

*Single  
Shots*



## Re-Ignition

*A Torquere Press Single Shot by A.R. Moler*

Does it count as alcoholism if you only drink once every couple of months, but when you do, you drink till you black out? This was the thought sluggishly creeping across Griff Rieckert's mind as he clawed his way back to consciousness. His head was pounding in time with his pulse, and nausea churned his stomach. *Please let me die*, his brain suggested. Just opening his eyes was a monumental task.

Ceiling. Unfamiliar ceiling. He managed to turn his head just enough to glance at his surroundings through slitted eyes. He was in a bed. More precisely, someone else's bed. And so was the someone else. A mop of long, beautiful blond curls lay on the pillow beside him, the face turned away from him. Griff raised his hands and scrubbed them down over his face. This was going to be embarrassing.

The body beside him rolled over. Beneath all those gorgeous blond curls were dark lashes, full lips, and a neatly trimmed blond moustache and goatee. The blond man's eyes opened slowly, and embarrassment didn't even come close to cutting it. Griff scrambled up against the headboard with an intake of breath and immediately regretted it. He choked down the first wave of nausea threatening to overwhelm him, and didn't manage the second one.

Hanging off the edge of the bed, he vomited into the trashcan that some fore-thinking soul had put beside the bed. Someone held his head and prevented him from sliding face first off the edge. Gasping, eyes tearing, spitting the acrid taste from his mouth, he finally slumped back against the mattress.

"Figured you were gonna need that," said the man holding him. "Come on, let's get you up and into the shower. It'll help." Griff stared as he was dragged to his feet. The man looked young, desperately young. All those blond curls brushing his shoulders, broad shoulders and narrow hips, long torso and muscular legs, wearing nothing more than a skimpy pair of black bikini briefs.

A second look, however, made him reassess. There was a seriousness in those blue eyes that spoke of more years than the face seemed to imply.

The blond man picked up an elbow crutch from the floor and handed it to Griff. Griff took it reluctantly; judging from the stiffness and the intensity of the pain in his leg, he needed it badly. But the other man didn't let go. He pulled Griff's opposite arm over his shoulders and guided them carefully in the direction of the bathroom, snagging a pair of round, wire-framed glasses along the way.

In the bathroom, Griff leaned against the sink and glanced at himself in the mirror while the other man turned on the shower. Every single one of his thirty-eight years seemed to be etched into his face. A trace of gray showed in his short black hair, his eyes were horrendously bloodshot, and he obviously hadn't shaved in a couple of days.

"No offense," Griff croaked, "but who the hell are you?"

"Sean Avery. I'm guessing you don't remember last night. I'm not surprised. Here." Sean pressed several Advil into his hand and set a glass of water on the side of the sink. Griff took them and gulped down the water, hoping to wash some of the nasty taste from his mouth. "If you think you can manage to get undressed by yourself, I'll be back in sec."

Sean turned on the shower and walked out of the bathroom. Griff looked down at himself. He was still mostly dressed -- boxers, socks, T-shirt, but no jeans. The maze of scars starting on his right thigh and winding down to his calf was plainly evident. If he was still mostly dressed, what exactly had gone on last night? Although he was bisexual, the number of guys he had been with was far outweighed by women. There hadn't been anyone at all in the past year. The FBI wasn't exactly accepting of alternative lifestyles.

Not that he was FBI anymore... A car going more than fifty miles an hour through a parking lot had broken his knee in 23 places when it struck him. The damage had been so bad there had been initial talk of amputation. Some days he thanked God for brilliant orthopedic surgeons, and other days he wished the driver had finished the job and just flat-out killed him.

He managed to strip the rest of the way and left his clothes piled on the floor. Sean came back in carrying a big plastic cooler. Griff squinted at him, holding his head. What the hell was that for? Sean flipped it upside down and set it in the shower under the spray.

"Don't want you to fall," Sean commented, and Griff finally managed to realize it was for him to sit on. He appreciated the thought, and wondered just exactly who this guy was.

Sean helped him to his feet and into the shower. The nausea was surging again, and Griff turned his face into the spray, letting it flow down across him. It helped somewhat. Sean settled him on the upturned cooler and handed him a bottle of soap and a washcloth.

"I'm going to go get you some Gatorade. Give me a shout when you're done," Sean said as he left the bathroom again.

Letting the water cascade over him, Griff slowly bathed. The Advil was blunting the pain in his head a bit, but did nothing for his leg. Nothing short of Percocet would touch that, but he was used to the constant pain at this point. Seven frustrating, bitter months later, he had grudgingly adapted to using the crutch, having a handicapped tag for his truck, and going to physical therapy twice a week.

Sean. There was a flicker of memory. Chit-chat with Sean about the University of Maryland basketball team while he was at physical therapy. Griff had been in a sour mood, and the S&M nature of physical therapy hadn't improved it, but Sean had been friendly and laid back and had drawn Griff into a conversation. They had gone out for a drink with plans to watching the game. Griff had started knocking back tequila, intent on masking the agony in his leg. End of memory.

What was the old adage? One tequila, two tequila, three tequila, floor. That must have been just about the way it went.

Griff still had no idea why Sean had been at physical therapy. He obviously didn't have anything wrong with him. He hadn't given any indication he worked there, either. Then again, he could have poured out his life story, and Griff wouldn't have remembered a damn thing.

Feeling slightly more alive, he hauled himself up and finished rinsing off. He leaned out of the shower and snagged a towel that Sean had left on the toilet. He had carefully wrapped it around his waist, and somewhat unsteadily negotiated the lip of the shower stall, when Sean sailed back into the bathroom carrying a bottle of Gatorade.

"Hey, I told you to give me a yell when you were done. Don't want you wiping out in my shower. I'm not in the mood to do stitches on my day off." He smiled. Griff felt embarrassed.

"I'm not fucking helpless!" he snarled.

Sean just gazed at him calmly. "Uh-huh. Hangovers are a real bitch. Mess with your balance. I'm gonna jump in the shower. Why don't you sit down and see if you can drink some of this."

Griff glared at him, but obeyed. He owed the guy at least a little cooperation for dragging him home when he must have been absolutely hammered.

Sean set his glasses on the sink and stood under the spray, soaking his hair and soaping up. Watching all those lean muscles and those curls that he just ached to run his fingers through, Griff was getting a hard on under the towel. This was a bad idea. He wasn't even entirely sure if the guy was gay or bi or whatever. The appearance that absolutely nothing other than sleeping had gone on the night before wasn't giving Griff any clues, either.

He drank as much of the Gatorade as his stomach would tolerate. He was adult enough to know that, between the drinking binge and the barfing, he was dehydrated as all hell, which wasn't helping with the headache. He rested his arm on the edge of the sink and laid his head down.

"Griff, dude, don't pass out on me again. Not in the bathroom, anyway," Sean chided him. He wearily lifted his head. Sean was kneeling down in front of him, a hand on his shoulder.

"I'm not going to pass out on you, even if I do feel like shit," sighed Griff.

"Okay. Just making sure. I'm sure I've got a spare toothbrush around here somewhere. It would probably be a good idea to brush your teeth and crawl back into bed."

"Jesus Christ, you sound like my mother!" snapped Griff.

"Sorry, occupational habit," grinned Sean. Griff just stared at him. What the hell was that supposed to mean? "Since I'm sure you don't remember a word from our conversation last night, I am a pediatrician. Most of my patients are under the age of twelve."

"P-p-pediatrician?" stammered Griff. "You don't look old enough to be out of college."

"Yeah, so people keep telling me. I thought the beard and mustache would help. If I shave, I get carded every time I buy a beer. The mothers keep asking me if I'm somebody's big brother." Sean rolled his eyes on that one.

This brought a slight grin to Griff's face, then he sobered. This guy gave the impression of being an all-around Good Samaritan, and was probably engaged to some perky young lady with the hope of having six kids. He stared self-consciously at the floor.

Sean grabbed a towel and dried off and hunted up an unused toothbrush for him. Sean laid it on the sink and turned back to Griff.

"I'm going to go grab some clothes," Sean said, and walked back into the bedroom.

Griff hoisted himself to his feet and brushed his teeth. As he picked up his clothes to start dressing, Sean came back in carrying a pair of sweat pants and a T-shirt.

"You're only an inch or so shorter than me. This stuff ought to fit well enough to get by. I'll chuck your stuff in the wash, and by the time you catch a couple more hours of sleep, it'll be clean."

"You don't need to do this. I'll get dressed and get out of here and you can get back to whatever it was you intended to do with your day off. Hang out with your girlfriend or whatever," Griff said.

"Girlfriend? Dude, I'm gay. You must really be out of it."

"I wasn't... I don't remember shit about last night. I didn't want to jump to any assumptions. Oh, crap..."

"What's wrong?"

"Got any idea where my car is?"

"I'm guessing in the parking lot of Scandals. It's not like you were in any shape to drive. Hell, you could hardly stand up," Sean commented. Griff felt the heat of embarrassment color his face. "Be sensible. Borrow my stuff. If you still want to bail, I'll give you a lift home. Okay?"

Griff nodded and began to dress. He could hear Sean out in the bedroom. Sweats and T-shirt on, Griff turned to hang his wet towel over the top edge of the shower wall and his foot slid across the slick tile. The motion wrenched his damaged knee and a

searing pain shot up his leg. He let out a sharp curse of agony and only barely managed to catch himself and avoid slamming face first into the wall. There was a skitter of motion behind him and strong arms wrapped around him.

"Crap," muttered Sean. He essentially dragged Griff from the bathroom to the bed and eased him down on it.

Lost in the pain, Griff curled on the bed, teeth gritted, eyes squeezed shut, hands clenched into fists. The pain in his leg far outstripped the hangover, and he thought for a moment he was going to be sick again. Gentle hands rubbed his back and down the spasming muscles of his leg.

"Just breathe. Blow it out. Try to relax," soothed Sean. Tears of pain seeped from the corners of Griff's eyes.

"I'm such a fucking useless cripple!" he spat.

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Sean stretched out against him, holding Griff tightly in his arms. This is where the drinking binge had started last night. The initial part of the evening had been relatively low key and fun. They had some common interests in movies and books and travel. But somehow the conversation had turned dark, and Sean had become worried that Griff was hinting toward suicide. Sean had let him drink and talk, hoping to defuse some of the depression. It had seemed to help to a degree, but on the other hand, Griff had ended up absolutely wasted. So Sean had brought Griff home where he could keep an eye on him.

As a doctor, Sean knew chronic pain fueled clinical depression, but this was even more complicated than that. Sean had learned a few bits and pieces about Griff's career in the FBI. He had been an extraction specialist, one of those adrenaline-junkie professionals who lived so close to the edge that work and normal life never really separated.

And then there was the incident. A car-jacking gone very bad, and Griff had literally thrown himself in front of the car to prevent the perp from driving away with an infant in the back seat. Heroic, successful, and nearly fatal.

Sean whispered soothing nothings against Griff's temple, leaving soft butterfly kisses there and across his hairline, down the rough, unshaven jaw.

"Shh, it's okay. You're not useless. You're in pain," Sean murmured. His hand stroked the tight muscles of Griff's back, trying to coax him into relaxing. Slowly, Griff's breathing evened out and his muscles grew slacker. Sean drew back far enough to peek and see if he had fallen asleep. Griff's eyes were still open just a little.

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"Better?" he asked softly. Griff groaned a little.

"Unh, still feeling half dead," Griff huffed. The pain in his leg had died back to its more usual level.

"Go back to sleep. I'll wake you in a couple hours."

"Why are you doing this?" Griff asked.

"Doing what?"

"Taking care of me. Any sane guy would have dumped me on my doorstep, maybe stuck around long enough to make sure I got inside, and left."

"Hippocratic oath." Sean smiled. "Honestly? You intrigue me. My life primarily revolves around kids with ear infections, skinned knees, and broken arms. It boggles my mind the stuff you've done."

"'Done' being the operative word. My life is over." Griff closed his eyes for a second and swallowed hard. It would be so easy to give in and let Sean baby him. But what would that get him? Heartache to dump on top of his already shattered life?

"I think you mean that part of your life is done. You're what, maybe forty? You've twenty-five to thirty years of good, productive life ahead of you. Mobility issues do not equal an end to your life."

"Like you would know anything about that," snarled Griff.

"My sister was a cop. She got shot. Now she's in a wheelchair for the rest of her life. I take her to PT twice a week. It's tough, but she's getting on with her life!"

Griff was silent. At least now he knew why Sean had been at the therapy center. His head was still pounding fairly hard, and the rest of his body felt like something the cat barfed up. Doctors, therapists, and counselors had been telling Griff for months to move on, find a new direction, and reinvent himself. So why did it sound just a tiny bit feasible coming from this innocent-looking pediatrician?

"I don't know how," he whispered lamely. His throat was tight, and he struggled to choke back the tears that threatened.

"It takes time, but you can learn," said Sean simply. "Go back to sleep." He drew the blankets up over Griff and placed a chaste kiss on his forehead.

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Later in the day, Sean gave him a ride back home, since Griff's car was still at the bar. Griff stood inside the front door, leaning back against the metal. Sean was... well, "sweet" was word that came to mind. Sean impressed Griff as the kind to gather up strays and find them a good home. *Yeah me, I qualify as a stray*, he thought. That was an insanely depressing idea -- ex-FBI guy relegated to the role of pathetic lost puppy. He had fallen so far. Crashed and burned.

He drew a long breath in and blew it out slowly. His head still hurt, and he deserved it.

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A week later, Griff was lying under the front of end of his partially-disassembled MGB. Early evening spring sunshine slanted across the garage floor and cast irregular shadows of the parts scattered there. A much longer shadow fell across the concrete to the edge of the front bumper, and he slid the crawler he was lying on out from under the car.

Dr. Sean Avery was standing in the open doorway of the garage. Sean's blond curls had been tightly pulled back into a ponytail, and he wore a blue Oxford cloth shirt tucked into a pair of black chinos.

"Thought I'd come by and see how you were doing," Sean said casually.

"Better. Surviving my own stupidity for the moment," Griff answered. He sat upright on the crawler, one leg folded on the board, the inflexible one still stretched out in front of him.

"So what's wrong with it?" asked Sean, gesturing at the car.

"Transmission issues."

"Oh."

"It's a work in progress. I've been trying to get it going for a couple weeks now."

"Is that a long time or a short time for something like that?" Sean asked. Griff looked at him in puzzlement. "I can put stitches in a screaming toddler's elbow in ten minutes flat, but I don't even know how to change the oil in my car," the young doctor admitted.

"If I was actually motivated, it should have taken a couple of days. It's not like I have a lot of better things to do with my time." Griff hauled himself to his feet and limped heavily over to a tool bench, dropping a wrench into it.

"Are you hungry? I was thinking of going by the steak place on Randolph Road to grab some dinner," said Sean.

Griff looked at his grease-stained hands and filthy jeans and T-shirt. "Um... I'll pass. I'm kind of a mess," he replied.

"I'm not in a hurry. If you want to clean up, I'll wait," Sean offered.

Griff stood looking at him for a long moment. Dinner? Did that qualify as a date or just as food? He was still somewhat mystified by the interest Sean seemed to have in him. A washed-up, has-been, ex-FBI guy, permanently disabled. What could he possibly have to offer a young, gorgeous doctor?



Yet, Griff wanted this. Even if it was nothing more than conversation and a meal, he wanted to pretend, just for a couple hours.

He snagged his crutch from where it was propped against the back fender of the car.

"It's probably going to take to take at least twenty minutes..." he said, offering Sean an out if he had second thoughts.

"That's fine." Sean followed him into the house.

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In the shower, Griff stood under the water, soaping up, leaning slightly on the shower chair that faced the back of the stall. He had reached the point where he only used it occasionally now. For all its excruciating torture, physical therapy did help. He had progressed from barely being able to walk, even with a walker, to fair mobility with the crutch. The therapist had said he might even step down to a cane in a few more months, but he would never run again. The profound limp, the fact that his knee -- screwed, plated and wired together as it was -- only bent about forty degrees on a good day, was a statement of his life now.

The water cascaded over him, rinsing away the greasy dirt. He thought about watching Sean in the shower those few days ago. Wet, lean muscles, perfectly sculpted ass, all those damp blond curls. Christ, Sean didn't have to even be there, and he still made Griff achingly hard.

Griff wrapped his fist around himself and stroked hard. It only took a couple minutes before he came, splattering the wall of the shower. God, how he wanted to run his hands down that body. Like that was ever going to happen. The guy was just being nice, almost the equivalent of following up on a patient.

Griff got out of the shower and dried off. As he dragged on a clean pair of boxers, he thought for a moment about what Sean was wearing. He was dressed nicely, conservatively; he must have come here after work. Griff tossed the jeans he had grabbed from the closet on the bed, and pulled out a pair of tan Dockers instead, with a white shirt.

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Sean drove them to the restaurant. Here in the middle of the week, it wasn't very crowded. Sitting in a corner booth, Griff wondered for a moment if anyone glancing at the two of them would assume they were just a couple of work colleagues grabbing dinner.

"How's... um... your sister?" Griff asked awkwardly.

"Improving. She's getting used to negotiating doors in her wheelchair. She's gotten a little more feeling back below her chest. It makes it a bit easier for her to twist her body, and not tip over as easily. Did you go to PT yet this week?"

"Yeah. The usual torture."

"So tell me about the car? It's a beauty, even if I wouldn't have a clue of how to fix it," Sean said with a grin. Griff was amused. He didn't know too many guys who would admit so cheerfully that they didn't know what went on under the hood.

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After lingering over the meal for an hour and a half, they eventually headed back to Griff's house. Sean pulled up in the driveway and Griff got out. Crutch in his grip, he walked stiffly to the front door. Griff glanced back at the car. Sean was gazing at him through the open window. Was he hoping for an invitation inside, or was he just making sure Griff got safely into the house?

Griff stood uncertainly on the front porch for a moment, then he turned and called back to the young doctor. "Want to come in for a beer?"

"Yeah, sure." Sean put the car into park and got out.

Inside, Griff snagged a couple of bottles out of the refrigerator and brought them into his den. Sean was drifting along the edge of the room, looking at the bookshelf.

"You have quite a few books about the UK," he commented.

"Yeah. Been there once. Keep hoping I'll get around to going back." Griff handed him a bottle and sat on the sofa. Sean continued to read the titles on the spines for another minute before joining him.

"Any place in particular you want to go?"

"Some. Cambridge, Cornwall, Portmeirion, Cardiff."

"I think Cambridge is the only one I've heard of. Nope, actually, I take that back. Doesn't Cornwall have something to do with King Arthur?" said Sean.

"Yeah, something like that." Griff let his eyes roam down the length of the other man's legs. Sean was sitting only inches away. It would be so easy just to reach out and touch him. Was Sean even remotely interested in him that way?

Give Griff a situation where he had to judge how close a gunman was to pulling the trigger, and he could read every tell-tale twitch and fidget. But expect him to decide if an advance on a potential partner was wanted or not, and suddenly he was filled with doubt. He closed his eyes and clenched his jaw, trying to reach a decision.

Slender fingers brushed along his cheek, and his eyes popped back open. Sean was looking at him, an expression of gentle concern on his face.

"You okay?" Sean asked. Griff blew out a slow breath.

"Yeah. I'm fine," he replied. Time to dive in and probably get shot down. "I... I'm interested in you. Um... r-romantically..." he stuttered out. God, he sounded like a freaking teenager. What Griff really wanted was to push Sean back into the cushions and run his fingers through all those curls and kiss the man senseless.

"Good. Now I won't feel like I'm taking advantage of you." Sean smiled, set his beer on the floor, and twisted toward Griff, pulling him into a kiss. Oh, God, it nearly took Griff's breath away, the softness of his lips, the wiry graze of his moustache, the faint taste of the beer. His hands fumbled at the band holding Sean's blond hair back in a tight ponytail. He pulled it loose and wove his fingers up through the strands.

Sean finally pulled back a few inches, breathing hard. "Man, I think we're fogging up my glasses!" he said.

"We can fix that." Griff grinned a little. He eased the glasses carefully off Sean's face and set them on the coffee table.

"Of course, now I can't see shit if it's more than two feet away," Sean laughed.

"That's fine. I wasn't planning on being that far away." He pushed Sean down flat on the sofa. It took a moment to rearrange arms and legs so they weren't tangled. Griff was sprawled on top, hands cradling Sean's head, his aching erection grinding against one equal to his own. Their mouths were pressed together, tongues exploring, teeth nipping gently. Sean's hands were cupped around his butt, pulling their bodies harder together.

Griff wanted skin. He wanted to run his hands all over those long, lean muscles, wanted to bend Sean over a bed and... Oh, hell... Griff's body went still, his head dropping on the other man's shoulder.

"Griff?" said Sean.

"Uh-huh."

"Problem?"

"I can't..."

"Your body sure thinks you can."

"That's not what..." Griff pushed himself back up into a sitting position. The number of male partners Griff had had was fewer than his number of fingers. And every single one of them had been before the injury, back when his knee still bent and his balance had been fine.

Sean sat up and ran a hand down the side of Griff's neck. "Listen, Griff, it's been a while since my last partner. If you just want to mess around, that's fine by me," he suggested.

"Even when it doesn't hurt much, my knee doesn't bend but about maybe forty degrees... I... um... I'm not sure exactly what kind of position I can manage." Oh, God, that was embarrassing.

"So we'll improvise. Like I said, just fooling around is okay with me. Relax," said Sean. He drew Griff back down on top of him, kissing him slowly. Griff gave in to just enjoying the hard, muscular form of the man beneath him. Sean's teeth nibbled at his bottom lip. Jesus, it had been so very long since anyone other than the physical therapist had touched him, and that definitely didn't qualify as pleasant.

He was grinding himself against Sean's thigh, fingers tangled in all those soft curls again. Griff buried his face in Sean's neck and breathed his scent. A faint smell of laundry detergent from the collar of his shirt, blended with a smell that was all male. Strong fingers traced up Griff's spine, pulling the shirt loose at his waist, diving beneath the fabric, sliding under the waistband of his slacks just an inch or so. Then those fingers eased a little further down. That subtle pressure right at the base of his spine set him squirming.

"Oh, unh... Sean... God... I'm gonna... hell..." The climax swamped his senses. Eyes squeezed shut, the sticky warmth of semen flooded along the waistband of his boxers, all he could hear for a moment was the thunder of his own pulse.

Griff sagged limp as a rag doll on top of Sean. "Fucking hell... I thought I'd passed the teenage lack of control crap," he muttered. Sean's hands stroked gently down his back.

"It's okay. I'm kind of flattered that I got you so wound up," Sean murmured into his ear.

Griff pushed himself back into a sitting position again. "Your turn," he whispered. He slowly tugged the belt buckle of Sean's pants open and lowered the fly. The erection within was stretching hard against the fabric of the navy blue bikini briefs. Griff stuck a thumb under the elastic and pulled them down. Sean's cock popped free, rigid and damp at the tip. Griff wrapped his fingers around it, stroking. Sean moaned a little and bucked into his grip.

Griff lowered his head and slid his mouth over top of the head. His tongue traced around the entire outer edge of the tip. Huffing little moans came from Sean. Griff leaned forward a little and took as much of Sean into his mouth as he could manage. There was a small keening whine from Sean.

"Oh please, don't stop," Sean begged. His tone was fast approaching a whimper. Fingers, tongue, lips -- Griff sucked and stroked in a slow, even rhythm. Sean was thrusting shallowly, uncontrollably, and then his breath was a sudden explosive groan as he came. Griff swallowed hard, mouth full of the bitter, salty taste. He wiped his lips on the tail of his shirt and looked up at Sean, who had a soft, blissed-out grin.

"That was... amazing," Sean said, still struggling to catch his breath. Sean pulled Griff back down on top of him, nuzzling into Griff's throat, tongue tracing a slow path

up toward his ear, nipping on the ear lobe. They lay stretched on the sofa for a number of minutes, hands roaming slowly.

"I... really ought to get cleaned up," Griff said. He pried himself upright and limped heavily in the direction of the bedroom. He stripped off his slacks and his damp and sticky boxers. He could feel his face heat with embarrassment. He was an adult. Shit like that wasn't supposed to happen these days. He hastily cleaned off in the bathroom and pulled on that pair of jeans he had tossed across the bed.

Returning to the den, Griff saw Sean slouched comfortably in the corner of the sofa, glasses retrieved, drinking his beer. He had his legs stretched out in front of him across the cushions. Sean crooked a finger and gestured for Griff to sit between his legs. Evidently the young pediatrician was into cuddling.

Amused, Griff decided he could really appreciate the physical contact. He sat down and leaned back against Sean's chest. Sean nuzzled into the side of his throat. "So tell me more about the places you want to go in the UK," Sean prompted. They spent the next two hours talking about the places Griff wanted to see, and those he wanted to revisit.

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A week and half later, Griff lay flat on the vinyl-covered table in the physical therapy center, with a large Ziploc full of ice cubes draped across his knee. The intense cold against his joint was passing from the ache stage toward numbness.

"Are you about done with your torture session?" asked a familiar voice. Griff twisted his head and glanced back to see Sean.

"Yeah, almost. Are you here with your sister?" replied Griff.

"Yep, I'm the chauffeur. Eventually we're going to look into getting her a van with hand controls, but that's a ways off."

"Um, I can only imagine. It's been hard enough for me, and I still have feeling in both legs."

"Can I interest you in dinner? I'll cook," suggested Sean.

"Does that translate to a five-star chef meal, or that you can throw something in the microwave?" Griff teased.

"Something in between. I won't win any awards, but I don't set off the smoke alarm, either. Oh, I'm on call tonight, but chances are nobody will page me. Come by around six."

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Fettuccini Alfredo with chicken. Creamy, sinfully rich, laced with the earthy scent of fresh basil and slight *al dente* texture of gourmet pasta. Griff thought it was the best thing he had tasted in months.

"So... did you make the pasta yourself?" Griff asked.

"Uh, no. I don't have that kind of time, and that's probably a little beyond me."

"This is absolutely divine. I've been stuck in the 'throw the box in the microwave' rut for a while."

They dumped the dirty dishes into the sink. Griff slid his arms on either side of Sean's waist, trapping Sean between his own body and the counter. Pressing Sean against the sink edge, Griff kissed him.

"Mmm, you taste good," murmured Griff.

"Do I get to blame my own cooking?"

"Yeah, but you tasted good even before the Alfredo." Griff fisted a hand into the hair at the back of Sean's head, and pulled him deeper into the kiss. Tongue mapping the inside of Sean's mouth, he could feel Sean grinding into his hip. Sean nipped at Griff's lower lip, and cupped both hands around his behind to steady him as he squirmed again, getting harder by the minute.

"Bed," Sean whispered into Griff's open mouth. He guided Griff in the direction of the bedroom. He pulled Griff down on the bed beside him, kissing with a passionate intensity, fingers working on Griff's belt. He stroked his fingers down across the hard length trapped by boxers. "Want you," he whispered.

Griff's hands were fumbling with Sean's shirt, pulling it loose at the waist, roughly shoving it up and over Sean's head. He buried his face against Sean's chest, trailing across to a nipple and licking it. Sean moaned and worked harder at shoving Griff's boxers down. Griff awkwardly lifted his hips and allowed Sean to drag the trousers and underwear the rest of the way off him. He sat up enough to yank off his T-shirt and toss it over the side of the bed.

Sean was hastily stripping off his own clothes, and Griff could feel his own breathing speed up to the point of shallow gulps. He wanted this badly. He had seen Sean naked in the shower that first morning. Even hung over as all hell, the sight had left him aroused. Now the turn on was intentional, and rapidly heading toward something intense. He drank in the long, lean muscles that seemed to scream 'beautiful surfer boy' rather than 'doctor.'

Sean flopped back down beside Griff as soon as he had ditched the last of his clothes. He eased a leg over Griff's hips and rubbed his own erection against his partner's.

"Do you top or bottom? Or does it matter to you?" Sean whispered against Griff's ear. His teeth tugged at Griff's earlobe, and then his tongue traced a path down the edge of Griff's jaw.

"I... uh, usually t-t-top," Griff stuttered. The sensation of wet warmth beneath his ear was interfering with the connection between his brain and his voice. "But I'm... not sure what t-to suggest." He gulped a harsh breath. Beside him, Sean stilled.

"We could either try sideways with you behind me, which makes the angle kinda awkward. Or, if you don't mind not being, well... literally on top, I could ride you," suggested Sean. The thought made Griff's cock twitch in happy assent.

"Oh, yeah." Griff gripped Sean's hips and rolled onto his back, pulling Sean with him. The weight of Sean's body pressed their arousals together with greater force, and Griff groaned slightly. A smirk crossed Sean's face, and he dove in to capture a kiss. His thighs straddled Griff's hips as he slowly pushed himself upright and off in the direction of the edge of the bed. Sean twisted sideways to dig a condom and lube out of the nightstand drawer.

A minute later, Griff rolled to his side and Sean snuggled back against him. A shallow gasp slipped from Sean's lips as Griff slid a slick finger within.

"You okay?" whispered Griff.

"Oh, yeah... more..." Sean breathed. More fingers, scissoring, stroking. Griff could feel Sean's pulse pounding beneath the hand he had wrapped around Sean's chest. His own chest brushed Sean's back, and his face was buried in the long blond curls cascading over the nape of his lover's neck. He bit lightly at the skin. Sean moaned and pressed himself back.

"Kay... okay... now, God, I need you," Sean groaned. He squirmed around to face Griff and straddled his hips again. Griff had put the condom on and slicked it generously with the lube. As Sean lowered himself, Griff fought the urge to thrust upward. Tight, hot, oh, Jesus Christ... Griff held himself motionless, waiting till the overwhelming urge to come right then passed a little. Sean grinned down at him, raising his body a fraction at a time.

"You are just so gorgeous," Griff huffed out as Sean eased back down. They took a minute to hit a rhythm, as Griff raised his hips to meet Sean's body. A thin sheen of sweat filmed Sean's torso, highlighting the muscles beneath the surface of his skin. Griff's fingers stroked Sean's hard arousal, thumb caressing the slickness at the tip.

"Ungh... close..." Sean gasped. His eyes were squeezed shut. Griff shifted a little beneath him, adjusting the angle to hit the sweet spot with every thrust. Sean came with a low moan, muscles contracting, spurting across Griff's belly. The pulsing waves of his climax sent Griff over the edge, head slamming back against the mattress.

Sean sprawled limply on top of him, breathing in long gulps of air. He was heavy, but Griff enjoyed the weight of his blissed-out partner pressing down on him. Griff brushed his lips against Sean's temple.

"Hey, you still conscious?" he teased.

"Mmmm... uh, yeah... God, that was good," Sean mumbled. He turned his face, seeking a kiss, nipping a little at Griff's lower lip. He slowly slid off and curled next to Griff. Griff let his fingers trace along the texture of Sean's moustache. The short, slightly wiry strands of blond and red-gold outlined the top of his mouth. Trailing an inch lower, Griff's thumb caressed along the Van Dyke style goatee, the almost-point emphasizing the lean line of Sean's jaw. And his lips -- soft, full, delicious. Griff pulled him back into a kiss, tongue parting teeth so he could taste the inside of Sean's mouth. A thread of interest wound down toward his groin, tightening his balls a little, but his body was unwilling to respond again in the span of a handful of minutes. That was okay. Griff was pathetically happy to be sticky and plastered to the warmth of the body next to his.

"We should probably take a shower," Sean suggested. "Should I go grab my cooler?"

"Huh? Oh. No, I don't have the hangover from hell this time," said Griff, remembering the kind gesture from that other morning. "And unless you really want to shower alone..."

"Nope, I was thinking we should save water and do it together." Sean grinned at him.

They didn't. Save water, that is. They got distracted.

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Sean and Griff saw each other frequently over the span of the next several weeks. Sean's apartment, Griff's house, a restaurant -- it varied with Sean's work schedule.

Tuesday night, the two were supposed to meet at a Mexican restaurant. Griff was glancing at his watch as he went out the door, wondering if evening traffic was going to be bad. His cell phone rang.

"Rieckert," he answered.

"Hey, Griff, it's Sean. I'm not going to make it to the restaurant."

"Okay. What's up?"

"I had to go to the hospital. One of my toddler asthma patients had a bad attack, and the parents are still a little wiggled out. I'm probably going to be here another couple hours while we decide if the kid should be admitted or not."

"I could swing by later and see if you're free yet. We could grab a late cup of coffee or something," suggested Griff.

"Okay, sounds like a plan. Come by around eight. I'll leave word at the main desk that I'm expecting somebody. Even if I can't break away, we can have some bad hospital cafeteria coffee and few minutes to talk."

"Will do." Griff hung up and sat down on the steps of his front porch, leaning his crutch against the railing. He was vaguely disappointed, but shit happened. It was



slightly uncomfortable to realize how much he was coming to depend on Sean's presence in his life.

His hand strayed to his thigh, rubbing at the ache in his quad. Therapy that afternoon with Monica had worked him pretty hard. She was such a sadistic bitch sometimes. He grinned a little to himself. He supposed it was all part of the job. PT didn't really work if you didn't continually push the limits.

They had spent a few minutes discussing whether or not he would be comfortable switching to a cane sometime in the future. It was seldom the few steps here and there that were the issue; it was the walking longer distances part these days. He had hopes. A cane would be less obvious than the crutch. It wouldn't draw as much attention, and he could feel just a little bit closer to normal.

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Driving toward the hospital, Griff was once again thinking about Sean. The sex was great, but there was more. They talked. A lot. About Sean's patients, about the trip that Griff was contemplating, about Sean's surfing obsession and Griff's love of cars and the future. Griff hadn't seriously thought much more than a few months ahead in a while. These days, that future seemed to include Sean, and it was a disconcerting idea.

There was a slight chill in the air as Griff pulled into the parking lot, and he wondered for a moment if he should have grabbed a coat on the way out. He was mystified by the presence of five police cars, a fire truck, and a SWAT van. There appeared to be more arriving. He pulled into a space at the far corner of the front lot and got out.

He saw a familiar face in deep conversation with a SWAT officer -- Lieutenant Sheila McArdle, of the local police department. Swirling lights from all the vehicles cast blue and red glows across her features as she stood in the semi-darkness of the parking lot. Griff had worked with her on a couple hostage ops, back when he was still playing point man. She had even pulled him out of the line of fire during one particularly nasty op. That seemed like a million years ago; in reality, it had probably been eighteen months.

Suddenly his mind started connecting the dots. SWAT, more police, EMS; there was something serious going down at the hospital. Sean... His stomach immediately tied itself in a knot. Please, let Sean be just hanging out in the doctor's lounge, waiting on him...

Griff limped across the parking lot. His leg was still bothering him badly from earlier in the day. He approached the car where Sheila was looking at a rough sketch of a floor plan.

"Lieutenant?" he said. She turned to look at him and seemed startled.

"Rieckert? I... You're alive!" she breathed.

"Um... yeah," he said. "Is there a problem with that?"

"No! Of course not! Christ, I heard you got killed in a case gone bad last year," she tried to explain, and glanced down at his crutch

"What was that Mark Twain quote? Reports of my death have been exaggerated? I got hurt. Pretty badly, but, well... So what's going on?" he asked.

She drew a deep breath and blew it out slowly and jammed her hands in her pockets. We're still trying to get all the details. Some guy apparently drew a gun in the ER and started waving it around. As of about ten minutes ago, he was holding four people hostage in one of the bays. The rest of the ER has been evacuated and SWAT has their robotic camera making sweeps. We're trying to set up communications with the guy. Our hostage negotiator was heading in this direction and somebody hit his car. So now he's headed toward an alternate hospital, and I am just so fucked..." She glanced at the sky as if she was hoping for some sort of divine intervention. There was only darkness above, broken by occasional clouds. Her gaze returned to him. "Guess what? You've just been drafted," she said. Griff stared at her.

"Sheila, this is a bad idea. I haven't done this sort of thing in a while..." he said hesitantly.

"Well, guess what? I've never been on the giving-the-orders end of one of these. So rusty is better than bordering on clueless," she griped.

"Sheila, you're not clueless."

"People's lives are on the line. Help me, Griff."

"I can barely walk, in case you hadn't noticed."

"Damn you! I don't need your feet! I need your brain! Your experience! Somebody else can put themselves in the line of fire. I need someone to help me call the shots. And besides... you owe me." She gave him a harsh glare, and he flashed back to being on the receiving end of a flying tackle from her as a bullet passed through the spot where he had been standing.

The SWAT team commander strode over and stopped in front of McArdle.

"Lieutenant. We have a live feed," the man said.

"I'm coming," she replied, starting to follow him. Then she glanced back at Griff. "Are you?" she asked.

He held his breath for a moment. If Sean was in there, would he ever forgive himself if she or someone else fucked this up?

He nodded and followed her.

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Inside the SWAT van, a computer screen showed an interior corridor of the hospital ER. Sheila shoved a chair at him, and he sat where he had a good view of the video feed.

"Do we have audio?" she asked the commander.

"In another minute," the man replied. "I have my people on a headset channel." He handed her an earpiece and cast a curious eye at Griff.

"He's an FBI consultant, here to help me. Give him one, too," Sheila said.

Griff opened his mouth to correct her. He had been declared retired by the FBI after the car incident, so technically he had no official status. Then he promptly shut his mouth and held out his hand. He had indicated he would help, if he could. He still didn't know if Sean was trapped in the ER or not, and now seemed a really bad time to go dialing his cell phone.

The SWAT leader handed him an earpiece, and Griff tucked it into his ear, listening to the intermittent chatter. The SWAT team was confirming that all but four people had been evacuated. Well, four people plus the nut with the gun. A sniper was setting up on the floor behind the main desk in the ER hallway, cutting a tiny hole in the base of the huge counter.

"This is Red Six, I have a tentative visual," the sniper said. "If I'm looking at the right person, the guy is at the back, near the wall, with a woman about three feet in front of him. But there's a curtain covering at least half of the front of the area. I can see shadows, but not the rest of the hostages."

"I'm sending the 'bot closer," said Sheila, glancing at Griff. He nodded. The camera view wobbled slightly as the robotic machine rolled farther down the hallway. She handed Griff a microphone. "You talk." He gave her a dubious look. "Tell him you're PD, not FBI."

Griff took a deep breath and pushed the transmit button on the microphone.

"This is the police department. We would like to speak with you, sir. We're hoping we can resolve without anyone getting hurt. Who am I speaking to?" said Griff.

There was a faint whimpering sound, like a sniffing child, and a soft shushing sound. "I wanna talk with Dr. Alan Currin," a male voice called.

"Okay, sir. We'll find him. It may take a few minutes. Can you please tell me if everyone in there is okay?" Griff continued.

"None o' yer fucking business. What's with the damn toy tank thing? Back it off! I'll shoot people!"

"Okay, okay." Griff made a motion for Sheila to roll the camera-bot back a few feet. The view was mostly of the shadows behind the pale curtain. Griff could see only a hint of a woman's shoulder and a child's hand past the fabric. "Sir, the robot allows us

to talk with you, without anyone else being put in danger. We really need to know if the people you're holding are okay, sir. It would help assure us that you want to solve this."

"The doc's bleeding, but not like gallons or anything. The kid's still coughing. Nobody's dyin'."

"Could you tell us exactly who you have with you? We'd like to let their families know." Griff bit off the urge to add the part about the other people who cared about them, too.

"A nurse, a doc, and a kid and his mom."

"Maybe you could find out what their names are," Griff suggested. Standard protocol indicated that if a hijacker viewed his hostages as people with real identities, people were less likely to end up dead. He could hear terse muttering in the background. He tapped the microphone in his hand, turning it off, and glanced up at the SWAT commander.

"Does your sniper have a better view than us? I'd really like to know about the man he said was bleeding and the sick child," Griff said.

The commander tapped his headset. "Red Six, we have an impaired visual. Can you describe any of the hostages? Especially those who might be injured," he said.

The sniper responded, "He's keeping a woman between him and the edge of the curtain. She's wearing what looks like scrubs, so I'm supposing it's the nurse. She looks to be mid-thirties, dark hair, probably just a touch over five feet tall."

"Can you see anyone else?"

"She's moved a couple times, and I saw the kid's hand and I guess the mother's arm. Different skin tone than the nurse, couple of shades darker."

"This guy has mentioned a doctor twice. Do you see him? Maybe he's sitting down? He said the doctor was bleeding."

Griff forced himself not to clench his teeth in frustration as he listened to the exchange. He momentarily considered asking Sheila to have the hospital people try to get a roster of everyone who had passed through the ER that night. But, one, that was probably unlikely, because of the ebb and flow of personnel and patients; and two, it was considered a professional no-no to let a negotiator be more than peripherally involved if he knew one of the hostages.

"I can see a foot and part of a leg past the edge of the wall. It might belong to an adult male, looks big enough. And based on the angle, he might be sitting on the floor. I'm at about a thirty degree angle to the bay. So there's stuff I can't see. Can't the robo-camera get you a better view?"

"No, not at the moment. He got antsy when we tried to get it closer," said the SWAT commander.

Griff squeezed his eyes shut for a moment, scrabbling through his brain for shreds of past experience. He heard the rough voice of the gunman rise a little over the other connection.

"Hey, Cop, nurse's name is Jamie. What's yours?"

Griff pressed the on switch for the microphone. "My name is Griff. Thank you; that's a start. How about the little boy?" Griff prompted. Go slow, he told himself. Don't make it apparent you want to know the doctor's name.

"I wanna talk to Dr. Currin!" the gunman demanded.

"We're trying to find him. He may have gone home for the day, since it's getting late. This may take a little while." Griff turned and glanced at Sheila. She scribbled *Currin has been paged* on a note pad, followed by *oncologist*.

Griff took a deep breath and let it out slowly. Was the gunman a cancer patient? Or was it someone he cared for? Either way, the man might feel he had very little left to lose, and that was bad news. "Sir, could you tell us your name? That way, as soon as we get hold of Dr. Currin, we can tell him who's looking for him," suggested Griff.

There was a low, shuffling sound from the ER cubicle. "Dennis Webb."

"Thank you, Dennis. How 'bout the other three people? Can you tell me their names?"

Griff could hear more muttering that included "your kid" and "yeah, you." Behind him. Sheila had pushed her chair back a few feet and was talking quietly on her cell phone. She suddenly leaned forward and scribbled *Got Currin* on the pad in front of Griff. He pushed the mic button to turn off the sound.

"Is he on his way here? Does he have the slightest clue who Dennis Webb is?" Griff asked.

"Yeah, he does, and it doesn't sound good," she began, but stopped as Webb's voice was heard again over the speaker.

"Yo, Cop. The kid and his mom are named Darla and Jason Hertzog. The doc's name is Sean Avery. That satisfy you? I want to talk to Currin!" the man snarled.

Griff felt like he had been sucker-punched. He had suspected it was Sean, but hadn't been sure. To know that Sean was being held hostage by this psycho with a gun, immediately sent an icy chill through his veins. Slowly, he pushed the talk button with stiff fingers.

"Yes, thank you. That was helpful. Dr. Currin is on his way right now. It should take maybe ten minutes or so to get him here." He glanced at Sheila for confirmation, and she nodded.

"Okay. You got ten minutes, then I want to hear his voice, and then I want to see him!" This demand was followed by silence.

Griff turned off the mic again. He gazed at the lieutenant. "So, just how bad is this?" he asked.

"Currin said Webb is terminal. Pancreatic cancer that's gone way past the treatment point. Stage four. He said the guy has maybe six months to live." Her voice was flat. It was obvious that Sheila, as well as Griff, realized that Webb probably had very few objections to dying by gunfire and taking as many people as possible with him when he went.

A uniformed officer approached the open door of the van, leading a man. The man was probably in his mid-fifties, hair graying a bit, wearing a dress shirt and tie.

"I'm Alan Currin," the man said as he stepped up into the van.

"I'm Lt. McArdle. If you could give us as much information as possible about Dennis Webb, we're sort of on a timetable," said Sheila.

"I've probably already told you more than I should, given the whole doctor-patient confidentiality thing. But I don't think I could live with myself if I could have told you something that would have saved the lives of the hostages and didn't," said Currin. The doctor had a positively agonized expression on his face.

"What can you tell us about Webb's mental state? I know telling a patient he's going to die has to be a rough blow. How did he take it?" asked Sheila.

"Not well. I've seen some people rage, and some cry, and some plead for hope. He kind of started out in the last category. Webb has a history of clinical depression and borderline schizophrenia. His behavior did lead me to consider whether he might be suicidal. But then the last time I saw him, four days ago, he seemed slightly more accepting of his prognosis," the doctor explained.

Griff rubbed his hands down over his face. This was sounding worse and worse. Terminal, mentally unstable, and armed. Not a good combination. Griff stared at the ceiling for a moment, but all he saw was a vision of Sean lying dead in a pool of blood on a tile floor. The image tightened his chest and made it hard to draw a full breath. He blew out a long breath, hoping for composure and some luck.

Griff glanced at Sheila. She gave him a look of tension. "Your call," she said. "Do you think the sniper should take the shot if it presents?"

Griff clenched his teeth and grimaced, glancing up at the SWAT commander. The commander's expression was calm, but solemn.

"Let me talk to Webb. Let Dr. Currin talk to him too, but if I hold up two fingers, it's a go," said Griff. The commander nodded. Griff pushed the microphone button.

"Dennis, Dr. Currin is just getting to the hospital now," he lied a little. "It would be a show of good faith if you let Darla and Jason go."

"No! Lemme talk to him first!" Griff could hear a distinct edge in the man's voice.

"He'll be here in just a moment," said Griff. He stood up and motioned for the doctor to sit down in front of the microphone as he turned it off. "Do your best to keep him calm. See if there's something you can offer him, other than yourself, that will convince him to let at least some of those four people go." The doctor nodded and sat.

"Dennis, this is Dr. Currin. How can I help you?" said Alan as his fingers bunched the fabric of his slacks.

"Get me into the fucking experimental program! Give me a shot at staying alive!" snapped Webb. Along the curtain edge, the video showed that Webb appeared to be pacing. Little glimpses of his shoulder appeared.

"We can certainly reapply. There should be a new test group starting soon."

"Soon. I want now! Call them tonight, you bastard. I swear I'll kill these people. I want a chance to not die!"

"Dennis, you'll have to give me a couple hours to get hold of the right people," Currin said carefully. Rieckert could tell from the doctor's facial expression that he was promising something impossible.

"No! You'll do it right now! I am not going to wait while you fuck around! I want you in here where I can see you! So I know you're not just jerking me around!" Webb's voice was approaching a shriek.

Griff picked up the microphone. "Mr. Webb, Dennis, please calm down. We are doing our best to give you what you want, within reason. We can't let Dr. Currin in there. You should know that. Give me a little time to call these people."

"No! Fuck you! I want to watch him call them! You want me to kill these people, don't you!?" Webb's voice was almost incoherent with rage. Griff heard the voice of the sniper over his headset.

"This is Red Six. Subject is actively waving the gun in the direction of the hostages."

Griff pressed his lips together, held his breath, and lifted two fingers for the SWAT commander to see. The man nodded and murmured the order into his headset. For the next several seconds, no one seemed to breathe.

There was the sharp crack of a single shot, and the sounds of the entire rest of the SWAT team swarming to secure the scene. Sheila quickly left the van, along with the SWAT commander. Griff trailed behind at a slower pace, entering the hospital ER and praying silently that the shot had hit only Webb.

There was restrained chaos within. Webb was being confirmed dead, and there were officers and medical personnel busy doing damage control. Griff caught a glimpse of Sean. The young pediatrician was being led away from the main area of the ER. He had blood in his hair and trailing down the side of his face. It had soaked part of the shoulder of his shirt. But under the guidance of what appeared to be a pair of doctors, he was vertical and walking, if rather unsteadily. Griff finally drew a full breath. At least Sean was still alive, and it didn't appear he had any life-threatening injuries.

Sheila McArdle and the SWAT commander pulled Griff aside a moment later for what turned out to be nearly twenty minutes of debriefing and analysis. Their joint conclusion: it had been a justified call. If they hadn't neutralized Webb, he was showing all the signs that he was far too close to pulling the trigger on his hostages. There would, of course, be a full inquiry and hearing. Those sorts of things always went with the tough decisions that resulted in loss of life. The goal was always to get everyone out alive. Sometimes it didn't work out that way.

Griff finally broke away from the conference and went in search of Sean. He was told the injured doctor had been taken to the doctor's lounge, since he had showed visible distress when originally led to a different ER bay. Well, shit, no wonder, Griff thought. You try walking back into a nearly identical room after being held hostage for the past hour, see how you feel about it. Griff felt a surge of anger grab him and quickly choked it down. The staff was doing the best they could.

Sean was seated at a table in the lounge as another physician put sutures in the gash in his scalp. His hands were gripping the edge of the chair, white-knuckled. Griff walked toward him. He wondered if Sean was in pain, but the motions of the physician putting in the sutures seemed to have nothing to do with the restless clenching of Sean's hands. It must be pure stress, Griff decided.

Sean finally registered who was approaching him. A flicker of wide-eyed relief flitted across his features.

"How bad?" asked Griff, gesturing toward the wound.

"Ask Dave. I can't exactly see what he's doing," said Sean. His hands left the chair edge as if he were about to reach out to Griff, but then he balled them into tight fists in his lap.

"Looks like it's going to be nine stitches when I'm done. Said he hit a cabinet door," commented Dave as he continued his actions.

"Tell me what happened," said Griff. He watched Sean's face contort in a momentary flash of terror-filled memory, and his own hand tightened around the grip of his crutch. Griff wanted to drop it on the floor and pull his lover into his arms, but that just wasn't going to happen here or now.

"I was waiting with Jason and his mom, Darla. The kid with the asthma attack. He was improving, and we were discussing sending him home in an hour or so. Then this guy just sort of storms in and starts yelling. I figured he was some drunk that had shown up in the ER looking for something to help him with his DTs. But he grabbed



Jamie by the hair, and so I tried to grab him. He jammed a gun in my chest and shoved me back so hard I fell against a cabinet that had gotten left open when Jason was brought in. I guessed I was so freaked by the gun, I didn't even try to catch myself. Gashed my head open and left me kind of stunned. Still hurts like hell. Christ... He scared the shit out of me. After a while he started talking to one of those robot camera things the police use. That was you, wasn't it?" asked Sean.

Griff nodded. "I came by to meet you for coffee, and I got sort of pulled into it. Past experience and all that."

"He really started wiggling out when, what's-his-name, Currin? Started talking. Pacing and waving the gun. Then I guess the police shot him, and I think my heart about stopped 'cause at first I thought he had shot Jamie..." Sean drew a shaky breath and laid a tense hand flat on the table in front of him.. His face had paled noticeably with his story, and he swayed a little in the chair.

This time Griff did reach out and lay a hand on Sean's shoulder. His thumb brushed along the side of Sean's neck, an almost-caress. It was as much as he dared.

"Hey, Avery, are you gonna pass out on me?" queried Dave. He bent down a little and scrutinized his patient. Sean's lips had gone a bloodless white. "Yep, you're about to go. Let's get you horizontal before you fall out of the chair."

Griff and Dave hauled Sean up out of the chair and two steps away to the sofa against the wall. Sean sank shakily to the couch and was tipped back to lie flat; his face was ashen. "Just lie still and let me finish the sutures. Breathe and try to relax," said Dave.

Griff watched from the foot of the sofa. He crossed his arms as he waited for the doctor to finish his job. A long stripe of Sean's hair had been shaved away to give better access to the wound. Griff thought he could count seven already-completed sutures. It's just a cut, a fairly bad one, but just scalp wound, he told himself. It could have been so very much worse. It could have been a gunshot.

As Dave was finishing and applying a dressing, some of the color returned to Sean's face, but he still looked sort of pale. He sat up slowly and glanced at Griff, who was still standing at the foot of the sofa. Sean had a pleading look in his eyes, but was silent.

"Can I take him home?" asked Griff.

"Yeah, he's good to go. You have family, Sean?" said Dave.

Sean shook his head. "Yeah, but they're not available right now," he said softly.

"You really need someone to stay with you tonight. You may have slight concussion, it's hard to tell for sure. You know the routine."

"I'll make sure someone stays with him," said Griff. He held out a hand to help Sean up off the sofa. Sean's fingers felt chilly and damp. He was obviously still sort of in

shock over the whole experience. There was no way Griff was letting Sean out his sight for the next twenty-four hours. No way Sean was going to be alone.

The drive back to Sean's apartment was silent. Sean sat stiffly in the passenger seat, tension radiating, hands fussing nervously with fabric of his shirt. Griff glanced at him frequently, gently laying a hand on his lover's leg at times. He had seen the progression far too many times in his life. The combination of shock and the pretense at normality was generally only the first phase. The storm was coming.

Inside the apartment, Griff pushed the door closed. Sean was standing motionless, facing into the room. Griff ran a light hand down his back. "Relax, you're safe," Griff said.

An instant later, he found himself pinned against the wall. Sean's mouth was covering his, devouring him, hands roughly yanking his shirt loose from his belt. He could feel Sean grinding against his hip, his rapidly hardening length jammed against Griff's body.

And Griff finally allowed himself to acknowledge the entirety of the fear he had experienced at the possibility of his lover's death. They were both tearing at each other's clothes. A button went flying and shirts were flung to the floor. Griff ran his hands along Sean's body, down over sleek, tense muscles, subconsciously reassuring himself that his lover was still basically in one piece. He had to steady himself, a hand on Sean's arm, as his pants were jammed toward his ankles. Griff's erection bobbed free. Sean's naked body was plastered against his, hard cock against his, rubbing in exquisite friction.

"Want you now," Sean growled against the side of his face. They were the first words Sean had said in nearly half an hour.

"God, yes," was all Griff managed to choke out. Then Sean pulled away and darted toward the bedroom.

He returned a moment later, a tube in hand. Sean put a foot on Griff's pants where they were crumpled around his ankles, so Griff could step free, then spun him to face the wall. Griff could feel slick fingers stroking between his butt cheeks, circling his entrance. He spread his feet, bracing himself against the wall. One finger pressed into him. He pushed back a little, and the tip hit his prostate, causing his whole body to twitch in pleasure. Two fingers, pushing, stroking, twisting. Sean had one arm wrapped around his torso, holding him tightly.

Then Griff could feel Sean pressing into him, one long stroke that caught him almost unprepared for the intensity. Griff hissed out a breath, a mixture of discomfort and ecstasy tangled together. In another second Sean was pounding into him, every thrust hitting that perfect spot as Sean bent him forward a little. Hot, moist gasps blew against the nape of Griff's neck, then teeth grazed the place where his neck and shoulder met.

Sean's other hand fumbled around to the front of his body, closing around his cock, stroking him. Oh, God. Griff's body let loose a messy, pulsing splatter on the wall and his lover's hand as the orgasm tore through him.

Pressed against Griff's back, Sean gave a guttural half scream as he came inside his partner. Struggling for breath, legs trembling, they sank to the floor amidst a litter of clothing.

Waiting for his pulse to calm enough to restore his hearing, Griff felt a soft jerking motion from Sean's body, huddled against his shoulder blades. Griff twisted to face him. Sean was sobbing, hard, half-suppressed chokes of tears. He pulled Sean tightly into his arms and held him for a long time, whispering reassuring little nothings. Eventually, the tears dwindled to hiccupping gulps and sniffles.

"Sorry..." Sean whispered.

"It's okay. You had a really shitty day."

"I didn't... hurt you?" Sean looked up at him, tears still shining in red-rimmed eyes.

"Only for, like, two seconds." Griff smiled a little and kissed him softly.

Sean tensed a bit in his arms. "Oh fuck, I forgot... We didn't use..." Sean looked stricken.

"I know. I did sort of realize that at some point... Well, sort of."

"I'll get tested. Oh God, I'm so sorry." Sean buried his face into Griff's shoulder.

"Hey, it takes two. We'll be okay. We'll get tested if you want, but really, I think we'll be just fine," whispered Griff.

"Why didn't I remember? Jesus, I can't believe I was so out of control. It felt like... I don't know... starving or something." Sean tilted his head sideways, laying his ear over Griff's heart. Griff stroked one thumb along the edge of Sean's jaw, tracing the line down from his ear to his chin, brushing across his goatee.

"It's a stress response. Some people hit something. Some people cry. Some people screw their brains out. It's a way to prove to yourself that you're still alive," responded Griff.

"I guess I should be glad I only did two out of three and didn't punch you or something."

"If you had, I'd have understood."

Sean huffed out a sigh in his arms.

"Come on, shower and bed. We could both use some sleep."

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Morning sunlight slanted through a narrow slit in the curtains. Griff lay on his side, elbow bent, head propped on his hand, watching Sean sleep. Tangled blond curls framed Sean's face, lips parted in sleep, beard and moustache fringing divinely gorgeous lips.

A hard knot of angst clutched at Griff's chest. He had cared about a few people in the past, but it had never felt quite like this. To know that some deranged gunman had held Sean hostage, had hurt him, could have killed him... It felt like the one person who was helping Griff begin to piece his life back together had nearly been torn away. And it hurt, it hurt like hell. Was that love? He wasn't sure.

The muffled sound of his cell phone ringing jarred him out of his reverie. Griff hung over the edge of the bed and fished the phone out of his pants pocket.

"Rieckert," he answered.

"Hey, it's Sheila. How're you holding up after all the crap yesterday?"

"Passable."

"Good. How'd you like to do some consultant work? Let me pick your brain on a regular basis," she said.

"I..." The idea blindsided him.

"I ended up talking to your ex-boss from the FBI. I thought you were on temporary leave, but he told me it was permanent. But anyway, even if you were in a wheelchair, I could use your knowledge."

"Can I think about it?"

"Yeah, sure. I'll give you a call in a couple days, after the IA stuff is done."

"Okay, I'll let you know."

After he hung up, he lay staring at the ceiling. New job? New lover? In some weird way, after everything that had happened in the past year, the powers that be had finally decided to smile on him.

Re-Ignition

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