



Road rash hurt. Halfway healed road rash itched, burned and was a general pain in the ass. Or in the arm as the case might be. Dr. Mason Flynn rubbed at the gauze and tape that covered the damage to his elbow and a generous chunk of the back of his forearm. It was the legacy of trying to ride Cameron Bradshaw's motorcycle. Badly.

Mason fiddled with the sleeve of his dress shirt where he had rolled it up, trying to decrease the friction against the wounds. Tyra, one of the practice's nurses and a good friend, caught him at it as she passed him in the hallway between exam rooms. She had been on vacation for the first few days of the week.

"What did you do to yourself?" she asked, pointing at the bandages.

"Something stupid. I sacrificed about six to eight square inches of skin to the gods of concrete," he replied.

"Yow. Out running? I thought you ran on the beach."

"Not running. Riding a motorcycle, or more precisely wrecking one."

"Jeez! I didn't know you owned a motorcycle."

"I don't. A buddy of mine convinced me to try his out. Would you believe I was going about five miles an hour pulling away from a stop sign and hit a curb?" Mason made a face.

"Could've been worse. I hope you had a helmet on," she said.

"Absolutely. I may be a total klutz on two wheels but I'm not that stupid."

"Are you going to Steve's party next week?" Dr. Steven Villetti, one of the other partners in the orthopedic practice, threw an annual fall party. It was a relatively big event.

"Maybe."

"You could bring your boyfriend..." she said.

Mason pressed his lips together. Tyra knew he was gay and was eternally trying to pry details of his love life out of him. "I don't know. He's..." Mason wasn't sure what to say. It was an awkward situation.

"Shy? In the closet? Married?"

"Navy," said Mason, looking at the ceiling. He didn't want to destroy Cam's career, but damn it was hard to be someone's dirty little secret.

"Oh. I heard that the whole 'don't ask, don't tell thing' doesn't work as well in practice as some people hoped... Listen, Jason Ambers is waiting in exam three with his mom. Are you going to trade him off to an oncologist?" Tyra asked.

Mason drew a deep breath. Jason Ambers was four years old. His mother had gotten a referral from the family GP to the orthopedic practice when Jason's broken leg seemed to be healing

excessively slowly. Mason had known the first time he touched the little boy, that it was bone cancer. Being a psychic healer could be amazing. Sometimes, it absolutely sucked.

“Not yet. I have a consult with a pediatric oncologist guy named Santos first. I want to pick his brain some before I present options to the parents.”

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Wan dusky evening light filtered through the kitchen window of Mason’s house. He tossed his keys on the counter and picked up a pencil. On the calendar on the wall, he scrawled -- 1pm Oncology -- in the block for Friday. Not an appointment he wanted to miss. He sagged onto a chair, exhausted. Monday was the first time he had seen Jason. He had poured a vast quantity of energy into the boy that day. Today, two days later he had done it again. Was there any improvement? Any stalling of the deadly disease? Maybe. He needed an assessment from the oncologist and then maybe one from Peter Vithoulkas, senior healer for the top secret organization known as Division P. If things were slack at Division P, the other healer might even be willing to work on the boy himself. However, Peter’s first priorities were always the psi population of the agency.

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Lt. Cameron Bradshaw swung his motorcycle toward the ocean front of Virginia Beach. Riding through the near darkness, he was thinking about dinner with Mason. He hadn’t seen the man since the weekend. Their schedules had been at odds. He pulled into the driveway of the house that was a couple of blocks from the beach.

He opened the front door with a key and walked inside. There was a light on in the kitchen and Mason was standing at the counter, chopping broccoli. His dress shirt was untucked, sleeves were rolled up, and he was barefoot. Cam thought he looked delicious, and dead tired. Cam walked up behind Mason, wrapped an arm around his lover’s waist, and slid his hand up under the fabric of the shirt to lie flat on Mason’s stomach.

“Hey,” Cam said softly.

“Hey to you. I’m sorry I didn’t return your text this afternoon. I got side tracked,” replied Mason.

Cam rested the side of his head against the nape of his partner’s neck. “It’s fine. I figured you were busy. You look wiped.”

“Long day. Is the bike running okay? Scuffed and all.” Mason’s tone sounded guilty.

“No problem. The new turn signal’s on order. And you know I worry more about the fact you scraped up your arm than about the bike. I like the bike, but it’s just hardware.”

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Post dinner, Cam and Mason were slouched on the sofa, while the pilot pointed out the features of a motorcycle being reviewed in a magazine. Mason rested his head on Cam's shoulder, only halfway paying attention.

"Steve Villetti's throwing his annual football and beer bash next weekend. Wanna go with me?" asked Mason.

Cam looked up from the magazine and Mason could sense a thread of apprehension. He knew the party was an iffy proposition at best. Being an active duty Naval Officer, Cam's willingness to be seen in public together was always dependent on how much risk he thought was involved. Yeah, people knew they were good friends and made the assumption that it stemmed from Mason saving Cam's life after a devastating motorcycle accident. A few people in Division P knew the depth of their bond, and a couple of Mason's friends, but none of Cam's, so far as Mason knew.

"And just exactly what does this party entail?" asked Cam.

"Tons of food, good beer and college football on the TV. He usually invites fifty-some people. It's a sort of all day, come when you can thing. We could go for just an hour or so," replied Mason. He could almost see the internal debate in Cam's eyes, always wondering if his secret would destroy his career. "Steve knows I have a partner, and Tyra pries details out of me with the finesse of a Spanish Inquisitor," continued Mason, naming people who were part of the orthopedic practice. "As long as I don't grope you over the beer cooler, nobody else is liable to think twice about two single guys hanging out together with a bunch of other people watching football."

"I guess I can let you drag me along for a little while," said Cam.

"Good." Mason cupped a hand behind his lover's head and pulled Cam into a kiss. He was exquisitely pleased that Cam had agreed to the party idea. "You staying tonight? Or heading back toward the base?"

"I'll stay. I've barely seen you this week," replied Cam.

Mason smiled. He'd only in the past week convinced Cam to leave some clothes and other essentials at his house to streamline things when Cam spent the night with him.

"I'd promise to molest you except I think you're too tired to enjoy it."

"Mmm, yeah," admitted Mason. Sitting here against the warmth of his partner's body was lulling him toward falling asleep.

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Cam had to be at work earlier than Mason the following morning. The doctor was still in the shower when Cam went into the kitchen to grab a cup of coffee before heading out. Leaning on

the counter as he drank the coffee, he stared idly across the room at the wall calendar. There was something scribbled in the Friday block. He walked closer, wondering if Mason had plans for them to do something that night. He hadn't been exactly with it last night. Mason had fallen asleep in Cam's arms almost as soon as they went to bed. "1pm Oncologist" was printed in the square. Cam's heart froze. Oh God. No, it couldn't be. Oh, please God, no, his brain pleaded. Maybe Mason didn't know for sure. Maybe that's why his lover hadn't said anything. Some cancers were more treatable than others. It would be just like Mason to say nothing until he had all the facts and all the options.

Cam fought the urge to stalk back into the bathroom and demand that Mason tell him everything right then. But what would that say about his trust? He needed to give his lover a little space, a little time. If Mason still didn't tell him anything by the weekend, then Cam would drag the information out of him.

Walk into the bathroom and tell him you'll see him after work, Cam told himself. And it took every ounce of self-control he thought he possessed to do just that.

"You sure? I thought you had that aerial fighting thing going on this afternoon." Mason looked at Cam in the mirror as he shaved.

"ACM- 1v1."

"Yeah that thing."

"I do, but I'll still be done by six or so. Last night you were dead tired, so I figured maybe we could make up for it tonight," said Cam. Fuck, why hadn't he realized there was something wrong? Every time Mason had talked to him this week, he had sounded distracted or tired. Mason was standing in front of the sink, towel wrapped around his waist, still looking somewhat drained, even after a full night's sleep. As Mason wiped the remnants of shaving cream from his face, Cam put his hands on his partner's shoulders and spun him around. He kissed Mason passionately. "See you later," he said and walked out of the room.

Riding toward the base for work, Cam had to blink back the tears that threatened his vision.

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Buttoning his shirt in the bedroom, Mason was slightly mystified by Cam's behavior. Generally if the pilot spent the afternoon flying, followed by the usual dissection and analysis of the maneuvers, he tended to hang out with the other pilots and blow off steam or just go back to his quarters. Not that Mason wanted to complain about the promise to come by at the end of the day. He had been pretty beat last night.

The kiss in the bathroom was confusing, too. He had gotten used to the concept that if Cam was in uniform, touching was off limits. Now the guy was changing the rules in mid-stream. It seemed like a good change, but there was something wrong. Mason couldn't seem to put a name

on it. A hint of desperation? Maybe he could get Cam to talk to him more openly tonight. Pillow talk if it needed to be.

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What did you call it when nothing went quite right, but nothing went horribly wrong either? Cam stripped out of his “speed jeans” and his flight suit. The dogfight practice hadn’t been anywhere near his best. Even his opponent had gone so far as to comment on Bradshaw having an off day. Every time Cam thought he had his focus down pat, the word oncologist flashed in his head and suddenly his concentration was all but blown.

Cam sat down on the bench in the locker room, elbows on his knees, hands dangling between. If Mason was dying... Nobody died of cancer overnight. They had to have at least a few weeks, maybe as much as years. There was chemo, and radiation and surgery. Some people lived for a lot of years after being diagnosed with cancer. He just couldn’t quite wrap his head around the idea of losing Mason. They’d had their bad moments... the fight regarding Cam’s new motorcycle being the most vicious, and most recent. But he loved the man. He still had trouble with that concept at times. In the general public, homosexual relationships were not particularly well accepted. In the Navy... damn, why couldn’t they be like the British and not care what the sex of your partner was? If whatever Mason had was terminal, would the military even let him take time off to care for his partner?

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“Damn, will you let me go long enough to put the dishes in the sink?” said Mason. Cam had pulled a plate from his hand, set it on the table and backed him against the kitchen wall, kissing him. They had finished dinner and Mason was making a really vain attempt to clean up.

“No. I won’t! The fucking dishes can wait. I don’t know how much time we have left and right this minute I want to spend it touching you!” snapped Cam.

Mason was startled by the intensity of hurt that seemed to be blazing from his lover. “What happened? Did somebody out you at work?” asked Mason carefully. He relaxed back against the wall. Cam’s hands were braced on either side of his shoulders.

“No. Why?”

“What you just said. Something about not knowing how much time we had left. I thought that meant the command was threatening you with transfer orders.”

“I meant how much time you have left to live. God damn it!” shouted Cam. Mason raised an eyebrow. The man was making no sense.

“Are you planning on killing me?”

“Fuck! Mason. The oncologist appointment. The cancer. You being dead tired! Why didn’t you tell me!?” Cam raged.

Mason took a deep breath. Man, talk about mixed signals and jumping to conclusions. He took Cam’s face in his hands. He wasn’t sure he had ever seen such raw grief from his lover.

“Listen to me. I’m fine. Honestly. You made a wrong assumption,” he said softly. “The oncologist thing, it has to do with one of my patients.”

Cam gave him an uncomprehending look. “You wrote it on your calendar. Here at home...” Cam whispered.

“I know. This kid, my patient, he’s four years old, and has osteosarcoma, bone cancer. I’m doing everything I can to improve this kid’s chances. I’ve been pouring energy into him, trying to stall the progression. It wipes me out, in a different way than short term emergency stuff does. I made a consultation appointment with an oncologist so I could discuss the case more objectively without the parents around. I usually try not to get so involved, but God, something about this kid just gets to me and I think his chances are pretty slim.” Mason pulled Cam tight against his body and wrapped both arms around him, drawing the pilot’s head down on his shoulder. “So don’t worry, it’s not about me. Not really anyway.”

They stood unmoving for a number of minutes. Mason could feel Cam’s chest heaving as he sucked in tense gulps of air. It had never occurred to him that a hastily written reminder combined with the fatigue of trying to heal the little boy would lead his lover to leap to such a devastating conclusion.

“I’m sorry I scared you. When did you see my note on the calendar?” Mason asked.

“This morning,” muttered Cam. His face was still pressed against Mason’s shoulder.

“Ah, so that’s why you kissed me before you left.”

Cam finally lifted his head and looked at Mason. “What? I usually kiss you before I leave.”

“Only if you’re not in uniform.”

“Oh... um...” Cam looked away.

“It’s okay. I get it. That whole compartmentalization thing. I don’t fit into that part of your life.”

“Shit, I don’t want it to be that way. I flew like absolute crap today, ‘cause I couldn’t stop thinking about how much I love you. And how I was so scared I going to lose you.” Cam sucked in another agonized breath. “I wasn’t going to say anything ‘til after the appointment on Friday. Then all through dinner you acted like nothing was wrong and I assumed...”

“Do you really think that if I had cancer that I wouldn’t tell you?”

"I figured that you wanted to wait until you had all the facts in a row. Then you'd try to present it as -- here's the diagnosis and here's all the options."

"Am I really that much of a control freak?" asked Mason.

"Yeah you are." Cam kissed him softly. "But I sort of understand why. It keeps you together." Cam buried his face against the side of Mason's neck and leaned against his body, pinning him gently to the wall. "God, this has been a really shitty day. Can I have a nervous breakdown now?"

Mason's hands stroked down his lover's back. Despite finding out his horrible belief was wrong, Cam was still wound tight enough to knot every muscle down his spine. Mason nuzzled his mouth along his lover's temple. All he wanted to do right that moment was soothe away the stress and the heartache.

"Come," he whispered, and eased Cam away from himself a few inches so he could turn and guide his lover out of the kitchen.

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The bedside lamp cast a warm light across the bed as Cam stood in front of his lover. Mason's hands were slowly undressing him, pulling off his T-shirt, unbuckling his belt, pushing his underwear and jeans down over his hips. His cock jostled limply against the inside of his thigh as he stepped out of his pants. Mason pushed him down to sit on the bed and hooked a finger in a sock to take it off, then did the other one.

"Lie down on your stomach," said Mason softly.

Cam felt the bed dip as Mason straddled his thighs and warm hands began to knead at his shoulders. Firm fingers dug into the muscles along his backbone and he could feel that subtle, familiar energy vibration that came with Mason's healing talent. His breath hitched a little as too many thoughts churned through his head. If Mason had had cancer, could his healing talent help to defeat it? The doctor's psychic healing skill was iffy at best when it came to fixing himself.

Cam squirmed beneath Mason and rolled over to face him. His lover had removed his shirt but still wore his slacks. Cam took hold of Mason's wrist and bent his arm slightly to see the bandages that still covered the road rash from the motorcycle fall. Mason sat back a little against Cam's legs.

"It's healing. Slowly. Normally. I haven't had a lot of energy to spare to hurry things along," said Mason.

Cam stared up into those intense blue eyes, slowly letting go of Mason's wrist. "If..." he started and couldn't get the words past his lips.



“I don’t know. Cancer can be a big thing, or it can be something tiny and localized. There are too many variables,” said Mason.

“Mmm, spoken like a doctor.”

“Uh-huh.” Mason shuffled back a few inches on his knees then lay down on top of Cam. He was a heavy, welcome warmth. Mason’s hands pinned Cam’s on either side of his head, fingers interlaced. Cam could feel the calm concern emanating from his lover. Warm lips grazed his chin, then roamed upward to his mouth. Mason kissed him with care, tracing Cam’s lower lip with the tip of his tongue then softly pressing it against his teeth. Cam’s mouth opened willingly to the gentle invasion.

It was a long slow battle of tongues and teeth and lips and Cam slowly noticed the rest of his body responding to the assault. His hardening cock was being pressed along the fly of Mason’s pants and butting against his partner’s own arousal.

“You ha’ too many clothes on,” Cam mumbled around Mason’s tongue.

Mason made a noise of agreement and finally let go of Cam’s hands to struggle with his belt. It took another minute for him to shuck his pants and briefs and toss them off the end of the bed. Mason stretched out beside him. His hand skimmed across Cam’s chest and brushed along his nipple. It tightened in response and the tiny motion sent threads of heat straight to his groin. Cam rolled toward him. Mason crooked a leg behind Cam’s and drew their bodies tight together. Mason’s hand cupped the back of Cam’s head and pulled him back into a deep open mouth kiss.

“*Better?*” was the whisper in his head. Cam’s hands slid around his partner’s body and reveled in the energy thrum that tingled his body every place they touched. His fingers had passed the uneven texture of scar tissue that a bullet had left on Mason’s side. A bitter reminder of a narrow escape. Cam’s breath caught. That event had been very real. Mason rocked his hips forward a little, rubbing his own hard cock against Cam’s

“I’m here. I’m real and I’m safe,” his lover whispered.

“Fuck me,” said Cam. His voice was husky and uneven. “Hard.”

Mason gave him a long level look. “On your knees,” replied Mason softly. As Cam rolled to his hands and knees, he heard the slurpy sound of lube being squeezed from the tube. A cool slick finger pushed against his ass and slid carefully in.

“No! Just do it!” snapped Cam. He wanted it to hurt. In the morning, he wanted every move to remind him just how real and alive and healthy his lover was. Mason’s hand on his hip was motionless and he could feel the uncertainty his partner broadcast. Then came that slurpy blat of lube again.

“The safe word is ow,” said Mason softly, and this drew a convulsive snicker from Cam.

The cool press of something a lot bigger than a finger cut off the laugh. Cam gulped in a sharp breath as the burning stretch drew all his attention. Oh God, he hadn't realized just how careful the healer had been in the past months to make sure he was ready the times he bottomed. Mason held himself still, waiting.

"More," Cam gasped. Mason drew back just a little and when he thrust forward, Cam suddenly rocked back impaling himself on the full length of his partner. The mix of discomfort bordering on pain combined with the impact against his prostate and he let out a keening moan.

"God... shit..." Mason gasped, both hands clenching around Cam's hips holding him immobile. "Slow down!" Neither of them moved for several seconds, before Mason withdrew a little. When he pushed in again, their bodies made a smacking sound as flesh hit flesh. And it escalated. A hard aggressive fuck that lasted only a couple minutes. Cam let out a choked cry of ecstasy as he spurted semen across the sheets. Mason's orgasm was mere seconds later. As the echo of his partner's climax washed through his nervous system, Cam collapsed shakily to the mattress, Mason on top of him. They were both fighting to catch their breath, hearts pounding hard.

Cam could feel Mason's breath against the back of his shoulder and the slow slither of Mason's softening cock sliding from his body. It was too much trouble to move right then.

"You okay?" Mason mumbled in his ear.

"Fab."

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Gotta come up with a good story, Cam decided as he rode to work, because somebody was sure to notice that he was being a little careful about how he sat down. He was sore, with good and obvious reason. In the shower that morning, Mason had given him a guilty look of concern and offered to use his healing talent. Cam refused.

True to form, somebody did notice halfway through the morning.

"Hey Bradshaw, you break your butt or something? You're sitting down as careful as some old lady with hemorrhoids," said Curtis, one of Cam's fellow pilots.

"I stepped backward off a curb last night. Fell flat on my ass. I probably bruised my tailbone," said Cam.

"Even if you broke it, it's not like they could put a cast on it," snickered the other man. Cam just grinned. Inside, his chest tightened. Mason was healthy and whole and had practically pounded him into the mattress. Every moment's physical discomfort was a welcome contrast to the heart-wrenching emotional agony of the day before.

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The wind that blew across The Hague bordered on icy, as Mason stood with his elbows braced on the concrete railing. This inlet of water ran only a few scant blocks from Children's Hospital of the King's Daughters. The oncologist he had gone to see had an office close by. Evening traffic flooding off the Naval base toward the midtown tunnel was starting to cause a back up, and he wasn't in the mood to sit in the bumper to bumper crawl right then. The cancer specialist had been helpful and sympathetic, but, ultimately, the prognosis was poor. Choices seemed to lie between aggressive chemotherapy with little chance of remission and amputation followed by radiation with only slightly better odds.

The sun was dipping toward the horizon, and Mason had barely moved a muscle in past half hour. All the information churned through his brain. Could he do anything to alter the options? He hadn't had time to talk to Peter Vithoulkas yet, the senior healer at Division P. Maybe there was some hope there.

A hard shiver ran through his body. Damn, maybe he ought to go someplace a little warmer to drown himself in his internal angst. He pushed away from the railing and began to walk slowly back in the direction of the parking garage near the hospital. Turning his cell phone back on would probably be a good idea, too. As the device played its little boot-up tune, he noticed there were four text messages and two missed calls, all from Cam. Mason thumbed his lover's cell number. No answer, it flipped over to voice mail. That could mean anything from Cam was on his motorcycle to he was in a meeting on base. Mason scrolled down through the menu and started popping open the text messages.

- ONCO MTG OVR?
- GNEWS? BNEWS?
- IM THINKIN BAD
- U K?

Mason heaved a sigh and guiltily tucked the phone back in his pocket. Obviously Cam was worrying about him. He decided to try calling again in fifteen minutes or so, which then reminded him of the early evening traffic snarl clogging the roads near the hospital. There was really no point in even getting in his car. A cup of coffee in the hospital cafeteria was probably as good as any other ploy to kill some time.

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Scanning the faces of the people in the hospital cafeteria was really more a habit than a necessity. This close, the tug on Cameron Bradshaw's talent for finding what he was after was an unmistakable pull. He saw his lover sitting alone at a table, chin resting on a hand, coffee cup before him, long graceful fingers wrapped around it. His Blackberry lay in front of him. The idle play of those fingers along the edge of the cup told a story of tension.

Cam crossed the room and laid a hand on Mason's shoulder. The doctor looked up at him, with a slightly startled expression, then relaxed.

“If it was anybody but you, I’d ask how you knew where to find me,” said Mason. Cam set his helmet on the table and sat down beside his partner.

“Better than Lo-Jack and GPS combined,” he said with a smile, then sobered a bit. “I’m guessing the meeting went badly?”

“The meeting was fine, but yeah, I know what you meant,” replied Mason.

“I’m sorry.” Cam wanted to put his arms around his lover and offer him comfort. He settled for brushing his fingertips against Mason’s where they were curled around the coffee cup.

“I’ll... figure something out,” said Mason. “I tried calling you back a little while ago... I had my cell turned off during the meeting.”

“Answering my phone while I’m riding...”

“Yeah, I wondered if you might be on your bike. Not exactly a safe option,” Mason said as he sat back and crossed his arms.

Cam recognized the maneuver. When they were in public, Mason would often do something to remind himself that careless touches were a bad idea. God, when had he become so attuned to such tiny indicators in Mason’s body language? Probably right about the time he had finally admitted to himself that he was hopelessly in love. “I wasn’t expecting to see you today,” Mason said.

“I know, but you’ve been really bent out of shape about this kid. I figured you could use some company. And I didn’t want to tell you over the phone that I have to go to Philadelphia for a couple of days. Division P stuff.”

Mason grimaced faintly. “Is this going to involve you getting shot at?”

“I think the risk is pretty low. I’m being loaned to the FBI to help them find some money stolen from a bank three days ago. Apparently they’re clueless.”

“When are you leaving?”

“Tonight at ten pm. You could come with me...”

“This involves an airplane right?”

“Um, yeah.”

“No, thanks. You know my opinion of flying.”

“Thought it wouldn’t hurt to ask. It’s only a couple hours flight. We could go to the airport bar and get you really drunk first,” Cam teased gently, knowing that Mason’s fear of flying bordered on phobic.

“I’m sure that would go over well. Not to mention showing up with a friend in tow probably wouldn’t exactly wow the FBI I’m sure,” said Mason.

“You are Division P. An all-signed on the dotted line and mostly trained agent.”

“Christ, that makes me sound like James Bond, instead of some doctor who got roped into something I haven’t decided whether I like or not.”

Cam looked at him for a long moment. “Do you regret your contract with them?” he said slowly.

“No. Yes. Hell! I don’t know. I like having Peter to openly compare notes with. I’m probably better than I used to be at ‘that stuff’ for the training they’ve given me. I like having a place where you and me doesn’t matter. But it all comes with a price doesn’t it? Peter’s been hinting about sending me on official business for a couple weeks now. Did they ask you to tap me for this?”

“Danny suggested that sending you as a sort of trainee might not be a bad thing. The FBI doesn’t even have to know what you do for P. All they have to know is that you’re one of us,” said Cam.

Mason braced his forehead against the heels of his hands. “God, I hate flying,” he whispered.

“Is that a yes?”

“I guess so. Part of me wants to claim that I need to stay close to my patient. But the other part knows that if I do this, I might be able to get Peter to willingly help me figure out a way to fix Jason Ambers. And a weekend’s probably not going to make a difference in the end result anyway.”

“That bad?”

“Yeah, probably... I keep trying to convince myself that maybe what I can do, my gift, can save him. But I just don’t know.”

“Come on. Traffic’s hopefully let up a little by now.”

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They walked out of the hospital and across the street to the parking deck. Mason was about two-thirds of the way to where he had parked when it occurred to him, that he had no idea where Cam’s bike was.

“You don’t have to walk me to my car. I can find it by myself, honest, I’m a full fledged grown-up,” Mason said, in a teasing tone.

“I’m parked one space away from your Mustang. There was some Toyota thing parked between us when I left it.”

Mason opened to mouth, shut it, then finally said, “Hon, sometimes you are just plain scary with that stuff.”

Cam let out a snort of laughter. “This from the guy who can turn off pain like a light switch and seal up skin like it’s never been torn?”

“Mmm, yeah,” muttered Mason. True to Cam’s word, his motorcycle was one space away in the deck, one car parked between them. Mason unlocked his car door. “How do we do this?”

“Go pack enough stuff for a couple days. I have to get my gear from my quarters on base. Danny Valentine’s picking me up at eight, then we’ll swing by your place. The game plan is to make sure we’re in Philly and all ready to go by nine-ish tomorrow morning,” said Cam.

“Suit and tie? Business casual? Jeans?”

“Uh, I usually opt for the middle unless I know it’s going to be something really filthy.”

“You taking uniforms?”

“No. Unless it’s a job that’s a direct spin off of Navy stuff, I’m officially Division P and not military.”

“Oh.” Thoughts of the flight combined with his last somewhat involuntary “mission” involving Naval Intelligence churned through Mason’s head. That had been a real nightmare. As he opened the car door, his fingers trembled a little at the memory of the woman he had killed to save Cam’s life. Beside him, Cam must have sensed his stress. Strong fingers curled around the side of his neck and Cam’s thumb ran along his jaw.

“Nothing about this op is personal. This is what I usually do. Out on assignment for a couple days, then back to flying. Business as usual,” said Cam.

“I guess,” replied Mason. Feeling Cam’s fingers against his skin was a welcome touch.

“Are you okay with this?”

“I have to be, don’t I? I signed away my right to refuse.”

“You could tell Peter you’re not ready.”

“No, I can’t. Not if I want him to help me with Jason Ambers.”

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In a garage in Philadelphia, a man set a can bearing a label that declared it to be black rifle powder on a work bench. He proceeded to pick up a length of copper pipe and clamp it in a vise, then pound one end flat with a large hammer. A drill, a battery, a model rocket engine igniter, and several other items lay further down the bench. He worked in silence except for the noises of the tools.

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Cam hadn't been kidding when he mentioned getting Mason drunk in the airport bar. Well, not exactly drunk, but definitely a little less wound up. He had convinced Mason to have two rum and cokes before they left, and it was probably about the only thing that kept Mason from outright hyperventilating when they took off. Blissfully, the flight was smooth and relatively short. They would be landing in about ten minutes.

The plane was relatively full, but judging from the number of people who seemed to be snoozing, it appeared to be mostly business travelers. As they began their descent, Cam watched Mason fidget and twist in his seat, fingers intermittently clenching around the arm of the seat and balling into fists in his lap. In the darkness of the cabin, Cam couldn't tell if Mason was really as pale as he looked in the dim lighting. Cam pushed the arm rest between them up out of the way and slid an arm behind his partner. He pulled Mason closer to him.

"Chill, you're safe," he whispered in Mason's ear. He could feel the hard thud of the man's pulse. Cam cupped a hand against his lover's cheek and turned Mason's face toward his own. Cam kissed him softly. Soft lips were bordered by the rasp of razor stubble. Cam could feel the anxiety churning through his partner. "Focus on me," he murmured and curled his hand against the back of Mason's head, pulling his lover deeper into the kiss. He nipped gently at the delicious mouth against his and pressed his tongue against the doctor's teeth. Mason's mouth opened to him and Cam put his best effort into being a complete distraction. It worked until they hit a pocket of turbulence.

"Shit!" gasped Mason, and his fingers dug into Cam's shoulder.

"It's okay. It's just bumpy getting down," Cam tried to soothe his lover. He hugged Mason's head down against his shoulder.

"I'm such a fucking wuss," Mason mumbled as his fingers tightened on Cam's thigh.

"We're almost down," replied Cam.

In another five minutes, the plane landed.

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Two people met Cam and Mason at the airport. A stunning blond woman in a charcoal gray business suit waited with a stocky man bearing a small placard with Cam's name written on it.

"I'm Cameron Bradshaw."

"Madison Carthage, director of the FBI's Philadelphia office," replied the woman holding out a hand. Cam thought she had a sort of predatory look. He guessed it took that sort to run with the big boys. "I was under the assumption that you were coming alone," she continued. Her eyes raked down the length of Mason's body, where he stood a couple of feet away.

"This is Mason Flynn. He's one of Division P's trainees," said Cam.

"And what's his specialty?" she asked.

"Sorry, that's classified."

"Oh. I'm afraid we only made arrangements for one hotel room," she said.

Cam could detect a hint of annoyance. This was a woman who obviously didn't like either surprises or secrets.

"That's fine. We'll cope." Cam glanced at Mason for any sign of disagreement. Mason shrugged.

"Very well. Agent Buchner will be taking us to the hotel. You'll be collected at 8:30 and brought to the federal building for a briefing."

"Okay. Got it." They all began to walk toward the baggage claim area.

"Mr. Flynn, how long have you been with Division P?" the Director fished. Her gaze had taken on a sort of sultry look.

"About five months," said Mason. He glanced at Cam.

"And what did you do before?"

"I'm an orthopedic surgeon. I still have an active practice."

"Oh? I suppose I should have called you Dr. Flynn then," said Madison.

"It's fine. I don't mind."

"If we're going to work together, I hate to get started off on the wrong foot," she smiled.

\*\*\*



The triage bag that Mason grabbed off the belt at baggage claim weighed quite a bit. What the hell was in it? Bricks? He grunted a little as he slung over his shoulder. Peter had sent it to him via Danny Valentine when he had been picked up prior to the flight. Mason couldn't really fathom why he was supposed to bring it, but he wasn't about to argue after the fiasco at the Meridian Air Station back at the beginning of the summer.

Mason already had his garment bag. They were waiting for Cam's to make an appearance. Cam gave Mason a glance as Madison chattered away beside him. Ten minutes later, they were all headed off to the hotel.

Standing in the hotel lobby, Ms. Carthage was confirming that a room had been reserved for Cameron Bradshaw and could the concierge please see if a second room was available. Regrettably, the Concierge said the hotel was full due to a convention occurring in the area.

"I'm so sorry," Madison said, looking at Mason.

"It's fine. We'll manage," Mason replied.

"At least the concierge assured me that there are two beds," she said. "I'll see you tomorrow." She gave Mason a warm smile, to Cam she nodded and left with Buchner trailing after her.

In the elevator, heading toward the tenth floor, Mason saw Cam look at him with a smirk on his face. "That woman is just dying to get into your pants," said Cam.

"If only she knew how absolutely non-existent her chances are," said Mason. "Or that the second bed is going to go sadly underused. Unless you really want to sleep alone..."

"Not if I have another option. Although it is almost one am. I'm not sure much more than sleeping's likely to occur."

"You still sore?"

"A little."

"I'll fix it for you," Mason promised.

The elevator made a soft chime and the doors slid open. The two men walked down the hallway to the room and Cam popped the key card into the lock.

The room was fairly generous in size and furnished with two queen size beds. Mason set down the gear bag and his garment bag then flopped on the bed. He still wasn't sure how he had gotten maneuvered into coming to Philadelphia with Cam. It's a bargaining chip, he told himself. Cam crawled onto the bed and knelt over top of him, looking down into his eyes.

"I'm sorry I'm such a total flake about flying," Mason apologized.

Cam just grinned at him and eased down to lie on top of him. “We could pick up where we left off before we landed...” Cam suggested softly. Mason tugged at the back of Cam’s shirt, untucking it from his slacks. He laid a hand against the hard muscles at the back of Cam’s waist and opened his shields. He could feel the nagging ache of abused muscles and the faint burning discomfort that was a result of the previous night.

“You should’ve told me you hurt,” Mason gently chided his lover as he sent a warm flood of energy cascading through his hand.

“Unh, not important,” whispered Cam, beginning to kiss Mason.

\*\*\*

Six people walked from the federal building into the attached parking garage. Cam fingered the evidence bag containing the lock from a money transport bag where it was tucked into his pocket. The FBI had shown him shell casings, an ink pen dropped by one of the men in the robbery, a dubious shoe print, photos of the scene and bags and locks that had been chopped off with bolt cutters.

“Do you want me to find the people or the money?” he had asked. The decision had been made that the money took priority. Cam thought that fell in the category of kind of weird. Didn’t finding the “bad guys” generally trump just money? It wasn’t like the missile he had located for the Navy. Money was just money, wasn’t it? So Cam made the usual disclaimers that what he did was not an exact science and results were not guaranteed. So now he stood in the garage with Mason, Madison Carthage, Agent Buchner, and two more FBI men, whose names he had already forgotten.

“You do realize this is going to be slow and excruciatingly boring?” Cam said to Ms. Carthage. “It would probably be less frustrating for you and all your people to let me wander around for an hour or so and figure out what direction I’m going.”

“What exactly does wandering around entail?” Ms. Carthage asked.

“Pretty much, just that. I usually have to sort of get my bearings before I know which way to go. I’d prefer to do it on foot.”

“Very well. Do you want to start from here or from the scene?”

“Unless you have some overwhelming reason to believe the money is closer to the original crime scene, here’s just fine.”

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A light drizzle was developing as Mason walked along beside Cam. They were just ambling along a city street. Cam had his earbuds in and his mp3 player tucked in his pocket. The infamous Ms. Carthage was trailing along, heels clacking on the sidewalk. Periodically she

would try to draw Mason into conversation, asking him about his orthopedic practice, the area where he lived and Division P. He kept his answers as brief as he could manage. God, the woman was irritating. He supposed he should be flattered that she was so hot for him. She was obviously operating under the premise that she just hadn't found the right way to tempt him yet.

Mason suddenly lunged forward and grabbed Cam before he walked face first into a bus stop.

"Hey! Careful!" Mason shouted. Cam gave him a startled look then laughed a little.

"This is why driving when I do this is usually such a bad idea."

"Making any progress?" asked Mason.

"Yeah, actually I just got a pull."

"Should I request the rest of the team to meet us here?" asked Madison.

"Not yet. Give me another half mile or so."

\*\*\*

Stor-It-Here was one of those self-storage places that had sprung up like mushrooms. Cam had indicated that Agent Buchner should stop along the high fence that bordered the place. Mason was in the back seat with Ms. Carthage. Cam glanced back at them. Carthage was gazing at Mason with a look that made Cam think she would consider jumping him if they were alone.

They were on the edge of the city, some seventeen miles or so from where the robbery had taken place.

"Is this it?" asked Carthage.

"I'm about eighty percent sure. Things are harder to track than people," replied Cam.

"Okay, I need to make a phone call to verify a warrant, then we'll have a look," she said, climbing out of the car. Cam got out and leaned on the front fender to wait. Mason walked around to stand in front of him.

"Do you think if I stuck my tongue down your throat she'd back off?" whispered Mason.

Cam smiled a little. "Guess you don't swish enough to give her any clue you're not het," replied Cam. He was hard pressed not to laugh. Mason rolled his eyes.

It took about ten minutes for the FBI to gain permission to enter the storage facility. Cam began walking the road that led between rows of locked doors. He stopped in front of one numbered 3866.

“This one,” he said. It felt right. It had the magnetic-style draw that he followed. Agent Buchner retrieved an enormous pair of bolt cutters from the car. It took a couple of tries to get the right angle for him to cut the lock off. Inside the storage area was some old furniture stacked along the wall, a large number of cardboard boxes and some plastic ones also.

“Search everything,” ordered Madison. She walked back toward the corner where two roadways through the complex intersected, dialing her cell. Cam shrugged at Mason and they went to stand by the doors on the opposite side of the road.

“Think you hit pay dirt?” asked Mason.

“Yeah, I think so.” They were both watching the three agents systematically begin to search the contents.

“I left my cup of coffee in the car. This looks like it could take a while, I’ll be back in a couple of minutes” said Mason. Cam nodded. Sheer curiosity kept him close to the open storage space, and he lingered as close to the door as he could without being in the way.

“Hey, I...” called Buchner to one of the other agents as he began to open a cardboard box. The rest of his words were ripped away by the roar of an explosion.

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Mason had traveled only thirty feet or so from the opened storage bay, when the “whump” and concussive shudder of the blast startled Mason so much he stumbled. He managed not to fall flat, thoughts spinning wildly as his brain tried to process the sound. Bomb. Explosion. Cam! He whirled back toward the direction he had come from, and began to run.

He saw Cam lying against the door frame of the open room. His gut clenched so hard he thought he was going to vomit. Then Cam moved, slowly rolling to his knees, one hand braced on the ground, the other holding the side of his head. Charred and smoldering pieces of paper littered the ground. Money. Burning money.

Mason fell to his knees beside Cam and wrapped an arm around him, easing him back into a seated position.

“Easy, I’ve got you,” Mason said, his voice sounding far calmer than he felt.

“Shit! I’m okay! I just got knocked down!” snapped Cam, the words followed by a groan. “Help the other guys.”

Mason threw open all his senses and cupped Cam’s face in his hands. He let his mind rifle through Cam’s nervous system with a brutal efficiency that left his lover grimacing further. Pain. Ear, head, shoulder, knee. No critical injuries.

“Go!” yelled Cam. Mason swallowed hard and forced himself back to his feet, going into the storage bay. Agent Buchner had been flung face down in a heap. His clothes were singed and one hand was completely missing, blood spurting with each beat of his pulse into an ever widening puddle.

Madison Carthage teetered to a stop a couple of feet from Mason, out of breath and eyes wide.

“Oh, fucking hell...” she whispered.

Mason was rolling the injured man over. He clenched one hand around the severed wrist trying to exert as much instant pressure as he could while he began to yank off the man’s tie.

“Call 911! Tell them we have a traumatic amputation! Go get my backpack from the car. It’s a medical field kit! NOW!” ordered Mason.

The woman stumbled away.

Mason let all his senses blow wide open. He had mere minutes to get the bleeding slowed enough to keep the man alive. His grip around the wrist was slowing the gush somewhat. Tie in his hand now, he improvised a tourniquet, wrenching the narrow fabric as tight as possible. The flow of blood was slowing to a pulsing trickle.

Mason was dimly aware of the other two men groaning and slowly trying to gather themselves up. Like Cam, they had been nowhere as close to the blast as Buchner. Mason ripped the agent’s shirt open and laid one hand on his chest, the other went on the man’s arm as Mason forced the blood vessels to constrict and further slow the blood loss. Buchner was still breathing.

Mason began scanning down through the rest of the agent’s body. Head trauma -- that seemed to be result of the blast combined with the impact on the floor. Some lung damage -- again probably due to a combination of the blast and hot gases of whatever explosive was used. There were hints of abdominal bleeding from the liver and spleen. All over bits of debris were embedded in the agent’s body. Mason poured a vast amount of energy in the broken body, trying to buy time until the EMS people could arrive.

Ms. Carthage dumped the heavy backpack on the floor beside Mason, saying, “Fire, rescue and local PD are on their way.”

“Good,” said Mason. One hand still on Buchner’s chest, he fumbled the bag open and began digging for a proper battle-field tourniquet. “Now look for his hand and get a bag of ice to put it in,” he ordered. Re-attachment was a dicey proposition, but there was sometimes a chance it might work. Carthage gave him wide-eyed sick look.

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The agonizing ice-pick-in-the-ear-canal pain combined with a raging headache left Cameron Bradshaw moving very slowly. Nothing was broken so far as he could tell, and except for a few

shallow cuts from flying debris, he didn't seem to be bleeding much. His steps were unsteady as he headed toward where Mason knelt on the floor beside Agent Buchner, who was lying in a huge pool of blood. The doctor was inserting an IV port into the injured man's undamaged wrist. Madison was standing several feet away yelling into her cell phone something about ice. Cam dropped beside the open field kit.

"Tell me what to do," he said.

"Find me a bag of saline," snapped Mason. He was checking the man's pupils. Cam hunted through the pockets of the kit and pulled out the fat bag of saline. It was only then that he realized Buchner's opposite hand was... gone. Oh, shit. He gulped hard and held the bag out to Mason. The sounds of sirens drew his attention. EMS was heading their way. Thank God.

Cam gave himself a moment to look at Mason. The doctor's motions were all smooth and methodical, but he was filmed in sweat. He had taken off his coat and laid it over the lower part of Buchner's torso. Sweat darkened large spots on his shirt and his face was flushed with the huge amount of energy he was pouring out. Cam's mind scrambled. Memories of a previous crisis situation welled up. There was going to be hell to pay when this was done. Cam dug through the bag until he found a handful of the little foil pouches labeled glucose gel.

The paramedics arrived and there was a flurry of activity as they began to take over. Cam grabbed Mason's shoulders and forcibly pulled him back out of the way. The doctor struggled to return to his position.

"Quit it! You're done! Let them do their job!" Cam yelled at him. His lover's body was fever hot beneath the damp fabric of his shirt. Cam held him tightly. "Mason! Break the connection." He had Mason in a virtual head lock trying to keep him back. Mason suddenly stilled, half-lunged forward, then stilled again.

"Let. Go. Of. Him." said Cam in terse measured words. Mason finally relaxed in his grip. Cam pulled him back to sit on the ground between his legs and tore open one of the glucose packets. "Open up." Mason hesitated as if the instruction made no sense, then finally opened his mouth. Cam squeezed the goop into Mason mouth and jammed a thumb under his chin to coerce him into swallowing it. He could see the color already starting to drain from the doctor's skin as his healing talent began to shut down. A hard shiver ran through his lover's body and Cam brushed his hands down Mason's arms. His body temperature was plummeting and the chill October air wasn't helping. Cam slapped another pouch of glucose gel in Mason's hand. "This one too," he ordered and started taking off his jacket. He could see his partner's fingers trembling as he consumed the next dose. Cam draped his jacket around Mason's shoulders.

"How much do you need?" asked Cam.

"Don' know. Gotta give it a couple min' uhs," Mason slurred. Cam wrapped both arms around his lover and pulled him back tight against his body.

"Every time you do this, it scares the fucking hell out of me," whispered Cam.

“An’ I’m sup’os a be okay with you getting’ almost blown up?” Mason mumbled. Mason’s fingers curled around Cam’s and he could feel a faint tingle of Mason’s energy crawling along his skin.

“Don’t! You’re barely staying conscious as it is! Fix me later!” snarled Cam.

Mason took a slow deep breath. “You have a concussion and a ruptured ear drum and enough bruises that tomorrow you’re hardly going to be able to move!” snapped Mason. Something about the way his teeth were half-clenched made Cam realize just how hard his lover was concentrating not to slur his words or chatter his teeth.

“None of which is going to kill me!” A shadow fell across them. Cam looked up to see Madison Carthage.

“Maybe the two of you can stop with the testosterone poisoning long enough to tell me whether you need to go to the hospital or just need a ride back to the hotel while we sort out the rest of this cluster fuck,” she said.

“The hotel would be fine,” said Cam, slowly climbing to his feet.

“Go back to the car. I’ll get somebody to drive you there. Tomorrow sometime, there’ll be a full debriefing. Right now I’ve just got too much on my plate,” she said. Cam held out a hand to pull Mason to his feet.

“Can I get someone to call me and let me know if Buchner’s going to make it?” asked Mason.

She nodded.

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“Take a shower. I’ll order room service,” said Cam as they walked into the hotel room.

Mason really wanted to lie face down on the bed and fall instantly asleep, but one look at the amount of blood that stained his clothes and skin made him realize just how stupid an idea that was.

“Got any preferences?” asked Cam.

“Meat, carbs, and the biggest OJ they have,” said Mason, as he struggled to shed his clothes.

Staying upright and awake in the shower was a challenge. Mason resorted to turning the water temperature down to lukewarm. He had to re-bandage the abrasions on his arms. Life would be easier if he had the time and energy to sit down and just heal them. He walked out into the room, a towel wrapped around his waist. Cam was slowly stripping himself. Mason could see the

blossoming bruises on Cam's shoulder and ribs where he had impacted with the concrete wall. Mason stretched out a hand and Cam grimaced and dodged away.

"I am *not* letting you touch me until you've eaten. I know that glucose stuff is only going to last a little while," said his lover.

Mason sighed and sank onto the bed. "I can tell you're in a hell of a lot of pain even without touching you," said Mason. The words came out more harshly than he intended.

Cam opened his mouth as if to yell something back at him, but was interrupted by a knock on the door. Cam opened the door for room service and handed the attendant some folded bills as he shut the door. The cart was heavily laden with food.

"Christ, how much food did you order?" asked Mason.

Cam smirked a little. "Probably too much, but I figured you might get hungry again in a couple hours. Sometimes you raid the fridge in the middle of the night." He handed Mason a tall glass of juice.

They ate in virtual silence for the next fifteen to twenty minutes, before Mason began to actually feel more human. However, bitter exhaustion was still creeping around the edges.

"If I hadn't pulled you away from Buchner... what would have happened?" said Cam softly.

Mason gazed at him for a long moment. He had screwed up, big time. He never should have let his Talent get that far out of control. It was dangerous, way dangerous. "I would have probably passed out."

"Just how dangerous is that?"

"Depends."

"Damn it! That's not an answer!"

"I don't have an answer. It's not a yes or no question."

"Could it kill you?"

"Maybe. If I was alone and unconscious and my blood sugar sank maybe down below twenty or something. I don't know. There's so many variables."

"I thought Peter was teaching you better control."

"He is." Mason replied, knowing the man referenced, his mentor, was going to be mighty unhappy when he found out.



“Doesn’t look like it from my point of view.”

“Trauma stuff is... unpredictable,” said Mason. He thought he could see where Cam was heading with this and he looked at the ceiling in guilt.

“Would you give your life for someone else?”

“For you, yes,” said Mason. He watched Cam swallow hard.

“For just anyone?”

“No, not intentionally.

“Fuck, Mason,” said Cam. He got out of the chair and came to kneel in front of Mason. “How many different ways are you going to make me worry about losing you?”

“I’m sorry. If it makes you feel any better, Peter’s going to kick my ass for losing control,” replied Mason. He ran his fingers through Cam’s short hair, detecting pain. Headache from the probable concussion still warring with the sharp ache in Cam’s ear. “I’ve eaten. Now will you let me ‘fix you’ as you so ineloquently put it earlier?”

“Yeah I guess,” said Cam with a sigh.

Mason dropped the towel he had been wearing to the floor and slid between the sheets of the bed, while his partner shucked his pants and crawled in beside him. Mason’s fingers carefully explored the skin surrounding Cam’s right ear, letting his healing senses get a more thorough look at the damage than his earlier hasty exam.

“You’re not going to be flying for at least a week,” Mason said.

“It really did blow my eardrum?”

“Yes. Gave you a touch of a concussion, too.”

“Just effing great.”

“It can take up to a couple months for eardrums to heal.”

“Thought you just said a week.”

“I’ll hurry things along.”

“You don’t have to do it tonight.”

“I’m *not* doing it tonight. I don’t know if I have enough energy left to do more than get things started anyway.” Mason slipped his arms around his lover and pulled Cam against his body,

hooking a leg behind Cam's so they were skin to skin from shoulder to thigh. He let his energy flow gently across every connection, soothing away the pain. Sleep was threatening to sweep him under, but he knew his body wouldn't let go even in unconsciousness.

"It could've been you who lost a hand," murmured Mason. His own fingers stroked carefully along the back of Cam's head.

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Who was knocking on the damn door? Cam squinted at the clock on the hotel room nightstand. 9:37 pm. Okay, it wasn't anywhere near as late as he thought he was. It had been a really shitty afternoon and evening. Mason stirred slightly as Cam got out of bed. Oh, pants would be a good idea, he thought as the cool air hit his skin.

Cam dragged his slacks on and opened the door. Madison Carthage stood in the hallway with Mason's med-kit backpack in her hand.

"Dr. Flynn left this at the scene. Things were pretty chaotic there. I thought I should return it," she said. "Is he here?"

"He's asleep," said Cam.

"Oh," she said and looked disappointed. "Could you tell him that Agent Buchner made it through surgery? He's in ICU and they're guardedly opti--" A noise behind him made Cam turn and look. Mason was standing several feet behind him, one hand braced on the wall, looking very *not* awake and buck naked.

"Are you okay?" mumbled Mason.

"I'm fine. Go back to sleep," said Cam. He glanced back at Madison. If ever there was an expression of absolute lust on a woman's face... She actually licked her lips. "Like I said, he was asleep," said Cam. He pulled the bag out of Madison's grip. God, if he hadn't been standing in the doorway, he wondered if she would have gotten in bed with Mason.

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"She likes you even better without the clothes," Cam teased as Mason stood in front of the hotel bathroom sink brushing his teeth. Mason glanced at his own reflection. He looked like he'd been up for two straight days instead of actually having gotten a full night's sleep.

"Who?"

"Ms. Carthage."

"What the hell are you talking about?" Mason asked, spitting out a mouthful of toothpaste. He glanced at his partner. The bruises on Cam's shoulder and ribs were livid stains under his skin.

“Last night when she dropped off the med-kit. You don’t even remember, do you?” Cam wore a silly teasing grin.

“Remember what? You said she dropped off the kit and told you Buchner had made it through surgery.” Mason picked up a glass and rinsed out his mouth.

“Her knock on the door must have woken you up about halfway. You got out of bed and came looking for me... sans skivvies. I thought she was going to leave a drool trail.”

“Oh, God...” Mason felt his face flush hot in embarrassment. “And she was already looking for any excuse to jump me.”

“I’ll protect you,” Cam said with a grin. He was obviously expecting Mason to laugh.

Mason met his gaze in the mirror.

“No, you won’t...” said Mason softly, a note of sorrow in his tone. Cam would never take that kind of risk.

“Mas’ I...” Cam began, his voice choking.

“It’s okay. I don’t expect you to. It would just be easier to say ‘see this guy? He’s my partner. That means I’m taken, so back off.’” He turned to look at Cam’s near frozen expression. Damn. He’d said too much. Being this exhausted made him fail to think twice about what came out of his mouth. “I’m sorry,” he said. “I didn’t mean it that way.”

Cam’s hand came up and curled around Mason’s neck as his other arm wrapped around Mason’s waist.

“I never seem to do the right thing,” Cam whispered, drawing Mason into his arms.

Mason kissed him. A long lingering kiss to soothe away the hurt. He wished he could ease the emotional aches the way he dealt with the physical ones. “You’re hurt and I’m tired and neither of us really wants to go face the FBI this morning,” said Mason.

“Isn’t that supposed to read -- sick and tired?” asked Cam, smiling just a little.

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“Tim Buchner is in the ICU currently. He’s expected to pull through. No one else was seriously injured,” said Madison Carthage.

Cam and Mason sat a long conference table along with a dozen other people while she conducted a briefing.

“The storage locker is registered to one Thomas Pethrick. He served time eight years ago for armed robbery. He roughly fits the description of one of the perps from the bank robbery. Forensic prelims say the box that contained the money was rigged with a fairly simple clothespin and battery trigger connected to a copper pipe bomb. Pethrick has a reputation for paranoia, but he is also very shrewd. Our profilers have suggested that his intention was to leave the money untouched for some amount of time while the investigation stalled, then come back for it. Since we know two other people were involved, the assumption is being made that he expected one or both to consider double crossing him, hence the booby trap. A BOLO has been put out for Pethrick and some of our people are looking for known associates. I want these people found.” The woman leaned on the table with both hands as she spoke the last few words. Cam watched her eyes rove across the faces around the table. Iron-clad bitch seemed like a good description to add to predatory and temperamental.

One of the agents at the table spoke up. “There’s a rumor going around that some psychic tipped us off as to where Pethrick stashed the money,” the man said.

“We received assistance from another federal agency and I’m not at liberty to divulge details. That’s all you need to know,” Carthage replied.

“Okay, whatever you say. I was just going to say if it was true, why didn’t this chick know about the bomb?”

Cam practically had to bite his tongue to keep from getting in the guy’s face and telling him it didn’t work that way. Dude! The psychic is a *he*! And God! He wished it did work that way! If he had known about the bomb, that would have been the first information out of his mouth. This wasn’t the first time his identity as a Division P member had been hidden away either. He exchanged a glance with Mason, who merely gave him a slight shrug.

Carthage continued, handing out assignments to various agents. At the end of the meeting, she crooked a finger at Cam and indicated that he and Mason should follow her. They all walked down a corridor to a much smaller room. Cam guessed it to be a lounge of some sort judging from the pair of sofas that bordered a coffee table and the tiny kitchenette in the corner. She shut the door behind them and indicated that they should sit.

“I received explicit instructions from the Division P liaison that in exchange for your assistance I was to admit as little as possible to the rest of my branch,” she said.

“That’s often one of the conditions placed by Director Bottman,” replied Cam.

“Do they always send a doctor on an assignment?” she asked with a smile at Mason.

“It varies,” said Cam.

“I’m sure Agent Buchner is amazingly thankful that you were there to save his life, Dr. Flynn.”

“So am I. He could have bled out in a matter of minutes,” replied Mason.

“He’s still in ICU, but I received information that he’s slowly improving. He’ll be given retirement with full disability pay. Your flight leaves in four hours. I’ll have someone deliver you to the airport shortly.”

“We can’t do that. Flying is not an option.”

“Excuse me?”

“Cam has a perforated eardrum from the explosion yesterday. Flying would stress the damage further. We need a rental car or a pair of train tickets.

“Oh. I’m sorry, I didn’t realize you suffered any damage other than maybe some bruises,” Madison replied.

“Nothing serious, just painful and inconvenient,” said Cam.

“I’ll have someone start making arrangements for a car. It could take several hours, since non-case related travel is a lower priority.”

“That’s fine. If we need to stay in the city another night to smooth things out that would be fine,” said Mason.

“I’ll get one of my people to start on the car requisition, but yes, an extra night may be the easiest way to get this changed, if there’s no immediate rush to get back to Virginia. I’m sure I can find you a pair of hotel rooms somewhere.” Madison stood up and walked toward the door. “Maybe we could even find time to appreciate last night’s view,” she said as she walked out.

Cam burst into a fit of giggles after she was gone. “You jumped into that one with both feet. Now she thinks that since our part of the case is done, you’re just fine with a hop into the sack with her.”

“God. All I was thinking about was the fact that you still have a mild concussion and I’m still fairly ragged out. In all probability neither of us should be driving the six hours to get home today. Just shoot me now,” suggested Mason.

“Nah, no shooting. I’m kind of fond of you.” Cam blew out a long breath and pulled his cell phone out of his pocket. “I’ll call HQ and let them know we’re not going to be on the flight this afternoon.”

Once the lengthy call to Division P was completed, Cam slouched back against the sofa and closed his eyes. The pain in his ear was killing him. He laid his hand over his ear hoping the slight pressure and warmth would decrease the sharp ache.

“You could stop being a martyr and ask me to help you with that,” said Mason, sitting down beside him.

Cam nodded. They were in the federal building. Despite the fact they were in a room by themselves, his brain was stuck in 'don't touch each other' mode. He relaxed a little and rested his head against Mason's shoulder.

"It hurts," he said.

"Uh-huh. And the fact you banged your head pretty damn hard is probably not helping, said Mason.

The doctor turned partially sideways and stretched his leg along the back of the sofa, so that Cam was sitting between his legs and resting his head more fully on Mason's shoulder. Cam relaxed a little further, the warmth of his lover's body alone eased the ache a little. The long talented fingers of his partner skimmed along his jaw and spread around his ear, slightly cupping the side of his face. A welcome tingle of energy flowed into his skin and the pain faded into nothingness.

"I really didn't get any healing done last night. Just some stop gap stuff. Mostly making sure you weren't in any danger from the head trauma."

Cam opened his shields so he could feel Mason's steady presence more fully. "You give a whole new meaning to magic fingers," whispered Cam.

Mason gave a faint snort of amusement. His free arm was curved around Cam's back, hand draped on Cam's hip. Cam turned his face a little more toward Mason. This put his mouth mere inches from the hollow at the base of Mason's throat and the wisp of dark chest hair barely visible in the V of his shirt collar. Cam closed his eyes and pressed his lips against that warm depression. He felt a soft intake of breath from Mason. Cam tipped his head back a little and Mason's mouth trailed a line of gentle kisses from his forehead down his nose to his lips.

There was a faint clicking noise from the opposite side of the room, and with shields blown wide open, Cam knew it was Madison Carthage coming through the door. His mind flashed back to a slice of the conversation in the hotel bathroom that morning, and he made a choice. His hand flew up and clenched in the hair at the back of Mason's skull and Cam pulled his lover into a deep open-mouth kiss. Where his wrist was pressed to the side of Mason's neck, Cam felt his lover's pulse spike in a weird combination of fear and lust. From the doorway, there was a tiny sound bordering on a squeak and the door closed again. Cam relaxed his grip and Mason's face pulled back from his.

"Was that...?" Mason said, breathlessly.

"Maybe she'll think twice about your interest level now," replied Cam.

The look Mason gave him was apprehensive, and his lover heaved a sigh. "This might solve my problem, but will it *cause* problems for you?"

“I doubt it. Do you really think she’s the type of go blabbing that the guy she wanted to jump into bed with turned out to be gay? And she saw him in a liplock with his partner?”

“Maybe not. You gonna hold still now and let me work on your ear?”

“Yeah, yeah.”

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“The car assigned to you is in space forty-six in the garage,” said a male agent, handing a set of keys to Cam. “I believe it’s supposed to be returned to the Norfolk FBI office.”

“Okay, thanks,” replied Cam. He picked up his garment bag and briefcase and headed down the hallway. Mason trailed behind him, carrying his own gear. In the parking garage, they both slung their luggage into the trunk.

“Considering it took exactly two hours for us to be provided with a car and not the hotel room, I think maybe we got the point across to Ms. Carthage,” said Cam.

Mason noted the slight grin on his face. “Guess so. She didn’t even come to kiss us goodbye. Give me the keys.” Cam rolled his eyes and handed them over. “The guy with the head trauma and ruptured eardrum *does not* get to drive,” Mason said.

“Thought you fixed the concussion part?”

“Enough that you’re in no danger,” replied Mason, sliding behind the wheel.

Cam got in the passenger seat. “Any idea how to get home?”

“I think that’s what the GPS is for,” said Mason, pointing at the dashboard.

“Are you really planning on driving all five or six hours home today?” Cam asked.

“I’m not sure. Let’s get out of the city first.”

Mason drove for two hours. Cam slouched on the opposite side of the car. The pilot had called Division P and told HQ that they were heading south, but weren’t sure exactly when they would make it back. Mason glanced at his partner after the call. His hand was cupped against his ear again and his eyes were alternating between unfocused and drifting shut. Mason stretched a hand across and touched Cam’s hand, where it lay loosely curled against his leg. Mason didn’t dare more than a cursory scan while he was driving, but he could tell the sharp discomfort had returned and was starting to generate a pounding headache in Cam.

“You’re eavesdropping on me,” said Cam.

“Yes. You have this really hard headed tendency to deny how much pain you’re in until it all but incapacitates you. Let’s stop and eat and I can at least shut down the pain for a while,” Mason chided him.

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It was after ten pm when the car reached the Division P complex. Cam’s glance at Mason told him that the doctor really could not have forced himself to drive much further. At least not safely. Cam was certain that they would be assigned a room for the night in the residential wing as soon as the inevitable debriefing occurred. Military, law enforcement, or federal, the demand for information about how the mission went never changed. Danny Valentine met them in the main foyer to the complex.

“I heard things went sideways in Philly,” said the head field agent.

“Yeah, you could say that,” replied Cam.

“I’m assigned to debrief you. Mason’s getting sent off to see Vithoulkas. You okay with that?” Valentine asked.

Mason nodded and headed in the direction of the medical wing.

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“You lost control.”

Mason glanced up at Peter Vithoulkas. The senior healer was standing with his hands braced against the table in front of him.

“Yes.”

“I received a report that you lost control so badly your partner had to pull you away from the victim.”

“I think that’s a little bit overstated,” replied Mason, his voice relatively level.

“Bullshit! You’ve always been lousy at disconnecting when the job was done. We’ve been working on this for months! I thought you were getting better at it.”

“His hand was blown off. He was in danger of dying.”

“What’s rule number one?”

“Protect yourself.”

“You didn’t follow it. You put yourself at risk. Did his heart stop?”



“No.”

“If it had, what would you have done?”

“CPR and...”

“And what?” Peter cut him off.

“Tried to get it going again.”

“How long do you think you could hold him on this side of death? Would you have followed him into the dark?”

“No! I...”

“Could you have *not* followed him? Damn it, what we do is a risk. A big risk all by itself! When you lose control, you skyrocket that risk! If Cam hadn’t been there, if he hadn’t known the signs, you could’ve gone into hypoglycemic shock. Been there, done that. It sucks! Big time! It can do permanent damage. If it was one of our people, if it had been Cam, I could understand, just a little. You still fucked up, but I could understand. You’re losing your objectivity. You’ve gone from just barely using your gift in careful controlled circumstances, to coming close to flaming out.”

“I saved his life,” replied Mason, fighting the anger that welled within him.

“Good! You still fucked up! You should have been using your healing skill as an adjunct to your medical knowledge, not the other way around. I spent a tour on a battlefield in Kosovo. The never ending flood of casualties almost killed me, but I finally figured out I couldn’t save everybody, and that sacrificing myself wasn’t going to help the situation. We have to solve this problem because I can’t be worrying that every time I send you out in the field, you might come back in a body bag. Our job is dangerous enough as it is. People don’t call Division P because their car won’t start.”

“This was supposed to be a simple find the missing money job. I was expecting nothing more than to watch Cam do his thing.”

“Uh-huh. And shit went wrong. You can bet that someone higher up on the food chain didn’t tell you the whole story either. Hell, you’ll probably never know the background details that might have prevented the whole thing.”

Mason looked at him in stunned silence. He was willing to admit that he had screwed up, badly, but it had never occurred to him that the FBI might have intentionally withheld information. Fuck. He should’ve learned his lesson about that from the previous fiasco with the traitor inside Naval Intelligence.

“You think they told you everything?” Peter continued. “FBI, CIA, NSA, they all tell selective truths as best suits their purpose. Returning to the problem, your problem. I want you to run rescue for a couple of months. I’ll make arrangements for you to ride along as a trainee with one of the local EMS squads, once a week. Doing the dry run and practice crap here at the complex obviously is not doing the trick. I want you to spend twelve hours a week using ten percent of your gift and ninety percent of your knowledge. Got it?”

“Yes.”

“Get out of here. Eat. Get some sleep. See me in the morning for details,” and with that Peter literally turned his back on Mason and went to sit in front of his desk. Mason walked slowly out of the room.

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Outside an igloo in a raging blizzard or just sitting on a concrete bench in the dark courtyard of the Division P residential wing, Cam would always be able to find his lover. His own debriefing had been fairly short, heavy on facts and pretty much exactly what he expected from Danny Valentine. An hour later, when Mason still hadn’t made his way to their assigned quarters, Cam decided maybe he should look for his partner. Not that he had any belief that Mason was in danger, not here.

Walking across the chilly expanse in the dim outdoor lighting, Cam saw his lover, sitting with his arms crossed and long legs stretched out in front of him, fifty foot stare in the ten foot space between him and the nearest tree. Cam settled on the bench beside him.

“I kind of wondered where you’d got to,” said Cam.

“I needed a little down time after getting reamed a new one by my boss,” Mason replied.

“That bad?”

“Yeah, that bad. I knew he’d be pissed but... I guess I underestimated to what degree.”

“So I guess you never got around to talking to him about the little kid with cancer.”

“Nope. It’s usually bad form to ask for favors when you’re getting your ass chewed,” replied Mason.

“Mmm, yeah. It’s kind of cold out here. Can I convince you to come inside? Like maybe before you catch pneumonia?”

Mason nodded faintly and followed Cam inside.

The room they had been assigned was essentially no different from any other they had used in the complex on other occasions. Cam watched his lover sit on the bed to untie his shoes. His

movements were bone-tired slow, but the brooding tension was apparent too. Cam could sense the frustration level. Mad at himself, annoyed with the situation, feeling overwhelmed by the layers of responsibilities, it would be a toss-up over whether exhaustion won out or if Mason tossed and turned all night.

Cam pushed Mason backward on the bed. His partner offered no resistance as Cam straddled his thighs and folded forward to catch himself on his hands. He stared down into the blue eyes of his lover. It was getting late, pushing midnight. In theory, they both had to be at work tomorrow, though maybe not first thing in the morning. And it wasn't like he was going to be doing any flying for the next few days anyway.

"How much do you trust me?" Cam asked softly.

"What kind of a question is that?"

"Just a question. How much do you trust me?"

"I trust you with my heart," Mason replied.

That was not the answer Cam had been expecting.

"You took a risk this morning for me, when you kissed me in the FBI offices." Mason's fingers ghosted lightly across Cam's mouth. "I know how hard it is for you."

"I think it was worth it. I was... I was going to suggest something to take your mind off what went on up there. The bad stuff, not the Branch Director's sexual intentions."

Mason's mouth quirked a little in a half smile. "What did you have in mind? Something involving your body and mine?" He scooted up toward the top of the bed, so his legs were no longer hanging off the end.

"Yeah, sort of, it's a little more complicated than that. I, um, would you let me tie you up?"

"You're kidding."

"No, actually I wasn't. Not anything that causes pain. I'm not into that, and as far as I know, neither are you. I just... I have a tie in my luggage. I thought maybe you would let me bind your wrists to the headboard. I had a girlfriend a while back who thought getting restrained was really hot." Cam could feel his face heating in embarrassment, but he kept going. "I know you like to be in control, but when you lose it, you tend to lose it in big time dangerous ways. I thought we could play a little, where you have basically no control. But something relatively safe." The look Mason gave him was very uncertain. "No safe words. If you tell me to untie you, I will."

"Cam, I..." Mason trailed off, looking ashamed.

"It's okay. If it's not your thing, that's fine."

“You think I don’t trust you.”

“No. I think you don’t trust yourself, to lose it just a little. It’s okay. Really.” Cam lowered himself down to lie on top of his lover. He kissed Mason softly. “I do still want to make love to you, any way I can get it.”

Mason’s arms wrapped around his body, pulling him down tight.

“Need you,” was the husky murmur from his partner. Cam could feel the want, the tension bordering on the edge of tears and the iron fisted control choking them down. Cam began to kiss his way down the side of his lover’s neck. He pushed back upright, hands tugging on Mason’s shirt, pulling it loose at the waist, unbuttoning it. Cam’s fingers grazed across dark silky curls of chest hair, tracing the muscles of his partner’s chest. Mason’s body was fairly well defined, tall, relatively thin, a runner’s physique, which was appropriate, considering Cam knew Mason ran on the beach three to four times a week. His ribs seemed to show a little more sharply than usual. It was probably a result of the sheer quantity of energy he had been putting out lately.

Cam leaned down and drew his tongue across the dark rose of a nipple. Mason drew a slow uneven breath in. It wasn’t quite the response Cam was expecting. He left a trail of kisses and soft nips down the center of his lover’s chest. Although Mason’s hands were stroking softly down Cam’s back, the rest of his body gave little response. As Cam skimmed his hand down across Mason’s crotch, there was no sign of arousal. All Cam could feel was the stress radiating from his partner. The man was just wound so excruciatingly tight, but only some of it was in his body, the rest was in the churning of his mind. Cam slid off his lover’s thighs and stretched out on the bed beside him, leaving an arm draped across Mason’s body.

“Talk to me,” he prompted.

Mason was usually more easily verbal about emotions than he was.

“I... My life has gone from calm and sane and borderline boring, to... I’ve gotten shot. And I killed somebody. And people are getting blown up. And my talent has been unleashed. And so has my control. And, and, and...” The words stopped. Cam could almost see the dam disintegrating. Mason rolled away, burying his face against the edge of the pillow. Mason’s hands were clenched under his arms as hard, barely suppressed sobs were shaking his body.

Cam carefully grabbed his lover’s shoulder and tried to turn him back toward him. Mason resisted, so Cam tried a different tactic. He spooned up against his partner’s back, sliding one arm under Mason’s neck to snake down across his chest and wrapped the other arm around his waist. Cam held Mason tightly in silence and let the storm rage.

After a number of minutes the sobs dwindled to snuffling gulps. Only then did Mason let Cam turn him to face into Cam’s shoulder. Cam also grabbed a wad of tissues out of the box on the nightstand and handed them to his lover. Mason blew his nose.

“Shit,” Mason muttered. “Trust the gay guy to end up crying when the going gets tough.”

“Hey, it’s okay. It beats the alternative. Half the guys I work with think drinking themselves stupid and getting in a fist fight is the best way to deal with major stress. Either that or screw the nearest willing female.” Cam brushed his thumb across Mason’s tear stained cheek. He would do anything he could to comfort his lover.

“God, wasn’t that where this was supposed to be heading? Before I decided to have a meltdown?” whispered Mason. He looked acutely embarrassed.

“You better be talking about the screwing part and not the fist fight,” Cam teased gently. “And there’s nothing female about you.” He scraped a fingernail across the dark beard stubble along Mason’s chin. This was one of the times when it just astounded him that his *lover* was a guy somewhat in need of a shave with blue eyes, blood shot and red rimmed. Mason’s breathing was still broken by occasional hiccupping gulps. Cam kissed Mason tenderly.

“Love you,” he whispered. Mason’s hand clenched softly in the fabric of Cam’s shirt, his eyes squeezed shut. “Mason, look at me.” Cam waited for his lover to open his eyes and a long moment passed before Mason did so. “You don’t have to pretend for me. If you’re falling apart, I want to be the one to put you back together. Never be afraid to cry on my shoulder. Okay?”

Mason gave him a minute nod and Cam kissed him again. This one was not brief.

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Mason could feel Cam’s hand cradling the back of his head, the other hand between his shoulder blades, holding him. Mason opened his mouth to the gentle assault on his lips. His lover’s teeth nipped carefully at his lower lip and Cam’s tongue swiped slowly along his teeth before exploring the depths of his mouth. Oh God, how Mason loved this man: strength and confidence; fierce passion and gentle affection. His breath hitched. Oh please, don’t let me start crying again, he cursed himself. He must have tightened up, because Cam’s hand began rubbing circles down his back.

“Relax,” murmured Cam.

Mason gave in to the sheer comfort of feeling his lover’s hand on his back. Strong fingers traced down his spine to his waist, then skimmed down over his belt and drew a random pattern at the base of his spine. That spot always made him feel like a cat, arching into the sensation. Cam’s mouth moved to his throat, sucking and licking at the skin there. He nuzzled into his lover’s temple, the short military haircut prickling at his nose and mouth. Hands kneaded into the muscles of his buttocks, pulling his hips in tight to Cam’s. He could feel the hard bulge of his lover’s arousal pushing against the inner edge of his hipbone. The care of Cam holding him close, snuggling, kissing, loving him, was slowly stoking his own desire.

Mason eased back slightly so he could loosen his lover’s belt. He unzipped the fly and slid his hands down inside Cam’s slacks and underwear so he could feel skin. His thumb stroked along

the top of his lover's hip and then further forward to slip across the damp tip of Cam's hard cock. Cam inhaled sharply and swallowed. His face was buried against the side of Mason's throat, worrying a spot with his teeth.

"I think maybe we should ditch the clothes," Cam whispered. He pushed himself up to his knees and took off his shirt, then shimmied out of his pants and briefs in one go. Mason's disrobing was a little slower. The long drive had put a serious dent in whatever energy last night's sleep had given him.

Cam stretched out beside him and began kissing down the length of his body: collar bone to nipple to the center of his belly, tongue wetting the dark line of hair leading down toward his groin. Nothing hurried. Mason gasped slightly as his lover blew a warm breath across his cock. It bobbed as his balls tightened a little. Cam avoided the obvious destination and licked down the long almost straight length of his hipbone then back up the seam where his leg met his body. Mason bucked a little into the wet heat. Cam made a small snort of amusement and pushed Mason's legs apart. His hand cupped around Mason's balls, rolling them slowly as he gazed down into Mason's face.

"Am I driving?" he asked.

Mason nodded. He wanted to feel Cam inside him. He saw his lover grab the tube of lube from the suitcase near the bed.

A slick finger circled his entrance for a moment before pushing in. In, out, deeper, hitting the spot that made his cock jerk and his vision go a little starry. His cock was starting to leak slippery warmth against his belly. More fingers pushed in, stretching twisting, drawing embarrassing moans from him. Cam was going so slowly, Mason squirmed on the bed trying to increase the pace. Then the fingers were gone and his eyes popped open.

"This week, when you get the chance. Do our blood tests, okay?" Cam said softly, on his hands and knees above Mason. Mason could just glimpse the foil packet tucked between Cam's fingers.

"Yeah. Got it." It took a moderate amount of concentration to get those few words out. Comprehension of language was not a high priority with his brain right that moment. Knees hooked against Cam's biceps, he let out a completely involuntarily moan as his lover pushed into him, slowly, almost excruciatingly slowly.

"Cam... God... Faster..." he begged. His hand groped for his own cock. Anything to hurry the release. He ached. Surely most of the blood in his body was below the beltline at this point. Cam grabbed his wrist and licked the center of his palm. Oh lord, that whimper was his own. His lover's thrusts were almost leisurely. "Please..." he pleaded, rocking his hips.

Cam's gaze was locked on his face, watching him come undone. Cam lifted one of Mason's legs to hook over his shoulder and his hand folded around Mason's own and gripped his hard cock, stroking. The change slammed Cam against Mason's prostate and it was all over.

Mason was drowning in that pulsing rush of ecstasy that blew through his nervous system, graying his sight, contracting muscles, as jets of liquid warmth drenched his hand and Cam's.

A hard gut-wrenching groan came from Cam as he followed heartbeats later, body hitting Mason's in erratic jerks as he spent himself.

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Flopping onto the pillow beside Mason, Cam cupped a hand against Mason's cheek. His lover's eyes were still red-rimmed and blood-shot, but they had lost some of that look of frustrated misery. He brushed his thumb across his lover's mouth and kissed Mason softly.

"Better?" he asked.

"Yeah. Anything that involves touching you," his lover whispered. His eyelids were already drooping with the combination of release and exhaustion. Cam fished his shirt up off the floor and wiped them off enough to make do. Anything else could wait until morning.

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The list of patients due for appointments that day scrolled across the screen of Mason's office computer. Some were post-op, some were pre-op and long term care arthritis patients were interspersed. After a moment of staring at the list, it dawned on him that he was searching for Jason Ambers' name. It wasn't there. He leaned out into the hallway and called for Tyra.

"Hey, I thought I supposed to have an appointment with Jason Ambers today, before I sent him to the consult with the oncologist?" Mason said.

"Change in plans," said Tyra. The solemn expression on the nurse's face told him that the news wasn't good. "On Saturday night he was in a lot of pain and his parents took him the hospital. Steve was on call and he admitted Jason. He also took care of contacting Santos. I think they transferred him to CHKD while the parents are trying to decide what route they want to go."

Mason leaned against the walls, arms crossed, eyes closed. Fuck. When the kid could really have benefited from his talents, where was he? In Philadelphia, saving someone else's life... God, what a no win situation. If he had been here, the FBI agent would probably have died. So he was in Philly and Jason had been taken to the hospital, A dying child in capable hands of a competent orthopedic surgeon and a reputable oncologist. So why did he feel like he had just so totally dropped the ball?

"You okay? You look like you had a pretty rough weekend yourself," Tyra commented.

"I... ended up doing some emergency triage duty for DMAT in Philadelphia," replied Mason. His explanation for all the days he had spent away from the orthopedic practice over the past few months were written off as becoming involved with and trained by Department of Health and Human Services to learn the skills for working with a field hospital team for a Disaster Medical

Assistance Team. It wasn't horribly far from the truth after all. He knew full well the ultimate goal of his lessons with Peter was to prepare him for field medic work on Division P personnel. And he felt like he was failing miserably on all fronts.

The rest of the day was scarcely better: grumpy patients, misplaced records, arguments with insurance companies about what should be covered and what wasn't. All the while, the half healed road rash on his arm itched like hell at random intervals. By five o'clock he was thoroughly ready for the day to be over. He was standing at the reception desk scribbling notes on paperwork, when a welcome voice broke his train of thought.

"Hope somebody other than you can read that." Mason looked up from the patient file and saw Cam leaning his elbows on the counter.

"That's why they call them *transcriptionists*," he replied.

Tyra cruised by and started to scoop up a stack of folders. "Sorry, can I help you?" she asked, apparently thinking Cam to be a patient.

"Just here to give Mason a ride home," Cam said, gesturing toward him.

Mason swallowed hard. The last thing he needed at the end of this crappy day was to get grilled by Tyra.

"You look awfully cute for taxi service," she smiled. "I take it you're a friend?"

"Tyra MacCorkindale meet Lt. Cameron Bradshaw," said Mason. He wondered if his tone sounded as tight to her, as it did to himself.

"Tibial plateau fracture," she said. "Then you got transferred back to military care."

"Is that how you remember people? By their injuries?" Cam asked with a slight grimace.

"Occupational habit. So Dr. Flynn, is this *your* sailor?" Tyra teased and Mason felt his face flush in embarrassment.

"Um, he doesn't so much sail as fly," muttered Mason and then wished he had kept his mouth shut.

"Oh? So you're a flyboy?" said Tyra.

"Guilty as charged," replied Cam.

"Come on back to my office. I have to finish a couple things," Mason said, hoping to deflect more questions. Cam followed. Mason pushed the door closed when they got there, and was promptly pressed against the back of the door by Cam's hand on his chest.



“So what has you in such a pissy mood?” Cam demanded. His voice was low and his gaze fixed on Mason’s face.

“Jason, my osteosarcoma patient, is in the hospital,” Mason said.

Cam’s expression was calm. His hand slid up Mason’s chest and cupped against Mason’s neck, and he tilted his head slightly as he leaned in to kiss Mason. It was gentle and warm and Mason could feel the sympathy offered by his partner.

“I’m sorry,” Cam whispered. “But realistically, would you being here have prevented it?”

“I don’t know.”

“Since I know you’re not going to stop tearing yourself up about this, put the problem aside for now. Time to suck my blood. It *is* half the reason I came to pick you up.”

Mason blinked. It took a second for him to remember that Cam had agreed to have his blood tested, to make sure they were both clean and could do away with the condoms. It was a serious step in their relationship. He wrapped his arms loosely around his lover and hugged Cam.

“Thank you,” Mason said. “Stay put I’ll go grab one of the venipuncture buckets.”

“Ew. Could you not mention the puncture part?”

“Chicken.”

It only took a couple of minutes for Mason to draw the sample. Cam gave him the hairy eyeball when he drew his own.

“That’s just plain creepy watching you do it to yourself,” commented Cam. “How long until we get results?”

“End of the week probably. You worried?”

“No, not really. There’ve been a couple times I wasn’t safe, couple of women. I suppose there’s always a chance I picked up something. But honestly I think it’s pretty low. You?”

“I get checked every year. Health professional and all that. Last year was fine. I’m jumping the gun a little on this year, but no biggie. Are you sure you’re okay with this?” Mason asked.

Cam’s hand closed around Mason’s wrist and he pulled Mason’s hand to his chest, placing it over his heart. “I’m sure,” said Cam. Mason’s breath caught a little. “Now how ‘bout we head for your place. I brought your helmet.”

“I take it this means you’re planning on taking me home down 264 going like sixty miles an hour.”

“Yep. All you have to do is sit still, snuggle up to my back and put your arms around me,” Cam teased.

“Only you could make riding your motorcycle sound like a proposition.”

Seeking Balance 2: Lack of Control

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