be a stop-gap anyway, until Peter could finish healing the nerve damage in his leg.

Debriefing seemed to be occurring in segments. He had only been asked a handful of questions by Daniel Valentine, one of Division P's head field operatives, the first evening at the compound. Since then, he had been to see Valentine three more times, been grilled by a Naval intelligence man, somebody from the defense department, and the head of Division P, Andrew Bottman. And now he had to go see the shrink. He chugged the rest of the nasty stuff in the bottle and grabbed for his crutches.

It took Cam ten minutes to make his way down through the halls of the main building. Stephen Benford welcomed him into an office tastefully done in discrete dark furniture. Cam sank onto the sofa along the wall, and Benford sat across from him in an upholstered chair, with a legal pad in his lap.

"How are you holding up, Cameron?" the man asked. Cam gazed at him coolly. Benford was average height, with medium brown hair and dark eyes. Everything about his demeanor was unremarkable, and very, very deceptive.

"Fair, I guess."

"You know I want more than that. You had a very serious motorcycle accident, which we're now pretty sure was no accident at all. Your roommate was murdered. We think the two events are somewhat likely to be connected. And Peter told me that you have serious pain management issues that he is actively trying to resolve. That's an awful lot on your plate." Benford waited in silence for Cam to respond.

The mention of the whole pain issue brought a sharp image to Cam's mind: Mason Flynn -- the short dark hair, the intensity of his blue eyes, the feel of his hands against Cam's skin, the warmth of his kiss.

The psychologist raised an eyebrow in question and Cam hastily slammed his psychic shielding tightly shut. It wasn't like it would actually keep Benford out of his head if the psychologist really wanted to press the issue, but it would at least get the point across. Benford was no less Talented than any of the other core staff of Division P. He was an extremely powerful telepath with a flair for mental dominance. In other words, he was capable of ramming his way into

another's mind and forcing cooperation. In another setting or from another man it might have bordered on a version of rape. But when the suicide rate of Division P was an astronomical 8%, he had been known to violate of few ethics in order to save a life.

"Who is he?" Benford asked.

"A friend."

"His image evokes strong emotions."

"Yeah, well, he saved my life. He's scraped me off the highway and held me together till the ambulance could get there."

"Ah. And you feel you owe him?"

"No... yes... not the way you mean..."

"Your file says Daniel picked you up from this man's house."

"Yeah, after I found Keith dead in the apartment, I needed a place to stay." It was a half-truth, and Cam knew it. He wondered if Benford would call him on it. But the psychologist followed a different line.

"Describe your relationship with Lieutenant Commander Keith Haverty," prompted Benford.

Another rather uncomfortable half an hour inched by as Cam was asked about the depth of his guilt regarding Keith's death, his own brush with mortality, and his stubborn reticence about accepting help in dealing with his physical recovery issues. Peter had been busily kicking his ass on that front, too.

After the end of the session, Cam went back to his quarters. He was tired and annoyed and felt like he had been put through an emotional wringer, but then he guessed that was sort of the point. He flung himself onto the bed, and closed his eyes. He hadn't called Mason since he got here. It wasn't like they had a relationship. A slightly less than straight hetero Navy flyboy buddying up with a gay orthopedic surgeon. Oh yeah, that was recipe for disaster. But his gut was trying to tell him otherwise. The guy had cared far more than the situation seemed to warrant. He had taken Cam into his home and into his bed and cared for him, physically and emotionally, as Cam had fallen from one disaster into another.

Cam scrubbed his hand across his eyes. Just call the guy, let him know you're doing okay, and move on, Cam told himself. He hauled his body up off the bed and went out to the desk in the other room. There was a laptop on it and he did a quick internet search to find Mason's number. He was subtly amused that Mason's phone number wasn't even unlisted to the public. That just fit his personality so thoroughly, to leave himself so accessible.

He picked up his cell phone and dialed the number. It rang several times before it picked up.

“Hello,” said Mason.

“Hey. It’s Cam Bradshaw.”

“It’s been a few days. I wasn’t really expecting to hear from you again,” replied Flynn. Oh, ouch, that stung, and he deserved it.

“Sorry, I um... should’ve called sooner, to let you know I’m okay. Things are a little chaotic around here. Debriefing stuff and all.”

“How’re you coping with the pain?” the doctor asked.

“Fair. It’s being... handled.” Cam wanted so badly to tell Mason that he was being treated by another healer, one that fully comprehended the narcotics and lack of shielding link. Peter was good, obscenely good, but it was all about healing his body, nothing else, no emotional connection.

“They sending you back to the base any time soon?”

“No, not yet. The other stuff is... ongoing,” Cam said. There was really so very little he could tell Mason about the missing pair of operatives and the equally missing missile prototype. Or the apparent fact that someone knew he had been assigned to help recover it and was very willing to commit murder to short circuit the process.

“Mmm, way cloak and dagger,” commented Mason.

“I wish I could tell you more, but there are security issues.”

“Listening to you almost makes me paranoid enough to believe somebody really was in my house.”

Cam’s hand clenched on the phone. “Say that again.”

“Listening to you makes me paranoid?”

“No, the part about somebody in your house.”

“Forget it, it’s been a really busy couple of days.”

“What happened? Did they take anything?”

“No, no, I’m just hallucinating. I thought somebody moved some of my stuff around and remade my bed. How’s that for really losing my mind?”

“Shit. Shit. Shit,” said Cam. “Do you own a gun?”

“No. I’m a doctor. What the hell would I do with a gun?”

“You could be in danger. If they saw you with me at the murder scene, they might assume you were helping me. Not medically, I mean classified stuff. Lock your doors. Don’t let anyone in. I’ll call you back in about half an hour. Okay?”

“Cam...I’m sure it’s...” Mason began.

“Visualize Keith in my apartment,” growled Cam, cutting him off. “It’s a pretty sure thing he was killed because of his link to me. You’re linked to me. And you have no fucking idea how to defend yourself. Stay put. Stay by the phone. Got it?”

“Yeah, I got it.”

Cam hung up, and dialed the internal number. Comeoncomeoncomeon pick up, his brain demanded.

“Valentine,” the field agent answered.

“Dan. I have a situation.”

“Here?”

“No. In Virginia Beach. Remember the doctor whose house I was at when you picked me up? He thinks somebody’s been in his house.”

“He got robbed?”

“No, no, more like cased. Subtle stuff.”

“Don’t you think he’s over reacting?”

“No. He thinks he’s probably imagining it, but since somebody executed my roommate I don’t think he is. He could be next.

“From what little we know for sure, Lieutenant Commander Haverty’s death is due to his connection to your squadron. Apparently a piece of information was leaked as to the whereabouts of our contact, but we’re not sure they got a name to go along with the squadron designation. “

“It doesn’t matter. If these people think I talked to Mason... Please. Go with me to see him. I can probably drive, just barely, but I’m trying to be sane about this. I’m not in great shape to protect him.” There was a long silence at the other end of the line. Cam tapped his fist against the desk

top, trying to decide if he should play one last card to try a convince Valentine of the urgency. "If I'm wrong, all we're out is a couple of hours and some gas."

"Cam, we're trying to keep this whole thing as low profile as possible." Valentine said.

"He's psi," Cam blurted out. "He's a strong psi... and he's a healer." Now there was dead silence on the line.

"If you're lying..."

"Damn it, Valentine! He's a healer. I'm pretty damn sure that having him at the accident scene is the only fucking reason the attempt on my life wasn't a success. And he helped me with the pain issues. He's good. Really good."

"Okay, we'll drive to Virginia Beach and talk to him. And along the way you can give me the run-down on his psi Talents."

Mason paced the floor of his den, beer bottle in his hand. Cam had seemed very worried. The phone rang and he thumbed the answering button.

"Flynn."

"Hey Mason, it's Cam. I'm heading in your direction. Stay put, okay? I'm also bringing Valentine with me. The guy who picked me up a couple of days ago. Remember?"

"Yeah, I remember him. I know you're wigged out about this, but honestly I think it's probably my imagination."

"If it is, it is. But too much wicked shit has happened in past couple weeks not to check it out. We'll be there in about forty-five or fifty minutes."

"I'll be here." He hung up. From Suffolk to the ocean front of Virginia Beach, yeah, that probably was close to an hour's drive. He glanced out the window. The drapes were hanging open. The sun had set, and it was fading toward full dark. He was tired, but this whole maybe somebody broke in deal was making him restless. He paced some more, thinking.

How did one go about setting up an "accident"? He had watched the pickup truck hit Cam. It wasn't like the guy was sitting still, just waiting for the right motorcycle to come by. Maybe there had been multiple people involved? He supposed that would make more sense. He still had no real clue as to why someone would want Cam dead, but the pilot had implied that it had to do with this Division P bunch of people.

Mason flopped down on the sofa and surfed through dozens of channels. There was nothing on that caught his interest. He got up and wandered around the room some more, eventually

finishing his beer. He set his empty beer bottle on the coffee table. A small red flash caught his eye. It glinted slightly off the polished wood of the coffee table and jiggled along the arm of the sofa. It reminded him of a laser pointer used during seminars to point at things on the screen. He turned to look out the window. There was probably some kid getting his cheap thrills running around in the dark pointing it through people's windows, like a gun sight.... Oh fuck.

The window of his den exploded in a shower of glass as Mason flung himself sideways. He rolled across the floor, arms up in front of his head, trying to protect his face. He scrambled up and darted into the kitchen, putting a wall between himself and the broken window. Away, was the only coherent thought in his head. Heart pounding hard enough to hurt, he edged toward the door that led out onto the patio. He fumbled with the dead bolt, trying to open it with shaking hands. Mason thought he might have seen a shadow through the gaping opening surrounded by shattered glass. He finally wrenched the door open and ran.

It was a mad sprint across the concrete patio and over the low fence at the side of the yard. He fell trying to clear the four foot wooden border and skidded palms and knees across the grass of his neighbor's lawn. He staggered back to his feet and took off running again, expecting a bullet in the back any second. He cut down the next street toward Atlantic Avenue and hid behind a parked car as a moving car headed up the road.

That car pulled serenely into a driveway and a woman and a child got out. Gasping for breath, Mason knelt there for another couple of minutes. His side hurt. He glanced down and saw his shirt was soaked in blood all along the right side of his ribs. Gritting his teeth, he fingered what seemed to be the wettest spot. There was a deep gouge in the flesh, and it was bleeding freely. But it didn't feel like a hole. The doctor part of his brain kicked into gear and he assumed that he must have been grazed by the bullet. The edges of the wound felt too irregular to be a slice from flying glass. The exploding glass had nicked and scraped his hands and arms in multiple places and left a myriad of little bloody gashes in his slacks.

A man in dark clothing carrying a duffle bag walked from between two houses. The bag said N&R Plumbing. There was something peculiar about the way the man's hand rested near the top seam of the bag. Oh God, I'm so freaking paranoid, thought Mason. It's probably just some guy finishing up a service call, and not really a guy with a gun out to kill me. He twisted a little to peer up over the edge of the parked car and the pain in his side made him let out a thin whimper. Oh God, what if the guy heard him?

He sank back down with his back against the wheel, and tried to pull his thoughts together. Go someplace with a lot of people, and get someone to call the police, because knocking on the door of someone's house wearing blood drenched clothes was apt to get him shot by a skittish homeowner. That, and turn off his pain.

Mason knew he could block off his own perception of pain. It didn't actually make it stop, it just wouldn't be noticeable. He couldn't heal himself. It was too close to "robbing Peter to pay Paul." Maybe there was some way around it, but he had never figured it out. He closed his eyes for a moment and dragged down the blocks that would allow him to ignore the pain in his side and the collection of other lesser agonies. It would come back to bite him in the ass big time, but he

couldn't really see another option. He had done something similar one time after injuring his ankle while hiking. By continuing to walk on it for six more miles, he had ended up damaging it badly enough to put him on crutches for seven weeks.

He peeked above the edge of the car again. The man had walked down the street in the direction of the main road. Mason decided he needed to go in the other direction.

Valentine and Bradshaw pulled up in front of Mason's house. One look at the shattered window and they both knew things were going very bad, very fast. Valentine bolted out of the car, gun drawn. Cam's gut clenched. Were they too late? Was Mason already dead? He threw his psychic shielding wide open and formed a mental image of Mason, searching for his presence. Nothing immediate drew his attention. No presence, but no film of empty death either. He grabbed his crutches and got out of the car, heading toward the house. Daniel leaned out the front door.

"All clear," he said. Cam went inside.

Only the den was in disarray. Broken glass strewn across the carpet and a fist sized stain of blood was obvious. Other lesser flecks of blood led toward the kitchen.

"You think he's alive?" asked Valentine. "I haven't found a body yet."

Cam bent down and touched a finger to the blood on the carpet. Mason's blood. He knew it was Mason's the moment his hand made contact. It was far more than just drops. Mason was hurt. Cam went toward the kitchen. On the wall was a blotch of blood. He touched that, too. Mason had leaned against the wall before going through the door in that room.

"So? Opinions?" asked Valentine. Cam glanced at him, where he stood in the doorway between the kitchen and den. Cam took a deep breath.

"I don't think he's dead," Cam replied. There was no empty void when he groped inside his head for those impressions he associated with Mason. None of the gray blank nothings that he knew indicated death.

"Can you find him?"

"I will. I have to." Cam looked around the kitchen. On the counter lay a bottle opener. He picked it up. Mason had held it sometime on the past hour or so. It was a common item, but held a good impression of its user. Cam stared for a moment at the object in his hand. It had a line of writing embossed on it. "Virginia is for Lovers." His throat tightened and he mentally begged the powers that be to keep Mason alive until Cam could find him. Shoving the bottle opener in his pocket, he headed for the exterior door. The knob was smeared with more blood.

"You do your thing. I'll follow. I'm also going to call HQ and let them know things are escalating again," said Valentine. Cam nodded.

He went outside and stood on the patio. Come on, lock on, he berated himself. Search for the pull. He closed his eyes and waited for his mind to settle just a little. There. It was a bit of a cross between using a compass and running a stud finder over a wall, waiting for that subtle magnetic indication that you were aiming at the right thing. He followed the sensation to the low fence at the far side of the yard. With crutches, there was no way for him to easily get over it. He had to backtrack to a gate. Outside he slowly followed a path across a lawn to the next street. Most of a block down, he stopped beside a car. There was blood smeared along the edge of the wheel well. Daniel was a few steps behind.

“Headquarters has been alerted. If we don’t find him within the hour, they’ll send some extra manpower. You still have a lock on him?” asked Valentine.

“Yes.”

“Is he ok?”

“I’m not sure. Seeing more blood is kind of coloring my assessment on that.”

“How far?”

“Less than a mile. More than a couple blocks.”

“Okay, keep going. You doing all right?” Valentine gestured to Cam’s crutches.

“I’m fine. Slow and clumsy but fine,” Cam said. It was fairly close to the truth. Tomorrow he would be sore as hell, but that was pretty irrelevant at this point.

Mason was hiding like a terrified child, which was a damn good description, he decided. Except the monster he was hiding from was all too real and had a gun. His original intention had been to head for the high rise hotel along the north end of the beach. But he had seen the man with the duffle bag three times before managing to make it to the beach side of Atlantic Avenue. He was further down the beach than he had thought he would be, in the wrong direction.

Mason was currently hiding between some fencing and a huge clump of pampas grass near the slope of the dunes that led to the beach. He could hear the sound of breaking waves and the wind was blowing in erratic little gusts. Mason had sprinted down the street after a car had driven past and darted into the first reasonable hiding place he saw. It was small piece of government property rented out to military and their dependents for parties and similar events. His heart was still thudding hard in his chest as he attempted to slow his breathing. No one lived there. It was just a large enclosure full of table and chairs and beach equipment and the like. There would be no barking dogs and no homeowners to betray his presence. Sliding ungracefully down the fence, he hugged his arms around his chest. Wet. Oh hell, he was still bleeding. In the shadowy combination of moonlight and reflected streetlights, he pressed his hand against his side and then

looked at it. The blood looked nearly black in the semi-darkness.

An adult could lose a full pint of blood without much in the way of ill effects. After all, that was how much you gave when you donated blood. Even a few teaspoons always seemed to look like a vast amount. Mason tried to convince himself as he shivered. It really wasn't all that cold out. It was early May. Now you begin to pay the price, his brain suggested. Your body is starting to go into shock. He let the pain blocks fall free and his vision went starry white as the pain hit him. He panted for several minutes trying to regain control, and only the fact that he was sitting still, leaning on the wall of the structure made it a halfway doable prospect.

Cameron Bradshaw knew he was getting close. The draw was tugging on him, telling him to go this way. And hurry.

He had crossed the main drag from the side of Atlantic Avenue where Mason lived to the side closer to the beach. He had never been so amazingly glad that his psychic Talents ran to finding things and more specifically, people. The street ended at a wide sandy path that led up over the dune to the beach beyond. No, not the beach -- left. Cam turned. There was a high privacy fence that ran for half a block, enclosing a government owned spot to hold parties and other functions held by the military. He recognized the place. He had been to a Hail and Farewell here sometime last summer.

There. He could feel the subtle pull of Mason's proximity.

"Mason?" he called softly. All he could hear was the surf. The doctor was near, near enough that Cam caught hints of pain and fear. He swallowed hard. "Mason, it's Cam," he said. There was no response.

"You sure he's here?" asked Valentine.

"Yes. I'm sure," Cam snapped. The fence that led up around the area was bordered by heavy soft sand. That was going to be a bitch on crutches. Cam carefully maneuvered his way around the corner. He thought he could make out a dark form along the wall, half covered by some bushy plant. He shuffled his way closer.

"Mason?" he said. The man was huddled against the fence, arms wrapped around his body, knees drawn up, and head down. Cam leaned down and touched a hand to Mason's shoulder. The doctor's head jerked up and he sucked in a sharp gasp of pure terror as he raised an arm to try to protect himself. "Easy! You're safe!" Cam said, squeezing Mason's shoulder.

"Oh shit, I thought you were... him," Mason replied in a hoarse whisper. Cam sat down beside Mason, dropping the crutches. He put one hand on Mason's arm and the other cupped against the side of Mason's neck. He could feel the hammering pulse beneath the clammy skin. Weak relief mixed with pain filtered through the connection.

“How bad are you hurt?” Cam asked. “There was blood in your house and a couple other places, too.”

“’Tis not so deep as a well, nor so wide as a church door...” Mason muttered.

“Say what?”

“Forget it. I think I got clipped by a bullet. It tore through the muscles along my ribs. I know I’ve lost some blood, but I don’t really know how much.”

“Can you walk?” asked Daniel. He was standing at the corner of the enclosure, weapon out, scanning the area.

“Yeah, I think so,” Mason replied.

Cam awkwardly got to his feet and, bracing himself on his crutches, offered a hand to the injured man. Mason unfolded himself a little and levered himself up with one hand on the wall. Mason made it about four steps before he fell to his knees, one hand on the ground and the other pressed to his side. He was gasping for breath.

“Okay, we’re not going to make it back to car like that,” said Daniel. “Cam, you stay with him? I’ll go get the car. Cocked and locked?”

“Yeah,” said Cam. He popped the snap on the holster on his belt and pulled out his 9mm.

“I’ll be back as fast as I can.” Daniel jogged back the way they had come. Cam sat back down beside Mason.

“You have a gun,” Mason said.

“Yeah, I do.”

“I’m supposing you know how to use it.”

“Yes.”

“Good, because I certainly don’t.” Mason sat back on his heels, his hand still holding his side. He clenched his teeth and stared up at the night sky. “Am I safe?”

“No guarantees until we get back to the compound.” Cam wasn’t willing to lie to the man beside him. “Are you still bleeding?”

“Yes.”

“You can’t... you know, fix yourself?”

“No, it doesn’t work that way,” Mason whispered. Cam pulled off his T-shirt and folded it into a rough square.

“Lean up against the wall again. I’ll try to put some pressure on it,” suggested Cam.

Mason scooted back a little and rested his head and shoulder on the wall. Cam sat in front of him, so he had an adequate view in either direction and held the fabric pad against the wound. Mason sucked in a hissing breath at the pressure. They sat nearly immobile for a number of minutes. Cam could feel the burning pain leaking through the physical connection between them. A thread of fear trickled through Cam. The wound wasn’t huge, but Mason had been running and scrambling. How much blood could an adult male lose before it became a life-threatening issue? Mason seemed to be breathing just a little too fast, considering they weren’t even standing up.

“This is romantic. I’m bleeding and you have a gun in your hand and we’re hoping your buddy gets back before the guy who shot me finds us,” said Mason.

“Yeah, that about sums it up. For what it’s worth, I’m sorry. I never meant to put you in danger. God... he could’ve killed you.”

“Unh... yeah.” Mason’s head was drooping.

Cam used his wrist to tip the doctor’s head back to lean on his shoulder, because there was no way he was laying down his gun.

“Come on stick with me, Mas’,” he whispered. More minutes ticked by.

All the adrenaline that had kept him going had very definitely burnt out of his system, Mason decided. The mad run, the hiding, more running... now he was just sitting. Even the fear was sort of fading into a kind of cold blankness. If the wall hadn’t been there for him to lean on, he’d probably be sprawled in the sand. Guns, and bullet wounds and assassins, oh my. And don’t forget the secret spy stuff.

He shivered. God that hurt. The irrational part of his brain suggested he was going to die, here behind a dune on the beach. But then that same part has made approximately the same suggestion about forty times in past hour, and so far he was still breathing.

“You get shot at often?” he asked.

“Um, no. And most of the few times it’s happened, I was in a nice multi-million dollar piece of flying hardware.”

“That has really big weapons.”

“Yeah, you could say that,” replied Cam. Mason could feel the gentle heat of the pilot’s breath

on his face.

There was a slight sound at the far end of the wall. Cam raised his gun, and Mason felt Cam's body go tense for several seconds. Mason gulped hard and prayed it wasn't the guy who had shot him. After a few more moments Cam lowered the gun and Daniel came toward them.

"I parked the car as close as I could," Valentine said. He helped Mason to stand and hauled Mason's arm over his shoulder. A wave of nauseating pain swept through Mason as he staggered along beside Valentine.

Cam was a few steps behind them, floundering slightly in the sand with his crutches. At least luck had been with them in Daniel getting back to them swiftly. Cam did his best to hurry around the car as Valentine eased Mason into the back seat, and then noticed the agent had vanished momentarily around to the trunk. Cam slid into the back seat from the opposite side, letting out a few choice curses as he banged the metal struts of his "cast" on the door frame. Valentine shoved a blanket and a first aid kit into his hands.

"I take it we're not heading for Virginia Beach General," said Cam.

Valentine had darted back around to the driver's side and jumped in, quickly starting the car and backing into a turn. "He's alive, conscious and breathing. We have no clue who or where the hit man is. P is the only place that's gonna be guaranteed secure. I called Peter, on my way back to get the car. He knows we're going to be arriving with a casualty. Keep him together, I'm going to break a few speed limits as soon as I hit the highway," Valentine said.

Cam glanced at Mason. The injured man was partially curled against the seat. His teeth were clenched and his lips drawn tight. Cam dug into the first aid kit and pulled out some bandage scissors and packs of gauze, tape and a penlight. He cupped his hand around Mason's neck and ran a thumb along the lower edge of his jaw. Mason squinted at him.

"I'm going to cut your shirt off and try to get a look. Then you're going to have to clue me in as to what you want me to do," said Cam. Mason nodded a little.

Cam pulled Mason's shirt loose at the waist and slit it near the seam and up the sleeve. He peeled the blood soaked fabric away and dropped it on the floor. Holding the penlight in his teeth, Cam could see a furrow along Mason's ribs, about as deep and wide as one of his fingers. Although the blood had clotted somewhat near the ends, the center portion was still actively seeping.

"Am I supposed to try to clean it?" asked Cam.

"No. Not here. It'll have to wait till we get... wherever the hell you're taking me," said Mason. "Just layer a batch of 4x4's together and tape it all down and put some pressure on it again. It's in a spot where every time I move it pulls on it, and starts the bleeding again."

“Okay. Guess this is going to hurt.” Cam was as gentle as possible in taping the thick gauze layers over the wound. He also draped the blanket over the majority of Mason’s body.

“Okay, just like out by the wall, lean back against me. It’ll be easier for me to do the pressure thing and keep you still, too,” said Cam.

Mason let out a heavy groan as he twisted a little in the seat. Cam wrapped his arm around Mason’s chest and put his palm flat over the bandage. Reluctantly he increased the pressure. Mason’s breathing went from slightly fast to gasping pants.

“Sorry,” whispered Cam. He put his other arm around the front of Mason’s shoulders, and hugged the man carefully against his own body. Mason’s back was damp and chilly where it pressed to his own skin. Shock, thought Cam. Fucking hell, he’s going into shock.

It also dawned on him that he was holding onto Mason like a lover. He almost pulled away, and then realized, it didn’t matter. Daniel Valentine wouldn’t care. To say that Division P was flexible was kind of an understatement. And right now, it definitely didn’t matter because he was too damn worried. Cam could tell from the blurry quality of Mason’s presence and the sheer tension of his body that he was fighting to stay conscious.

The motion of the car, the feeling of approximate safety and sheer exhaustion from blood loss was warring with the pain that surged with every breath. Pass out or fall asleep? Was there an actual difference? Mason wondered if he tried to re-assert the pain blocks again, would it help him stay conscious or make it just that much easier to slide into unconsciousness? The car banked into a turn and he unthinkingly stiffened a little in response. That was a bad idea, and the argument became a moot point as the pain washed him into blackness.

Cam felt Mason’s body go stiff, and then limp. Heart in his throat, he pressed fingers to Mason’s neck. The pulse beat weak and fast beneath the skin. He glanced out the window. They were only a couple of miles from the compound. Thank God.

“Valentine. Mason just passed out. I don’t think we have time for the usual routine at the gate.”

“Okay, I’ll call ahead.” Cam listened to Valentine’s end of the brief phone conversation. “They’ll hold the gate open, but there’s also gonna be four armed guards on point. Understand?”

“Yeah, I got it.” The usual mode for entrance to the multi-acre complex usually involved a checkpoint, a pass code, a fingerprint scan and a visual ID. Not exactly speedy.

The car slowed in another few minutes, long enough to pass through a retracted metal fence and by a guard house into the center court in front of the main building. A cluster of people waited: Peter Vithoulkas and the trauma team with a gurney, and four men with M-16’s. The car ground

to a halt and the back doors were immediately opened, the trauma team easing Mason's limp body out of the back onto the gurney.

"Follow as soon as you can," said one of the corpsmen and he darted off. Cam hauled himself out of the back seat and clomped across the concrete. Mason was in good hands, he told himself, probably just about the best there were.

Valentine nodded at Cam and made a gesture that he was to go ahead and enter the building. Cam went down a wide hallway to the infirmary. By the time he got there, the rest of the Mason's clothes had already been cut off, and Vithoulikas was starting to check the injured man out.

Mason was beginning to rouse a little with all the activity and the many hands that touched him. Peter glanced up. He was busy loosening the bandages across Mason's ribs as a nurse took Mason's blood pressure.

"Get over here and get your hands on him. I can feel him beginning to freak. I can't kill off the pain and deal with hysteria at the same time," ordered Peter. Cam stood at the head of the gurney and laid one hand on Mason's shoulder, the other he brushed through Mason's hair.

"Easy, it's okay. These people are going to help you," Cam said. He could keenly sense the rising panic within Mason. Disoriented, groggy and injured, it had to be a real bitch to wake up to half a dozen different people you didn't know touching you. Cam hung forward over the tops of his crutches. He watched Peter carefully begin cleaning the brutal wound along Mason's ribs, while a nurse inserted an IV. Mason gave no sign that either action caused him pain, but his eyes rolled and blinked as he clawed his way back toward consciousness. Peter drew up a stool and sat down with both hands against Mason's body. The wound had stopped bleeding.

Mason gasped slightly and his free hand groped in the direction of Cam's.

"It's okay. You're safe," said Cam softly. A nurse slipped an oxygen mask over Mason's face. Cam took hold of Mason's hand and gently squeezed his fingers. "You're being taken care of. You'll be okay." He looked at Peter, hoping for agreement.

The senior healer nodded. "He lost a fair bit of blood and there's a cracked rib under this mess, but he'll be fine. I'm going to do a partial repair job tonight. And we'll do a clean up job, to make sure we get all the broken glass off his body. Tomorrow, I'll worry about the rest," explained Peter. "Miranda, grab a wheelchair for Cam. He shouldn't be standing."

Mason looked down along his body to where Vithoulikas was sitting. Peter gave him a smile.

"Don't mind the heat. It's a perception thing. Have you ever been on the receiving end of healing?" Peter asked.

"My grandmother," Mason mumbled.

“Ah, so you have a genetic lineage gift. We’ll have to talk about it when you’re feeling better. For right now, just relax and let me do the driving, okay?”

Mason nodded a little and his eyes drifted shut again. Cam wondered if that was of their own accord or with a hefty nudge from Peter.

Cam sat heavily in the wheelchair that had been brought for him. The meds he’d taken earlier were beginning to wear off. All the mad desperate rush to find Mason was catching up to him. He watched the organized bustle of the people in the infirmary, and wondered why he hadn’t been duly shuffled out of the way. Not that he was complaining, sitting out in the hallway waiting would have been nothing but angst. He was still holding Mason’s hand where Mason’s arm lay folded limply across his chest. Nobody told him to let go and get out of the way. He was disconcerted by that. Had Benford told them he was involved with Mason? If one could even go so far as to call it “involved.”

After a long number of minutes, Peter told one of the nurses to start cleaning Mason up a little, so that they could think about moving him to a room. Peter swiveled on the stool to look at Cam. Cam hastily withdrew his hand from Mason’s.

“Don’t,” said Peter. “He needs someone familiar.” Cam gave him a dubious and confused look. “I’m assuming you guys are friends at least.” Cam felt himself flush in embarrassment. Peter continued. “You’re the only person in this place he knows. I know you spent the requisite training period here, but it’s probably unlikely anyone ever talked to you about all the odd medical issues of all of us psi. You and I talked a bit about the whole narcotics messes with your shielding issue, but there’s an awful lot of other stuff, too. When Division P first got put together, before my time, a whole handful of the injured died when medically they shouldn’t have. Then we had a batch of near misses over the next few years. It took me and Stephen and a couple of others a while to put all the pieces together.

“Really good psi aren’t wired like the rest of the population. But you already know that. We finally figured out that it extends to how our bodies process damage, too. If you’re hurt badly enough to need ER care, or worse, that generally involves an awful lot of total strangers touching you. It’s weird and traumatic enough for the average John Doe off the street, but for most psi, it’s so much worse. Best description we can come up with is the body mounts a massive stress response, which of course makes anything already going wrong that much worse. Anyway, we finally realized that if the victim has physical contact with a family member or a loved one or even a close friend, it significantly reduces that problem. So in a way holding his hand is rather literally helping to keep him stable. Does that make a certain amount of sense?”

Cam nodded, and then a continuation of the idea occurred to him. “Does that mean if we had taken him to the hospital he wouldn’t have survived?” It was a hard question to ask.

“No, he probably would have done okay. I know the damage looks nasty and he did lose a good deal of blood, but as long as he got medical treatment, it probably would have worked out. However, that’s not to say there’s a guarantee. I don’t know him. I don’t know anything about the extent of his Talent. This is one of the reasons we’re so careful about this sort of thing now. I

read a case file on an early member of P that was in a car accident. She was taken to a local hospital, and none of her actual injuries were life-threatening. But she was an extremely sensitive telepath, with only some training. She coded four times in the ER, and wasn't stabilized until her brother managed to make it to the hospital and see her. That was actually one of the first pieces that helped us start to make the connection."

Mason drew in a sudden breath, eyes blinking open. It was semi-dark and there was a slight warmth on his wrist. Familiar warmth. Cam.

He glanced around. He was in a rather clinical looking room in a hospital bed. An IV line protruded from his arm and an oxygen cannula trailed under his nose. A gurney had been pushed up close to the edge of the bed, and Cameron Bradshaw lay sprawled on it. The pilot had one hand draped over the rail, fingers curled around Mason's wrist. Memories from the previous hours came rushing back. Getting shot, running for his life, bleeding, hiding, being found by Cam, the car ride, and... blurred, disjointed images of a man in scrubs and bright fluorescent lighting and heat and way too many people... and Cam.

Mason shifted a little in the bed. His side ached, but similar to a bad bruise, without the sharp intensity that it had before.

"Shh, s'okay, y'r safe," Cam mumbled, thumb stroking along Mason's wrist. His eyes dragged open and he squinted at Mason. "Hey, you're awake," said Cam with a little more coherence.

"Mmm, yeah."

"You doing okay?"

"I think. I'm kind of sore."

"Peter spent some time putting you back together. He's a healer, too. He's good. Really good."

"Where are we?"

"Medical wing, at Division P in Suffolk. Do you remember the drive at all?" Cam asked.

Mason scoured his somewhat fragmented memories. "Most of it, I think."

"You passed out before we got here. About scared me shitless."

"So did you punch somebody out to let you stay with me?"

"No, it's actually SOP around here. They always put someone who knows the patient in physical contact. It supposed to prevent some sort of stress response thing. God, ask me again, when I'm actually awake." Cam glanced at his watch. Mason could see it said 0231. "Better yet, ask Peter.

I'm sure he's going to wanna talk to you."

Mason watched Cam stifle an enormous yawn. The pilot's fingers were making little strokes on his wrist and he was fairly sure Cam wasn't even aware he was doing it. It was a comforting sensation.

"Go back to sleep," muttered Cam.

Mason relaxed back against the pillows, and closed his eyes.

Movement in the hallway woke Cam. Judging from the lighting he figured it must be morning. He glanced at the hospital bed next him. Mason was still sleeping. His face was pale, especially in contrast to the darkness of his beard stubble, but he looked a little better than he had the night before. Thank God, that had been way too close. Cam sat up and scooted down to the end of the gurney. His crutches lay on the floor. The metal strut of his leg fixation pinged against the leg of the gurney as he slid off. Mason's eyes opened, and he blinked hard.

"I'm going to go track Peter down and find out what's going on. Will you be okay here for a while?" asked Cam.

"Yeah, I guess... Bathroom?" Mason said.

Cam pointed at a door near the corner of the room.

"Can you handle it on your own? Or should I get a nurse?"

"I'll be fine."

Cam wasn't certain if that was really true or just an automatic response from Mason.

"Okay, I'll be back."

Sore muscles and the ache in Mason's side made the short trip a bit of a shuffling stumble, not to mention that fact that he was dragging an IV stand along with him. God, he would about kill for a long, hot shower. After he took care of business in the bathroom, he noticed a set of scrubs and an institutional style bathrobe folded on the low cabinet beside the sink. Somebody had had the forethought to realize that since all his clothes had been cut off, he had nothing to wear, unless you wanted to count the hospital gown.

He contemplated the IV for a long moment. The bag was labeled as being the standard saline and dextrose mix. He'd argue with the medical staff later if they protested too much about him removing it. All he had to do was undo the tape, use his thumb to hold the skin still and pull. The

needle slid out with little difficulty. He held a washcloth against the spot where he had pulled it loose for a couple minutes to stop the bleeding.

He put on the scrubs. No underwear. He guessed he was going commando today. His heart rate spiked and his hands clenched on the edge of the sink for a moment. Christ, that word evoked thoughts of the previous night. He stood motionless, fighting to control his emotions. It may have been sixty seconds, maybe more, before his pulse and breathing slowed enough to come close to normal. He shuffled back out into the main room.

A medium height man with sandy blond hair came into the room, carrying a plastic tote of medical supplies. He raised an eyebrow at Mason.

“It might have been a better idea to let someone help you get up,” the man said. His tone was even as Mason sat on the edge of the bed. “My name is Peter Vithoukas. We met last night, though I suspect you may not remember that.”

Mason watched him. There was a slight familiarity to the other man.

“I’m the senior healer around here. I’d like to have a look at the wound if you don’t mind.”

“Are you a doctor?” asked Mason.

“No. If you’re asking about my actual degree, I have a BSN. But around here what I do with my hands is a lot more valuable. Can you lie down for me?” Peter asked as he sat the tote on the end of the bed. Mason lay back on the bed. Vithoukas pushed up Mason’s scrub shirt and peeled the tape away from the wound dressing.

Mason twisted sideways a little to look at the damage. The wound was a good seven inches or so long and ran roughly horizontally near the bottom of his rib cage. It was about three quarters of an inch wide and the muscle tissue looked almost chewed. But he also noticed that the scab development and pinkness at the edges implied the injury was three to four days old. His brain began to make all the connections. The man had said he was a healer. Cam said he worked for a group of government psychics. Did that make this man a healer just like him?

Vithoukas pulled a stool away from the wall and dragged it over to the bed. He sat down and put his hand against the wound. Mason immediately felt the warm buzz of energy flowing across the injury. After a minute or so, the other healer looked up at him.

“Lieutenant Bradshaw said you do this sort of thing, too,” Peter said.

Mason was uneasy. It was a secret only five other people knew about him. This man seemed rather open and up front about his own Talent.

“Don’t worry. No one’s going to stick you in a cage like a lab rat. We have a rather unusual skill set in the people around here.”

“And if I can?” said Mason cautiously.

“I was hoping for a little demo after breakfast. Mmm, I really wished you’d asked before yanking out the IV.”

“I’m a doctor. I do have a clue on how to put in and take out an IV.”

“Orthopedic surgeon, if I remember correctly from your file. I know it’s a little irritating, but you’re the *patient* at the moment.” Mason glared at him a little. “Don’t give me attitude, Dr. Flynn. My infirmary, my rules.” Vithoulkas lifted his hand away. The scab was peeling away at the edges now and the ends had the bright pink shininess of new skin. The injury would pass as more than a week old. Mason was impressed. It was probably better than even he could do.

“I... it looks good. Thank you,” he said.

“You can take a shower if you like. Just don’t pick at it. The brass and some of the field people will be debriefing you this afternoon. I’ll get someone to bring you some breakfast. Oh, and this. Drink it.” Vithoulkas handed Mason a plastic pint sized container of thick liquid.

“What is it?”

“Soy protein, couple hundred milligrams of ferrous sulfate, some extra electrolytes and some other vitamins. You lost probably close to two units of blood. I can kick start your body into producing RBC’s a bit faster, but you have to consume the raw materials to make them from. That’s one law of physics we haven’t managed to figure out how to violate yet.” Vithoulkas stood up and walked toward the door. “I’ll be back in awhile,” he said.

Mason was curious and somewhat disconcerted. Vithoulkas was quite obviously a psychic healer and operated without any attempt at disguising what he did.

Cam showered and changed in his quarters and grabbed some coffee from the cafeteria intending to head back toward Mason. Peter Vithoulkas had assured him he would be looking in on Mason and discussing a few things. Halfway back, Cam was diverted by Daniel Valentine.

“We’ll be debriefing Mr. Flynn in a few hours. I also thought you’d like to get a little warning that the Naval Intelligence brass is heading our way. I think they want you to restart the task of finding those two missing men,” said Daniel.

“Okay, it’s not like I’m overwhelming surprised about that. It’s what spawned this whole cluster fuck isn’t it?” Cam replied.

“As far as I know... yes.”

“Do they have any clue how this all went so very wrong?”

“I don’t know.”

Eggs, bacon, toast and juice. Mason supposed it was a fairly traditional sort of thing to have for breakfast. Personally, he was a cereal and three cups of coffee kind of guy; it was just one more thing out of his control. Peter reappeared a few minutes after he had finished.

“I hope you’re ready to give me a little demo of what you do,” said Vithoulikas.

“Exactly what did you have in mind?” asked Mason.

“Oh, nothing too epic.” Vithoulikas pulled a disposable scalpel out of his pocket and slipped off the protective cover. Mason watched him with a little nervousness. The man held the blade like he was going to peel an apple and promptly drew it across the ball of his own thumb. Bright blood welled up from the gash. Vithoulikas held out his bloody hand to Mason.

“Fix it,” he said.

Mason gaped. He was still in shock at watching the other man injure himself intentionally. Mason grabbed up the napkin that lay on his tray and pressed it against the dripping wound. He was angry. Slashing your hand open with a scalpel was a damn stupid thing to do. He hastily sandwiched the bleeding finger between his palms and hesitated. Cam was the only person he had done any healing on in years who’d had the slightest clue what was happening. He gritted his teeth a little and flared his Talent. The idiot wanted a demonstration. Fine.

Mason poured energy into the small, vicious wound. He sealed the blood vessels, repaired tissue, and mended the torn skin. He dropped his hands away; Peter’s thumb was now coated with sticky partial dried blood. Vithoulikas picked up a wet nap from the breakfast tray and used it to clean off his hand. There was a faint pink line where the slash had been, nothing more. Mason felt dizzy and he rubbed his eyes.

“Oh, I’m impressed. Very impressed. You’re decently good,” said Peter.

“If I wasn’t, you’d be needing stitches,” said Mason.

“No, I’d have fixed it myself.”

Mason stared at him. “You can do that?”

“It’s not as easy as doing someone else, and it takes a little longer. But yeah, no problem... You... don’t know how?” The question was gentle. “I wondered why you let the bleeding go on so long if you were a healer. I mean, I know personal trauma makes detail work really hard, but...” Peter regarded him with a long gaze.

“I know how to block off pain in myself... but healing myself... I haven’t got a clue.”

“Bet you could learn.”

“How long did it take you?”

“Better part of six months.”

“Unh, sounds difficult.” Mason rubbed his temples. The dizzy feeling was still lingering.

“Sorry to push you so hard. I would have waited a couple of days for the demo. But the powers that be are chomping at the bit to try and resolve this whole thing with the job Cam is doing for Naval Intelligence. It doesn’t actually involve me except that I seem to be assigned to patching up the collateral damage.” Peter sounded annoyed. “I have to go. I think someone’s coming by to debrief you in a bit.”

There was an ammo box with a padlock sitting on the table in front of Cam, along with two personnel folders. He had been redirected yet again on his way back to the infirmary. Two Naval Intelligence men and one from the NSA sat across the table.

“Unlock it, sign the chain of custody, and remove the contents,” instructed Commander Rymal.

Cam did as he was told. Inside the box were a watch and a set of keys, the same items he had been shown nearly two weeks before. They were double bagged in plastic evidence bags. “You attended the original briefing. At that time it was uncertain as to whether the mission had been compromised. Sean Bennett and Adrian Davis have not been in contact in any form since that briefing. Nor have we managed to learn the whereabouts of the missile prototype they were transporting. We’d like you find our people and the device.”

Cam gazed at the bags lying before him, not touching them.

“You do realize that finding the people may be easier than the missile. Especially since you haven’t given me anything to reference the prototype. A picture? A packing crate? Schematics?” Cam said.

The two Intelligence men exchanged a glance with the NSA man.

“We’re waiting on clearance from the Navy before we’re allowed to give you that,” said the NSA man. Cam heaved a sigh.

“Okay. Could you all leave the room or at least two of you leave? It would improve the chances that I can do something productive with this stuff,” said Cam. He would have preferred to filter all this through Daniel or one of the other Division P people who had an infinitely better clue on the difficulty on the whole task, but c’est la vie. The Navy people got up and left.

Cam carefully undid the fastenings on the two bags, but didn't touch the contents. Next he thumbed his way through the very meager contents of the folders. They contained ID photos and bare bones information about the two missing men. He already had a sort of sinking feeling.

Dumping the keys out of the bag, he let them rest in his hand. Car, home, gym locker, bicycle lock... gray, empty, void, chill flat blankness. Mr. Davis, the owner of the keys was no longer in the land of the living. Cam might be able to find the body. He'd found corpses a couple of times before. It was a decidedly unpleasant experience. He laid the keys on top of the empty bag. And stared at the ceiling for a moment.

"Does that indicate you had no success?" asked the NSA man carefully.

"No. It means the guy is dead."

"Which one?"

"Davis."

"And Bennett?"

"Haven't got there yet," growled Cam. The NSA man fell silent. Cam plucked the watch out of the second bag. To look at there was nothing magnificent about it. Neither a cheap department store version nor anything as pricey as a Rolex, but Cam had the definite impression it had been worn fairly frequently. He closed his eyes for a moment. It didn't have the same empty texture that the keys held. He glanced back at the small photo in the personnel file. Sandy blond hair, a sort of hawkish nose, thin lips... Cigarette. Huh? He didn't smoke. It didn't say whether Bennett was a smoker or not. So why was he getting the distinct impression of a cigarette held between nervous fingers, blowing out smoke through slightly crooked teeth. Holding the watch in his hand, Cam got up and paced the length of the room. A name popped into his head. Little Rock. Did that mean the city?

"Davis and Bennett were driving from DC to New Mexico right?" Cam asked.

"Yes. Why?"

"I am moderately sure they only made it as far as Little Rock."

"Does that mean Bennett is alive?"

"He seems to be. I'm not sure I'd even say he was harmed in any way. Just stressed." Cam wasn't sure exactly what that implied. Had Bennett sold out? He could tell that was probably conjecture on his part. His Talent didn't usually provide that sort of information.

"Is he is still in Little Rock?"

"I don't know. I know this frustrates you, but sometimes I have to think about this sort of thing

for a while. If he was close, say within fifty miles, I'd say just start driving and I'd feel around 'til we hit the right direction. But he's not close, so I have to let my brain kind of cook the information."

"How long will that take?"

"Probably at least a couple hours. In the mean time, it won't hurt to get in touch with whatever people you have out in Arkansas. I have a suspicion you might be able to find the truck they were using." Cam sat down at the table again and laid the watch down.

"And what do you intend to do for the next couple of hours?" pressed the NSA man.

"Check on my friend who got shot last night to start with."

"He's being interviewed."

"You do realize he's a civilian and has absolutely no experience with this sort of operation. I still haven't figured why these people are going after anyone connected with me with such a vengeance." Cam ran his hands down over his face.

"It was an unexpected development."

Cam let his hands fall and gazed narrowly at the man across the table. What exactly did that mean? He could sense there was something specific he wasn't being told, but he didn't know what to ask.

"And you managed to lose your pursuer because you know the neighborhood?" said a thin balding man.

"Yes, I think so. I've lived there for six years. I know the area pretty well." Mason wiped his sweating palms on the scrubs he was still wearing. He had spent the last hour being questioned extensively on every single detail of the events from the previous night. Reliving the terrifying experience was making his heart pound, and he was sure his blood pressure was in the red zone. He felt like they were examining his every word under a microscope. In the corner of the room, a man with a laptop was currently using some sort of graphic arts program to produce a picture of the gunman from Mason's description.

The man named Valentine who he'd met before, had put in a brief appearance earlier and brought him a bottle of water.

"Peter was impressed by your Talents. When this thing is over, we need to have a discussion," Valentine had said. He had squeezed Mason's shoulder and departed. That comment had probably been the only moderately kind thing that had been said to him since this whole interrogation thing had started.

Mason rubbed his hand along his side. Sitting still in the hard metal chair was aggravating the partially healed injury. And he was exhausted. The little display for the other healer had really sucked what little energy he had recouped from a few hours sleep right out of him.

“I’d like to return to your description of the assailant,” said balding man. He had introduced himself and said he was from Naval Intelligence. Mason was totally spacing on the guy’s name. The man got up and walked behind him. Mason swallowed hard. There was some sort of aggression emanating from the man, and it was completely creeping Mason out. And then the man laid his hand on the back of Mason’s neck. Too much.

Run. Hide. Die.

The crutches skidded on the tile floor when the sudden spike of terror hit Cam. He had finally been heading back toward the infirmary, hoping to find Mason. He stumbled. It was pure naked fear and all coming from Mason. Cam dropped the crutches and began to run. A bolt of pain shot up his leg with every other step. Find him. Now.

He rounded the corner of the second floor hall and nearly wiped out. Cam burst into the room. One of the Naval Intelligence guys was bending over slightly and looking under the edge of the rectangular metal table near one side of the room. He could see the blue fabric of scrubs under the edge of the table. The intelligence man was about to reach under the table.

“Back off! Don’t touch him!” Cam shouted and hobbled the last few feet to the table. He shoved the other man to one side. “Get the fuck away from him! Go get medical help! Now!” The man hesitated then hurried away. Cam knelt down in front of Mason. The man’s six foot two frame was drawn in as tight as possible against one of the table legs and he was shaking violently.

“Mason?” he said softly. “It’s okay. You’re all right. Nobody can get you here. You’re safe.” Cam was uncertain about touching Mason. He wondered if the doctor would lash out thinking he was trying to protect himself. Was this a part of the stress response thing Peter had been talking about? Cam gingerly touched his fingertips to Mason’s arm. No response. He laid his entire hand on Mason’s arm. No response.

“Mason? Can you look at me?” he asked. Cam wasn’t sure he had ever seen any adult so utterly paralyzed in fear. He kept his hand on Mason’s arm. He wasn’t sure what else to do.

Peter came practically skidding into the room. He slowed as he saw Cam sitting on the floor next to his now catatonic patient.

“Well... shit,” Peter muttered. Cam looked up at Vithoulkas. “What the hell happened?” asked Peter.

“I have no idea. Ask Commander Rymal. He was the one in here with him,” snarled Cam. The

technician who had been sitting silently with his laptop in the corner, finally spoke.

“The commander was asking him more questions. He touched Mr. Flynn and he just... well... freaked.”

“When are you fucking morons going to learn? You don’t *ever* touch Division P people without their consent! Not unless it’s a life threatening situation,” shouted Peter. Cam could tell the healer was just absolutely furious.

“What are you going to do?” Cam asked.

“Nothing. Nothing unless I have to,” said Peter. “If I touch him, the only thing I can really do for him is force him into unconsciousness. Not an ideal solution.” Peter glanced back at the technician. “Leave. The fewer people near him at the moment, the better.” The technician hastily folded up his laptop and left. Peter gave Cam a long appraising look. “Hold him.”

“Huh?” Cam blinked at the request.

“You’re the only one he knows here. If he had a wife or girlfriend, I’d be on the phone in a heartbeat. He needs skin contact. Someone to pattern from. Someone who cares about him. You’re the closest thing he’s got at this moment.”

Cam’s face burned with heat. It could destroy his military career. Division P, on the other hand, didn’t give a rat’s ass about his sexual orientation. He edged back to lean on the wall and carefully wrapped his arms around Mason’s body. The doctor was still rigid. Cam pressed his forehead to Mason’s temple, letting his breath brush along the side of Mason’s face. He traced slow circles on Mason’s back and shoulders, and let his mind skim the fringes of Mason’s, seeking acknowledgement. All he could sense was a kind of locked fear. He wished he was capable of telepathy, but all he had was the empathy that came with his finding skills. He began to leave light little butterfly kisses along the side of Mason’s face.

“Come on Mas’, relax okay? You’re safe. I’ve got you. I’ll protect you. I know I got you into this. I’ll fix it. I’ll make it right. Please stop doing this. I’ll take care of you.” Cam whispered little promises and pleas into Mason’s ear. After several minutes, he felt Mason’s body begin to unwind a little. Peter had retreated to the doorway, keeping watch, but offering them a faint illusion of privacy.

It took twenty more minutes for Mason’s body to go nearly limp in his arms. His head lay cradled against Cam’s shoulder and he finally looked up Cam, blue eyes infinitely vulnerable. Cam rubbed his thumb across Mason’s mouth, that mouth he knew was capable of deliciously passionate kisses.

“Are you back online?” Cam asked. Mason swallowed and nodded.

“He was going to...” Mason began and couldn’t get any more words out.

“Shh, it’s all right. I understand. Last night was... traumatic. It’s going to haunt you for a while. You need to let Peter check you out. Is that okay?”

Mason nodded, but his fingers tightened on Cam’s leg. Cam crooked a finger at Peter.

Vithoulikas ran light fingers along the length of Mason’s body, doing a psychic version of a thorough exam.

“It’s been less than 24 hours since you went through hell. I knew it was too damn soon to put you through something like this. Cam, you stay with him. I’m going to go get a wheelchair for him. Oh, and where the hell are your crutches?”

Cam gave him a guilty half smile, “I dropped them somewhere down the other hallway.”

Peter rolled his eyes a little. “Jesus... I ought to tie both of you to a bed. I’ll be back in a few minutes. Stay put,” said Vithoulikas as he walked out the door.

Peter returned in a few minutes, pushing a wheelchair that had the crutches laid over the arms. The healer handed the crutches to Cam.

“Use ‘em okay? There’s only so much stress newly regenerated bone is willing to take,” he gently reprimanded Cam. Then he helped Mason into the wheelchair.

“I ... I can walk,” said Mason.

“Yes, I’m sure you can and I’d rather you didn’t,” replied Peter. He looked at Cam as he pushed the wheelchair out into the hallway. “I want him away from people as much as possible for at least the next few hours. Do you mind keeping him in your quarters for a while? Just watch some TV or something.”

“I never did get to take a shower or shave,” muttered Mason. He was beginning to sound a little closer to normal, Cam thought.

“Excellent idea. I want you to have some time to get your head back in gear. I know we haven’t had much of a chance to talk details but all our research tells us people with psi have more difficulty dealing the psychological impact of trauma. So cut yourself a break. In the mean time, I’m going to rip Naval Intel a new one. We let them use our people on *our* terms. Something I think they’ve forgotten,” said Peter.

They crossed to one of the residential buildings, where Cam’s quarters were located. Mason was pushed inside. Peter drew Cam back out into the hallway for a moment.

“Touch him frequently, okay? He’s way out of his depth, even though he’s trying really hard to pretend it’s not so. And I’m worried about him,” Peter said. Cam nodded. “If you care about him, tell him, or at least be honest. He needs some serious emotional support. Got it?”

“Um... yeah,” Cam replied. He knew Peter liked to severely downplay the fact that he was nearly as gifted a telepath as he was a healer, but every now and then he stopped pulling his punches.

“I’ll check on you two in three or four hours,” said Vithoulikas, and departed.

Cam went back into the suite. Mason was sitting on the sofa, leaning forward with his elbows on his knees and his face in his hands. Cam’s stomach clenched as he wondered for a moment if Mason was going to the catatonic withdrawal thing again.

“Even if I take a shower, I haven’t got any clean clothes to put on. Wonder if I can get some clean scrubs,” said Mason. He dragged his fingernails down through the heavy beard stubble along his jaw. Cam thought he looked frazzled.

“You’re skinnier than me by a little. If you don’t mind the fact that my jeans are gonna look like high waters on you, you can borrow some of my stuff,” Cam suggested.

“You sure?”

“Yeah, it’s kind of a new take on letting you get into my pants,” Cam deadpanned. This drew a hint of a smile from Mason.

“Right now, I’d settle for your shower.”

As the water pounded against his shoulders, Mason looked down the length of his body. There was a host of small bruises and scrapes. Knees, elbows, hip, all the little marks that were yet another reminder of the previous night. He pressed a hand against the tile wall of the shower. I will not freak out again, he told himself. He still wasn’t entirely sure what had happened during the interrogation. He had a blank spot in his memory of some unknown number of minutes after... after... The last thing he could remember before the empty place was that Intelligence guy circling around behind him.

Cam came into the bathroom. There was only a glass partition between the stall and the rest of the bathroom and Mason could see him lean on the sink.

“You doing okay?” Cam asked.

“Yeah. Can I... how long was I... well... out of it, there in that room?”

“Somewhere between fifteen and twenty minutes.”

“Oh.”

“I’m guessing you really don’t remember much about it.”

“No... I wonder if that makes it kind of like having a seizure. Epileptic patients don’t often remember what goes on from a couple minutes before it really happens up through a few minutes after.” Mason finished rinsing off the soap and stepped out, grabbing a towel. “The clean part’s taken care of. You have a razor I can use?” He wrapped the towel around his waist.

“In the medicine cabinet,” said Cam. Mason opened it and pulled out a can of shaving cream and a disposable razor. He set them down on the edge of the sink and looked at his hand. It was shaking. Maybe shaving was not such a good idea at the moment. Cam’s hand came to rest between his shoulder blades. It was a welcome touch.

“Forget the shaving thing for the moment. Let’s go see if I can find something to fit you,” Cam suggested.

Back out in the bedroom, Mason sat on the bed. The shower had helped, but the exhaustion thing was slamming him hard. The medical training part of his brain offered up the blood loss as a partial reason. Cam tossed him a T-shirt and a pair of boxer-briefs. He really ought to put them on, but instead he sat motionless, feeling the muscles in his arms and legs twitch. That whole rattled and out of control feeling was creeping up on him again. I’m an adult, I’m a doctor, I will not behave like a wigged out teenage girl, Mason told himself.

Cam sat on the bed beside him and wrapped an arm around his shoulders. Cam felt warm and solid and real, and Mason longed to just curl up in the man’s embrace. He must have been broadcasting pretty hard, because Cam pushed him down to lie on the bed and stretched out beside him.

“Are you about to do that zone out thing on me again?” Cam asked. His hands were kneading gently at Mason’s back. Mason met his eyes. They reflected the anxious concern he felt from Cam’s mind where it brushed along the edge of his own.

“No... I don’t think so. I... Damn, I feel like some scared kid trying to pretend he’s got it under control,” said Mason. He closed his eyes. The room wasn’t particularly cold, but his body wanted to shiver. He fought the feeling, and concentrated on Cam’s hands on his skin. He could tell that a fairly intense ache had returned to Cam’s leg, but with nowhere near the same incapacitating level as before. He laid a hand on Cam’s chest, letting his own Talent damp down the pain.

“Hey, don’t do that,” said Cam. “It’s not that bad. Peter’s been doing some big time healing on it the past few days. However, running down the hallway like a maniac without the crutches kind of... annoyed it. Anyway, I don’t think you have the energy to spare.”

“I’m fine,” said Mason, but it was just words, that automatic thing you say. Cam pulled him closer, cradling Mason’s head to his shoulder.

“Just hang out and relax. Peter wants you away from everybody for a while anyway.”

Mason let himself lean more fully against Cam's body. He could feel the steady thud of Cam's pulse and the strong hands tracing slow patterns on his skin. It was comforting, grounding, and also beginning to arouse him. Underneath the towel still wrapped around his hips, he could feel his cock was already half hard. His breath hitched as Cam's fingers ran down his spine.

Cam lifted Mason's hand and sucked on two of the fingertips of Mason's hand. It was tentative and yet a very definite turn on. Mason had to swallow hard. He wanted to rub himself on the side of Cam's hip where their bodies met. Cam let his hand fall and moved to curl his own hand around the back of Mason's neck, drawing him into a kiss. Cam nibbled at his lower lip and his tongue ran along his teeth, Mason's mouth opened to the gentle assault. It was hot and slow and the sensations crept down to his groin. He was so hard it ached.

Cam pried himself out of the embrace long enough to yank off his shirt. He wanted Mason's hands on his skin. Pulling the other man close, he smirked just a little at the fact the towel was doing very little to hide Mason's jutting erection. He wasn't doing a whole lot better. The front of his jeans had a noticeable bulge. Cam kissed his way down the side of Mason's throat to the little hollow at the base. It just begged to be tasted. He swiped his tongue across the little dip in the skin. This drew a moan from Mason. Cam ran his teeth along the diagonal of his partner's collar bone and down to a nipple. As he licked it, it tightened into a hard nub. Cam continued down the side of Mason body, pausing at the long scabbed wound. He looked back up at Mason's face.

"It's healing," said Mason softly. "More than a week's worth in a single day."

"Will it leave a scar?"

"I'm not sure."

Cam caressed it with his thumb. A scar would forever be a reminder of just how much danger he had put Mason in. He kissed the injury. The crusty hardness of the scabbing was bordered by peeling bits of dried skin. Mason inhaled a slow breath as Cam's mouth headed toward the center of his stomach. Muscles twitched and his cock bobbed as Cam blew across the tip. There was something absolutely intoxicating knowing that he was the reason for Mason's desire. He lapped at the leaking tip, tasting the salty slickness. His hand cupped his partner's balls, rolling them carefully with his fingers. Mason was bucking slightly in shallow thrusts. Cam licked along the hard length.

"Oh God, please just fuck me," Mason panted. Cam rose up on his hands and knees straddling Mason and looking down in his face.

"I've never... I think I have a condom in my wallet, but... don't we need...well, KY or something?" Cam was completely uncertain. He definitely didn't want to hurt his lover.

"Uh... yeah... 'kay. Use your fingers," said Mason.

Cam was amused. He could tell Mason was having trouble stringing an intelligible thought together.

“I might need... um, some suggestions,” replied Cam.

Mason nodded. Something approaching control was returning, judging from his expression.

“Hand lotion if you have any. Can’t really use it with a condom, but with fingers it’ll do. A demonstration might be more... enjoyable,” said Mason.

Cam smiled. It took him a couple of minutes to struggle out of his jeans. Getting the right leg off over the metal bars always presented a bit of a challenge. Once he was as naked as Mason, he stretched out next to his lover, flat on his back. Mason had retrieved a sample size bottle of hand lotion from the bathroom.

“Bend your knee,” said Mason, gesturing to the one without the external fixation. Cam flexed his leg and put his foot flat on the bed. Mason curled against him, licking across the front of his hipbone toward the base of his own hard length. Mason’s mouth encircled the head. It was a delicious heat. Mason’s hand stroked him a couple of times then was gone. He poured the lotion over his fingers, coating them.

“Tell me to quit, if you don’t like it,” said Mason solemnly. Cam nodded. A cool slick finger was pressing between his butt cheeks, circling his opening, pushing in with a gentle pressure. His body tightened for a moment unsure of the intrusion, then relaxed and he could feel it sliding in a little further.

“You okay?” Mason asked.

Cam huffed out a breath. “Uh-huh.”

Mason’s head descended and he could feel the hot wet suck of his lover’s mouth on his cock. Mason’s finger was slipping out a little and then back in. Ungh, he wasn’t sure if he wanted to thrust forward into Mason’s willing mouth or scrunch backward to increase the pressure. Mason’s finger was pistoning slowly in and out. Cam’s brain was short circuiting. Further, further, hitting that spot inside his body. He came with a guttural groan, pumping his semen into the slick heat of Mason’s mouth.

After another minute or so, he regained enough awareness to pull Mason’s body over on top of him, kissing Mason again. The stubble from Mason’s beard was a light abrasion on his own face. The contrast with the soft heat of Mason’s mouth was just incredible. In the background, he could still feel the faint underlying buzz of the healer’s energy.

“Hey, I thought you were going to turn off the healing stuff,” Cam said.

“s’off as it gets. Th’ rest is jus’ me,” replied Mason. His teeth were nipping at the underside of

Cam's jaw. Cam could also feel his lover's hard cock trapped between their bodies.

"Your turn," he said. "You're going to have to give me some instructions though. I'm not sure any of what you did for me actually reached my brain." Mason snickered a little.

"Use the lotion, so it's good and slippery, then just one finger at a time. I'll let you know if it hurts."

"I don't think I can suck you off at the same time..." Cam felt the flush of embarrassment heat his face and he closed his eyes. Mason placed a kiss on his forehead.

"Cam, look at me." Cam opened his eyes. Mason's gaze was both intense and serious. "It's okay to be kind of clueless. Bet the first girl you had, you were done before she was even getting hot."

"Unh, yeah, sort of."

"Being an adult has its advantages, including the willingness to take your time and figure stuff out. And I don't mean the just us having sex part. Okay?"

Cam nodded. His throat was tight. God in heaven, every time he thought he had the attraction between him and Mason pegged as just a physical thing, something wrenched his heart and told it him it was so much more.

Both arms around his lover's body, he rolled Mason back onto the bed. Mason obligingly bent his legs as Cam fumbled with the lotion bottle. He watched Mason's face as he rubbed his index finger across the tight crinkle of skin. His lover gave him a smile. He pushed his finger inside, trying to mimic what Mason had done to him. The tight heat drew snug then relaxed. He moved his hand, and Mason slid downward, driving himself further onto Cam.

"More," whispered Mason. His tone had dropped and his pupils were blown wide.

Cam increased the pace a little.

"Two... fingers... then three," Mason panted.

Cam obeyed with some uncertainty, but it only lasted seconds. Mason was rocking against the sensation, lips parted, face slightly flushed. His cock was bobbing on the front of his groin, slowly leaving a smeared puddle. Cam could feel the tense build toward release. That thrum of energy was heading for a fever pitch. He pushed his fingers a little deeper, grazing past... oh that... He curled his fingers a bit, to increase the friction. Mason came with a groaning shout all over his stomach, back arching and hands clenching.

Cam fished the towel off the end of the bed and used it to clean up the mess. Mason was sprawled limply across the blankets, looking at a Cam with a certain amount of glaze to his expression. Cam pulled Mason into his arms.

“Do that thing the women always make into an accusation, go to sleep,” said Cam. Mason’s fingers trailed across Cam’s lips.

“Will you be here when I wake up?” Mason asked. The look in his eyes was infinitely vulnerable.

“Yeah, I will.”

Mason watched him for a long minute, eyelids drooping, fluttering, and falling shut.

Cam lay there, just looking at Mason. What drew him so hard to this man? Cam had spent his adult life in the Navy. If someone had asked him a couple of months ago where his life was going, he would have answered keep flying, do his twenty, try to find a woman he cared about and have a family. Now... he just flat out didn’t know.

Rumor had it his squadron might be going on deployment in about five months. If he pursued this thing with Mason, there wouldn’t be any tearful kisses on the pier. There wouldn’t be anyone waiting with balloons when he got back. He wasn’t even sure if they would be able to manage email more than once in a while. He knew damn well there were at least a couple dozen same sex relationships held by people on the base. How did they cope? Jesus Christ, one problem at a time. Right now, the next couple of days, the goal had to be doing his job for Division P, and keeping Mason safe.

The short man with the graying hair walked across the parking lot of the naval base. He drew no attention. He belonged. He unlocked a dark blue Ford and slid into the driver’s seat. A plain white envelope lay on the passenger seat. He slit it open with his car key. Inside was a single sheet of paper. It read:

Associate two is still in place. She is awaiting further orders. The primary operative is currently untouchable, but may become accessible in the next forty-eight hours. The item of note will be moved from Little Rock to the next location.

A string of curses flew through the man’s head. Division P was apparently pulling out all the stops to protect their “magical finding man.” If that pilot located the missile before they could arrange the sale, the whole operation would go to hell awfully fast. The prototype was being moved to Meridian Naval Air Station. Where better to hide a missile than with a batch of other ones?

When Mason woke he saw... feet. It took his brain a second to process that Cam was lying across the bed on his stomach, oriented in the opposite direction. He was chewing on the end of an ink pen and there were some sheets of paper laid out on the blankets in front of him.

“You look deep in thought,” said Mason.

Cam twisted around to look at him. “Mmm, yeah. Work stuff for Division P, sort of.”

“Any chance you can tell me about it? I’d really like to have a clue why somebody thinks I make good target practice.”

Cam stared off at the wall for a minute or so before apparently reaching some sort of a decision. Then he proceeded to tell Mason about the current assignment. “So if you were a missile where would you be?” quipped Cam.

“Blowing something up?”

“Nah, you’re a valuable missile because you’re one of kind. The idea being that someone could take you apart and build another one.”

“Because they don’t have blueprints?”

“Bingo. Those are supposedly still all nice and safe.”

“Abandoned warehouse? Somebody’s basement? In the woods under one of those camouflage tarp thingys? How big is this thing anyway?”

“I’m not exactly sure. Too big to fit in a car trunk. They were driving a fair size panel van apparently... Go back to the woods thing.”

“Under one of those looks like bushes from the air tarps that the military uses.”

“No... I’ve got it. Where do you hide a tree? In a forest,” Cam grinned.

“I’m not making the connection.”

“You hide a missile someplace where they store other ones. Nobody notices much if you bring it on base or move it around. I got out some jeans for you. Get dressed. Go out in the main room and Google naval air bases. I’m going to want you to read me the list. I’m going to go see if I can get a large size map to eyeball.”

“Meridian Naval Air Station” said Cam. He tossed a folded map on the table in front of Commander Rymal. The NSA man was in the conference room, too.

“This is where Bennett is?” the man asked.

“I’m not sure about that yet, but I’m fairly sure that’s where the missile is.”

“How do we know for sure” said Rymal.

“We don’t. I don’t. It’s a gut feeling -- this is what I do. Can you institute an inventory of base ordinance?”

“We could, but there’s a high chance that would tip off whoever is pulling the strings on this before we could actually locate it,” Rymal said.

“You think this is an internal job?” asked Cam. His expression was wary.

“Yes.”

“How long have you known?” Cam wasn’t sure he liked where this seemed to be heading.

“We suspected it the moment we lost contact with Bennett and Davis.”

“That was before I was brought in.”

“We still aren’t certain. And we don’t know where the leak is.”

“I was bait, wasn’t I?” snarled Cam.

“Not intentionally.”

“With all due respect... sir... Fuck you! You should have warned me! You got Keith Haverty killed! You nearly got me killed! And Mason Flynn, who’s only link was the fact he scraped me off the highway and pasted me back together. Sir, fuck you, sir ! You hung me out to dry!” Cam was screaming at this point. He was so pissed he could barely think.

“Lieutenant! We had no idea that these people would go to such lengths.”

“You could’ve made a wild guess! How much do you think they’re going to sell that prototype for? Fifty mil? A hundred mil? Jesus H. Christ, people kill for a whole hell of a lot less. Not including the fact that treason is probably involved.”

“Lieutenant Bradshaw, could you go grab a cup of coffee or something and come back in about fifteen minutes? I need to discuss some options with the Commander,” said the NSA agent, speaking for the first time.

“Yeah, whatever!” snapped Cam and grabbed his crutches, making for the door.

“Feeling a little more grounded?” asked Peter as Mason sat down in a seat in the cafeteria.

“I suppose. I still don’t really understand what happened. I’ve seen patients have panic attacks a few times... but I never quite imagined myself on the ‘having one’ end,” replied Mason. He was slightly uncomfortable talking about it but he felt like he desperately needed whatever information the other healer could provide. It was past seven and the large room was close to deserted.

“I think maybe you could call getting shot and running for your life, a precipitating event,” said Peter with a slight smile.

“Yeah. But why the... extreme response? I mean I can kind of understand elevated heart rate, and hyperventilation and the like, but the whole bit with me blanking out?”

“Psi aren’t wired like the rest of the world. We already deal with something like two to ten times the sensory input. Trauma often just pegs the meter, but sometimes it’s delayed. The proverbial straw and camel thing. You could learn an awful from Division P.”

“Why does that sound like an invitation?” asked Mason.

“You may be an excellent surgeon, but there are only three healers in all of Division P currently. The other two are decidedly less Talented than me. That sounds egotistical, doesn’t it?” Peter said with a grin.

Cam was beckoned back inside. Rymal was standing with his arms crossed.

“We want you to go to Meridian. We think it’s our best shot at finding the missile. And maybe Bennett, too, if we’re lucky. Here’s the basic plan: drive to Oceana, there should be a Gulfstream waiting for us by the time we get there, fueled and ready to go. The flight to Mississippi should take less than two hours. Someone from Naval intelligence will meet us. You do your thing and we secure the missile.”

“Specify the ‘we’ part,” said Cam.

“You, me, Valentine, and Simpson.” Rymal jerked a thumb in the direction of the NSA man. Cam pondered the game plan. There was something about leaving Mason behind that bugged him. He couldn’t put his finger on it. He ought to be perfectly safe at the Division P compound, but... he had an uneasy feeling about the unknown leak of information. It had to be somebody, obviously, but in what organization? NSA? Naval intelligence? He supposed it could even be within Division P, but somehow that seemed a less likely scenario. Too many of the psi tended to “eavesdrop” a little on each other for that to be particularly viable. Valentine was a telepath of middling Talent, but his vast field experience with the CIA gave him a level of shrewd discernment.

Cam trusted Valentine far more than he trusted Rymal or the NSA guy, Simpson. He needed Mason to come with them. It was the only way to keep Mason safe. He couldn’t even begin to

say exactly why, but it was the same sort of gut feeling he often got at the beginning of the hunt for something. Once upon a time, he used to discount those feelings as just his brain playing tricks, but training at Division P had taught him a hell of a lot about trusting those subtle little whispers of information.

“And Mason Flynn,” said Cam.

“Who?” asked Simpson.

“The orthopedic surgeon who’s been taking care of Bradshaw. He’s apparently a psychic healer, too. And no way, he’s a civilian,” said Rymal.

“I still have eight steel pins drilled into my leg, and I’ve only been out of the hospital a little over a week. Vithoulkas has done a certain amount of repair work, but when the pain starts to get out of control, I need a healer. Drugs mess up my psi stuff.”

“Why not Vithoulkas then?” said Rymal. “He’s got adequate security clearance.”

“Peter doesn’t do ops, period. He’s too valuable to risk. Just ask Daniel.” Cam knew this wasn’t strictly true, but he was gambling on Valentine to back him on a hunch. “Where is Daniel anyway?”

“Coordinating with Bottman before we leave,” replied Rymal.

“I am not taking a civilian. He’s an unknown quantity,” said Simpson.

“Then I’m not going. You screwed me over already. My way or the highway!” Cam shouted. There was a possibility this could turn into a real pissing contest between agencies, but he just flat out didn’t give a fuck.

“Get Valentine down here. I want a personal guarantee that this surgeon will do as he’s told if we drag him along,” said Simpson

In the back of a fifteen person van driving them from Suffolk to Oceana, Mason sat beside Cam, with a back pack well stocked with medical supplies. Why on God’s earth he was being sent to Meridian Mississippi with a batch of military men on a covert operation totally defied comprehension. Cam had drawn him aside for a moment, while gear was being loaded.

“Don’t ask questions. Just trust me, please,” Cam had whispered. “If you stay here, I’m afraid someone’s going to have another go at you.” His hand was resting on Mason’s shoulder and he brushed a thumb along Mason’s neck. Mason could tell the plea was very real. He swallowed hard and nodded.

Valentine was sitting in front of him, stabbing the stylus against the screen of his PDA. After a

few minutes, he twisted around to face Cam.

“When this is done... I want details,” said Valentine.

“Yeah, got it.”

As soon as they made it through the gate on the base, they were tracked directly to the airfield. A sleek little Gulfstream was waiting with the engines running. The van pulled to a stop a few dozen feet from the plane. Four people waited outside the plane, three men, one woman.

All the passengers of the van got out. Everyone but Cam grabbed gear bags. He picked up his crutches and slid his arms through his own backpack. Rymal crossed to speak with the woman. She was blond and wore a leather mini-skirt and a gray blouse. She handed a briefcase to Rymal.

Cam paused for a moment, while Simpson and Valentine got in the plane. There was something familiar about the woman, and something vaguely disconcerting. Perhaps he had met her when he went for the initial briefing at the beginning of this whole fiasco. Awkwardly, he made his way up the steps into the plane. Mason was following him. Trust the orthopedic surgeon to be keeping an eye on the guy on crutches. The woman and one of the men remained behind on the ground.

Getting on a plane under any circumstances qualified at one of his least favorite experiences. Mason clenched his teeth a little and told himself to stop acting like an idiot. He was definitely a white-knuckle flier and he avoided it whenever possible. He glanced over at the few people who hadn't boarded yet. That Navy intelligence guy. Cam had said he was Commander somebody-or-other. And the woman he was talking to seemed familiar. Blond, built like an athlete, she must be Naval intelligence also, he assumed. So why did he keep thinking she should be wearing a nurse's uniform? He must have her confused with someone else. She reminded him of someone from the hospital, he just couldn't remember who. And there was something tense and aggressive about her stance. Maybe that was just a product of this entire situation. Anyway, it didn't look like she was going with them, so he dismissed her from his mind. He looked back up the steps. Cam was passing through the doorway.

Time to get moving.

Hell Dog's Squadron 2: Angle of Attack

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ISBN: 978-1-60370-670-4, 1-60370-670-4

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Printed in the United States of America.

Torquere Press, Inc.: Single Shot electronic edition / March 2009

Torquere Press eBooks are published by Torquere Press, Inc., PO Box 2545, Round Rock, TX 78680