



“At most, I might be able to prolong his life an extra week or two. Beyond that... the cancer has Swiss cheesed the bone in his leg and it’s spreading rapidly through the rest of his body. But I think you probably know that,” said Peter.

Dr. Mason Flynn paced restlessly across the floor of the doctor’s lounge. His four year old osteosarcoma patient was dying and there was nothing he could do about it. All his healing talent, even that of his mentor was for naught. He paused at the window in the doctor’s lounge of the hospital and ran his hands back through his short dark hair. The darkness outside cast his

reflection back at him and he felt like his heart was sinking down into the pit of his stomach. Doctors weren't supposed to get bent out of shape about dying patients. Usually he was pretty good at that sort of thing. And the average orthopedic surgeon didn't have the high loss rate that, say a cardiologist had. Maybe it was the age. Mason didn't run across a lot of terminal children. Maybe it was the stoic calm of the boy. As long as the pain stayed under control, he complained very little.

Mason looked at the image of the other healer in the glass. Peter Vithoulkas was the wunderkind of Division P, a highly secretive government agency that recruited and trained people with psychic talents. They primarily acquired their pool of agents from other government agencies and the military. As a civilian orthopedic surgeon, Flynn was a notable exception.

"If you feel you *have* to do something, control his pain some, so he's less drugged out by the morphine pump. Otherwise, leave it to the oncologist and the hospice people," said Peter.

Mason slowly turned to face his colleague, hands shoved deep in his pockets. "I couldn't be an oncologist," Mason said softly.

"Me neither."

"I keep hoping... thinking there must be... something."

"I know. What you and I do is off the scale impossible to start with," replied Peter. The senior healer stood up and walked toward Mason, stopping in front of him. "I set up your assignment with the Virginia Beach EMS. You're scheduled for Station 14 next Tuesday at six a.m. No Tuesdays out at the complex for a while. I want you doing this for at least three months. Remember, 10% of your Talent, 90% of your medical knowledge. I expect a detailed report after each shift."

Mason nodded. Peter laid a hand on his shoulder and gave it a gentle squeeze.

"Some things just get to us all," said Peter. "I know it sounds callous, but go home, call Cam, stop thinking about it for awhile."

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The vibration of his cell phone against his hip drew Lt. Cameron Bradshaw's attention. It was a blissful distraction from the drudgery of standing duty because he was "med down."

After having his ear drum ruptured by the blast of a bomb while he was in Philadelphia back over the weekend, he had joylessly reported to the flight surgeon on Monday.

"Oh yeah, it's ruptured, but not too badly," the flight surgeon had reported.

As if Cam hadn't already known. There were certain perks to having a man who was both an MD and a psychic healer for a lover. The flight surgeon had declared Cam "med down" for at least the remainder of the week. All the responsibilities of his job and *no flying*; it just sucked.

Cam flipped his phone open. There was a text from Mason.

NO LUCK W/PETER. TERMINAL CONFIRMED. CALL ME WHEN U CAN.

Cam let out a sigh. He knew Mason had been counting on Peter being able to do something for the tiny cancer patient. The doctor was usually fairly low key about his patients. Something about this one was obviously causing a great deal of heartache. Cam wished he could call Mason and offer him words of comfort, but they had agreed that communication needed to be kept as casual as possible whenever Cam was at work.

SO SORRY. OFF DUTY @ 7.

Cam glanced at his watch as he pushed the button to send the message. It read five fifteen. He still had close to two hours. Back to organizing the maintenance schedule for the jets for the following week.

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Two sheets of paper equaled the only bright spot in the whole day. Mason sat at his desk in the deserted orthopedic practice office. He had swung back by his office to check on some insurance information. Some of the HMO's were notoriously tight with authorization of procedures and testing even of patients who truly needed the services.

Two envelopes had been tossed on his desk while he was on his futile quest at the hospital. He suspected what was inside even before he opened them. Blood test results for him and Cam. A brief scan confirmed that both of them were clean, not that he really expected otherwise. Now the biggest question would be if Cam was really comfortable with the idea of abandoning condom use. One more step in a path binding them together.

Mason stared unseeing at the surface of his desk for a long moment. Was he really hoping for forever? Yes. How likely was it? That probably fell in the category of maybe. Being a partner to a Navy man was hard enough on a wife, an openly recognized relationship. Acknowledgement of his and Cam's relationship would never be "okay" except in a few specific places, Division P being one of them.

God, he had a love/hate relationship with those people. Having the backup, the protection, and the training -- all that was just incredible. Then there was the down side -- watching Cam at risk, and himself for that matter, the flying thing, the fact that they wanted Mason to become competent in the field, which could translate to under fire -- that part just sucked. His brain circled back around to the fact that even Peter, who he tended to unrealistically think of as all-powerful, couldn't save the life of four year old Jason Ambers. That made him just want to scream or hit something. Yeah, right, like that would be productive.

Mason's cell phone vibrated on his hip and he answered it without bothering to look at the number, "Dr. Flynn."

"Hey Mason. How're you holding up?" asked Cam.

Mason leaned back in his desk chair and ran his fingers through his hair. "I'm okay," Mason replied. "You headed in my direction?"

"No... I have to be at a Hail and Farewell for Commander Rochester at the officer's club in half an hour. I thought I told you." Mason thought he could hear guilty reticence in Cam's voice. A Hail and Farewell was a long standing tradition when an officer was moved to a different duty station as it usually involved a promotion as well.

"Crap," Mason said with a sigh. It had totally slipped his mind. "You did. You really did. I forgot. I'm being brain dead."

"It's okay. It's understandable. I'd come lend some moral support, but this is a Navy politics sort of deal. I need to put in some face time."

"It's fine. I forgot. I don't need a babysitter. I've lost patients before, and well, technically he's not even dead yet."

"Mason..." Cam said. His tone was soft.

"Don't sweat it. We made an agreement. Your job and my job have to take precedence. That includes the internal politics stuff. Me being in a shitty mood does not constitute a crisis. "

"I have duty till four tomorrow. I'll be there as soon as I can afterward, so we can go to the party. Okay?"

"Yeah."

"I'm sorry, you know. I wish having Peter be able to help had panned out."

"It was a long shot," Mason admitted.

After Mason hung up, he stared at the phone for a while. Just how lame he could he possibly get? To wish, if only for one illogical moment, that Cam would beg off from the Navy event. Mason had gone through literally years of his life with only occasionally having a lover he felt safe enough with open up to even a little. Now here he was having thoughts worthy of some idealistic love-sick teenager. Suck it up, he told himself. Go home. Eat. Do something *not* work-related for a couple of hours.

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Two beers, a sit down dinner, and an irreverent skit about the Commander's tour of duty at Oceana Naval Air Station later, Cam was leaning back in his chair, listening to Captain Martin spin a tale about embarrassing the crap out of his teenager daughter.

"So we're sitting in the mini-van waiting on Jen, and Gwen is flopping around complaining about how if she *has* to wait she wishes there was enough room to stretch out and take a nap. It was just too good an opening. I said -- there's room enough for sex, implying that her mother and I... And then there's this dead silence and I thought she was gonna try and crawl under the seat. She says -- I *so* did not need to know that." Martin finished his tale, and the people around the table went into gales of laughter.

It was a funny story, but Cam's thoughts were of his partner. He was worried about Mason. The trip to Philly, meant to bolster the doctor's confidence in his field skills, had been a stressful near disaster. Add the guilt about this child cancer patient and Cam wondered just how dark the depression eating at Mason's psyche was likely to be tonight. Not that Mason would let him know more than a hint of his personal torture until he practically disintegrated under the weight.

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The chisel shaved loose a narrow sliver of wood as he tapped it carefully with a mallet. It would probably take another dozen passes before the area beside the pin of the dove-tail was sufficiently clear of wood. Mason adjusted the chisel to a horizontal position and levered out the tiny slice. He could probably do this task in about 30 seconds given the proper power tool, but that would never draw the same sort of satisfaction. Mason hated modern power tools. You didn't feel the wood the same way. The hot smell of friction would have overpowered the scent of the maple. He stubbornly stuck to the height of 18<sup>th</sup> century "technology" -- hand tools, muscle power and patience. It would probably take him at least another four months of painstaking work in spare hours to finish this little table.

Mason had already spent two hours out here in the garage tonight. The radio played softly in the background as he tried to distract himself from an internal monologue of what ifs. The little pile of wood chips and shavings was growing on the floor. He glanced at his watch. It was after ten; Mason had been up since six. Maybe it was time to put up the tools and give up for the night.

The inside of the house was nearly silent, only the faint hum of the refrigerator in the kitchen disturbed the quiet. Mason flipped on the light and set about filling the coffee pot and pushing the button for "cruise control" so it would come on in the morning. Heading into the bedroom, he stripped and grabbed a pair of pajama pants from a drawer. The night was chilly and there wasn't going to be a warm body to snuggle up to tonight.

Damn, damn, just damn. Mason sat down on the edge of the bed. When had he become so dependent on Cam for comfort? Mason blew out a long breath as he pulled on the pants. Be a grownup. What are you going to do when he goes on deployment? Mason asked himself. That was an idea he wasn't ready to face at the moment. He turned out the light and crawled into bed. He lay in the darkness for a long time, staring at nothing.

Finally he got up and went to hunt through the laundry basket. This is stupid; this is juvenile, he told himself. He found a T-shirt that Cam had left there days ago and Mason put it on. It smelled faintly of his lover. This was freakin' pathetic... and no one would ever know. Sleep did come eventually.

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As Cam walked through Mason's house, he could faintly hear the sound of the shower running. He made his way to the bathroom and leaned into the open doorway.

"Cat burglar," called Cam.

"You're out of luck. I don't have a cat," replied Mason over the noise of the water.

"A bit late in the day to be taking a shower isn't it? Or did you pull an all nighter?"

"I went running. Didn't think it'd be exactly PC to show up for the party drenched in sweat," said Mason. The water shut off and Mason pushed the shower curtain open. Cam drank in the sight of the long lean lines of his lover's body, dripping wet.

"Speaking of cats... I could give you a tongue bath?" Cam teased.

"I think that would kind of defeat the purpose of the shower." He watched Mason grab a towel and begin to dry off. "So how'd the shin-dig go last night?"

"Enh, the usual. Beer, food, bad jokes. You okay?" Cam took hold of the ends of the towel where it was draped over his lover's head, as Mason dried his hair. He pulled Mason toward him with the fabric and kissed him softly. The faint taste of soap mixed with the warmth of his lover's mouth was a funky odd contrast but still a turn on none the less. As Cam drew back his face, he met Mason's gaze.

"I'm surviving," Mason whispered. The doctor gently pulled away and finished drying off. Cam followed him into the bedroom and parked himself on the bed while Mason dressed in jeans and a dark green polo shirt.

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Backing the Mustang out of his driveway, Mason said, "Oh, the blood work came back."

"And? Since you're not bent out of shape, I'm guessing we're good."

"Yeah. We're both fine."

"You would tell me this when we're headed off to a party. You're just evil," said Cam.

Mason just smiled.

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Nearly two dozen cars lined both sides of the street near Steve Villetti's house. Mason frequently teased Steve about the size of the "McMansion" located in the upscale Courthouse Estates area. The nearest parking space was nearly a block away.

"Guess Villetti must be a popular guy," commented Cam. Mason could hear the sarcasm in his lover's voice. Steve had been responsible for Cam nearly falling off an exam table during an office visit for his shattered leg months before.

"From a patient point of view, his bedside manner improves markedly if you're under anesthesia," snarked Mason.

Cam laughed. "Tell me again why you're in a practice with this guy?"

"He's brilliant in the OR. And truthfully we get along better than most ego-centric collections of surgeons. Kyle's our buffer, anyway," said Mason referring to the third member of the practice, Kyle Marrin. "Think about it. If you put a couple dozen alpha male pilots together without the whole chain of command and military regs thing, wouldn't there be a hell of a lot of head butting?"

"Yeah, you're probably right."

They stood together at the front door as Mason knocked. A medium height woman with sandy blond curls opened it.

"Mason! It's about time you made it," she said with a smile. "Steve swore to me that you were coming, but the game started an hour ago."

"Which game?" asked Mason.

"Like I would know." She rolled her eyes. "Hi, I'm Lisa Villetti." She held out her hand. Mason introduced Cam and they followed her toward the kitchen. "There's beer and tons of food. Pretty much all the men are in the den watching the game on Steve's new toy, the plasma screen."

"He hasn't shut up about that thing for the past two weeks," said Mason. Two children came charging through the kitchen. Mason recognized the toddler as Tyra's two year old daughter, Elizabeth. The older one was Steve's nine year old, Constantia. Mason scooped the little one up off her feet as she scampered by, and she let out an ear piercing squeal.

"Geez, Lizzie! Trying to make me deaf?" Mason asked. He buried his face against her belly where her shirt had pulled up, and blew a raspberry on her skin. She let out squeals of laughter.

"Gain! Gain!" Lizzie yelled and Mason obliged. The little girl laughed until she was out of breath.

“Go play, squirt. No running in the house,” said Mason, setting her down.

Constantia gave him the hairy eyeball. “We *were* playing tag,” the older child said with an imperious tone. Constantia then hurried after the toddler.

“Oh Lord, nine years old, going on thirty,” said Lisa, her mother.

Mason saw Cam giving him a funny look.

“You’re, um... quite the hit with the little one,” said Cam. Mason walked around the counter to snag a soda from the bucket of ice on the floor.

“Tyra brings Lizzie to work every once in awhile when there’s daycare issues,” said Mason.

“No father?”

“He’s deployed for four more months. Ross is on the Stennis. He’s enlisted.”

“Oh.” The slight nod from Cam let Mason know that this was a very familiar concept.

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Cam spent the next couple of hours at the party, being introduced to people Mason knew, and generally hanging out, intermittently watching football on TV. It turned out there was a good handful of children at the party, ranging in age from someone’s infant son to Steve’s older child, a twelve year old boy, whose name Cam promptly forgot. All but the infant seemed to know Mason.

Mason was sitting cross-legged on the floor near Cam’s feet, the doctor’s back leaned against the edge of the upholstered chair where Cam was sitting. There was a careful few inches between them that wouldn’t have been there if they had been alone. Cam watched Lizzie come wandering toward them. The toddler plopped into Mason’s lap and curled up against his chest with a thumb in her mouth. Mason’s arm curved around her and he glanced momentarily down at the top of her head.

“Did momma turn you down?” Mason asked softly. Lizzie looked up at him with wide teary eyes, and then buried her face into his shirt.

“What’s that all about?” asked Cam.

“Tyra’s trying to wean her from nursing in public. Obviously this is an unpopular decision.”

“So why’d she come to you?”

“For sympathy while she pouts. I think she’s pretty tired, too.” Mason’s fingers trailed through the toddler’s hair.



“I’m beginning to wonder why you didn’t go into pediatrics,” said Cam. The look of anguish in Mason’s eyes made Cam regret his words. Cam had momentarily forgotten the little cancer patient. There was obviously an enormous difference to Mason between enjoying children, and caring for the sick and dying. Mason’s gaze fell back to Lizzie in his lap. She was nearly asleep.

“I probably ought to go find out if Tyra wants me to put her somewhere to nap,” said Mason. He shifted the child to his shoulder and stood up. Cam watched him leave. Children were not something the two of them were ever likely to have.

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After depositing Lizzie on a blanket in the far corner of the kitchen floor for Tyra, Mason lingered to get some food and a beer. A hand landed on his shoulder, and Mason glanced back to see a familiar face. The man behind him was several inches shorter and had short blond curls.

“Nathan!” Mason said. “Why the hell didn’t you tell me that you were coming to this coast?” he demanded, giving Nathan a bone crushing hug.

“Last minute business thing. I wasn’t even sure it was going to happen, then I up and forgot to email you.

“Still living the California dream I see.” Mason held up his relatively pale hand against Nathan’s deeply tanned one.

“Unh. Yeah, and the California mortgage to go with it. Ed and I are looking to move someplace cheaper and a little less earthquake prone.”

“Kansas?” grinned Mason.

“So I can trade earthquakes for tornados?”

“Sure why not?”

“Actually we were kind of thinking about moving back here.”

“Wow. How come this is the first I’ve heard of this?” asked Mason.

“It’s all just kind of hypothetical at this point. It depends on job opportunities and a whole slew of other iffy things.”

“Grab a beer and give me all the details. God, it’s good to see you.”

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Cam glanced in the direction that Mason had disappeared. There was no sign of him. Maybe it was time to get a drink and see where the man had gotten to. Cam ambled into the kitchen. There were several people eating and talking in the room. He could see Tyra's back. She was talking to Mason and... another man. A man with blond curly hair about the same age as Mason was standing with his arm hanging around Mason's neck. They were laughing and talking with the nurse. Cam felt an uncomfortably hard knot in his chest. Mason didn't let people touch him casually, not often anyway. Who was this guy hanging all over him?

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"So tell me about this guy you're seeing" prompted Nathan as he took a sip from his beer bottle. "Last email I got from you, it sounded serious."

"It is. Or at least it seems to be," Mason said. Mason couldn't help the little smile on his lips. He saw his lover on the far side of the room. They met eyes, and Mason was disconcerted. Cam seemed to be bordering on angry. Not that anyone else would notice, but the tense line of his crossed arms, the stance, and the hint of a head tilt. What was bugging him? The look they shared, on the other hand, suggested he'd like to fuck Mason up against a wall. People moved in between them and Mason's view was cut off.

"Somebody I know?" asked Nathan.

"No, I doubt it. He's... military."

"Oooh, that's gotta make things awkward."

"Yeah, some parts of it are difficult."

"You never did easy very well. That's probably why we never stuck as permanent thing."

"Oh come on, we were in college and getting laid by anybody was half the goal in life," laughed Mason.

"You got that right."

"How's Ed?" asked Mason, referring to Nathan's partner.

"Fine. Home. I miss him like hell. I have two more days in the area before I fly home."

"You still looking into starting a family?"

"Sort of. Maybe. I don't know. Doing a little research. Trying to make up our minds. Wondering if we'd be better off buying a dog," said Nathan.

Mason snickered. "Pooper scooping versus diapers."

“Yeah.”

“Come on. I’ll introduce you to my partner. Last time I looked he was talking to Villetti. Probably about motorcycles.” Mason pulled Nathan along.

Near the sliding glass door, he saw Cam leaning on the wall listening to a conversation. Mason reached out and laid a hand on Cam’s arm. The slow simmer of anger was made even more apparent by the touch. Mason was somewhat mystified. Cam turned toward him.

“Hey I’d like you to meet an old friend of mine. We went to college together,” said Mason. “Nathan, meet Lt. Cameron Bradshaw, Cam, Nathan Carter.” The two men shook hands.

“Lieutenant? In this area, does that make you Navy?” asked Nathan.

“Yes.”

“I’m sales rep for a pharmaceutical company. Lots of traveling.”

“Sounds interesting.”

“Only sometimes. Some weeks are hell. I spend too much time alone,” lamented Nathan.

Mason felt a hard flash of annoyance from his partner. What the hell was going on?

“Alone has its uses,” said Cam. Mason raised an eyebrow at Cam. This really wasn’t like his partner at all. “We really need to head out. I have duty tomorrow.” Now Mason just stared at Cam, because unless something had changed in the past hour, that was a blatant lie.

“Um, yeah, okay. We should really try to grab a meal together before you have to fly back. Maybe tomorrow? I’ll give you a call around lunch,” said Mason.

“That should work,” replied Nathan. Mason slowly followed Cam toward the door, stopping briefly to say goodbye to several people.

Outside, Mason pushed Cam against the bricks of the wall around the corner of the house, and stood with his hands braced on either side of Cam’s head.

“Okay, give. What’s up with you?” demanded Mason.

“Nothing.”

“Don’t give me that. One minute you’re looking at me like you want to rip all my clothes off and the next you’re looking like you’re thinking about decking me!”

“I... don’t want to talk about it. I thought we were leaving.”

“Yeah I guess we are, at *your* insistence.” Mason turned to walk away then turned back. What ever the hell Cam was so pissed about must have a reason, and that man was never easily upfront and verbal about his emotions. Mason put a hand against Cam’s chest and pushed him back harder against the wall and kissed him. Cam relaxed a fraction. His arms went around Mason, pulling him tight to his body. One hand clenched in the hair at the back of Mason’s head and the kiss became more aggressive.

*Mine*, was what Mason heard whispered inside his head. Oh. Now he understood. How could he have been so stupid not to realize his lover was jealous of his easy familiarity with Nathan?

Mason let Cam take control. The pilot twisted him so that Mason was the one pinned to the wall as Cam’s hand pulled his T-shirt loose at the waist and ran a hand up underneath the fabric. His hand was warm on Mason’s skin, sliding up his ribs around to the back of his waist. Cam’s hand wormed down inside his briefs and cupped the curve of his butt as Cam ground himself against Mason’s crotch. Cam had one foot braced on the ground pushing. The force with which Mason was being crushed against the bricks was uncomfortable, bordering on the edge of pain. Suddenly Cam stepped back, letting go.

“God... sorry... I didn’t...” huffed Cam. He stared at the ground, breathing hard. “You would have... I could have...” Cam stumbled away toward the line of cars parked along the now darkened street. Mason followed, at a slightly slower pace.

Cam had finally stopped. He leaned forward with crossed arms braced on the roof of Mason’s Mustang. He wrapped both arms gently around Cam’s body and leaned against his back.

“You wouldn’t actually hurt me. Not on purpose. I’m fine. I’m sorry. I didn’t realize Nathan would make you jealous. I’ve known him for a long time,” Mason whispered in Cam’s ear.

“Not jealous,” mumbled Cam, his face buried in the crook of his arm.

“Yeah, you are. And I’m sorry I was slow on the uptake. But I’m flattered, too.”

“Why?” muttered Cam.

Mason placed a line of kisses down the nape of Cam’s neck. He felt his lover draw in a shuddering breath.

“Because it’s part of the whole relationship thing. If you care about me, then it makes you crazy to think about me being with someone else. I’m yours. Body and soul.”

“Still want to rip off your clothes and fuck you over the car,” muttered Cam.

“Would you settle for in the back seat? We’d draw less attention that way,” replied Mason.

“Oh geez, don’t tempt me.”

“I wasn’t kidding. There might even be a tube of Wet Stuff in the glove compartment...” suggested Mason.

“I don’t have a condom with me, do you?”

“We don’t really need one, you know,” said Mason softly. He waited for Cam to remember the brief discussion of the blood tests from earlier in the evening.

Cam was still leaning on the roof of the car. He turned slowly in the circle of Mason’s arms to face his partner.

“I... you really sure about this? You and me in the back seat like a couple of horny teenagers?” whispered Cam. Mason nodded. He was very sure. Cam pulled Mason into a careful kiss.

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Two full grown men in the back seat of a Mustang was pretty damn awkward. There had indeed been a partially used tube of slick in the glove compartment. Cam was sprawled on top of Mason along the seat. The car wasn’t exactly warm, but neither of them wanted to turn it on and draw more attention to their escapade. Cam’s mouth was currently plastered against Mason’s and he was kissing Mason slowly while his hand was stuffed down the front of his lover’s partially unzipped jeans stroking the hard cock inside.

Cam could feel the thrum of energy that came with touching the healer. It was warm and addictive and purely Mason. His body wanted to drive into his partner and pound him into the seat and prove just how much this man belonged to him, but Cam forced himself to slow down. Cam eased Mason’s jeans down over his hips, then it became something of a wrestling match to get Mason’s long legs out of the pants in the confines of the small space. They were both giggling like idiots by the time it was accomplished.

“Next time, remind me just how damn small the back seat of your car is,” snickered Cam.

“Shut up and concentrate,” said Mason.

Cam groped on the floor for the tube and squeezed out a generous amount on to his fingers. Mason let out a groan as Cam’s fingers pushed into him. After a couple of minutes of careful preparation and some unbelievably hot sounds from his lover, Cam ran his slippery hand down the length of his own raging hard-on and hesitated. This was a big deal. They’d never done it without the condoms, and here they were going hot and heavy in the back seat of a car like they were still in high school. God, he’d never loved anyone like he loved Mason, never believed he could feel like this about a man.

He swallowed hard and pushed into Mason’s body. It was almost over right then. It was always a deliciously tight, all-encompassing heat but there was nothing separating them this time. One of Mason’s legs was braced against the edge of the window and the other on Cam’s shoulder. Cam’s hands awkwardly supported himself on either side of Mason’s head.

“Breathe,” said Mason. Neither one of them moved for a number of seconds.

Slowly Cam eased back a little and thrust in. Mason bit down on his own lip, face contorting. Cam could tell he was struggling equally hard to postpone his climax, the vibration of the energy pouring off of his body everywhere they touched was at a fever pitch. Drawing back again and slamming forward with very little control left, he must have nailed Mason in exactly the right spot. His partner’s body jerked and semen spurted in a sticky spray across his stomach and the bottom edge of his shirt. That was it. All he wrote. The pulsing contractions sent him over the edge and Cam slammed repeatedly against Mason’s body riding the rush of his orgasm. Drained, he slumped weakly on top of his lover.

*Love you.* Mason’s thoughts whispered inside his head.

*Love you, too.* replied Cam. The intimacy of shared emotions was as intense as the things their bodies had done. Minutes ticked by before they peeled themselves apart and struggled back into discarded pieces of clothing.

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“Ya know it’s a good thing we’re going home, ‘cause I’m not sure anybody could miss noticing what we’ve been up to,” said Mason. He knew there was a stupid smile on his face.

“Uh-huh. You look well and truly fucked,” replied Cam.

“And sticky.” Mason gestured toward the mess on his shirt and a shiver ran through his body. Mid-October was definitely heading toward chilly.

“You’re the one with the car keys.”

“Unh... this is going to require that I move isn’t it?”

“Yup,” replied Cam.

Mason groaned as he climbed out of the back seat.

The first part of the drive home was mostly quiet. Mason finally broke the silence.

“I would like to meet Nathan for dinner tomorrow. I’ve known him for more than a decade. Yeah, we kinda sorta had something a long time ago. But it was never serious. And he’s happily married to a nice guy named Ed. They’re thinking about having children.”

“Do you know how weird it sounds to use the words married and to a guy in the same sentence?”

“They live in California, so they made it legal. Well, at least until the shit started flying.”

“Mmm, forgot about that. So the children part. Guess that implies adoption, since it’s not like either one of them can carry a baby.”

“There’s other options. Fostering and surrogacy.”

“You seem to know an awful lot about this guy who lives on the opposite coast....”

“Little thing called email. We try to keep in touch at least once a month or so.”

“Oh.” The flatness of Cam’s tone told Mason that his lover still had jealous reservations about what Mason might feel for Nathan.

“I went to college with him for four years. The pre-med part. He was a good friend. My first openly gay friend. Yes, we occasionally screwed each other stupid, but he’s about as head blind as they come, and I could never commit to anything permanent. We both knew anything serious would never work between us. We do much better as friends. And he’s taken. Just as much as I am,” Mason tried to reassure Cam.

“Does he know you’re a healer?”

“Yeah, actually he does. One of the very, very few people outside my family.”

“You never talk about your family.”

“And you do? I know you have a brother. That’s it.”

“My parents are dead. Yours?”

“Alive and well and would probably prefer that I was the one that’s dead.”

“Ouch. You an only?”

“Nope. Got two older brothers and a younger sister.”

“Wow. So what’s the deal?”

“The healer thing was rough, but it’s not exactly like I can run around telling the world about that. Being gay though...”

“And they can’t handle that.”

“Nope. Doesn’t matter that their son is a respected orthopedic surgeon. He fucks guys, so obviously he’s not worth shit.” Even just saying the words brought up bitter memories and emotions within Mason. And per usual he tried to choke them back down. Cam reached across and squeezed Mason’s leg. “What about your brother?” asked Mason.

“Shea? He was always the wild child. He does bomb disposal for the U.N. for a living. One of these days I’m going to get a phone call asking where to send the pieces of his body.”

“When you had the motorcycle accident, supposedly someone called him...”

“He was out of the country for six weeks. He did eventually get a hold of me. We’re really not that close.”

“Would he have a cow if he knew you were involved with a guy?”

“I doubt it. Like I said, he was always the wild child. I wouldn’t be surprised if he hasn’t at least tried the idea on for size... He’d probably laugh at me.”

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In Mason’s bedroom, Cam watched his lover strip out of his shirt. The bedside light threw just enough illumination to highlight the dips and planes of Mason’s naked torso, the narrow furrow of his spine, the way the muscles at the back of his waist flexed, the broad shoulders. Cam wanted to run his mouth over every inch of exposed skin. Oh, *and* the parts he couldn’t see at the moment. too.

“You enjoying the show?” said Mason, a teasing tone in his voice.

“Oh, yeah.”

“You don’t really have duty in the morning do you?”

“No,” Cam admitted. “I just... wanted to...” Cam fished inside his brain for a phrase that wouldn’t sound like he had been behaving like a jealous bastard.

“Get me to leave?” offered Mason.

“Yeah. I’m sorry.” Cam felt embarrassed.

Mason crossed the room and looped his arms loosely around Cam’s neck. “I think maybe I like you being jealous, just a little bit,” Mason said softly.

“Watching him with his arm around you... It’s not like you usually let people touch much... and not like that...” Cam’s voice trailed off. Trying to come up with words to describe his sudden intense response to seeing another man possibly trying to claim Mason’s affection was damn difficult. “Get naked,” whispered Cam. “Lie on your stomach on the bed, I’ll be back in a minute.” Cam had a sudden insanely silly idea. Mason looked at him with a raised eyebrow. Cam merely smiled and headed in the direction of the kitchen. There was a black Sharpie somewhere on the kitchen counter, he’d seen it.



When Cam came back into the bedroom, Mason was obligingly stretched out on the bed, facing the door, chin propped on his fists. Cam crawled onto the bed and straddled Mason's thighs. He popped the lid off the marker. When the cool wetness of the Sharpie tip touched the curve of Mason's left butt cheek, Mason's head jerked up.

"Hey, what're you doing?" Mason asked.

"Oh nothing. I'll tell you in a minute. It'll wash off in a day or so anyway." Cam carefully printed out -- Property of Cameron Bradshaw -- on his lover's skin. It was a block lettered label that followed the delectable curve of the left side of Mason's tush. "There. Now your ass is officially mine," said Cam.

Mason twisted enough to get a glimpse of the writing and began to giggle.

"I can't believe you just did that," Mason said between giggles. He squirmed beneath Cam's spread legs to roll over onto his back.

"Damn right."

"Hope you're not planning on having me show that to anyone."

"You sure as hell better not. Maybe I should add -- no looking and no touching?"

"That doesn't include you, does it?" There was a definite smirk on Mason's face.

"Huh-uh." Cam lowered himself down to lie on top of his lover. His lips met Mason's and the kiss started out gentle. Somewhere along the way it changed to hungry. Mason's arms wound around Cam's body pulling him down tight. The subtle thrum of the healer's energy was crawling along Cam's skin and it stirred arousal somewhere low in his belly. His jeans were getting uncomfortably tight as Cam's body began to respond to the idea. Mason's hand curled around the back of Cam's head and Mason rolled them over so he was on top.

"How come *you* still have clothes on? We need to fix that," said Mason as he began to push Cam's shirt up. The shirt got dumped off the side of the bed, followed in another minute or so by Cam's jeans and underwear. "Now since we're behaving like juvenile delinquents tonight, where's that marker?" asked Mason. Cam jerked a thumb toward where it lay on the bed.

Now it was Mason straddling Cam's thighs, but Cam lay face up. His cock was bobbing, rigid against his belly. Mason was pointedly ignoring it, as he began writing letters down the front of Cam left hipbone. His lover wrote MASON at a slight diagonal downward and then CAM horizontally across so the names intersected at the "A". When Mason popped the cap back on the marker, Cam took in what was written on *him*. Now it was his turn to laugh.

"Guess it's a good thing I'm not made of wood and you're the one with a penknife," Cam said.

"You look like you have pretty good wood to me," teased Mason.

“Are you planning on helping me with that? Or should I do it myself?” asked Cam. He made a gesture as if to wrap his hand around his own hard cock. Mason batted his hand away.

“Hands off.” Mason slid down Cam’s legs and blew a warm breath across Cam’s erection. It twitched happily at the attention. Mason started a trail of little nips and licks up the inside of Cam’s thigh. Cam groaned softly. The backseat adventure had taken the edge off enough that this might actually last a while. Mason’s tongue burned a slow path up the underside of Cam’s cock, swirling around the head and lapping across the weeping slit. Cam bucked into the sensation a little. Then his lover’s mouth closed down over his length. Ungh. Mason’s lips drew back up Cam’s cock at a snail’s pace and were gone. Cam blinked. Huh? It took a second for him to realize that Mason was groping in the nightstand drawer for the lube.

On his hands and knees above him, Mason gazed down at Cam. “Am I topping? Or you?”

Cam considered the question for a moment. Unlike some male couples, they didn’t have a set pattern. Neither of them consistently topped or bottomed, but it wasn’t taking turns either, it was some random combination that was somehow tied to situations and emotions. “You,” said Cam. He wanted to feel Mason without a rubber. Tonight was all about crossing that line, ditching the protection. The deal in the back seat had only been part one.

Mason squeezed out a generous amount of lube and took his time preparing Cam. The divine slide of fingers slipping in and out and stretching was taking Cam closer to the edge a whole lot faster than he’d anticipated.

“Damn, quit with the fingers already and get on with it,” Cam pleaded.

Mason gave him a wicked grin as his hand stilled. “I think I like it when you beg,” murmured Mason.

The low husky tone from his partner went straight to Cam’s cock which absolutely ached with the need for release. Cam gnashed his teeth in a mock snarl.

“Then screw me, *please*, before I start humping your leg,” Cam said.

“Roll over,” ordered Mason.

Cam groaned in frustration but complied. Stretched flat on the bed, his cock was trapped between his body and the blankets. He squirmed a little, seeking friction. Mason’s thighs straddled the outside of Cam’s hips and Cam moaned as his lover pushed his own erection against Cam’s ass. Mmph... damn... He could feel the head of Mason’s cock popping past his own tight ring of muscle. Cam’s fingers clenched into the sheets. God, his brain was just absolutely locking up with the sensation. Mason’s hand kneaded at his shoulder as his lover thrust deeper. Cam arched his back and their bodies slapped together. Cam could hear Mason’s breathing get more and more ragged as his lover was slowly losing the struggle to postpone his climax. Low husky panting groans became a violent gasp as Mason exploded within him, and the

bright energy wash from his lover tore away the last shred of Cam's control. They rode a blinding torrent as their minds and bodies came together.

Gasping and gulping for air, Mason sagged to lie sprawled on Cam's back. Cam could feel the deliciously damp heat weighing him down, pressing him against the slippery wetness beneath him. They both lay unmoving for minutes. Mason's softening cock was sliding from Cam's body and his lover rolled a little to lie beside Cam. Mason's face pressed into the nape of Cam's neck and his arms circled around to wrap across Cam's chest.

Sounding drowsy and spent, Mason whispered against Cam's ear, "I love you so much. Don't ever doubt that."

Cam took Mason's hand in his own and kissed the center of his lover's palm.

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The buzzing sound woke Mason. It took several seconds for him to realize the annoying little noise was his cell phone. He groped on the floor for his pants and dug the phone from the pocket. Squinting at the display, he saw it was the hospital.

"Dr. Flynn," he answered. He had nearly forgotten that he was on call tonight. The voice on the other end informed him that he was needed to deal with a pelvic fracture case from a car accident.

Mason hauled himself out of bed and dressed. As he was about to head out the door of the bedroom, it occurred to him that Cam would wonder where the hell he had gone. He shook Cam gently by the shoulder.

"Huh? Wha'?" the pilot mumbled.

"I have to go to the hospital. I'm probably going to be gone a couple of hours," said Mason.

"Uh, 'kay. I'll keep th' bed warm," Cam said, and fell silent.

Mason smiled a little in the darkness. There was a fifty-fifty chance the information had never actually reached Cam's brain.

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The X-rays of the pelvic fracture didn't look as bad as Mason had feared. This might only take a couple of hours to put the stabilizing hardware in. He stood in the locker room, stripping to his underwear to put on scrubs. Dorval, one of the anesthesia guys came in to perform a similar task. When Mason glanced back over his shoulder, the other man was standing still with his head cocked at an angle.

"What's up?" asked Mason.

“Did you get a tattoo across your butt? I swear it looks like it says Republic of China or something,” said Dorval. Mason suddenly felt his face flush with embarrassment. He’d forgotten about the “label”. Considering he was wearing white silk bikini briefs, it was undoubtedly pretty damn visible.

“It’ll wash off eventually. My boyfriend got hold of a permanent marker. I suppose I should be grateful he didn’t write something obscene,” replied Mason with as straight a face as possible.

Dorval merely chuckled and started putting on his own scrubs.

Later, in the OR, when Mason was finishing up, the tattoo idea flitted through his head again. The thought of Cam’s name written forever on his skin had a certain appeal to it. Not on his behind, however. Chances were he’d never actually go through with getting something like that done. Still... it was a thought.

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The coffee pot was gurgling and glugging to a finish. Cam stood in Mason’s kitchen fishing mugs from the cupboard.

“Can we talk about dinner?” said Mason. Cam leaned back a little as Mason’s arms circled his shoulders from behind. There was a hint of tension in his partner.

“Yeah, sure,” replied Cam.

“I think it would be easier just to invite Nathan to have dinner here. We won’t have to think twice about what we say or who might hear.”

Cam was silent for a moment, knowing that thought was mostly for his protection. God, there were times when the constant need to think about how dangerous his love for Mason was to his Navy career was just agonizing.

“That’s probably a good idea,” Cam said.

Mason kissed him on the corner of his jaw just below his ear, then continued down the side of his neck.

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The breeze blew the heavy scent of the grilling steaks across the patio behind Mason’s house. Mason leaned against the wall keeping an eye on the meat. Cam’s arm was draped around his shoulders and Mason had a thumb hooked in one of the belt loops of his lover’s jeans. Nathan was slouched in an Adirondack style chair, beer bottle in his hand.

“So I hear you’ve been on the receiving end of Mason’s magic fingers,” Nathan said to Cam.

Mason felt Cam flinch a little.

“More than once,” said Mason. “I’m still hurrying up the healing on his ruptured eardrum, so he can get back to flying.” He felt Cam’s fingers tighten against his shoulder. “I told you Nath’ is one of the exceedingly few people outside my family that ever knew before Division P recruited me” Mason reminded him.

“Not sure I’d even be here if it wasn’t for him,” commented Nathan.

“Okay, give, there’s obviously a story behind that,” said Cam.

Mason exchanged a long glance with Nathan. This was an uncomfortable memory for both of them.

“You tell it,” said Nathan.

“We were sophomores in college. We went out clubbing. Didn’t even try the fake ID thing, so we were actually both sober. We were being reasonably good, but on the other hand two horny twenty year olds on a Saturday night is probably tempting fate a little too hard.” Mason began.

“Groping each other in the parking lot behind the club seemed like a pretty harmless idea,” Nathan inserted.

“We even had all our clothes on. Apparently two guys in a lip lock, minding their own business, was morally offensive to a handful of redneck assholes looking for trouble. Next thing I know we’re being hauled apart and three guys are beating the shit out of us.” Mason hesitated. His gaze fell to the rest on the tips of his shoes. Visions of blood and darkness, pain and fear flitted through his head. Mason supposed that he must be radiating a certain amount of unease, because Cam’s arm slid down to curl around his body.

“I’m sorry. I didn’t realize...” Cam said softly.

“No, it’s okay. You ought to know. It’s a piece of my history.” Mason blew out a breath and continued. “Anyway, one of them picked up a broken beer bottle and stabbed Nathan in the stomach with it. I think maybe one of the bouncers from the club found out there was a fight going on in the parking lot and called 911. Of course, by that time we’d attracted a few spectators and the three guys bailed. I held Nathan together until the paramedics showed. That came back to bite me in the ass, too, because between getting the crap beat out of me and the stuff I’d done to save Nathan, I passed out. Woke up in the hospital three hours later.”

“Not that I remember more than bits and pieces, but he’s also not telling you that without his intervention I probably would have bled out in the parking lot. It took something like three hours of surgery to put me back in one piece, and then I think it was two days in ICU and another week in the hospital after that.” Nathan swigged another gulp of beer as he added to the tale.

“I was wrecked. Between being in not so fabulous shape myself and so torn up inside about how close Nathan had come to dying, I told him everything. Every last detail about what I did for him and what my grandmother had taught me and how deep the secret was because I didn’t want to spend the rest of my life locked in a lab with a bunch of rats,” Mason finished. He picked up his own beer from where it sat near the grill and took a long pull.

All three men were silent for a long moment. Cam cupped a hand against Mason’s jaw and pulled him into a kiss.

“Somewhere you have racked up some serious karma points in your favor,” said Cam. “The number of people who owe their lives to you just goes up and up.”

A hint of an embarrassed smile tugged at Mason’s mouth. “I’m a doctor. It’s in the job description.”

“He’s got a point,” commented Nathan. “You have knack for being in the right place at the right time. If ever anyone was born to be a healer, it’s you.”

The steaks were done and the three men moved inside to eat, as the chill of the October evening was becoming uncomfortable with the setting of the sun.

After dinner, dirty plates were dumped in the kitchen sink to be dealt with later and the conversation had turned to silly embarrassing reminiscing. Mason was amused that Cam had practically dragged him onto the sofa to sit between his legs and lean back against the pilot’s chest. Both of Cam’s arms were loosely wrapped around Mason’s body, and his fingers tracing aimless patterns on Mason’s chest. It was a totally blatant and possessive position that practically screamed “mine.” Mason was blissfully happy at the gesture. For Cam to be willing to be seen showing obvious attraction and affection by even just one other person was another inch toward what Mason constantly hoped for. A lifetime together.

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Monday equaled surgery followed by office hours. Mason saw twenty eight patients in five hours. By the time the end of the day rolled around he was more than ready to be done. Tomorrow was going to be a whole different game. Instead of the weekly foray out to the Division P complex, he was set up to ride with the Virginia Beach EMS.

Leaning on the front reception counter to put his signature on a stack of paperwork, Mason crooked a finger at Tyra as she walked by.

“What’s up?” she asked.

“The DMAT people changed my training assignment,” he said, referring to the cover story he had been using to explain away the time he spent with Division P. “They’re sending me to ride with the EMS people on Tuesdays for the next few months. I left word with the hospital to notify

me if Jason Ambers takes a serious down turn. But if they can't get hold of me on my cell, they might call here," Mason told her.

"I know this is the wrong question, but how's he doing?" she said.

"Slowly but steadily creeping downhill. They have him on morphine. Some days he's more lucid than others. I try to swing by every couple of days." Mason didn't say that when he went to check on the boy, he did what he could to block the pain and improve the quality of the short time the child had left.

"I am so sorry for him. He's such a sweet kid and he deserved to have an actual life," said Tyra wistfully. "God, talking about him makes me want to go get Lizzie from daycare and just hold her." Tyra squeezed his hand where it lay on the counter.

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The wind was blowing across the parking lot behind Station 14, a white cinderblock building with a green roof. Mason hurried across the lot to the back door. The street lights cast long shadows in the cold early morning darkness. It wasn't like he didn't get up obscenely early on a fairly regular basis, but somehow the white noise of the wind and the lack of traffic was vaguely eerie.

Mason knocked on the back door. He could see lights inside the long hallway that led away from the door, but no people. There had to be personnel inside; the EMS station was manned 24/7. He knocked again. Finally, a short man with a crew cut came down the hallway and opened the door.

"Can I help you?" the man said.

"My name's Mason Flynn. I was sent here by DMAT for field training. I think I'm looking for a guy named Raj Malik. He's a paramedic."

"Oh, he's in the kitchen. You an EMT?"

"Um, no," said Mason. He knew full well there was usually rancor between the EMS people and most doctors. Mason followed the man up the hallway, through a common room containing a TV and several sofas, and into a large kitchen. There were a few people drinking coffee and chit-chatting. A stocky dark haired man of Indian descent was slouched in a chair at the table with a cup in front of him.

"Hey Raj, this guy said DMAT sent him to you for training," said the man Mason had followed inside.

The dark haired man looked up. "Raj Malik," he introduced himself. "So enlighten me, what does a surgeon want with EMS time?"

“Most of my experience is in a hospital setting. If I’m going to be of value to DMAT in crisis situations, I need more exposure to field scenarios.”

“You do realize you’re not in charge out here,” said Raj. There was a distinctly dubious look on his face.

“Yes,” Mason replied as evenly as possibly.

“You might want to give the guy a chance before you shoot him down in flames,” said a female voice. Mason glanced over his shoulder to see a slender blond woman. “Hi, I’m Ginny Burke.” She held out a hand to Mason and he shook it.

“Mason Flynn,” he introduced himself.

The PA system let out a loud tone and spouted off cryptic information about a call. In the span of a few seconds, Mason was in an ambulance heading out.

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The morning was spent transporting an asthma patient, an elderly woman who had fallen and a teenager in need of stitches in his elbow after a bike accident. Nothing epic, nothing life threatening and Mason made sure to keep his mouth shut and his head down, doing exactly as he was told. Mason also didn’t use his healing Talent, except to check for signs of broken bones in the elderly woman.

An hour past lunch, things picked up with a shooting incident. Mason sat uncertainly in the ambulance with Raj and Ginny while they waited for the police to give the all clear at the site of the shooting. Mason hadn’t given much thought to the concept that incident scenes might be hazardous. Considering the couple of situations he had been involved in with Division P, he really ought to know better.

As Mason hopped down from the side door of the vehicle, he glanced at the victim lying in a pool of blood on the sidewalk. A steady drizzle had started and it was beginning to soak the pavement. The patient was a young black man in a heavy winter weight jacket and hugely oversized dark jeans. He was moaning faintly. Ginny headed toward the police to get some information.

“Let’s C-collar and backboard him and get him into the ambulance. Letting him get soaked is only going to make things worse,” said Raj. Mason nodded and circled around to the back of the ambulance to pull out the stretcher.

The victim was methodically secured and lifted onto the stretcher. Inside the ambulance, Raj took the victim’s pulse, while Mason got an oxygen mask over the patient’s face.

“I see an entrance wound,” said Raj. “Start cutting off his jacket. We need to find out if there’s an exit, too. I think there’s too much blood for the one hole.” Mason grabbed a pair of trauma



shears and stuck the tip under the edge of the sleeve at the wrist and pushed. The material gave way with relative ease... releasing a large puff of flying feathers which promptly started sticking to anything damp. Mason froze for a moment. What the fuck ? God, the guy would have to be wearing a down coat.

“Keep cutting dude, we’ll clean up later,” said Raj, with a snicker. The paramedic was busy listening for breath sounds with his stethoscope. Mason kept cutting. The back of ambulance was swiftly looking like a pillow fight explosion had occurred. Mason used a mixture of touch and his psi senses to locate the exit wound.

“Found it,” Mason said. “Just below the armpit. I’m thinking he may have already been either falling or on the ground when he got shot.” Mason began ripping open dressings and pressing them to the wound to try to slow the blood loss. Use ten percent of your Talent, Peter had told him. Okay, here goes, Mason thought. He let just a trickle of energy flow through his fingers, constricting the blood vessels around each rib and around the chest cavity as he pressed the layers of gauze firmly to patient’s body. That should slow the bleeding. Then he gave another little nudge in the direction of sealing the wound in the lung.

“Okay, that’s a police problem, not ours. He’s definitely got diminished breath sounds on the left side. I’m thinking we’re going to have to do something about the pneumothorax before you put that line in.” Raj switched from listening to the man’s chest to taking the patient’s blood pressure. This was definitely far closer to Mason’s couple of experiences with trauma and disaster via Division P than his usual mode of surgery or office visits or even practice with Peter. “Got the chest seals taped down?”

“Yes,” Mason answered

“Good,” replied the paramedic. “Find me a 14 gauge needle so I can deal with this.”

Mason had to wipe damp goose down off the glass front of the cabinet built into the inside of the ambulance to see if he could find the box with the bigger needles in it.

“I think I’m in the mood for Beach Bully. That sound good to you? We missed lunch transporting the bike accident guy. What are you in the mood for? We’ll take a meal break after we’re done with this one,” said Raj.

Mason was startled. Okay, he was hungry, but they were in the middle of a call. *What the fuck?* Why was this guy worrying about food?

While Raj stabbed the large needle into the appropriate spot on the patient’s chest, Mason grabbed a 16 gauge needle and concentrated on getting the IV started.

“IV’s in,” said Mason. He heard the door slam as Ginny got in the front to drive.

“We good to go?” she called.

“Yeah, tell ‘em we’re in transit and should be there in about ten minutes,” said Raj. The ambulance rocked a little as it pulled back onto the street. “His pressure’s dropping. See if you can get a second line in.”

Mason nodded and started ripping open the packages for another IV. He did however hesitate just a little as he hunted for a useable vein. Gloved fingertips on skin, Mason coaxed the blood vessels in the nearest gun shot wound area to shut down and limit the blood flow. His Talent suggested something more, the developing connection between him and critically injured man was strengthening. Mason blinked and swallowed hard. *Fight the connection*, he told himself.

When they arrived at the hospital, they were met by one of the ER doctors and a nurse, who guided them swiftly into one of the nearest available trauma bay. Raj lingered for a few minutes to hand off what information they had on the patient. Mason glanced back in the direction of the door, he saw a trail of blood, mud, rain, and feathers. Raj grinned at him.

“I think we made quite an entrance,” the paramedic laughed. Mason had to chuckle a little too at the sheer magnitude of the mess. “Hey, I’m sorry if I weired you out with the food questions. It’s a paramedic thing, you’ll get used to it.”

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The hospice ward was a quiet place. Mason had just finished checking on Jason Ambers. The “checking” part involved pouring energy into Jason's failing body and reinforcing the pain dampening effects of the morphine IV so the child could have some hours of relative alertness. Time was running out for Jason.

Mason went to the chapel, because it was a quiet place and no one was likely to ask questions he didn’t want to answer if he sat there with his head down for a while. He was doing all he could, and it wasn’t enough. It would never be enough. The child’s remaining lifespan was down to being counted in days at this point.

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Tonight, patience wasn’t his strong suit. Cam paced the floor of Mason’s house for a while, tried to watch TV, raided the refrigerator and checked his email on Mason’s computer. He wanted to hear how the day with the EMS people had gone. Multiple times he thought about calling Mason and decided that was stupid. At eight o’clock, he settled for a simple text message of

WHERE R U?

There had been no response. Cam was about ready to go get on his bike and find his lover when he heard the door open. Mason shuffled through the door, looking dead exhausted. Cam met him two steps into the den, and wrapped his arms around Mason.

“I was getting worried about you,” Cam said.

“Sorry, I was at the hospice unit.”

“You eat yet?”

“No.” Mason’s answered was muffled by the fact his face was leaning down against Cam’s shoulder.

Cam could feel the bone weary misery seeping from his partner. He placed a kiss against Mason’s temple.

“This’d be a good night for pizza and beer,” he suggested. He pushed Mason in the direction of the sofa and pulled out his cell to call for delivery. Mason sat on the sofa unlacing his shoes. When he was done, he slumped against Cam. “Do I dare ask how the paramedic thing went?” said Cam. He stroked his fingers through Mason’s hair.

“That? Oh, um, that went okay. I didn’t get as much flack as I expected, but then again I tried really hard to keep my mouth shut.”

Cam noticed several tiny downy feathers in Mason’s hair. “You get in a pillow fight? You’re wearing feathers.”

This drew a low chuckle from Mason. “It’s not really funny, because it involves a guy who got shot. But it was one of those ridiculous things you just can’t hardly believe while it’s happening.” Mason told Cam the tale of the victim with the down jacket.

After food, the two of them continued to sit on the sofa. The TV was on, and Cam was sort of halfway watching a rather lame action movie. Mason leaned against him, head on Cam’s shoulder. It was comfortable, and it felt like home. Mason’s head weighed heavier as his lover began to doze off. Cam eased him down, so Mason’s head lay on his lap, and let his hands rub gently across his lover’s shoulders.

As gunfire blazed and cars raced across the TV screen, Cam sat worrying about the man sleeping on his legs. Mason pushed himself so hard and this thing with the cancer patient was just tearing him up. It was an evil bad karma thought, but Cam hoped that it would be over soon. Watching Mason’s near constant self-torture regarding his inability to save the little boy was hard. Wasn’t there some prayer about changing the stuff you could and accepting the stuff you couldn’t? Mason could be bull headed about not wanting to accept some of those impossible things. How did you convince someone who already seemed to defy the laws of reality that they couldn’t save the world?

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Waking up with your face buried against your lover’s fly was disorienting. Funny but still slightly weird. Mason rolled his head back and blinked. He had fallen asleep with his head in Cam’s lap, while they watched TV. Okay, to be more correct, while *Cam* watched TV. There

was some infomercial thing playing now and Cam's head was tipped against the back of the sofa, his lover snoring slightly.

This was just the epitome of romance. Pizza, beer and falling asleep on the sofa, he thought wryly. Except he wasn't exactly wrong. It was coming home to someone who cared. Cam made sure that he ate, even if it wasn't the height of good nutrition, and got some rest, and listened to what he had done all day. If they had been a hetero couple, Mason was sure someone would have accused them of acting like they were married.

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For the next week, work and other responsibilities were so overwhelming, Cam and Mason barely saw each other.

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Tuesday's EMS shift began with three cardiac patients, and a child with an asthma attack. It was nothing life threatening, just time consuming, but Mason felt distracted and out of sorts without knowing why. There was a blissful gap of dead time for nearly three hours before traffic, stupidity and bad luck intervened. The call from the dispatcher said MVC with injuries, involving two vehicles and an entrapment. MVC translated to motor vehicle collision. The next portion of information then informed them that a police car was involved.

An ambulance, a zone car and a rescue truck were dispatched with a moderate amount of scrambling by the personnel. At the scene, Mason was impressed by the amount of damage. A small pickup truck lay on its side in the middle of the roadway. A police car was almost literally wrapped around a telephone pole. The entire front of the car scrunched around the post, light bar shattered, glass, parts and various debris flung out a dozen feet around the vehicle. One police officer was standing a few feet away from the wrecked car, hands shoved in his pockets, as another officer talked to him, a steadying hand on the man's shoulder.

The throaty grumble of the large rescue truck drew Mason's attention. People in turnout gear were examining the overturned pickup, trying to ascertain the best way to get the driver out.

"Hey Flynn, go talk to the cop. I see he's out of the car and up walking around. Make sure he's okay," ordered Raj. Mason noticed chocks and stabilizers being put under the edges of the pickup. A couple of the rescue guys were making some preliminary pries at the windshield area.

Mason walked toward the pair of policemen. "Hi, I'm Mason. Did you get out of the car by yourself?" he asked the one with the dusty uniform, and flecks of broken glass in his hair.

"Yeah. Well more or less. The door was kind of jammed and Justin helped me get it open," the officer answered. Mason looked at the name plate on his uniform. It said Donnelly. Looking past the two cops, Mason could see the limp remains of the airbag draped down over the steering wheel.

“Did you lose consciousness when you hit the pole?” Mason asked.

“I don’t think so. I just... I guess I was dazed for a minute,” Donnelly replied. “I called it in myself. Radioed for EMS and backup.”

“Considering just what a mess that car is, I think it would be a good idea for you to let me have a look at you,” suggested Mason. He gently took hold of Donnelly’s arm and guided him over toward the ambulance. There was something not quite right about the officer’s movements. He gestured for the man to sit on the bumper of the open back of the ambulance.

“Got a first name, Officer Donnelly?”

“Mark.”

Mason pulled out a penlight and checked the cop’s pupils. No obvious problems. “Anything hurt?”

“My wrist, just a little. I think I slammed it into the computer.” Mason unbuttoned the cuff of Mark’s uniform and examined his arm. There was the blue-purple shadow of a fresh bruise along the outside edge of his wrist. Mason also used the contact to drop his shields and do a hasty scan of the man with his Talent. There was something subtly wrong and Mason couldn’t quite figure out what without dropping his shields entirely, not something he really wanted to do on a street now full of police, EMS and fire department personnel.

“Can you wiggle your fingers?”

“Yeah.”

“Does it hurt?”

“Only a little, I don’t think I broke it or anything like that.”

Mason squatted down in front of the cop and checked his blood pressure. 150/90. A touch high but considering the accident had been about fifteen minutes ago, it wasn’t unreasonable. Mason mentally fished again. The guy was a little nervous and fidgety. Nothing surprising about that either. Mason stood up and gazed down at Donnelly, thinking about some discussions he had had with Peter about body language. The man’s shoulders were slightly hunched, curling him just slightly forward. How much was an unconscious reflex based on the crash and how much was indication that something hurt and Mark hadn’t noticed it yet?

Mason dropped to one knee and felt along the man’s chest and stomach. No help there. All those layers of Kevlar that made up the bullet-proof vest were a semi rigid obstruction to anything his fingers might notice. Oh. Corset effect. Mason suddenly realized that the inflexibility of the vest was probably preventing Donnelly from bending further.

“I need to get your vest off, okay? If anything I do hurts, tell me,” said Mason. He pulled the officer’s shirt loose at the waist and unbuttoned it. Donnelly shrugged out of the uniform shirt. He had a dark long sleeved T-shirt under his vest. The Velcro on the side of the vest made the characteristic tearing sound as Mason opened it. He continued, undoing the shoulder strap also before slipping it up over Mark’s head. Mason skimmed his hand carefully across the cop’s chest and stomach, pressing gently as he went. Mason knew what was coming before he got there. Crossing below the rib cage, Donnelly flinched.

“Ow,” he said flatly. Mason sensed the damage now, even with his psychic shielding still half active. Bruises to the liver, and some bleeding, probably not life threatening, but Mason would treat it with caution anyway. Damn, now he was going to have to justify why he “suspected” internal injuries.

“I think it would be a good idea to have you come lie down,” said Mason. “I’d like to see if you have any visible bruising.” Donnelly nodded and let Mason help him up into the back of ambulance. He lay down on the backboard that was on top of the stretcher and flinched again when Mason tugged the T-shirt loose and up to expose his belly. There were definitely the beginnings of discoloration beneath the skin.

“Guess I’m banged up a little worse than I thought,” said Donnelly.

“It might have been from the seat belt or maybe from the bottom edge of the steering wheel. I did point out that your car is seriously totaled,” replied Mason. Donnelly started to sit up, but Mason put a hand on his chest preventing him.

“You’re not going anywhere,” Mason said.

“So I’m going to be sore tomorrow. No big deal.”

“It could be more serious than that. You need an ultrasound at the hospital to check for internal bleeding.” Donnelly’s eyes widened a little. “It could be nothing,” Mason continued, trying not to spook his patient too badly. “But I’d rather play it safe.” Mason began to do up the straps to fasten Donnelly to the backboard. He needed to get an IV going fairly soon, too.

“I thought ultrasounds were for pregnant women...” the cop said uncertainly.

“They have a lot of uses. Checking blood flow and internal organs is just one more thing they get used for. Stay put, I need to check and see what’s going on with the driver of the pickup.” Mason walked to the back of the ambulance and jumped down so he could see what was going on with the extrication. Apparently things had gone pretty swiftly, and he could see the driver being carefully C-collared and strapped to another backboard. Mason crooked a finger at Raj and the senior paramedic walked over.

“What’s up?” asked Raj. Mason spent a moment explaining what he suspected. “Is he stable?” said Raj.

“Seems to be... You think I’m over-reacting.” Mason said as evenly as possibly. Okay, here’s where the whole ‘I’m a doctor and you’re not’ problem was going to get nasty, he thought.

“I didn’t say that. Overcautious is better than under. If the squad car wasn’t such a fucking disaster, I might say you were blowing it out of proportion. But standing here looking at it, it’s almost unbelievable to know that the guy got out and walked away under his own power. That said, it’s probably going to be a couple of minutes until we can leave.”

“Okay, I’ll get the IV going and keep a close eye on him.”

“I need to go see what’s going on with the other guy for a minute. Hang tight with your patient.” Raj hurried off back toward the second ambulance.

Mason climbed back into the ambulance where Donnelly was waiting. He was lying relatively still, not that he had a lot of choice, strapped down as he was, but his fingers were nervous fiddling with fabric of his slacks

“You doing okay?” asked Mason.

Donnelly gave him a slightly doubtful look. “I... um... I keep shaking,” he admitted.

“The whole adrenaline rush thing is wearing off. I’ll grab a blanket for you.” Mason took one out of the myriad of cabinets and, unfolding it, draped it over Mark’s legs and torso. “Are you in pain?” Mason sat on the bench next to the stretcher and took hold of his patient’s wrist under the auspices of checking his pulse. It was up a little. Mason could tell by touch that Mark was definitely less comfortable now than a few minutes ago.

“I’m fine.” That was a knee-jerk response, Mason decided.

“I’m going to start an IV on you. It’s a precaution. It might hurt a little,” said Mason. Mason glanced up toward Mark’s head as he started the IV. The man’s face had paled and his free hand had clenched against his leg. Mason grabbed the blood pressure cuff and used it. He knew Mark’s blood pressure had dropped a little, but he needed numbers to support his “theory.” 110/60. Not critically low, but lower than before. Mason laid a hand against Mark’s belly. Bleeding, slowly, but still bleeding. Mason went to the foot on the stretcher and lifted the backboard so he could wedge a blanket underneath. Tilting the backboard would help a little with hypovolemic shock.

“Tell me what you were doing when the guy hit you,” Mason suggested as he returned back toward the top of the stretcher. He needed to distract Mark a little while he did some light healing.

Donnelly started telling him about how he was just cruising through the area looking at registration stickers so he could tick off that he had written a ticket that day. Mason nodded and stopped actually listening. He sent a small flood of energy through his fingers and palm, slowing the bleeding, constricting a few blood vessels and boosting his patient’s pressure a little. Once

again he was fighting the connection his Talent wanted to make. This one was harder than the gunshot victim from last week. Donnelly was awake and talking and it was just the two of them in the back of the ambulance right at that moment. Yeah, avoiding the connection was harder.

Raj poked his head in. "Everything okay?"

"Fair. We should go." Mason replied. Raj climbed into the driver's seat and they pulled away. The driver of the other vehicle had already been loaded into a second ambulance and transported.

\*\*\*

Six p.m. and it was the end of shift. Mason was tired, hungry and trying to decide what he was going to put in his report back to Peter. He might swing by Beach General and check on the cop from earlier in the day. Mason had privileges at that hospital, despite the fact he preferred to use Norfolk for his own surgeries. His cell phone vibrated against his hip and he pulled it off. The screen indicated it was his office.

"Flynn," he answered the phone.

"Hey Mason, it's Tyra."

"What's up?"

"I was about to walk out the door. The hospice unit called." Mason's heart sank. He knew what was coming next. "Jason Ambers died a couple of hours ago." Mason was silent long enough that Tyra asked, "You still there?"

"Yeah. I am. Thanks for calling me."

"I'm sorry. I know you did everything you could."

"Mmm ... yeah."

"If you want somebody to dump on..." she offered.

"I'll be fine." He hung up and sat on the hood of his car, staring at the ground. Knowing that it was coming didn't make it any easier. He thought about something Peter had said to him, well, actually screamed at him. If he had been there with Jason, could he have *not* followed the child across that metaphoric veil to whatever waited beyond? Jesus, he didn't have an answer for that.

"Hey Mas', you look like somebody killed your dog," said a familiar voice. Mason looked up to see Raj walking toward his own car in the parking lot behind the station.

"One of my patients died," said Mason.

"Oh, fuck. I'm sorry. Open mouth insert foot."



“Four year old, he had osteosarcoma. He’s been in the hospice unit for a couple of weeks.” Mason stared at his hands for a moment before looking back up at Raj.

“Sounds rough...”

“Yeah.”

“This might lift your spirits a little. The cop from this afternoon, you were apparently spot on about the internal injuries. I was talking to one of the second shift cops. He said they were planning on keeping Donnelly overnight in ICU. He had a bleed in his liver. Not serious enough for surgery probably, but bad enough.”

“I’m glad something went right today.”

“Wanna go grab some dinner?”

“No. I... really need to head home.”

“See you next week.”

\*\*\*

The garage light was on, Cam noticed when he got to Mason’s house. Somehow that just didn’t seem to bode well. He let himself in and cut through the kitchen to the door that led out into the garage. Mason was doing his woodworking thing. Cam suspected it was as close to a form of therapy as the healer would allow himself to get. The scritch sound of sandpaper was the only noise in the room.

“Talk to me,” said Cam. Mason glanced up at him. Cam could sense his lover’s churning painful emotions.

“Jason died,” Mason said.

Cam heaved a sigh, he had suspected it might be something like that. He knelt down beside where his lover sat on a stool and laid a hand on Mason’s leg.

“I’m sorry.”

Mason merely nodded.

Oh, it was going to be one of those days when Cam had to work at it, to get his lover to unwind at all. “Come on, no more sawdust. Get up.”

“Cam...” Mason protested weakly as Cam hauled him to his feet.

“We’re going down to the school parking lot and getting you back on my bike. It’s not gonna be dark for another half hour or so,” said Cam. He felt like he was pleading, but then realized his tone probably sounded more like an order. Mason stood immobile for a long moment. Cam gave him a push in the direction of the door.

\*\*\*

In the parking lot of the elementary school where he had wrecked Cam’s bike several weeks before, Mason pulled on his helmet. He wasn’t sure why he was letting Cam coerce him into this again.

“Let out the clutch slow and give it just a little gas,” said Cam, standing off to one side.

Mason managed to stall it three times in row. God, he just so absolutely sucked at this.

“Okay, stop, get off. I have an idea,” said Cam.

Mason put down the kick stand and got off. “Maybe this is a bad idea.”

“Chill. Get on behind me, but don’t put your arms around me. Just snug up tight and put your hands around mine. Drop your shields,” said Cam.

“And the purpose of this is?” Mason asked. It somehow seemed reminiscent of some of the early psi exercises he had done with Peter.

“Mimic me. I think it’ll help,” Cam replied. Mason swung a leg over and slid forward until his chest was pressed against Cam’s back. He stretched his arms out and loosely clasped his hands over top of his partner’s. Cam thumbed the starter. Mason blew out a breath and let his psi shielding fall open. He could feel the concerned brush of Cam’s mind against his. Cam turned his hand palm up and threaded his fingers through those of Mason’s right hand, giving it a gentle squeeze.

“Pay attention.” Cam leaned his head back to bang his own helmet very lightly against Mason’s. “Release slowly with your left, roll the throttle just a little with your right,” shouted Cam over the sound of the engine. The bike eased forward into a gentle roll. Then Cam stopped the bike and set it rolling twice more. Mason had to admit, feeling the motion of the flexors and extensors along with Cam’s intention made a certain amount of sense. “Let me off, and you try.”

Alone on the motorcycle, Mason glanced at Cam. He knew damn well this was a distraction maneuver as much as any desire to get him riding again. And yet, maybe Cam had a point. Mason managed to get the bike moving this time without stalling and took it on a slightly wobbly circuit around the parking lot, heart pounding and palms sweating inside his gloves. He kept flashing back to the sudden jarring thud and impact with the pavement from before. On the other hand, he had actually gotten back on the motorcycle again and driven it around the parking lot. He braked to a jerky stop near Cam, toeing it into neutral.

“Can I have my nervous breakdown now?” Mason said.

Cam grinned at him. “See, it helped.”

“Yeah, I guess it did.”

“Now, drive back to your house. I’ll walk.”

“You’re assuming I’m not going to have a wreck this time.”

“Yep.”

“My, you’re a trusting soul,” replied Mason.

“You’d better live up to that trust, ‘cause I don’t want to see you bleeding again.”

Cam gave him a thumbs up sign, and Mason put it in gear. He drove out of the parking lot and the few blocks up the street, parking it in his driveway. As he peeled off his gloves and took off his helmet, Cam came walking across the yard.

“You did fine,” said Cam.

“Uh-huh, I think I clenched my stomach muscles so hard, it feels like I just did fifty sit-ups.”

“Lot of people do that in the beginning. Don’t put your helmet away. I’m hungry. Let’s go down to boardwalk and find someplace to eat. Or did you eat already when you got done with the EMS thing?” Cam asked. Mason guiltily hung his head. “Mason... I just so need to kick your ass. What is it with you and the not bothering to eat thing lately!?”

Mason heaved a sigh. It wasn’t intentional, it wasn’t even a conscious thing. “I meant to go grab some food as soon as I got off shift. And then Tyra called to tell me about Jason and... I forgot,” Mason finished.

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It was just so tempting to haul off and smack that man, Cam cursed internally. “Did you heal anybody today?” he demanded of Mason

“Yeah, a little.”

“Ergo, you need to eat!” snapped Cam. Mason stood silently, staring at the ground. He didn’t appear to have a better excuse or a sarcastic comeback either. Cam set his helmet on the ground and took hold of Mason by both shoulders. “I worry. You’re not taking care of yourself... Mason, I can’t stand to lose you. Do you know you’re the first person in my life I’ve ever actually worried about? I love you. The whole concept of you being hurt or sick or in danger, basically scares the shit out me!” He wrapped both arms around Mason and held him tight, pulling his

lover's head down against his shoulder. "Come on, let's get you fed. And I want to hear exactly what you did with the EMS people today."

\*\*\*

Lying in bed with Cam's body spooned tightly up against his back, Mason let his thumb rub along his lover's wrist, trying to lull himself into sleep with the beat of Cam's heart. All through dinner, Cam had pried the details of the day out of him, and vehemently reassured him that his Talent had helped make sure the police officer from the accident made it through. Logically, Mason knew it was true, and the fact that he had limited the use of his healing Talent to approximately the minimum necessary would make Peter happy. So why did he feel like he was slowly coming unglued? How could things be going so close to right in his relationship with Cam and in his career and this new set of responsibilities with Division P... and this child's death be just tearing him inside out?

"It's okay to cry," whispered Cam in the darkness.

Mason could feel the soft comforting brush of Cam's mind against his own. He threaded his fingers through Cam's and hugged his lover's hand to his chest. "I'm okay."

"Liar."

\*\*\*

The temperature of the air was almost freezing and the sky was heavily overcast the day of Jason Amber's funeral. Mason stood a ways back from the graveside behind a cluster of people. The pastor was saying something that was probably profound and meant to be comforting, but Mason wasn't actually listening. He was watching the parents and trying very hard to ignore the heavy grief of the people around him. Jason's parents were still and composed. They had had a few weeks to come to some kind of terms with their son's death, some days in which to say goodbye. It couldn't have been easy, but in a twisted way Mason supposed perhaps it was gentler than a sudden and violent death.

As the brief graveside part of the service ended, people began to move away. Mason had an overwhelming urge to turn and run, or maybe that was just disintegrate, instead he stood motionless, frozen. There was a hard knot of anguish on his chest. It was over. There was nothing he could have done to save Jason's young life. He'd tried, tried everything he could think of and failed. This was why doctors were supposed to stay detached, because the alternatives were just too damn devastating. Tears would have been a welcome release but Mason's body refused to cooperate. Finally he managed to force himself to turn and walk away.

It probably ranked as some small miracle that Mason made it home without incident, because he had absolutely no memory of the drive. Cemetery. Home. Whatever occurred in between was a blank. He let himself into the silence of his house and methodically stripped out of his suit. He grabbed Under Armor leggings and a turtleneck out of a drawer and viciously yanked them on,

followed by sneakers and a hoodie. In another couple of minutes, he was back out the door and crossing the road to the beach side of the street.

He ran. Oblivious to the cold and escalating wind, he ran. When the rain began to fall, he ignored it. He ran until his lungs burned and his muscles ached. He ran because if he stopped he was going to fall completely apart. When Mason reached Rudee Inlet at the far end of the beach he turned around and headed back. There were nearly five miles between here and home.

When his foot hit an unusually uneven dip in the sand, he stumbled and fell, skidding across damp sand. Shit. Mason dragged himself back to his feet and kept on. His fingers were going numb and the rain was slowly drenching him in icy misery. It was a welcome torture because it was physical and he could force himself to cope with that kind of pain and win. It was something he could control.

Ten brutal miles. Mason was exhausted, soaked, and half frozen. He staggered into his den and sank into a chair to drag off his sneakers. His sole focus was a hot shower and bed. It didn't matter that it was only three thirty in the afternoon.

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The last hour of the day dragged on into an eternity as Cam's eyes kept straying to his watch. He knew that Mason had gone to Jason Ambers' funeral in the afternoon. Cam kept expecting a phone call or at least a text message. Nothing. That worried him. Mason's grief over the death of the child had weighed heavily on the healer during the past few days, and Cam hoped the funeral would bring some form of closure to his lover. Funerals were never for the dead; they were all about the people left behind.

Cold drizzling rain blew hard against the visor of Cam's helmet. He'd left work as soon as was feasible and headed straight in the direction of Mason's place. As nasty as the weather had turned, Cam wondered, not for the first time, if he really ought to consider buying a car, too. As much time as he spent riding between the base and the oceanfront, it was only going to get colder as winter set in. And if he did that, maybe he should just move in with Mason. That thought brought a chill that almost competed with the rain that slashed against his foul weather gear.

He'd had a roommate before. Many single Naval Officers had roommates. That part would draw little attention, but there was the ever present fear that someone would figure out that his relationship with Mason was far deeper than just two buddies sharing living space. He loved Mason, more than he had ever loved anyone. Did he love Mason enough to risk his career that much? They talked about the issue a little, now and then. There was no easy solution.

Cam parked the motorcycle beside the Mustang and let himself into the house, ditching his dripping rain gear in the kitchen. The house was unusually quiet and Cam let his talent lead him in the direction of the bedroom.

The room was dimly lit as the October evening darkness was settling in. Mason was curled beneath the blankets on the bed, knees flexed and head bowed forward, arms tucked in to his

chest. A sharp flicker of worry clenched Cam's hands. Was Mason sick? He'd been pushing himself so very hard.

Cam sat down on the edge of the bed and stroked his fingers lightly through the hair along Mason's temple. Mason opened his eyes slowly, blinked and squinted up at Cam.

"You okay?" asked Cam. "You're not usually in bed at five o'clock."

Mason heaved a slow sigh. "I'm fine. Just... I went running, up to Rudee Inlet and back and I got rained on and half frozen and really beat... I sound like an idiot..." Mason's voice trailed off.

"Rudee Inlet and back... That's close to ten miles Mas'. And it's something like thirty eight degrees *and* raining. Are you trying to give yourself pneumonia?" snapped Cam, then promptly regretted it when he saw Mason flinch. Cam mentally kicked himself. What his lover really needed was comfort, not a reprimand. Cam knew exactly why Mason had gone running in the freezing fucking cold and wet, but that actually didn't make it any less stupid. "Yeah, you do sound like a fucking idiot. I know you're grieving, but you did everything you possibly could. Every week, there are other people who you save. Buchner in Philadelphia, the guy with the exploding down coat, the cop in the car accident, all people who quite possibly wouldn't have made it if not for you! Start counting the successes for a change. I want to come home and have you tell me what an awesome magnificent job you did and how many lives you saved."

Mason gave him a funny, uncertain look. "You said come home..."

"Yeah, I did. My quarters on base are a place to stow my stuff, this is home. Home is where you are, and I need to fix the part where I spend way too many nights sleeping somewhere else. If you're up for it, I'd like to move in with you," said Cam.

The slow smile that curved Mason's lips was a bit like watching the sun rise, as it lit up his face. "I wasn't sure you'd ever..." Mason said quietly.

"I know. I worry about the Navy thing a lot, but I think I need to push my boundaries a little. You're worth the risk." Cam pulled Mason into a kiss. It was escalating toward something more intense when Mason's cell phone rang.

Mason gave a small growl at the interruption.

"Flynn... Oh, hey... I guess I could be... God, yeah, okay. I'll stay by the phone." When Mason hung up, Cam gave him a questioning look. "That was Peter. One of Division P's people got injured in Caracas. He's being airlifted to Pensacola. Peter's trying to get details on just how bad it is, but I might get sent down there to well... do my thing."

"You might get to save another life," said Cam. He pulled Mason back into the kiss.

Seeking Balance 3: Clutching

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