

Rating:	Explicit
Archive Warning:	Graphic Depictions Of Violence
Category:	F/M , M/M
Fandom:	Supernatural RPF
Relationship:	Jensen Ackles/Misha Collins , Jared Padalecki/Felicia Day (briefly) , Jared Padalecki/Kim Rhodes (briefly off screen)
Character:	Jensen Ackles , Misha Collins , Jared Padalecki , Genevieve Padalecki , Jim Beaver , Ty Olsson , Felicia Day , Kim Rhodes
Additional Tags:	Cockles , Alternative Universe - FBI , Alternate Universe - Police , FBI Agent Jensen , Police Officer Misha , Serial Killers , Warning: Mild Breathplay
Series:	Part 1 of The SPN RPFiles
Collections:	DCBB 2013
Stats:	Published: 2013-10-03 Chapters: 10/10 Words: 138649

Angel Slayer

by [emwebb17](#)

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or there is something else that really needs an explanation, let me know and I will add it in.

3. I'm not sure what the exact plot:sex ratio is, but this is very plot heavy—just in case

anybody was wondering.

4. As a preemptive response: No, I do not work for the FBI, but I may or may not know

someone who may or may not know a little bit more about it than the average Joe. Or

Hollywood producer.

This was written for the Dean/Cas Big Bang 2013. Please check out all the other amazing

entries [here](#).

Huge thank you to [Pamela](#) for being my awesome beta. Any and all errors are my own as learning how to type in America a long time ago has apparently left me with an antiquated

style I just can't let go.

Super cool art is by Chef Geekier and can be found [here](#)!

Akael

Monday, September 16, 2013

Jensen opened his eyes.

Across the room he saw that the IKEA dresser definitely did slant a little to the left. He moved

his eyes to his bedside table. His alarm clock glowed a green 5:29 back at him. There was the

barely audible click of the device turning on and the radio played a slow beat rock song softly.

The morning radio host wouldn't be on for another twenty minutes with his braying hyena-donkey

hybrid laugh. He moved his eyes back to the dresser.

Why hadn't he been able to see that it was slanted before now? She'd kept telling him it was.

Why had he argued with her about it? Why had he picked on her packrat tendencies? Why had

he not liked her cooking? Why had he asked her to move in with him after only six months? It

had been too soon. Way too soon. And yet, the six months since she moved out had felt like an

eternity. Was that because he really missed her? Or did he just miss the pretty decent, fairly

regular sex? He felt like six months shouldn't seem like a long time to go without sex, but he

hadn't had this kind of dry spell since—fuck, since before he lost his virginity. He might have

considered himself a slut if it weren't for the fact that he'd realized a long time ago he didn't have

one night stands but one year stands. He'd date people for prolonged periods, but never tried or

even wanted to develop close relationships with any of them. So why had he tried with her?

The radio switched to a hard, driving Red Hot Chili Peppers song and Jensen rolled onto his

back. He was not going to have another one of those maudlin self-reflection mornings. He

realized the only reason he was tempted to was because of the phone call from his parents last

night. His brothers were all happily married with children (his little sister was exempt since she

was only twenty-four though their mother worried about her too), but apparently being thirty-two

and having nothing to show for it except a successful career that he enjoyed and was damn good

at was not enough to make him *really* happy. Only a spouse and children could give a person

complete fulfillment in life. Jensen frowned. He wondered how many more centuries it would

take before that bullshit philosophy was completely debunked. Well, that took care of the "What

am I doing with my life?" portion of the day.

Jensen sought solace in his routine. Routine was his very best friend in the whole wide world.

Coffee, brush teeth, shower, get dressed, clip handcuffs in holder to belt, check safety on service

weapon, holster gun, holster Blackberry, recheck safety on weapon, re-holster gun, put

credentials in left suit jacket pocket, put lanyard with work badge around neck, pour leftover

coffee into travel mug, lock door, unlock door, retrieve gym bag since he had brought it home

over the weekend to wash his smelly gym clothes, lock door, go to parking garage, go back

upstairs, unlock door, check already turned off coffee machine, lock door, check that door is

locked, back to parking garage, bang head on roof of car as realize forgot car keys upstairs.

If only he could say that this was just one of "those" days—this was every fucking day.

Jensen made the turn onto 3rd Street to access the garage on the backside of the Washington

Field Office building. He smiled at the guards and waved his badge in front of the scanner to

activate the barrier in front of the ramp to drop. He drove slowly down the

ramp and around the

sharp, blind corners having to go to the third level before finding a parking space that wouldn't

require double parking. He still left the doors unlocked and the keys on the dash just in case.

By the time he was on the elevator on his way to the fourth floor, he'd mostly forgotten about the

crappy start to his morning and was running down a mental list of the cases he needed to do

progress checks on. He also needed to make a final attempt to contact a source that had been

reluctant as of late to continue his duties.

The elevator stopped on the ground floor to pick up a rather bedraggled looking woman who

was struggling to keep her hands on her badge, her bag, her coffee cup, and her dripping

umbrella. The metro was only a short walk from the building, but if the rain was heavy enough it

could seem like a much longer one, especially if one was wearing heels. The woman shuffled

onto the elevator and cursed quietly as her coffee sloshed out of the broken plastic lid and onto

her shirt. Jensen tried to stand as inconspicuously as possible in the back corner of the elevator

and the woman punched the button for the seventh floor like it had murdered her entire family.

She was probably an analyst and since only agents were allowed to park in the garage, that left

poor creatures like her to juggle their possessions on the metro and combat the weather

conditions with what looked like a very small, mostly bent out of shape purple polka dotted

umbrella—and then keep the ungainly armfuls out of the way as she had to badge through three

sets of doors. She didn't look like she was enjoying her morning exercises.

The elevator stopped on the fourth floor and Jensen scooted off quickly so as not to hold up the

woman any longer on her harrowing journey to her desk. He took the exit out of the elevator

bank to his left and walked past the cubicles of the other criminal squads before reaching the

back corner where CR-2 made their home. He was the first to arrive and the overhead lights

flickered on when the motion detectors picked him up. He set his gym bag on the floor next to

his chair and bent over his desk to jiggle the mouse on his computer to wake it up. As he was

typing in his password a chair rolled into his space and a voice said, "Morning, Jensen!"

"Jesus Christ!"

Jensen started violently, his finger hitting the enter key too early and the computer beeped at him

that he entered the wrong password. Jensen turned around and saw the newest agent on their

squad grinning at him.

"Jared," Jensen said calmly. "Where the fuck did you come from?"

"I just got back from the gym."

Jensen noticed his wet hair for the first time. He probably should have noticed it earlier; it made

it look longer than it was when it was dry—which was already on the longish side considering

he was an agent, but appearance rules were rarely enforced. Jensen glanced at his watch: 6:51.

"What time did you get here this morning?"

Jared shrugged a shoulder. "Five-thirty."

Jensen blinked at him. "You know, fit time is built into our work schedules. You don't have to

work out before or after hours."

"I know. And sometimes I do that too."

Jensen made a disgusted face and tuned back to try his password again. Even wearing a suit it

was pretty obvious that Jared was built like every clichéd comparison to Greek gods that

existed. And Jensen had seen him out of that suit and in his gym clothes—sweaty and extra toned

from his workout. If he didn't have such a puppy-like personality Jensen

might have been

tempted to do something about it, but as it was the kid was just too much like a little brother. He

was only four years younger, but he'd been in the Bureau for two years compared to Jensen's nine

and that just made him seem like he was much younger. Plus Jared had only transferred to CR-2

from the Cyber Division three months ago. He was a total noob, not completely jaded yet, and

still eager to please his seniors. Fortunately his intelligence wasn't limited to all things technical

and Jensen was already impressed with his sharp intuition.

Jensen was so wrapped up in his warring inappropriate thoughts about someone he viewed more

like a brother than a potential hook-up and typed in his old password. The computer beeped at

him.

"Fuck."

One more try and he'd be locked out and have to call stupid computer services to reset his

password.

"So, Jensen—"

"Hush, hush, hush," Jensen murmured and concentrated on his password. Finally his desktop

began to load. He turned back to Jared who was waiting patiently and not at all offended at

being shushed. "Yes?"

"I've got requalification coming up next month, so I was wondering if you'd want to go to the

range with me sometime this week."

Jensen took a moment to think about his completely open social calendar.

"Yeah, I could do

that. I'm free this weekend."

Jared grinned. "Great. Oh, yeah. After you left on Friday, we got an e-mail about the DNI

briefing that's coming up—apparently it's our squad's turn or something. And the deadline for

the threat assessment reports got pushed up a week."

Jensen frowned at Jared with all the displeasure he could muster. Not because he knew he was going to get stuck with preparing the briefing. And not because the IAs on his squad were going

to kick his ass later if he didn't get them the info they needed to complete their reports on time.

He frowned because this little shit had left after him on Friday and still showed up before him on

Monday.

"Jared, you need a girlfriend."

Jared laughed. "Don't I know it, man. You know anyone you could set me up with?"

Jensen crossed his arms and looked up as he went through the list of females he knew. He was

halfway through his never-slept-with-acquaintances when Jared cleared his throat.

"Is it really that in depth of a decision?"

"Yes. I know a lot of people. What are you looking for? Date material or a hook-up?"

"At this point? Either."

Jensen harrumphed and narrowed his eyes. "So, you're saying I shouldn't set you up with my

sister?"

"Definitely not. Not that I would treat her poorly or disrespect her, but no way am I dating a

colleague's sister. Let alone yours."

"What's that supposed to mean?"

"I've heard the rumors, Jensen."

"What rumor—" Jensen scoffed in annoyance. "I swear, you punch—are *rumored* to have punched—one SSA for ogling your baby sister and all of sudden you have a reputation as an

overprotective big brother."

Jared laughed and used his feet to twist his chair back and forth. "Mm-hmm. Is that the reason

you transferred to counterintelligence?"

Jensen's growing good mood dissipated just like that. He kept his smile in

place though.

"No. I just transferred because I'd been in criminal for three years and thought I needed a

change."

"What made you decide to come back?"

Jensen laughed softly. "Do you have any idea of how unsatisfying counterintelligence is? You

can't arrest anybody. Most of your time is spent trying to figure out their little cat and mouse

games and who're they're playing them with. At most you get a PNG, but then that country just

PNG's one of our own in retaliation. I like criminal because I like getting the bad guys and

making them go to jail."

"You didn't want to do counterterrorism?"

Jensen shrugged. "There weren't any openings when I decided to transfer out a couple years

ago. I also prefer criminal to counterterrorism. Is that where you wanted to go?"

"Honestly I just took the first opening there was. Turns out I can't compartmentalize as well as I thought."

Jensen nodded sympathetically recalling which squad specifically Jared had come from.

"Well," Jared said, "I'll let you get caught up on your e-mails. Don't forget we've got a squad meeting at ten."

Jensen made a face. "Who schedules squad meetings for Mondays?"

"I do, Ackles," his SSA griped as he walked past him.

"Morning, Bob."

"Hnn."

Their SSA disappeared behind his cubicle wall and Jared and Jensen grinned at each other.

"Whoops," Jensen mouthed silently.

Jared laughed and rolled his chair back to his own space.

"It is too early for giggling, ladies!" Bob snapped from his corner of grumpiness.

Jensen heard Jared's matching sniggering as he dropped his head to his desk to muffle his own

laughs. He kept a hand over his mouth as he clicked on the Outlook icon in the Taskbar to access

his e-mail. While that loaded he pushed the button on the switch that connected his monitor to

both his classified and unclassified computers. The monitor flashed to the username prompt for

the unclassified computer and Jensen entered his password. While that one loaded he shrugged

off his suit jacket and hung it on the hanger he kept hooked on his cubicle wall.

The next three hours passed by quietly. His other squad members greeted him as they trickled in

and Jensen worked on an EC he had promised their analyst, Osric, would be finished last

Wednesday. He hadn't received any e-mails from his source, again, and he was about to

compose one to him when Jared tapped his shoulder.

"It's ten," he said.

"Oh, crap," Jensen muttered as he checked the time and then locked his computer. He stood up

and grinned at Jared. "You're like my very own OST, you know?"

"More like his secretary," Brad giggled as he passed them on his way to the conference room.

"That is an OST," Jared called after him in confusion.

"Shhh!" Jensen shushed him quickly and glanced around, making sure Loretta, CR-2's OST

wasn't around. "Technically, yes, OST's are secretaries, but some object to that particular

moniker. And if you ever want your ECs and mail to not get lost, I suggest you never mention

that to Loretta, okay?"

Jared nodded, wide-eyed. He'd already been subjected to one of Loretta's verbal ribbings his

first week on the squad and he was not eager for a repeat performance. Jensen patted him on the

back in solidarity and picked up a notebook and pen to take to the squad meeting. They hadn't

taken two steps when they saw SAC Kripke walking toward them. They both smiled and nodded

in greeting, and only took two more steps before they realized the SAC was actually heading

toward them. They stopped in their tracks and waited for Eric to get to them.

"Good morning, Jensen."

"Eric," Jensen replied with a genuine smile. Eric was one of the few executive level managers who wasn't a total dick. "Have you met Jared Padalecki? He just transferred to criminal from

cyber about three months ago."

Eric and Jared shook hands.

"Yes, the name is familiar. I'm sorry I haven't had the chance to get around to having those one

on squad meetings I keep claiming I'm going to do."

Jensen shrugged. "SACs are busy."

Eric repressed a grimace. "More than I realized actually."

Jensen smiled and looked at Jared who was standing almost at attention. He was so cute

sometimes.

"Eric was my SSA when I first started working at the Bureau," he explained, hoping to convey to Jared that this meeting didn't need to be so formal.

"I still remember the first time I met you," Eric laughed. "I was genuinely wondering if the Bureau had changed its age requirements for special agents. I thought there was no way this kid

was twenty-three."

Jensen's lips twitched down. "I was almost twenty-four."

Eric laughed and patted him on the shoulder. "I know, but you didn't look it. Seriously, Jared, is it? You should see some pictures of him back then. Total baby face."

Jared bit his lip to keep his smile in check, but his eyes were lit up like Christmas trees.

"Okay, thanks, Eric," Jensen grumbled. "Just don't be surprised when you're notified about an OPR complaint."

Eric just laughed at that empty threat. "You know, I'm still curious why you're not an ASAC yet.

Or at least an SSA."

Jensen shifted his weight uncomfortably and cleared his throat. "Well, after I switched to

counterintelligence, I just kept my head down for a few years. And I need to put the time in

again now that I'm back in criminal. I'm probably not cut out for a supervisory role anyway."

"You are," Eric said assuredly, but he had also sobered considerably.

There was a moment of uneasy tension in the air. Jensen saw Jared take a breath as if to speak,

but then decided to remain quiet.

"Actually, that's why I've come to see you today," Eric finally said.

Jensen raised his eyebrows. "About my lack of ambition?"

Eric smiled wryly. "No, not that. About what maybe caused your lack of ambition."

Jensen swallowed and slowly curled his fingers up into his palms.

"What—" Jensen couldn't think of the rest of the question he wanted to ask, so just left it at that.

"I received some information regarding a mutilated body found in Elton, New Hampshire."

"New Hampshire? Why would that come to the attention of WFO? Shouldn't—who handles

New Hampshire?"

"Boston."

"Shouldn't the Boston field office be handling it?"

Eric nodded. "They are sending a couple of agents from the Portsmouth RA to help out the local

PD. It came to my attention because I've got a request for certain leads to be brought to my

attention. Specifically, unique details regarding murder cases."

Jensen swallowed again. "What kind of details?"

"Well, this body in Elton was found in a coffin." Jensen felt a chill begin to settle on his skin.

"The victim had been tortured and mutilated, both pre- and post-mortem." Jensen felt pain and only belatedly realized he was clenching his fists so hard his hands were shaking. "There was a

word carved onto her chest: a word that looked like the name of an angel. A pretty obscure

name though. They haven't figured out its significance yet." Jensen was actually feeling ill from the spread of cold dread that clashed with the wave of hot anticipation building in his gut.

"What was her crime?" he asked hoarsely.

"That we don't have," Eric said, holding Jensen's gaze steadily. "They didn't report it. So, maybe they didn't find it. Maybe it's a copycat who doesn't know." Eric shrugged. "Maybe it's a coincidence."

"It's not a coincidence," Jensen said with more force than he meant to.

"I don't think it is either. I thought you'd want to know about it. And I thought you wouldn't mind that I told the Portsmouth RA to be expecting you to come up to help with the investigation."

Jensen let out a rush of air he hadn't realized he'd been holding.

"Yes. I mean, no. I don't mind. Thank you, Eric, really. I'll be on a plane this afternoon."

Jensen turned to walk back to his desk, but Eric called him back.

"Settle down, Jensen. I understand how important this is to you, but the case is under federal

jurisdiction. We've got a claim on it and the body isn't going anywhere. You've got a travel

voucher to fill out and cases to brief to others to take over while you're gone. You can fly out

first thing in the morning."

"But—"

"Ackles! Paladecki!"

All three men jumped at the loud, irate shout from the man leaning out of the

door of the

conference room. "What's the hold up?"

When Bob saw their SAC he immediately switched to a neutral face and approached the group.

"Sir, good morning."

"Good morning, Bob," Eric said pleasantly. "I'm sorry for holding up your agents, but I'm afraid I'm going to have to co-opt your best agent for an indefinite amount of time. We've got an

emergency TDY to New Hampshire that Jensen personally needs to attend to."

Bob raised his eyebrows but only said, "If that's where he is needed then that's where he'll go.

Will he have back up?"

"Of course, the Boston field office is cooperating with our efforts."

Bob looked at Jensen. "Is this—about that case?"

Jensen nodded minutely.

"But how—"

"We're not sure yet," Eric answered. "It may not be him. That's why we're sending Jensen."

"Do they know this was our case first?"

"They're aware of the circumstances surrounding the request for Jensen's presence."

Bob frowned. "I don't want Jensen sidelined on this."

Jensen tried to keep his eyebrow from quirking too much in surprise. Bob was a good enough

guy, but he never would have pegged him for being so defensive of his agents.

"I think they'll welcome his insight on this particular case."

"Maybe it would be better to send someone else with him. Someone else acquainted with the case."

"Mitch is retired," Jensen said softly. "Whitfield is an ASAC now. Brown is an SSA in

Houston. And no one else knew the details. Not like we did."

"Jensen is very capable," Eric assured Bob, and maybe Jensen too. "Besides, this case could go on for quite some time; I don't know if we can spare two senior agents or keep an ASAC away

from his duties for an indefinite amount of time."

Bob frowned harder. "I still don't like sending him alone. Not that I don't think he can't handle it, but it would be better to have a greater WFO presence so he won't be pushed aside."

Jensen opened his mouth to tell Bob he would be fine alone when Bob's eyes snapped to Jared

like he'd just realized he was there.

"Padasnicki."

"Yes, sir?"

"How would you like to go on a TDY to exotic New Hampshire?"

Jared's jaw dropped for a moment and then he nodded. "Yes, of course, I'd love to help Jensen

with..." he trailed off as he realized he had no idea what case the other three were talking about.

"Great. It's settled. Not sure if this is a good case to break you in on, but I've always found the deep end is the best place to learn how to swim."

Jared gulped nervously.

"Jensen," Eric drew his attention. "Weekly updates, even if there's nothing to report."

"Yes, sir."

"And make sure your travel voucher is turned in before you leave, okay?"

"Will do."

Eric shook hands with all of them and took his leave. Bob's face soured when he was gone.

"All right. I guess you're leaving tomorrow? You can start making arrangements after the squad

meeting." Jensen started to protest but Bob cut him off. "You need to hand your cases off, so it's best to do it while we're all together and can figure out who can work on what."

Jensen conceded and the three of them walked to the conference room, but his mind was five

hundred miles and eight years away.

Tuesday, September 17, 2013

Jared strummed his fingers on the desk of the Enterprise car rental counter and glanced back

where Jensen stood by the sliding glass doors, fidgeting with the clasp on his expensive looking

watch. Of course it could have been a knockoff from Chinatown for all Jared knew about brand

name jewelry. He thought his Fossil watch was pretty fancy himself. He studied its slightly

scratched face since he didn't have much of anything else to think about.

Yesterday had gone by faster than he could have imagined, mainly because trying to book travel

arrangements to small towns while still staying within the government's requirements regarding

lodging per diems and which airlines happened to be acceptable on any given day ate up four

hours easily. And Jensen had left early using some comp time he had leftover from the last

wiretap he worked helping out another squad. So, the most Jared had learned about the case

was that it involved three unsolved murders that took place in the DC area back in the

spring/summer of 2005 and that the murder in Elton had too many similarities to the cold case to

be mere coincidence. They were either looking at a copycat or the killer that had eluded capture

eight years ago. But that's all he knew. He had no details or any knowledge of exactly what

Jensen's involvement in the case had been. It seemed unlikely he had been

lead on the case since

from the timing he wouldn't have even finished his one year probationary period as a new agent

when the first murder happened. And Jared had had no chance today to ask more about it as the

public venue of an airport was not the appropriate place for an in depth discussion regarding,

from what little he'd heard, a very gruesome case. Plus he and Jensen had been seated four rows

apart on the plane.

The flight had been uneventful and they'd both brought only hanging garment bags and a small

backpack as luggage so they wouldn't have to check any bags. Jared had left Jensen behind when

he went to check in for the rental car because Jensen had been grumbling non-stop about not

being able to fly to a closer airport the moment they'd landed at Logan. Jared didn't want

someone being grumpy to ruin their possible chance at getting a free upgrade on their car; the

government only let them go as high as intermediate size. Neither he nor Jensen were

intermediate sized.

Unfortunately most of their fleet was booked for that weekend (or so they claimed) and Jared was handed the paperwork for a Hyundai Accent. He grimaced, already feeling sorry for his

legs, and walked over to Jensen.

"We set?" Jensen asked and walked out through the doors without waiting for an answer.

They traded their paperwork for a set of keys and Jensen loaded their luggage into the trunk

while Jared went over the exterior inspection with the agent. At last they were on their way,

trying their best to navigate the streets of Boston and figure out how to use the GPS device they'd

paid an extra twelve dollars a day for.

"This is ridiculous," Jensen griped as they had to make a trip around a second traffic circle to the fourth main road they had to take before getting to I-95.

"They should have let us fly somewhere

closer than this. If not Laconia than at least Portsmouth. I mean, it's a freaking international

airport. How is that not big enough to accommodate government approved carriers?"

Jared assumed the question was rhetorical, but answered him anyway. "It's not that far of a

drive, actually. Only a couple of hours. And we could use the time."

"To do what?" Jensen groused.

"Well, you could fill me in on this case for one thing. I'd like to show up and have some inkling

of what's going on."

When Jensen didn't answer Jared glanced at him. He was leaning an arm on

the door's armrest

and gnawing on his lower lip with a scowl furrowing his pretty face. No, better go with

handsome. Jared wasn't the kind of man who couldn't own up to noticing another's man

attractive qualities, but Jensen didn't seem like the type to be amenable to being called pretty.

Jared looked back to the road, a little peeved that he was being ignored. He was technically a

junior agent, but he wasn't incompetent. And despite their SSA implying he was only being sent

to take up space, he had no intention of watching this from the bleachers.

"When I first started in the Bureau," Jensen began, "they actually didn't have a place for me after I graduated. I spent the first six months kinda floating from squad to squad doing mostly OST

work actually. Then I was sent permanently to the Criminal Division and was assigned to

violent gangs. Then there was some internal shuffling and some internal bickering. You know

how it goes," Jensen said dryly.

"Yeah," Jared huffed out a laugh. "Don't have to be long in the Bureau to see that nonsense."

"Yeah. So, I was finally assigned to CR-4 and had only been working there for a couple months,

really finally settled down and learning the routine, when a case came in involving a priest that

had been kidnapped in Maryland and driven into Virginia."

"It became a federal case."

"Yep. So, one of the senior agents, a really great agent named Mitch Pileggi, was going to help out the local PDs and said he'd take me along to help get my feet wet. It was just supposed to be

—I mean, you know they teach us that there's no such thing as a routine investigation, but this

was supposed to be—pretty routine."

"I take it that it didn't turn out to be quite so routine."

Jensen's jaw clenched as the memory flashed in his mind as fresh as the day he first saw it. "We

found the priest because the killer wanted us to find him."

Jared waited for Jensen to speak again, but his eyes were looking out the front windshield,

unseeing. At least, his eyes weren't seeing anything that was currently in front of him. Jared

was grateful he'd managed to convince Jensen to let him drive because Jensen simply was not

there. He decided to wait Jensen out; he'd speak when he was ready. After ten minutes of

silence and the urban gradually melting into the suburban, Jared wondered if Jensen had

forgotten he was there. He adjusted his grip on the wheel, hearing the tacky sounds of his skin

peeling off the leather. When had he gripped the wheel so tight?

“Jensen, I realize this—”

“He had hand carved a coffin.”

“Wh-what?” Jared was a little startled by Jensen’s sudden return to the vehicle.

“The killer,” Jensen said, the faraway look gone from his eyes as he glanced at Jared. “He’d

been planning the killing for a while. He’d made a coffin out of white pine. It was beautifully

crafted. Every piece fit perfectly together; it was perfectly level; perfectly smooth. But unlined,

undecorated, no hardware. Just the pine. And the priest was in it. He was stripped except for

his collar.” Jensen shook his head. “You couldn’t even see the color of his skin it was so

mottled with bruising. I mean, literally, every inch of skin, front and back, had been beaten. The

ME said it was probably a rubber mallet, among other things. All done while he was still

alive. His wrists and hands were broken. His fingernails had been pulled off. Wooden

splinters shoved under his toenails.”

Jared shifted in his seat as he felt that weird squirming feeling in his stomach people got when

thinking about having things shoved under their nails.

“His eardrums were punctured pre-mortem, his eyes carved out postmortem.

He'd taken them

out almost surgically and then placed them back in. When we were at the scene we had no idea.

He had a brand burned into his skin pre-mortem. A word on his penis actually."

Jared raised his eyebrows and glanced at Jensen before looking back to the road.

"Molester."

"Molester?" Jared sucked in a breath. "This story is probably going to get a whole lot greyer,

huh?"

"I guess that depends on what you feel is cruel and unusual punishment. The violence

perpetrated on the body was the result of uncontrolled anger: it was sloppy and wild and

personal. And, I mean, I can understand that, in a way, if you know what I mean. But it was all

the postmortem stuff. Not just the eyes, but there were cuts on the body: methodical, exploratory,

curious. As much as I find it reprehensible, I can understand beating someone you feel wronged

you. But. He was playing with the body, Jay. It became a game." Jensen clenched his jaw

again. Sometimes he found it difficult to reconcile that he was a member of the same species as

some of the sick fucks out there.

Jared watched the emotions flicker across Jensen's face: anger, repulsion, grief, a brief glimpse

of fear, determination, and then despair. The despair lingered. Jared cleared his throat to draw

his attention.

"So, I thought I heard Kripke say something about angels?"

"Oh, yeah. He'd carved the word 'Gabrael' onto his chest."

"Gabriel?"

"Close to it. At first we thought the killer had misspelled Gabriel, but after a little Googling we

found there is an angel named Gabrael, spelled G-A-B-R-A-E-L. He's associated with a few

things, but predominantly he's a protector of children."

"Ah. So the, uh, accusation on his genitals...?"

"We were never able to get an official confirmation, but he had been moved from diocese to

diocese over the years. We contacted some, heard the rumors. A grown man did tell us he was

abused by Father Dolan. He was in his 40's. We had decades worth of potential victims—and

suspects. We made the mistake of assuming this was just a revenge killing. We should have

known better—the joy he took mutilating the body should have clued us in

that he was just

getting warmed up. Or maybe he had inadvertently gotten a taste for it. I mean, we didn't stop

investigating—didn't assume the priest got what he deserved and moved on to other cases.”

“Of course not.”

Jensen chuckled humorlessly and he looked out his window. There was nothing but forest on

both sides of the highway.

“We were actually surprised when the next body turned up. Two months later, another pine

coffin showed up with a woman's body. Jeannine Tirro. She was tortured before she was

killed. I mean, Spanish Inquisition shit, man. She was sodomized with... ME's best guess, a

wooden spatula.”

Jared winced and made a face.

“She'd been branded on the back of her neck with the word 'abuser.' And had the word 'Kael'

carved onto her chest. Another obscure angel name. And then he killed her by suffocating her

with chloroform. And *then* he really started to play with her.”

"What did Kael represent?" Jared asked, trying to pull Jensen away from that memory.

"Another guardian of children. But, she had no connection with the Catholic Church. Or any

church for that matter. She was just a woman who drove a city bus for a living. And only had

grown children. When we called her children in to tell them about her death, neither of them

were particularly upset by it. In fact, the daughter just walked out as soon as we told her we had

nothing else. The son admitted their mother used to abuse them when she was frustrated. She'd

fill the bathtub with scalding water and hold them in it. It wasn't hot enough to scar them, so

there was never any evidence that other people saw—but it was enough to cause second degree

burns.

"Anyway, we thought we'd really get him now. The crossover of people who know the priest

and this woman, it couldn't be that many. We even investigated Tirro's son because he used to

date a girl who attended Dolan's church, but it didn't pan out. He had an alibi for Dolan. We

were baffled. Every lead was a dead end and we weren't getting any new ones. Then two

months later, right on schedule actually, Walter Feldman showed up in a box. And we were

scrambling now. It's so rare for a serial killer to kill that often. I mean, twice

a year is kind of

considered frequent, you know?”

Jared nodded. He did know. He’d loved the behavioral science unit of their classes and the

case studies they’d reviewed at the academy, but he didn’t interrupt to share that tidbit of

information about himself.

“Three bodies in less than six months. All of them violently abused and tortured and then played

with after death. Feldman was sodomized so brutally his colon was ruptured and leaked into his

body cavity. The ME actually thinks he got lucky with that.”

“Lucky?!” Jared blurted out, shocked.

“It killed him. Slowly yes, but probably quicker than the killer intended. Most of his damage

was done postmortem. Including the angel name carved on his chest: Raguel. The brand was

pre-mortem. We think it’s the first thing the killer does: brand the victim with their ‘crime.’

Feldman’s was the word ‘depraved’ across his lips.”

“What’d he do? Does Raguel protect children too?”

“Raguel is associated with justice. Feldman was a lawyer who apparently specialized in

finding technicalities that kept pedophiles out of prison.”

“Hn. I get that that’s despicable, but he didn’t abuse anyone himself?”

“Not that we could find.”

“Seems like the killer was just looking for an excuse at that point to satisfy his own twisted desires.”

“Yeah, pretty much,” the words escaped on a tired sigh. “And we couldn’t access the list of the

victims of the people he’d gotten off to cross reference them with our previous pitiful list of

suspects. Sometimes client privilege really is a bitch.”

“Yeah,” Jared laughed softly. “Until you want it yourself.”

“Exactly,” Jensen grouched.

Jared smiled at his pout. “So, what happened then?”

Jensen grunted. “Nothing. We panicked as the next two month time limit seemed to tick down,

but there was no body. Not then, and never again. We poured over and over our three vics and

re-interviewed witnesses and followed any leads we had ignored before because we thought

they weren’t leads at all—and as it turns out, they weren’t. There was no new evidence. What

we had told us nothing.”

“What about the forensics?”

“Zilch. The crime scenes were spotless. The wood of the coffins was untraceable to a specific

store or lumber yard. Or, hell, even a forest. We got 'white pine is common in the northeast.'

We found one hair at one scene, but it was a dog hair. The victim didn't own a dog, but we had

no way of knowing if it was brought in by the victim or the killer."

"What kind of dog?"

Jensen gave Jared a look. "A brown one."

"What? Can't they do DNA analysis on dogs too?"

"Come on, Jay. You know that hair itself can't be tested for DNA. There needs to be a follicle

with cells attached to it. It was just a hair."

"Okay, okay," Jared replied, chastised by his own sense of I-should-have-known-better and

oddly pleased with the nickname Jensen seemed to have assigned him. "So what happened with

the case?"

Jensen half-shrugged.

"It went cold. Frigid actually. He didn't kill again. We couldn't progress any further with what we had. Poor Mitch stayed past his scheduled retirement an entire year. But...just...nothing. I

don't know if he ever really let it go, but he eventually retired. And I passed the case on to

others on my squad to see if fresh eyes would help. I mean, they had helped all along of course,

but maybe if someone else took point they might take a different approach.
But it got buried

under more pressing cases, and I transferred to CI to take a break. That case
was all I had

worked on the criminal side and I was ready for something completely
different. So I followed around Chinese IOs for the next five years.”

Jared nodded thoughtfully. He knew Jensen had transferred from criminal to
counterintelligence

and back again, but he hadn't known any of the reasons for the transfers. It
wasn't uncommon for

agents to change divisions every now and then; his own transfer from the
Cyber Division hadn't

been a shock to anyone.

Jensen shifted in the bucket seat. They both had their seats pushed all the way
back, but leg

room was still a little scarce for Jensen's 6'1" and Jared's 6'4" frames in their
little Hyundai.

They drove in companionable silence for a few miles and crossed the state
border from

Massachusetts to New Hampshire. There was a sign that said they were two
miles from

Seabrook. Jared smiled at the name.

“Seabrook,” he said.

“Hm?” Jensen murmured the half-question.

“Seabrook. It's just such a New England town kind of name, isn't it?” he

chuckled.

Jensen just frowned. Jared was worried for a moment that he had offended him or something,

but he was pretty sure Jensen had been born and raised in the DC area.

“It is,” Jensen said. “I can’t believe we’re going to work a case in some tiny New England

town. It has like five thousand people. And it’s on a lake. I’m sure it’s quaint and positively

charming.”

His scowl deepened and Jared laughed at him.

“Do you have a problem with quaint and charming New England towns?”

“They’re creepy! The weirdest shit always happens there. There are psychotic groundskeepers

and murderous little children and ghosts and demon possessions.”

Jared laughed harder and had to refocus on his driving quickly. “Please don’t tell me you

believe in the last two. Or all four, really.”

“You’ve seen the movies. All these small towns have secrets. And they don’t like outsiders.

One of us isn’t going to make it out of this alive. Mark my words.”

Jared shook his head, still smiling. “As long as it’s not me.”

Jensen made a face and Jared checked the GPS on the dash.

“So, we’re going to be passing Portsmouth soon. Do you want to swing by

the RA and get in

contact with the ASAC first?”

“What time is it now?” Jensen asked, answering his own question by looking at the car’s

dashboard clock: 1:31pm. “Nah. Let’s head straight to Elton. I want to get checked into the

motel and get over to see the police chief as soon as possible. I want to be able to see the body

today if possible. I’ll call and let them know our plan and they can meet us there.”

Jensen pulled his Blackberry out of the holster on his hip (enviously eyeing Jared’s new issue

Android phone) and began to search through the directory for Jim Beaver’s phone number.

Jensen chuckled to himself. *Beaver.*

“Hey, Jensen?”

“Yeah?”

“Do you think it’s him?”

Jensen stopped his search and repressed a sigh as he looked out the windshield at the oncoming

road.

“I don’t know. The coffin wasn’t handmade. And they haven’t found a brand. Both of those

facts were kept from the press. So, a copycat wouldn’t know to do them.”

Jared nodded. “That’s what your head is telling you. What’s your gut say?”

Jensen gnawed on his lower lip for a long minute. Then he said quietly, “I think it’s him.”

Jared looked around the motel room. There weren’t a whole lot of options in Elton, especially

when the government rate was factored in. They were at the Lakeside Motor Lodge, and it

wasn’t actually as fancy as it sounded. They’d gotten rooms next door to each other, but where

Jensen had a king size bed, Jared had a room with two queens. If anyone needed more room to

stretch out it was him, but the mattresses were soft so at least he wouldn’t need a chiropractor by

the end of the week. He took in the dull maroon carpet, worn paisley bedspread, chipped

furniture, and sad, drab artwork on the walls. He wondered how long they would be here for.

They had filled out their travel vouchers for the maximum thirty days allowed, and he had a

feeling they would be filling out an extension. There were no extended stay hotels in Elton

proper and Jensen hadn’t wanted to stay even a short drive away. Jared supposed he

understood, but not having a kitchenette or even a mini fridge for the foreseeable future was not

exciting.

Jared had just finished hanging up his other two suits in the closet when there was a knock at the door.

“It’s open!” Jared called, still marveling at the concept of a motel in the modern age that still

used actual metal keys and locks instead of a card key system. Jensen opened the door but didn’t enter.

“You ready to go?” he asked.

Jared didn’t think they’d been in their rooms a full ten minutes. He hadn’t even put his toiletries

in the bathroom yet. Jared wondered if Jensen had unpacked anything or had just dropped his

luggage on the bed, taken a leak, and come to get him. He really didn’t want his dress shirts to

wrinkle in the too small garment bag they were currently squished in, but he supposed there was

a semi-functioning iron hidden away in the closet.

“Yeah, I’m ready,” Jared replied as he quickly dug out the lockbox from his backpack that had

housed his firearm during the flight. He worked the combination open and then attached the

holster to his right hip, hiding it under his suit jacket. He considered taking his overcoat, but

even this far north mid-September was still balmy and pleasant. Which was a

departure from

the hot and humid miasma that was currently smothering DC; it was enough to give anyone a

wicked case of swamp ass if they weren't vigilant with their hygiene.

Jared hurried outside as Jensen had already walked to the car, but had to turn back when he

remembered he had to actually lock the motel room door. Jensen was waiting patiently by the

passenger side door. He wondered if Jensen was trying to be nice by letting him drive or if he

just didn't want to be seen driving an Accent. Of course, it wasn't like their Bu cars were

anything to brag about, and he didn't know what Jensen's personal vehicle might be.

The drive to the police station was short, only about ten minutes, but by the time they got there

Jared's nerves were on edge. They hadn't spoken a word, but he could feel the tension build in

Jensen and saw his shoulders stiffen in increments. He also chewed on a thumb and bounced a

leg all the way there.

The police station was pretty small, even for a small town in Jared's opinion, but he supposed

the Elton Police Department probably didn't have that high of a crime rate to battle. The parking

lot was empty except for a couple of unmarked cars and a marked SUV that touted the K9 unit.

Well, maybe the Elton PD was not as small town as he'd thought. Jared had to drive past

several spots before he found one that wasn't marked as reserved. He'd barely put the car in

park before Jensen whipped his seatbelt off and was out the door. He wondered if Jensen

realized all those empty spaces, including the one marked for the police chief, meant that there

probably wasn't anyone to talk to inside.

Jared got out of the car and locked it (at least the Accent had a key fob), and then buttoned his

suit coat as he walked down the sidewalk to the station entrance. Inside it was quiet like a

library: no people milling or rushing around, no rumble of conversations, no ringing phones.

Jared found Jensen being mostly politely informed by the receptionist of what Jared already

knew: no one was there.

"Do you have a way of contacting the police chief?" Jensen asked the woman.

According to the name plate on her desk, the woman's name was Rachel. She was a pretty

brunette with a smile that made Jared wonder what exactly it was she knew that they didn't

because there had to be something with that smirk. She returned her attention to the paint job she

was applying to her blood red nails.

“Yes, of course,” she replied, “but he won’t come back unless it’s an emergency. And you, even

being a fed, is not an emergency.”

“He’s expecting me though,” Jensen insisted.

“I’m sure he is. He told me to expect you. And that if you arrived while he was out that I should

tell you to go have lunch at Nell’s Diner, and he’ll finish with his call as soon as he can. So, go

have lunch at Nell’s Diner. His wife runs it, so he’ll be expecting your rave reviews when he

gets back.” She smiled prettily, but Jared was glad that it wasn’t directed at him. Even still he

shivered a little at her expression.

Jensen seemed unfazed by it. “Would it be a problem if I waited here?”

"No," Rachel said slowly, though clearly she did think it would be a problem. "But Nell's is literally a five minute walk from here, a ninety second drive. If you leave your number, I'll let

you know the second he's back. And you know, the body's not going to wander off." She blew

daintily on her drying nails.

"I still think—"

Jared's traitorous stomach took the opportunity to grumble loudly in the relative silence of the

station. Jensen turned to look at him and Jared smiled embarrassedly and waved a hand.

"I'm fine. Let's wait here."

He thought he saw a small smile quirk the edges of Jensen's mouth, but then he turned to look at

Rachel with a grim expression.

"Let me leave you my contact information; please call as soon as the chief gets back."

"Good decision," Rachel said, her voice drawling and smoky. "You won't regret it. They have

great pie."

Jensen raised an eyebrow. "Pie you say?"

"Mm-hmm."

"I prefer cake," he deadpanned back. He handed her one of his business cards and she pinched

it carefully between her fingers.

"In that case I recommend the devil's food cake. It's very... moist." She gave him a wink.

Jensen cleared his throat and turned on his heel. Jared followed, repressing his chuckle.

"Take a left out of the parking lot," Rachel called after them. "You can't miss it."

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True to her word, Nell's was a ninety second drive away and Jensen insisted they take the car.

Bells jangled lightly as they entered the diner, and only one patron who sat at the counter glanced

up at them, gave them a once over, and then returned to his bowl of white—Jensen was going to

assume chowder. Other than him they were the only customers at 3:30 on a Wednesday

afternoon, which he supposed made sense since they were in between the lunch and dinner

crowds. Or maybe in a town as small as Elton, there were no crowds.

He and Jared stood awkwardly at the vacant hostess stand since there was no “seat yourself”

sign. They looked around for a moment and Jensen considered opening the door to trigger the

bells again. Before he could enact his plan, a very nice pair of legs strode through a swinging

door that he presumed lead to the kitchen. Jensen forced his eyes up and saw the short pink

dress and white apron next and noted the distinct hourglass shape under the dress.

*Further up* he chided himself.

Eventually he saw a face that was more cute than pretty, but hey, redhead. The waitress beamed

at them.

“Hi,” she said cheerfully as she approached them. “Two?”

“Yes,” Jared responded, grinning.

Jensen side-eyed him, but refrained from commenting with either words or facial expression.

“Follow me,” she said, turning with a wink for them both.

“Gladly,” Jared murmured and this time Jensen did raise an amused eyebrow at him.

The pink skirt—waitress—led them to a booth by a window. They sat down across from each

other and placed their folded hands on the table. They looked up at the waitress. She smiled

brightly back at them.

“Um,” Jensen started, “do you have menus?”

“Oh!” The waitress laughed and looked a little embarrassed. “I’m sorry about that. Most

people who come in here already know what they want. Heck, most people who come in here *I*

already know what they want. We don’t get many strangers.”

“I guess that’s why you don’t have a nametag?” Jared asked. “Everybody knows everybody.”

“Pretty much,” the waitress agreed as she rocked on her heels.

Jared waited and then glanced at Jensen who was biting the inside of his cheek to keep from

grinning. Jared returned his attention to the waitress. He opened his mouth to speak, but then the

waitress started so violently she startled the both of them.

“Oh! The menus!” She started to turn away, but Jared called out, “I’m Jared...”

“Oh. Well, hi, Jared.” She smiled, and then realization finally dawned over her features.

“Feliciaday! I’m Feliciaday.”

She stuck out her hand and Jared shook it. They smiled at each other and Jensen wondered if he

should excuse himself to the bathroom or something. Then the waitress pulled her hand from

Jared’s grasp and thrust it at Jensen. He started slightly, but then shook her hand.

“I’m Jensen.”

“Jensen? That’s a unique name.”

“No more so than Feliciaday.”

She looked confused a moment, and then amused, and then flushed pink with embarrassment.

“Oh, no. It’s just Felicia. My name is Felicia. Day.”

Jensen smiled, letting her know he was teasing her. She playfully narrowed her eyes at him and

then turned on her heel and walked away, presumably to get their menus. Jared and Jensen

leaned forward a little to get a better view of her departure. Then they sat up and smiled at each

other, acknowledging their mutual pathetic male stereotype.

“Wow,” Jared said. “That is nice.”

Jensen gave a half-shrug. “I do like redheads.”

“Oh, come on.” Jared dropped his voice and leaned forward. “Do not tell me you wouldn’t hit

that.”

“Not under these circumstances.”

Jared immediately sobered and sat up straight. “Right. Sorry. I mean, we’re here on business.

Terrible business and it would be—really inappropriate?”

Jensen smiled, easing some of Jared’s discomfort. “It’s not like that. I just meant I wouldn’t

cockblock my adorable little protégé.” He gave him a shit-eating grin.

Jared sat back with a huff and a laugh saying, “Oh, fuck you, Ackles.”

Felicia returned a moment later with two glasses of water and set them on the table.

“So, what can I get for you?”

Jensen and Jared exchanged a look and then smiled up at Felicia. Her smile disappeared and

she used a hand to partially hide her face.

“Oh my God. Menus.” She fled and returned very quickly with two single

sheet laminated menus. “I’ll give you a couple of minutes to look them over.”

She turned and walked away, still looking embarrassed. Jared smiled after her.

“She’s so cute.”

“Mm,” Jensen agreed mildly, checking his watch as he eyed the pretty limited menu. His

Blackberry buzzed and he answered with half his mind still deciding between “chicken

sandwich” and “hamburger.” That was literally all the description the menu gave. “This is

Ackles.”

“Agent Jensen Ackles?” The voice was gruff with a slight accent that Jensen couldn’t place

right away.

“Yes, sir?” Jensen responded to the authoritative tone.

“This is Beaver. I got your message. I guess you’re in Elton by now?”

“Yes, sir. We’re waiting on the police chief to return from a call. I wanted to take a look at the

body today if possible.”

“Hn. Well, we won’t make it out today. We’ll come tomorrow, but you go ahead and look at the

body if you can.”

“Yes, sir. Pardon, sir, you said we? I thought an agent named Cortese was coming out.”

“She is.”

“She?”

“That a problem, son?”

“No, sir.”

“We should be in Elton around nine a.m. tomorrow.”

“I look forward to meeting you both, sir. But if you don’t mind me asking, are you coming

because...this case is so high profile?”

“Ah, I know you boys at your big field offices are used to your ASACs just running around

holding their dicks, but out here we still do real work.”

Jensen swallowed a laugh and said, “Glad to hear it, sir.”

Beaver grunted and hung up. Jensen raised his eyebrows. Well, tomorrow should be interesting.

“Who’s the ‘she?’” Jared asked.

“Agent Cortese. She and Beaver are coming tomorrow around nine.”

“The ASAC is coming?”

Jensen shrugged.

“Well, that should be interesting,” Jared echoed his thoughts.

Felicia returned and took their orders, the “chicken sandwich” for Jensen and the “hamburger”

for Jared. After she left, Jensen gave Jared hell for ordering a Diet Coke.

“Well, hell, I guess if you’re going to ruin your own chances with her then I’ll step in.”

“Shut-up, man. There’s nothing wrong with a man ordering a Diet Coke. In fact, I’d say a man

very secure with his masculinity can order a Diet Coke with no shame.”

“Yeah. You keep telling yourself that.”

After a short wait Felicia returned with their sandwiches (and Jared’s Diet Coke) and flirted

with both of them for a couple of minutes before being called away by Chowder Guy.

Jared made a slightly frustrated face. “She can only be into one of us, right? How can we tell

which?”

“Who says a person can only like one person at a time? Besides, it doesn’t matter. Just ask her

out.”

“I can’t do that.”

“Why not? I thought you had balls made of Diet Coke.”

Jared made a face at him. “But seriously though. If she’s interested in you, you don’t have to

step aside for me or anything.”

Jensen laughed. “Jared, we’ve been here for half a day. How much sex are you used to getting

that you’re already staking out your TDY booty call?”



Jared flushed. “I’m not—I don’t—I am taking this job seriously.”

Jensen let his smile fade a little. He could tell Jared probably wasn’t as ready for a case this

gruesome as he pretended to be and Felicia was a welcome distraction. “I know, Jay,” he said,

using the nickname that for some reason he already felt comfortable using. “I think I’m just a

jealous old man.”

Jared rolled his eyes. “Oh, yes, I should’ve known better. Never trust anyone over thirty.”

Jensen smiled. “You’ll be there soon though, won’t you?”

“The better part of two years,” Jared sniffed haughtily. “What’s it like on the other side?”

“Sore joints and enlarged prostates.”

“Shut-up.” Jared took a bite of his hamburger. “Ohmuhgahd,” he managed around the large bite.

“What? What? Is it bad?”

“Nuh. If’s gud.”

Jensen eyed his own plain looking sandwich. He took a bite and flavor exploded in his mouth.

He moaned and chewed slowly not able to identify the seasoning as anything other than “yum.”

“This is awesome. ‘Chicken sandwich’ indeed.”

“I know, right? Wanna try a bite of mine?”

“That’s okay. I’ll just order it tomorrow.”

“Or tonight.”

Jensen nodded in tacit agreement to the plan of Eat-Every-Meal-At-Nell’s since his mouth was

full again.

“As much as I’d like to pocket some of our per diem by buying some groceries,” Jared said, “I

really wouldn’t mind eating every meal here.”

“And not just for the scenery,” Jensen managed to get out around another bite as the two of them

watched Felicia lean over the counter, her skirt riding higher.

“Mm-hm. Hey, though. You really don’t mind if I take a shot at that?”

“Nah. I’m sure I’ll have other opportunities.”

“In a town full of nothing but psychotic groundskeepers, murderous children, and ghosts?”

“Hn.” Jensen paused in his chewing to make a concerned face. Then he swallowed. “You

forgot the demons.”

Jared took a sip of his Diet Coke. Through a straw. Geez. “Well, maybe you can find an angel

then.”

Jensen put his sandwich down and sat back into the stiff cushion of the booth.

“The only angels we’re going to find here are dead ones.”

Jared paused in his eating as well, and they sat in a silence that was only broken by the sound of clanging bells as the door to the diner opened. Felicia turned around and smiled softly at the

new customer.

“You’re late,” she said gently.

“Yeah. I forgot,” the man replied.

Jensen couldn’t see his face as he leaned against the counter, but he could tell that he had a lithe

figure under the police blues that showcased him better than most police officers looked in

uniform. Felicia patted his clasped hands and then disappeared into the kitchen. Jensen took a

few more moments to take in the man’s dark hair, tan skin, and heck—couldn’t deny it was there

—nice ass. He took a sideways bite of his sandwich as he allowed his eyes to linger, hoping it

might improve his mood. He also couldn’t help but to wonder if the guy’s face matched that ass.

Or wait... that didn’t come out right.

Jared made a choking sound and that finally drew his attention away. Jared’s hazel eyes were

wide with surprise.

“What?” Jensen asked.

Jared glanced at the officer and then back at him. “Really?”

Jensen shrugged. “I take my EEO training to heart.”

Jared laughed. “And to bed apparently.”

Jensen just chewed, nonplused.

Felicia returned from the kitchen with a brown paper bag and handed it to the officer. He pulled

out his wallet to pay.

“How are you doing?” Felicia asked concernedly.

“I’m fine. Thanks, Fee.”

The officer didn’t wait for change and turned to leave. He glanced briefly at Jared and Jensen,

but Jensen couldn’t even see if his face was as pretty as his ass. All he saw was blue eyes. And

then they were gone. Before he could dwell on the hard look he caught in those eyes, Felicia

was in front of them.

“How is everything here, gentlemen?”

Jared and Jensen couldn’t answer; their mouths were once again full and their cheeks were doing

fairly decent impressions of hamsters.

“Excellent. So. Pie or cake?”

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Even after a lengthy debate of pie versus cake, Jared and Jensen still made it back to the police

station before the police chief. They sat on hard plastic chairs in the moderately noisier room

watching Rachel put a top coat on her nails. At least Jensen was watching her (or glaring at

her), Jared was playing World Champion Poker on his cell phone. He was up nearly twenty

thousand dollars, which was the highest he'd ever gotten, but his thumb was hurting and he

wished they'd stayed longer at the diner.

Jared looked up as the front door to the police station opened, but it was only a uniformed

officer. The guy was the scrawniest thing Jared had ever seen in his life and was surprised his

utility belt wasn't unbalancing him and sending him swaying into walls. He spotted the agents

and grinned at them, giving them a little salute that on anyone else would have seemed mocking,

but coming from him was just kind of cute. Jared turned to see what scathing expression Jensen

was giving this officer, as he had done to every single person who had walked in and out of the

front office who wasn't the police chief, but Jensen didn't see the newest arrival. His eyes were

tracking the dark haired officer they'd seen in the diner as he disappeared around a corner. Even

from only two brief glimpses, the man had made an impression on Jared. He

was attractive, in

an odd way really, but attractive nonetheless. But what stood out was the barely controlled rage

that tightened his shoulders, his lips, his eyes. There was a lot of anger in that man and Jared

hoped they'd be able to avoid working with him if at all possible.

Jensen pushed back in his chair, a grating screech invading the quiet of the room as the metal feet

caught on the tile. The back hit the wall, and Jensen grunted and scooted forward again. Then

he settled heavily back in the chair, thumping the plastic back against the plaster. Jared watched

him and Jensen, feeling eyes on him, glanced at Jared. He frowned and looked away, but

stopped fussing with his seat. Jared returned to his game. They had another maybe fifteen

seconds of calm silence before the front doors of the station burst open with clomping boots and

shouting voices. At first Jared wasn't sure if the voices were angry or just excited or if any of

the people coming in were in custody. It seemed with that amount of noise, someone should be

under arrest, but everyone appeared to be free of handcuffs. Two were uniformed officers, two

appeared to be plain clothes detectives, and one just looked like he'd rolled off a two week

hangover on the beach.

After some more raucous yelling of insults and jokes, the Beachcomber peeled off from the

group as they disappeared into the bullpen. Beachcomber approached Rachel and spoke with a

drawl that wasn't southern in origin, nor anywhere else Jared could identify.

“Afternoon, Rachel. Anything interesting to report?”

Rachel carefully screwed the top back on her nail polish and set the bottle down next to the

impressive set of manicure tools that took up a large portion of her desk.

“Not especially. There was another drunken domestic dispute between the Fieldings about an

hour ago, but I sent Bradley out on that. And... oh yes! I finally got a hold of the cable guy and

he says he'll come replace the box in the bullpen tomorrow.”

“Well, thank God for small favors.”

Rachel smirked at the mention of God. Jared suspected she somehow knew for a fact whether

He existed or not.

“And, of course, you-know-who has been slamming doors all day.”

Beachcomber's pleasantly mellow face dissolved into the kind of blankness people get when

they try not to let their feelings show.

“Well. I think it’s still recent enough that we can put up with it,” he replied sharply, coolly.

Rachel lost her smirk. “I just meant, he’s not okay. And maybe we should start being concerned

that he’s not.”

“It hasn’t even been a week yet, Rachel.”

“I know. But he’s not even trying to deal with it.”

“Look, you don’t know him as well as you think you do. He’s going to need some time to

process before he can even begin to deal with it.”

Rachel put her hands up in a displeased surrender. “I’m only saying it because I’m worried and

contrary to popular belief, I do care about someone other than myself.”

Jared dropped his eyes back to his phone. He didn’t want to get caught listening in on this

conversation. Jensen didn’t appear to have that qualm as he stared at them.

“I know, Rachel. I didn’t mean it like that. Look. I’ll talk to him. Eventually. Maybe we

should sic Traci on him or something.”

Rachel made a face. “I don’t think it’s that bad yet.”

Beachcomber let out an honest to God guffaw. “Yeah, does seem like it might be cruel and

unusual. Especially for him.” He rapped his knuckles on her desk twice. “Keep up the good

work.”

Beachcomber started to walk away and Rachel’s eyes landed on Jared and Jensen.

“Oh, right. One more thing,” she called out getting Beachcomber’s attention. “The feds are

here,” she indicated with a tilt of her head in their direction.

Beachcomber turned and spotted them as they shifted awkwardly on their plastic chairs. He let

out another loud laugh.

“How on earth did I miss these two? Stick out more than a virgin in a whorehouse.”

Beachcomber walked up to them and Jared and Jensen stood on autopilot. “Gentlemen.” He

offered a hand to both in turn. “I’m Ty Olsson.”

Out of habit, Jensen pulled out his credentials and flashed them briefly after shaking the police

chief’s hand. Then he introduced himself and Jared.

“I wasn’t expecting you until tomorrow though.”

“Clearly,” Jensen said shortly.

His tone wasn’t lost on the otherwise jovial police chief and he turned fully to face Jensen.

“Now I hope we don’t get off to the wrong foot here, Agent. I’ve got a whole town that needs

protecting, and that means I can’t just sit around guarding a corpse all day. I

know that this case

is going to wind our nut sacks up and then just let ‘em fly—” Jared and Jensen blinked at the

analogy. “—and it’ll only get worse if it turns into what you boys think it is. That’s why I’m

prepared to work this thing 24/7 with you until we get it solved and the motherfucker who did it

is put in the clink. Or the ground. I’m not picky which. But I wasn’t expecting you

until tomorrow, today was my day off, and I still got called in to pull in some crazy squirrel-

licker who was threatening to shoot a pickerel in the head for looking at his girlfriend funny.

And just so you know—‘squirrel-licker’ is not some crazy colloquialism.”

Jared wanted to glance at Jensen, just to get some guidance on what kind of response to give to

that burst of information, but he didn’t want to appear to be the junior agent that he technically

was. He saw Jensen shift in his peripheral vision.

“Please excuse my brusque tone,” Jensen said, sounding like he was sorry, but with no less

brusqueness in his tone. “It has been a long day for us, and I’m afraid this case has brought back

some very bad memories.”

“Understandable,” Chief Olsson said and gave Jensen’s shoulder a manly,

commiserating slap,

which almost knocked him into Jared. “Now, follow me. I’ll drop you off at the morgue and Dr.

Rhodes can show you the body and discuss her findings with you. I’ll change, take care of few

other things, and then we can discuss what you think about the case before we call it day. Sound

like a plan?”

“Yes, thank you, Chief,” Jensen replied.

“Ty. Call me Ty. I might punch you if you call me chief again.”

The man laughed and walked away from them down a corridor to the left. Jared and Jensen

exchanged looks before hurrying after the man. Jared was fairly certain the police chief—Ty—

actually would punch one of them if they didn’t call him by his given name. The man led them to

a stairwell and went down a long flight of stairs and into the basement. The place was

windowless and lit by fluorescents, casting the dreary grey concrete walls and floor in sickly

green light. They passed by the evidence locker, where a uniformed officer dozed in his chair,

and came to a set of double doors at the end of the hall. Ty pushed them open and when they

stepped inside they were hit with the smell of a morgue.

Morgues were peculiar things. They didn't smell like rotting bodies or death—but they did have

a chemical and alcohol smell that was altered into a completely unique smell by the decaying

organic matter, excrement, and fungal growth that was just masked underneath it. It wasn't the

smell of death, but it was a smell one learned to associate with death. And Jared had on

occasion gotten a whiff of this strange odor in places like grocery stores—and that was

disturbing in ways he didn't let himself think about.

“Dr. Rhodes?” Ty called out.

The space was neither small nor large, but serviceable with two examination tables attached to

large sinks in one corner with a small section of refrigerated storage directly across. On the

other side of the room was a desk with a computer and pile of folders, and across from that was

a lab bench with a light microscope and what looked like a comparison microscope. The walls

were lined with glass front cabinets and all of them were stuffed to capacity with various tools

of the medical examiner's trade. Jared wondered if Dr. Rhodes was a true medical examiner or

just a coroner. Based on the title, he was probably the former.

Ty crossed the room and stuck his head through a door and bellowed, “Dr. Rhodes!”

“Jesus, Ty. I’m right here.”

Jared and Jensen started and spun around, hands instinctively going to their waists for their

service weapons, but not drawing them when they saw the woman who had entered the door at

their backs.

She was tall, with short brown hair, and wore a tight pair of jeans and an even tighter T-shirt that

rode up high enough to reveal an intricate tattoo across her midriff. She smiled at them, her eyes

flicking back and forth (and up and down Jared didn’t fail to notice) before sticking out her hand.

“Hi. I’m Dr. Rhodes. You can call me Kim. I take it you’re the ones from the FBI?”

“Yes, ma’am,” Jensen responded, giving her a firm handshake.

Jared did the same as Ty approached them. “Well, I’ll leave you two in her very capable hands.

Just come upstairs when you’re ready and Rachel can direct you to my office.”

“Dr. Rhodes,” Ty said with a bit of snark in his voice as he departed.

“Chief,” Kim responded in kind.

Once again, Jared and Jensen exchanged glances. Maybe Jensen was right about small New

England towns. This whole thing was going to turn into some freaky *Twin Peaks* shit before too

long.

Kim walked over to her desk and Jared could feel his eyes lingering on her ass and just couldn't

do anything about it. Jensen elbowed him hard and his eyes snapped up just in time for Kim to turn around and only see hard eye contact from the two agents. She had a folder in her hand and

brought it over to them, handing it to Jensen as he had stuck out his hand first. Jensen opened the

folder to the page that contained a line drawing of a female body. These were used to quickly

reference where any injuries or marks on the bodies were. The page was covered in ink.

"Tell me your impressions," Jensen said, not looking up. "And anything you found of note."

"Well, of note, I noticed that this woman was abused. Terribly. Both before and after death.

She was raped with a foreign object, but I'm not sure what. Probably something made out of

rubber, or even glass, as I didn't find any trace evidence left behind in the vagina or anus like I

would have if it had been made of wood, and no tearing like if it had been metal."

Jensen frowned at this information.

"There was a lot of bruising and cuts. Of note, a piece of her thigh was cut

out and then sewed

back in. Upside down.”

Jensen glanced up at Kim with a raised eyebrow. She shrugged and pointed to the left thigh on

the picture.

“The most prominent thing was the word carved on her chest, of course. 'Akael.' We're not sure

what it means. We're consulting the local clergy, but we might have better luck just Googling the

damn thing.”

“It might not be a bad idea to do that,” Jensen said. “Killers have access to the same Internet

research we do. Now, the coffin she was found in—it was commercial? Not handmade?”

“No, not handmade for sure. Definitely something mass produced. It actually came from

Costco.”

“Costco?” Jared finally joined the conversation. “Were you able to track the purchase?”

“Sort of. It was sold to a funeral home in Missouri, and they can't find any record of it going

missing. We've requested a list of employee names who have access to the inventory, but the

owner is fighting it. Says he wants a warrant, and we have to go through the court system here to

request a judge in Missouri to grant us access. That will probably take a few weeks to be

honest.”

“Yeah, not like it’s important or anything,” Jensen grumbled as he flipped through the report,

reading Kim’s notes.

Jared cleared his throat, “Dr. Rhodes—”

“Kim, please.” She smiled warmly and Jared blushed. She was probably only ten years or so

older than him, but she reminded him a little bit of a maternal figure. Though a super-hot crazy

one with tattoos on her abdomen. Her self-assuredness was a little intimidating.

“K-Kim. Were there any other strange, surgical-like injuries, or...” Jared trailed off, feeling a little stupid. He’d never done this before, but Jensen wasn’t giving him funny looks so he

assumed his question was okay.

“Well, there were some deep cuts made to her throat. I’m not sure if they were surgical, but it

did seem like he was trying to, I don’t know, get to something inside. Of course, that’s all

speculation on my part.”

“Did you do a tox screen on her?”

“Of course. Negative for alcohol or narcotics or recreational drugs. But, she had been missing

for several days, so it's possible if the attacker did use something to incapacitate her it would

have been flushed from her system by then."

"Dr. Rhodes," Jensen spoke, looking up. "Did you find a brand? We were told one wasn't

reported, but did you find one? A word, burned onto her body anywhere?"

Kim looked like she was going to respond immediately, but then stopped to think. Finally she

said, "No, there were definitely no burn marks of any kind. The only word I found was the angel

name on her chest. I did a very thorough examination of her entire body, but I didn't see anything

like that."

"It may have been hidden," Jensen pressed. "On her scalp under her hair. Armpits. Toe pits.

On the inside of her labia..."

Kim shook her head. "I promise you, Agent Ackles. I was very thorough and I found nothing

like that."

"I absolutely do believe you were thorough in your examination. Your notes prove as much.

But, I hope you'll understand and not be offended by my desire to check for myself."

"I'm not offended at all. But, I'm afraid you can't."

Jensen snapped the folder closed in one hand, anger darkening his face. “I was told we would

have the full cooperation of the Elton Police Department.”

Kim put up her hands soothingly. “Whoa, hey. I’m not telling you ‘no.’ I’m telling you, ‘you

can’t.’ The body isn’t here anymore. I had finished with my examination and collected and

recorded and photographed all the evidence. So, I released the body to the family to be

cremated.”

“What?!”

Kim started at Jensen’s outburst. “I can give you full access to the pictures and lab reports—”

“I was told they were going to hold the body for us!”

“I—I wasn’t aware of your need to see the body in person. Besides, this—”

Jensen spun on his heel and stormed out through the double doors. Jared turned to follow him,

but Kim grabbed his elbow.

“Look, I’m getting that this case is kind of personal for him, but you’ve got to rein him in. This

was in-house.”

Jared tilted his head for a moment in confusion, and then it hit him. This woman had either been

a cop or the family member of a cop.

“Shit,” Jared breathed and took off running after Jensen.

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Jensen took the stairs two at a time, seething in the closest thing he’d felt to fury since he was

twenty-one years old. What the fuck was wrong with these people? You didn’t burn fucking

evidence. Of course you couldn’t keep the bodies around forever and families deserved some

closure, but not before people had the chance to find out what happened. Before he had the

chance. He had to know if this was *him*. Everything in his body screamed that it was despite the missing pieces. But he had to know for sure. He had to see for himself.

Jensen burst into the front office.

“Where is he?” Jensen yelled, louder than he meant to, but he was just grateful he wasn’t shaking

Rachel at this point.

Rachel immediately dropped her smarmy, apathetic routine when she saw him. Smart girl.

“Who?” she asked carefully.

“The police chief. *Ty*,” Jensen spat.

Rachel pointed toward the bullpen. “In the back, last door on the left.”

Jensen stormed past her desk and pushed at the swinging panel that connected the two counters

that separated the bullpen from the front office. He spotted Ty, not yet changed, and laughing

with a bunch of stereotypes who were actually munching on donuts and drinking coffee out of

Styrofoam cups. Ty spotted him, and peeled away from the group, concern on his face.

“Is there a problem, agent?”

“Is there a problem?! You fucking burned the body?!”

The noise in the bullpen died immediately and all focus was on them.

“Jensen!”

Jensen heard Jared call him as he entered the room, but didn’t acknowledge him.

“You didn’t think it was worth mentioning that you’d already gotten rid of the only evidence we

have against this guy?!”

Ty kept his voice calm, but Jensen could see he was furious. “We didn’t throw out any

evidence. I’m not sure what you’re referring to.”

“Well maybe you shouldn’t have been chasing squirrel-licking, fish-threatening lunatics and been

here guarding the body after all.”

“Agent Ackles, you need to calm the fuck down, right the fuck now, and explain to me why you

think it’s okay to disrespect me in *my* house.” Ty’s voice hadn’t gotten much

louder, but the

threat was clear and it gave Jensen pause. Which was all the time Jared needed to clamp a firm

hand onto his shoulder and speak first.

“We were expecting to be able to examine the body for ourselves,” Jared said calmly. “We

were told it was being held for us. And K-k-Dr. Rhodes just informed us that it has already been

released to the family for cremation.”

Jensen shook Jared’s hand off, and then forced in a deep breath. He felt his anger subside from

the boiling point. From Ty’s raised eyebrows, he clearly knew nothing about this. And with the

red gone from his vision, Jensen was able to acknowledge that he had made a serious misstep.

Not only had he misrepresented the Bureau, but he might very well have destroyed any

cooperation between the two law enforcement entities before it had even begun.

Ty’s eyes traveled to the front of the room. “Dr. Rhodes. Care to explain what happened to the

body?”

Jared and Jensen turned to see Kim standing at the entrance to the bullpen, looking pale and her

face drawn tight.

“He asked if I was finished. I told him I was. He just wanted to give her—some peace. He

said he had your permission,” she finished miserably.

Ty let out a soft grunt and turned slightly away from Jensen and Jared. And then he roared,

“COLLINS!”

The others in the room broke into hushed whisperings and shuffled things around on their desks,

but no one returned to work. A dark head stood up from the back of the room and slowly, almost

casually, approached the trio. It was the officer from the diner but the last thing on Jensen’s

mind was finally checking out his face. This asshole was the one responsible for this

clusterfuck. However, even with his thoughts mostly preoccupied with anger, embarrassment,

and some despair at losing evidence, he still noticed the grace with which the man walked. And

fuck him, those blue eyes.

“Yes, Chief Olsson?” the officer addressed Ty formally, but kept his cold eyes on Jensen.

“I’m quite certain you knew the FBI was coming to look into this case. You knew we were

holding the body. And you went behind my back. Lied to Kim. What is going on in your head?”

The man finally looked away from Jensen to Ty. Jensen felt like a weight had been removed

from his chest with that glare gone.

“I have a right to bury my family, Ty. She’d already been down on that slab for a week. Kim is

excellent at her job. A professional. She didn’t miss anything. Everything had been recorded.

She deserves to not just be some naked refrigerated corpse in the basement!”

“She didn’t find everything!” Jensen cut in, grabbing the officer’s attention again. “She didn’t

find the brand. I need to see for myself.”

“She didn’t find it because it’s not there! I know what case you’re working, Agent, they

informed us. This isn’t the same guy. Too many details are different. You just *want* it to be.

And there’s no reason why my sister has to suffer because you want to poke and prod at her

some more! She’s been through enough!”

“You don’t—” Jensen took a step forward and checked himself sharply when he heard the

growl. He looked down and Jensen started back a step at the ferocious snarl being directed at

him by a very large, very unhappy dog. How had he not seen that monster before now?

Probably because he couldn’t remember seeing much other than the bluest

eyes he'd ever seen in

his life for the last few minutes. What he saw now was a dog that was big even for a German

Shepherd, and had a shiny link chain around its neck. Attached to the chain was a gold police

shield. Jensen wasn't terribly familiar with police badge designs, but he was fairly certain this

dog outranked some of its human counterparts. He kept a wary eye on the dog but returned his

attention to the uniformed cop who was quickly ruining his whole life.

"You don't know that that's true. You can't. And if it *is* him, this is the fourth kill we know of.

And it won't be the last! Catching this guy has got to take priority! Hell, catching this guy has

got to take priority to a funeral even if it isn't him!"

The dog barked and snapped its teeth at his tone, growl getting louder.

"Collins," Ty snapped. "Get that mutt under control. Now."

The officer, Collins, reached a hand down to brush his fingers against the back of its head. It

stopped bristling and licked its lips, but a low rumble still spilled from its throat.

"Down, Bunny," Collins said softly, and at last the dog sat back on its haunches and ceased its

growling.



Jensen opened his mouth to speak again, but then glanced from the officer to the fearsome dog,

and back to those eyes.

“Its name is Bunny?” he heard himself asking before he could stop himself.

The question caught the officer off guard and the hard lines of his face softened just a touch, and

if Jensen wasn’t mistaken, the corners of his lips twitched up just slightly. They eyed each other

for a long moment. Probably longer than was socially acceptable, and then Collins’ face was a

mask of stone again though some of the anger was gone.

“I’ll accept any discipline, sir,” he said addressing Ty but still locked eyes with Jensen. “But

there’s nothing to be done about it now.”

“Actually, there is. You are going to take Agent Ackles and Agent Pasa-Palla —”

“Padalecki,” Jared murmured softly.

“—to the funeral home and you are going to tell Andrew that he’s going to stay open late tonight

and let these two do their examination.”

Jensen felt a spark of hope. Was the body not destroyed yet?

Collins opened his mouth but was cut off by Ty.

“And don’t even try to tell me she’s already been cremated. I know the body didn’t leave here

until today and Andrew is the slowest fuck with paperwork I've ever had the misfortune of

dealing with."

Jensen could tell that Collins was biting the inside of his cheek painfully hard, but it kept him

from saying anything stupid and possibly from letting the glassy look that was now in his eyes

turn into full blown tears.

"Fine. They can go do whatever they want to do. But there's no reason for me to—"

"There's every reason, Collins, not the least of which you are the only one who can give

permission for them to see the body. And believe me. You and I will have a conversation about

this tomorrow. Right now, you are taking these agents to the funeral home. And when I say

'right now' I mean 'right the fuck now.' Are we clear?"

The man swallowed thickly. "Yes, sir."

Collins spun on his heel and walked stiffly back to his desk to collect a set of keys. Ty looked

Jensen square in the eye.

"I apologize for the misunderstanding, Agent Ackles. I hope you will find this resolution

acceptable."

Jensen swallowed uneasily at the police chief's cool tone. "Y-yes. It's fine."

"Good. And you and I will also have a conversation tomorrow."

Jensen felt a wave of heated mortification roll through his body. The sensation almost made him physically ill.

"I think that would be best," he replied. He needed to get this business sorted out before the

ASAC from Portsmouth arrived. The last thing he needed was this incident getting back to his

SSA or Kripke or anyone else at WFO. Though it probably would. That's how the Bureau

worked. It was a vicious gossip mill hidden under the guise of chain of command.

Collins strode past them without a word, Bunny hard on his heels. Jensen considered shaking

Ty's hand again, but now probably wasn't the time. He nodded to Jared and they started to leave

the bullpen, following the quickly disappearing back of the officer. Jensen kept his eyes down;

he didn't want to see the looks he was sure to be getting from the other officers and detectives.

He did glance up to make sure he wouldn't walk into anything on his way out and saw a plain

clothes detective leaning on one of the counters. One hand clasped his wrist, keeping his other

hand in front of his groin. The curve of his hand made it seem like he was cupping an erection.

He looked to the man's face, finding it unremarkable with a sharply trimmed beard, but with

glittering brown eyes. The detective wasn't smiling, but he was on the edge of one. Jensen

looked away.

Outside the sun was still fairly high in the sky even though it was after five o'clock. Collins was

opening the backseat to the police vehicle marked K9 and Bunny hopped right in. He shut the

door after her and got into the driver's seat without so much as a glance at the agents and only a

muttered, "Follow me."

Jensen heard the SUV start up and he uttered a curse under his breath as he jogged over to their

stupid Accent. Jared was right behind him and they managed to turn out of the parking lot only a

few seconds after Collins. The funeral home was a fifteen minute drive away, which meant it

was on the complete opposite side of town. DC and Elton actually had pretty much the same

square mileage, but the thought of getting across DC in fifteen minutes was laughable.

When they parked and got out, Collins and Bunny were already halfway inside the door, and

allowed it to slam shut behind them. Jensen slammed his car door in his aggravation. He

realized the guy was going through some shit—knowing what had been done to his sister

couldn't be easy—but for fuck's sake they were all on the same side here.

“At least since he's personally involved we won't have to work with him on this case,” Jensen

muttered as they approached the door.

Jared glanced at him but didn't respond. Jensen wasn't sure if it was because he had nothing to

say or because he thought Jensen's sentiment was a little callous. He couldn't be bothered to

care at the moment.

Inside there was the quiet murmur of voices going back and forth. The few words he caught

made it clear that Andrew was not thrilled about staying late and Collins was not thrilled with

the FBI's presence in general. Jared and Jensen entered the room and Collins glanced back at

them before returning his attention to Andrew. Bunny kept her sharp focus on Jensen.

“Look, you don't have to stay. I can lock up for you.”

“No way, Misha. You can't stay here while they—you can't see her. Not like that.”

“I've already seen the reports. And I'm not going to watch them do the exam. I'll just sit out

here and wait. It's my fault anyway. I didn't have permission to release the

body. You shouldn't

have to miss your shows because of my—my mistake.”

Andrew snorted. “Miss my shows? It's September. And those bastard studios keep pushing

back the fall premiere dates every year. I swear, one year, they'll debut the week before they go

on holiday hiatus after Thanksgiving.”

Collins gave the smallest of smiles, but it was enough for Jensen to see how beautiful he could

be.

“Well, fuck.”

“What?” Jared asked.

Jensen started. Had he said that out loud? He looked at Jared and shook his head. “Nothing.”

“I guess you two are the agents?” the funeral director called out. He was short, stocky,

redheaded, and covered in freckles. He felt bad for thinking it, but Jensen was pretty sure this

guy's high school life hadn't been the easiest. “Come with me. I'll get—her—out and show you

where you can work. You stay here,” he added with a pointed finger at Bunny.

Bunny tilted her head at him like he was saying something funny. When Collins gave her a hand

signal, she lay down and put her chin on her paws dejectedly and watched the humans move

down a dimly lit hallway. Jared followed the funeral director toward a white door, and Jensen

paused to catch Collins' eye and say, "Misha?"

Collins' lips did that twitch again like he was fighting a smile. "Jensen?" he replied in the same

tone.

This wasn't the first time Jensen had been touché-ed for making fun of someone else's name, so

he followed Jared without further comment. Though he did wonder when Collins—Misha—

Collins, fuck—had learned his name.

Once again they were led downstairs into a basement. Jensen thought that maybe they should put

morgues in big open rooms above ground with a lot of windows for natural sunlight. If a person

had to work with death all day, at least they would still be able to see life around them. The

same smell from the police department's morgue wafted up the stairs as they descended, but

once they hit the main floor the sharp mixture of embalming chemicals hit them full on. Jensen

parted his lips to breathe through his mouth for a minute until his nose got used to the malodorous

intrusion.

“You haven’t embalmed her yet, have you?” Jensen asked.

“No,” Andrew replied, short and clipped. “We don’t embalm those slated for cremation. Do you really think it would be a good idea to send all those chemical into the air? Not to mention

about forty percent of my mixture is ethanol. It would as likely explode.”

Jensen ran his tongue over his teeth to keep from commenting. One, no, ethanol would not cause

a corpse to explode, just burn quicker. And two, he got that the dude was defending his fellow

town person or whatever (or maybe they were friends), but Jensen was fed up with the

population of Elton and didn’t want to deal with anyone else’s snarky bullshit.

“If you would just get the body set up for us and tell us where we can find some gloves, we’ll

handle it from there.”

Andrew gave him a playground stink eye, but walked over to the stacked storage unit that

presumably held any number of dead bodies. Misha—Collins—Misha, fuck—was leaning

against the wall next to the door, not speaking, just watching. He closed his eyes when Andrew

pulled out the tray that held his sister. She was covered in a white cloth and Jensen helped lift



the tray and place it on one of the work tables.

Andrew spoke softly so Jensen could barely hear him, and for certain Misha couldn't, "She's

been with only refrigeration for close to six days now, so she's actually in pretty bad shape.

They also used an antifungal disinfectant on her with mixed results. Be careful not to get any on

your skin or in your eyes. And try not to breathe it in."

Jensen nodded in acknowledgement and Andrew showed them where the heavy duty aprons and

gloves were, along with some simple tools that might help them. He went into great detail about

the locking mechanism on the refrigerated storage unit and made sure both Jensen and Jared

could do it themselves before he was willing to leave. He surveyed his space for a moment with

hands on hips and a nervous eye. Jensen was worried the guy might elect to stay, but he checked

his watch and turned to Misha.

"Come on, Misha. Walk me out so I can show you how to lock the front door."

"No," Misha murmured, eyes on the white cloth-covered figure. "I'll stay here."

"Misha, I don't think—"

"No, you're not," Jensen said firmly. "Go upstairs."

Misha's cold blue eyes turned to him. "I'm not leaving her al—Relax, Agent, I'm not saying I

don't trust you and think you will plant evidence. But I'm going to stay down here as witness.

Chain of custody and all that."

"Chain of custody is already shot to hell, *Officer*. Even if we find anything here, it won't be

admissible in court. At best we're going to try to confirm it's the same guy who killed in DC

eight years ago."

"My being here won't hinder you in that goal."

"You're not staying here."

"You have no authority—"

Jensen took two steps which put him squarely in Misha's personal space and effectively trapped

him between Jensen's body and the wall. Misha was only a couple of inches shorter, but Jensen

was broader through both the shoulders and hips, making him appear much larger than the other

man. But Misha didn't flinch or seem the least intimidated.

*Emotional manipulation it is then*, Jensen thought.

"You're not staying here—while we search through every crevice of your *sister's* body."

Misha inhaled sharply and kept his glare going as best he could, but clearly

Jensen's words had

affected him. Perhaps the mental image was enough to convince him to go before he saw

something he couldn't un-see.

"Misha," Andrew said softly.

Misha moved forward, and rationally Jensen knew he was simply moving to shoulder him out of

the way, but for a moment all Jensen could see was a sea of blue and lips so pink and full they

were just begging to be abused. Then Misha was roughly shoving past him and marching up the

stairs. Andrew gave the agents one last hard look before following him up.

Jensen took a couple of short breaths and licked his lips. He kind of hoped he never saw Misha

Collins again. Even if that meant the guy left right now and locked him and Jared in a funeral

home overnight.

"Jensen?"

Jensen turned around and saw that Jared had already put on a thick apron and had just barely

managed to squeeze his giant paws into a pair of XL size latex gloves. Jensen put on an apron as

well and had a bitch of a time trying to squeeze his hands into size medium gloves. Medium was

the only size Andrew had in nitrile. Jensen was allergic to latex and that was an allergy that

made shopping for condoms unpleasant and expensive.

Jared stood on one side of the body and looked at him. Jensen could see the discomfort and

mounting anxiousness in his eyes.

“You ever worked with a body before?”

Jared shook his head.

“You ever *seen* a body before?”

“Just the ones at The Farm.”

“Well, this should be worse than TV, but better than The Farm.”

Jared nodded. Jensen gingerly grasped the top of the sheet and pulled it all the way down to the

corpse’s feet. They froze for a moment, staring at the killer’s handiwork.

The body was misshapen from a lot more than just decay. The eyes were sunk into the skull, the

skin pulled back from the hairline and the fingernails. There was a general sense of flatness that

came from gravity’s pull on the remains that had lost its vitality. But that was common at six

days out. Even with the blood removed from the body, and the large hole stitched up in her chest

with a large gauge needle that housed the plastic bag that held her internal

organs, it was clear

that the body had been absolutely mutilated. Bruises, cuts, tears, rips...Jensen shuddered and

looked away from one gash in her right arm. Dr. Rhodes hadn't lied: her throat had been cut into

ribbons, still connected on either end to the body. Everywhere he looked there was some

violation, some sadistic experiment, some sick curiosity satisfied.

Jensen forced his brain to stop seeing the whole. To only focus on one part at a time. He looked

up at Jared.

"Heads or tails?"

Jared gulped and looked down at the body. He looked at her feet, and then her head.

"Heads, I guess."

"Check everywhere. Scalp. Inside her ears. Inside her mouth. Look in her throat; see if he

branded her inside. Those cuts he made are something new."

Jared nodded, visibly steeled his resolve, and moved to stand at the top of the table. He

tentatively began to comb through her once blonde hair. Jensen moved to her feet and picked one

up. He carefully looked over the bruised skin, making sure nothing was hidden in the

discoloration. Then he pulled her toes apart one by one to check the skin hidden in between.

Finding nothing, he began the slow process of inspecting the splotchy skin of the tops of her feet,

her soles, her ankles, her shins and calves. Jensen had reached her knees and had counted no

less than three hundred individual cuts and slices into her body. He stood up, wincing as his

back protested the movement and twisted gently side to side to stretch out the cramp that had

formed over the last half hour. Jared stopped his work on her throat when he saw Jensen stand

and stretched out his kinks as well.

"Anything?" Jensen asked, already knowing the answer.

"Not yet."

"Did you check her mouth?"

"Yeah. I looked at her tongue and the insides of her cheeks, but I didn't see anything." Jared

chewed on the corner of his lip, but didn't speak again.

"What, Jay?" Jensen hoped the nickname would soften his question since his exhaustion was

coloring his tone.

"Do you really think if it were him, he would hide the brand so carefully?"

No, Jensen's internal voice told him. "I don't know," he said aloud. "I mean,

he did blatantly display their crimes as a way of proving they deserved his punishment. It doesn't make sense

that he would hide the crime—unless he was trying to mask that it was him. But this guy is a

narcissist. He *wants* to be noticed. He'd love nothing more than for everyone to know that he is killing again. If he ever stopped. I wonder if we should comb through the unsolved murders in

whatever town in Missouri that coffin went missing from."

"But, why would he switch to premade coffins? The care he took in the original three—it just

doesn't—" Jared trailed off, not finishing his thought.

So Jensen finished it for him, "Seem like this is our guy."

Jared started to speak, perhaps to refute what they were both thinking, but then decided not to

bother.

"Alright," Jensen said, "let's just finish checking over the body and maybe we can get a flight back to DC in the morning."

They continued their search in less detail, and it was with great reservation that Jensen pushed

the corpse's thighs apart and began to inspect the labia. It seemed kind of disrespectful to do this

to her if he wasn't really expecting to find anything.

"You think it's possible to even get something to settle flatly on the roof of the mouth?" Jared muttered, Jensen assumed, to himself.

Jensen heard the disturbing resistance of the stiff jaw as Jared pried it open

again. The body

shifted a little as he tilted the head back and Jensen leaned down to inspect the flesh in between

the opening to the vagina and the anus. He should probably turn the body completely over to

inspect the skin around the anus. He looked up to tell Jared to help him flip the body—and

froze. Jared was pulling the tongue up and out of the mouth to look at the skin of the mouth

underneath. On the underside of the tongue were sharp black marks. Jensen walked forward,

not taking his eyes from the marks.

"I don't see anything under here," Jared said, disappointment evident in his voice as he released the tongue. Jensen's hand darted out and grabbed the muscle and Jared started in surprise, not

having noticed Jensen's approach. Jensen pulled the tongue out as far as he could and bent it

back.

There, burned into the graying flesh, was the word **WITCH**.

### **Wednesday, September 18, 2013**

Jensen was pacing the small room with his Blackberry to his ear and his personal cell phone in

his other hand, thumb roving the touch screen. Jared couldn't tell which cell phone was causing

him to make such an annoyed face; possibly it was both. It was only mid-



morning but Jensen's

coat was already discarded in a chair, his tie loosened, and shirt sleeves rolled up. Jared

wanted to feel excited for his first real field case, but he was just nervous. With the discovery of

the brand last night, shit suddenly got real.

He decided not to think about the stormy scene that had taken place between Jensen and Officer

Collins after they'd come barreling up the stairs with their news. Jensen hadn't been the most

tactful in explaining what he'd found and Collins had looked to be about three seconds away

from punching him in the face. Instead he considered how impressive and efficient the Elton

Police Department was. The next morning a room had been cleared for the FBI's use. Two

desks had been placed against one wall, leaving space for both Jensen and Jared to work and to

set up the field laptops the agents from the Portsmouth RA were bringing. Three whiteboards

had been crammed against the opposite wall, and one was set up with the DC victims.

Father Isaac Dolan, Jeanine Tirro, and Walter Feldman. Each had a headshot as they appeared

in life taped to the board and underneath were written the facts of their individual cases. Next to

Feldman's, Jensen had left a space and written "Missouri?" in blue marker. The second

whiteboard had a single picture on it: a stunningly beautiful blonde with the name Natalia Smith.

The details of her case were listed beneath her picture. Jared looked at the empty space to the

right of her picture. And the completely blank third board. He prayed to God that those boards

wouldn't fill up with more pictures and that they could solve this with the information they

already had.

Jensen passed in front of him one more time and it cleared Jared's blurred vision. He focused

on the victims again. Above each photo was written a pair of words: Molester: Gabrael,

Abuser: Kael, Depraved: Raguel, Witch: Akael. They were still waiting to hear back from the

local clergy and religious scholars if there was any significance to these names individually or

in combination. Jared had gone ahead and conducted a Google search on Akael, but so far had

only turned up Facebook and blog pages and a user name on YouTube with no videos associated

with the account. He'd done a Bing search afterwards just to compare, but all Bing had done

was provide him pages that had information on things that were spelled

similarly, but not the

same. He'd dig a little deeper later, but right now he was rereading the case notes from the three

DC murders so he'd appear knowledgeable when the Portsmouth agents showed up.

After another half hour, Jensen had stopped pacing and was sitting at his new desk away from

home. His Blackberry was set aside and he was poking at his personal phone's screen. Jared

leaned forward in his chair just a bit to see if he was playing a game or something.

"Agents."

Jared jumped to his feet and could see Jensen's face go from surprise at his swift action, to unhidden amusement at his puppy-like nature. Jared hated to acknowledge other people's

assessment of his personality being doglike, but there it was.

They turned to face the entrance to the room and Ty stood in the door with two people in dark

suits. Feds. There were a lot of incorrect stereotypes about the FBI and the suits were kind of

one of them. A lot of agents took advantage of the "business casual" policy most field offices

had if they were expecting to be riding the desk all day with paperwork. But out in public: ugly,

ill-fitting suits and bland ties were almost a required uniform.

“I found these two out wandering the halls,” Ty said pleasantly, “thought they might belong to

you.”

The man and woman behind him sent glares at the back of his head.

“I’ll see if I can get a hold of our IT guy and send him over here to hookup your equipment. I’ll

let you all get acquainted, but then I’d like to have a joint meeting so we can discuss how you

would like to proceed with the case and what resources you’ll need from us.”

“That sounds about right,” said the male agent who was average height with a small bald spot,

but with beard enough to make up for it. “Probably aim for after lunch.”

Ty nodded. “It’s a date. If you’ll excuse me now, I’ve got a squirrel-licker to book.”

Ty looked at Jensen and Jared thought he might have flushed a little at the reminder of the

disturbance from yesterday. When they’d arrived that morning Jensen had been shanghaied into

the chief’s office with a closed door for a solid hour. Jared had worried the entire time. He

wasn’t that familiar with Jensen yet even though he felt they’d clicked pretty instantly in terms of

personality, but he did think Jensen had a bit of temper and had a hard time keeping it to himself.

Fortunately he’d had the distraction of setting up the whiteboards per

Jensen's instructions, and a

thoughtful officer had stopped by with coffee for both of them. The officer had been friendly,

though Jared sensed he was a little disappointed he didn't get to meet Jensen as well. He even

stayed and talked for a good thirty minutes, but eventually had to return to his duties before

Jensen came back from his meeting with Ty. When he did come back, he didn't seem to be upset

or embarrassed, so Jared assumed it had been a good talk and had wisely decided not to ask

about specifics.

Ty gave Jared a nod as well and then left the new agents. The man stepped forward and

introduced himself as ASAC Jim Beaver. From knowing him for all of thirty seconds Jared

could tell he was gruff and a man of few words. He was also clearly someone who wouldn't put

up with anyone's shit. The woman was pretty with long dark hair in a high ponytail and a petite

figure displayed rather nicely in a well tailored black pantsuit. These thoughts zipped in and

right out of Jared's head as she stepped forward and gave them both a strong, confident

handshake. She introduced herself as SA Genevieve Cortese, and the intelligent glint in her eye

and no-nonsense attitude immediately incurred respect.

“I read over the cases in the database,” she began, “but of course I’d like to hear your impressions as the original investigator. Also, I haven’t seen any of the material for the case that

happened here. Do you have copies?”

“Well, I have *a* copy,” Jensen answered. “The locals haven’t been too interested in making

copies for us, but you’re welcome to read over all the notes I have. Also, I would like to ask if

you, or ASAC Beaver, are taking point on the case. I have no problem with that since this is

your jurisdiction.”

His face and voice were calm and professional, but Jared saw the way his fingers were

twitching at his side. He would *not* be okay if he was reduced to a secondary on this case.

“No,” Cortese responded. “This is your case. I’m here to assist you in any way I can. Jim is

here to get the lay of the land and a firsthand account of the case, but I’ll be your primary liaison

to the Portsmouth RA.”

Beaver had meandered over to the whiteboards and was looking over the victim summaries.

“So, tell me again what it was that made you so sure this is the same guy? Aside from the

obvious?”

Jensen, Jared, and Cortese moved to stand in a small semi-circle near Beaver.

“I’ll start with the least important reason first, sir,” Jensen began, “but quite frankly it’s because

—I just *knew* it was him.”

Beaver raised an eyebrow but made no comment. If anything, he looked a little pleased with that

reason.

“Secondly, the violence and the torture and the exploration of the corpse have similar

signatures. I’ve spoken with some of the people in Martinsburg and asked if handwriting

similarities are restricted to what a person does with pen and paper, and they said no. So, I’ve

sent pictures of the angel name carvings down to them for a comparison, but they look identical

to me. What really clinched it for me was the brand we found on the latest victim. The fact that

the killer was carving angel names into the victims’ chests was released to the public—”

“I guess that’s why the ridiculous moniker ‘Angel Slayer’ was adopted,” Beaver grunted.

Jensen made a face acknowledging how stupid he thought the name was too, and then continued,

“But the branding of the victims ‘crimes’ was kept out of the paper. So we

had something to

identify copycats with and to make sure any confessions we got were real ones.

“The brands appear to be carved out of a single piece of metal specifically for use on each

victim depending on their crime. It’s speculation mostly, but we thought at the time that the brand

is the first thing he does to the victims. He lets them know what crime they are guilty of and that

is why they are being punished. He sees himself as punishing the wicked and giving them what

they deserve.

“Now, we were never able to prove it definitively, but I believe that all three DC victims were

somehow linked. That they knew each other or had some common connection amongst them.

The second victim’s son’s girlfriend attended the same church that Father Dolan preached at. I

just can’t accept that that’s a coincidence.”

Cortese shrugged a dubious shoulder. “Seems like a stretch to be honest.”

“I know it is. And unfortunately we couldn’t find a link with either of them to the third victim,

but we also never got access to the list of people who were victims of his clients. But I feel that

since they all somehow involved children that there was one common link, or



a chain, that led

him to his new victims. He identifies his targets by whatever their sin is. And if we can figure

how he's determining or finding out what these people's crimes are, we might—"

"Stop saying that!" someone shouted from behind them. The small group turned to see Officer

Collins fuming in the doorway. "She didn't commit a crime! She's not guilty of anything! She

didn't deserve this!"

Jared saw Jensen's eye twitch in annoyance and he almost reached out a hand to stop him from

approaching the other man. The last thing they needed was to cause another scene.

"I'm not saying she did," Jensen said sharply, "all I'm saying is that *he* thinks she did. And there has to be *some* reason why he does."

"Yeah, he's a crazy fucking serial killer!"

"He doesn't pick his targets arbitrarily! Something draws them to him. He has a God complex;

he thinks he's doing God's work. He's punishing the wicked. He can't just punish innocent

people. He has to believe there's something that they did—"

"And I'm telling you, you shit, Natalia has done nothing to draw this killer's eye! I can't believe

you're fucking blaming the victim!"

Collins started to turn like he was going to leave them with that as his last words, but Jensen's

hand shot out and clamped tightly around his wrist. Jared raised his eyebrows. He could have

gone for the shoulder or upper arm, and if there was anything his lessons at the Behavioral

Science Unit had taught him about body language, it was that touching another person's wrist

was an oddly intimate way of getting their attention. Whatever his reasons for reaching for

Collins' wrist, he then used his grip to drag Collins across the room. Jensen stood him in front

of the DC board.

"Look at this," Jensen said, voice a little softer, a little calmer. "Molester. A priest who abused

children. He was wildly beaten. A lot of the damage was done before death and it was

sloppy." Jensen pulled Collins slightly to the right.

"This woman abused her children. She was tortured while she was still alive, and only after death were precision cuts made." Once more to the right. "This one helped set pedophiles back

loose on the streets. He died too fast, so everything was more carefully done; his body became a

playground." Jensen pointed to the word Missouri.

"He disappeared for over eight years, but he didn't stop killing. He couldn't have. In these

eight years he's learned to enjoy his kills. He takes more pleasure in them."  
Jensen stepped to

his right again, placing himself in front of Natalia's picture and description so  
Collins couldn't

see it and was forced to meet Jensen's eyes. "Now...now he's truly found his  
niche. He...

was *experimenting* on her. Enjoying his handiwork. Able to conduct it calmly  
while they're

still alive. Something he hadn't done previously. The torture is the thrill  
now...not the

punishment. But he can't just torture for fun. In his head they have to deserve  
it. He has to have

some reason, no matter how big a pile of bullshit it may be, to do what he  
does. So he finds

them 'guilty' of a crime. And he may grasp at straws to do it, but there *has* to  
be *something* that makes him see it."

Jensen drew breath to speak again, but then stopped, and just looked at  
Collins. They stared for

a moment, and then Collins dropped his eyes to the corner of the  
whiteboard's marker ledge.

Jensen dropped his eyes too, but not to the floor. Jared could have sworn he  
was staring at

Collins' lips. Which, that was both good and bad. Good in that he clearly  
didn't have

competition for Felicia's attention now, and very, very bad because Jared  
couldn't think of a

worse person for Jensen to crush on than an angry, volatile cop who was the brother of one of

the victims of the case they were working.

“Misha,” Jensen said softly, and their eyes met again. “It would help us catch him if we could

figure out *how* he’s choosing his victims. There has to be...something...”

He trailed off and Collins’ jaw muscles ticked in anger, annoyance, grief—it was hard to tell.

Then his features softened as a realization washed over him.

“She—she was into that new age crap. Crystals and oils and incense and little tiny gongs. She

was a huge environmental advocate. An almost literal tree-hugger.”

Jensen nodded thoughtfully. “And new age crap and nature is often associated with the Wiccan

religion. And by extension, witches and witchcraft.”

The room was quiet for a moment. And then Collins let out a soft, bitter laugh.

“Well, glad I could be of help,” he said harshly before walking out of the room abruptly.

Jensen raised a hand and opened his mouth, but didn’t go after him and didn’t speak. He shook

his head slightly and looked at the small group of agents.

“Well, that does help. Someone who does new age practices was enough to trigger his sense of

heavenly justice, so—”

“Do you really think that’s what it is?” Beaver interrupted. “I mean, do you really think this angel fruitcake *believes* he’s doing God’s work?”

“I don’t think he thinks he’s talking to God or anything, but I think he truly feels righteous.”

“As if he wasn’t dangerous enough,” Cortese said dryly.

“Exactly,” Jensen agreed with a brisk nod. “In fact, I think the best way we can deal with this is

not to release to the public that this in fact the—” Jensen let out a small annoyed sigh “—Angel

Slayer. Right now he’s trying to keep a low profile. I think he has for over eight years now. If

he finds out the police, or the FBI, are onto him again, he’ll escalate. Quickly.”

Jared chuckled as he had a Ron Burgundy flashback. Beaver, Cortese, and Jensen glanced at

him. Jared cleared his throat and tried to look pensive as he crossed his arms and asked what he

hoped was an intelligent enough question to distract them from his lapse in professionalism.

“So, do you think he’s been traveling around the country this whole time? Do you think he’s

already left the area?”

Jensen made a face. “I’ve been trying not to consider that possibility. We don’t have an

extended pattern, but maybe he kills in threes. But this is such a small town; it wouldn't make

sense to stay here where a stranger would stick out like a sore thumb. Especially if the locals

keep turning up dead."

Cortese tilted her head slightly. "Maybe he's not a stranger. Have you talked to the police chief

about new people in town? And I mean, I know it's a small town, but it still has a population of

five thousand. I wouldn't expect for everyone to literally know everyone else."

Jensen looked hard at Cortese, but Jared didn't think he was really seeing her. "Not a

stranger..." he mused softly. Then he gave a slight shake of his head. "We shouldn't rule it out,

but I'm disinclined to believe that he's from here. Or any of the places where he's killed."

"How about the town where that priest had his first assignment?" Beaver suggested.

"Springdale, Arkansas. Maybe. But I don't think he was personally abused by the priest."

"But I thought you said these beatings and torturing were personal," Cortese said. "Why would

he do that to a priest that didn't personally hurt him or at least someone he knew?"

Jensen deflated a little. "I'll be honest; we just don't understand this guy's

motivations well

enough yet. It could be that he finds their crimes personally offensive. Could just be he's a sick

fuck."

"I think that's the one thing we can declare to be fact in this case," Beaver said crustily.

Jensen's eyes flicked to Beaver, but he didn't say anything. Cortese stepped around them and

began examining the whiteboards.

"I think you're right, Agent Ackles."

"Jensen," Jensen said softly.

"Jensen. I think he really is constrained by finding victims that have—to his mind—done

something wrong. He needs victims that are deserving of their punishment. I think it's the crime

that he's fixating on. The victim—who they are as a person—is not really important at all." She

turned around, ponytail swishing. "This will make it so much harder to catch him if we can't

identify his victims. Not without knowing his thought process. Is there a common thread to the

crimes at all?"

"Well, the first three involved children. This last one?" He shrugged a shoulder. "If new age

crystal crap makes her a witch, I don't see how that could really affect children."

Jared twitched as he had an epiphany. Everyone caught the movement and looked at him.

"She's a teacher," Jared said, turning away to grab her file from Jensen's desk. He thumbed

through it until he found the page recording her personal details including her occupation. "She

was an elementary school teacher. Maybe he thought she was teaching her new age stuff to

them. Corrupting the children with witchcraft."

Jensen snapped a finger and then pointed it at Jared. "Yes, Jay! Good catch."

Jensen walked over to the third whiteboard and on the far right side wrote "children" in green

marker. Then under it in black he wrote smaller "failed protector" followed by two question

marks.

"I think we should—"

"Before we get too embroiled in all that," Beaver interrupted, "is there anywhere around here I

can get some decent lunch?"

"Nell's," Jensen and Jared said in unison.

They shared a smile. Then Jensen told Beaver and Cortese they would take them to a local



place for lunch while he rolled down his shirt sleeves and collected his suit jacket. Jared

organized the files neatly on the trays on Jensen's desk. The man had a system and he already

dreaded what would happen to him if he messed it up.

The four of them had lunch at Nell's, and Jared decided to branch out and try the "chowder"

though there was no indication if it was clam, crab, or other. It was delicious, but he couldn't

taste out the source of the meat either. He kept his flirting with Felicia to a minimum since

ASAC Beaver was present, but he did hand her one of his cards with his Blackberry number on

it when he covered the bill on his government credit card.

Back at the station they had a lengthy meeting with Chief Olsson and Detective Russell Little

who had been assigned the case before the feds were called in. He was average height, average

looks, with brown hair and eyes, and a neatly trimmed beard. Jared recognized him as the detective who had brought him and Jensen coffee that morning. Now it made sense why he'd

been interested in meeting them—they were the federal dicks that had snaked his case. Jared

didn't think Jensen was particularly thrilled about it, but he had agreed to Little working the case

with them.

A large portion of their planning session was discussing whether the Elton PD forensic team

would handle any future crime scenes or if the FBI's ERT should be brought in. Jensen had

stopped the unending circle of the argument by saying they shouldn't anticipate another crime

scene. They should be working with what they had now to catch the guy before another crime

scene could be made. They all agreed with this point, though none of them spoke aloud what

they were all thinking: they had no suspects and no evidence that pointed to one. They

actually *needed* another crime scene.

It was after six o'clock when they finally called it a day; Beaver and Cortese had to drive an

hour back to Portsmouth and Jared and Jensen had been at the station since seven in the morning.

They still agreed to meet back in Elton at seven thirty the next morning. Beaver said more than

likely he wouldn't return the rest of the week as he had meetings to attend, but he'd try to get out

next week. Cortese shook their hands firmly and Jared found that he really liked her. She was

smart, unafraid to jump into a case feet first, and thus far unflappable; those were traits he

admired in an agent and aspired to himself.

He and Jensen were leaving their appointed office space when he remembered his overcoat was

hanging in the corner. He thought it was supposed to be colder today. It wasn't.

"Oh, hey, Jensen, hold up. I need to get my coat. I'll lock the door. Here." Jared tossed him the

keys to the Accent.

Jensen frowned at them and Jared just smiled at his utter distaste for their rental car. He said

goodnight to the swing shift crew in the bull pen and was less than a minute behind Jensen as he

exited the building, so he saw him change his direction abruptly.

"Misha!" Jensen called out and approached Collins as he was unlocking the K9 vehicle's

backdoor for Bunny. Jensen jogged up to him and then, good for him, didn't stand too

awkwardly beside him. "Hey. Look, I really am sorry about this afternoon. I hope you know

that I understand how difficult—"

"Agent Ackles," Collins cut him off sharply. "I don't think you really understand anything of

what I'm feeling, to be honest. And I don't think we've reached a level of intimacy in our

relationship that warrants us being on a first name basis."

Jared sucked some air through his teeth. Ouch. Jensen looked just as taken

aback.

“Apologies, Officer Collins,” Jensen said completely blandly. That was even worse than if he’d

been cold or angry about it.

Jensen turned and walked to their rental car. Jared saw the mental kick Collins gave himself as he watched Jensen walk away. Bunny let out a soft, grunting whine and the officer looked down

at her. Based on Collins’ abashed reaction to her, Jared didn’t feel crazy for thinking Bunny was

disappointed with him.

“I know, I know,” Collins muttered and opened the backdoor for Bunny to hop in.

Jared walked across the parking lot, acting like he hadn’t witnessed anything. Because he

hadn’t, right? That certainly hadn’t been proof that K9 Officer Misha Collins may very well

reciprocate Jensen’s interest. Right? Because, while cerebrally interesting, that could be the

worst possible thing to happen.

**Damael**

**Thursday, September 19, 2013**

“Worst possible thing that could happen,” Jared muttered. “Why do people even have thoughts

like that?”

“What?” Jensen asked as he glanced at Jared.

“Nothing,” the younger agent grunted and stepped around the two small, yellow placards that

read seven and eight and marked where chunks of flesh had been flung from the body on the

plush, white carpet.

Jensen allowed his eyes to wander the scene again. The house they were in was large and

opulent and probably only used as a vacation home in the warmer months. The furniture was

light colored birch or pine, the carpeting white, and the upholstery, curtains, and décor were all

varying shades of ivory, beige, and ecru. It made it much easier to see all the splashes of rusty

brown around the room.

The nude body was balanced lengthwise on the side of a knocked over coffee table, arms spread

out in a mockery of crucifixion. Or maybe that’s just the way they naturally fell. Fist size chunks

of muscle, skin, and fat had been cut or ripped from the body and flung in all directions. Some

of the fingers and toes had been cut off with varying degrees of meticulousness—and Jensen was

sure the ME would tell him that some were before and some were after death. Bloody bald

patches dotted the skull where hair had been torn from the roots. The face was beaten in beyond

recognition. They were going to need to conduct dental or DNA identification to verify that the

victim was the owner of the house, Davis Thompson. His chest bore the name Damael. And

brazenly branded onto his forehead—no pretense at hiding now—was his crime: Blasphemer.

Jensen rubbed his eyes for the fifth time that morning. It was 5:47; the sun was barely making its

presence known on the horizon visible through the open front door. Gingerly stepping over the

threshold into the house, Dr. Rhodes made her appearance. Jensen waved her over. He hadn't

decided yet whether he wanted the local PD or the FBI to handle the evidence collection, but

he'd been impressed enough with Dr. Rhodes' report on Natalia Smith that he wanted her to

conduct any further autopsies. Dr. Rhodes reached his side and made hard eye contact, and

wouldn't look anywhere else. Odd behavior for a medical examiner actually.

"Don't often go to the crime scenes?" Jensen asked gently.

Dr. Rhodes shook her head. "No. I usually don't see them until they're on my table. Makes it

easier to not see them. Which sounds really callous."

“No, I get it. Thank you for coming out. I want you to do a once over before we move him to

make sure a shift in position doesn’t alter or mask anything.”

She bobbed her head determinedly. “That makes sense.”

Jensen put a reassuring hand to her elbow. “You’ll be fine, Dr. Rhodes, I promise.”

“Kim,” she said a little forcefully.

Jensen smiled tightly. “Kim. I’ll be right here. Just focus on the details for now, not the whole.

That’s my job.”

Kim nodded and moved closer to the body to begin her preliminary examination. Jared

completed his third circuit of the room that morning and stood by Jensen. Jensen crossed his

arms over his chest, allowing his eyes to sweep slowly over the room.

“Jared.”

“Yes?”

“Tell me, what do you see?”

“No sign of forced entry. The victim either left the door open or knew the attacker and invited

him in. That is when pleasantries ceased. The struggle was wild, violent. The assailant was

definitely not significantly stronger or bigger than the victim. By the time the torture began and

the brand was applied to the forehead, the victim was either subdued or unconscious, but still

alive.”

“Very good. Now, think about the whiteboards. Think about the crime scenes themselves, not

just the victims. What do you see here?”

Jared looked around the room. Furniture was upended, glass shattered, stains that weren’t just

blood covered both horizontal and vertical surfaces. This was his first live crime scene

regarding this case. He’d seen the pictures, but he wasn’t sure what he wasn’t seeing. He knew

Jensen was trying to lead him somewhere.

“What is it?”

Jensen dragged his teeth across his lower lip, his eyes jumping as they darted around the room.

“Well, first off, all of the previous crime scenes haven been dump sites. This is the kill

location. So it’s possible that the initial struggle with the other victims was this violent as well.

But what I’m seeing here is a loss of control. All of those crime scenes were spotless. This one

—I don’t know what it will be or where we’ll find it—but something is turning up from here.”

Jensen made a clicking sound with his tongue. “Why the loss of control? He



was getting better

at it. He was perfecting it. Why the step back?”

“Excitement maybe,” Jared said with a sour taste in his mouth. “I think he knows it’s not a secret

anymore. This is a message for us. Maybe even a challenge.” Jared took a step forward and turned enough to catch Jensen’s eye. “Do you think it could be laid out like this for you? Would

he know you worked the cases in DC?”

Jensen startled at the suggestion and felt his jaw drop slightly. Was that possible? Would the

killer actually know who he was personally? He felt a chill run down his spine and shuddered

with it.

“Maybe. That might explain why he decided to kill again so soon after the last one. And why he

didn’t bother to try to hide his signatures. The Elton PD was very good about keeping the

information about the angel name out of the press. And we only just found out that it *is* him when we found the brand. So, he didn’t get pulled back into the spotlight. No...he shined it on

himself.”

Jared turned even closer toward him and murmured softly, “So do you think that means we can

narrow down the list of suspects to people who have seen us in town?”

Jensen gave Jared a wry smile. “That’d be nice if we could. And while we

haven't been all

over the place, we could never know who was standing across the street at any given moment.

Also, while the details of the murder have been kept under wraps, I think FBI involvement made

the news. He may just think it's fun the FBI is involved at all and has no clue of who I am."

Jared dropped his gaze and stepped back, looking a little embarrassed. It hadn't been a terrible

theory, just not thought out to completion. Jared was learning, and trying to think around the

edges of the box at least. Jensen was becoming more and more convinced that the "place

holder" that had been sent with him had been grossly underestimated by their SSA.

"Agents."

Jensen turned and saw Detective Little escorting Agent Cortese, Gen as they'd come to know

her, into the room. Even though four was definitely a crowd, Jensen would gladly keep Jared on

the case. Gen had already proven herself to be a valuable asset and remarkably gracious in her

willingness to act as secondary investigator. So, that left Little. Jensen didn't know enough

about him yet to know if he was going to be a help or a hindrance, but in the spirit of cooperation

(and the fact that he'd already pissed off the police chief) Jensen was going to make an effort to

include the detective in the investigation. He greeted both with a nod.

“Good morning, Gen. Detective Little.”

“You can just call me, Russ. I’m not sure if you noticed, but the formality is a little absent in the

Elton Police Department.”

Jensen smiled at the detective. “I guess it depends on the person,” he said wryly.

Russ tilted his head in thought and then let out a little “ah” of understanding. “Collins. Yeah.

He’s more proper than most of us, but I promise you, he’s usually not that much of dick. He... he

and his sister were close.”

Jensen felt his face warm up. Had people seen that little exchange in the parking lot

yesterday? “I didn’t mean—” He cleared his throat. “At any rate, as long as we have an

understanding amongst each other. I think it’s more important to focus on the case and not have

to worry about formality and tiptoeing around each other’s sensibilities. And to that end,”

Jensen turned slightly apologetic eyes on Gen, “I know you don’t want to hear this, but my squad

back in DC is all men. And I just know I’m going to say something stupid at

some point—”

Jensen cut off at the pointed look Gen gave him.

“Jensen, I have five brothers. I’m certain there’s not much you could do that would offend me.”

He grinned at her. “Famous last words before I get my ass OPR-ed.”

Jensen, Gen, and Jared laughed, and Russ blinked at the unfamiliar acronym. Then the trio

immediately cut off their laughter and put on stern faces as the other people in the gruesome

crime scene turned to see who was laughing.

“Uh, Gen and Russ, if you want to take a look around the crime scene, Jared and I have already

been here a while.”

Gen and Russ nodded and moved further into the room. Jensen looked at Jared and said under

his breath, “Quick lesson from your mentor: try not to laugh at crime scenes.”

Jared ran his tongue over his teeth, and it kind of masked his attempt not to smile.

“Agent Ackles, Jared,” Kim got their attention as she approached them, snapping off a pair of

latex gloves.

“Why am I ‘Agent’ and he’s ‘Jared?’”

Kim thought for a moment. “I don’t know. Your name seems more intimate somehow. Probably

because it's weird."

"It's not weird."

"It is a little. Anyway, Jensen, Jared. I think I've seen what I need to here. The photographers

have gotten every angle and the forensics team wants to examine the table now. So, I think we're

ready to move the body. There are definitely some things I need my lab for to get a better picture

of what happened. For one thing, his fingertips are discolored. I have a suspicion of what that

might be from, but I need to verify it before I start throwing out theories."

"What's your best estimate for time of death?" Jared asked.

"Well, that's a little tricky you know. There's no rigor, but that could mean it's already passed or

it hasn't set in yet. The lividity patterns suggest he died in the position he's in now. There is a

wide variety of coloration in the bruising and some scabbing, so I think it's possible he was kept

alive and tortured for several days before he was killed. My guess is that death happened sometime last night. But, I couldn't swear to that. Not right now anyway."

"But wait a minute," Jared said, "We're pretty certain this is not a dump site. If he was kept

alive and tortured here for days—how come no one noticed?"

"Davis is a snow bird. Florida in the winter, summers up here. Being

September, it's possible

people thought he'd already headed back down south. He's a widower, so he lived here alone."

"I don't suppose you'd know why he would have been branded as a blasphemer, do you?"

Jensen asked.

"Very vocal atheist."

"Ah. Well, that explains that."

"Any connection to children?" Jared asked.

"Not that I know of. And I don't think he has any of his own."

Gen and Russell returned from their circuit of the room.

"They're getting ready to move the body now," Russ said. "Unless there's something more

you'd like to do here, I suggest we reconvene at the station and discuss what we'd like to do

there. I already have several officers canvassing the neighbors to find out if they saw or heard

anything. I think Thompson had a maid service, but we'll need his credit card records to verify

which one so we can identify who to speak with."

Jensen gave Russ a pleased nod of agreement. He was starting to think the local detective would

fit in nicely on this team.

“I picked Gen up at the station when she arrived this morning, so she doesn’t have a car. Jensen,

you can ride back with me if you like.”

Jensen just kept his eyebrows down and only briefly glanced at Jared.

“Yeah, sure.” He looked at Jared and Gen. “I’ll see you two back at the station.”

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Jared finished writing the word “chunks” on the last line of detail under Davis Thompson’s

picture on the whiteboard. He stepped back to compare this latest addition to the others. Jared

definitely didn’t have OCD nor was he a slut for uniformity, but he was observant. And Jensen

was a little bit of both of those things. He turned around and saw Gen sitting at his desk,

studying and using a marker to make notes on a printed set of the crime scene photos. Jensen

was leaning back heavily in his chair, his head falling all the way back, fingers rubbing his eyes.

On the computer the Elton PD had provided them for Internet access was a webpage that had

naked cherub gifs floating around the mystical meanings of angel names. It didn’t look like Jensen had had any Eureka! moments regarding the names Akael or Damael.

“Okay, I got it,” Russ announced as he appeared in the doorway. “Marvelous Maids of Maine.”

Jensen sat up and half turned, hanging an arm over the back of the chair. “Is that just a name? Or

are we really that close to Maine?”

“Well, I think they’re incorporated out of Maine. And we’re about half an hour from the border.”

“Hunh.”

“Anyway, they gave us the name of the maid who normally cleans for Thompson and she lives in

the next town over. I’ve called and set up an interview for 10:30. Do you want me to take it?”

Before Jensen could reply, Kim came up behind Russ and put a hand on his shoulder. He

stepped aside so she could come into the small taskforce center as well.

“Do you have something for us, Kim?”

“Yes, I do. I mean, I still have a lot of work to do and I’m still not confident about a time of

death right now except that I’d say there’s a more than average chance that it happened very late

Tuesday night or very early Wednesday morning. And if a neighbor hadn’t seen the open door,

he may have sat there for quite some time.”

“Well, we can all be thankful that didn’t happen,” Gen said.

“Thankful,” Jensen muttered. “He left the door open on purpose. He was done. It was time to

show off his work. He's such a child."

"I don't think this is the work of someone immature or unintelligent," Russ said softly.

"Unintelligent? No, not at all. But immature? Definitely. Juvenile. Puerile. Asinine."

"Okay, Word-a-Day," Russ chuckled. "Got it. Kim, you had some information for us?"

"Yes. I verified that the discoloration on his fingertips, even the ones that were no longer

attached, was from being soaked in bleach."

"Why would he do that?" Jared asked.

"Because I think Davis got a piece of him. There was tissue under his nails, but none of it was

salvageable."

"This doesn't make sense," Jensen sighed. "Why is he getting sloppier?"

Russ opened his mouth to speak, and then scratched behind his ear as he glanced at Jared. Jared

returned his silent shrug. If they didn't have a plausible answer, Jensen probably didn't want them to tell him they didn't know.

"Well," Gen said, "this did come right on the heels of the previous kill. They're barely a week

apart. Maybe he had a time crunch. But why would he rush his next kill like this?"

Jared answered, "Jensen and I have considered that maybe he's heard the FBI is now involved.

And it made him giddy.”

Gen made a face. “God. He is a child.”

“Okay,” Russ cut in. “Maid. The interview is in less than an hour and it will take at least twenty

or thirty minutes to get there. Who wants to go?”

“Um,” Jensen pondered and then spotted Kim still in the room. “Kim, thank you for the update.

Keep them coming.”

“Will do.”

Kim left the room and Jensen continued with his assignments.

“Jared and Gen, will the two of you go talk to the maid? Gen, I know you know what to ask, and

Jared, I’d like you to get some interviewing experience in.”

Jared nodded, not offended. He knew he was still green when it came to criminal cases.

“Russ, I’m going to need you to take care of something a little sensitive for me.”

“Anything.”

“We need to see if there’s a connection between the victims at all. And it would be best to start

with family, then friends, and then coworkers. And regarding the first victim’s family, I know

you probably know the answer anyway, but I still feel like we should ask him directly rather than

make it seem like we're doing it behind his back."

Russ nodded. "You want me to talk to Misha."

"Yeah. Could you?"

Russ grinned. "You're not scared of Collins, are you?"

"No. But I am a little of Bunny."

Russ laughed. "Trust me, Agent. The name matches the personality of that one. But, I gotta say,

I know the statistics say if you're going to get murdered it's most likely going to be by your

nearest and dearest, but this really seems like the wrong tree here. I don't think Misha has even

been outside of New Hampshire let alone been to DC. Heck, the only time I think he's been

outside of Elton is when he went to Dartmouth."

"Oh, I'm not suggesting—he went to Dartmouth?"

"Yeah. Every three years or so our little town produces an Ivy Leaguer."

"Hunh."

Jared barely stopped himself from rolling his eyes. Jensen was getting even more enamored

with his crush. Geez.

"Anyway, I'm not suggesting you treat Mi—Officer Collins as a suspect. I'm just curious to

know if the victims have any connections to each other. Of course, if he's one

of those

connections, well, then we might need to pursue that if necessary.”

“Understood. I think he’s off today. So, I’ll start with Natalia’s coworkers and see if any of

them know if she had dealings with Thompson. They’re teachers as well, so maybe that might be

a connection to children. Are we still looking for that?”

“No,” Jensen said swiftly. “Not looking. Never look for a clue you *want* to find because more

than likely you’ll find it. Let the evidence come in and sift it out to where it belongs.”

Russ smiled, looking impressed. “They teach you that at the Academy?” he asked.

“Not in so many words,” Jensen said. “But, it’s always important to make sure the theory fits the

facts and that you don’t try to make the facts fit your theory.”

“What are you gonna do, Jensen?” Jared asked.

Jensen groaned. “I’m going to keep looking into the angel names. I have to get in touch with the

local librarian again; he’s been pulling volumes that might be of interest and I need to swing by

and pick them up at some point. I’ve also got a couple of appointments with a local priest and a

rabbi. I know these names mean something. They’re not remotely arbitrary. I know it.”

“Are you sure you’re not fitting the facts to your theory?” Russ asked with a challengingly arched eyebrow.

Jensen frowned at him. “No, I’m not sure,” he said, exaggerating the annoyance in his voice so

that everyone knew he was joking.

Russ just chuckled. “Good luck with your research, Agent.”

Jensen grunted as Russ handed Gen a folded piece of paper from his pocket.

“This is the address of the maid.”

“Thanks,” Gen said and Russ nodded and left the room. Gen looked at Jared. “Ready to go?”

“Yeah,” Jared responded. He looked at Jensen. “You need anything before we go?”

“Nah, I’m good.”

Jared put his suit jacket on and followed Gen out into the bullpen. It had actually gotten warmer

and the jacket was a little stuffy, but he needed it to cover his weapon. He glanced at Gen’s

hips. Her suit jacket was past her waist, but it seemed too tailored to be hiding a gun, handcuffs,

and a cell phone.

The station was as quiet as it had been the first day he’d been there and Rachel had been

replaced at the desk by Katie, a pretty blonde who was way overdo to have

her roots done.

Normally Jared couldn't tell a real blonde apart from a bottled one, but two inches of dark

brown hair growing out of the top of her head was a good clue. He'd make a crack agent yet

with observations like that.

Outside, Gen stopped on the sidewalk and turned to him.

"Do you think we can take your car? I couldn't get our squad car today and had to drive my

POV."

"We can, but Jensen and I only have one—what do you mean your squad car? You don't have

your own Bu car?"

Gen gave him a snarky smile. "Excuse me Mr. Big Field Office Agent, sir. We can't all have the

funds to give every agent their own car."

"Oh, well," Jared flushed and looked at his toes. "I mean, they'll reimburse you for mileage,

won't they?"

"It's not that..." Gen trailed off, a little embarrassed.

She led them over to a rusted piece of dull yellow scrap metal.

"Good lord. What the hell is that?"

"It's a 2001 Pontiac Aztec."

“A what?”

“Exactly. My dad said I could pick what car I wanted for my sixteenth birthday, within reason of

course, and I don’t know what happened—it was yellow and sporty and cute and I—have never

lived it down.”

“Or been able to afford a new car? I mean, I know we’re government employees here, but we

do get law enforcement pay on top of our salaries.”

“I know,” Gen said testily. “I’ve just had—other expenses.”

“Like what?”

“None of your beeswax. Can we take your rental so the Bureau doesn't roll up to an

interviewee’s home in that?”

“God, yes. Right this way.”

Jared led them toward the, truthfully, only marginally better looking Accent and unlocked the

doors with the key fob. As they slid in and buckled up Gen asked, “You said you only have one

car between the two of you? Should I go back in and give Jensen my keys?”

Jared laughed. “I doubt he’d be willing to get into that thing. He can walk to Nell’s for lunch.

Besides, I imagine we’ll be back before he’s ready to call it a day.”

“Good points all. Let’s roll.”

The first several minutes after departure were spent navigating out of town and entering the

maid’s home address into the GPS device. Once they hit the open highway though, a slightly

awkward silence descended. Jared watched the trees rush past and strummed his fingers on the

wheel. He heard Gen inhale deeply and then let it out slowly. More silence followed.

“So,” Jared said, trying to sound conversational and not desperate for the silence to end. “How

did you find your way to the FBI?”

Gen smiled wryly. “Nepotism.”

Jared glanced at her with a smile. “Really?”

She shrugged a shoulder. “You know, I took the usual route. College, BS office job for two

years, applied to be an agent when I turned twenty-three, got in on the first try because I’m a

third generation legacy.”

“Really? Third generation? How old are you? Oh, I’m sorry, I shouldn’t—”

“It’s okay. I’m twenty-eight. My grandfather was in the Bureau from the 40s to the 60s. My dad

joined in 1977. He still works at the Boston field office. He’s an ASAC.”

“Are your brothers in the Bureau too?”

“One is. Two are Marines and one is in the Navy. I have a sister who works for the CIA and

one for NSA. And our littlest brother is still in college.”

“Shit—I’m mean, shoot—that’s a large family.”

Gen chuckled. “It certainly was for me. I was smack dab in the middle, so I never got to

experience what it was like to have only one or two siblings in the house like the oldest and the

youngest did.”

“Are you—Catholic or something?”

Gen shook her head, but thankfully she was still smiling. “Just had two very lovey-dovey

parents. What about you? Siblings? Parental legacies to live up to?”

“Nope. Only child raised by a single mother. She was a teacher, so she always told me *not* to

become one because you get paid shit to do a hard job with no gratitude. So, I thought I’d do

something that would make a lot of money and I got into computers. I got a job as a software

designer and did computer programming for five very long years. On a whim I applied to

become an agent—and fortunately kept my job while I did because that was a long ass process.”

“Tell me about it. Being a legacy does not let you skip any of the steps.”

They both laughed, glanced at each other, and then away. Silence fell again. Fortunately before

too much time passed, the GPS chimed and informed them of their exit. A few minutes later they

were pulling into the shared parking lot for a row of townhouses. They made their way up the

stairs for the one that was almost dead center and the reek of cigarette smoke permeated through

the gaps in the doorframe. Gen rang the doorbell.

The door opened a crack, revealing a pair of narrowed, suspicious eyes. Jared and Gen flashed

their credentials and the woman opened the door wider and invited them inside. She was

wringing her hands and looked like she hadn't gotten much sleep lately. The front room of the

townhouse was sparsely furnished with old 80s era pieces and the carpet was stained in several

places. The woman, Belinda Brighton, didn't offer them any refreshments and when she sat

down on an arm chair, they took that as an invitation to sit on the couch.

"Ms. Brighton," Gen began. "You've heard about Davis Thompson, correct?"

"Yes," she whispered, twirling a piece of dingy blonde hair in her fingers. "Can you imagine?

If I had walked in on the killer? He might have done that to me!"

Both Jared and Gen made sympathetic faces, but Jared was wondering how

much detail had

made it into the papers.

“When is the last time you saw Mr. Thompson?” Gen asked.

“I double checked with my employer's records for you. I was in Elton on September 10th,

a Tuesday. And I remember it myself because I usually clean for Mr. Thompson on Mondays.

But I took a job here on Monday to cover for—my friend. She also works for the maid service.”

“What is her name?”

“Candice Guzowski.”

“Thank you,” Gen scribbled down the name on small notepad. “Did you actually see Mr.

Thompson on that Tuesday, or did you just clean that day?”

“No, I spoke with him. He was getting ready to head back down to Florida soon, so he wanted to arrange a cleaning of the fireplaces and the heating ducts. He sometimes rents the house out in

the winter. Which is what made the following Monday so odd. My boss had said he hadn’t

contacted him regarding the extra cleaning, and when I got there, there was a note on the door

telling me I wasn’t needed. Usually he calls to cancel so I don’t have to drive all the way out

there. I should have known something was wrong then. If I had gone to the police, he might still

be alive!”

Ms. Brighton wrung her hands even tighter and let out a wheezing sound that Jared wasn't sure if

it was a sob or a very dry cough. The smoky air couldn't be helping matters.

“Ms. Brighton,” Gen said gently, “there was nothing you could have done. You know the police

wouldn’t check on a man because he left a note on his door. You’re doing excellent by

remembering all of this. Can you tell me, did you recognize the handwriting? Did it look like

his?”

Ms. Brighton shook her head, looking distressed. “I’m not sure. He’d left a note a couple times

asking for something to be cleaned that wasn't usually done. And he wrote out checks for the

service. But—it didn’t strike me as being different.”

“Did you keep the note?”

Jared tried not to tense with excitement. That note could be the only break they needed. It could

tell them where the paper came from. If the handwriting was that of the killer. *Fingerprints.*

Ms. Brighton shook her head. “No. I took it off the door and left. I know I crumpled it up and

dropped it in the cup holder of my car, but then I threw it out with the trash at another client’s

house.”

“Which client?”

“The Seecotts. They live in Farmington. But, that was their trash day. It was collected by the

garbage men I’m sure.”

Gen nodded. “Probably. But, we’ll still follow up with them just in case. Can you tell me

anything else that you noticed? When you spoke with Mr. Thompson was he acting strangely?

When you found the note on Monday, were any doors or windows open?”

Ms. Brighton took the time to search her memories. “He was definitely himself the last time I

saw him. And... I’m sorry. I don’t remember anything being out of place. Nothing major was

or I would have noticed. The house looked like it did any other day I cleaned it. Except for the

note on the door.”

“Thank you very much, Ms. Brighton, you’ve been a tremendous help.”

Jared and Gen stood up and Ms. Brighton did as well. Gen handed the woman her card.

“If you think of anything else, please feel free to call or e-mail me.”

The women turned the card over and over in her hands. “I should have kept that note. I should

have done something.”

“Ms. Brighton,” Jared said, stepping forward and laying a hand on her shoulder, “you did what

anybody else would have done. And you really have been a huge help today.”

He gave her an encouraging smile and turned on the puppy dog eyes. The woman relaxed a little

and gave him a small smile. They said their goodbyes again and exited the townhouse. They

were barely in the car when Gen said, “You practice that look?”

Jared chuckled and backed out of the parking space. “Innate talent.”

Gen laughed and this time they fell into easy chatter on the drive back, which was a good thing

when they found themselves slowing down to a complete halt as the highway backed up in both

lanes for as far as they could see.

“Oh, geez, look at that,” Gen murmured as she leaned forward in her seat to look around the

giant SUV directly in her view.

“It’s okay,” Jared said. “Even if it moves slowly, our exit is only half a mile away. We’ll be out

of it soon.”

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Jensen checked his watch again. Neither Jared and Gen nor Detective Little were back from

their interviews. It’d been over three hours and he’d already gone to lunch

and back. Felicia

had tried to convince him to try the meatloaf. He told her he would next month.

Both the priest and the rabbi had come down to the station as they didn't want to disturb their

parishioners by having the feds clomp around, but neither had been helpful. Neither was

familiar with any of the angel names except Raguel, who was apparently an archangel, but not

necessarily a seraph which is the highest order of angel. The priest was both the most and least

helpful. Apparently all of two angels are actually named in the *Bible*, but Catholics have a

whole list of angels and saints (that are not the same thing apparently) that have varying roles in

heaven and on earth. Jensen had politely listened to personal accounts of angel interactions by

people from his church and he'd learned a great deal about the classification and ordering of

angels, but since he couldn't apply any of this to the specific angels he was looking for it all

seemed rather pointless.

He couldn't believe he was having such a difficult time identifying these angels. The killer had

to learn them from somewhere. He would have started to believe he was just making them up,

but they had found the DC angels, so Jensen believed that other two were real as well. Or at

least, someone somewhere had written about them and the killer hadn't just made them up.

Unless, of course, Russ was right and he was just trying to make the facts fit his theory. But how

could that be the case? He didn't *have* a fucking theory. He didn't have a suspect. He didn't even have a shifty eyed dude lurking about at crime scenes. Jensen threw a pen against the wall

and it bounced back onto his desk. His Blackberry rang.

"Ackles speaking," he answered, rubbing his eyes.

"Agent Ackles?" a very quiet voice said in his ear.

"Yes, this is Jensen Ackles."

There was some whispering.

"Hello?" he asked.

Just barely audible enough to be heard a woman said, "Hi. It's Emily. From the library. You

called asking about texts on angels?"

"Oh, yes. Someone—Daniel, David—I'm sorry I didn't catch his name said he could get some

materials for me and would let me take them out of the library. Without checking them out," he

added, just in case she had grand plans of getting him a spanking new library card.



“Darren,” he just managed to hear if he held his breath. “Yes, it’s all ready. You can pick it up

today, but we close early on Thursdays. At three o’clock.”

Jensen checked his watch again since he hadn’t even noticed the time the last time he did. It was

a quarter past two. He grunted softly.

“Yeah, okay. I can come get it now. The library is on the same street as the police station,

right?”

Whispering.

“Emily, can you speak up and say that again, please?”

Jensen had to strain to hear, “Yes, on Main Street. Next to the Dairy Freeze. It’s not far at all.”

“Excellent. I’ll be there shortly.”

Jensen ended the call and grabbed his jacket from the back of his chair. He was halfway out of

the station before he realized Jared had the rental car keys. He slowed his walk and stepped

outside in the warm September afternoon. The Accent was missing from its parking spot. Why

hadn’t they taking Gen’s car? He was about to head back in to beg a ride off someone when

catty-corner to the police station he saw a Dairy Freeze. Just to the right of that there was a sign

for the Elton City Public Library.

“Hunh.”

Jensen jogged across the street and down the half block to the library. The tiny parking lot to the side of the building had one car in it. He pulled open the glass door and walked past a glass

foyer covered in children's drawing of their favorite books. He caught a glimpse of a picture

hidden toward the top that said, "My favorite book is Jean-Paul Sartre's *Nausea* because

inanimate objects like books take away my spiritual freedom and make me nauseated." It was

written in crayon, but clearly some smartass librarian or college kid home on break had created

it.

Inside the library proper, Jensen was stunned by the utter silence. He saw now how wrong he

was in thinking the police station was like a library. In Elton, that quiet shuffling of papers and

hushed voices was apparently the equivalent of high-paced chaos. Jensen actually found himself

starting to tiptoe toward the circulation desk.

"Hello?" he called out in a voice barely above a whisper.

A girl popped up from behind the desk and Jensen jumped back three feet in alarm. She had a

wild look about her face and wide eyes. She was definitely in fight or flight

mode and he wasn't

sure which one was going to win.

"Em-Emily?" Jensen asked carefully.

"Agent Ackles?"

"Yes."

The girl relaxed and Jensen wondered momentarily if she were high. He didn't see a glaze over

her eyes nor were they bloodshot, but she looked strung out all the same. Maybe she was just a

nervous, anxious person who lived in a perpetual stressed out state. One of his brothers was

like that.

"I'm, uh, here to pick up the materials Dan—Dave—"

"Darren."

"Darren set aside for me."

Emily's eyes darted to the left and back again. "It's right there."

Jensen started to turn his head, but kept his eyes on Emily. "Right... there?"

Emily's eyes darted again and Jensen looked over to the four very thin books stacked on the edge

of the circulation desk. Jensen completely forgot his unease at the antsy librarian with his

disappointment. He walked over and picked up the stack to glance at the four titles. The books

were very thin and one looked like a children's book. Jensen looked at Emily.

"This is it?"

"And that one," she said, pointing at a fifth book.

It was the *Bible*. And it looked like a Gideon's version. Jensen repressed a sigh.

"I think I already have that one in my motel," he said. "Well, thanks for these. Can I take them?"

"I'll probably bring them back tomorrow."

Emily nodded. Jensen turned to leave but a soft whisper caught his ear.

"We didn't have anything here really, so Darren called the Rochester branch. Brian says he has a

whole bunch of stuff for you. But, it's in Rochester."

"Where's Rochester?"

"On the border of New Hampshire and Maine. It's only a half hour drive."

"Can the books be sent here?"

"Yes. But, they would have to be entered into the system and be transferred, and the library truck only makes intersystem deliveries bi-weekly. And he just came two days ago. But if you pick

them up yourself, they'll let you take them without checking them out. Because you're FBI."

Jensen actually didn't hear the last sentence and a half of what she said because her voice

tapered off, but he caught the gist of it.

"So, they'll hold the books for me?"

Emily nodded. "They stay open until six o'clock tonight."

"Thank you, Emily. You've been a big help."

She smiled awkwardly and then ducked back down behind the counter. Jensen blinked. And

looked around. He was almost certain he was alone in the building and Emily had somehow

jumped dimensions. Perhaps she'd gone back to her home world. He shook his head and

walked back to the police station. He didn't even bother to look through the four books in his

hands and tossed them onto his desk. He sat in his chair and picked one up, but then tossed it

aside. Instead he pulled over the preliminary report on Thompson that Kim had brought upstairs

and began to read through it again. He knew the full report was probably one or two days off

still, but he couldn't shake his impatience.

A couple of hours later he was scratching through his seventh profile of the killer. There were

too many pieces. He wasn't even using the "missing pieces of the puzzle" analogy; he felt like there were pieces from a different puzzle thrown into the mix. He looked around the empty

taskforce center. Where the hell was everyone? What was taking Jared and Gen so long? He

pulled out his Blackberry to see if he'd called or sent an e-mail. The screen was dark. He

pushed some buttons and then held the power button down. Nothing.

"Damn it."

His charger was back at the motel. He checked his watch. It was 4:37. If he was going to get

those materials from Rochester tonight, he was going to have to leave soon. He would go to

Rochester by himself, but he didn't have a car. Maybe Ty would let him borrow a squad car? Or

take one from the impound yard?

Jensen made his way into the bullpen and headed for Ty's office when he spotted the police chief

glaring at a young teen girl who had her hands on her hips and was glaring back just as hard. He

slowed his pace and stopped a few inconspicuous feet away. The staring match continued until

at last the girl threw her hands in the air.

"Fine!" she said. "I'll tell her!"

Then the girl turned and stomped out of the police station. Jensen was worried this might put Ty

in a bad mood, but he was smiling as he watched the girl go. He turned and saw Jensen standing

nearby, clearly spying and eavesdropping, and approached him.

"My daughter," he explained, though Jensen had assumed as much. "She and two of her friends got picked up for truancy. It's only the second week of school. I mean, I never liked school

much either, but at least I made it to October before I started skipping."

"Who does she have to tell?" Jensen asked.

"Her mother."

Jensen grinned. "Let me guess. You're actually the least scary parent?"

Ty tapped the side of his nose with his finger. Then he sighed. "I don't get it. When she was

twelve she was still sweet and obedient. She turned thirteen over the summer and I got...that."

Jensen smiled a little malevolently at the thought that his oldest brother was only two years away

from "that" himself. It would be hilarious watching his brother deal with a teenage daughter.

"Can I do something for you, Jensen?"

"Oh, yes, actually, I was wondering if I could ask a favor. The library in Rochester pulled some

research material on angels for me, but Jared seems to have disappeared with our rental car.

Would it be possible for me to borrow a car out of the impound yard to go pick them up?"

Ty rubbed at the scruff on his chin. "Well, I think our 'impound yard' is empty at the moment."

Jensen made a hopeful face. "Could I borrow one of the squad cars?"

Ty saw something over Jensen's shoulder and grinned wickedly. "I got a better idea. I'll get you

a guide and chauffeur."

"I don't think—"

"Collins!" Ty bellowed.

Jensen stiffened and didn't bother to turn around. *Oh, Jesus, no.* Jensen still didn't turn to look at him, but he could feel when he arrived beside them.

"Yes, Chief?" Misha asked evenly.

Ty was still grinning. "You have the worst timing of anyone I've ever met in my life, Misha."

"Sir?" His voice sounded confused, but Jensen still wasn't looking at him.

"Agent Ackles here needs a ride to the library."

There was a long pause. "He can't walk a block and a half? Or can he not cross the street by

himself?"

Jensen whipped his head around to glare at Misha. And oh God he wished he hadn't. Misha

wasn't in uniform. He was wearing faded jeans and a stretched out black AC/DC T-shirt, but

that did nothing to hide exactly how lean and strong his body was. Jensen was also fairly certain

he hadn't touched a brush all day as his hair was an unruly mass of waves on his head. Jensen

just barely stopped himself from licking his lips. It had been years since he'd



been *this* attracted to a man. Misha flicked his eyes to Jensen and frowned at his scrutiny. Fortunately Ty drew his

attention when he started speaking again.

"The library in Rochester. You're going to drive him there so he can pick up some books, and

then you will also drive him back here."

Jensen was grateful Ty had included that last bit. He wouldn't put it past Misha to drive him to

Rochester and then strand him there saying all Ty said he'd had to do was drive him there, not

bring him back.

"Ty, I don't have to run errands for the FBI."

"You're off duty today, Misha."

"I know. Which is exactly why you shouldn't ask me to do this."

"Misha, we ain't exactly the NYPD here. Our resources are stretched thin in the best of times.

I'm not pulling an on duty officer for this task. I'm asking you to do it. And besides, don't think

that I don't know why that mutt is not glued to your heels right now."

Misha crossed his arms over his chest. "I don't know what you mean."

"I know she is at her little doggy day spa getting her quarterly 'check up' and grooming that costs this department a hundred fifty dollars a pop."

Jensen raised an eyebrow and Misha ignored the look.

"Not like she doesn't earn it," Misha mumbled.

"Well, we'll agree to disagree on that, but she *is* a valuable asset. More so than you're proving to be at the moment. So. You're going to drive Agent Ackles to the Rochester library, let him get

his books, and then you're going to bring him back. Understood?"

"Fine," Misha relented grudgingly. "Let me just get my stupid gym bag."

He stalked off toward his desk and Jensen felt a twinge of empathy. He had definitely gotten

drawn into last minute work at the office by going back for something he'd forgotten. And he

probably should have told Ty that he didn't think it was a good idea. That he really wanted

someone else to take him. Or shoot, there was no reason he couldn't wait until tomorrow and

pick them up with Jared. But, fuck him; he wanted to spend some time with Misha. For some

reason he wanted to try to clear the bad blood between them. He knew he'd been kind of a dick

to the officer when they'd first arrived, and Misha was clearly still in the anger phase of his

grieving process, but there was no reason why they couldn't find some common ground. And

yeah, that was the only reason he wanted to spend time with him. Just to clear the air. So it

wouldn't make any future interactions awkward for others around them. Yeah, that was it. So he

turned to Ty.

"Thanks, Chief," he said dryly. "I've always wondered what a drive through hell might be like."

Ty just grinned at him and slapped him on the back as he walked away.

"Let's go, Ackles!" Misha called as he pushed through the swinging panel on his way out of the station.

Jensen had everything on him he needed, but he took the time to go back to the taskforce office

and lock the door. Then he moseyed slowly out of the bullpen. One officer who was at his desk

noticed his slow gait and tried to hide a smile as he returned to his phone call that sort of

sounded like he was trying to talk a woman out of using a lighter and Aquanet hairspray to kill a

wasp in her bedroom.

Misha had pulled up to the front of the station in a red 1968 Dodge Charger. Jensen gave a low

whistle. That was a pretty nice classic car, and it looked like it was in perfect condition. He

walked around to the passenger side and opened the door. Before he got in he brushed his hand

over the upholstery.

"The dog's never been in here," Misha griped.

Jensen smirked and got into the car. He barely had the door shut before the car was moving.

"You know, *Officer*, I'm pretty sure New Hampshire has seatbelt laws."

"Then you better put your seatbelt on before I have to arrest you."

Jensen tried really hard not to smile at the thought of Misha cuffing him. He failed.

"And actually, New Hampshire doesn't have seatbelt laws for adults."

"It doesn't? That seems weird."

"More like evolution."

"What do you mean?"

"If you're stupid enough not to wear a seatbelt, then it's best if you don't pass your genes on to

future generations by getting smeared across the pavement."

Jensen nodded his head and then gave it a little shake. "Okay then."

They rode in silence until Misha merged onto the highway. The officer leaned his left elbow on

the side of the car and ran his fingers over his lips as he stared straight ahead. Jensen cleared

his throat, and he saw the slight eye roll Misha made.

"Look, Officer Collins. Saying we got off on the wrong foot is a gross understatement and I—"

Misha sighed dramatically. "Yes, I know. You were just doing your job. You're

compartmentalizing. It's what we're taught to do. It's a job, it's not personal. That's the best way

to focus in order to get the job done. I'm overreacting to a lot of things because I'm still pissed

and distraught and disgusted about what happened to my sister. She was missing for *at least*

three days and nobody even fucking noticed. Not even me. So, I'm still just a big ball of fucked

up asshole who doesn't want to listen to people who are just trying to help because I'm still in

big ball of fucking asshole mode. So, I treated you unfairly and poorly. You weren't wrong and I

wasn't right, but you know, you weren't right and I'm not wrong. So, we just have to accept that

and move on. Water under the bridge. You work your case and I'll stay out of your way. And

we'll be fine. Can we just leave it at that?"

Jensen swallowed thickly. He didn't really want to just leave it at "stay out of each other's hair,"

but it wasn't his decision to make apparently. So, he finally nodded.

"Yeah. We can. I just, I do want to say I'm sorry. I was out of line on Tuesday. Not just with

you, but with Ty also, and I misrepresented myself and the Bureau. And I—"

"Water, bridge, Ackles."

Jensen deflated and sat back in his seat. Well, all right then. An awkward silence filled the car,

pulling and tugging at them both as they tried to only look straight ahead or

out of their own

windows. Jensen got fed up. This was ridiculous. So their first encounter was water under the

bridge. Fine. No sense in rehashing it. But that didn't mean they needed to act like old, fussy

white ladies attending a black Baptist church service around each other.

"You know," Jensen started, "this car is really something. I heard the engine before I got in, she

was purring beautifully but I can feel the power in her too. It's always nice to find other people who appreciate classic cars, but who also aren't afraid to use them. I actually have a '67 Im—"

"It's not my car," Misha snapped. "It was my sister's. I actually couldn't give two shits about cars, classic or otherwise."

A strained silence fell between them. Jensen didn't try to fill it again.

When they arrived at the Rochester Public Library it was a quarter past five and only a few cars

were in the parking lot. Misha pulled into a space close to the door, but left the engine running.

Jensen got out and said, "You still going to be here when I get back?"

He didn't wait for an answer and slammed the door shut.

The Rochester library was a little more familiar to him: brightly lit with a circulation desk that

had a person already standing behind it instead of beneath it. There was some light chatter

coming from amongst the shelves of books and to the left was a brightly

colored corner furnished

with large pillows and a rocking chair. Jensen waited for a mother and daughter to finish

checking out their books before approached the young man behind the counter. He had sandy

colored hair, acne scars on his cheeks, and a nametag that said, "Brian."

Jensen pulled out his credentials and displayed them as he introduced himself to Brian. Brian's

eyes went wide and he broke out into a giddy smile that told Jensen that this encounter was going

to be a little awkward.

"Oh, wow. Special Agent Ackles. Hi. You're here. I almost thought maybe you wouldn't come

today. Emily said you were, so I got everything ready, but it was getting late. And I was all like,

he's an FBI agent. He's got so much more important things to do. But, you're here."

Jensen gave him his best stoic agent face. "I am. You have the materials ready?"

"Yeah! Yeah, follow me!"

Brian scampered out from behind the counter and walked over to a room with a sign on the door

indicating only employees were allowed in.

"So, this is for a case, right? I mean, duh, obviously. Like, I heard about that woman's death in Elton. But they weren't saying anything about it. Then I get

a call and they're all like the FBI

wants books on angels and I was all like—this is the Angel Slayer! Isn't it!"

"Brian," Jensen said firmly. "Lower your voice."

"Oh, right!" he whispered. "I'm sorry!"

"It's fine. Just, what made you think this is the Angel Slayer case? And how have you even

heard of it? How old were you when those murders happened?"

"I was fifteen! And I read about them online. Such as the Internet was back then. You know?"

But, like, I've always been interested in serial killers. I've read every book about and by the

infamous American ones. And I'm in community college now. Getting my associate degree in

criminal justice. But, then I'll transfer to a four year. Because you need to have a Bachelor's

degree to be an agent, right? And that's my goal. I want to be a profiler for the FBI."

Jensen could feel that he was staring and blinked his eyes to get some moisture back in them.

"Um, you know, we don't really profile like they do on TV."

"Oh, I know! TV is full of shit. I know. I've done my research. Oh! Speaking of research!

Here! I found all this for you!"

Brian opened the employee lounge door and Jensen saw five large



Rubbermaid storage bins

stacked by the door. Jensen gaped.

"Are those all full?"

"Yes." Brian was practically glowing with pride.

"There's this much information on angels?"

"There's probably more than that. I mean, our library is small. I actually drove to Sanford to

raid their shelves, but it's in Maine so we don't share the same library system. So, it would be

awesome if those could definitely get back to me because they don't really know that I took them

and transported them across state lines."

Jensen wondered briefly if interstate library book theft was a felony. He rubbed his forehead,

partly amused and partly concerned by Brian's enthusiasm.

"Okay, well, thank you very much. I will definitely take care of them and get them back to you as

soon as I can." He surveyed the boxes. "Do you think you could help me carry them out to the car?"

"Yes! Of course!"

Jensen put out a hand in a calming gesture. "Take it easy, Brian."

"Yes, yes. Sorry."

He was still grinning ear to ear. It took two trips, some griping at a scowling

Misha, and

unloading two of the bins in order to get all the material to fit in the small trunk of the Charger

since there was no backseat. At last the trunk closed completely and Jensen turned to shake

Brian's hand in thanks.

"It's no trouble at all, Special Agent! I actually don't work weekends, so if you need me to come

out and help sort through and organize all this I would love to help!"

"Yeah, Special Agent Ackles," Misha said from where he leaned on the roof of the car looking obnoxious and fuckable all at once. "Why don't you let Brian come out and help?"

Jensen gave Misha the best glare he could muster when being faced with those blue eyes, a smirk

on those lips, and that damn sex hair he had going on today. He turned to Brian.

"I am grateful for the offer, Brian. You have really outdone yourself with your research. I'm

certain this will yield positive results for the case. Unfortunately, with chain of custody and

discoverability—" out of the corner of his eye he saw Misha roll his eyes, but Brian didn't see it

because he was fixated on Jensen. "—we can't have a civilian help out because if— *when*—we

catch this guy we don't want the defense to be able to throw out any evidence."

"Oh, yes. Right! I understand."

Jensen wondered what sort of grades Brian was making in his criminal justice associate's degree

program. He gave him another firm handshake and a nod of the head. Brian returned the same

solemn gesture.

"We'll be in touch if there's anything you can help us with."

"Yes, sir!"

Jensen got into the car and Misha immediately peeled out of the parking lot.

Jensen rubbed his forehead and laughed softly. "Geez, I wonder if we should put him on the

suspect list."

"Do you even have a suspect list?" Misha asked dubiously.

Jensen shot him a dirty look. "It's a work in progress."

"Hn. Yes, I can see how your list of living suspects would be hard to assemble when you're still

working your way through the dead ones."

Jensen cocked his head sharply to get out a crick in his neck. He ran his tongue over his teeth.

Okay, so he was going to be a passive-aggressive little shit. Fine.

"Well, I understand how it might be difficult for a cop who spends his days busting kids for

smoking pot in stairwells might have trouble understanding the criminal

investigation process

even after it's already been explained to him."

Misha let out a humorless laugh. "Oh, yes, yes, you're right. All I know how to do is tell my dog to stick her nose up people's butts."

"Isn't that what she is?"

"Well, since you're clearly so curious about Bunny and our duties together, she *has* been trained

in drug identification and locating. But she's actually a cadaver dog."

"How much use does a town of five thousand people have for a cadaver dog?" Jensen sneered

and then immediately regretted how harshly that had come out. But Misha was getting on his last

nerve.

"She's trained to be available for national emergencies. For instance, her predecessor and I

went to New York the day after 9/11."

Jensen stared at Misha. "What was that like?" he asked quietly.

"What do you think? It was awful. And I'm done talking about it."

Jensen looked out the windshield, watching the highway roll away beneath them as the sun

moved closer to the horizon.

"So you *have* been out of New Hampshire," Jensen murmured, mostly to himself.

"Of course I have," Misha snapped.

Jensen leaned against his side of the car and checked his watch. They still had at least twenty-

five minutes of driving to do. Awesome.

Thirty-one excruciatingly silent minutes later, they arrived in Elton.

"Turn onto Pine," Jensen said, startling them both as he broke the tenuous silence.

"Pine heads in the opposite direction. Do you think I don't know my way around my own town?"

Jensen gripped the door handle to keep his temper in check. "Yes, I'm sure you do. But I don't

want to go back to the station; I want to go to the motel."

"Why?" Misha challenged, but still hung a sharp right onto Pine as he almost missed the turn.

"Because I'm certain most of that stuff is worthless and I want sort through it there and only bring in the pertinent materials so I don't clutter up our already cramped taskforce center."

He heard Misha snort derisively. Probably at his use of the term "taskforce center" for the

"spare office" they were using at the station.

"Which motel?" he asked.

"The Lakeside Motor Lodge."

Misha's laugh actually sounded a little genuine. "Classy," he murmured.

Jensen didn't speak again except to direct Misha around the side of the

building to the parking

spots closest to his room. He didn't see the Accent anywhere. Where the hell was Jared? They got out of the car and Misha unlocked the trunk with the keys. They frowned at the mess of loose

books that was clogging the space. Jensen reached in and began to shimmy a storage bin out the

trunk, having to adjust it to several awkward angles before it slipped free. He used his knee to

support the bottom while he got a better grip on the handles, and then started walking toward his

room. He noticed Misha was leaning against the side of the car.

"You gonna help?" he griped.

"Hauling books was not in the task description."

Jensen narrowed his eyes. He'd just known Misha would be a loophole aficionado.

"Well, look at it this way. The sooner all these books get into the motel room, the sooner you can leave my company."

Misha immediately turned and began to pull a bin out of the trunk. Jensen grumbled to himself as

he balanced the bin on one leg and struggled to get the key to the room in the lock with his free

hand. It took several trips to hand carry the pile of books scattered on the trunk floor inside, but

at last they dropped off the last couple of stacks on the already overflowing desk that was next to

the dresser the old fashioned tube TV sat on.

"Thanks for the help," Jensen said.

Misha muttered something under his breath which Jensen didn't catch but he was certain it wasn't

flattering. Jensen followed him to the door and slammed it shut, almost hitting Misha's face.

"What the f—"

"What happened to water under the bridge, huh? Is this how it's going to be the entire time I'm

here? Because this is bullshit, pal. I'm here to help solve this case. I'm here to catch a

murderer. I'm here because I did nothing but eat, drink, sleep, and breathe this guy's carnage for

two years. I've spent eight years never being able to shake it off. And now I have a chance to

get him. And I am doing everything within my power to stop him. You should show me—"

"Well if you had done your fucking job eight years ago, my sister would still be alive, wouldn't

she?!"

Jensen took a step back like he'd been slapped. He had no rejoinder for that; Misha was right.

Jensen knew it. Had always known it. But no one had ever said it to his face.

"I—"

"But no. He got away then to come here and murder people like the sick fuck he is. And you

doing 'everything in your power' is trying to figure out why the victims deserved what they got!"

"I never said that! I explained to you—"

"Fuck you, Ackles! Your explanations are shit! You can't figure fuck all out so you're willing to try any crackpot theory that will keep people from seeing what an incompetent ass you are!"

Jensen was feeling that blinding rage again, red clouding around his vision. He wasn't mad at

Misha. No, he was just speaking the truth of Jensen's inadequacies, but he took it out on Misha

anyway.

"You know, it's funny how you seem to think that everything we're doing is to the detriment of the

case—so much so that you're trying to get us to stop working on it. That's strange, don't you

think?"

Misha drew breath to speak, but Jensen pushed him back against the door.

"But you know what's stranger? You *knew* we were coming to see the body. But you went to

Kim and *lied* about having permission to release it. Were you trying to get rid of the evidence?!"

The unvoiced accusation hung heavy in the air and Jensen knew he'd stepped way too fucking far



over the line. Misha's whole body went rigid, his eyes widened, and the twitch in his arm was

all the warning Jensen needed to know what was about to happen. He dodged just in time to

keep Misha's fist from cracking against his jaw and pushed hard against his shoulder to slam him

against the door again. He couldn't let Misha punch him for his own sake. Even if there weren't

witnesses, if it came out, he might have to arrest him for assaulting a federal agent. Jensen

started to straighten, but he'd underestimated Misha's level of rage. The smaller man brought his

arms to his chest and then pushed them out, dislodging Jensen's hold on him. Then he turned

slightly and punched both palms against Jensen's chest, shoving him into the wall adjacent to the

door. Jensen gasped as the air was knocked out of him with the force. Pain squeezed tightly

around the back of his rib cage and distracted him enough that he barely managed to catch

Misha's wrist as he swung for his face again. Jensen turned and pushed Misha back into the

small bit of wall between the door and the wall his back had recently become acquainted with.

"Misha!" Jensen grunted, trying to get control of the man.

Misha used the wall as leverage to throw his whole weight onto Jensen. He

stumbled back, still

holding Misha's wrist and turned, used Misha's forward momentum to throw him off balance.

The guy had catlike reflexes and turned to grab a hold of Jensen's jacket lapel. Their feet tangled

and their momentum sent them staggering several steps as they tried to stay on their feet. They

crashed onto the bed, missing the floor by about three inches, and Jensen landed squarely on top

of Misha. He pushed up with one arm on the mattress to look down and saw Misha's chest

heaving quickly both with exertion and his anger. His cheeks were flushed and his eyes were

shining with anger, bitterness, and... grief. Such overwhelming grief.

Jensen only had time to think, *Don't do*—before he leaned down and pressed himself again

Misha fully, lips to knees. He must have caught Misha off guard because his lips parted, and

Jensen swallowed the groan that fought to get out as their mouths sealed with deep, muffled

inhalations through their noses. He felt Misha shift below him, realized he'd done something

monumentally stupid, and was about to get kneed in the groin if not shot with his own weapon.

He started to sit up, but stopped moving when he realized Misha had a very firm grip on the hair at the top of his head and he was working his thigh in

between Jensen's legs. Was he really—?

Jensen's thought process short-circuited when Misha's tongue thrust into his mouth, curling

around his own. They both shifted their hips at the same time causing their groins to collide.

The friction, their mirroring moans, caused Jensen to get hard so fast it actually hurt. They

writhed against each other, the hard lines of their cocks fitting snugly together between their

legs. Jensen still had one hand pinning Misha's wrist to the bed, so he used his other to cup

Misha's jaw and then slide his fingers up into his hair. It was soft and smooth as the locks

tingled between his fingers and the sensation shot down through his whole body.

Their kiss had yet to lessen in intensity, and Jensen was in some desperate need of air. He was

also getting just clearheaded enough to be embarrassed by the mewling grunts and whimpers they

were both making as they devoured each other. Misha moved the hand that was in his hair and

started pushing at his shoulder. Jensen thought he was trying to get him to stop, so he pulled back

and let go of Misha's wrist. All the other man did was use both hands to shove Jensen's jacket

off his shoulders. Jensen shrugged out of the garment and let out a noise of

surprise as Misha

pulled him back down to kiss his lips again. His hands slid over the smooth material of his

dress shirt, and Jensen took that as permission. He put his hands to the hem of Misha's T-shirt

and groaned as he felt his palms drink in the smooth skin and hard muscle of Misha's abdomen

and sides as he moved his hands up his body.

Misha bucked his hips up and Jensen was painfully reminded that he was making quite a wet

patch on the material of his boxers. Jensen reluctantly removed one hand from Misha's chest and

rolled to the side just enough that he could reach down and grip Misha's erection. Misha

moaned into his mouth at the contact and rolled his hips up into Jensen's hand—and damn was

the guy hung.

Jensen pulled himself away from Misha's lips, and was mollified slightly by the fact that he too

was panting just as hard, and used both hands to quickly pop the button and pull down the zipper

of Misha's jeans. Misha bit his lip and muffled a cry that made Jensen's dick throb lustily. He

pushed the man's pants and briefs down just a couple of inches so that he could pull out Misha's

cock and get a good grip on it. He pumped it fast, but loose, denying Misha any real

stimulation. Then he gripped Misha's upper arm and slid him up the bed a few inches before

bending over and angling his cock toward his lips.

For one moment he panicked as he remembered it had been a very long time since he'd been on

the giving end of a blow job and he worried he might not be able to do it. He parted his lips and

felt the heat of Misha invade his mouth before he leaned down more and closed his lips around

it. As soon as the weight hit his tongue, Jensen hummed excitedly. The heated skin sent a pulse

of arousal through him, the bitter salt flavor actually tasted good to him, and the girth made his

mouth water. Jensen hummed again, sending the vibrations down the shaft and Misha's hips

thrust up, causing the head to hit Jensen's palate. It had been awhile since he had done this, but

even the first time he'd never had much of a gag reflex. Jensen took in more, loving the feeling in

his mouth so much he could practically feel it on his own cock.

There had been a reason the guy he'd dated for six months sophomore year of college had called him a cockslut. And it wasn't because he'd slept around.

Jensen wrapped his hand around the base of Misha's cock, giving it quick little pulls as he

hollowed his cheeks and swallowed Misha down. The only warning he got was Misha's body

going completely rigid and his thighs pulling against his jeans to spread his legs further apart.

Jensen sat up quickly and turned his head to avoid the spurts of come that almost hit him in the

eye. As it was he still had some in his mouth and he debated what to do about it as he stroked

Misha through his orgasm. Aw hell, the guy probably didn't have anything, and he could gargle

with some bourbon later. Jensen swallowed.

He looked at Misha where he lay boneless, his head lolling back and forth in dissipating ecstasy

as Jensen eased his grip a little but kept stroking. The fact that Misha spread his legs when he

came was something he would love to explore more. A lot of people's natural instinct was to

lock their body up in order to prevent overstimulation. He'd definitely had his ears thwacked by

more than one woman's thighs.

Jensen waited anxiously for Misha to come down from his high. He knew what would happen as

soon as he did. He'd freak out, possibly punch him, leave him harder than frozen snot in the

arctic, and then drive down to the station to file sexual assault charges.

He stopped moving his hand at the same time Misha heaved one last deep breath and returned to

normal respiration. Misha raised his head and Jensen braced himself for whatever came next.

Misha sat up and grabbed Jensen's tie, yanking him forward, and bringing their lips together.

Jensen raised his hands to hold Misha's face, trying to focus on the kiss now. To really feel the

soft, now wet, drag of his chapped lips, the faintest hint of cinnamon gum flavor, the odd

nostalgic feeling of stubble scraping against his own. He let out a startled "mmph" noise when Misha's hands found his fly and liberated him roughly. Before he knew what was happening, his

world swirled around him as a gun calloused hand began working his shaft and another one

gripped the back of his neck and pulled him down. Jensen struggled a little from the sudden loss

of orientation and the pleasure literally gripping him. He attempted to pull up from the

overwhelming kiss, but Misha's hand kept him firmly in place, fucking relentlessly into his mouth

with his tongue without allowing the seal of their lips to break. The pace increased on his cock

and Jensen again tried to pull slightly away as lack of air became an issue. Jensen felt his body

spasm as his mind warred between wanting more pleasure and needing air. He let out a small

desperate sound into Misha's mouth as he felt his lungs protest the energy his hips were using to

rut at the same bruising pace Misha's hand was using to jack him. Even though his eyes were

closed, he could sense a white fog beginning to form around the edges of his vision. His orgasm

suddenly sprang out of its holding pattern and Jensen used every bit of strength he had left to pull

himself free of the kiss and expelled the stale air in his lungs as an actual scream as he came all

over Misha's hand.

Jensen raked in a breath and gasped and panted his way around several whimpers and moans.

His hips still pumped minutely, his orgasm not even close to being finished yet. He turned his

head and buried his face in Misha's hair, almost sobbing with the intensity of the pleasure he'd

just been given. He had no idea he'd be into breath play.

"Oh, fuck, Mish," he moaned, still struggling to breathe. "I—fuck. Mish..."

He felt Misha shift under him.

"Sha," Misha said sternly.

"Wha--?"

Misha sat up and pushed Jensen off him. Mi-sha. My name is Mi- *sha*."

Jensen flopped onto his back, brain still hazy, but managing to at least



understand that Misha was

now doing his freak the fuck out thing as he walked into the bathroom.  
Jensen put a hand to his

head and focused on getting his breathing back under control. He heard the  
faucet turn on and

run for several seconds. There was an aggravated curse and then the sound of  
cloth being

furiously scrubbed. More cursing. The faucet turned off with a loud thump.  
Misha emerged

from the bathroom with a scowl on his face and a large damp spot on his  
jeans where Jensen

assumed some semen must have landed. The scowl turned into a hard glare  
when he saw Jensen.

"You say *one* word about this to anyone—"

"Who the fuck am I gonna tell without getting fired?"

Misha thought about that for a moment. "Good point."

"Can we at least stop snipping at each other in public now?"

"Only if you can stop being an arrogant asshat."

Jensen didn't even have it in him to be insulted by that. He was too worn out.

"Have we at least reached a level of intimacy in our relationship that allows  
for me to call you

by your first name?"

Misha turned a withering look on him. "You think this was intimacy?"

Jensen sighed and looked away. "I guess not. Good night, Officer Collins. Thanks for the ride.

To the library, I mean," he added hastily.

There was a moment of quiet and Jensen didn't know what Misha was doing.

"I should be furious with you, you fuck," he said calmly.

Jensen turned to look at him.

"That was *not* the kind of fight you resolve with sex."

Jensen sat up and tucked his dick back into his underwear so that his seriousness wasn't detracted from by rogue genitalia. "You're right. Absolutely. I don't know what I was thinking.

I just—I just—"

"You just wanted to do that from the moment you saw me in the diner."

Jensen felt heat creep under cheeks, but he tried not to react to those words. "Maybe. Look, I'm

really sorry I took advantage of you like that. Shit, I wasn't even sure if you liked guys."

"I don't."

Jensen raised an eyebrow.

"Usually." Misha scrubbed a hand over his face. "Look, it was inappropriate for you to kiss me at that moment in *that* fight. Which, I'm not sure we're actually finished with it yet since you kind of accused me of murdering my sister."

Jensen felt a wave of shame wash over him followed by a spike of nausea.

"But, I know—I *think*—you would have stopped. You started to pull away,

and I didn't let you.

Because I needed to stop thinking. Even if only for ten minutes. So, yeah, shame on you for

taking advantage, but shame on me for using you."

Jensen shrugged a shoulder. "At least you reciprocated."

"Shut-up," Misha responded, but there was no venom in the words. "Just—just find my sister's killer, okay? Can you do that for me?"

Jensen nodded solemnly. "He's not getting away this time."

"Promise me."

Jensen stood up and moved to put himself directly in front of Misha, their faces a scant couple of

inches apart, their eyes almost crossing from the proximity as they stared at each other.

"I promise," he vowed, knowing only his death would keep him from solving this case.

Jensen stared into that wide expanse of blue and felt himself sway forward. He kissed Misha

and put a hand to his waist. Misha allowed it for a moment and then pushed him away.

"Jesus, Jensen, you really have no sense of timing, do you?"

"Sorry," he murmured and licked his lips, his eyes still closed.

"Don't lose focus."

Jensen opened his eyes. Misha's hand was on the doorknob.

"I won't."

Misha's eyes roamed over him for several moments, and then he shook himself and opened the

door.

"What the fuck just happened?" he asked himself as he left the room.

Jensen shuffled back until he felt the bed at his knees and sat down heavily. He stared at the

closed door.

"What the fuck *did* just happen?"

**Friday, September 20, 2013**

Jensen checked the safety on his weapon for the third time before sliding it back in the holster.

Then he checked that his credentials, his phone, and wallet were all in their assigned pockets for

the second time. Finally he pulled the door of the motel shut behind him and triple checked the

lock on the door. Jared strummed his fingers on the steering wheel and knew better than to

comment on the morning ritual. He only had a couple months worth of observations to draw his

conclusion, but he was pretty sure Jensen's OCD was directly correlative to his level of stress.

Jensen squeezed his legs into the front seat of the Accent, and they were off. Jared glanced at

Jensen and saw him roll his head back and forth on his neck a bit, but he somehow in

counterpoint to his stress-induced habits already looked pretty relaxed.

"How did the interview go yesterday?" Jensen asked, watching the group of power walking

grannies round the corner of King and Pine as he checked his watch. Jared wondered if Jensen

was tracking their routine.

"Good," he said, remembering to respond. "I think we got some useful information, and

unfortunately some evidence that would have been very helpful got thrown away. We'll fill you

in together at the station. Gen has an amazing memory. And she kept all the notes." Jared let out

a small laugh. He glanced at Jensen. "So, um, sorry for stranding you like that last night. We

got stuck in traffic on the highway. An accident completely blocked the road for like five hours."

"Man that sucks."

"Yeah. So...how did you get back to the motel? I swung by the station but you'd already left.

You didn't walk, did you?"

"No, no. I had to go by the library to pick up some materials. I thought it'd be just a few books

that I could read before going to bed, you know? But this guy had pulled like five boxes worth

of source material. It was crazy. I probably should have just brought it all to the station rather

than taking it back to my room."

"How'd you get it there?"

Jensen didn't so much as blink at the question, but his laugh sounded forced.

"Officer Collins

drove me."

"*Really.*" Jared bit down on his lip to keep from saying more.

“Yeah, I think Ty is still punishing him for the whole releasing the body early thing. He wasn’t

even on duty; he just had bad timing by being at the station. So, Ty told him he had to play my

chauffeur.”

“*Really*. How did that go?” *Keep it together*, Jared told himself.

“Well. You know. He’s still projecting his anger for his sister’s death onto me.”

“Unh-hunh.”

Jensen looked at Jared and he realized he was staring. He quickly whipped his head forward

and was glad no one had been on the road because he had definitely drifted. Now, how should

he phrase his next question?

“So, what was the big epiphany you had last night?” Jared asked, pointedly looking out the

driver's side window to check for non-existent traffic.

Jensen didn't answer right away, but finally he said, “What epiphany?”

Jared fought against the grin that was dying to get out of him. “It had to be something you learned

from the library books, right? Something to do with the angel names?”

Jensen’s brow creased in confusion. “I don’t understand. Why do you think I figured something

out?”

Jared could feel his battle against smiling ending in defeat. “Well, that was some shout you let

out last night.”

Jensen's jaw almost hit the floor. And then his whole head flushed an alarming shade of pink

right up to the tips of his ears. He groped for words. Found none. Jared's hands were clenching

the wheel and he didn't dare look at Jensen.

“Or maybe Officer Collins had the epiphany?”

“Ohmygod,” Jensen uttered and turned his head. There was a dull thud as his forehead hit the

glass of the window and he used his left hand to hide the other half of his beet red face.

“I'm not sure if I should give you a reproachful look or a high five.”

“Stop talking, Jared.”

“Like how did it even happen? I knew you were crushing on him, but I really thought he might hate you.”

“He does not—what do you mean you *knew* I was crushing on him?”

“I'm very observant, Jensen. And you're not very subtle. At anything you do.”

“Jared, please, no one can know that that happened. I mean, it was a onetime thing. It was pretty

much an accident. Just an ill-thought act of desperation on both our parts, okay?”



“I would never gossip about something like this. But come on, you can’t expect me not to bust

your balls over it.” He grinned at Jensen and there was nothing malicious about it.

Jensen groaned again, but a smile tugged at the corners of his lips. “It’s not funny and you’re

being really unprofessional.”

“I’m unprofessional? Dude, I now know what you sound like when you come \_\_\_”

“Jared!”

“—we have already broken past the unprofessional barrier.”

Jensen ran a hand down his face, but he was smiling.

“I hate you.”

“Well, I don’t hate you. And I can say, ‘Good on ya, son.’ I may score a zero on the Kinsey

scale, but even I can see Collins is a hot piece of ass.”

Jensen made a face at him. “You shut your mouth. You must just be jealous then. Felicia been

ignoring you when I’m not around?”

“Not exactly. After I couldn’t find you yesterday, I went to Nell’s for dinner. Felicia was very

friendly. And when I told her I’d see her tomorrow for dinner, she said not if I go to Nell’s

because it’s her night off. But, if I come over to her place, I could still see her

for dinner.”

Jared beamed, very proud of himself.

“Dude. We’ve been here for four days and you’re already in with your TDY booty call?”

“Dude. We were here only *three* days before you were gettin’ it with a guy who hates your

guts.”

“Touché.”

They rode in silence for a couple of minutes, in which short time got them to the police station.

Jared parked and turned off the car, but before Jensen could get out, he asked a question.

“Look, I know it’s none of my business...but how exactly did it happen?”

Jensen laughed harshly. “What, you want positions? Pitcher and catcher stats?”

“What? No! Sorry. I meant how did it happen at all—wait, you know what? It’s none of my

business.”

Jared could tell Jensen was trying to soften his expression, but he wasn't too successful. “You’re

right, it isn’t your business. And I do appreciate that you were able to figure that out for

yourself.”

“Jensen, seriously, I mean no harm. I—”

“I know, Jay,” Jensen cut him off. “I just—I can’t joke about it because I’m not proud of what

happened last night. It was unprofessional, completely out of line—and I took advantage of...of

a *victim*. That’s not—right.”

“Jensen, I don’t know what happened last night, obviously, and maybe a professional line was

crossed, but I don’t think you—” Jared searched for a word. “Hurt him?” he finally settled on.

Jensen shook his head. “Oh, no, I just accused him of murdering his sister. That’s all.”

Jensen got out of the car and ignored Jared’s exclamation of “You what?!”

Jared stared dumbly after Jensen for a few moments before he got his act together and got out of

the car.

Friday mornings at the Elton police station were actually a little busier than normal. Rachel was

answering a phone call, so she didn’t see Jared’s nod, and two uniformed officers and a plain

clothes detective were in a small conference around the coffee machine. Ty was visible at his

desk through the open door of his office, phone to his ear, frown on his face, but he waved an

acknowledgement to him. Jensen had already unlocked the door to their makeshift command

post and flipped on the lights. When Jared came up behind him he saw Jensen's eyes trained on

the photo of Natalia Smith. He sensed Jared behind him and immediately looked away from the

whiteboards and walked over to his desk to deposit his motel room key and jacket. Jared did

the same; it was probably going to be a very long day.

Jensen was working the combination on the heavy duty safe that had been transported from the

Portsmouth RA for them to store the FBI laptops as Jared crossed back to the door and shut it

firmly. He left his fingers on the knob as he watched Jensen for a moment. He didn't want to ask

his next question, but it had to be asked.

"Jensen...is he a suspect?"

Jensen was concentrating too hard on watching the digital numbers change to the one he wanted

to really pay attention to Jared. "Is who a what?"

"Off-Officer Collins. Are we investigating him?"

The final number popped up and Jensen turned to look at Jared as he turned the knob to the right

until it clicked. "What are you talking about?"

"You said you—do you really suspect him?"

Jensen groaned softly and opened the safe. "No, that's not what I—shit."

Jensen took his laptop out and carried to his desk. "Last night—some things were said. By both of us. And that

resulted in us saying even more things. And I—I questioned why he lied to Kim about getting the

body released to the mortician when he knew we were coming to look at it."

Jared tilted his head as he pulled his laptop out of the safe. "Well, that is a fair question. One he never answered. Though I'm not sure we ever asked."

"Yeah, well, I followed it up with if it was because he was trying to get rid of evidence."

Jared sucked in air through his teeth and made a face. "Ooo. Yeah. That may not have been so

tactful."

"Understatement, dude."

"So, what happened then?"

"Well, let's just say it led to a physical altercation."

Jared let out a laugh as he put his laptop on his desk. He grinned at Jensen. "I'll say."

"Wha—?" Jensen blushed. "That's not what I meant!"

Jared laughed and sat in his chair. "So, he punched you?"

"Almost. I blocked it. And we grappled and—end of story."

Jared shook his head as he logged on to his computer. "Dude hates your guts, you accuse him of

killing his sister, and you still got laid. How is that even possible?"

Jensen plopped down in his chair and covered his eyes with his hand.  
"Normally this would be

my cue to boast of my awesomeness—but last night was so fucked up."

"Would you do it again?"

Jensen removed his hand to look at Jared. "What?"

"If you had to do it all over again, would you?"

"Of course not!"

"Not the accusation. The sex."

Jensen stammered around his reply, "Wh-what does that have to do with—  
Jared! Shut it! Not at

work!"

Jared shrugged a shoulder. "I'm just saying, how it happened may not have  
been ideal

circumstances, but you don't regret that it did happen, right? I mean, you like  
him, don't you? So,

it's a good thing, right?"

Jensen gaped at him. "Far from it!"

Jared opened his mouth to speak but the door opened and Gen entered the  
room.

"Good morning," Gen greeted them.

Russ was right behind her carrying a cardboard tray with four coffees in one  
hand and a box of

donuts in the other.

“Morning, team,” Russ grinned.

Gen raised her eyebrows as she placed her bag on Jared’s desk. “You’re in a good mood,” she

observed.

Russ whistled three notes as he placed the coffee and donuts on Jensen’s desk. He stood beside

the agent and put a hand on his shoulder.

“Good mood is actually my default. It’s just harder to see buried under a five a.m. call to a

crime scene. But, today is a new day, and we’ve got some leads, right? How did the interview

with the maid go?”

“It was okay,” Jared replied. “We need to follow up with another family and a garbage

collection company, but we’re pretty sure we won’t be able to find the note the killer left on the

door.”

“The killer left a note on the door?” Jensen asked, and Jared could tell he was trying very hard

not to squirm under the pressure of Russ’ hand on his shoulder.

“Maybe,” Gen said. “It’s possible Thompson did leave the note himself. Or he could have been

forced to write it by the killer. It would be nice if we could get some fingerprints off it, but

we've no guarantee it was touched by the killer. Plus, it's buried in literal tons of garbage by

now."

Jared felt a little heat creep under his cheeks. He should know better than to make assumptions

like that. He cleared his throat and said, "But, the maid did say that nothing appeared out of the

ordinary. Based on what the forensic team said, I think we should really consider that this

wasn't a break in. I think the killer was known to the victim or at least represented someone that

a person would willingly invite into their home."

"What about you, Russ?" Jensen said, swiveling in his chair to face the detective and effectively dislodging his hand. "How did your interviews go? And where did you disappear to

yesterday?"

"Two of the teachers live a couple towns over from Elton. I got stuck in a terrible traffic jam on

my way back. Didn't even make it to Elton until after eight o'clock. Everyone had left the

station by then."

"We were stuck in the same traffic," Jared bemoaned. "Half a mile away from our exit for five

hours."

Russ chuckled. "I hope the two of you find each other's company



stimulating, then.”

Jared and Gen shrugged a shoulder and said, “Eh.” Then they glanced at each other with a grin

of amusement at their uncoordinated though matching reactions.

“Well, unfortunately I was stuck by myself with nothing but a pop station available on the radio.

I didn’t even have many notes to review. I spoke to two of Natalia’s coworkers and neither had

much to say. She was new to the job. This was going to be her first year teaching and they’d

only met her in July when the teachers came back to prep for the upcoming year. Natalia had

been living in Flagstaff for the last seven years. She came back after her divorce.”

Gen lean-sat on the desk and crossed her arms over her stomach. “Do you think the killer

followed her here?”

Jensen groaned. “Let’s not add another city just yet. Let’s assume she came back to town and

for some reason that sparked his desire to kill again.”

“I thought you said he’s been killing all these years; that he hasn’t stopped,” Jared said.

“And that you didn’t think he was a local,” Russ reminded him.

Jensen glared at all three of them and turned in his chair to boot up his laptop. “I’m going to

choke the life out of this guy when I find him.”

Russ laughed and gave a couple squeezes to Jensen’s tense shoulders.  
“Unfortunately he just

might like that.” He patted Jensen’s arm and only chuckled more at the  
disgusted look Jensen

threw over his shoulder.

“I’m going to go find Kim and see if she has an official report on Thompson  
yet.”

“Yeah, you do that,” Jensen grumbled. He took one of the coffees from the  
tray and took a sip,

screwing up his face as the liquid hit his tongue. “What is with you New  
Englanders and

Dunkin’ Donuts? This stuff is rank.”

He stood up and started to leave the room with his cup while Gen narrowed  
her eyes at him.

Jared assumed Jensen was going to doctor the coffee with the cream and  
sugar kept in the station

kitchenette and picked up his own cup to follow him. He liked his coffee so  
creamy and sugary it didn’t taste like coffee anymore.

“Gen, you need to fix your coffee?” he asked.

“Nope. We New Englanders have balls enough to take it black.”

Jared laughed and Jensen returned her narrowed eyes, but he was smiling.  
The two of them

made their way across the bullpen to the small kitchenette at the far side.  
Jared was about to

speak when both of their attentions were drawn to Officer Collins and Bunny as they entered the

building. He saw them, gave them a nod, and continued on his way to his desk. Jared twisted

his lips to the side to keep from saying anything as he looked at Jensen. He didn't react, not

really, but Jared could tell he'd realized the same thing Jared had.

If Collins had made a point to blatantly ignore him that would have at least been

acknowledgement that something had happened. If he had gotten a little flustered or even shot

eye daggers at him that would be something. Getting nothing but a perfunctory nod

acknowledging he existed in time and space, which was the same thing he'd essentially given

Jared, it pretty much made it clear that he'd completely dismissed what had happened between

them last night.

Jared watched Jensen violently shake some imitation sweetener packets to get the grains to the

bottom before ripping off the tops.

"Well," Jared said as he removed the lid from his coffee, "now you really don't need to feel

guilty about it or anything. It obviously didn't bother him that much—"

Jared stopped talking at the look Jensen shot him.

He poured some half and half into his cup. “Right. None of my business.”

## **Apofael**

**Tuesday, October 1, 2013**

Jensen sipped his coffee, enjoying having breakfast for lunch and a cup of Nell’s brew for the

first time in several days. He’d been drinking a lot of motel swill over the last week and a half,

even on the weekend, due to spending his mornings rooting through the piles of angel-based

research material stacked in his motel room. He wasn’t even going through it in depth; just

dividing it into “read further,” “probably useless,” and “definitely useless.” Brian had almost

done his job too well. It had been two weeks of angel this and angel that and status reports for

Beaver and phones calls from Eric that always ended in Jensen basically saying they had

nothing.

Kim had been right about Thompson getting a hold of his attacker—the material under his nails

had been human flesh, but it had been so damaged by the bleach it was all but useless. They’d

exhausted every possible witness who lived in Thompson’s neighborhood and interviewed all of

Smith’s coworkers and acquaintances she’d reconnected with since moving

back to town. There

didn't seem to be any common thread between the two victims. Except for the fact that Smith

was technically new in town and Thompson was only a part-time residence which made it less

likely that their absence would be noticed as soon. Their paths had never crossed inasmuch as

they could ascertain, and Jensen took Russ' word for it when he said his conversation with

Misha regarding a potential connection had gone both better and worse than expected, but still

resulted in the same information.

Jensen poked at his scrambled eggs as he thought of Misha. It had become pretty apparent they

were going to keep their relationship in a strictly professional capacity (not that Jensen had

really expected anything more) and since Misha wasn't working the case, they never crossed

paths and rarely even saw each other since Misha worked more swing and overnight shifts than

day shifts. But that wasn't what really bothered Jensen.

That night had been one of the stupidest things he'd ever done in his life, and he was more than

grateful that Misha was willing to pretend it didn't happen, but he couldn't forget the promise

he'd made to the man. He'd vowed to find his sister's killer, and their investigation was

stalled. The only consolation was that the higher ups hadn't started leaning on them and

demanding answers—yet. But he knew it was coming. Especially if another body turned up—

and Jensen just couldn't shake the gnawing unease that he'd woken up with this morning. Maybe

it was just the trembling tension from the approaching storm hanging heavy and close in the air.

The clouds were so thick and grey that it was quite dark outside and electricity danced along his

skin even inside the diner.

“Jensen!”

Jensen looked up from the design he'd traced in his eggs. Jared was smiling bemusedly at him.

“You okay?” the younger man asked.

“Yeah, sorry. Just got lost in my thoughts. Having an off day, I guess.”

“That's understandable. This is the kind of weather that puts people on edge because you can

like—*feel* it coming. If that makes sense.”

“Perfect sense. If you're a rabbit.”

“Shut up,” Jared huffed at him, but he could tell he was being teased.

“Is there anything else I can get for you this afternoon?” Felicia smiled at

them as she refilled

their coffee cups and set down another bowl full of individual creamer containers. “It’s been a

while since I’ve seen you here in the afternoons.”

Jensen opened his mouth to ask for some catsup for his hash browns, but was  
condiment-blocked

by Jared.

“Yeah,” Jared said disappointedly. “We’ve been on the go pretty much non-stop. I guess you

don’t usually work the dinner shift?”

“No, not usually. But Rosemary is going to start a pottery or poetry class or something in a

couple weeks that meets at nights, so I agreed to switch shifts with her.”

“Oh, that’ll be good. We’re always here for dinner.”

“So I’ve heard. She never fails to mention it.”

“Well, can you blame her?” Jared grinned.

Felicia gave him a saucy look and lightly slapped his arm as she walked away. Jared watched

until she was around the other side of the counter, and then turned back to face Jensen. He toned

down his grin at the pointed look and raised eyebrow Jensen was giving him.

“Every time she comes over to ask if we need anything, she flirts with you, forgets, and leaves

before I can ask for my catsup.”

Jared shrugged a shoulder.

“Seriously, I think you two can stand the deprivation. Don’t you see her first thing in the morning

anyway?”

Jared shook his head. “Never have. Not once.”

Jensen was surprised. “Really? Even after dinner—when was that—?”

“Couple of weeks ago. And, nope. I went over to her place, she made me dinner. We ate it, it was good. We talked a bit, and then I was shown the door.”

“Hunh.”

“I thought at first that meant something had happened and I’d blown it somehow, but the next day

she was all smiles and flirty and acted like everything was fine.”

“Maybe she follows the three date rule.”

Jared rubbed the back of his head. “Yeah...that’s the thing though, right? If we wait until the

third date, won’t we be, you know...dating?”

“Ah.” Jensen speared a cube of potato and glared at its delightfully brown and crispy skin.

What kind of diner didn’t keep catsup *on* the table? “Well, when it comes to picking a booty

call,” Jensen glanced up at Jared and quirked an eyebrow, “You have chosen...poorly.”



Jared threw a piece of toast crust at him. “Don’t quote *Indiana Jones* at me. You really think

your choice was chosen wisely?”

Jensen scowled. He really didn’t like Jared knowing about one of the two things about himself

he was actually ashamed of.

Jared kind of froze and then said, “Sorry, dude. Low blow.”

Jensen shrugged. “But still fair.”

“Not really. Let’s head out now. Aren’t we supposed to get that fax from Missouri today?”

“Oh, yeah.” Jensen had nearly forgotten that the court order for the sales receipts at the funeral

home that had sold the casket Smith had been found in finally went through. The inventory,

purchase orders, and list of employees who had access to the stock were set to be faxed over

today. Granted they had only been gone for thirty minutes tops, but Jensen wanted to be there the

moment it came through.

Jensen took a final slug of his coffee and shoveled in a forkful of eggs for the road while Jared

crammed his last piece of bacon into his mouth and squirreled away two napkin wrapped

sausages into his coat pocket. They waved to Felicia on their way out. They’d set up a system

where they basically kept an open tab all day and paid after their last meal or coffee break of the

night.

Jensen felt the hairs on the back of his neck stand on end as they exited the diner. The storm had

to be practically on top of them. He wished they'd driven the car rather than leaving it at the

station. It may only be a five minute walk, but they might only have thirty more seconds of dry

weather. Thunder rumbled in the distance and they quickened their pace as the wind picked up.

The streets were empty as most people were wisely staying in with the promise of a wicked

storm in the air, so the sound of a car coming up behind them and then slowing down was

noticeable. They kept walking but glanced over to see the K9 marked patrol SUV rolling beside them. The passenger side window rolled down and Misha looked at them.

"You do realize it's about to pour down rain, right?"

"Yes," Jensen said, a little ticked that these were the first words Misha had said to him in almost

a week.

"Okay, then."

Misha rolled up his window and drove off. Jared turned a glare on Jensen.

"What? I didn't do anything."

Behind them they heard the approaching drone of a heavy rain as it crept up on them.

“Fuck,” Jensen muttered, and they took off running.

They were only in the rain for thirty or forty-five seconds, but it was so heavy they were pretty

drenched by the time they burst into the police station. Rachel looked up from filing her nails as

they stood dripping on the entryway carpet.

“Towels in the locker room,” she said, pointing to a hallway to the right with her file. Then she

returned to fixing her pinky nail.

Jared and Jensen squelched in their shoes down the hall until they came across a swinging door

that indicated it was the men’s locker room. The funk of two decades of sweat and mildew and

piss accosted them as they entered and the towels were very stiff and abrasive as they dried off

their hair, faces, and necks.

“Wishing you had shorter hair now, huh hippie?” Jensen asked.

“Shut up. If it weren’t for you I wouldn’t be wet.”

“How do you figure?”

“Well, he probably would have offered *me* a ride.”

“I doubt it. He’s an ass.”

“Hmm. You know, I might side with you on this one. You were short with your answer, but that

was no reason to leave us.”

“I wasn’t short with him.”

“Jensen, you were so clearly miffed about something. Did you two have some sort of encounter

lately I don’t know about?”

“No, not at all. We haven’t even spoken in a week.”

Jared chuckled and ran the towel over his suit, not that it did him much good.

“Maybe that’s the

problem. He’s feeling neglected.”

“That’s not—that logic doesn’t even make sense.”

“It does if he, you know, has a crush on you too.”

“I don’t have a crush on him. We’re not in middle school.”

“Alright, you’re hot for him.”

“Jared,” Jensen said sharply and glanced down the empty row of lockers.

Jared winced as he

realized they might not be alone in the locker room. At least they hadn’t used any names.

Though pronouns could be just as damning in small towns.

“Okay. I know a way to get back at him.”

Jensen tossed his wadded up towel at Jared’s head and walked out of the locker room. Jared

wasn't far behind and they got a few snickers sent in their direction as they crossed the bullpen.

The thunder was still sporadic enough that every squishy step was heard as they made their way

to their office. Jensen felt Jared tap his shoulder and he turned to look at him, but the tall man

was bent over at the waist and looking toward Misha's desk.

"Bunny!" Jared called out. "Come see me!"

The police dog yelped excitedly and dashed across the room to jump on Jared. She completely

ignored Misha's shouted command to return. The officer crossed the room, his eyebrow

twitching in irritation and Jensen couldn't keep the smirk off his face. Jared grinned at Misha as

he scratched the side of Bunny's head where she'd laid it against his leg.

"This is the most disciplined dog I've ever trained, Agent Padalecki. When she's on duty she

obeys all commands and ignores all distractions. And then *you* came along."

Jared's reply was to bend over and kiss Bunny on the head. She whined and wiggled under him,

trying to kiss him in return.

"Really? Just because I let you two get a little wet?"

"A little?" Jensen griped.

Misha looked at him, a small smile on his face, and Jensen could see his eyes

sweep over his

body. And that absolutely did not make him feel all tingly. Misha shrugged a graceful shoulder.

“You done with my dog?” Misha asked.

“I guess,” Jared sighed. “I can’t have dogs in my apartment. It sucks.”

“Did the fax from Missouri come in yet?” Misha asked, apropos of nothing.

Jensen raised an eyebrow at him. “How do you know about that?”

“Your business isn’t really that secret around here.”

“No, it hasn't come yet. But, can I ask you who I need to talk to about getting into the evidence

locker?”

Misha crossed his arms over his chest, but still allowed Jared to pet Bunny.

“Depends. What

do you need?”

“I did a search of old police records the other day with certain keys words to see if there had

been any unsolved murders here in the past that could indicate he got his start here but hadn’t

developed his technique yet.”

“Did you find anything?”

“Not murders, per se. There was something about animal mutilations, but the culprit was a

minor so the records are sealed. But, I thought if the photos or reports of the

type of damage

were still available, that could be something to consider. A lot of serial killers start with

animals when they're young."

"I think, Dan could—hey Dan!" Misha turned and addressed a man who had to be three days

away from retirement. "Can you help Agent Ackles with—?"

"Nope. Squirrel licker got loose."

"Fuck me, again?"

Dan shrugged and Misha's sigh was closer to a groan.

"Agent Padalecki?"

"Yeah?"

"Will you keep an eye on Bunny for me?"

"Sure!"

Jensen and Misha stared at Bunny and Jared. It was hard to tell which one was the bigger

puppy. Misha turned and waved a hand indicating for Jensen to follow him.

"Do you remember the case file number?" Misha asked.

"I wrote it down. I'll be right back."

Jensen jogged over to their office and unlocked the door. Fortunately his notepad was sitting on

his desk and not in the safe with the laptops. Jensen shrugged out of his

waterlogged jacket,

plucking his credential from the breast pocket, and draped it over the back of his desk chair to

dry. He slid the leather rectangle into his pants pocket and pulled at his dress shirt to keep it

from sticking to his body. Some of it was still dry, but half of the front was wet and he wished

he'd worn an undershirt since his nipple was pretty visible whenever the thin fabric plastered

itself to his skin.

He walked back into the bullpen and came up behind Misha just as he'd pulled up a DOS-based

looking query search. Jensen read off the file number and Misha typed it in. Like yesterday, the

records had been scrubbed of any personally identifying information. Misha scrolled down and

then tapped the screen with his finger.

“So, we still have some pictures of the mutilated bodies of the animals. But, this record is from

1992. More than likely we don't store that in this building anymore. You can check down in the

evidence locker, but they've been moving the old records around for long term storage and stuff

that's twenty years old, probably isn't there anymore.”

“Well, can I get in there? Without an Elton officer escort?”



Misha made a face. “Probably not. Hey, Reggie—”

“Hey, Misha, can it wait?” a young officer in uniform replied as she passed by the desk. “Got a domestic call.”

Misha turned in his chair and looked at the man in the desk across the aisle from him.

“Nope. I got a mountain of paperwork to do because your dog just had to find fifty kilos of coke in the trunk of a tourist’s car.”

Misha frowned at the back of the man’s head.

“Come on, Officer Collins,” Jensen said, drawing his attention. “I’m sure the potheads aren’t coming out in this storm.”

“Is that really all you think I do? Bust kids for smoking up?”

Jensen didn’t smile, but he was pretty sure Misha could tell that he wanted to. Then the officer huffed in defeat.

“Is the idea of escorting me to the evidence locker really that repellent?”

Lightning flashed outside the windows followed by a loud crack of thunder. The bullpen went

silent for a moment as everyone held their breath, but then the low level buzz resumed as people returned to work.

Jensen laughed uneasily, “Is that a yes?”

Misha cracked a smile, but then stifled it. “Just come on.”

They traipsed down the hallway that led to the basement stairs and out of the corner of his eye

Jensen saw Jared giving Bunny a sausage link as he coaxed her into the FBI office space. The

storm was so miserable that there was virtually no difference between upstairs and the basement

with its complete lack of windows. They headed toward Kim’s laboratory, a route Jensen was

very familiar with now, but peeled off to the left at the entrance to the evidence locker. A young

officer sat ramrod straight in his chair and diligently made sure Misha and Jensen were very

thorough when they filled out the sign-in sheet. He unlocked the floor to ceiling chain link cage

door and let them in, locking it behind them. Misha led Jensen through and around several

shelves stuffed floor to ceiling with boxes and even a row of refrigerators on one side. In the

back was a door that led into a room that was easily a thousand square feet and completely filled

with oversized file cabinets that were as tall as he was. Jensen let out a low whistle.

“How much crime do you guys have in Elton?”

Misha smiled and flicked on a light switch. A couple of fluorescent lights flickered on, but left

most of the room in dim shadows.

“When the new station was built twenty years ago the idea was to be able to store *all* of Elton’s records. Dating back from the mid eighteen hundreds. The plan has since been reevaluated.”

Jensen snorted as they walked along the rows, checking the labels for the beginning of the file

number they were looking for.

“A lot of the records were moved to the new city hall. Old census and birth and death records.

Stuff like that.”

“Why was that ever stored in the police station anyway?”

“This room is lined with steel.”

“Fireproof.”

“You got it.”

Jensen snorted. "And Superman proof."

Misha shot him a derisory expression. "It's not made out of kryptonite."

Jensen opened his mouth to retort something clever, but then realized he had nothing to counter

that.

"Anyway, most of these file cabinets are empty.”

“Why? If you have the space?”

“They’ve been moved to another facility for electronic conversion. I can’t remember if we

asked for the hardcopies back or not. Seems like we should have though. Oh, here we are.”

Misha turned down a narrow row and followed it halfway down before turning to the right,

skimming his fingers over cabinet labels as he walked a few more paces. Jensen was

transfixed. His fingers were long and thin and deceptively delicate looking. He could think of

few things to do with those fingers. He shook himself and focused on Misha’s face again. It

didn’t really help. He was clean shaven today, which was not always the case, and even in the

shadows his eyes were ridiculously fucking blue.

“It should be in this one,” Misha said as he stopped in front of a cabinet, slim fingers hooking

inside the handle.

Jensen stepped forward and slid his fingers through Misha’s hair and around to grasp the side of

his jaw so he could turn his head to face him. Misha's startled expression almost matched

Jensen's surprise at his own actions.

*So much for propriety*, Jensen thought as he held Misha in a half embrace and leaned forward.

He kissed him, barely repressing a moan as the feeling of Misha's soft, full lips was even better

than he remembered. And he had been trying to remember almost daily.

Misha pushed him back slightly. "Ackles! Seriously, you and your timing."

Jensen pulled him back in, running his hand up and down Misha's arm while the other held the

back of his head.

"Not my fault," he murmured around a kiss. "I think it's yours." Kiss.

"Remember Ty said you

have terrible timing?" Kiss. "I can't help it." A longer kiss.

"I bet you could if you tried...nm." Tongues brushed together. "Damn it, Ackles." Kiss. "I am

not—" kiss "going to make out—" a longer kiss "with you in the—oh, fuck."

They both stopped talking for several long minutes. They kept their hands above the waist

(mostly because their guns and other belt attachments made an effective barrier to all points

south), and just allowed their lips and tongues and occasionally teeth to explore the other now

that they had the wherewithal to do so.

A thud outside the file room made them startle apart, but Jensen kept an arm around Misha's

waist, not letting him go far. They stood silent, panting slightly, as they listened to see if the

person was coming into the file room. There were a few more bangs and then the distant sound

of the chain link door shutting. Misha sighed in relief and gave Jensen the stink eye, which just

made him smile, which made Misha scowl harder. Jensen leaned forward and kissed a

wandering trail down Misha's jaw line.

"Okay, this time the timing will be your fault. Get off me."

Jensen might have considered listening to him if he'd had the slightest bit of conviction in his

voice. And if his arm wasn't locked around the back of Jensen's neck.

"No, it's all you, Mish," Jensen breathed in deeply as he buried his nose just behind Misha's ear.

Misha gripped one of his shoulders and the arm around his neck moved enough for Misha to

slide his fingers through Jensen's hair.

"For fuck's sake—Ack-Acklesss..."

Misha hissed in a sharp breath as Jensen sucked his earlobe into his mouth and worried it with

his teeth gently.

"Misha, Misha, my name is Misha...Jensen."

"Okay."

Jensen let go of the earlobe and licked the nearby skin. Misha shifted against him and Jensen

tightened his arm around his waist and pulled him closer.

“Come on, Jensen, we can control ourselves.”

“Speak for yourself. You’re not the one under a timing curse.” Jensen’s hand strayed lower.

Fuck, he really needed to stop.

“Oh, so you believe in curses and hexes, huh?” Jensen was surprised to hear the suddenly hard,

bitter edge to Misha’s voice. “Maybe we should broadcast that and use you as bait for the Angel

Slayer.”

Jensen straightened and pulled back. He felt a sick roll of nausea through his gut. He’d fucking

done it again. Misha immediately looked contrite, but it didn’t register. There was something

wrong with him. He’d never been turned on by power dynamics before—why couldn’t he leave

this particular victim alone?

“Jensen, I’m sorry. I didn’t mean to—”

Jensen cut him off and pulled on the cabinet drawer Misha had been about to open earlier. Even

before it was all the way out, Jensen could tell it was empty. Misha sighed softly, either at the

situation or the empty drawer, and pushed it closed again.

“I guess it’s been moved. I’ll put in a request to have it sent back here.

Shouldn't take more than  
a week if it's still in our possession."

"Okay. Thanks."

Jensen turned on his heel and began to weave his way out of the labyrinth of file cabinets.

"Jensen—"

Fortunately he had the rectangle of light from the door leading back to the main room of the

evidence locker to guide him. Just as he reached the door, a hand shot out, slamming it shut and

almost hitting him in the face. He started to turn around but was stopped as Misha crowded him

against the door. He turned his head slightly and his cheek brushed Misha's nose.

"Jensen," he said softly, voice curling around his ear. "I'm not going to say there wasn't real

anger and a very large desire to turn your face into pulp at one point, but from the *moment* we hit that bed—you haven't done anything to me I haven't *also* wanted. Okay?"

Jensen licked his lips and turned his head just a bit more, feeling Misha's lips on his skin—his

breath warm and smelling of cinnamon. If he craned his neck just a bit more...their lips just

brushed together and the door in front of him pushed open, smacking his head and sending him



and Misha stumbling back. The person trying to open the door paused, and then tried again.

Jensen moved his hand from rubbing his throbbing temple to his forehead, which would be a

more plausible place for him to get hit if they were exiting like two normal people.

Russ peeked around the door. "You okay?"

Jensen nodded. "Yeah, just tried to be in the same place as the door at the same time."

Russ smiled. "Newtonian physics are a bitch, huh?"

"Little bit. You need something from the file room of doom?"

"No, I came looking for you. Misha, you're helping him look for a file?"

"Yes," Misha replied.

"Well, you can keep looking, but I've got to steal Jensen away. We got a call."

Jensen felt his stomach drop.

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Jared walked the circuit again. Head, shoulders, knees, and toes. All the other parts were set

end to end in the shape of a coffin around the main focus. The sternum had been clipped from the

rib cage and lay by the left shoulder with the word "Apofael" cut into the skin. Next to the right shoulder was a bit of flesh Kim had identified as the victim's labia. It had lost its shape, but it

didn't take much imagination to read the brand: adulterer.

Jared stopped by the bottom of the coffin, closest to the toes. He scrubbed a hand over his face.

This was the worst kind of killer to deal with. He wasn't doing this in response to some deep

seeded emotional issue. He wasn't lashing out in response to some childhood trauma. He

wasn't being told to do it by God or his dog or the alien overlords. And he wasn't crazy. He was doing this because it was a fun *game*. It was a joke. It had nothing to do with the victims, and everything to do with the investigators. He liked the attention and he liked seeing them

work; that last part is what worried Jared the most. The only way this could be fun for him was

if he was seeing them run around in circles trying to figure everything out. So, the question was

is he watching from afar or does he have insider access? He intended to talk to Jensen about that

later in private; no sense getting people riled up or upset by sharing controversial theories too

soon.

Jensen was up by the head with Russ, but they weren't looking at that. They were crouching

down and appeared to be looking at the placement of the coffin-shaped body parts and gauging

the distance between each piece. Gen was in the front hallway, trying to get some sense out of

the man that had found the body. He'd been sobbing non-stop since as long as Jared had been

there, and they'd been at the scene for over an hour now.

Jared walked back around the body to the top of the coffin and Jensen and Russ stood up. Jared

raised his eyebrows in silent question.

Jensen barely suppressed an eye roll, but Jared knew it wasn't directed at him. "Do you have

any idea how long it would take to get this lined up this perfectly? I'm pretty sure he used a

fucking ruler."

"I don't understand why these particular parts were placed inside the coffin though," Russ said.

"The song?" Jared suggested.

"What do you mean?"

"You know, that kid's song: Head, shoulders, knees and toes, knees and toes..." Jared sang

softly.

Russ made a face. "Seriously?"

"It's a game," Jared replied. "This whole thing. But why is this one so... perfectly planned?"

"And the last one was a clusterfuck?" Jensen asked. He rubbed his eyes with his fingers.

"Something isn't right, here," he murmured. "Smith was meticulous.

Thompson was a mess.

And now we're back to this?"

Jared shrugged. "Like I said—"

"It's a game, sure, but all games have rules."

"Do they?" Russ interjected. "We have rules we follow, but does this guy? I understand some

killers like to think of playing with the police as a game—and they do follow certain rules to

make it fun and interesting. But—maybe we're not really understanding this guy's motives."

"Well, if he's not doing God's work and he's not fucking with us, then what is it?"

Russ swallowed and looked down. "I don't know, Jensen. Maybe he's just bored."

"That's not—"

"Hey, guys," Gen said as she came up to them. "So, I think the forensic team is ready to start

bagging the pieces, and we've kept Mr. Hannigan here long enough. I think any further

questioning needs to be done in a neutral location like the station because I can barely get a

coherent word out of him here."

"Did he identify the victim?"

"He says it's Sarah Vanderpool."

“Anybody here could tell you that,” Russ said. “She’s pretty well known in town. Very vocal at

town hall meetings and the like. Ran for mayor a couple times, but always on a platform that

was a little too conservative to get any real numbers behind her.”

“Is he her husband?” Jensen asked.

“No,” Russ shook his head. “Gilbert, Mr. Hannigan, is a heating and cooling technician and

definitely runs in different circles than Sarah. To be honest, I’m not sure what he’s doing here.”

Jared glanced down at the branded body part. “Could it have something to do with the supposed

crime she was punished for?”

Russ raised his eyebrows and bobbed his head to the side. “I suppose it could. But, honestly, I

just don’t see Sarah being willing to slum it that hard.”

Jensen let out a soft huff that may have been a laugh and glanced at Russ. The man gave him a

half smile and shrugged in return.

“Hannigan said he was here on a service call,” Gen said. “We’re obviously going to need to

check on that with his employer.”

“All right. Let’s let forensics do their job here and reconvene at the station,” Jensen said.

“We’ve obviously got some questions to answer here. Like, how long was Sarah missing and

did anyone know that she was?”

“And why is Hannigan here?” Russ asked.

“And who is she having an affair with if the brand is true?” Jared chimed in.

“And...” Gen said, looking around, “where’s all the blood?”

The other three looked at her for a moment and then turned to look at the body. There were no

stains under the carpet and no bloody trail leading from another room.

Jensen let out an aggravated noise. “And we’re back to a dump site. Does this fucker have

schizophrenia or something?”

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Jensen sat patiently, waiting for Gilbert Hannigan to blow his nose—for what had to be the

twentieth time. The man was small in stature and in constitution. He had a strangely angular

face that’s looks were not improved by bloodshot eyes and the glaringly red nose he was rubbing

raw with the cheap tissues the police kept on hand.

“I don’t understand why,” Hannigan said miserably as he shifted in the hard plastic chair he sat

on. “Why her?”

It wasn't the first time Hannigan had muttered that question and Jensen was all but convinced that

Hannigan hadn't shown up to the Vanderpool house just to service her heating system. They had

managed to work out that he hadn't spoken to Vanderpool recently. The appointment actually had

been set up through his company about a week and a half ago, by Vanderpool herself, during a

week when her husband was out of town on business. As far as Jensen knew they hadn't

managed to get a hold of Mr. Vanderpool yet to tell him about his wife's murder, but his company

had been the one to provide the information that he was away on business. Sarah Vanderpool

didn't have a job and had no regular meetings or appointments to keep in the previous week.

She could have been missing for days and no one would have noticed. In fact, no

one *had* noticed. Jensen was now convinced the killer was taking the time to stalk his victims to know which ones would not be reported missing for several days—or he knew them well

enough to already know that.

“Mr. Hannigan,” Jensen said. “Can you remember if anything seemed strange or out of place

when you approached the house?”

Hannigan shook his head. “No, nothing. I already answered these questions at

the house. Why

am I here? Can I leave? Am I a suspect? Are you charging me with anything?”

Jensen gave a small shake of his head and pretended to write something down on his notepad,

noting the way Hannigan’s eyes tracked the movement. “No. Not yet anyway. We’ve confirmed

that you did have an appointment to be at the house and you’ve showed up to work regularly the

last week. And you were with friends in Boston last night to attend the Bruins home opener. It

seems unlikely you would have had the time to show her such attention.”

“And I wouldn’t!” Hannigan shouted, finally showing an emotion other than weepiness. “I

wouldn’t hurt her! I lov—”

Hannigan clamped his mouth shut and blew into his tissue again. Jensen nodded and closed his

notepad.

“Thank you for answering our questions, Mr. Hannigan. We’ll contact you again if we need anything.” Hannigan glanced up and Jensen made hard eye contact with him. “I suggest you stay

in the area for the indefinite future.”

Hannigan sagged and his eyes clouded. “I’m not going anywhere. You can be certain of that.”

Jensen stood up and so did Hannigan. They walked to the door of the



interrogation room and

Jensen couldn't stop himself from glancing at the two way mirror. All he saw was his reflection

and Hannigan's, but he knew there were at least five people on the other side of it.

Jensen escorted Hannigan through the halls of the station until they reached the bullpen. He was

going to walk him all the way to the door when a man shouted, "You son of a bitch!"

There was a flurry of activity and some more shouting and Jensen found himself trying to pull a

large, heaving man off the diminutive Hannigan. Hannigan was cowering near a cabinet and it

took three people to pull his attacker away from him. The man wasn't athletic or particularly

strong, but he must have outweighed Jensen by at least a hundred pounds. When he was more or

less under control he was panting harshly, the gasping breaths of a man terribly out of shape.

"What did you do to her?" the man yelled at Hannigan. "They won't even let me see her body!"

"I didn't kill her!" Hannigan sniveled. "I just found her."

"Oh, 'just found her.' You lowlife piece of shit! You were fucking her! You put your filthy

hands on her and then you killed her!"

Hannigan pulled himself up in a surprising display of courage. “I only touched her because the

thought of you touching her made her sick!”

Mr. Vanderpool, Jensen assumed because really, who else could it be, screamed and lunged

forward again.

Hannigan shrank back and hid behind a nearby officer, while another uniformed officer, Russ,

and Jensen kept Mr. Vanderpool from wringing his scrawny neck. It took less effort to get Mr.

Vanderpool under control this time as the man was rapidly running out of steam.

“Mr. Vanderpool, why don’t you come sit with me?” Russ suggested. “We’ll get some coffee

and I’ll explain what we know. And then I will check with the medical examiner about getting

you in to see her, okay?”

Mr. Vanderpool nodded acquiescence because he was wheezing too hard to answer properly.

Russ clapped him on the back and began to lead him back to a secluded investigation room.

Jensen shot him a grateful look and Russ nodded in acknowledgement. Jared came into the

bullpen just as the two men were escorted in opposite directions. He raised his eyebrows at

Jensen.

“So, what’d I miss?”

“Well, we pretty much got confirmation that Sarah Vanderpool was committing adultery with Gilbert Hannigan.”

Jared’s brow creased in thought. “So, the crimes are real then. Maybe that’s the rule.”

“What do you mean?”

“Can we...” Jared trailed off and nodded his head toward their office.

Jensen nodded in return and they crossed the bullpen to enter their office and shut the door

behind them.

“What’s up, Jared?” Jensen asked, crossing his arms over his chest and giving him his undivided

attention.

“Something doesn’t feel right about this whole thing,” Jared started. He winced and said, “Well,

of course it’s not right—”

“I know what you mean, Jared. Keep talking. Tell me your thoughts.”

“Well, this last crime scene was—it was a joke, Jensen. I’m sorry, but it was. We can try to

read meaning into the placement of the body parts and how it was cut and why certain pieces

were placed where—but I think it’s meaningless. He was poking fun at us. Maybe because we

said his last work was so sloppy—but you heard Kim, this scene so far has been immaculate!

Why be careful this time and not the last? You wondered if he's schizophrenic—maybe he is!

Maybe he has a copycat. Maybe there are two. Maybe he's deliberately making these scenes so

confusing and different because he likes us trying to figure them out. Jensen —" Jared stopped.

Even in privacy with just Jensen around, he felt uncomfortable speaking his next thought. "I

think he has an inside view of what we're doing. Police, forensics, maybe even media. He's

hearing things..."

Jared heaved in a breath and let it out harshly. Jensen uncrossed his arms and placed a

comforting hand on Jared's shoulder.

"That's a lot of thoughts."

"I know, I'm sorry—"

"No, that's a good thing. It's better to be open to all possibilities. And you're right. He's

absolutely playing with us. That's why I don't think it's a copycat or that there are two separate

killers. He's going from organized to disorganized killing and back again. And I think it may be

his frame of mind that dictates how each kill turns out. When he's organized,

he plays a game

with us, but when he's disorganized, he's out of control. And that will make him slip up. He

already has once—when Thompson got a hold of him.

“Now, I don't want to wait for him kill again so we can get another mistake out of him. Let's

concentrate on what we have, figure out his game, and nail his ass to the wall, okay?”

He gave Jared's shoulder a couple of pats and Jared nodded. Jensen glanced at the window, surprised to see it was full dark. He checked his watch; it was almost eight o'clock.

“Well, I think we still have some work to do here tonight, so why don't you run over to Nell's

and get us a couple of hamburgers to tide—”

“Jensen! Jared!”

The agents turned in mild surprise when the office door flung open and Gen burst in.

“Gen, what's up?” Jensen asked, taking a step toward her.

She shut the door behind her and held up a plastic bag with a yellow strip across the top

indicating it was an evidence container. In the bag was an index card.

“The forensic team found this at the Vanderpool house. They did a search of the whole

premises, looking for the room where she might have been held captive or tortured or...

drained.”

Jensen took the baggy and looked at the note card. In neat handwriting with what looked like a

Sharpie marker, the word ‘Apofael’ was written in the middle of the page. Jensen looked up at

Gen.

“Did one of the technicians write this down when they saw the body?”

“No. It was in her office. In a pile of junk mail.”

Jared took the bag from Jensen and looked at it. “She had it before she was killed?”

Gen nodded, not able to stop the smile pulling at the corner of her mouth. “I think he sent it to

her before he ever captured her. I think he was marking her as his next victim. Guys, we have

got to figure out what the angel names mean. If he’s actually warning them beforehand, we’ll

know who the victim is and—”

“Wait, Gen,” Jensen interrupted her. “This is crucial evidence, but let’s not get ahead of

ourselves here. We have no indication that the other two victims received something similar.

The killer could have brought it as a reminder of sorts.

“You’re right though; we need to get on these angel names. Jared and I will bring in the best

materials we have tomorrow and we'll all start sorting through and reading it. We also need to

determine if the other victims did receive these notes. First and foremost though, we need to

know what the forensics says about it."

"Kim's technicians are working on that now," Gen said. "Unfortunately there are no fingerprints,

but she's analyzing the paper and the ink now. Should have the results in a day or two."

Jensen nodded. "Good. This is good. It's something at least. Does Kim have any other word

on the body?"

"Not much right now. They're still going over everything. But, she did say that the blood they

found in the containers in the kitchen—"

"Let me guess, it was hers?" Jared muttered.

"Yes. It's definitely hers. And while Kim can't say anything definitively yet, she thinks based

on the state of the blood when they originally found it—Sarah was killed today. Possibly within

an hour or two of Hannigan finding her."

"Do you think he knew when Hannigan was coming over?"

"I'm positive he knew," Jensen said. "You're absolutely right, Jared. He's baiting us. He wants

us to discover his projects and play along with him.”

“Does that rule Hannigan out then?” Gen asked. “The last call he was on took up the entire

morning and the customer stayed with him the whole time.”

Jensen half-shrugged. “Not one hundred percent, but I don’t think we need to focus on him. For

one thing, gauging time of death based on blood congealment is probably not an exact science

which I’m sure Kim will tell us. But, I also don’t think Hannigan did this. He was having a true

emotional response to her death. I don’t think our killer could fake it like that. I don’t think he’d

even bother to try.”

The three stood in little circle together, arms all crossed over their chests as they thought.

Finally Jared broke the silence.

“So, three hamburgers from Nell’s then—?”

Jensen hummed a pondering noise. “No, maybe not. There’s nothing more we can do tonight I

don’t think. It will take some time for the forensics to tell us something, Hannigan has been

released, Vanderpool won’t be ready to talk tonight, I’m sure about that, and all our angel

research is in my motel room. We should break for tonight and get a good’s night sleep for a lot



of reading tomorrow. Plus I'm sure interviewing Vanderpool won't be pleasant. Moreover,

Gen, I don't like you having to drive an hour home too late at night."

"Jensen—"

"It's every day and night though, Gen. And we're working over twelve hours as it is. Maybe

you should ask Beaver about getting a motel room here too."

"I don't think I can. Portsmouth is actually less than forty miles away, so it falls into the 'under

fifty miles it's a normal daily commute' zone."

Jensen frowned.

"It's okay, Jensen. It's not a bad drive. We don't have traffic like you do down in DC. It's less than an hour both ways."

"Still—"

"Would you be this concerned if I were a man?"

Jensen narrowed his eyes playfully at her. "Yes."

She laughed and patted his arm. "Well, thanks for the concern. I'll see you guys bright and

early tomorrow. Seven right?"

Jensen nodded. "You got an umbrella?"

"Is it still raining? Geez, I've been in the basement so long I didn't even notice. Yeah, I got

one."

“Drive safe, Gen,” Jared said.

Gen smiled, her eyes brightening with amusement. “Wow. I really don’t know what to do with

the attention of two such handsome men.”

“Get your ass OPR-ed for sexual harassment, that’s what,” Jensen said. “Get out of here.”

Gen laughed and waved goodnight. Jensen turned to walk over to his desk to shut down his

laptop, and he noticed that Jared was standing still, looking at the door Gen had passed through

on her way out.

“Jared?”

Jared’s head snapped to Jensen. “Yeah?”

“You okay?”

“Yeah. Just, thinking.”

“Well, try to turn it off. Let your subconscious do a little work for now.”

Jared began shutting down his computer as well. “What do you mean?”

“You know, the brain is a funny thing. Sometimes it observes things you don’t consciously

record. And sometimes it can make connections for you that you would otherwise never see.”

“And what good does it do if it’s stuck in our heads?” Jared asked, slipping his computer into

the safe for overnight storage.

“You don’t remember your dreams?” Jensen asked, curious.

“Very rarely.”

“Hunh.”

Jared laughed incredulously. “Please don’t tell me you solved a case once by dreaming the

answer.”

“Not *solved*...”

Jared laughed again and shook his head. “I’m teamed up with a psychic. Awesome.”

“I’m not a psychic. Just...go get the car and pull it around, huh?” Jensen tossed him the sole

umbrella they had between them. “I’ll finish locking up here and meet you at the front door.”

“Okay,” Jared said as he left, still chuckling.

“Asshole,” Jensen murmured fondly and finished securing their sensitive materials in the safe

and locked it. He was pulling on his dried out but wrinkly mess of a suit jacket when there was

a soft knock at the open door. Jensen looked up and felt his heart take an extra hard beat as his

eyes landed on Misha.

“Hey,” he said softly. “Um, I mean, hi,” he amended in a more professional tone. “What are you

still doing here?”

“I’m on the swing shift. I’m here until ten.”

“Oh. So. Um...”

“I found this in the copy room,” Misha said, holding out a thin stack of papers. “It must have

come while you all were out and someone just set it aside in the inbox rather than bringing it

here.”

“Oh, the fax from Missouri!” Jensen walked over and took the stack of papers from Misha. “I

completely forgot these were coming today. We locked the office when we left, so I guess they

couldn’t have been dropped off even if someone did think to bring them over. Thank you, for

bringing it.”

Misha shrugged. He looked like he was about to speak, but Jensen was too busy glancing over

the pages to really pay attention to him.

“Okay, then. I’ll see you later.”

Jensen scanned a few more lines before Misha’s words registered. He looked up and said,

“Yeah, we—” to Misha’s retreating back.

Jensen groaned softly to himself. He hadn’t meant to blow him off, but he shouldn’t exactly be

thinking he needed to use every opportunity to—to what? Flirt? Win him over? Maybe it was

better when they stayed out of each other's way—

Jensen sucked in a breath when he read one of the receipts. "Misha!" He reread it several times

to make sure he wasn't seeing things.

"What is it?"

Jensen was startled by Misha's return. Then he realized he had called out for him.

"This receipt, for a coffin purchased from the funeral home in Missouri..."

"What about it?"

Jensen handed him the paper. Misha frowned at him, but took the paper and read it over. His

face turned to shock and he looked up at Jensen.

"Natalia. Natalia ordered the coffin?"

Jensen put out a hand, showing he had no answers. "What reason would she have to order a

coffin?"

Misha looked over the receipt again. "The dates are wrong."

"What dates are wrong for what?"

"Nothing. She ordered this a month before she was killed. I wonder...if this was what she was

talking about?"

“What do you mean?”

“All the teachers in the school are put in charge of certain school activities, like the autumn

festival, Christmas parties, stuff like that. Natalia was on the Halloween party team. She was

actually pretty excited about it and told me she had plans to go all out. Maybe she ordered a real

coffin for authenticity.”

“So early? And why from Missouri?”

Misha shook his head. “I don’t know.”

“Would anyone have had access to her accounts or credit cards?”

“It seems unlikely, they were all new accounts she’d opened after divorcing her husband and

reverting back to her maiden name.”

“Did she—Smith is her maiden name?”

“Yes.”

“Oh. But. Your name is...”

Jensen trailed off. It was none of his business, so he didn’t ask. But maybe Misha wouldn’t

mind telling him. He could see the man repress a sigh, but he answered.

“We’re actually stepsiblings. My father married her mother when I was seven and she was

three. But, she’s always been my sister.”

Jensen nodded. "I see."

Their eyes met for a moment and they just stared for what was probably not a socially

acceptable amount of time. Jensen shook himself.

"So, um, new accounts. So her ex-husband didn't have access to them. And they were new

enough they she probably couldn't have run into identity theft. Did she report her cards stolen or

were her bank records checked for any strange purchases? I guess not otherwise that would be

in the file. And we would have noticed her making a purchase at an out of state funeral home.

Why weren't her bank records or credit cards run?"

"I think they were. Only it was a thirty day check."

"Maybe we should request to have a full financial background check run," Jensen said as he

flipped through the other receipts. "See if there are any more unusual purchases."

"Yeah," Misha scoffed softly. "And we're back to investigating the victims."

Jensen looked up sharply.

Misha dropped his eyes immediately. "I'm sor—"

"No, you know what? Fuck you, Misha. We'll let you know if we find anything."

Misha eyes flashed with anger as he looked back up. Then he shook his head

with a smile that

was anything but amused.

“I’m allowed to have my doubts regarding your investigating abilities. We’re at three murders

now and you don’t have a single lead. Zero suspects. You’re just chasing your tails!”

“Actually, Officer Collins, since you’re not working this case you don’t know what evidence we

have, what leads we’re following, or who we have an active interest in. So, you can keep your

opinions to yourself.”

“Who you have an active interest in? Natalia? Me? How are those leads panning out?” Misha

sneered.

Jensen stepped forward without thinking and grasped Misha’s forearm. Misha jerked back, but

Jensen kept his grip, and suddenly they were staring at each other with a dangerous energy

charging the air around them. But, it wasn’t anger and accusation and hatred. The moment they’d touched the atmosphere had taken a distinct turn. Jensen took in a shallow breath and

licked his lips. Misha’s eyes followed the movement, and then he gave a slight shake of his

head.

“We’ve got to do something about this,” Misha said, his eyes still on Jensen’s



lips.

“I can think of a few things,” Jensen murmured, feeling only marginally like a cheesy idiot.

Misha’s eyes flicked up to meet his. “I meant we need to figure out how to talk to each other

without getting worked up like dogs in heat.”

Jensen released Misha’s arm and some of the tension drained away. He looked at the tile floor.

“Yeah, I knew what you meant.”

“Doesn’t mean I don’t want what *you* meant.”

Jensen looked at him with a small shake of his head. “Misha, don’t—”

“Hey, Jensen—oh, hi, Misha.”

Jensen and Misha tried to hide their startled reactions to the voice and both took an

inconspicuous step away from each other as they turned to face Russ.

“Hi, Russ,” Jensen said. “You got something?”

Russ’ eyes lingered on Misha for a moment, and then Misha looked like he realized something.

“Oh, right. Official business. I was just dropping off the fax. I’ll get out of your way.”

“Not in the way,” Russ said. “Thanks, though, for getting the fax for us.”

“Sure.”

Misha walked out of the room and Jensen felt a ridiculous urge to stomp the

floor in frustration,

but he refrained and looked at Russ.

“Um, actually, it’s not a big deal at all. I just had Mr. Vanderpool driven home, and set up an

interview with him tomorrow morning. Hopefully he’ll cool off—a little bit at least—in the

meantime.”

“Yeah, that’s a good idea. And thanks again, Russ, for handling the situation.”

Russ smiled broadly. “No problem. And, um,” he hesitated and toned down his smile, “I know

you and Misha had some issues when you first got here. Are you two still having problems? I

know him pretty well. I mean, I could talk to him for you—”

“No,” Jensen said quickly. “Thank you, but no. That won’t be necessary. We’ve—well, I wouldn’t say we’ve reached an understanding, but we’re dealing with it. Sort of.”

“Is he being a problem?” Russ asked, suddenly serious.

“No. Not at all. Um, you know what? It’s late and Jared is actually waiting for me outside.

We’ll pick up tomorrow. Hopefully Kim will have something for us, and these receipts need to

be sorted through. Plus all the angel research and the Vanderpool interview. Big day tomorrow.

Be sure to get some rest.”

Russ smiled again. "Right. See you in the morning."

Jensen locked the door behind them and said goodnight to Russ. He didn't look to see if Misha

was at his desk. He walked out of the station and jogged the five feet in the rain to where the

Accent was parked against the curb. He hopped in and Jared put the car in gear.

"What took you so long?"

"The fax from Missouri came in after you left. I couldn't help glancing through it."

"Anything interesting?"

"Well, Natalia Smith bought a coffin from them."

Jared made a face. "That's weird."

"I know."

"Hunh. Should we stay and look into to it?"

"No. I need a shower and I need sleep. We've got all day tomorrow."

"Okay." Jared drove out of the parking lot. "So you just swung by the copy room on your way

out, or...?"

"Oh, no. An officer saw it in the tray and dropped it off."

"Oh."

They drove for a couple minutes and then Jared cocked his head. "An officer?"

Jensen sighed. “Misha brought it over.”

“Oh, now it makes sense. You made me wait in the car for nearly ten minutes because you were

‘glancing through the fax.’ You’ve got some weird euphemisms, dude.”

Jensen shot him a disgusted look and Jared just chuckled.

### **Wednesday, October 9, 2013**

Jared took down a note regarding angel hierarchy from the book he was reading and then glanced

around the room. Jensen was leaning on his desk, finger stuck on the open page of a book as he

skimmed through it. Gen sat in an office chair, gently twisting back and forth as she perused a

copy of *Angels in the Occult*. Russ sat on the floor with his back against the wall by the door, squeezing a stress-relief squishy ball in one hand as he turned the pages of his book with the

other.

Jared returned to reading. Then all four started violently as their quiet research atmosphere was

shattered when the door flung open and banged against the wall. They all looked up to see

ASAC Jim Beaver. He scowled at them.

“Sorry to disrupt your book club, ladies, but do you mind if we have a little progress update

meeting?”

Jared watched Jensen shut the door to the conference room. He'd already spent most of his

morning on the phone with Eric—and hadn't spoken more than three words as he'd had to listen

about how this case was now national news and they had better have some sort of statement if

not answers to give the press. It was times like those when being the junior agent with less

responsibility was definitely a good thing.

Jensen walked away from the door and took a seat next to Jared. Sitting at the round conference

table were himself, Jensen, Gen, Russ, Ty, Jim Beaver, and Jim Beaver's surly scowl.

Jim opened with a succinct message to the group. "Whose ass do I need to start chewing on to

get some movement on this case?"

"I'm the lead investigator," Jensen said. "That would be my ass."

Jared saw Russ bite his lip to hide a smile.

"Three murders. In one month. No suspects. Zero evidence—"

"We don't have zero evidence, Jim," Gen spoke up. Jared hoped she was familiar enough with

him to know whether or not that was a career ending move. "But it does take time to process.

The same amount of time that it takes to process evidence when the kills are six months apart.

We have to bear in mind that this guy is a pro. He has a lot of experience. Possibly over nine years.

"You know me, Jim, and if I thought these DC agents were dragging their butts on the carpet, I

would have taken over. We're doing everything we can. We're seeing this from a lot of

different angles. We have a lot of leads that we are doing our best to cover. But, you know it

takes time. And this guy—he's not giving us that. But that will make him sloppy."

"What kind of leads, Agent Cortese?"

Jared saw Gen's shoulders tense slightly. Clearly being addressed formally unnerved her.

"Well, for one thing, we're pretty certain he's marking his victims and even notifying them of that

fact. He sends the name of the angel he carves onto their chests to them before he kidnaps them.

We found a note in Vanderpool's home, and we sent a team back in to search Thompson's house.

We found a note card with the name of the angel on it in one of the trash cans. That tells us he

received it after the last time his home was cleaned, which means he received it a week or less

before he was discovered. So, more than likely the kidnapping and torture doesn't last more

than a few days and the killer takes them shortly after delivering the note. One wasn't found in

Smith's home or desk at work, but one of her coworkers did remember hearing Smith mention

something about a strange note. She'd assumed it had been a secret admirer type of thing at the

time, but said that Smith never said that. Just that it was—"

"Okay," Jim interrupted her. "I got the picture. He's warning them ahead of time. What do the

angel names mean?"

Everyone shifted in their chairs.

"We're working on that, sir," Jensen said.

"So, even if another victim gets a card, we won't know what it means."

"We'll know to put them in protective custody at least."

"Will we? We didn't know about the other notes beforehand."

"The victims didn't know what they were," Ty interjected smoothly. "If we inform the public,

they'll be able to come forward and ask for protection."

"Is that such a good idea?" Russ asked. "We let this news out, and I'm pretty sure the killer will

stop sending the cards."

"Maybe," Jensen agreed. "Depends on how arrogant he is. Another thing to consider is that if

we announce this to the public it's going to generate a lot of false leads and panicky people."

"People are already panicking, Agent Ackles," Jim said. "People three states over are flipping out."

Everyone was quiet for a moment as they considered their options.

"I think..." Russ said hesitantly, like he wasn't sure if he could speak, "... that we should not

inform the public for now."

Everyone looked at him and he looked nervous. Jensen gave him an encouraging nod and he spoke again.

"I mean, it will create panic every time someone gets an unmarked letter or has a note slipped

under the door. Stupid teenagers may do it to prank each other. And now that the case is out

there—that people are aware of the killer marking their victims with the names of angels—I

think that if someone did receive a card it would seem unusual enough to make them question it.

Hopefully they would bring it to our attention."

Jensen nodded. "That makes sense. But if we have some way of warning the populace, and we

don't do it, forget the fall out we'll receive from it. It's our ethical duty to do what we can to

protect people. I just don't know on this one."

No one else volunteered an opinion.



“How sure are we that this is the killer warning them ahead of time? We’ve got, two out of three?”

“Yes, sir. Possibly three,” Gen confirmed.

“But we don’t know three. In fact, we don’t know that the killer isn’t planting these at the crime scenes after the fact.”

“And that’s a possibility,” Jared said. “This guy is all about the game. Everything he does could

have a specific meaning or it could just be a decoy to get us off chasing a lure.”

“Allure?” Ty asked.

“Like, the things dog chase at dog tracks.”

“Oh. A *lure*.”

“Alright,” Jim said. “We don’t know if the notes are given to the victims before they are

kidnapped. We do know that the angel name is left on the body and that based on the murders in

DC, they probably have some sort of meaning. Let’s work on that angle since that’s what we

know. We won’t make any announcements about the cards just yet and keep that information in-

house. What else do we have?”

“Well,” Jensen said, “despite my earlier reservations, I’m starting to become

convinced that this

guy is local. And that he's not new to the area. He knows these victims too well. Knows their

routines, their habits. Knows when they'll go long stretches without being expected by people.

None of these victims have been reported missing—and they have been held and tortured for at

least two or three days before their deaths.

“He is also someone who could somehow have access to personal information like credit card

purchases. The first victim actually bought the coffin she was found in. A coworker confirmed

that she'd had the idea to use one in the school's Halloween festival even though she hadn't

known she'd already purchased it. The funeral home is a chain, so when she ordered it online, the order got placed in the Kansas City, Missouri branch's account.”

“So, we're looking at people with access to financial records or good hacking skills.”

“Not necessarily,” Jared said. “It's not like a package that big wouldn't go unnoticed. At the

very least people at the post office saw it.”

“So now we're thinking our guy is a mailman?” Jim asked crustily.

Jensen shrugged a shoulder. “Even serial killers have day jobs.”

“Or, the killer could have come across it in her basement when he attacked

her,” Russ suggested.

“I guess. But there’s not a lot of evidence to support that she was kidnapped from her home or

held there while he tortured her. But what I don’t get is why he stopped making the coffins by

hand. Smith was in a premade coffin, Thompson had none, Vanderpool had one made of her own

body parts. Why the switch? He put such care in the craftsmanship of those coffins in DC.”

“They probably take a long time to make,” Gen said. “He’s stepped up his game with the

frequency of the kills. He doesn’t have the time.”

Jensen made a face but didn’t respond as he chewed on his thumbnail. Jared knew the look

hadn’t been directed at Gen but at the situation. He hoped she knew that.

"Regardless," Jensen said sitting up. "He's local. And he's been to DC. I was wondering if we could—"

"Access the private information of every citizen in my city?" Ty said with a disapproving look.

"That's not what I was going to say."

Ty chuckled humorlessly. "Trust me, Agent, whatever you were about to say was going to

violate a lot of people's right to privacy, so just get it out of your head."

Jensen's eyes flicked to the side, but he did manage to not actually roll them. They were all

saved from further discussion (or argument) on that topic when someone rapped on the door and

opened it. Kim was halfway through the doorway before she noticed the large party gathered.

"Oh. Oh, I'm sorry. Dan said the agents were in here but he failed to mention you were all

having a big powwow. I'm sorry to interrupt."

"It's okay," Ty said. "Jim, this is Dr. Kim Rhodes, our medical examiner."

"Pleasure," Jim grunted and somehow sounded like he meant it. "I've been impressed with the thoroughness of your work on this case."

"Well, thank you."

"Did you have something for us, Kim?" Jensen asked.

"Well, yes and no. Just some more details of the kill, but nothing that will identify a suspect I

don't think."

"Please share it with us," Jim said.

"Okay. Um. The first thing is that based on the injuries and clotting and healing of the body

parts, I'm fairly certain she was kept alive and tortured for over five days before being bled out."

Everyone in the room shifted in their seats.

"And despite being cut into separate pieces, I was able to determine that both the vagina and

anus suffered from sexual trauma. I also found traces of phthalates on those

tissues."

Jared's brow creased. "He's using dildos," he said. "And old fashioned ones at that."

"Do we want to know why you know that?" Russ asked.

Jared opened his mouth to respond, but Beaver spoke up.

"Is that true?"

"Well," Kim answered, "phthalates are found in PVC rubber and that used to be the standard for making dildos. Until it was discovered phthalates are carcinogens. I think the killer has used

other devices as well, both traditional and non-traditional, but the point I'm trying to hit on—and

I think Jared was as well—is that he's not raping them with his own member."

"Typical," Jensen snorted. "A psycho with mommy issues can't get it up so he takes it out on innocent people."

"He may not be impotent," Russ said. "He might just know about forensics and not want to risk leaving the DNA."

"Yeah, sure."

"And what do you mean mommy issues? What evidence do we have of that?"

"They all have mommy issues."

Russ opened his mouth to argue, but Jim stood up. "All right, well, I think this meeting has run

its course. Ty and I are going to discuss the statement we're going to release to the press. I want

the four of you back in that room figuring out these damn angel names. And Dr. Rhodes, do you

have any other results to share before we break?"

"The analysis of the paper and ink of the cards with the angel names on them should be in by today as well as the results of the trace evidence gathered at Thompson's crime scene.

Vanderpool's is still being sorted through. There were a lot of rooms in the house and we

vacuumed and dusted for prints in all of them."

"All right then. Always report immediately with new findings. Don't worry about if we're in

meetings or not."

"Yes, sir."

Everyone stayed seated and Kim stood awkwardly at the door.

"Didn't I just give you all assignments? Get!"

The three agents and one detective stood up swiftly and exited the room. As they entered the

bullpen, Russ grasped Jensen's elbow and made him stop. Jared slowed down too, not sure if

the conversation was meant to be private or not. Jensen glanced down at Russ' hand when the

man didn't let go, but didn't try to shake him off.

"Jensen, I really hope you didn't mean what you said in there."

"What do you mean?"

"About those clichés about the killer. We can't put this guy in a box. I didn't think you'd be

swayed by that pop psychology profiling bullshit."

Jensen shifted his weight and it put his body at an angle that made Russ either let go or have to

reach out to keep a hand on him. He let go.

"Believe me, Russ, I'm not underestimating him. But I'm not above ridiculing him. I'm only a

man."

Russ' face took on a strange expression and he opened his mouth to speak, but was interrupted

when Misha came up and said, "Agent Ackles, I was wondering if I could have a word? Unless,

I'm sorry, am I interrupting?"

"No," Jensen said at the same time Russ said, "Yes."

They looked at each other and Jensen patted Russ' shoulder. "We can discuss this further if you'd

like. I don't want you thinking I'm not taking this case seriously."

"No, no of course not. I know this case is—everything to you."

"Um, well, it's everything right now, definitely. We should get back to our research. I'll join you all shortly."

Russ nodded and walked toward the FBI office. Jared raised an eyebrow at Jensen and he half

shrugged one shoulder and waved a dismissive hand in the air. Jared and Gen

left Jensen to talk with Misha and joined Russ in the office. He was staring at the latest entry to the whiteboard:

Sarah Vanderpool, forty-two years old, married, no children, adulterer. He turned around when

he heard the agents enter.

"So, are we ready for more angelic knowledge?"

"No," Gen griped. "But I guess that's not really an option."

Russ smiled. "No, ASAC Beaver seemed pretty clear. I think I am going to go grab my desk

chair though. The floor is starting to get a little old."

Russ left and Gen turned to face Jared. She smiled at him. It made her look very cute, but it just

made Jared's blood run cold.

"W-what?" he asked.

"Oh, relax. It's nothing bad. But—"

"But what?"

"Will you go over to Nell's and get me some loaded french fries? I need carbs and cheese if I'm

going to spend all afternoon reading about Zippity Do-Dah-el."

Jared laughed. "I haven't come across that angel yet."

"Oh, he protects against racial insensitivity."

Jared laughed again and felt his smile just grow wider as he looked at Gen.

"You're kind of



funny."

"And you're kind of tall. Fries?"

"Right. Fries."

Jared checked to make sure he had his wallet and then left the office. Jensen was on his way in

and Jared raised an eyebrow at him and gave him what he knew was an obnoxious grin.

"So, did *Misha* help you 'go over anymore faxes?'"

Jensen narrowed his eyes. "Jay."

"What? Okay, I'm sorry. But, did he apologize for being a dick on Monday?"

"No, he didn't. He was letting me know the animal mutilation file I'm looking for is at the

contracting company's office that's doing the electronic conversion. He said it'll be here in a

couple of weeks."

"Ah. Do you think it will really help?"

Jensen's whole body sagged a little. "Honestly? No. But we're flapping in the breeze here.

This asshole has our pants around our ankles and I don't want to just bend over without a fight."

"Thank you for the vivid mental picture."

"You're welcome. Where were you going?"

"Nell's."

"Gen wants loaded cheese fries?"

"Yep."

"Cool. Get me a chicken sandwich and some fried pickle chips."

"Really? Haven't seen you up jogging in the mornings lately."

"Bite me, Jared. And if it takes you longer than twenty minutes to get back, we'll all know you

were 'looking over some faxes' with Felicia."

Jared laughed and discreetly flicked him off as he walked out of the bullpen.

### **Thursday, October 24, 2013**

Jensen flipped through the stack of photos again. They depicted two cats and a squirrel

dissected in such a precise manner that Jensen wondered at the term "mutilation" being used to describe them. In fact, it was the clinical, scientific manner of the act that had gotten the

offender off with nothing more than a warning. The court deemed that there was nothing

malicious about the act, just a healthy scientific curiosity. Jensen definitely disagreed with that.

It was not normal for a fourteen year old to surgically dissect their neighbor's cat for any reason.

He wished he could have the kid's name. Then there'd be only one of Ty's fine citizens whose

privacy he wanted to invade. As it was he was sorely tempted to run a search in the police

records for all thirty-five to thirty-six years old males. And if he thought he could do it without

word of it getting back to Ty, he would have done it by now. It was a terrible violation and

would break his oath of rigorous obedience to the Constitution, but they were at the end of their

rope.

Fortunately, there hadn't been another murder nor were there any missing person reports filed.

Everyone in town seemed to be accounted for, but Jensen wouldn't put it past the killer to select

a victim from the neighboring towns. And that killer was still just as big a mystery as ever. The

trace evidence from the Smith and Vanderpool scenes had yielded nothing. The Thompson scene

revealed some fibers made of cheap, low quality cotton which didn't match any of Thompson's

clothing, but those fibers were found in just about every kind of garment made for every Wal-Mart, K-Mart, Target and other affordable retailers. There was also some dirt that matched the

soil around Lake Winnepesaukee (no, don't ask him to spell or pronounce that), but Thompson's

house was *on* the lake. The note cards with the angel names on them were index cards that could

be bought in any store that sold office supplies and the ink was from a mass produced Sharpie

marker. They could hardly ask the local stores for records indicating those people who had

bought those items. People didn't understand why they couldn't stop terrorists like the Boston

Marathon Bombers, but they couldn't arrest someone or even investigate them for simply buying

a pressure cooker and ball bearings. What the hell were they supposed to do about people

buying index cards and markers?

At least the tension and commotion from two weeks ago had eased some. After the surge of

media and reporters had been given some scraps, they had analyzed it on twenty-four hour news

programs to ridiculous conclusions. However, after several days with no information, no new

body, and some political scandal in Washington, the story had been all but dropped. He didn't

know if the short American attention span was a good thing or a bad thing.

Then tension in the office had also relaxed as Eric called less often, Jim visited for progress

reports less often, and Jensen and Misha crossed paths less often. So there'd been a moment a

week back when Misha and Jensen had somehow found themselves alone in the FBI office. And

somehow the door had gotten shut. And somehow Misha had wound up with his back against the

door with Jensen attempting to give him a tonsillectomy with his tongue. They'd been interrupted

by a loud commotion out in the bullpen as the Squirrel Licker was brought in shouting about a

striped bass plotting an assassination on the President. No one had caught them, but they'd

suddenly realized how stupid they were being by getting too carried away in places where it

would be very easy to get caught.

They'd taken great pains to make sure they were never anywhere alone together since then. And

it had helped keep them out of trouble and certainly it had made their tenuous relationship

become less antagonistic though they still sniped at each other on occasion. Misha really did

have a snarky sense of humor and genuinely seemed to enjoy watching people squirm. And that

was fine. And they were good. Really. Of course, three days ago Jensen had woken up for the

first time in nearly twenty years with a mess in his underwear. But he could blame that on his

eight month dry spell more than any fixation on Misha. Well, when he could get himself to

believe that anyway.

Jensen checked his watch. It was nearly ten o'clock and he hadn't eaten dinner. Fortunately

Nell's stayed open until two in the morning. Jensen looked at his watch again to check the date

and felt a cold, squirming worm of unease roll in his stomach. There had been about a week

between Smith and Thompson. Two weeks between Thompson and Vanderpool. Now it had

been over three weeks with no new body. And that was a good thing; Jensen didn't want another

person to die so he could have more evidence—but this was starting to feel like DC all over

again. They'd been so certain there would be a fourth kill, and then he'd disappeared for eight

years. Jensen would go insane if he lost him again.

"Hey," Jared said as he popped his head into the office and rapped on the frame.

Jensen was too tired to even be startled. He just turned to face the younger agent. His hair was getting long. It really was longer than regulations allowed for, but he looked cute with the floppy

bang thing going on.

"Where you been?" Jensen mumbled, rubbing a hand over his face.

"Talking with Kim."

"Given up on Felicia?"

"What? It's not like that at all."

"Jared, the two of you flirt like it's a competition."

Jared laughed. "I think it is. Kim and I just have fun trying to one up each other."

"Hmm."

"You awake?"

"Yeah. I'm just tired. But I'm not tired for sleep. Just—I need a break."

"But you feel guilty for thinking that let alone actually taking one."

Jensen wouldn't meet his eyes. "I just feel like I'm missing something. And if I stop looking—

it'll slip through the cracks and be lost."

"Hey, not 'I,' 'we' okay? We are in this together. You, me, Gen, Russ, even Ty and Jim. Hell the whole Elton PD. We'll figure it out."

"Yeah," Jensen didn't sound convinced.

"Come on. Close up. We're getting dinner at Nell's and then going to Home sweet Motor

Lodge."

Jensen looked at Jared for a moment, and then slapped his already hibernating laptop closed.

"Yeah. I can get on board with that plan."

They drove the Accent to Nell's since they wouldn't be returning to the station. When they got

out Jared was still giving Jensen hell for running over the curb on the way out of the police

station parking lot.

"Run along," Jensen waved him off as he bent over to inspect the bottom of the car. "Put our name on the wait list," he said wryly.

They had been to Nell's at every possible time of day and discovered the busiest time was eight

a.m.—and even then only half the tables were full. There might be a cop or two picking up

coffee for the start of their shift, but they'd probably be the only ones eating this late at night. He just wanted Jared gone in case he discovered he had actually screwed up the stupid car. It was

hard to see much in the dim light from street lamps but Jensen didn't think he'd done any damage

cosmetic or otherwise. He stood up and walked toward the diner entrance. He saw Jared

talking to Felicia who had evidently just come off her shift and was on her way home. He heard

them laugh and almost gagged at the sweet smile they shared.

As he stepped up onto the sidewalk he heard Felicia say, "So, since you're here, I guess that

means you can give me a ride back to my place."

Felicia smiled brightly and Jared returned the gesture until he saw Jensen nearing the door.

"Oh, no, I can't," Jared said.

Felicia's smile wavered and she flushed with a little embarrassment. "Oh, of course not. I

mean, I wasn't trying to imply—"



“No, it’s not—” Jared talked over her, just as flustered.

“It’s my fault,” Jensen said as he shut them both up. “He thinks he can’t because he’s technically

my ride. But, I can find my own way back. This isn’t a big town. Jared, don’t keep a lady

waiting.”

“But,” they both started to protest but had to stop and move out of the way of the diner door

opening. Misha took a step outside and stopped upon seeing the small gathering. He raised an

eyebrow as he shifted a white paper bag to one hand, probably to free up his gun hand.

“Is there a problem?”

“No,” Felicia said. “Not at all. Um, Misha, can you give me a ride home?”

Jensen sucked on the inside of his cheek to keep from laughing at Jared’s dismayed expression.

“Yeah, of course, Fee,” Misha replied.

“Or,” Jensen said, “Officer Collins can give me a ride back to the motel and Jared can drop you

off at your place.”

“Are you sure that’s a good idea?” Jared asked.

Jensen widened his eyes at Jared and did his best to telepathically tell him to shut up.

Fortunately Misha seemed to take the comment to refer to their still

somewhat strained rapport at  
the station.

“Oh, we’ll be fine. It’s a short enough trip that I’m sure we’ll be able to  
refrain from saying  
something stupid to each other.”

“Might be best if we don’t talk at all then,” Jensen mused.

Misha flicked his eyes to him, but didn’t comment.

“Are you sure?” Felicia asked. “The motel is the opposite direction of where  
you live.”

“Fee,” Misha sighed. “This whole awkward conversation is only going to get  
more awkward if

you don’t just take your agent and go. We all know what’s going on. Don’t  
make us say it out

loud.”

Felicia went scarlet. “Misha!” She grabbed Jared’s hand and stomped away  
toward the Accent

with him in tow. Jensen slapped the key of the car into Jared’s palm and  
grinned as he watched

the sight of a 6’4” man get manhandled by a 5’5” woman. The sex should be  
interesting. He

turned back to face Misha and saw the man scowling as he looked after them.

“Jared’s a good guy, right?” Misha asked.

Jensen shrugged. “Good enough.”

Misha turned the scowl on him, and then realized Jensen was teasing him.  
His did a quick roll

of his eyes and started walking toward his patrol car.

“Let’s go, Ackles.”

“Ah, wait, actually, I need to get some dinner first. That’s why we were here.”

Misha stopped and glanced at Nell’s Diner. Then he looked at Jensen with what looked like

actual concern on his face.

“Do you guys eat *all* your meals here?”

“A solid eighty percent, I’d say.”

“Yeah—you know, the food is good, but if you’ve eaten here every meal for the last two months

—it’s only a matter of time before you have a cardiac event.”

Jensen let out a small laugh. “So, what are you suggesting? I drive to the mall and get a salad at

Chop’t?”

“Well, actually, that’s a better idea than the one I was going to suggest.”

Jensen ran a tongue over an incisor. “And what exactly were you going to suggest?” he asked

dryly.

Misha suddenly found the bag in his hand interesting. “I was going to suggest that I could cook

for you, but—” he trailed off and raised his eyes to look at Jensen.

“But—?”

“But that would be a bad idea.”

Jensen nodded and licked his lips. “A terrible idea.”

Jensen could see Misha’s eyes move as they flicked over his body and then back to his face.

Misha ran his teeth over his bottom lip, and then swallowed.

“Oh, fuck it. Come on.”

Misha began to walk toward his car and Jensen followed after him, watching his backside more

closely than he needed to. When he got into the passenger side of the K9 patrol car, he found

Misha placing the white paper bag on the middle console and giving the strict command of

“Leave it” to Bunny who was lying in the backseat and eyeing the bag with, well, dogged

concentration. Misha started the car and they both took Jensen’s earlier advice and didn’t speak

on the drive out to Misha’s home. No sense in ruining the chance for mutual gratification by

potentially ticking each other off.

Misha lived just outside the Elton city limits in a well kept neighborhood with large houses,

landscaped lawns, and honest to God white picket fences. Misha’s house was

the largest one at

the end of a cul-de-sac with a frickin' fountain in the front yard that was lit up and spouting

away. Jensen took in the—shit, *mansion*—and then looked at Misha.

“What—”

“Shut up.”

Jensen grinned as he got out, wondering if he had found himself a sugar daddy. He walked

around to Misha's side of the car and watched him open the door for Bunny who bounded out

with quivering energy, but still sat down and waited for orders.

“So, how much time do we have until your parents get home, Mish?”

“Shut—sha, Jensen. My name is Mi- *sha*. Here, hold this.”

He handed Jensen the white paper bag and then bent over to unclip Bunny's badge from around

her neck. She shuffled her feet and let out a small whine, but remained sitting. Misha gave

Jensen a malicious smile.

“Bunny. Off duty.”

Bunny barked and jumped on Jensen. If the car hadn't been behind him, he would have been on

the ground. He let out an undignified squeak when the dog initially pounced, legitimately

worried she was going for his throat, but she was alternating between licking his face and

sniffing the white bag.

“What the fuck is in here?”

“Some raw meat scraps Nell had left over. Bunny’s a good girl and deserves a treat every now

and then, don’t you?”

He baby voiced the dog, which only excited her more, which made her try to climb Jensen like a

tree. He sputtered around her tongue and tried to get the white bag open.

“You suck, Misha!”

Misha just laughed and headed for his front door. “Be sure she does her business before you

come in. Use the command ‘potty time.’”

“Potty time?” Jensen called out, finally getting a piece of meat into the dog’s mouth. Upon

hearing the command, Bunny immediately dashed away into the yard and squatted. She really

was a well trained dog.

“Stay out until she does number two. Thanks, *Jen!*”

Jensen made a disgusted face at Misha’s retreating back, but was still prepared when Bunny

came back for bit of meat. He fed the dog and scratched her behind the ears. It took three passes

of checking his hands with nose and tongue to believe the meat was really gone, and then she

padded out into the yard to sniff around. Jensen waited for what he felt like must be long enough

to mean the dog didn't really need to go, and then finally she performed that awkward walking

squat dogs do when working out their business. Then she bounded back across the yard and

headed for the front door completely bypassing Jensen.

Jensen grumbled and walked up the rest of the driveway. He was *not* picking that up.

Inside the house several lights were on, and from the back he could faintly hear the sound of

running water and a knife hitting a cutting board. Bunny had already disappeared, so Jensen shut

the door behind him and took the time to examine the house Misha lived in. He was a little taken

aback by the large foyer and the double grand staircase that swept gracefully up from both sides

to a landing at the second level that turned into a hall disappearing to either side. It took him a

moment to pull his eyes away from the black and white marble foyer, and when he did the rest of

the house was just as startling. To say it didn't fit the police officer he vaguely knew was an

understatement.

To the left was the living room and dining room, done in pastels so pastel it made Jensen's teeth

ache. The furniture looked like real antiques being large heavy pieces made of dark colored

wood, which clashed pretty terribly with the pink, baby blue, and yellow walls, curtains, and

generally tacky décor. To the right was a study that led into an observatory. Its color palette

consisted of burgundy, hunter green, and brown. The furniture on this side matched a little better,

but was clearly cheap IKEA home builds and there were at least three different species' heads

stuffed and mounted on the walls.

Maybe Misha really did live with his parents.

Jensen walked across the marble floor and under the arch of the staircase. He passed through a

small dark passageway, and the room immediately opened into a large space with a casual

dining area set up on the right, a door to a screened back porch directly in front, and a large,

open professional grade kitchen to the left. Misha was standing at the center island, which was

as large as the counter in his kitchen in his apartment, washing, peeling, and then dicing

potatoes. He looked up as Jensen entered, dropping off a handful of white cubes into a large pot.



“What took you so long?”

“She wouldn’t go.”

“I told you to use the command.”

“I don’t know. It just seems wrong to make something poo on command.”

One side of Misha’s mouth curved into an amused smile. He waved Jensen over with the knife,

and then handed him the implement.

“I’m going to go change. Can you finish peeling these last two potatoes and cut them up?”

“Um...yeah. Probably.”

“Probably? Please tell me a self-sufficient man in his thirties knows how to cut a potato.”

Jensen made a face and mumbled high pitched noises in mock imitation of him.

“Don’t cut off a finger. That’s very sharp. And try to make the pieces all the same size. And

don’t leave too much peel on.”

“Why don’t you just do it, then?” Jensen grouched.

Misha didn’t answer as he left the kitchen by another stairway tucked into the back wall. It was

a servant’s staircase. What the hell kind of house did Misha live in? Jensen concentrated hard

on getting the skin off in as thin a layer as possible, and then dicing the tuber into cubes that

looked about the same size as the ones in the pot. He was so meticulous he had only just

finished washing the knife in the sink when Misha returned. Jensen's eyes caught on him and

tracked him as he crossed the floor barefooted. The jeans were faded and extremely well worn

in all the right places and the heather grey T-shirt fit him like a glove. Jensen just let himself

stare. He wasn't allowed to drool at work, but he certainly could here.

Misha walked right up to him and Jensen turned enough that their arms just barely brushed,

sending a shiver through his whole body.

"Take a load off, Agent. Stay a while."

Misha turned to pick up the pot of potatoes and walked away to set them on the stove. As he was adjusting the gas burner to a high heat to get the water boiling, Jensen realized he was still

wearing his full suit. He decided to take Misha's advice and shrugged out of the coat as he

walked over toward the table and chairs on the other side of the room. He folded and neatly laid

the jacket on the back of one of the chairs and tilted his head as he looked at the table. It was a

vibrant, natural red brown wood made of several planks slatted together to form a flawless

unbroken surface. Jensen was certain it was handmade; he'd unfortunately become overly

acquainted with carpentry techniques about eight years back. He could tell the chairs were part

of the same handcrafted set. He unbuttoned the cuffs of his dress shirt and rolled the sleeves up

past his elbow. This dining set would probably easily sell for thousands of dollars. He reached

for his tie to loosen it, debating whether or not to take it off, and just settled for unbuttoning the

top two buttons of his shirt and leaving it on.

“Hey, Misha?”

“Yeah?”

“You live alone? There aren’t any kids here, right?”

“No, of course not,” came the reply a little sharply. “Why?”

Jensen looked at him and tried not to smile at his miffed expression. He pulled the gun and

holster from his belt and displayed it to Misha before setting it down lightly on the table.

“Oh, right,” Misha mumbled, looking a little embarrassed.

Ordinarily Jensen would never just leave a gun lying about anywhere, but the only two people in

the house were trained in firearms, so he took the risk. Jensen ran a hand along the top of the

table; it was perfectly smooth—he could barely feel where the planks began and ended.

“Hey, where did you get this table set? This is amazing craftsmanship.”

Misha approached wiping his hands on a towel, his cheeks a little flushed.

“You like it?”

“Yeah. I mean, I’m not an expert or anything, but even I can tell this is pretty flawless.”

“Oh, not flawless. See that crooked plank right smack in the middle?”

Jensen searched for an imperfection. “No,” he said.

“Ah, well, I guess you see your own flaws easier than other people do.”

Jensen turned to face him, astonished. “You made this?”

Misha shrugged a shoulder. “I dabbled in carpentry. Just as a hobby. This probably is the best

thing I’ve ever made.” He laughed. “Which, of course, isn’t saying much.”

“It’s saying a lot,” Jensen murmured and ran his hand over the smooth top again.

Misha tried to hide his blush by turning to scold Bunny who was sniffing her nose along the top

of a counter. The dog ignored him and continued her exploration.

“Hey, uh, this isn’t white pine, is it?” Jensen asked.

Misha cocked his head as he looked at him. “Did you really just ask me if a dark red wood is

made out of *white* pine?” He chuckled Jensen under the chin. “At least you have your looks.”

Jensen scoffed in indignation as Misha turned and walked back into the

kitchen.

“I just meant it could be stained! I was wondering if wood can be disguised like that.”

Misha shook his head. “White pine could never be stained to that color. There is a bit of sealant

on it, which altered the color a little, but that’s the natural color of cherry wood.”

“It’s nice.”

“Unh-hunh. Now forget about the table and tell me how you like your steak cooked.”

“We’re having steak?” Jensen asked as he walked toward Misha. “How exactly is steak and

mashed potatoes a healthier alternative to Nell’s?”

“It’s not, dumbass,” Misha replied with a smug smile as he doctored the steaks.

Jensen took the admission of his ruse as an invitation. He placed the back of his hand at Misha’s

neck and lightly ran two knuckles down his spine. The man shivered and flexed his neck, like he

was trying to get away from the sensation. Jensen wasn’t about to let that happen. He moved to

stand directly behind him, running his hands down the sides of Misha’s soft T-shirt, before

grasping his hips firmly. He stepped closer again and pulled Misha back forcing them to come

in full contact from where Jensen's lips pressed into Misha's hair right down to where their

ankles bumped awkwardly with the proximity. Misha continued his work with seasoning the

steaks, but Jensen could see his hands trembling when he flipped one over to do the other side.

Jensen smiled and inhaled, enjoying the spicy scent of Misha's shampoo mixed in faintly with his

natural essence. This wasn't exactly the standard operating procedure for a TDY fling, but he

couldn't help it. The guy smelled good. He tilted his head a little to press his lips to the nape

of his neck and ran his hands up, this time over Misha's hard abdomen and flat stomach. He

reached his chest and used his wide hands to cover his pectoral muscles and squeeze gently.

Misha let out a soft sound and shifted against him, drawing attention to Jensen's rapidly growing

erection as the soft denim offered little barrier to the cleft of his ass. Jensen was fairly certain

he wasn't wearing underwear.

To check his theory he moved his hands down again and slid them to the sides of Misha's

erection, which must be uncomfortably jammed against the cabinets. Jensen ran his thumbs up and down the length, absolutely positive that there was nothing between them except a thin layer

of worn out cotton.

Misha grunted and slapped his hands to the counter to give him the leverage he needed to grind

back against Jensen. Jensen obliged him and let their hips roll together for several long

moments, encouraging Misha to spread his legs a little wider with a gentle nudge to his thigh

with his knee. He managed to press in a little further to Misha's ass and the man dropped his

head back onto Jensen's shoulder with a softly spoken obscenity. Jensen moved his hands from

Misha's groin and reached up to grab his pectorals again, thumbing rapidly and repeatedly over

his nipples. Misha tried to arch away from the sudden and excruciating stimulation, but found

himself trapped by the counter and Jensen's body. This made him struggle more and groan out

Jensen's name.

Jensen gasped softly, his hot breath coursing down Misha's neck. Hearing Misha say his name

like that...it had sent a spike of pleasure and lust straight to his dick. His cock continued to feel

throbbing aftershocks with each desperate inhalation from the man who was causing it all. He

needed to hear more.

He dropped slowly to his knees, placing kisses along Misha's clothed back, his hands trailing

down until they found hips again. He turned Misha around and then pressed him back against the

counter, holding him still. Jensen would have felt ridiculous rubbing the side of his face against

Misha's dick, but it felt too good to be this close to having that hot, salty weight on his tongue

again. God he hadn't realized how much he missed sucking cock until Misha had reminded him.

"J-Jensen," Misha said shakily, "we have to finish making dinner."

Jensen popped the button on his jeans and closed his teeth gently around the thick bulge he could

feel twitching through the denim. Misha bit off a moan and one hand found Jensen's shoulder

and the other grabbed onto his hair for dear life.

"The—the steaks—"

"We have time," Jensen mumbled, drunk on the dark, heady scent he was breathing in greedily as

he nuzzled the apex of Misha's thighs. His hands slid around to grab his ass, pulling the man

closer, and he opened his mouth again to catch the warm, soft weight of Misha's balls through his

jeans.

Misha's grip on his shoulder and hair increased to the point of pain.



“Jensennn...nm.”

Jensen loved how he kept biting off the noises he was making. It just challenged him to work

him over so hard he wouldn't be able to censor himself. Jensen took the tab of the zipper in his

teeth and started to pull it down. He squeezed Misha's ass again and the man cut off another

groan and jerked so violently he banged the cabinets with a thigh creating a loud echoing thump.

Two seconds later Jensen heard a threatening growl right beside his ear. He froze and turned his head, letting go of the zipper tab, and saw Bunny about six inches from his face, teeth bared,

muzzle wrinkled in anger, and a continuous, unhappy growl rolling out of her throat.

“Bun-Bunny, down,” Misha breathed distractedly.

One of Bunny's ears flicked toward his voice, but she didn't move from her crouched and ready

to attack and kill position.

“Bunny,” Misha said sharply, coming back to himself fully. “Down.”

Bunny stopped growling and glanced up once before she sat down, glaring at Jensen.

“Go away,” Misha said, waving a hand at her. “Back up.”

The dog kept her eyes trained on Jensen, but shuffled back a few steps before sitting down again.

“Stand up, Jensen.”

Jensen immediately moved to stand, but Misha put pressure on his shoulder.

“Slowly, Jensen,” Misha said and snapped his fingers to draw Bunny’s attention to him and away

from Jensen. However, when Jensen started moving, slowly, her eyes were back on him. Once

he got to his feet he was pressed pretty firmly to Misha’s side, but he didn’t try to move away

while the dog seemed so edgy.

“Bunny, up,” Misha gave the command in a friendly voice. She got to her feet at once. “Lay

down.” She flopped to the floor immediately, ears looking much more perky and friendly.

Misha pointed a finger gun at her. “Bang!” he said softly. Bunny flopped to her side and put her

paws in the air. She didn’t look very dead though as her tail was wagging and her eyes were

carefully watching Misha.

“Good girl! Up!”

Bunny jumped to her feet with a bark, tail wagging, and tongue hanging out happily.

“Jensen, make a loose fist and hold it out.”

Jensen was mildly amused as he obeyed Misha’s command as readily as Bunny.

“C’mere, Bunny,” Misha called the dog over and scratched behind her ears.

“Good girl. Now,

give him a sniff.” Misha guided Bunny’s head so that she could sniff Jensen’s hand and

scratched her head and praised her as she did so.

“Now, we like Jensen, don’t we? Well, at least we like his body.”

“Hey.”

Misha smirked at him and then clapped his hands and shooed the dog off. She wandered to the edge of the kitchen and lay down to continue to watch them. Jensen finally began to breathe

normally again.

“Well, damn. I think that actually completely killed my boner,” Jensen said as he glanced down

at his crotch and saw that his penis had indeed gone into hiding.

Misha, the little shit, actually laughed. “Yeah, she does have that effect.”

“I was going to suggest we pick up where we left off, but I don’t think I like having an

audience.”

“It’s better that we don’t anyway.”

Jensen at last took his eyes completely off the dog to look at Misha. Misha just smiled and

patted his cheek.

“Not permanently. I just meant until after dinner. I fully intend on putting those pretty cock-

sucking lips to the use God intended.”

Jensen frowned at him. He'd been told he had cock-sucking lips all his life and he'd never

really appreciated it. And besides, who the hell was Misha to talk? His eyes and thoughts were

caught on those lips now, and before Misha could turn away to do whatever he thought he needed

to do that wasn't kissing him, Jensen put a hand to the back of his neck and brought their lips

together. Misha opened up easily, lazily massaging Jensen's tongue as it swept eagerly into his

mouth over and over again. Jensen tilted his head, sealing their lips and sucked Misha's tongue

into his mouth. His arms snaked around the man pulling him close and sending them slightly off

balance. Misha put out a hand behind himself to steady them and knocked the lid of a pot across

the counter. It clattered loudly and Bunny was back on her feet with a bark.

Jensen pulled away muttering, "For fuck's sake."

Misha chuckled and reprimanded the dog again. He looked at Jensen and wiped the spit-shiny

corner of his mouth with a thumb before sucking the pad clean. Jensen gritted his teeth. His

erection was back and the dog wasn't going to make it go away this time.

"In the bottom crisper drawer of the refrigerator is some broccoli. Will you get that for me

please, Agent?”

Of course, who needed an overprotective dog to harsh his boner when Misha could do it quite

handily with cooking duty assignments?

“Fine,” Jensen tried not to sigh dramatically. “But we’re shutting that dog up somewhere, later.”

Misha smiled. “Don’t worry. She won’t stop you or me from getting what we want out of this

evening.”

Jensen disguised his aroused deep breath by walking away toward the refrigerator. He was a little surprised to find mixed with the arousal was... disappointment? That they were on the

same page about wanting sex tonight was fantastic, but...Misha made it sound so matter of fact

and perfunctory. Like they were just going to—service each other and be on their way. And

that’s all this was, right? Jensen pulled the bag of broccoli florets out of the crisper drawer.

Was he expecting anything more? No, of course not. Misha was, technically, his TDY booty

call. Or, perhaps he was Misha’s. Either way it was just a little reciprocal stress relief that

happened to end with mind numbing orgasms. No big deal.

Except...why was it that even with the groping and grinding and delicious moaning sounds he’d

pulled out of Misha, what had gotten him the most worked up had been the kiss? Misha was a

good kisser. It just felt good. But how could that feel better than rubbing his cock against his

firm—

“Jensen?”

“Yeah?” Jensen whipped around to look at Misha; he was poking at the potatoes in the now

boiling pot with a fork.

“Can you rinse those off and then put them in the steamer? It’s in that cabinet,” he indicated

which one with a jab of his fork.

Jensen tried to speak, failed, swallowed, and tried again. “Sure.”

They moved around each other comfortably while they prepared dinner, conversation mostly

restricted to ingredients and preparation. There'd been a playful battle over the cooking of the

steaks. Misha kept trying to fend off Jensen's attempt to pull his off the stovetop grill before

Misha overcooked the thing, and Jensen flat out told Misha he'd never speak to him again if he

actually ate his steak well done. In the end Jensen had to sigh in dismay at his medium cooked

steak while Misha pretended to gag at the bloody mess that was his medium well cooked steak.

The seasoning was good enough that neither really could complain about the flavor and the

Cabernet Misha had produced from the wine cellar (yes, the literal *wine cellar* downstairs)

complimented it perfectly. The mashed potatoes were decadent with butter and sour cream and

the broccoli was still crisp. He was used to his mother's version of cooking vegetables which

was to steam them to a pile of mush. He did have to admit Misha was a fantastic cook and he

wouldn't mind sharing another meal with him. Except...the conversation definitely stalled almost

immediately.

They enjoyed their meal in a half-awkward silence until Jensen couldn't stand it anymore. He

took a large gulp of some dry, fruity liquid courage and looked at Misha.

"So, we *can* talk, right?"

Misha raised his eyebrows as he chewed slowly. "Yes?"

"Oh."

Jensen speared a piece of broccoli and crunched into it. *Smooth*, he thought sarcastically.

"What would you like to talk about?" Misha asked before taking a sip of his wine.

*How blue your eyes are.*

Jensen actually recoiled at his own stupid thought.

"I don't know. Honestly, I tend to know a little bit more about the people I almost have oral sex

with in their kitchen."

Misha's mouth quirked at one corner and he cut a piece of steak. He placed his knife down on

the edge of his plate, switched the fork to his other hand, and raised the piece of steak to his

mouth.

"Well, I'm a Leo. I'm a long distance runner. I hate the Red Sox. And I like the green of your

eyes."

He ate the bite on his fork and kept a completely neutral face as he looked at Jensen across the

table. Jensen blushed and pushed his mashed potatoes around his plate. That was so unfair.

How could he say such a stupid, cheesy line about his eyes with such a bland expression?

"Do we need to get more personal than that?" Misha asked.

Jensen looked up, ignoring the small, sharp stab he'd felt in his chest. "I guess we don't need to.

What do you consider too personal? Can I ask about work?"

Misha's brows creased in what could have been a little anger or possibly mild annoyance.



"You think the case is good dinner conversation?"

"No, not the case. I meant *your* job. How did you get into the canine unit? Or is that too personal?" he asked a little cheekily.

Misha inhaled and put down his utensil. "My father was chief before Ty. He never pressured

me into joining the force, but it just seemed like the best thing for me."

"But you went to Dartmouth, right?"

Misha tilted his head. "How do you know that? Did you run me through one of your FBI

databases?"

"No. Russ told me. It came up for some reason."

"Unh-huh." He eyed Jensen suspiciously, but continued. "Yeah, I went to Dartmouth and

majored in political philosophy. And I realized I liked the theory very much, but the practical

application is a nightmare. I had no real aspiration to become a politician and I knew I didn't

want to teach. Plus, my—my girlfriend at the time wanted to move back home to Elton. I knew I could get a job since I had an in with the police chief. I volunteered to join the canine unit and

stayed with it until I *became* the canine unit. We don't have a lot need for search dogs here, it's true, so one or two officers is usually enough to suffice. I did take the detective's exam, and

passed, but I didn't want to give up working with police dogs. I like being able to help when

people need it. After 9/11, I went to New Orleans after Katrina, and I spent three months in

Haiti after the earthquake."

Misha inhaled a breath to speak again, but then seemed to become self-conscious and started

eating instead. Jensen stared at the man, more than impressed. Not only had Misha spoken more

than he probably had in the totality of their acquaintanceship, but it turned out he was an amazing

human being. And that was so bad. So very, very bad. Misha wanted to keep this impersonal.

Being in awe of him would not help Jensen separate his feelings from the inevitable turn this

night was going to take. Maybe if he already liked him this much, he shouldn't sleep with him.

Jensen laughed to himself. Fuck that.

"What?" Misha asked with a small smile.

"What?" Jensen asked.

"You just laughed."

"Oh. Oh, uh. Nothing. You just kind of made me realize that my own grand 'serve the people'

mentality isn't quite so noble. I get paid."

Misha shrugged. "So do I."

"Not for volunteering to go on humanitarian missions."

"No, but...my guess is you aren't going to be getting overtime for working twelve to fourteen hour

days seven days a week while you're here, are you?"

Jensen scoffed. "With the budget cuts and sequestration? Fat chance."

Misha grinned. "Well, we'll see if we can't find you some other perks to make up for it."

Jensen laughed at the ridiculous eyebrow wiggle he gave him, but did notice they both ate a little

faster. Jensen actually felt a nervous flutter in his stomach when he swallowed the last of his

wine. He'd never been nervous before sex; not even his first time. But, they were both done

eating and now they were just supposed to—what, lunge at each other over the table?

Misha stood up with his dishes and walked to the sink. Jensen took in a calming breath. That at

least was something he could do. Help clean up. And his nerves disappeared as Misha actually

made them wash all the dishes, put away the left over mashed potatoes, and wipe down the table

and counters. The tasks would have gone faster if Jensen had kept his hands to himself, but he

found that now that he had the go ahead it was very difficult to pass by Misha and not run his

fingers through his hair, or put a hand to his hip and nuzzle behind his ear. He had his arms wrapped around Misha's waist from behind him and was doing

his best not to leave a hickey as

he sucked and kissed Misha's neck while the man wiped the last crumbs off the granite counter

top and into the sink.

"Alright, already!" Misha cried out in faux-exasperation. He turned in Jensen's grip and they kissed non-stop as they stumbled across the kitchen to the back stairway. Halfway up, Jensen

couldn't stop himself from grabbing Misha's ass and pulling him close. They lost their balance

and fell up the stairs. Jensen knelt with one knee between Misha's legs on a stair and Misha

used one hand to push an excited Bunny away.

"We're not playing, Bunny!" he said, before moaning and pulling Jensen closer to deepen the

kiss. They stayed on the stairs a minute, enjoying the kiss, but when Jensen shifted forward and

his thigh pressed against Misha's groin, they both groaned and forced themselves to stand up.

They made it to the top of the stairs and only ran into the wall twice before Misha pulled them

into a room. He used his foot to keep Bunny on the other side of the threshold and shut the door

in her face. She immediately began to whine and scratch at the door.

"That going to bother you?" Misha asked as he bit gently on Jensen's lower lip.

"Nope."

Misha flicked on the lights and Jensen could tell they weren't in the master bedroom, but other

than that all he noticed was that the room contained a king size bed. He kicked off his shoes and

barely got his socks off before Misha pulled him onto the bed. Jensen didn't think anyone had

ever felt better under him than Misha. And then Misha rolled them over and he didn't think he'd

ever felt anyone over him better than Misha. Misha's knees fell to either side of Jensen's legs

and their groins rubbed together just enough to encourage the heated lust throbbing in his lower

body. Misha grasped Jensen's face in both hands and sat up just a little to lick and bite at

Jensen's lips.

"Fuck, you're a good kisser," Misha sighed and dove back in for more.

Jensen actually felt himself blush with the compliment. Mainly because he felt like he was just

lying there like a slug letting Misha do all the work. He ran his hands up under Misha's T-shirt,

humming at the feel of his muscles moving powerfully as he rocked back and forth on him.

Jensen did his best to contribute to the rhythm by thrusting his hips up to meet Misha's and they

both had to stop kissing for a moment as they rutted against each other—too distracted with

pleasure to do anything more than pant into each other's mouths.

Misha sat up with an aggrieved whine and stilled his movements just long enough to work the

buttons of Jensen's dress shirt open. While he did that, Jensen removed his tie and then sat up

slightly to help Misha push the garment off his shoulders and down his arms. It got flung to the

left somewhere and Misha's T-shirt quickly chased after it. Their lips came back together as

with spontaneous coordination they reached for the fastener of the other's pants. The sounds of

their gasping breaths and smacking lips filled their ears and only heightened the driving need to

get naked immediately. Misha got there first as his loose jeans slid down his legs easily and he was, now unquestionably, going commando. Jensen reached out a hand to grasp his already fully

erect member, but the man sat back on his heels and yanked Jensen's pants down his legs. He

pulled up swiftly and Jensen's feet went up in the air as the pants were yanked off. He fell back

onto the mattress trying to laugh and not giggle. He wasn't sure if he was successful. Then he

felt Misha's hands on the waistband of his underwear and he stopped laughing. They were gone

in a flash and he raised his head, and then started laughing again at Misha's saucer sized eyes.

"Jesus Christ you're fucking huge."

Jensen didn't blush at that compliment. He knew he was bigger than average and it wasn't the

first time someone had told him so.

"Didn't notice that the first time?" he said cockily.

"Well, I could tell it was more than a handful but...seeing it is something else altogether."

Jensen laughed again and put a hand to the back of Misha's neck to drag him forward into a kiss.

And to break his trance since his eyes hadn't left the sight of Jensen's enthusiastic erection.

Misha hummed happily when they kissed again. He pushed on Jensen's shoulders and got him to

lie back down, settling on top of him again. This time when they moved, nothing could keep

them from holding back the overwhelmed moans and breathy grunts. Their cocks slotted next to

each other, trapped in the warm friction of their hard torsos. Their hands roamed through each

other's hair and held each other's faces as they kissed. Jensen had the passing thought that if

Misha wanted to keep things impersonal...this wasn't the way to do it.

Misha reached a hand down and pushed at the inside of one of Jensen's

thighs; his legs parted

and Misha settled between them, thrusting up so that they rutted against each other from balls to

cockheads. Misha braced himself above Jensen, working his hips, and tipped his head back—

eyes closed, mouth slack with bliss. Seeing him so gone on lust made Jensen bite his lip to hold

back a whimper and he arched his back to grind up into Misha's body. The movement threw off

Misha's rhythm, and that seemed to remind him someone else was in the room. He stopped

moving and sat back on his heels, breathing hard.

"Wait, wait. Shit. Sorry. We keep that up and I'm going to embarrass myself."

"Heck, you've already lasted longer than last time. So, it's all uphill really."

Misha opened his eyes and shot Jensen an annoyed grin. "You fucker. Last time doesn't count

towards anything!"

"Sure it does." Jensen reached for him. "C'mere."

"Hang on."

Misha leaned way to the left and had to stretch his whole body to grab the drawer of his

nightstand. He grunted in annoyance as he had to stretch even farther to reach inside it, leaning halfway off the bed. Jensen put one hand behind his head and used the other to give his cock a



few firm pulls as he was entertained by Misha's flailing leg as he attempted to not fall off the

bed. With a final grunt he pushed himself back onto the bed and ripped the back off a new box of

condoms. Most of the contents fell onto the bed and then the floor, but Misha did manage to grab

a string, ripping one off along the perforated edge. He dropped it beside Jensen's hip and then

began to struggle with the protective plastic around the lube cap. He sat back on his heels and

cursed as he picked at it with a nail.

"Should have opened these beforehand."

Jensen laughed and reached for the ripped box, already knowing what it would tell him. He was

distracted from reading it when Misha leaned down and captured his lips again, his perfect

tongue giving his mouth a good, slow fuck. Jensen groaned and clenched the box in his hand. He

could only imagine what that tongue would feel like fucking in and out of his hole. Then he

wondered if he was going to be the bottom tonight.

The sudden press of a finger with not quite warmed up lube at his entrance told him that he was

indeed bottoming tonight. It had been even longer since he'd done that than the last blow job

before Misha. Not that it really mattered because they actually *couldn't* do that tonight.

"Misha," Jensen said, regretfully pulling his lips away from the pleasurable kiss. Misha just started to kiss down his jaw line instead. He raised the condom box and looked at the crumpled

cardboard. He'd never felt so disappointed in his life—not even when Santa Claus hadn't

brought him that dirt bike when he was ten.

"Misha, we can't—ah!"

Jensen's whole body started as Misha's finger slid completely into him. His finger was slim

enough and he had enough lube on it that it hadn't hurt, but it had been surprising. Misha started

pumping his finger in and out and Jensen rolled his hips into the movement. Why had he ever

stopped sleeping with men? He bottomed so fucking well.

"Oh, fuck yes, Mish." He raised one knee, opening himself wider, encouraging the second finger that was already starting to push in. This one stretched with a little pain this time, but Misha

kept working his hand and soon it just felt good and so far from being enough.

Jensen scraped together what few brain cells he could and said, "Misha, wait, I'm sorry, we

can't."

"Why the fuck not?" Misha grumbled, sucking a bruise onto his neck, but below the line of a

dress shirt collar.

"I'm allergic to latex."

"So?"

Jensen bonked him on the head with the box of condoms. He sat up with an irritated,

disapproving look.

"What?" he asked grumpily.

Jensen waved the box in front of his face. "These are latex condoms. And as good as it might be

at the time, I'm not going to spend the next couple of days with a literal itch I can't scratch if you

know what I mean."

"So, do you have something we can use?"

Jensen tried to process that sentence, but Misha hadn't removed, or stopped moving, his fingers

inside of him.

"No, not on me."

"Jesus, Jensen, why did you come over if you weren't expecting sex tonight?"

"I wasn't expecting sex tonight when I left the motel room this morning! And when you invited

me for dinner, I thought I'd be lucky if we exchanged blow jobs."

Misha frowned at him and rubbed his thumb against Jensen's rim with every inward thrust of his

middle and index fingers. Jensen tried to stop the twitch his body made every time it happened,

but it was fucking sensitive down there.

Misha sat up so he could lean over and suck the tip of Jensen's dick into his mouth. He tongued

relentlessly at the glans nearly wrenching a premature orgasm out of him. Jensen cried out in

alarm as the pleasure built and almost spilled out of him, but it was counterbalanced by the sharp

pain of a third finger stretching him wide open. Jensen choked back a shout and gripped the

sheets desperately. The orgasm faded, but the pleasure was still great enough that he forgot

about the pain almost as soon as it happened. Now he was just floating in a sea of ecstasy that

was spiraling dizzyingly toward the edge again. That was some good fucking technique. Jensen

pushed back onto Misha's fingers. God it was going to be so disappointing to not feel a cock in

him tonight.

Misha pulled off Jensen's dick and gave it a kiss. "I can pull out," he said.

"What?" Jensen said, fighting against delirium.

"I can pull out. Before I come."

Jensen opened his eyes and made a face at Misha. "I'm not worried about getting pregnant."

"Well, you won't get anything else. I've only slept with two people in my life. And with no one

in the last four and a half years."

Jensen stopped moving his hips and sat up on his elbows. " *Four and a half years?*"

"Not since my wife and I separated."

"You're *married*?!"

"Divorced." Misha lowered his head and gave a little lick to Jensen's leaking cockhead with

each thrust of his hand. He looked up at Jensen from beneath his eyelashes. "Please, can I?"

Jensen knew he was fucked. He'd already given in, but he was still going to put up a token

resistance.

"You're not worried about me? I'm kind of a slut." Not entirely true, but in the interest of full disclosure, some people might call him one.

Misha shrugged and put his lips around the engorged head of Jensen's penis, sucking once—

hard. Jensen's hips bucked off the bed and Misha pulled off, but allowed his fingers to get

buried practically past the knuckles in Jensen's aching hole.

Jensen could barely understand Misha when he said, "The penetrating partner has a much lower

risk."

When all those words made sense in the right order, Jensen chuckled weakly and murmured,

"Asshole."

"Please," Misha pleaded, leaning forward to kiss Jensen's lips. "I *need* to be in you."

Jensen had already capitulated. He might as well let Misha know.

"Do it," he breathed.

Misha sat up and continued to work his fingers in and out of Jensen as he used his other hand to

get the lube open and squirted some onto his dick. He slicked up his shaft and then circled his

palm over the head, biting his lips at the sensation. He moved in between Jensen's legs as he

spread them wider. Then he spread his fingers out, stretching Jensen's entrance so that the ring

of muscle circled the tip of his cock when he pulled his hand away. He put a hand behind

Jensen's right knee and pushed the leg up. Jensen raised his hips a little and bit his lip as Misha

pushed in.

Jensen keened as Misha slid into him. He had never once in his life had sex without a condom

either on the giving or receiving end. The difference was unfathomable. Even with the lube he

could feel the drag of Misha's skin against his as they connected. His cock

was hot and hard, but

the skin itself was so soft and—fuck him—velvety. It was full on trashy romance novel velvety.

Then the fucker was pulling out. Jensen lifted his head, about to voice some very salty protests,

when Misha thrust back into him. Jensen groaned and dropped his head back. Oh, yeah. That's

how this worked.

Jensen went pliant underneath Misha, letting his legs splay open as much as possible as Misha

fucked into him. It felt so unbelievably good and he hadn't even gotten a solid hit on his prostate

yet. A steady stream of nonsense spilled from Jensen's lips and he threw his arms above his head, finding and grabbing onto the wooden slats of the headboard as Misha picked up the pace.

Misha leaned down and tried to kiss him but couldn't since his mouth was otherwise occupied

trying to breathe around his own grunting moans. The movement did result in Jensen's cock

getting rubbed six ways to Sunday in between their bodies. And then Misha shifted, lifted his

hips or something, and suddenly that was all she wrote for Jensen. With the sudden pounding on

his prostate and the frenetic friction on his cock, his balls tightened and all the pleasure centered

in his groin and then exploded out of him.

Jensen was vaguely aware that he'd screamed and that the headboard had creaked loudly and that

his hands kind of hurt with how tightly he was gripping it, but all that was submerged under a

tidal wave of euphoria that retreated and then crashed back on him again and again. He cried out

when his cock—his whole body—clenched with oversensitivity.

Misha stopped moving and kissed the tears from the corners of Jensen's eyes as he gasped for air

and carefully unfurled his fingers from the wooden slats. They were stiff and it hurt to straighten

them, but the pain made it easier to come to his senses. The first thing he thought was that he

was amazed he'd come untouched. Well, not *untouched*, but it had been the first time that had

happened without something *around* it.

Misha had moved his hands to brace himself on the mattress and straightened his arms so that he

was high enough that he wasn't touching Jensen's tender penis anymore, but his hips were rocking

gently into him. He was still very hard if Jensen's ass had anything to say about it.

"Go on, Mish," Jensen panted.

He shook his head. "Can't. Gotta let go of me."

"Hunh?"



Jensen, now more aware of his body, realized that the leg Misha had been holding up was now

wrapped around Misha's back, heel actually pressing between his ass cheeks.

"Let go so I can pull out."

Jensen hesitated.

"Seriously, Jensen," Misha's movements quickened. "I can't—"

"No," Jensen said, and fortunately Misha knew what he meant by that.

He almost sobbed with joy and started drilling Jensen's ass. Jensen's sore fingers curled around

the headboard again. He couldn't believe it could still feel this good even after coming.

"Oh, shit—fuck, Misha—so good, so good. Your cock feels so fucking good in me. Come on,

come onnnn..." Jensen was not one to talk in bed and he would have been embarrassed by the

dirty encouragement he was letting tumble out of his mouth, but he felt too damn good to care.

Misha's thrusts intensified and Jensen pulled at the headboard as a new wave of pleasure rolled through him and his dick actually tried to fill again. The wood squeaked violently and Misha

swiftly moved a hand from the mattress to brace against Jensen's forearm.

"Don't break my bed, babe," he ground out distractedly.

Jensen felt a thrill shoot through his body at the use of the endearment. Which was stupid

because Jensen was *not* a sap. Misha plunged into his body one final time and froze. His mouth

dropped open in a silent cry, his thighs trembled, and Jensen could feel his member pulse and

shudder inside him as a warmth he'd never felt before flooded his body. Then Jensen realized

that was Misha's spend being rubbed into his flesh as Misha moved his hips in little figure eights

as he worked through his orgasm. The thought should have grossed him out; instead it made him

reach a hand up to Misha's face and pull him down into a kiss. Their tongues tangled lazily as

finally, their hips slowed and ceased moving. Misha started to pull out, but Jensen tightened the

leg that was wrapped around him.

"Not yet," he said quietly so maybe Misha wouldn't hear him.

He did hear, however, if his pleased groan and sudden kiss were anything to go by. Misha

kissed his lips several times and then his cheek. Jensen turned his head letting Misha kiss a trail

to his ear.

"I could spend the rest of my life buried in you," he murmured hotly.

Jensen let out a small sound and put his hand to the back of Misha's head. And those words

should not have been a turn on. Because that hadn't been dirty talk so much

as sweet talk—and

weren't they supposed to be keeping this thing impersonal? Well, he supposed letting Misha

come inside him had blown that plan to hell, but they shouldn't do anything more than what they

were ready for tonight. So, even though he didn't want to, he pushed gently at Misha's shoulder

and joked, "Well, that's a change in attitude from the first time we did this."

"Shut-up," Misha responded, but after only a couple more moments of breathing together, he sat up and slapped Jensen's thigh lightly.

Jensen gingerly unhooked his leg, feeling the tight muscles protest the movement. Misha pulled

out carefully and Jensen hated it. Misha sat back and leaned on his elbows, still between

Jensen's legs. Jensen pushed himself up on his elbows too and looked at the other man. He put a

foot behind Jensen's knee and lifted his leg up and to the side, exposing him enough that Jensen

could feel Misha's come dribble out of his ass. He suspected that was exactly why Misha had

done it and found that equally demeaning and arousing.

"Like the view?" Jensen asked dryly.

Misha hummed and lowered Jensen's leg. Then he let his head fall back and said, "God I needed

that." Then he lifted his head and looked Jensen straight in the eyes. "I

*wanted* that."

Jensen, to his chagrined embarrassment and utter horror, blushed.

Misha smiled at him and Jensen had to look away. Misha pushed off the bed and crawled over

Jensen to kiss his flushed cheek.

"Come on, let's shower. As much as I would love to do this all night, we both have to work

tomorrow and I need to get you back to your motel."

Jensen grunted. "It's not that late—" he looked at the watch that was still on his wrist. "Oh." It was almost one in the morning. He was due at the office in six hours. "Fuck."

Misha kissed his cheek again and slid off the bed. He let out a yelp as he slipped on the condom

packages on the floor. He fell against the bed and started laughing. It was such a natural, happy

sound that Jensen immediately joined in. They continued to laugh as they struggled out of bed

and as they made their way to the bathroom. By the time Misha got the shower going they had

settled into chuckles and the occasional giggle. Jensen stopped laughing, but he was still smiling

broadly as he watched Misha check the temperature of the water. It was a ridiculously fancy

shower with multiple water spouts set on three walls at varying heights. Misha turned back to

him to say something, but Jensen cupped his face with a hand. He smoothed his thumb along

Misha's cheekbone and drew him close. Misha paused just before kissing him, their lips almost

touching, breath being shared.

"We can't," Misha said weakly. "Please, Jensen, you know we can't let this..." he trailed off and Jensen nodded, nuzzling their noses together.

"I know," he replied, and leaned forward to kiss him.

Just like earlier, Jensen knew he was fucked. This was the sweetest kiss of his life and he knew

nothing would ever live up to it. Not unless it was another kiss from this man.

Misha pulled back and shook his head. "You idiot."

He stepped into the shower, pulling Jensen with him. Their arms went around each other, lips

seeking each other like a cold-blooded animal craving the sun. The water fell on them like a

warm summer rain.

Jensen ran his hands over and over Misha's body, mapping it, memorizing it. Misha in turn

skimmed his nails up and down Jensen's back, making him shiver and yearn for more contact.

He surged forward, pressing Misha into the wall of the shower, got a thigh between his legs, and

began rubbing against his groin. Misha clutched at his shoulders and jerked his head away to

gasp in a breath.

"Do-do we—" Misha panted. "Think we have time for—"

He stopped talking when Jensen kissed him again and rolled his hips. Then Misha pulled back

and gently said, "Ah, ah!" He dropped his eyes to watch his fingertip trace Jensen's wet lips. "I

made a promise to myself earlier this evening regarding these lips."

He raised his eyes to meet Jensen's and arched an eyebrow. Jensen kissed his finger, and then

sank to his knees.

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Instead of falling asleep on the couch before the end of the movie like Jared thought would

happen, he and Felicia were necking like teenagers and well past second base. Felicia had been

impressed with his ability to not only get her bra undone blind, but also his ability to get it off

with her shirt still on.

"That a skill they taught you at the Academy, G-man?" she giggled.

Jared laughed. "More like—" he cut off as he thought that maybe mentioning the cheerleading

squad had often enlisted the basketball team to hone their skills on them wouldn't be the most

romantic thing to say. "Among other things," he said instead and scooped her

up into his arms as he stood up from the couch.

Felicia squealed and threw her arms around his shoulders. She twisted her fingers in the hair at

the nape of his neck and put her lips to his ear as he carried her back toward her bedroom, which

in her tiny apartment was about five steps.

"I hope your partner won't mind me keeping you up so late," Felicia said and followed it up with a nibble to his earlobe. Jared bit back a noise and dropped Felicia's legs but still held her upper

half. Then he pushed between her legs as he laid them on the bed. He gave her pretty, pink lips

a long kiss and then pulled back.

"He's actually not my partner."

Felicia laughed as he bent down to kiss along her neck, fingers working on the button of the jeans

she had changed into when they got to her place.

"I know he's not your *partner*. Otherwise this would be really awkward."

Jared stood up to slide the jeans off her slender legs. "No, I know what you meant. I mean, he's

not my work partner. That's kind of a Hollywood thing. We work on squads with several agents

and we work with different people depending on the case."

"Oh. That's a little disappointing. No Mulder and Scully bonding?"

Jared slid his hands slowly up her smooth legs enjoying the way she bit her

lip and squirmed a

little the closer he got to the flimsy pink cloth at the apex of her thighs.

"If Jensen and I bonded the way Mulder and Scully did..." he dipped his head and mouthed at the cotton, feeling it start to dampen, "you and Misha would be SOL this evening."

Felicia giggled, and then sat up. "Wait, what do you mean about Misha?"

"Uh...nothing," Jared said and kissed her mouth, dipping his tongue inside and forgetting his

blunder in the sweet warmth.

He put his hands to the hem of her shirt and broke the kiss long enough to pull it over her head.

His hands felt massive on her small breasts, and she arched into the sweep of his thumb over her

nipples. Jared began to kiss his way down Felicia's neck, loving the mewling gasps he pulled

out of her as she tossed her head back and forth on the bed. His lips moved down to her chest

and he flicked his tongue against a peaked nipple before pulling it into his mouth. Felicia

moaned louder and tangled her fingers in his hair. One of his hands went lower and he stroked

her with one finger through the panties. She was warm and already sopping wet and Jared

groaned as he pressed his finger forward, the fabric doing nothing to keep the digit from sinking

into her heat. He kissed down her stomach and over her abdomen as he raised both hands to

hook his fingers into the sides of her panties so he could slide them over her hips and down her

legs. He kissed and licked feverishly as he moved closer to his goal and put both hands on her

thighs, pushing them apart. Felicia cried out when he spread her and just before he dipped his

tongue inside her, Jared opened his eyes.

He sat up with a start, and then turned away—his eyes fell to his groin. He groaned as he

realized his erection had completely and utterly disappeared.

"Shit."

"Jared?" Felicia sounded worried and sat up. "Jared, is something wrong?"

Jared laughed humorlessly and covered his face with a hand. "You are absolutely going to hate

me."

Felicia scooted back and drew her comforter up to her side to partially hide her nakedness.

"What do you mean, what's wrong?"

Jared shook his head. "Nothing. Just my own hang ups. I'm sorry. I should go."

"Go?" Felicia said sounding more surprised than angry. "Why? Did I do something?"

Jared turned to her and took her hand. "No, of course not. Well, not in the way you're thinking."

Felicia looked to the side and then back to him. "So, it is me."

"No, not you—just." Jared groaned again. "You are going to hate me if I tell you."

"Maybe. But I will definitely hate you if you don't."

Jared drew in a breath and then sighed heavily.

"Jared." Felicia crossed her arms over her chest and pursed her lips. She looked more cute than intimidating, but he decided not to share that with her.

"Okay. You know that I've been with the Bureau for a little over two years, right?"

"Yes."

"Well, I'm actually new to the criminal investigation part. This is my first case." Jared's eyes unfocused as he thought about the case.

"Hey," Felicia said gently and leaned forward to rub his arm. "It's okay. I don't know the details, but I know these murders are really bad."

Jared shook himself and put his hand over Felicia's. "Yes, it is, but that's not the—problem.

Before I worked the criminal side of the house, I was in the Cyber Division. And we do a lot of

things in that unit like track criminal hackers and prevent foreign government intrusions into our

system. But the squad I worked on for two years...it's called innocent images."

"Innocent images?" Felicia asked with a look that said she hoped that didn't

mean what she

thought it meant.

"Child pornography," Jared clarified. "I spent about two years looking at some really disturbing material in the hopes of identifying victims, offenders, and locations. And it also made me—

uncomfortable with some things. Especially in a sexual situation."

He tried to meet her eyes and she cocked her head as she looked at him. And then she blushed as

a realization hit her. She pulled the comforter back a bit and looked down at her Brazilian styled

crotch.

"Oh, balls," she said.

"Yeah," Jared agreed.

They fidgeted awkwardly for a moment. Then Felicia said, "So, uh, this probably isn't going to

happen, huh?"

Jared looked at the floor and rubbed the back of his neck. He blushed furiously as he said,

"How long would it take to grow back?"

"Well. I didn't shave it. I got waxed."

"Ah."

They picked at the nits on Felicia's comforter to keep from looking at each other. Then Jared

stood up.

"So, I should go," he said hooking a thumb over his shoulder.

"Yeah," Felicia bobbed her head. "Okay. See you tomorrow at dinner."

Jared laughed so he wouldn't sob with embarrassment. "Yeah. See ya."

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Jensen put on his other shoe and waited for the guilt or regret to start poking at him. He sat up

and watched Misha brush his teeth in the bathroom. He felt only a pleasant warmth gliding just

under his skin, and that wasn't an appropriate reaction. He'd known Misha for not quite two

months, barely had a handful of conversations with the guy, and a lot of those had not been

pleasant. And he'd just had unprotected sex with him. Not smart. Not responsible. Not safe.

Misha flicked the light off in the bathroom and leaned against the frame as he looked at Jensen.

"Ready to go?"

Jensen nodded and despised the thin T-shirt and jeans that kept him away from Misha. It may

have been stupid, but he now knew he would never be able to have sex with Misha with any kind

barrier between them. It wouldn't be...right.

Jensen felt a wave of panic at that irrational thought and stood up quickly.

"My jacket and gun  
are still in the kitchen."

"Okay. It's on the way to the garage. I think I shouldn't drop you off in the patrol car this late."

Jensen smiled nervously and swallowed. And then he had a thought that cheered him right up.

"Can we take the Charger?"

Misha rolled his eyes but smiled as he crossed the room. "It's the only other car I have."

"Awesome. Hey," he snagged Misha's wrist and pulled him close. "Can I drive?" he asked suggestively.

"What will you do for me?"

Jensen dipped his head and placed a chaste, closed lipped kiss against Misha's parted ones.

Misha's eyes snapped open, irritated Jensen hadn't given him more.

"Let me drive and you'll find out."

Misha huffed and pulled out of his grip. He opened the door and Bunny raised her head from her

paws. Her body was blocking the whole doorway.

"You were here this whole time?" Misha scolded gently. "I don't know if you're pathetic or a perv."

Jensen laughed and waited for Misha to get the dog to move before following him into the

hallway. They fumbled around in the darkness and laughed at how stupid

they were for

attempting to navigate the stairs in the dark. Fortunately they'd left the lights on in the kitchen

and Jensen grabbed his jacket and gun from the handcrafted table while Misha retrieved the car

keys from somewhere in the front of the house. Jensen ran his hand over the table again. It

really was beautiful work, and now Jensen knew quite intimately just how talented Misha's

hands were.

"Let's go, Ackles!"

It was just shy of two thirty in the morning when Jensen pulled into a parking spot at the

Lakeside Motor Lodge. He put the car in park, but let the engine idle. He ran his hands over the

real leather steering wheel.

"This car is beautiful, Mish. Really."

Misha laughed softly and shook his head. "Why do you keep calling me 'Mish?'"

"Why does it bother you?"

"Because. Misha is already a nickname. You can't shorten a nickname."

"Sure you can. It just becomes a pet name." He grinned at him.

Misha made a disgusted face, but then smiled softly. "No pet names. We're —"

"Keeping this impersonal. Yeah, I got it."

Misha rubbed his forehead. "Yeah. Impersonal." He glanced over, almost shyly, at Jensen.

"What is Misha short for? Are you Russian or something? Collins sounds a little—white

bread."

"Yeah, it is. My father is American of English descent. My mother was Russian and lost the

fight with my Dad over what to name me. So she just always called me Misha and that's what

everyone learned to call me."

"So, what, your dad wanted to name you Bob or something?"

"No. My name is Dmitri."

Jensen couldn't stop the smile that spread over his face. "Dmitri? I thought your dad won the

fight."

"He did. The Russian diminutive for Dmitri is Dima."

"Dima. That's cute."

Misha shook his head warningly. "Please don't. I would prefer Mish to Dima."

Jensen laughed and nodded. "You got it, Mish."

Misha groaned. "Fuck. That's not what I meant." He scowled at Jensen's growing grin. "Hey, aren't you supposed to be doing something for me for letting you drive?"

"Oh, yeah."

Jensen leaned forward, pulling Misha in with a hand to the back of his neck. They kissed mostly

closed mouth, trying to keep the heat from rising again—like it had in the shower. Twice.

Jensen put his other hand to Misha's face and held him as he flicked his tongue along the seam of

Misha's lips.

"No," Misha said. "No..." then he pushed forward and thrust his tongue into Jensen's eager mouth. The sound of a seatbelt unbuckling startled Jensen for a moment, but then he had a lapful

of Misha to distract him. He reached a hand down to pull on the mechanism that moved the seat

back as far as possible, and then he reclined it back a bit. He pulled Misha close to keep him

away from the wheel. He could just picture them scaring the living daylights out of themselves if

Misha bumped into the horn.

Misha managed to get his knees on the seat just outside Jensen's legs and settled squarely in his

lap. Jensen wrapped his arms around his waist and rolled his hips up into the warm invitation of

Misha's body. They never once broke the kiss, instead taking in breaths when they needed it by

kissing full upper lips and nibbling on plush lower lips.



"Fucking hell," Misha moaned softly against Jensen's lips as his hands ran wildly through his hair, nails scraping lightly along his scalp. "I can't believe I'm doing this. You're like a fucking

incubus or something."

Jensen chuckled and sucked Misha's lower lip into his mouth, and then he pulled back letting it

slide slowly back out through the pull of his teeth.

"And here I thought it was just my winning personality."

Misha sighed and petted Jensen's hair as his eyes roamed over his face.

"Jensen—we can't..."

"I know," Jensen said. "Believe me, I know."

They looked at each other for another long moment, and then Misha leaned forward hesitantly.

Jensen tilted his head up, encouraging Misha to bring their lips together again. They startled

apart when something rapped sharply on the window. They looked around and noticed the

whole car was fogged up.

"Shit," Misha said as he slid awkwardly back into his seat. Jensen used the hand crank to roll down the window. Jared was bent over at the waist, grinning at them.

"Excuse me, kids," he said, "I think it's way past your curfew."

"Funny," Jensen said flatly. He turned off the car and he and Misha got out so that Misha could get in the driver's side. Though he hadn't had much trouble maneuvering into it before.

He looked away from Misha as he walked around the car so it wouldn't be quite so obvious how

pathetic he was, and then he noticed Jared was wearing his running clothes, which consisted

only of a pair of nylon shorts and a T-shirt. It was way too cold this late in October in New

England to go running around in the dead of night in so little. It was crazy to go running in the

middle of the night period, but he was definitely returning from a run as his shirt had sweat stains

and his headphones dangled from one hand.

"What the hell were you doing out running at this time of night?"

"Uh...just...working off some excess energy."

"Felicia didn't take care of that?" Misha asked like he didn't really want to know the answer.

"Oh, yeah. That uh, didn't really pan out."

Misha looked at him sharply. "What did you do to her?"

"Nothing! Like, literally nothing. There was...a landscaping issue."

"Landscaping?" Misha and Jensen asked together.

Jared made a discomfited expression. "She had a Brazilian."

"Ohhh," Jensen said in sympathetic understanding.

"I didn't need to know that," Misha griped, "but so what?"

"He used to work kiddie porn," Jensen said.

"Ohhh," Misha said in sympathetic understanding. "Well, them's the breaks, kid."

Jensen laughed and Jared made a face at them. "You guys suck. Each other's dicks. Literally."

Jensen laughed harder but Misha didn't look too amused, so he tempered his laughter and ran a

hand over his mouth to hide his smile.

"Hey, Jared, turn around for a second."

"Why?"

Jensen gave him a look and the younger man put his hands in the air and turned around. Jensen took Misha's face in his hands and kissed him.

"Goodnight."

Jensen couldn't see it, but he felt the warmth of Misha's blush under his fingers.

"Yeah, goodnight," he mumbled and slid into the car.

Jared and Jensen watched him drive out of the parking lot and then turned to face each other.

"So, we're going to get about three and a half hours sleep tonight?" Jensen guesstimated.

"Yeah, tomorrow is going to be a great day."

**Gathouel**

**Friday, October 25, 2013**

*Today is not a great day*, Jared thought to himself as his senses were barraged with the horror of another crime scene.

They were in the woods about two hundred yards from the lake shore.  
Forensic technicians and

police officers were working out from the body in a circle grid pattern.  
Jensen and Russ were

examining the damaged bark on a large oak tree three feet from the body.  
Gen was talking to

Misha.

A call had come into the office around four in the afternoon. Two frantic  
teenagers experiencing

a very bad reenactment of *Stand By Me* had called to report seeing a body in  
the woods by the

lake when they took a shortcut on the way home from school. They had run  
from the scene and

had a hard time describing or remembering where exactly they had seen it.  
Misha and Bunny

had been dispatched to investigate since they would have the best chance of  
finding the body (if

there was one) in the nearly ten square miles of woods the boys had done  
their best to narrow

the search area down to. An hour and a half later, Misha had called the station  
requesting for

back-up, the forensics team, and the federal agents.

According to the identification in his wallet, the man was Daniel Hernandez,  
twenty-nine years

old, resident of Elton, New Hampshire. They'd already put out feelers to try  
to find the last

person who had seen him alive. Because he had been killed and left in the woods, Kim had

informed them they would be able to get a very accurate determination for time of death via

insect activity—or lack thereof. Kim was already certain the kill had been pretty recent,

especially since the dried blood and exposed innards had a freshness that indicated Hernandez

had died within several hours of discovery.

Jared was very certain they were at the scene of the kill and not a dump site. The fallen autumn

leaves and underbrush were in disarray leading up to and around the tree Jensen and Russ were

examining. The bark had been scraped off in a line that would be about chest height if a man

were kneeling. It was probably damage from rope. There were abrasions on the body's face,

torso, and genitalia. It seemed like he had been tied facing the tree and had struggled against his

bonds. Very large, dark bruises covered his back and buttocks and surrounded breaks in his

skin. His chest cavity had dents in it and his hips were at a strange angle. He'd definitely been

beaten with something heavy enough to break and dislocate bone. He'd been beaten—hammered

—with something large and heavy; Jared's first thought had been a sledge

hammer.

There was also blood streaking his inner thighs and his throat was distended. They'd thought it

was just broken at first until Kim confirmed that something was lodged down his trachea, but she

would wait until she got the body to the lab to try to extract it.

Everything about the scene screamed a lack of control, even a lack of experience. This was nothing like Smith's or Vanderpool's scenes. Heck, even Thompson's was better organized than

this. The only thing that kept this from being a random killing in the woods, other than the

extreme brutality and sexual component, was the name "Gathouel" carved into his chest and the

word "wrathful" branded across his knuckles like a gang tattoo.

None of it added up. Killers tended to be organized or disorganized; they didn't switch back and

forth depending on their mood or the day of the week. It couldn't be a copycat—too many things

that weren't public knowledge were the same. Things were the same, things were different—one

and one just didn't equal one. Jared tilted his head as he let his eyes sweep over the broken

body of Daniel Hernandez. One and one may not equal one—but it did equal two. Two

killers...? The master and the student?

"Jared!"

Jared turned and saw Jensen waving him over from a few meters away from the damaged oak.

Jared picked his way carefully over the ground, not wanting to disturb anything even though the

scene had been photographed from about seventy different angles. Jensen, Russ, and three

forensic technicians were gathered around a patch of forest floor that had been cleared of leaves

and debris.

"What is it?" he asked.

Jensen pointed at the dirt. "Look at that."

Clear as day, as if someone had made the mark for forensic students to use as a study tool, was a

boot print. It was the full boot, tread pattern completely intact.

"Is this?" Jared asked, barely daring to hope.

Jensen grinned. "It is."

One of the technicians piped up. "We can tell just by looking that this is way too small to belong to the victim. And the boys that found the body were wearing tennis shoes. We found their

tracks on the east side of the body."

"This is real evidence," Jared said with a disbelieving laugh.

"At last," Jensen muttered.

"Yeah," Jared murmured softly. "I need to talk to you about that."

Jensen tilted his head curiously. "Okay. We'll talk at the station. We're about done here. We

need to get out of these amazing science-y tech-y people's way anyway." He gave the youngest

technician a wink and she turned bright pink.

"We'll get this processed right away!" she burst out. "We'll be able to tell you height and weight

of the guy and the brand of the shoe!"

The other two technicians made grumbling, amused noises behind her and the pink started to turn

red.

Jared turned so he could grin discreetly at Jensen and saw Russ calling to another officer as he

took a step back, not looking where he was going.

"Look out!" Jared shouted.

Jensen whipped around with remarkable reflexes and grabbed Russ as he stumbled into him.

Jared lunged forward against Jensen's back and all three of them went sprawling to ground—but

away from the impression in the dry dirt. They lay unmoving on the ground for a moment,

stunned because none of them had braced for the impact. Jensen had taken the brunt of the crash



as he'd been spun by Jared's push and had landed on his back with Russ lying over his head and

Jared across his legs. Jared started as something licked worriedly at his cheek. He pushed onto

his hands and Bunny licked his face in earnest. He sat back sputtering and pushed the dog away,

wondering where the hell Misha was. Then he spotted the officer, running his tongue over his

teeth as he watched Russ and Jensen disentangle themselves as they sat up. He couldn't wait to

tease Jensen later about his jealous, possessive boyfriend.

"Are you okay?" Russ asked Jensen as he apologetically brushed some dirt off his shoulder. "I have no idea what happened. Jared, did you tackle us?"

"Yeah, sorry, I didn't really think. I was worried you might stumble into the print."

Russ whipped around to look at the spot on the ground. "Oh, shit. Please tell me I didn't just

—!"

"It's fine," one of the technicians replied quickly. "You completely missed it. And we've got pictures, so we still have that even if we couldn't get a good cast out of it."

Russ' shoulders sagged in relief. "Thank goodness," he said flatly. He got to his feet and held out a hand to help Jensen up.

Jensen brushed off his backside and hunched his back in a stretch. He winced a little and Jared

hoped he hadn't injured something.

"Alright," Jensen said. "Let's just, get back to the station. We've got work to do."

Everyone shuffled as they either prepared to leave the scene or returned to work. Jared turned

and saw Gen beside him.

"What I'd miss?"

"Not much. Just my amazing quick thinking that saved the evidence."

Gen gave him an amused smile and then punched his shoulder. He nudged her back and they repressed their smiles as they started to follow Russ out of the forest. Jared glanced back and

saw Jensen petting Bunny's head while Misha pulled a leaf out of his hair. It put a smile on his

face that lasted all the way to the station—where it promptly disappeared as they were

confronted with a grim-faced Jim Beaver.

### **Sunday, October 27, 2013**

Fifty-nine hours. They'd been at the station, with the one exception of the trip to the Hernandez

crime scene, for fifty-nine hours. The agents had managed to snatch a couple hours of sleep in

shifts on one of the cots in the station's on call room, but they'd been told under no uncertain

terms that they were going to need to have some sort of answers to provide when the media came

raging back. And not just because of the media. The public was demanding

answers and the

FBI executives that were taking a personal interest in the case were climbing higher and higher

up the chain of command. The last thing they needed or wanted was that kind of attention.

They'd decided to stay at the station around the clock so that as the forensic evidence trickled in

they would be ready for it. Their case had been put at the top of the queue and prioritized over

every other case and many technicians had volunteered to stay overtime to work through the

night.

The boot print had yielded the information that the wearer had been most likely male, about

5'6"-5'7" and 120 to 135 pounds. Kim had discovered that the bulge in Hernandez's throat had

been from his own boxer shorts being lodged down his windpipe. She'd been pretty certain that

they'd been stuffed down with a foreign object. Hernandez's house had been searched and a

crumpled card had been found in the trash. Gathouel had been written on one side and the

directions to a bar in Concord on the other. Hernandez's live-in girlfriend had confirmed that the

trip to Concord had taken place the previous weekend, and he had returned from it. So, the card

had been delivered to him prior to his kidnapping. His girlfriend hadn't seen him in several

days, but that wasn't unusual. He would often disappear on drinking binges—usually after

beating her. Hernandez had a police record as long as Jensen's leg and the last incident dated

from no longer than three weeks ago.

Even still, he hadn't deserved to die the way he did. Kim was almost positive every wound had

been sustained while he was still alive. Only the angel name carved into his chest had been

postmortem. They also knew that he had been killed in the early hours of Friday morning; an

expert from the Boston PD had been dispatched on an emergency assignment and come in on

Saturday morning to examine the insects found on the body. Based on the kinds of insects and the

eggs and larval stages and other gross things Jensen didn't want to think about, the technician had

given them a 95% certainty for his estimated time of death.

It seemed like a lot of evidence, and it was, but it brought them no closer to identifying a

suspect. Taking the usual route of looking into the victim's loved ones and enemies would not

give them a useful suspect pool unlike eighty percent of all homicides. Murders committed by

strangers were always the hardest to solve—and they generally did go unsolved. Serial killers got caught when they got sloppy or arrogant and began leaving clues. It was happening to the

Angel Slayer—but the pieces he was leaving behind were not interlocking. Not yet. But Jensen

knew they would. If he could just line them up right. If he could just see them from the right

angle. If he wasn't just a pathetic, desperate idiot who made puzzle analogies rather than

actually solving the damn case.

Jensen slammed the stack of books he'd been carrying into a plastic container and put a hand to

his face and the other on his hip.

"Jensen?" Jared asked carefully. "You okay?"

"Yeah. Fine."

They were picking up the piles of books scattered around the office and putting them in bins to

take back to the Rochester library. Brian would be so disappointed to learn his meticulously

gathered materials had given them fuck all to go on. They were alone in the office. They had

sent Gen home to get some sleep and agreed to meet back tomorrow morning at six. She had

made them promise that they would leave by five o'clock. It was now ten minutes after seven.

"We should just call it a night," Jensen said. "The announcement about the killer sending cards to his victims is airing on tonight's and tomorrow morning's news broadcasts. By noon

tomorrow I'm sure we'll be flooded with calls and we're going to have to look into all of them."

Jared picked up the last stack of books Russ had piled by the door and walked over to Jensen.

"Hey. We *have* made progress, Jensen. And now that the public knows and can warn us ahead

of time...we've got a fighting chance."

"I doubt he's going to continue sending the cards once the announcement is made. It's going to be

all false leads. Or fucking decoys."

"Maybe. Even you said it depends on how arrogant he is."

"Yeah, but, I don't know what to think about what I used to think. There're too many anomalies.

This just doesn't add up."

"Oh!" Jared said suddenly, startling Jensen. "I meant to talk to you about this sooner." He dropped his pile of books into the bin.

Jensen noticed a thin book sitting on top. The colored barcode on its top didn't match the others.

He bent over and picked it up.

"This one belongs to the Elton library," he said. He turned and tossed it onto his desk and then gave his attention to Jared. "What's on your mind?"

Jared snapped the lid onto the last bin and gathered his thoughts. He knew

Jensen would never

ridicule him for spit-balling a theory, but he still wanted his words to be succinct.

"I was thinking at the crime scene on Friday that we've gotten a second disorganized kill. Two

organized, two disorganized. We've got two kills where the killer played more when the victims

were dead and two kills when the damage was done mostly while they were alive. The type of

instruments used and how the cuts were made and where—there are differences, but also

similarities. But the similarities and the differences are with the same victims." Jared let out a frustrated noise. "Do you understand what I mean?"

Jensen crossed his arms over his chest and licked his lips. He actually did understand what

Jared meant. The whole case was confusing because there was no consistency. Except Jared

had seen where the inconsistencies were consistent.

"I understand what you mean, what are you suggesting?"

Jared straightened and tried to stop clenching and unclenching his fingers.

"There are two of

them, Jensen."

For one moment, Jensen saw it. It made perfect sense. Two killing styles, two killers. Then he

shook his head. "No, I don't—I mean the angel names—they're being carved

by the same

person."

Jared nodded, undeterred. "Yes. By the teacher. He starts the kills with the brands, and he ends them with the carvings. But the rest is sometimes him, and sometimes his student."

It made sense, but he wasn't sure if thinking there were two killers followed Occam's razor or

not. He ran a hand down his face and cursed softly.

"Two."

Jared shrugged. "It's a theory."

"A theory we need to seriously consider." He gave Jared a small smile. "Did you dream it?" he asked.

Jared laughed softly. "No. I did the math."

Jensen turned and faced the whiteboards. He looked over the victims one at a time. He heard

Jared sit down in a chair giving him the time and space to think. He appreciated it, but his mind

was a little fuzzy. He needed some real sleep. They really should just get dinner at Nell's and

go to bed. He turned to face Jared about to suggest they close up the room, when Jared sprang

out the chair, his eyes glued to the thin little book Jensen had tossed onto his desk for return to

the Elton library. Jensen put out a hand, concerned.



"Jared, are you okay?"

"Natalia Smith," Jared said. "What is her estimated time of death?"

"What? Why—"

"Natalia Smith's estimated time of death, Jensen! I know you have it all memorized!"

Jensen swallowed and took a step back. "Um. Late September 10th to early September 12th."

Jared walked to the whiteboards and snatched up a red marker. "Get a calendar. Tell me the

days. The days of the week."

Jensen knew better than to question the demand. Whether or not an epiphany was nonsense

should be sorted out after it had come to fruition. Jensen sat at his desk and wiggled a finger on

the mouse pad on his laptop. The computer woke up and he clicked on the time in the bottom

right corner and opened the calendar. He clicked back to September.

"Tuesday to Thursday," he said. He turned around and saw that beside "Akael" underneath Natalia's picture Jared had written "20th hour of Wednesday."

"Davis Thompson," Jared said.

Jensen pulled up the dates in his memory and looked back at the calendar. "Saturday to

Wednesday morning when we found him."

Back on the whiteboard next to Damael, Jared had written "Tuesday."

"Sarah Vanderpool," Jensen said. "Monday morning to Tuesday night."

Next to Apofael Jared wrote "17th hour of Monday."

"And the bug guy said Hernandez was killed on the day we found him," Jared said. He wrote

"Friday" next to Gathouel.

Jensen stared—more shocked than he had been by anything else in the case so far. "He's—he's

telling the victims when he's going to kill them."

Jared shook his head, feeling a strange, disconcerting smile pull at his lips.

"He's not going to

stop sending those cards."

"No, no he's not. What the fuck do you have?"

Jared turned the book over. "It's a listing of all major and minor angels. The entries in the book itself are about what they protect or what they represent. And it's only a selection. But the index

has a complete listing that also says when each angel can be summoned. Some are linked to

days, but some are linked to a specific hour of a day."

Jensen looked at the boards. "And look—the hour specific ones are with the organized kills.

The general days are with the disorganized one. The master can plan it to the hour and the

student has more leeway."

Jensen laughed a little hysterically. "Fuck me. There *are* two." A sudden rage blinded him and he felt pain somewhere on his body but he didn't register it as he screamed, "He's training

someone to follow him!"

Jensen felt like he couldn't breathe. His chest constricted and his vision started to go black

around the edges. He needed to sit down. Maybe lie down. He felt cool hands on him and they

guided him to the floor. The tile felt cold against his back and he turned his face to press his

cheek against it. It felt good, cool, soothing. He opened his eyes and Jared was kneeling next to

him with a bottle of water, but Jensen didn't reach for it.

"What if it's not him?" he asked weakly. "What if the DC killer trained someone. What if this is just his student teaching a new student?"

"Hey, hey, don't think like that," Jared said calmly. "Come on, sit up and drink some water."

Jensen obeyed and felt the beginnings of humiliation tickle the fuzzy edges of his brain, but he

probably wouldn't feel the whole of it until tomorrow morning.

"There were no disorganized killings in DC," Jared reminded him. "It was him. And he came here. He came home. To train someone new."

Jensen nodded. "Home. He is from here, isn't he?"

"He knows everyone's secrets."

Jensen cleared his throat and got to his feet. "I'm sorry, I don't know what

happened." Oh wait, actually there was some humiliation coming tonight.

"No way. Don't apologize to me. We need sleep. And we need food. I'm not sure about the

order, but that's what's happening tonight."

Jensen nodded. "No arguments from me."

They closed up the office and put on their coats. If anyone in the bullpen had heard Jensen's

breakdown, no one gave him funny looks—at least not so he could see them. On their way out,

Jensen spotted Misha in the break room.

"Uh, Jared, can you hang on for just a minute?"

Jared tried not to make it obvious that he glanced over at Misha. "Yeah, sure. I'll wait outside."

He gave Jensen's arm a pat and walked out of the bullpen. Jensen walked over to the break

room and glanced around when he entered. Misha was alone. He turned when Jensen entered,

and watched as he moved to lean against the cabinets on the opposite side of the small room.

"Hey," Jensen said softly.

Misha closed the refrigerator and leaned against the counter. For some reason, the space between them felt like a chasm.

"Hi," Misha said. "How are you? You've been going non-stop all weekend."

"Yeah, it's been—a little rough. But, we've had a breakthrough."

Misha opened his mouth and then immediately snapped it shut. Jensen could tell he was

desperate to ask about it, but he refrained with a strength of will Jensen wasn't sure he himself

possessed.

"That's good to hear," Misha said quietly.

"So, um," Jensen glanced to the door; they were still alone. "I don't know if this is completely out of line...but I need..." He looked up and met Misha's eyes. He saw the man's jaw clench and

his chest expand as he drew in a deep breath. Jensen lowered his voice more and said, "I was

wondering if you could cook dinner for me tonight." Misha closed his eyes and Jensen added,

"If you want."

Misha opened his eyes with a pained laugh. "Jensen, what—" he paused and glanced at the

door. "What I *want*—and what I *need* to happen—are light years apart."

Jensen felt a strange sinking feeling in his chest. "What do you mean?"

"Thursday night," his voice had dropped so low Jensen could barely hear him, "was a mistake.

Everything about that night was a mistake. And it can't happen again."

Jensen felt liked he'd been punched in the gut. He was feeling dizzy again. He needed to leave.

"I understand," he said quickly and walked out of the room.

"Jensen..."

Jensen walked quickly through the bullpen and out of the station. The cold night air was a

welcome shock to his senses. He breathed deeply and saw Jared standing by the Accent.

"So, uh, are we going to Nell's?"

Jensen walked slowly toward Jared. "Actually, I'm not really that hungry. Can you drop me off

at the motel? I mean, we can swing by Nell's if you want to pick something up—"

"No, don't worry about it. I can take you there and come back. You look like you need sleep

more than food."

Jensen tried to smile. "Thanks."

Jared's eyes were soft with concern. "It's no problem."

**Keriam**

**Saturday, November 2, 2013**

Jensen vigorously towed off his head and then looked at the mirror. It was completely fogged

up from his long shower. He was pretty certain he'd used up about half of Elton's hot water

supply, but he'd needed it. It had been a very long week. Russ, Jim, and even Gen had been

hesitant to accept Jared's theory that there were two killers, even with

Jensen's complete

agreement. They had been more accepting of the meaning behind the angel names, but the point

had still been debated for days. And on top of all that the station's tip line had been flooded with

calls from as far away as New York with people saying they had received an Angel of Death

Card—and Jensen hated that term even more than Angel Slayer.

There had only been a handful that they had considered even remotely legitimate. Those people

had been asked to bring the notes to the station. None had been black marker on an index card,

but they had agreed to analyze the handwriting just to be on the safe side. Jensen could tell just

by glancing at the notes that they weren't the same handwriting, but they had an obligation to the

public. The Elton PD didn't have enough manpower to keep them all under surveillance, so they

instructed each to check in every day and to not go anywhere alone. All five had checked in

today and they'd verified that the handwriting did not match the Angel Slayer's.

Jensen wrapped the towel around his waist and brushed his teeth. He turned out the bathroom

lights and the lamp by the desk. He noticed that it was 12:07, and then scowled; he'd intended

to be in bed before midnight. He walked over to the drawer that housed his last pair of clean

underwear. He didn't know if he would have time to do laundry even though it was the

weekend. He might have to just buy some.

He looked up and raised an eyebrow when he heard a knock at the door. He double checked the

time. It couldn't be another body—they would have called. It must be Jared. Jensen walked

barefoot across the floor even though he tried not to as much as possible. The carpet was

actually pretty gross. Jensen opened the door.

Misha stood on the other side in khakis and a pale blue button down shirt that brought out the

blue of his eyes even through the dark of night outside and the dim orange lighting of the motel

lamps. They stared at each other for several very long moments. Misha drew in a breath to

speak, looking contrite. Then he exhaled sharply and just sort of looked annoyed.

"Not a fucking word," he muttered and stepped forward to take Jensen's face in his hands.

Even though he saw what he was doing, Jensen was still surprised by the press of his lips:

warm, a little chapped, fucking plush as sin. Jensen kissed him back without thinking and they



stumbled inside, Misha slamming the door shut with his foot. They broke apart and Misha

pulled back to look at him like he was actually seeing him for the first time that night. A wicked

smile curved one corner of his mouth as he ran his hands down Jensen's bare, muscular chest.

"And Ty says I have the worst timing," he murmured.

He curled his fingers in the towel and Jensen snapped out of his trance. He grabbed Misha's

wrists.

"Hey. I will say a fucking word. I think I might say several."

"Fine," Misha said, pulling his wrists from Jensen's grasp. He yanked the towel off and Jensen tried to catch it, failed. Misha pushed him toward the bed. "Talk all you like. Just do it on the bed."

"You're an asshole, Misha. You treated me like shit."

"You're the one who walked away before I finished," Misha said. Jensen's legs hit the bed and he fell back onto it; Misha crawled on top of him and hooked his hands under Jensen's knees to

slide him completely on the mattress. "All I said was that what happened Thursday couldn't

happen again. None of the personal stuff. But the sex—that we can do."

Misha leaned down to kiss him, but Jensen turned his head. That didn't change Misha's plans,

however, as he just kissed his cheek, his jaw, and then a warm line down his neck. Jensen was

still pissed at him, so it wasn't nearly as distracting as it could have been.

"Actually. You said that *everything* about that night was a mistake. Everything includes the sex.

And secondly. Maybe I don't want sex without the intimacy."

Misha repressed a sigh and sat up to look down at him. But he didn't speak, and they just stared.

The light was harsh and unforgiving, but Misha's face shone golden, the angles of his cheek

bones were sharp yet delicate, his nose a straight line that he wanted to run his fingertip down,

his lips so full they cast a shadow onto his chin. He was preternaturally beautiful, but not

perfect: there were crow's feet at the corners of his eyes and bags underneath them. The

imperfections showed that he was human, that he could make mistakes. Jensen felt himself

lifting his head off the bed, but then he forced it back down.

"And thirdly!" he said, embarrassed by the near shrill tone to his voice. "You were a total asshole that night!"

"No," Misha said softly, combing a hand through Jensen's hair. "That night I was vulnerable and being honest about how scared I was." His fingers curled in Jensen's hair, and pulled, inciting a

little pain and tilting his head back. " *Tonight*, I'm being a colossal douche bag."

They played another game of "You Blink First."

Jensen lost so he said, "I hope you're not waiting for me to disagree."

"Jensen."

"What."

Misha's grip loosened slightly. "I have been living in my messed up head for weeks now. You

are working yourself to an early grave. Can't we just..." he carded his fingers through Jensen's

drying hair again. "...get lost in each other for a little while?" He used his other hand to run a finger slowly down Jensen's chest. "Can't I just...suck your brains out through your dick so that

they can take a breather on the floor?"

Jensen wrinkled his nose at the mental image that presented. Because he ignored the first part of

it.

"And *afterwards*," Misha continued, "you can tell me what a huge King of Mixed Signals asshole I am."

Misha removed his hands from Jensen's body, which made Jensen frown. He was still ticked off

at him, but that didn't mean he wanted him to stop touching him. Until he noticed Misha's fingers

were working the buttons on his shirt open. Misha getting naked was an acceptable alternate use

of his hands. Misha shifted and the fabric of the khakis rubbed uncomfortably on his skin, but

Jensen's dick was about halfway full and cradled pleasantly between Misha's

thighs. Jensen

wondered if he was wearing underwear. He figured he was about to find out, but that didn't

mean Misha should think that he'd already won the battle.

"You know, I'm not really in a fair position to make an argument against that logic."

Misha's hands swept his shirt tails back, revealing his chiseled torso. Jensen felt his eyes

widen. It wasn't like he hadn't seen the guy naked before, but *damn*. Then he noticed the smirk on Misha's face. He was well aware that Jensen would not be able to form any sort of coherent

argument when faced with the onslaught of his utter hotness.

Jensen narrowed his eyes. "Fuck you, Misha."

Misha smiled and leaned down. "That's the idea, Agent. I think it's your turn, is it not?"

Jensen's breath caught in his throat and Misha sucked his lower lip into his mouth and suckled it

gently. He nibbled on the plump flesh, making it become tender and swollen. Jensen was

completely focused on his oversensitive lip, a low, moaning surrender escaping his throat as

Misha's tongue soothed over it. Misha pulled back and it took a moment for Jensen's awareness

to float back down to his body. His cock was now fully erect, pressing into Misha's bare ass.

Jensen's eyes flew open. When had he gotten naked?

He slid his hands over Misha's thighs and fit his thumbs against his wicked hip bones. "Do you

ever wear underwear?"

"Only when I'm on duty."

"Is that a true statement?"

Misha laughed and raised three fingers on his right hand, holding his pinky down with the thumb. "Scout's honor."

"Were you a boy scout?"

"I was. Are you really asking me that when I'm..." Misha stopped using his words and rocked in Jensen's lap. They both let out porn worthy groans—and then laughed when they met each

other's eyes.

Misha leaned down, fingers threading through Jensen's hair, and kissed his lips. He pulled back

a little and looked him in the eyes.

"Are you okay with this, really?"

"What, meaningless, impersonal sex? It's not really my style."

"You said you were a slut," Misha accused him gently.

"Well, I've slept with my fair share of people, but I don't do one night stands."

"Hmm." Misha sat up and bit his lip as Jensen slipped further between his cheeks. "So, do you have your super whatever condoms?"

"My what?" Jensen asked distractedly as he traced a finger along a vein in Misha's cock.

"Your no-latex condoms," Misha said a little breathlessly. "What do you use anyway?" he asked as he circled his thumbs over Jensen's cute, pert nipples.

"Well, I used to use polyurethane..." Jensen's hips bucked up when Misha flicked his finger over the already sensitive bud. "...but lately I've been using polyisoprene."

"Those sound like big science-y words for plastic."

"Essentially."

Misha put his palms flat on Jensen's chest and used the leverage to push himself down hard

enough that as he began to rock back and forth Jensen's balls connected with his ass with little

slapping sounds. "All right let's see 'em," he forced out between short, grunting moans.

Jensen closed his eyes, grasped Misha's hips, and just went along for the ride. "I don't have

any."

Misha stopped moving. "What?"

It was a struggle, but Jensen opened his eyes. "I don't have any."

"Why not?!"

Jensen almost laughed at Misha's childlike dismay. "Because, I didn't come here expecting to get laid and after last week I figured sex with you was off table. And I wasn't planning on having

sex with anyone else in town."

"Really? That's kind of sweet."

"Is it? I mean, what are my other choices?"

Misha didn't seem particularly amused with that answer. "Alright, well, we'll just have to go

without."

"Misha...are you sure? Going without that time...it was..."

"Stupid, irresponsible, unsafe, blah, blah, blah." Misha tilted his head back and a little to the side as he looked down at Jensen. "Would you really be willing to wear one with me anyway?"

Jensen blushed remembering his idiotic thoughts a week ago—about how he knew he'd never be

satisfied if there was ever a barrier between them.

"It's a moot point at this juncture."

"You're damn right it is. And I didn't drive an hour and a half to another town so I could go to a drugstore where no one would know me."

Jensen propped himself up on his elbows and grinned. "What'd you buy on your secret trip?"

Misha's skin was dark enough that it was hard to see a blush on him, but at the moment he was

clearly radiating some serious heat.

"Nothing."

"Come on, Mish," Jensen whined as he bounced Misha in his lap. "Tell me."

"I—" Misha covered his face partially with a hand. "I thought I would offer to...bottom tonight.

But I've never done it before. So, I thought I should...Oh god I feel so ridiculous."



Jensen reached up and gently grasped his wrist. He pulled Misha's hand away from his face.

Misha opened one eye and Jensen rubbed the soft skin of his inner wrist with a thumb.

Misha groaned embarrassedly. "I bought an enema."

Jensen refrained from reacting just yet because there was a very important question he needed an

answer to before he potentially pissed Misha off.

"Did you use it?"

Misha nodded.

"Shit, baby."

Misha laugh-groaned. "Poor choice of words there, stud."

Jensen laughed. He studied Misha for a moment and then bent his knees to buck Misha off. The

man was completely unprepared for it, so he went flying with a yelp. The only thing that

prevented him from sailing clear off the bed was Jensen keeping a hold on him and putting him

on his stomach.

"What are you—?" Misha's question ended in a squeak when Jensen lifted his hips and made

him get his knees under him. Then he spread his legs so that Misha's ass was up and exposed in

the air.

"J-Jensen!"

"Did you like it?" Jensen asked palming Misha's cheeks and pulling them apart gently.

Misha clutched at the sheets and kept his head down even though he glanced back over his

shoulder.

"It-it was an experience."

"I bet," Jensen murmured, running a thumb around the pink, puckered ring. It fluttered when he flicked his index finger back and forth over it. Misha jerked under him.

"Jensen! The fuck are you doing back there?"

"You want me to stop?"

The blush on Misha's cheeks traveled down his neck. "Didn't say that," he mumbled.

Jensen leaned forward and kissed him squarely on his entrance. Misha bit off a noise and jerked

forward. Jensen grabbed his hips and pulled him back onto his tongue. Misha let out a keening

whine and dragged his hands down the sheets and then slapped them onto the mattress again for a

better hold. He rocked back onto Jensen's face as he kissed and licked him, flicking his tongue

and pointing it enough to just breach the tight ring. Misha let out a noise that sounded

suspiciously like a sob.

"Why does it—oh God, how does it feel like that?" he whispered into the sheets.

Jensen pulled back to say, "Lot of nerve endings right there," and used the opportunity to work the tip of a finger inside. Misha inhaled sharply and Jensen slipped a second tip in, spreading

him slightly. This time Misha winced, but Jensen soothed the hurt by plunging his tongue into the

small opening. Misha staved off a shout by biting a pillow and his whole body rocked back and

forth as Jensen fucked his tongue into his sweet, delicious heat. He had a salty, musky flavor—

one he actually recognized as Misha. Jensen groaned at the feeling of Misha clamping around

his tongue and Misha gasped when the vibrations went through his body.

Misha started talking, but Jensen couldn't discern any words other than his name. He loved pulling Misha apart like this, and knew that it really was something he needed. He slipped a

hand between Misha's legs intending to give his cock a few quick pulls to make sure the pleasure

was stimulating his erection, and was surprised to find it rock hard, heavy, and quivering

tremulously. Jensen pulled back a little and replaced his tongue with a finger.

"You doin' okay, Mish?"

"Nnnngg."

"Okay."

Jensen slid his finger in easily, Misha's cavern wet with his saliva. He found Misha's prostate

and gave it a couple of nudges. And suddenly Misha was screaming into the mattress and the

cock in Jensen's hand trembled violently as he came all over the sheets. Jensen sat up, a little

startled by the intensity of Misha's orgasm, but dutifully worked his cock until he sagged against

the bed, still babbling incoherently.

"Hunh. I wonder if that's what I was like when I had my man cherry popped," Jensen mused

aloud.

"Sh-shut-huh-up," Misha panted.

Jensen rubbed his hand through the sheen of sweat on the warm muscles of his back comfortingly

until the man flipped himself over.

"Fuck. I am so sorry. You were supposed to—"

"Don't worry, I will. And don't get stressed over it. This is your first time, so we're going to

work you open nice and slow. And by the time you're ready, you'll probably be hard again."

"Hn."

"And even if you're not, that won't really prevent me from enjoying it."

Misha scowled. "Thank the heavens I didn't ruin our special night," he said in

a faux Southern belle accent.

Jensen grinned and leaned over to place sucking kisses on Misha's still slightly heaving chest.

"Pants pocket," Misha said languidly.

"Hmm?" Jensen was much too busy kissing and sucking and biting a mark onto the skin below

Misha's left pectoral to pay him much attention.

"In my pants pocket is some lubricant. Unless you have an allergy to whatever."

Jensen moved to lean over the side of the bed and stretched out, just barely snagging the cuff of one of the legs with two fingers. He pulled the garment closer and dug into the pockets until he

produced the partially full tube they had used before.

"Couldn't spring for a new bottle, hmm?"

"I thought it would be okay! Does it go bad if not refrigerated or something?"

Jensen would have laughed but he felt a grown man shouldn't ask that question with such a

straight face.

"No, Mish, it's fine. I'm just yanking your chain."

"Oh. Right."

Misha turned his face away from Jensen, but bent his knees a little so he could spread his legs.

Jensen felt a warm pulse of affection in his chest for the man in his bed. He was clearly

nervous, but wanting to do what he could for Jensen. Jensen scooted close to sit by him and

rubbed his thigh soothingly.

"Hey, Mish. You don't have to do this for me. I had my feelings hurt a little, but I don't hate you for it."

Misha shook his head. "I'm not doing this because I think I owe you. I want it." Misha pushed up on the balls of his feet a little and rolled his pelvis. "I wanna...feel...fuck, Jen, you. I wanna feel you in me."

He turned his head further way and put his hips back on the bed. His knees came together and

Jensen pushed them back open.

"Ah, ah," he intoned, planting a kiss on one knee. "None of that. You want me, you're gonna have to open up."

"Don't make it embarrassing."

"That's half the fun with you, Mish."

Misha huffed out a breath and turned a look on Jensen. Jensen just laughed at his expression and

popped the cap on the tube of lubricant.

"All right then, how about if we distract you from what's going on?"

"How are we going to manage that?" Misha's whole body jerked when Jensen circled a wet,

warm digit around his hole.

"Well, you're going to tell me how you've only slept with two people in your life and how on

earth you went four and half years without sex."

"Really, Jensen? Sexual histories? Is that really the best way to get in the mood?"

Jensen kissed his knee again and pulled down slightly on the edge of his rim, eliciting a

surprised, though pleasure-filled hiss.

"Don't worry, you leave the mood to me. You just talk."

"I—I cannot talk about my ex-wife while you're doing...that!"

Misha sat up to try to look between his legs where Jensen's finger was slipping easily in and out

of him. Jensen put his hand on Misha's chest and pushed him back flat on the bed. He was eager

to slide another finger inside, Misha was loose from his orgasm and the lube was certainly doing

its job, but Jensen didn't want to rush him through the process. Besides, his body was tightening

up a little bit with his anxiousness.

"Just tell me who was first," Jensen said, rolling the underside of Misha's balls with his thumb.

Misha's legs jerked up and a little wider at the touch, and he groaned when Jensen's finger slid

completely inside him.

"W-wife," Misha panted.

Jensen repressed a laugh. It was wrong that he was finding this to be arousing

and funny. He

was sure Misha would do him some serious bodily harm if he realized exactly how much Jensen

was enjoying watching him fall apart at the simple touch of his hands.

"Your wife got you first? Oh, Misha," he said disappointedly. "You cheated on her?"

"What? No. Don't stop moving your fucking finger."

Jensen smiled and resumed moving his right hand again, teasing his entrance with a second

finger. "Well, if the first person you ever had sex with was your wife, how did you have sex

with two people if you didn't cheat?" Jensen gasped in an exaggerated, scandalized way.

"Unless your wife was present when it happened. You guys into kinky three ways?"

Misha made some sort of noise that could have been pleasure, but was probably annoyance.

Jensen used the opportunity to slide his middle finger in alongside his index finger, and then

shallowly pumped the digits in and out.

"We actually discussed a threesome once, but it never panned out. Jesus, fuck, Jensen, your

fingers are so hot."

Jensen laughed. "I had no idea my hands were such a turn on for you, Mish."



"No, you ass, they're temperature hot."

"Oh." Jensen laughed again and pushed them deep inside causing Misha to keen and writhe on

the sheets. He leaned forward and put his lips near Misha's ear. "Trust me, baby, you're hotter."

Misha squirmed some more and Jensen began working his hand, loving the way Misha kept

pulling him deeper every time he plunged his fingers back in. He was deliberately avoiding his

prostate for now; he still needed some answers.

"So, Misha. How did you not cheat on your wife?"

Misha didn't respond, he just kept rolling his hips gently in time with Jensen's thrusting hand. So

Jensen gave him a light slap on the thigh. Misha let out a disgruntled noise and spread his legs

wider, letting his knees fall sideways onto the bed. Jensen was impressed with his flexibility.

"I grew up with Andrea. We knew each other since elementary school and started dating in

middle school. We dated throughout high school and decided to take a break when we got to

college. I dated Mary Ann in sophomore and junior year and then got back together with Andrea

my senior year. And that was it."

Misha delivered all of this in a rush and one of his hands moved

unconsciously to pull on his

cock. Jensen was pleased to see it was already showing signs of life again, so he upped his

game and began massaging Misha's prostate. The man groaned loudly and arched his back.

Jensen kept working the bundle of nerves mercilessly, enthralled by Misha's thrashing.

"Shit, shit, Jensen! Stop! I can't take it!"

Jensen split his fingers and let them slide around the sides of the nub. "Yeah, you can. You're

taking it beautifully."

"Sh-shut-up." Misha worked his hips. "Fuck, it's—something's not—I can feel—it's so stupid I know you have two fingers in me, but it feels...empty."

Jensen licked his lips and prodded Misha's entrance with a third finger. "You need more, baby?"

Misha closed his eyes and gave one jerky, embarrassed nod of his head. Jensen took over

coaxing Misha's cock back to hardness with one hand and leaned down to nuzzle and mouth at

his balls. Misha sighed shakily and relaxed. Jensen pushed a third finger all the way in. All of

Misha's muscles clenched tightly and he choked back a noise of pain, but Jensen kept his right

hand still and continued to tease his growing erection. He waited until he felt Misha's body

unlock and his breathing even out. He licked a long stripe up the length of Misha's cock and this

time the noise Misha made was pleasurably happy.

"How ya doin', Mish?"

"Good," he breathed. "Really good actually."

"Yeah?" Jensen began moving his right hand again and Misha moved with him. The cock in his

hand was getting hard fast now. "But, we're missing a part of the story."

"What? Seriously why are you still talking?" Misha complained.

Jensen chuckled and spread his fingers on the backstroke before pushing them back in. Misha

jerked and tossed his head around on the mattress.

"Close, right?" he gasped.

Jensen let go of Misha's cock and stopped moving his hand. "Are you about to come again?"

"No, no. I meant, I'm close to being ready, right?"

"Well, I'm kind of big."

"Don't care. Hurry up. I can still feel the spaces between your fingers. I need—fuck, Jensen, if you actually make me say that I need to feel your cock filling my ass I will never forgive you."

Jensen couldn't stop his laughter. He leaned forward and kissed Misha's stomach. "You know, I

don't think I've ever laughed this much during sex. I like it."

"Well, good for you."

"Alright, baby, just let me spread you a little bit more, and you can tell me about the third person you had sex with that you're not telling me about."

"What do you mean?"

"Well, I may be an insensitive jerk for making assumptions based on the other two's names, but

there has to be a third person in this story. Last week was not the first time you had ever

fingered someone's ass."

"How do you know Andrea or Mary Ann didn't like anal sex?"

"I don't. But...last week also wasn't the first time you've had a cock in your mouth."

Misha rolled his hips and gripped his own dick and began to stroke it firmly.

"Freshman year I may or may not have decided that I wanted to explore my attraction to men."

"Unh-hunh. Keep going."

"And there was this guy who I flirted with and made out with a couple of times, but I didn't know

what to do beyond that. So, I asked my roommate, who was gay, if he could give me some

pointers."

Jensen made a slightly pained face. "You did what?"

"He didn't seem to mind. In fact, he seemed eager to teach me."

"Oh, no."

"Stop. Pull your hand out."

"What?"

"Hand. Out."

Jensen immediately complied and Misha took in a couple deep breaths as his body recovered

from the stimulation. Then he sat up and guided Jensen to lie on his back. He poured some lube

onto his hand and then began to slick up Jensen's slightly flagging erection. It was at full

attention again in no time under Misha's talented hand.

"Did your roommate teach you this too?"

"Yeah, actually he did. It was the only thing I let him show me through practical application."

"Misha..."

"What?"

"You do realize that your roommate had a crush on you, right?"

"Oh, I figured that out when he caught me in the middle of fingering and sucking off the guy I'd

been taking lessons for. It was a very unpleasant scene. And it was a very awkward three

weeks until we switched roommates with two other guys on our hall who weren't getting along

either."

"So, what happened with the other guy?"

"I felt so bad about what had happened with David that I couldn't see him anymore without

thinking about the whole thing. So, we stopped seeing each other and I never really had sex with

him. Then I decided to stick with what I knew and dated Mary Ann."

Misha threw a leg over Jensen's body and knelt over him. "Can we dispense with the chatter

now?"

Jensen ran his hands up Misha's thighs and grasped his hips. "If you're sure you're ready."

"What's the line? 'Guess we'll find out.' Or something."

"Misha, we don't..."

Misha grasped Jensen's cock and guided it by feel to his stretched hole. He lowered himself

slowly, carefully, and when Jensen felt the first drag of tight muscle on his cockhead he promptly

told himself to shut-up. Misha continued to push down slowly, stopping when it became too

much, but Jensen had done his job well and in no time Misha was seated in Jensen's lap, lips

parted on an unvoiced moan, eyes closed in bliss.

"You okay?" Jensen asked, desperately trying to ignore the clenching heat

around his member

that was telling his brain to push up, to fuck, to take.

"So good, Jen," Misha said on an exhalation of air. "You don't even know how good. I feel..."

he trailed off and didn't finish the thought. He started moving, just grinding figure eights and

moving forward and back, not up and down, but they didn't need that yet. Jensen tightened his

hold on Misha's hips, not even caring when the man winced a little at the pressure. He helped

Misha's movements, and then began to lift him on every other movement. And then every

movement. And then Misha began to use his thighs to lift himself up and before they knew it

Misha was riding Jensen hard and fast, their panting grunts coinciding each time their bodies

reconnected.

Jensen was lost in a cloud of pleasure and lust. He'd felt a bare hand on his cock before, but it

just hadn't prepared him for what being inside someone bare would be like. It was so much

warmer and felt tighter because of the increased friction. He could feel the contours of Misha's

body and it felt like he fit into it perfectly. Every move up and down felt like he was sliding in

and out of a heaven that had been made just for him.

"M-Misha..." Jensen stopped and swallowed quickly because he couldn't spare the air the

motion took away from him.

"Yeah, babe?" Misha moaned, head tilted all the way back, clutching Jensen's forearms as he

increased his pace.

"I-I—" Jensen cut off and found he couldn't speak. His whole body was buzzing with

adrenaline, riding a fine line between enjoyment and a desperate need for release. He felt

pressure in his chest and then gasped for air as he realized he was holding his breath in

anticipation.

"Misha, baby, I need it...are you...?"

He started to reach out a hand to grab Misha's cock, when he felt a hand at his throat. His eyes

flew open and he saw Misha looking down at him, one arm outstretched with the space between

thumb and index finger pressed against his windpipe. They hadn't stopped the motion of their

hips, and Jensen dropped his hand to his side. He met Misha's eyes and gave the tiniest of nods.

Misha pressed down.



Jensen knew a thing or two about choking. Choke holds were actually designed to cut off the

flow of blood to a person's brain. Without blood, the brain shut down fast, actually encouraging

passing out so that the body would fall down and go horizontal, and as a result put less pressure

on the heart to pump blood up to where it needed to be. It was why there was minimal struggle

and people often passed out quickly when choked. Strangulation and suffocation on the other

hand were entirely different beasts. There were three things humans as a whole had an

evolutionary imperative to fight and even kill for. Food and water was one, sex was

unfortunately another, and air above all. When a person's air supply was cut off, they fought like mad and it could take a good two minutes, or even longer, to get a person to succumb.

Jensen assumed Misha knew all this too because he didn't press on the arteries in his neck, he

pushed on his windpipe, cutting off his air. Jensen's first instinct was to fight, but a split second

later, Misha's hips came down and a wave of ecstasy spiked in his groin and then washed over

his whole body. It made him forget he couldn't breathe for a moment, but then when he tried to

draw in air he couldn't. He didn't feel the need to fight it this time—he just gripped the sheets

and concentrated on the pleasure. His chest grew tight, his lungs frantically tried to dispel the

air trapped in them, and his whole body jerked and grew tight with desperation—but not with the

need for air. All he could feel was rapidly approaching rapture threatening to consume

everything he was—and above him his vision was filled with a pair of intense blue eyes. Then

an orgasm hit him so violently he arched almost completely off the bed. The sudden rush of

sweet oxygen into his lungs made the orgasm punch through him a second time. He could scream

now and found that he was doing so loudly as well as sobbing and digging his hands so hard into

Misha's hips he had actually forced the other man to stop moving.

Jensen gasped in breath after breath, reeling in endorphin soaked pleasure as his consciousness

floated somewhere above where his body lay twitching in abject satiation. He became vaguely

aware of his physical self again when he felt a coolness on the lower portion of his softening

cock. He opened his eyes and found Misha braced above him on one hand, just the tip of

Jensen's dick still in his body, and a truly beautiful expression of ecstasy on his face. His other

hand was working furiously on his cock and it was only a couple of seconds

before he let out a

shout and shot his load all over Jensen's stomach and chest, one spurt so strong a bit of come

caught on Jensen's chin. Misha moaned and worked his cock until he was spent and then

slumped forward onto Jensen.

He panted harshly and then managed to ask, "You okay? Should I move?"

"You're fine for now," Jensen said, circling an arm around his waist and holding him close.

After a couple of minutes though, he became a little too heavy for Jensen to breathe easily. He

tilted his body slightly and Misha slipped to the side. He kept an arm and a leg over Jensen's

body and laid his head on his shoulder. They lay quietly together for a long time, though neither

knew exactly how long.

Jensen was in the process of dozing off when he felt Misha's fingertips trailing softly over his

throat.

"You're okay?" Misha murmured.

Jensen flushed. "Uh, yeah...Um. I'm sorry about that."

Misha propped himself up on his elbow and forced Jensen to meet his eyes. "Sorry for what?"

"Making you—making you think I needed that—or—I don't know. That was

weird, right? I've

never...done anything like that before."

"Shit. You haven't? I thought you were into it otherwise I never would have done it. I thought you nodded...I should have heard you say yes!"

Misha started to struggle to sit up and move away, but Jensen wrapped a weak arm around his

waist and pulled him back. Fortunately Misha was as spent as he was so he gave in and

collapsed back at Jensen's side. Jensen pulled him close with the arm that was around his waist

and used his other hand to grasp his elbow where it lay across his body just in case he got any

more ideas about trying to get away.

"I did give you permission to do it...I just didn't know until right that moment that I wanted to.

And I certainly didn't know until it was happening how much I would like it. I—I'm apologizing

because that's a really weird fucking kink to spring on someone. Especially one I didn't even

know I had. I mean, God, that's weird, right? Breath play? I mean, I don't do autoerotic

asphyxiation or anything. I'm not like—"

"Jensen. Shh." Jensen hushed. "For one thing, of course you've never done autoerotic

asphyxiation because you're still alive."

Jensen let out a huff. "I meant the act not the sometimes unfortunate end result."

"I know what you meant. And it's not that strange."

"It's not?"

"No. Hypoxia causes a kind of hallucinogenic state on its own. Combine that with the

endorphin rush of an orgasm and it can be like a chemical high."

Jensen let out a small laugh. "Yeah? Explains why it felt so damn good. Doesn't make it any

less weird."

"Well, at least there's a physiological explanation for why you liked it. Now me on the other

hand—the fact that I got off on doing it—that's psychosomatic." Misha propped himself up on

his elbow again and traced the curve of Jensen's strong jaw with a finger. "I'm the one who's

messed up. I liked watching you struggle under me. I liked holding your life in my hands."

Jensen swallowed. "And I liked that it made you lose control. You keep yourself so put together

—it felt like I was..."

He trailed off and shrugged, looking away from Jensen's gaze. "Anyway, sorry. It's not

something we should have done on the fly."

In response, Jensen pulled Misha down and tucked him into his side. He gave him a kiss above

his brow and buried a hand in his hair.

"Way too tired to talk now, Mish. Can we save our regrets for later?"

He felt Misha's head nod. His thumb brushed over his chest soothingly, though Jensen wasn't

sure which one he was trying to soothe.

"Do you have regrets about tonight, Jensen?"

"Not one," he said without hesitation.

"Yeah, that's what I'm worried about."

"Are you really going to kill our afterglow by being all rational and realistic about what's going

on between us?"

"I have to. It's too easy to forget around you."

"Forget what?"

Misha just shook his head. "Doesn't matter. Shouldn't we get up anyway?"

"Why?" Jensen whined.

"To get cleaned up?"

"I feel fine."

"Really?" Misha reached up and swiped off the clump of semen on his chin.

"This is all over you."

"Eh. Give it another ten minutes. It'll liquefy and then look like it's gone."

Misha turned his head to hide his laugh in Jensen's body, probably because it was more giggle

than laugh.

"That is so sexy," he said when he returned to his place on Jensen's shoulder.

"Yeah, well, so are you."

"Ucghh...I'm not sure that comparison is a compliment."

"Just hush already. Didn't we agree to talk later?"

"How later?"

"Whenever it's not now."

"We can't fall asleep, Jensen. I can't stay here."

"I know." Jensen yawned. "Just a ten minute cuddle."

"A ten minute cuddle. We're not supposed to cuddle at all."

"Says the man snuggling into me like—ow!" Jensen scowled and rubbed his pinched side.

"Stop talking, Jensen," Misha murmured sleepily.

Jensen woke up four hours later when his cell phone started ringing at the same time someone

started pounding on the door. He struggled for a moment to orient himself, reaching out for

Misha. His hand felt open space and he turned to look at the bed and found it empty. The ringing

and pounding sounded again and Jensen forced himself to get up and wrap the discarded towel

around his waist. Misha's clothing was gone from the floor so either he had taken it into the

bathroom with him or he had left while Jensen had been sleeping. He was pretty sure he knew

which one was the correct assumption. He picked up his cell phone and brought it to his ear as

he crossed the room to the door. As he reached for the knob he felt the itchy pull of dried semen

on his chest. He hoped whoever was at the door would be too preoccupied to really notice any

odd flaking of his skin. As he opened the door his ear was accosted with Russ shouting

something through his cell phone. Jared stood outside the door in the sweatpants and T-shirt he

slept in.

Both Jared and Russ were talking urgently, and Jensen got the idea that he needed to get dressed

as soon as possible because some shit had gone down overnight. He knew he didn't have time,

but Jensen couldn't go to a crime scene with crust come on him, so he took a quick shower and

dressed in dress pants and shirt, but forwent the jacket and tie. He did make sure to attach his

gun and handcuffs to his belt, and then slipped his credentials into his pocket. He met Jared

outside and followed him around to the far side of the motel and across the



parking lot to the  
second building of units.

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The Lakeside Motor Lodge consisted of three single story buildings that contained ten rooms

each. There was a single uniformed cop, who looked like a scared kid, standing in front of the

partway open door of the second room from the east end of the building. A few guests stood in

their pajamas in their doorways, hugging themselves and whispering intently. The night manager

for the building was sitting on the pavement being propped up and fanned despite the chill night

air by one of the staff. Distantly Jared and Jensen could hear sirens approaching rapidly.

The young officer was visibly shaken and jumped forward to block them from getting too close

to the door.

"I'm sorry gentlemen, this is a crime scene. You need to return to your rooms and we'll let you

know when everything is safe."

Jared and Jensen exchanged looks, and then produced their badges.

"Do you recognize us, Chris?" Jared ask.

They weren't familiar with every officer at the Elton PD, but they had

interacted with Officer

Chris Benet on more than occasion.

"Oh. Oh! Agent Ackles! Agent Padaleski! My God, I'm so sorry. I'm just—I'm actually grateful you're here. I cannot. There's—" he stopped abruptly and shook his head. "Why are

you here already? Did they call you first?"

"We're staying here," Jensen said. "We're in that building over there."

"Oh, God. This is just. You should." Chris cut off and crossed his arms over his chest tightly.

"You can go in."

"Well, why don't you tell us how you came to be here first," Jared suggested in a soothing voice.

Chris nodded and loosened his arms a little. "We got a 911 call in and it was one of the staff

here. It sounded like he was reporting a break in. So, dispatch called me since I was out on

patrol, and I came. When I got here, the manager was passed out on the ground and the guy over

there doesn't really speak English. So I called for an ambulance and went inside the room to see

what the fuss was all about..." His arms tightened again. "And I—I came back out and..." he glanced at a spot on the pavement that was gleaming in the street lamps. Chris had apparently

vomited in reaction to what he had seen. "Then I called the station and told them to send—

everybody. I guess they called you too."

"Russ called me," Jared said. "He says he doesn't know for sure it's our case, but that he figured it probably was because of the...nature of the call put in."

Chris looked a little embarrassed. The sirens were on top of them now, and they turned off as

the ambulance turned into the parking lot of the motel. The cops and fire trucks couldn't be too

far behind. Jensen nudged Jared with his elbow.

"Let's go check it out before the cavalry gets here."

"Okay."

Jensen gave Chris a pat on the shoulder and walked toward the open motel room door. A thin

rectangle of light spilled out onto the sidewalk. Sunrise was about thirty or forty minutes away

so all they had in the way of light when they entered the room was the overhead bulb in the

entryway. One of them would have to walk further into the room to turn on the lamps by the bed,

but they hesitated in the frame, worried about stepping on evidence. And definitely not because

of what they could just make out on the bed.

There was an obese body trussed on the stripped mattress. Her arms were yanked at an

unnatural angle behind her back; her legs were spread to be perfectly perpendicular with her

torso and held in place by something Jared couldn't see. He could see shadows on her body that

he didn't think was from the lighting or the rolls of fat. It looked like there were craters in her

body—scooped out bits of skin and muscle and fat pockmarked her torso and legs.

Jared swallowed a feeling of queasiness and felt the need to say something, anything to clear the

buzz starting in his head.

“Ten bucks says her crime is gluttony,” he said.

Jensen looked at him with a bit of shocked disappointment, and Jared's stomach turned. Then

Jensen's face softened to sympathy and he stuck out his hand.

“Nah, our guy's more creative than that.”

Jared shook Jensen's outstretched hand and they turned back to face the body. Jensen took a few

careful steps into the room and managed to turn on a bedside lamp by tucking his fingers up into

his sleeve. The light revealed the body in more detail—and Jared wished he hadn't been right

about the scooped out flesh. He could now see that her legs were being held out so far by

fishing wire that was strung from the corners of the headboard and dug into her ankles so deeply

the line was actually covered by the rolled, puckered flesh. Her face was a

wreck. Her eyelids

were missing, her nostrils had been cut open and peeled back, her lips had been...filed down...

was his best guess. But there wasn't a lot of blood. So, either the killer had cleaned her up

afterwards, or she had been dead when he'd started to play.

They heard the wail of sirens again as more vehicles rapidly approached the scene. An EMT

from the ambulance stuck his head in the room.

"Does anyone in here—Oh, God."

"No, you're not needed in here," Jensen said.

The EMT was gone in a flash. Jared looked at the floor to watch where he was stepping as he

moved closer to the bed. The woman's large breasts had been sliced on the underside and

pulled away from the body to leave plenty of room on her chest for the carving "Keriam."

Across her stomach her alleged crime had been branded so deeply into her flesh the skin had

cooked and curled in on itself, making it difficult to read the word. But he could still make it

out: "Gluttonous."

"Damn it," Jensen grumbled. "I don't have my wallet on me now."

"Pay me later," Jared, said, breathing through his mouth. This close the

release of her bowels

was more evident. “She died here,” Jared said.

“Yes,” Jensen agreed.

“This is different. Killer One uses dump sites, not kill sites.”

“That’s true. But look at this kill site. It’s under our fucking noses, Jared. He knows we’re here

and he did this to throw it in our faces. I swear to God this man will not see the inside of a

prison cell; I will cut out his heart.”

“Jensen,” Jared said softly, but didn’t know what else to say.

The barrage of sirens got intensely louder as several emergency response vehicles pulled into

the motel parking lot. The room filled with flashing red, white, and blue lights. Thankfully after a few moments the sirens were turned off though the lights continued to bounce colors and

shadows off the walls. The sounds of equipment being gathered and soft conversations filtered

through the door. Jensen was leaning over the head of the bed, so Jared walked to the foot. He

got a clear shot of the damage between her legs.

“Oh, fuck,” Jared said, and turned away. He was thankful he hadn’t eaten for several hours, as it

was he felt the acrid sting of bile in the back of his throat.

“Jay, you okay?”

Jared started to say yes, but then shook his head.

“Jesus fuck what happened here?”

Jared and Jensen turned to face the door. Russ stood at the entrance eyes wide and glued to the

body.

“Is the forensic team coming?” Jensen asked.

Russ tried to tear his gaze away to look at Jensen, his head actually turned even though his eyes

wouldn't move. “Yeah, they should be.” Russ let out a small hysterical laugh. “I think

everybody got called in.”

Someone tapped Russ on the shoulder and he jumped about a foot as he turned to look at the

person. One of the forensic evidence recovery team members stood behind him, hand frozen in

place where she'd touched him.

“Sorry, Russ.”

“It's okay, Alyssa. Um. Maybe you should wait for your other team members to get here. I

don't think you should start by yourself.”

Alyssa saw half of the body on the bed. “Okay. I can wait.”

“Alyssa, wait,” Jensen said. “Do you have any gloves on you?”

“Yes, sir, right here.”

She pulled some latex gloves out of a pouch on her belt. Jensen looked at Jared and nodded

toward the gloves. Jared remembered Jensen's latex allergy—and against his will had to

wonder what he and Misha were using for protection since he'd gotten some unfortunate

evidence that their fling wasn't over in the middle of the night—and walked over to retrieve the

gloves. He slipped one on and moved to stand closer to Jensen where he still stood by the head

of the bed.

“Did you find something, Jensen?” Russ asked anxiously.

“I don't know.” Jensen shuffled back so Jared could take his place. “Jay, do you see that...is there something wedged between the wall and the bed? Or am I seeing things?”

Jared leaned over and looked between the headboard and the bed. He couldn't lean too far

because of the fishing wire.

“You're in my light, can you—that's better. Um. What am I looking for?”

“Like a beige colored thing.”

“A beige colored thing,” he repeated to distract himself from the glimpse he got of the top of the

woman's head; she was missing skin and hair right on the crown—he could see her skull. Then

he saw what Jensen was talking about. It was a beige—thing. It looked to be

about the length of

his forearm but the thickness was hard to tell because it was partially covered by the mattress.

Jared straightened and then crouched down so he could bend under the wire. He felt Jensen

place a steadying hand on his shoulder so he wouldn't fall into the crime scene. Jared turned

sideways to maximize his reach and felt the object—firm though pliable rubber. He curled his

fingers around it to get a good hold on it and already knew what he was going to pull out.

Jared stood up and presented the large, flesh tone dildo to Jensen. Jensen almost reached out for

it, but then stopped at the last moment. He rubbed his hand off on his pants even though he hadn't

actually touched it.

“Fuck,” Russ said from his position by the door. Jared and Jensen turned to look at him. “So he

is using dildos. So much for DNA.”

“Unless it's on this,” Jared said. “Or has fingerprints. If he didn't intend to leave this here,

maybe he doesn't wear gloves when he holds it.”

Jensen half shrugged. “Maybe, but I doubt it. But even if he did, does this surface hold

fingerprints well?”

Jared shrugged and they turned to look at Alyssa.

“It depends,” she said without needing to be asked. “Plastic is often a good surface for making

clear, full prints. But, not if it’s porous. I’ll be honest here—I’m not terribly familiar with

dildos.”

“Just vibrators,” Russ said.

Alyssa made a shocked, annoyed face and hit his arm. “Russ! Gross!”

“What’s going on in here?” Ty asked as he arrived behind Alyssa in the door.

“Jesus, Russ, did you actually call everybody?” Jensen asked with a small laugh.

Russ shrugged a shoulder and Ty said, “I think so. Danny’s out there and he’s a damn traffic

cop. We’ve got the blood spatter and ballistics guys out here. Misha and Bunny are outside playing fetch.”

“They’re what?” Jensen asked.

“I think the only people not here are Agent Cortese and the guy who brings our muffins to the

station every morning.”

“Ooo,” Jared said. “Did we call Gen?” He knew she would be pissed if she were left out of

the loop.

“I called her, after you two,” Russ said.

“Good.”

Jensen looked at the dildo in Jared’s hand. Something lit up behind his eyes.

“What’cha thinking over there, Jensen?”

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Jensen stepped outside the motel, waving for Jared to follow him. The forensic team and

photographers were moving in to begin their work. He knew he should probably spend more

time looking at the crime scene in person—he would regret it later when all he had was

photographs to look at—but maybe he wouldn’t need to look at them at all if he could get a beat

on the killer. He spotted Misha leaning against his police SUV in a parking spot that was out of

the way of the other police and emergency vehicles. He was wearing his uniform, so he must

have gone home after leaving Jensen alone in the motel. He shook himself. Don’t have stupid

thoughts like that. Of course he went home. Bunny was sitting beside him, shifting excitedly on

her paws with all the commotion going on.

“Misha!” Jensen called out getting the officer’s attention.

He started to smile, but then saw Jensen wasn’t alone and just gave him a nod in greeting.

Jensen rolled his eyes at him while Jared was still behind him and couldn't see it. Misha's lips

twitched, but he still didn't smile.

"Can I help you, Agent?" Misha asked. "And please tell me it doesn't have anything to do with

your partner and that massive dildo."

Jensen turned and saw that Jared and Russ were both right behind him. He turned back and

faced Misha.

"Um, actually it does."

"Good Lord. What do you want?"

"We think the killer touched this. Can Bunny sniff it and then maybe follow his trail out of here?"

"What?" Russ asked around a strange laugh.

"Jensen, how exactly do you think dogs' noses work?" Misha asked dryly.

"Besides, she's a drug dog," Russ said.

"She's a cadaver dog, right Misha?"

Misha gave Jensen a strange look. "Yes, but...I'm assuming that thing was used on the victim."

"Probably."

"The victim...whose body is in that motel room. Where do you think Bunny will lead you?"

"Oh."

“Can I stop holding this now?” Jared asked.

“Here,” Russ said, snapping on a glove. “I can take it over to Alyssa and get it bagged up.”

“Shouldn’t have walked out of the crime scene with it in the first place,” Misha said.

Jensen frowned at him. “I was trying to catch a killer.”

“And now I wonder how stringent the requirements are for becoming a federal agent.”

Jared laughed. “We’re mostly accountants.”

Russ waved the dildo around in one hand. “Not so familiar with these then.”

“More than I’d like to be,” Jared replied.

Russ and Jared began a conversation about whether or not accountants should be more or less

familiar with monster dildos and Jensen turned to Misha.

“Can we, uh, can we talk? For a second. In private.”

Misha raised his eyebrows slightly. “Sure.”

Jared and Russ didn’t look like they were rushing to Alyssa’s side any time soon, so Misha gave

Bunny an order to stay and walked around the side of his car. Jensen followed. He wished they

could move somewhere farther away, but that might look strange. Misha waited for Jensen to

start, which seemed fair since he was the one who had asked to speak with him. Suddenly

Jensen felt a little stupid and crossed his arms over his chest. He couldn't look Misha in the eye

when he spoke.

"You left," he mumbled.

"Well, yeah, of course I left. I told you I couldn't stay. I couldn't risk people seeing me leave in

the morning. And it's a very good thing I didn't because I'm not sure how we could explain why

I was already at the crime scene in civilian clothing."

"No, I knew you had to leave. But. You didn't say anything."

"You were asleep."

"You could have woken me up. You should have woken me up. It sucks just waking up alone,

you know?"

Now Misha suddenly looked uncomfortable. He crossed his arms too and looked at something

on the ground.

"I didn't want to wake you up. You've been working so hard and such long hours, I could tell

you needed the sleep. And it was a deep sleep, Jensen. It would have made you dead tired to

have it disrupted."

"But—"

“And you know what else?” Misha said as he looked defiantly up at him, finally meeting his

eyes. “Not only did I not want to wake you up, I turned off your alarm!”

Jensen blinked at him. “You did what?”

“That’s right,” he said a little defensively, “I turned off the clock alarm and the one on your cell

phone. You needed sleep and I was going to let you be late to work so you could get it. That’s

why I didn’t wake you up. That and I was concerned that if I did you would convince me to stay

for a round three and neither of us had time for that.”

Jensen’s face broke out into a smile.

“Don’t do that,” Misha said, irritated.

“You’re mad at me? I could kill you right now for being so sweet.”

“Shut-up, I am not sweet.”

“You are. And I want to kiss you. And I can’t.”

“No, you can’t. And don’t think it either. Don’t get—attached.”

Jensen opened his mouth to respond when there was a sudden burst of shouting and the pounding

of running feet and scuffling noises. Jensen and Misha were already running around the car,

hands on their weapons. Barking began in earnest, and then there was a sharp whimpering noise as Bunny cried out in pain. They rounded the car and saw a couple of officers threateningly

forcing Bunny away from where Russ was bending over to pick up the dildo from the ground.

“What the fuck happened?” Jensen yelled.

“What happened?” Russ asked. “That fucking dog thought this was a chew toy and almost

destroyed the evidence!”

Misha balked. “That’s crazy! Paul! You lay another hand on my dog and you will lose it!

Bunny! Here.”

The German Shepherd slunk along the ground away from the officers to Misha’s side.

“How did she get a hold of it?” Jensen asked, taking a closer look and grimacing when he saw

the teeth marks in the rubber.

“She grabbed it out of my hand!” Russ raged.

“She would never do that!” Misha shouted, laying a comforting hand on Bunny’s head. “Were

you still waving it around like a jackass?!”

“What happened?” Jared asked as he jogged up to the group.

“Where were you?” Jensen snapped.

“I—”

“You always act like she’s smarter than half the force, Collins. She’s just a fucking dog!”



“A very well trained dog, Little, who wouldn’t just grab something out of someone’s hand!”

“You know, this isn’t the first time that mutt has destroyed evidence,” Russ sneered.

“She was four months old when that happened! And besides, weren’t you supposed to be taking

that to Alyssa for proper storage?!”

“What’s going on here?” Ty’s voice boomed across the full parking lot, drawing even more

attention to the group.

“Fat lot of good it will do us now!” Russ threw back at him.

“That’s on you, buddy,” Misha snarled. And then he turned on Jensen. “Why the fuck did you

take it out of the crime scene in the first place?!”

Jensen’s jaw dropped. He had no response. Misha was right.

“This isn’t Jensen’s fault,” Russ growled, taking a step toward Misha. Misha stepped forward as well and the tension in the circle suddenly jumped up several notches.

“Hey, hey, hey!” Ty shouted, stepping between the two men and placing a meaty hand on their

chest. “Back off. And calm the fuck down. What happened here?”

Misha’s eyes were glaring long, sharp daggers at Russ, who drew a breath to speak, but Jensen

beat him to it.

“It’s my fault,” Jensen said.

“It’s not—” Russ started, but Jensen held up a hand to silence him.

“I removed evidence from a crime scene without properly documenting it—”

“I’m the one who did actually,” Jared said. “You should blame me.”

Jensen shot him a look telling him to shut up. “I authorized the removal of evidence because I

thought Bunny might be able to pick up a scent outside the motel—it was a long shot, and a crazy,

not thought through one at that—but that’s why it was outside. And Bunny somehow got a hold of

it—”

“That’s the problem I’m having here,” Ty said. “Agent Ackles we can discuss proper crime

scene handling later when I make my decision about letting you back into any of them.”

Jensen flushed so suddenly and furiously he felt dizzy. Ty couldn’t actually keep him out of

future crime scenes because the case was technically federal and not local, but the publicly

announced lack of trust was humiliating.

“What I want to know is how Bunny ‘somehow got a hold of it.’ Collins, what happened?”

“I—” The man cleared his throat. “I wasn’t present. I gave Bunny an order to sit and I walked

a few feet away to discuss a private matter with Agent Ackles. But she wouldn't grab something

to play with it. She knew she was on duty. She knows she doesn't play when she's on duty. He

did something to her."

Russ' jaw dropped. "I did something to her? Like I was playing fetch with the evidence?"

"No, like you antagonized her with it."

"What?! Why would I hit your dog with a dildo?"

"I don't know! You're the one holding the dildo with teeth marks on it!"

"Did no one else see it happen?" Ty interjected.

"I left to go get the evidence bag," Jared said, holding it up weakly.

"Why didn't you go with him, Russ?" Ty asked.

"I thought Jensen and Misha would be right back. And Jared said he would be back too. I

actually thought it would safer not to walk around with it more. What were you two discussing

anyway?" Russ said with a hard look at Misha. "Why are you even here?"

"I was in my vehicle on the way to work when we got an all hands call to come to the Lakeside

Motor Lodge. Apparently, that call came from you, right, Russ?"

Russ' eyes narrowed and Misha gave him a challenging look.

"All right, enough!" Ty shouted. "This is a big enough clusterfuck as it is.

Collins. Take Bunny

and go to the station. Your shift started thirty minutes ago. Little. You're going to canvass the

guests of the motel and see if any of them heard or saw anything. Paul, go with him."

"Yes, sir," Paul said, the only one of Ty's employees to respond verbally.

"Agent Ackles, Agent Padalecki. Take that fucking thing over to someone and bag it up. And the

two of you get to explain to Kim what happened to it when she shows up. I'm going to follow

the fire engine over to Euclid to deal with a body found tied up in the living room of a burned out

apartment."

"Another body?" Jensen asked sharply.

"Yeah," Ty sighed. "But not one of yours. Probably. It's the Squirrel Licker's apartment. I

think he finally snapped and hurt his girlfriend."

"Oh, Jesus," one of the officers said. "I told her not to stay with him."

"Who hasn't?" Ty grumbled. "When I get to the station later today, I want a report of the findings

from this scene. And I don't want it covered in anymore bullshit. Is that clear?!" he roared the

last question and everyone jumped.

There were despondent murmurings as everyone agreed to do as Ty bade

them, but he didn't

stay to listen as he marched over to his unmarked vehicle. Jensen glanced at Misha and all he

got was a fleeting glance in his direction, and then Misha took Bunny by the collar and led her to

the backseat of the K9 SUV. Russ looked at Paul and then jerked his head toward the group of

people clustered in a gossiping group behind the police tape that had gone up. They walked in

that direction and Russ dumped the dildo in the evidence bag Jared held up as he passed him.

Jared turned slowly to look at Jensen.

Jensen rubbed a hand over his eye until he saw golden crackling lights under his eyelid. He

released it and watched the world slowly come back into view in his right eye. Jared was

looking at him, judgment free, and with a large dildo in a plastic bag in his hand. Jensen almost

laughed, but his head was pounding.

"Let's—call Gen and get an ETA from her. And we'll let the professionals handle this," he said

bitterly.

"Jensen—" Jared started, but Jensen waved a tired hand and he stopped. Then he said, "I'll call

Gen."

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“Well, do you want the bad news or the disgusting news?” Kim announced herself as she stood

in the doorway of the FBI temporary office in the police station.

Jared turned to look at her, a smile halfway to being formed, and then he saw that Kim was pale

and tense and wasn’t offering any sort of humor at all. Russ started to get up to offer Kim his

chair, but she declined, so Russ sat back down in it wearily. Gen had her legs crossed and held

her face up by a hand and propping her elbow on the armrest of the chair. Jensen was slumped

low in his chair tapping the thin booklet that contained the information regarding angel names on

his leg. They’d discovered “Kerian” could be summoned at the fourth hour of Saturday. The

victim, Ms. Marissa Mueller, was probably killed at four in the morning, not a hundred yards

from where Jensen and Jared slept. It was six in the evening and the early wakeup call this

morning combined with severe sleep deprivation was taking its toll on all of them.

“Let’s go with bad news,” Jensen mumbled softly.

“Well, the bad news is that the dildo was useless; no DNA, no fingerprints, no manufacturer

information.”

Jensen closed his eyes and breathed like it was an effort.

“Well, I suppose the good news is that Bunny had nothing to do with that. It had been bleached

clean. Possibly he set it on the bed while he mutilated her postmortem and when it fell behind

the bed he forgot it. Either that or he thought it was funny to leave a useless clue.”

Jensen opened his eyes again and Jared felt relief for them both that evidence hadn’t been

destroyed by their overzealous and unprofessional actions. Kim tapped the edge of a folder

against her palm and gnawed on her lower lip thoughtfully before speaking again.

“More bad news includes that there doesn’t appear to be any other evidence we’re going to be

able to use. The team is going over the room with a fine tooth comb, but you know hotels are

notoriously difficult to glean trace evidence from because of the hundreds of previous

occupants. And I got nothing off the body which could be linked directly to the killer. She was

clean, wiped down with disinfectant.”

Everyone was quiet as they absorbed that soul crushing, though not wholly unexpected, news.

“I know I’m going to regret this,” Russ said. “What’s the disgusting news?”

“You told us her friends said she was meant to be gone this week on an extended spa trip...”

“And the spa confirms she never checked in,” Gen said.

“So, if we assume that she’s been missing since Sunday, I think based on the tissue damage—and

healing—that she was raped repeatedly and brutally for five days.”

Jared clenched the pen in his hand.

“The other injuries didn’t occur until late last night or early this morning. The—wounds on her

torso and legs were made by—shit, guys, it looked like he used a giant sharpened melon baller

on her.”

“Oh, God,” Gen said and turned partially away from Kim as if that would help.

“Does such a thing exist?” Jared asked.

Russ shrugged a shoulder. “Maybe it was an ice cream scooper?”

“That’s way too dull,” Jensen said, moving his mouth like he had a bad taste in it.

“It could be sharpened.”

“I still haven’t reached the disgusting part yet,” Kim said.

Everyone practically held their breath as they waited.

“Those wounds were done while she was still alive. And—he punished her

for being

gluttonous. He—he made her—”

Kim cut off and slapped the file into her hand, startling them.

“What is it, Kim?” Jensen asked sharply.

“There was material in her stomach. Partially digested. But—it was her own flesh. He made

her eat her own flesh.”

“Oh, fuck,” Gen moaned bending over slightly to put a hand on her stomach.

“Jesus,” Jensen breathed and lost all the color in his face.

Jared felt a little lightheaded—and let the feeling linger. He didn’t want to think about what he’d

just heard. He was done.

Jensen’s chair squeaked deafeningly in the quiet room as he turned around to face his desk.

Jared didn’t have to look at him to know he was looking at the small evidence bag on his desk

that contained a photograph. After leaving the motel crime scene, they had obtained permission

from the courts to enter Mueller’s house since she lived alone and no one could grant them

access. They had begun a thorough search of the house namely looking for signs of a struggle or

a note card from the killer. What they had found brazenly left on the kitchen counter was the photograph.

It showed Mueller standing in her kitchen and the shot was obviously taken from quite some

distance away with a telescopic lens through the open blinds on a window. In her hand was a

white note card that plainly showed black marker bleeding onto the back. Mueller had a

confused look on her face.

They hadn't found a note card in her house and they were left to wonder if she had received it

before the public announcement was made or if she just didn't recognize "Kerian" as an angel

name. They had reviewed the tips and calls they had received the prior week—none of them

came from Mueller. But the killer had clearly wanted them to know she had received a card and

he hadn't stopped sending them.

"Is there really no good news at all?" Jensen asked, hand on his forehead.

"Well, we are able to definitively link two crime scenes now, but the information still isn't

identifying."

"What is it?"

"We found a partial boot print out back of Mueller's house. It matches the size and tread of the

print we found in the woods at the Hernandez scene."

Jensen sat up straight and looked at Kim. “Good match?”

“Pretty solid.”

“And this is the print that gave us the 5’6”-5’7” 120-135 pound description, correct?”

“Yes.”

Jensen looked at Russ and Gen. “Don’t you see? There *has* to be two of them. I mean no

disrespect to Ms. Mueller, but she weighed nearly 350 pounds. There is no way a man that

small could have lifted and maneuvered her around by himself.”

“He’s not necessarily small,” Gen said. “That could be 135 pounds of pure muscle. And if he

had a cart or something to wheel her around on...”

Jensen shook his head, but didn’t try to argue with her. Jared definitely still believed there were

two killers, but everyone else was still holding out. Occam’s razor told them that the simplest

answer was most likely the correct one, and two serial killers working together was very rare.

But with all the evidence piling up, Jared firmly believed the simplest explanation *was* two

killers. It was the only way the gross differences in the kills made any sense.

The seconds ticked by in silence, and Jared was grateful there wasn’t a clock on the wall for

them to actually hear the clack of a second hand. They all looked around the room at each other.

No one had anything to say. No one had any grand epiphanies.

“Kim,” Gen said softly, barely daring to disturb the room, “that’s all you’ve got for us today,

right? The rest of the tests won’t be done until tomorrow?”

“Probably not until Monday honestly.” She stepped into the room and handed the green folder in

her hand to Jensen. “I was just dropping off a quick write up of my preliminary findings. The

official report will come after we finish the chemical analysis of the disinfectant he used. It had

some strange properties, but I won’t have access to a gas spectrometer until Monday morning at

the earliest.”

“Thank you, Kim,” Jensen said, opening the file out of politeness, but clearly not seeing much as

he flipped through it.

“In that case,” Gen said, “is it okay if I go home? I—my brain is mush right now. I’m afraid I’d

be more of hindrance than a help.”

“No, of course,” Jensen said. “You should go home and get some sleep. Actually, I think we all

ought to take a break this weekend. Take the time to rest. To think. Write some notes, make

some profiles. Make some theories. Anything. We'll regroup on Monday and brainstorm while

we wait for the forensics."

No one voiced their agreement, but the fact that no one said "No, we must keep working!" was a

clear sign that they were all burned out. Gen made the first move to start shutting down her

computer and Jared and Jensen followed her lead.

"Hey, Kim, Russ," Jared said, "Do you want to join us for dinner at Nell's? Give us all a

chance to unwind? You too, Gen, unless you really need to get on the road."

"No, it's still--relatively--early for us. I think I would rather eat first."

"Great." Jared turned to Russ and Kim.

Kim shrugged a shoulder. "Yeah, sure, I could eat. I actually haven't been to Nell's in while. I

always go in there intending to order a salad and wind up with a bacon cheeseburger instead."

"You can put bacon and cheese on the hamburger?" Jensen asked.

"Well, *I* can. I don't know how strong your cred is with the establishment yet." She gave him a wink.

"I wish I could join you," Russ said, "but I've got some personal matters I need to attend to that

I've been putting off for too long."

"Are you sure?" Jensen said turning to him. "Team Drowning in Our Own

Frustrated Tears

wouldn't be the same without you."

"Jensen!" Gen shot him a half-hearted scowl.

Russ laughed. "No, I know. But, I'll have to take a rain check." He stepped closer to Jensen.

"And hey, um, I am sorry about what went down this morning, at the crime scene—"

Jensen put a hand on his arm. "It was completely my fault. And Ty and I had a discussion about

it and we are still on good terms. Hopefully this is all just water under the bridge. Especially

now that we know Bunny didn't do any damage."

Russ gave a shake of his head and an irritated smile. "I kind of hate that dog," he muttered. "I

mean, I know she's a good dog and does her job well, but—I don't know. Dogs in general."

"I understand," Jensen said quietly, straightening up the neat mess on his desk. "I'm not really a

dog person either. My ex-girlfriend really wanted one, so I appeased her by telling her about

this program you can adopt retired army dogs from and it's great to rehabilitate them and help

them through their PTSD and everything. Just didn't tell her it has a one or two year waitlist."

Russ chuckled and slapped his back. "I like the way you think, Jensen."

Louder he said, “I’ll

see you guys Monday,” and walked out the door.

Jared leaned close to Jensen. “You better not let Misha hear you say that.”

“Shut your mouth, Jared.”

The tone was snarky, but the blush didn’t escape Jared’s notice. He grinned and Jensen punched

him lightly in the shoulder.

“You ready?” he asked Jared and the two women.

Gen nodded as she gave a pull on the safe drawer, ensuring it was locked.

"I need to run downstairs and lock up the lab," Kim said. "Give me five minutes?"

The quartet exited the office and Jared locked it behind them. The three agents passed through

the bullpen to the front waiting room while Kim made for the basement. The bullpen was quiet

—even more so than usual. Everyone had been affected by Leanne Woliczak’s untimely death;

she was the Squirrel Licker’s long time on again off again girlfriend and she had not had a

pleasant end. The Squirrel Licker had been arrested and brought in for questioning, screaming

the whole time about conspiracy theories and that he was being framed.

Jensen and Gen were absorbed with their phones, thumbs moving on the screens, eyes half

unfocused. Jared thought about checking his for messages, but he was too hungry to think. He

leaned against the wall and then flinched away with a silent, "Ow." He turned to look behind

him, rubbing his shoulder. There was a small corkboard hanging on the wall covered with

dozens of overlapping pictures: old, faded ones buried under brighter, crisper photos held in

place by colorful pushpins. Jared let his eyes roam over the board; the pictures seemed to be

mostly from department picnics and barbeques with the occasional solo photo of a person with a

large fish on a hook or a family standing in front of a famous landmark. Jared grinned when he saw a picture pinned down near the bottom.

"Hey, Jensen, take a look at this."

Jensen moved closer and looked at the picture he was pointing to. A very young, baby-faced

Misha was kneeling on the ground next to a black lab. He held a certificate in his hand that

indicated "Bailey" and Officer Collins had passed the K9 Police Dog Handler training program.

The picture had been taken in a large green grassed yard on a sunny day. In the background was

a fancy, two colored wood dog house. Jensen smiled and Jared did his best not to comment on

the sappy expression on his face.

"I wonder if he built that," Jensen murmured.

"Built what?" Gen asked, coming up to see what had their attention. She gasped and then

giggled. "Is that Misha?"

"Yeah," Jared said.

"The dog house," Jensen said. "He does carpentry as a hobby."

"Carpentry is a hobby?" Gen asked.

Jensen laughed. "I guess for some people. He made an amazing table and chair set by hand.

And he actually uses them in his kitchen."

"When were you at his house?"

Jared was impressed by Jensen's total non-reaction to the question.

"Oh, one night Jared was trying to put the moves on Felicia and I volunteered to make myself

scarce. Misha offered me a ride back to the motel but then took pity on me when I said I hadn't

eaten and swung by his house on the way to let me have some leftover Chinese."

Jared bit on his cheek to keep from smiling. All of that was one giant pile of bullshit. He

wondered if Jensen had ever lied that easily to him about anything. To distract Gen from asking

another question he pointed to a picture about halfway up the board.

"Is that Ty?" he asked.

Jensen and Gen leaned forward to squint at the photo. There was a man, who certainly

resembled Police Chief Ty Olsson, wearing what looked like a too small Minnie Mouse outfit

and very heavy makeup. They were still snickering when Kim came up behind them.

"Ah, I see you've found our bulletin board," she said. "Well we should really move along before you see anything else."

"Are you on here?" Jared asked, turning to her with a grin.

"Nope. Not a single picture of me. Are you hungry? I'm hungry."

Jared was hungry. Otherwise he would have stayed and searched through all the photographs

until he found the one of Kim he was sure was on there. Jensen and Gen were also pulled away

from the board with the promise of food and the four of them left the station. Outside the air was

brisk, but not too cold yet. The sun had set about half an hour ago but the day had been warmer

than usual and that rise in temperature lingered now. They decided to make the short walk to

Nell's and Jared paused as he felt around his jacket and pants pockets.

"Oh, hang on, I forgot my wallet in the car," he said.

The other three paused on the sidewalk and Jensen called after him, "We can put it on mine

tonight.”

“I know,” he said over his shoulder, “but I don’t want to just leave it out.”

“It’s been there all day!” Gen pointed out.

“And who would break into a car at the police station?!” Kim chimed in.

Jared grumbled and told himself that they would go back for their purses. At the far end of the

lot the Accent was parked slightly askew. And parked next to it was an awesome red car with a

hot cop in jeans and a T-shirt leaning on it. Misha straightened when he saw Jared and then

fidgeted nervously when he noticed he was alone.

“Oh. Um. Hi, Agent Padalecki.”

“Jared, Misha. I think we’ve become suitably intimate to use first names.”

Misha gave him an odd look, but didn’t comment on that. “Jared. Is...Jensen staying late?”

“Nope,” Jared said, bending inside the car to retrieve his wallet. “Hey Jensen!” he shouted and

Misha started and put out an alarmed hand. “Come over here! You have the keys!”

“No I don’t!” Jensen’s voice floated from down the sidewalk.

“Yes, you *do*. Get over here.”

They heard Jensen’s feet jog on the pavement, and he was checking his pockets as he got closer,

so he didn't see Misha right away.

"Jared, I'm telling you, I don't—" He looked up and froze when he saw Misha in his casual

clothing, clearly waiting for him.

Jared patted Jensen's chest by his shoulder. "I think Misha wants to take you to dinner tonight."

It was too dark to see but both men clearly blushed and Jared got a kick out of it.

"And after dinner, please go back to Misha's. I can't take another night of listening to Jensen

scream like a howler monkey."

"Fucking—" Jensen went completely rigid. "Jared!"

"He *is* a screamer," Misha agreed musingly.

"Misha!"

"So are you, Officer Collins," Jared said dryly. "Have a nice night."

Jared left the two men to do whatever awkward mating dance it was that they did around each

other and returned to the two quite attractive ladies he had the honor of escorting to dinner. He

continued walking toward the diner and they fell into step with him.

"Where's Jensen?" Kim asked.

"He got a better offer."

"From who?" Gen asked, eyes sparkling.

“Who said it was with somebody?”

“You did by using speech indicating he was offered something by a person,” Kim said.

“Could have meant he found a coupon for a personal pan pizza on the ground.”

“Something’s going on,” Gen said with a smile sliding up the side of her face.

Jared just shrugged.

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Jensen had waited as long as he could, knowing he couldn’t touch Misha in the police station

parking lot or even on the well lit streets of Elton proper. But once they were on the dark back

roads that led to Misha’s neighborhood, Jensen slid a hand onto his leg. He dipped his fingers

onto his inner thigh and squeezed lightly. He wasn’t even trying to instigate anything sexual; it

just felt good to be able to touch him like he had a right to touch him in such an intimate place.

Misha put his hand on Jensen’s and pushed it away. He started to feel a little disappointment,

but the man hadn’t completely removed the straying hand, just pushed it farther down his leg to

safer territory. And he left his hand near Jensen’s, a couple of fingertips overlapping. Jensen

turned his head to look out the passenger side window to hide his smile.

They didn't speak a word on the trip, just watched the tiny sliver of waxing quarter moon appear

and disappear through the forest lining the road, Lynyrd Skynyrd's "Simple Man" playing softly

from the radio. Jensen almost didn't want the trip to end when they pulled up into Misha's driveway. Misha parked the Charger in the garage and when the engine cut out they sat in

silence, listening to the car settle and cool down. They sat long enough that the overhead light in

the garage went out and plunged them into darkness. Misha opened the car door and the interior

lights turned on, enabling Jensen to see enough to get his door open and make his way around the

car. Misha waited until Jensen had the door leading to the utility room open, and thereby

providing another light source, before he shut the car door. Jensen waited until he was mostly

through the door before slamming it shut and pushing him up against it.

Jensen swallowed Misha's urgent groan and thrust his tongue into his mouth, feeling a throb of

arousal in his groin every time their tongues slid together, circling, massaging, stroking. Jensen

pulled back for air and felt his erection come to full attention when his lower lip pulled slowly

through the gentle drag of Misha's teeth.

“Fuck,” Jensen said. Pretty much the first word he’d spoken to him all night.

Misha let his head fall back against the door, and raised a hand to pet the side of Jensen’s head.

His eyes roamed over Jensen’s face for a moment.

“I think Russ has a thing for you.”

Jensen blinked. “What?”

Misha shrugged.

“Are you sure...what do you mean? A thing?”

“Like, he’s got a thing for you.”

Jensen smiled and leaned down to kiss Misha’s beautiful lips. “I have pretty good gaydar and I

don’t think he plays on both sides of the field.”

“I’ve known him all my life and I wouldn’t say he did either. But he’s...just got a thing for you.”

“Maybe he wants to be an agent.”

“Maybe.”

Jensen leaned forward and kissed Misha again, lingering on the soft, warm feel of lips made

plump from his attentions. He kissed those lips again. And once more before pulling back

slightly.

“You jealous, baby?”

“No.” Misha kissed him. “And don’t call me baby.”

## **Chariel**

**Friday, November 8, 2013**

“Holy fuck, baby,” Misha panted. “Th-that was good.”

Jensen tried to chuckle but was breathing too hard to manage it. “Just. Good?”

“Stop fishing,” Misha muttered and pulled Jensen toward him so that he laid his head on Misha’s

shoulder and settled down flush along the length of their bodies. He lightly drew a finger over

the skin of Jensen’s back in a repetitive motion, and Jensen allowed himself to snake an arm

around Misha’s waist—instigating a true cuddle session.

"Clingy, aren't you?" Misha murmured, running his fingers up Jensen's neck and into his hair.

Jensen didn't comment on the hand in his hair, the one on his forearm, or the ankle hooked over

his. He drew in a deep breath and let it out, finally back to normal respiration. They lay

together in amicable silence, but Jensen wanted to talk. He was just afraid that if he said

anything Misha would freak at the intimacy and kick him out.

Misha had been on day shifts all week, so he had lingered at the station most evenings, taking



Jensen home with him every night but one. On those nights Misha had cooked for him, they had

had sex, and then Misha had driven him back to the motel. Usually their time together didn't last

more than three or four hours. And Jensen could tell that that was the way Misha, maybe not

liked it, but wanted it. Keeping each other at arm's length seemed to be the only rule they had.

In any other situation Jensen would have had too much self-respect to get used like this, but he

couldn't bring himself to ask Misha for more. He knew that if he did he would lose him. And

however temporary this thing between them might be, he wasn't ready to let it go just yet.

Misha's fingers traveled back down to his neck, and then gingerly dipped around to his throat,

lightly playing over his Adam's apple.

"How's your throat?" Misha asked softly.

"It's fine," Jensen said, giving his side a reassuring squeeze.

Misha brushed his knuckles on the underside of Jensen's jaw. "I'm still not sure about this."

Jensen made an attempt to shrug. "Then don't do it if it makes you uncomfortable."

Misha let out an exaggerated sigh. "That's the problem: I do like it. A lot."

Jensen smiled. "Then do it, baby."

Misha let out a noise that sounded like he was trying to cover an amused one with an annoyed one. His fingers danced along Jensen's throat again.

"But what if I...what if I do it wrong? What if I damage something? Or do it too long and your heart stops?"

"Misha, you haven't even come close to that. And it's only the second time we've done it, so you can only get better."

"Or I'll get over confident and keep pushing the envelope and then—" Misha cut off and then

dislodged Jensen from his comfortable spot as he suddenly sat up. He propped himself on one

elbow and looked down at him. "Jensen. I wouldn't be able to live with myself if I hurt you."

Jensen looked up at his worried eyes and scared expression. He reached a hand up and cupped

his face, stroking his cheekbone with his thumb.

"Misha, my throat is fine." He gave him a long, solemn look. Then he smirked. "My ass on the other hand feels like I sat on the business end of a baseball bat."

Misha laughed, and then scowled and brushed his arm aside. "Don't make me laugh when I'm

trying to show serious concern for your wellbeing."

"Okay. Then we need a topic that you don't enjoy. Suggestions?"

"Red Sox baseball stats."

"I don't know any."

"Fatalism."

"I took Media Studies to fill my philosophy requirement."

"Okay then, you pick a topic."

Misha placed his hand over Jensen's heart and pressed his fingers against his sternum. Jensen

covered his hand with his own, and then moved it to circle his wrist. Just in case his suggestion

made Misha bolt, he'd be able to keep a hold on him and make him stay.

"Why did you get divorced?"

Misha didn't try to bolt, but he did make an abortive movement to roll his eyes.

"Picked a winner, didn't you?" he said with a humorless laugh.

"Never mind. It's none of my business. So. Fatalism. Guess the Red Sox breaking the Babe's

curse shot that theory to shit. Or did it support it?" Jensen was confused; he really hadn't taken any philosophy courses in college.

Misha smiled fondly at him and reached out a hand. He stopped just short of combing his fingers through Jensen's hair. He pulled his hand back and Jensen closed his eyes, cursing himself for

ruining their night. Then to his surprise Misha tucked himself against his side and put his

forehead to the bolt of Jensen's jaw.

"It's probably easier to understand why we divorced if you know why we got

married. Andrea

and I dated all through middle and high school, and decided to take a break in college."

"Yes. Your experimental phase."

"Shut-up. It was one guy. And then I dated Mary Ann for two years, but we didn't really have

much in common. Andrea and I got back together senior year and stayed together because we

were both doing five year programs to get our Masters when we graduated. I got an MBA and

she got one in Education."

"You have an MBA?"

"Yeah."

"What were you going to do with it?"

Misha shrugged. "Start a non-profit think tank in DC."

"No shit."

"Yeah."

"But, you figured out you hated politics."

"But I figured out I hated politics. And since I had no clue what to do with myself, I moved back

to Elton with Andrea. And we moved in together. She got a job teaching at the high school. I

got a job with the police. And we went on like that for several years. And

people would ask us,

'When are you going to get married?' And then they started asking us, 'When are you going to get married?' So, we got married.

"We were together for nine years after college, married for five. And we were never on the

same page about where our lives were going. She wanted kids, but I thought we were too

young. She didn't like that I constantly traveled to aid in disaster relief, and I didn't like that she hosted an endless number of those parties where you help a representative sell kitchen supplies

or candles or jewelry or whatever." Misha growled softly at the memory.

"A little bitter?" Jensen asked.

"We had a cookie press, a citrus press, a garlic press. I think one press was specifically for key limes."

Jensen smiled only because he knew Misha couldn't see it.

"And don't even get me started on the candles. I can't even pass a Yankee Candle in a mall without getting flashbacks of walking through the rooms of our house from pine needles to fresh

linen to berry delight. Ugh."

Jensen repressed a laugh and turned his head a little to press his lips into Misha's hair.

"To distract her from the constant product parties, I suggested we think about having kids. She

said she wasn't ready anymore. She was thinking about going back to school to get her

doctorate. I encouraged her. She got accepted to UC Berkley. We discussed moving out there.

And we decided it would be best for her to move out there first so as not to delay her starting her

program while I stayed here to get our affairs settled, sell the house. After a year, I hadn't

moved, and she hadn't asked me what was keeping me. Six months later the divorce was

finalized.

"No one cheated, no one grew to hate or resent the other. I don't think we even fell out of love. I think we realized that—we were never in love. Not really. We were just comfortable with each

other. So, that was that."

Jensen angled his head so he could lean his cheek against the top of Misha's head. He placed a

hand on Misha's arm where it rested across his stomach. He allowed the story to sink in for a

few moments, but then he couldn't help but ask his next question.

"So, I understand you not having sex while you were separated and then not until the divorce

was finalized. But it's been three years since the divorce. How have you not—hooked up with

anybody? Am I just oversexed? I mean, I get that not everyone has the same sex drive, but three

years? Technically four and a half?"

Misha sat up and threw a leg over Jensen's body. He settled in his lap and Jensen splayed his

hands over Misha's hips.

"Are you oversexed, Jensen? You go back and forth on your own history you know. You're a

slut, you're not really a slut. What are you?"

"Well, let's just say prior to coming up here I was in the middle of a six month dry spell—and

that was by far the longest I'd ever gone without sex since I was...oh, fifteen I guess."

Misha raised an eyebrow. "Maybe we should find some of those poly-whatever condoms after

all."

Jensen slapped his hip and he hissed his displeasure, but stayed right where he was.

"I'm not that bad. I've slept with...definitely less than twenty people. Less than one a year."

"Jesus, Jensen."

"Well! I never got close with anyone and after a while people want commitments. And I always

wore condoms with every single one of them every single time. So. Plus, I get tested annually at

my physicals. I've never even had a case of the clap."

"Congratulations," Misha said dryly.

"And don't change the subject. How did you not have sex for four years?"

"I knew everyone in town. And they all knew me. It made dating awkward. It made random

hookups impossible. I wasn't about to drive to another town to pick up somebody in a sleazy

bar."

"So that's it?"

Misha shrugged. "That's it."

"Aw, come on, I'm sure you touched yourself, right?"

Jensen gave him an obnoxious grin and quirked an eyebrow. Misha stared him down, but there

seemed to be a little color in cheeks.

"Of course. Most people do."

"How'd you do it?"

"What?"

"Show me, Mish. Let me see how you touch yourself."

"N-no!" Misha was definitely blushing now.

"Come on, baby." Jensen ran his hands up and down Misha's thighs. "Do it...for me?"

"I don't think I could. It hasn't been that long since we finished and I'm getting on in years."

Jensen used his left hand to circle Misha's cock in a weak grip. He gave it a few pulls and



Misha bit his lip and watched. Jensen slid his thumb along the underside of the head and

Misha's hips rocked forward a little. Jensen let his fingers play lightly along the length in a

teasing run up and down, up and down, up and...

"Mmn, fuck," Misha gasped, reaching down to grasp his dick firmly in his right hand.

Jensen let his hand fall away and watched as Misha worked himself slowly into an erection. By

the time he was fully hard Jensen's own dick had sprung to life and was pressing up against

Misha's ass. Misha rocked back and forth on it, doing his best to suppress his moans and grunts

and only succeeded in making them come out as desperate whimpers.

"Oh, fuck yes, baby," Jensen murmured. "You look so hot, Mish. Show me how you like it."

"Nn, stop taking."

"Why? You don't like it?"

Misha rocked faster in Jensen's lap and looked away. "Didn't say that," he muttered under his breath.

Jensen laughed and used his grip on Misha's hips to pull him down harder on each downward

movement.

"You know, I've noticed something about you, Misha."

"And what's that? Oh, yeah...there...harder, babe..."

Jensen swallowed thickly and tried to collect his thoughts. "You always complain about the

things you like the most."

"I do not."

"You do—shitshitshit, Misha, Misha!"

Misha leaned forward and planted his hands on Jensen's shoulders. He kept up the movement of

his hips, now sliding their achingly hard and wet cocks together, their balls dragging and

catching together, intensifying the throb of pleasure in their connected groins.

"Fuck me, why does this feel so good?" Misha moaned brokenly. His swirled his hips down

hard and Jensen's whole body shuddered with a violent frisson.

"C-cause it's sex?" Jensen hazarded to guess.

"No. I mean this," Misha ground their cocks together and they both groaned deep in the back of their throats. "Why does another man's—his—um—"

"Cock? Dick. Schlong. Tube steak. Pork sword—"

"Pork sword?" Misha laughed and impossibly moved his hips faster.

"—Dong. Tally Whacker. Johnson. One Eyed Trouser Snake..."

Misha was laughing so hard he partially lost his rhythm. "Shut-up, Jensen!"

"Thought you said you liked it when I talked."

"I lied," Misha said, leaning down and kissing him.

They worked their hips together, not breaking the kiss, and could feel the other getting closer and

closer until they both moaned into each other's mouths and reveled in the slick glide of their

pulsing members through the warm come coating their bellies. Jensen stopped moving first and fucked his tongue slowly into Misha's mouth as he continued to rut against him weakly. At last

they both stilled and came apart for air. Misha put a hand in Jensen's hair and pressed his nose

just under Jensen's ear.

"Penis," Jensen said.

"What?" Misha murmured, still halfway gone.

"I forgot penis. You could say 'Why does another man's penis feel so good rubbing in between

my cute little ass cheeks?'"

Misha sat up and gave him a glare. Then he looked down at the sticky mess they had made.

"So. Shower here or..." Misha trailed off and looked at Jensen.

"What time is it?"

Misha leaned a little to the left to look at the clock on the nightstand.

"11:40."

"Is it really that late?"

"Yeah. I guess, we kind of, took our time with the foreplay this evening."

Jensen hummed at the pleasant memory. "Well, I guess I should shower back at the motel

because the last time we showered together it did not go quickly."

Misha grinned. "No, it did not. We should do that again sometime."

"I agree. Your shower is awesome."

"Just the shower?"

"Who's fishing now?" Jensen said, giving Misha's butt a firm slap.

"Hey!"

Jensen soothed the sting by massaging his hand over it. "Although, tomorrow is Saturday. No

one is expecting me first thing in the morning. You could drop me off later."

Misha raised an eyebrow at him. "Are you asking to spend the night?"

Jensen had an internal *oh shit* moment. Would Misha take that the wrong way and freak out?

Would he take it the right way and realize that Jensen wasn't just talking about staying to have

more sex but wanting to curl up next to him in bed and actually sleep?

"Maybe you should stay," Misha said hesitantly. "I need to stay awake tonight anyway since I go back to overnight shifts starting tomorrow night."

"What?" Jensen whined. "Are you on overnights all next week too?"

"Afraid so."

"Fuck my life."

"Mine too."

Jensen tilted his head on the mattress and sighed softly. Then he lifted an arm and wrapped his

hand as far as he could around Misha's bicep and stroked his thumb over the mostly relaxed

bulge of muscle.

"So, you're saying you need me to keep you awake tonight?"

Misha chuckled and rolled off the bed. As soon as his feet hit the floor, Bunny began whining

and scratching at the door.

"Oh, good Lord," Jensen groaned. "That mutt is so codependent."

"Abandonment issues," Misha said from the bathroom. "She and her litter mates were

abandoned by their mother in a rundown house in a neighborhood just outside Miami."

"What were you doing there?"

"Staging site for the relief effort heading into Haiti. It was in 2010 after the earthquake. I found the puppies and took them to a shelter. And when I returned from my tour in Haiti I took one

home with me."

Misha walked back into the room, stomach a little shiny from cleaning it off. He carried a damp

washcloth and used it to wipe Jensen down.

"You're, like, some sort of do-gooder humanitarian save the world too good to be real kind of

person, aren't you?"

"Hardly," Misha said with a smile and gave Jensen's cock a more thorough cleaning than it

needed.

Jensen hissed as his flesh protested the stimulation, but there was also the undercurrent of lust

sparkling underneath.

"So, am I going back to the motel after all?" Jensen asked as Misha walked over to the bedroom door.

"You should," he said.

"That's not an answer."

"I know," Misha replied and opened the door. He walked back to the bathroom with the

washcloth and Bunny bounded into the room. She didn't even go after Misha but made straight

for the bed, jumping up on the rumpled sheets and lying beside Jensen. She placed her chin on

his stomach, wagged her tail, and stared at him with brown, glass bead eyes. Jensen made a face

and raised his arm to prevent her from suddenly lunging forward to his face. But she didn't

move, other than her shifting tail.

"You don't like dogs, do you?" Misha said as he sat on the bed beside Jensen and scratched

Bunny behind the ears.

"It's not that I don't like them. I mean, I grew up with dogs. Sort of. My mom had Yorkies. We

always had at least two, for a few years we had four. But they're not really dogs. They're like

overgrown hamsters. Or guinea pigs. My friend actually had a guinea pig that was bigger than

one of our dogs. Her name was Princess and she was three and a half pounds."

Misha leaned down to kiss Jensen's cheek. "So, why don't you like Bunny?"

"Who said I didn't like Bunny?"

Bunny raised her head and wiggled closer when he said her name. Jensen cringed.

"Yeah, no one said anything. I just figured it out."

"Well! She's hasn't been the friendliest of dogs, Misha. First time we met she growled at me.

Every time I kiss you she tries to go for my throat. Though I notice she doesn't mind when *you*

kiss *me*."

"That's because I'm the alpha," Misha growled playfully as he leaned down and kissed Jensen's

lips, flicking his tongue inside his mouth with teasing licks. Jensen hummed and grabbed a

fistful of Misha's hair to pull him closer. Bunny barked in alarm and Jensen let him go.

"Seriously?" he asked in exasperation.

Misha let out a small laugh and then licked Jensen's lips. He pulled back when Jensen tried to

kiss him and flicked his tongue out again. The next time Jensen met his tongue with his. They let

their tongues play together, barely coming close enough for their lips to touch. Jensen dared to

put his hand on Misha's shoulder. The next time their tongues came together, they were joined by

a third.

Misha and Jensen pulled apart spluttering and grumbling and wiping their tongues with their

fingers.

"Misha!" Jensen yelled.

Misha just laughed. "What do you want me to do? She felt left out."

"I'm about to shut her outside that door and make her feel really left out."

Misha laughed some more and rubbed Bunny's head, letting her lick his face.

"Okay, I'm done tonight," Jensen said. "I'm not going to kiss you with dog slobber all over—"

Jensen cut off as his cell phone started vibrating and ringing. He struggled out from between

Bunny and Misha and rolled off the bed cursing harshly. He searched on the



floor until he found

his pants and fought to disentangle the phone and holster from the fabric.

"What's the matter?" Misha asked.

"Why else do you think I'd be getting a call this late on a Friday night?  
There's another fucking

body. I can't—!" Jensen looked up and met Misha's clear blue eyes. He took a  
modicum of

calm from them. He got the phone free and answered it.

"Jensen, this is Ty," the police chief said in his slight drawl. He didn't sound  
angry or upset. But there was no way this was good news, right?

"Hello, Ty. What's happened?"

"We've got a lead."

Jensen clenched the phone tightly in his hand. He saw Misha stiffen at his  
reaction, clearly

expecting the worst.

"What kind of lead?"

"We had someone come into the station about fifteen minutes ago. He has a  
note card with an

angel name written on it. It looks legit, Jensen. I think we've identified a  
victim before he's

been taken."

"Is he still at the station?"

"Of course. Get Jared and get your asses over here now."

"I'm on my way."

"Good. I'll see you in ten."

"Oh, um, it might be a little longer than that."

Jensen made a face and hoped Ty wouldn't ask why.

"Okay. Just get here as fast as you can."

"Will do."

Jensen hung up and began searching for his underwear.

"What happened?" Misha asked anxiously.

"Baby, I want to tell you, but..."

"I know. Just. Is it another body?"

"No." Jensen pulled his underwear up and then stepped close to Misha and took his face in his hands. "Not a body. A fucking break in the case." He kissed Misha passionately and Bunny

stood up and barked. Jensen ignored her and kissed Misha until they were both slightly out of

breath.

"And I'm sorry I can't stay tonight, but I've gotta go."

"Yeah. Yeah. Of course. I'll get dressed and drive you to the motel."

Jensen smiled and brushed his thumb over Misha's lips. "You don't *have* to get dressed."

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Jared pulled the door open to the police station, but didn't slow down his

forward momentum to

allow it the space to open. He bumped into it and Jensen crashed into him. He grunted when the

edge of the door jammed into his chest.

"Jared!"

Jared tossed him a disgusted look over his shoulder. "You're the one who's right on my ass.

Back up."

"Just get the door open."

They struggled with the door and then put themselves back in order in the lobby before walking

into reception. Katie was at the desk and her hair was now fully chestnut in color.

"Ty told me to tell you they have him in interview room one," Katie said as soon as she saw

them.

"Where is that again?" Jared asked.

"On the left side of the building. Down the hall past the stairs to the basement. It has a big sign on it."

"Thank you, Katie," Jensen said. "Have they already started interviewing him?"

"I'm sorry, I don't know."

"That's alright." He gave her a tight smile and started through the bullpen toward the interview rooms. "They better not have asked anything past the

basics," Jensen grumbled quietly.

"Well, he has been here for a while. It would be odd if they just stared at him the whole time."

"It hasn't been that long."

"Longer than it would have been if you'd been at the motel."

Jensen gave him a glare. "Just because Kim's apartment is a full five miles closer than Misha's

house doesn't give you any high ground here, buddy."

Jared smiled and nudged his shoulder into Jensen's. Jensen gave him a quick smile back, but

they quickly schooled their features and Jensen gave a sharp rap of his knuckles on the door of

interview room one and opened it without waiting for an invitation.

Inside Ty was sitting on one side of a simple, cheaply made table in a hard wooden chair. A man

in his late twenties sat on the other side. He was lanky and probably at least as tall as Jensen

with a dark fringe of hair falling into his eyes and very light colored hazel eyes. He was quite

pale, but Jared couldn't tell if that was his natural complexion or if the circumstances had

drained him.

"Thank you for coming in so late, agents," Ty said standing up. "This is Brendan Foley. Mr.

Foley this is Special Agent Jensen Ackles, and Special Agent Jared Padalecki. Will you please

share with them what you told us about receiving the card and answer any of their questions."

Foley stood up to shake their hands and Jensen sat in Ty's vacated chair while Jared took the one

next to him across from Foley. Ty took his leave and said he would tell Gen where to go when

she arrived. They turned their attention to Foley and he leaned tiredly against the table.

"I'm sorry," he said. "I just got off a double shift and closed my coffee shop. I own it, The Daily Grind on Latimer?"

Jensen and Jared stared politely. They hadn't ventured much farther than Nell's.

"Anyway. I lost one of my managers when she went to college and I haven't found a replacement

yet so I've been picking up a lot of the slack. I would be willing to come in tomorrow, or today I

guess, to answer your questions. I'm just really out of it right now, you know?"

Jensen let out a short, sharp laugh. "Come back? As in, go home? I don't recommend that. I

think you need to remain in protective custody."

Foley stared. And then blinked. He looked back and forth between the two agents.

"For how long?"

"The foreseeable future."

Foley opened his mouth to protest, but Jared interrupted, laying a calming hand on the table.

"Before we discuss any of that, can you please tell us when and where you received or found the

note card?"

Brendan looked like he was about to stay on the subject of the future custody of his person, but

then let out a short huff of air and sat back in his chair.

"I'm not sure exactly when it arrived. I guess sometime between Tuesday and tonight. I had been

spending the last few days at my—at a friend's house because it's closer to the shop and I'm

working so many hours. I went home tonight and was sorting through the mail and found it mixed

in with all the other junk mail and bills.

"Any envelope?" Jared asked while Jensen asked, "Is it a locked mailbox?"

Brendan looked between them again. "No and no. Just the card. I have a mail slot on my door."

"Are there security cameras in your building?" Jensen asked.

"It's a row of townhouses actually, so, no I don't think so."

"We'll check anyway. Are your neighbors familiar with you and your frequent visitors? Do you

think they would notice if a stranger was hanging around?"

Brendan shrugged his shoulders. “Probably not. I only know the name of one of my neighbors.

And we have a shared parking lot with the townhomes across the street. I wouldn’t be able to

tell if one person walking around belonged there or not. I mean, no one even looks up anymore.

Cell phones.”

Jensen grunted softly and wrote something down on the notepad Ty had left behind. Jared looked

Brendan over. He didn’t seem terribly concerned with possibly being the next victim of a serial

killer.

“Brendan,” Jared said, “can you tell me if anything lately has seemed strange or unusual? Does

something stick out in your mind?”

Brendan’s eyes looked up as he thought, but he shook his head pretty quickly. “No. I mean. It’s

all been life as usual. I’m really busy, but it’s all been normal. The only thing that wasn’t was

this card in the mail. I didn’t even know it was something to do with the Angel Slayer. My—

friend is the one who heard about it on the news and insisted I come down to the station.”

“Your friend is a smart man,” Jensen said.

Brendan didn’t seem impressed.

“So, nothing stands out at all? Not even having just a moment of, ‘Huh, that’s odd.’ Nothing like

that?”

“No, not really.” Brendan cocked his head. “Well, actually, the other day I did think it was odd that Gilbert Hannigan was in my coffee shop.”

“Why was that odd?”

Brendan hesitated and then said, “Because he hates fags.” He sat back in his chair with a defiant

expression. He looked like he was waiting for Jared or Jensen to make some sort of negative

reaction or comment.

“Have you had an altercation with him before?” Jared asked.

“An altercation? No, not exactly. Last year he was a regular customer. And he would talk to me

sometimes at the register. Then one morning he saw me kissing my boyfriend goodbye and he

slammed his coffee down and said he wasn’t going to help me support my immoral, unnatural

lifestyle. And he never came back. Until last week he came in. I didn’t say anything to him and

I sent another barista to help him at the register. I thought it was strange he came back after that

speech, but the only Starbucks in town closed a couple months back. I just figured he was

desperate. And his need for coffee outweighed his disgust for me.”

“And you served him?” Jensen asked.

“Money is fickle. Its opinions and views change depending on who’s holding it.”

Jared let out a small laugh. “I like that. That’s true.”

Brendan gave him a small smile. Then he leaned forward on the table, looking at them both

intently.

“So, seriously, what’s up with this? Is this card real? Or just a hoax? And what exactly do you

mean by ‘protective custody.’”

“Brendan,” Jensen started, “this isn't a criticism, but you seem to not be up to date on the latest

news. Are you aware of what the Angel Slayer does?”

“No, not the particulars, but I figure being dead is bad enough. I mean, I’m just asking if you

think the card is legit. Why would he pick me?”

Jared and Jensen exchanged looks. Jared cleared his throat and answered because he was pretty

certain Jensen would tell him the truth.

“Honestly, the logic that happens in a serial killer’s brain is often times inscrutable to even

psychiatrists who specialize in psychopathy. It’s all about finding some small detail and twisting

it to fit their needs. Sometimes looks play a role in it, but all the victims so far

have had all

kinds of hair and eye colors, ethnicities, body types. He doesn't discriminate based on gender."

"Equal opportunity killer, then."

"It seems like. That's why we've been—" Jared paused. He didn't want to reveal to a civilian that they were struggling with the case. "—unsure of who might fit his target profile because he

doesn't have one. When we discovered that he was warning his victims in advance, we knew

this would be the opportunity we needed to get him. He's very dogged. He will be determined

to—come after you if he's set his sights on you. And if you're under our protection, he won't be

able to get to you. But that won't prevent him from trying and that's how we'll get him."

Brendan sat up straight. "So, what, I'm bait?"

"No," Jensen stepped in quickly. "Of course not. You're a target. And we want to protect you."

Brendan fidgeted. "I get that. But, I mean, are you serious? Do you really think this is real?"

"We haven't seen the card for ourselves yet," Jared said, "but the preliminary analysis is that it

is very similar to the others. We are performing an analysis on the handwriting and paper and

the ink now to determine if it matches the others."

Jensen added, “I know it feels surreal or unbelievable to hear that a serial killer is targeting you,

but we take the threat seriously enough that we want to put a protective detail on you. Or even

keep you here.”

“At the station? No way! I’m not sleeping in a jail cell. And I’ve got a business to run.”

“You wouldn’t be in a jail cell. There are beds in the on call room and there’s a shower and

gym here. And we will send a police detail with you to work, and they will bring you here at

night.”

Brendan chewed on his lip. “I don’t know. And I’d have to get some things from home.”

“Of course you can get some personal items,” said Jared.

Brendan sighed. “Alright. And I know this is a stupid question, but, for how long?”

Jared and Jensen exchanged looks again. Then Jensen said, “Until we catch him.”

“Awesome. So, any time from tomorrow to a decade from now.”

“He’s not getting away,” Jensen said firmly. “He doesn’t think it, but we are closing in on him.

He’s arrogant. He thinks he can give the police a warning and still manage to get his kill in.

You’ll be safe with us and he’ll get caught.”

Brendan was looking a little more scared now, but his eyes were latched onto Jensen's face like

he was his own personal savior. Figures he would pick Jensen. Jared tried to hide his smile at

his own ridiculousness. Since high school he had been obsessed with whether or not gay men

found him attractive. He knew there had to be some sort of term for this kind of bizarre

insecurity. It probably stemmed from when his best friend told him he was gay in the ninth grade

and then quickly followed that up with, "Don't worry, I'm not attracted to you." Jared wondered

if he'd be able to take back his decline on the RSVP he'd sent in response to his wedding invitation...if they caught the Angel Slayer this weekend, they might be home by next week. The

wedding was on...the 16th?

"Jared."

Jared looked up and saw that Jensen and Brendan were standing by the open interview room

door. Jensen was giving him a look that said, *Are you seriously spacing out right now?* He got to his feet.

"Yes," he said trying to sound like he knew exactly what he was agreeing to. He also noticed

Russ was standing just out in the hall.

"Hi, Russ."

“Agent Padalecki.”

Jared winced internally. He should have called him Detective Little.

“So, you’re okay with the swing shift?” Jensen asked.

“Yes.”

Jared nodded his head and he could see laughter in Jensen’s eyes. Clearly he wasn’t buying

Jared’s bullshit.

“All right then. Brendan, Detective Little will you escort you to the on call room and get you set

up there. And then I’ll drive you to your home to pack an overnight bag. That way you can go

home and get some sleep tonight, Russ.”

“Thanks, Jensen.” Russ smiled at him and then turned to Brendan, indicating a direction for him

to walk with his hand. Jared wondered why Jensen and Russ could call each by their first names

in front of the...witness? Victim? Jensen stepped back into the room and shut the door. He

smiled at Jared.

“You have no clue what is going on, do you?”

“No. Well, yes. I’m guessing we all signed up for round the clock babysitting duty on Brendan

and I got the swing shift?”

Jensen laughed and walked to retrieve his notepad from the table. “What were you thinking about?”

“Gay weddings.”

Jensen opened his mouth, closed it. And then said, “You know what? I’m not going to ask.”

“So are you on the overnight if Russ is going home?”

“Yeah.”

“I can take that one if you want.”

“No I’m cool with it.”

“Yeah, but, I thought you and Misha liked ‘having dinner’ together.”

Jensen glanced around the room. It was an interview room, so there was no two way mirror, but

there could be recording equipment. It shouldn’t be on, but he really needed to learn not to open

his big mouth when they were in the police station.

“We *do* eat dinner,” Jensen said. “And he’s switching to the nightshift starting tomorrow

anyway.”

Jared grinned. “*Really.*”

Jensen realized his slip and blushed slightly. “Shut-up, Jay.”

“Man, you’ve got it bad, don’t you?”

Jensen sat down heavily in a chair. He gnawed on his lower lip and kind of nodded.

Jared sobered a little. Oh. He really did have it bad. "What are you going to do when this is

over? It could be any day now."

Jensen shrugged. Then he looked at his notepad. "Anyway, at least we have a good guess as to

why Brendan was picked. My assumption is his crime will be sodomy or the like."

"Would be, Jensen. It won't happen. We've got him."

Jensen nodded. "You're right, I'm sorry. Thank you for correcting me. Although...something is

bothering me. Hannigan, Hannigan...why do I know that name?"

"Um...oh! Gilbert Hannigan. He's the one who found Vanderpool's body. And was having an

affair with her."

"Two victim connections," Jensen said, his eyes flashing back and forth as he thought. "That can't be a coincidence."

"Well, there are only two places to get coffee to go in this town. Half the population has been to Brendan's shop."

"Yeah, but how many of those openly spoke against the proprietor?"

Jared strummed his fingers once on the table in thought. "That's true. But Hannigan had an alibi for Vanderpool."

"So? We think there's two killers, don't we?"

Jared conceded the point with a bob of his head. "Yes, but as arrogant and brazen as these two

are, would they draw that kind of attention to a connection with a victim?"

"Probably not. Not the leader anyway. But the follower, he could be an idiot."

"Would the Angel Slayer be willing to work with an idiot?"

Jensen shrugged a shoulder. "Stupid people are easier to control."

Jared pretended to be examining a spot on the floor as he said, "Is that why Misha leads you

around by the nose?"

"You shut your mouth, Padalecki, or I will tell Kim how much you love a Brazilian on a

woman."

"Jensen!"

"Shit. What are we doing sitting here? We need to look at the card and get the name so we can

look up when to expect the kill."

"Should be a day and no hour."

"Think so?"

Jared shrugged. "It has consistently switched back and forth for all the victims. Always more

precise with the females, less with the males."

"Good point. But do you think he also kidnaps on the day indicated on the card, or only kills

them on the day.”

“I think the latter. None of the victims were ever missing for over a week. So...only the kill

happened on the right day.”

“That’s true. It does leave a large window for the snatching to occur though.”

“Well, we’ve got Brendan safe here with us, so unless he can figure out how to access this

building without drawing suspicion—he’s got no choice but to make a dumb move and get

caught.”

“Unless he waits us out. We can’t keep Brendan under twenty-four hour surveillance forever.”

“True.”

Jensen made a disgusted face. “I hate this fucker. Alright, never mind that for now. Let’s go see this angel name.”

Sunday, November 10, 2013

Jensen stood looking outwardly patient even though internally he was just about done stapling

Brendan's Foley's lips together. He understood the kid was probably transferring his fear of

being targeted by the Angel Slayer (which he was now aware that he definitely was and had a

better idea of what the sadist did to his victims) into anxiety for his shop, but if Jensen had to

hear one more time how sensitive the espresso machine was and how Brendan was the only

person who could properly start it up, he was certain he would blow a fuse.

"Morning!" Russ chirped as he popped his head in the on call room door, effectively getting

Brendan to stop talking—temporarily.

Jensen had never been so relieved to see someone in his life. Russ ducked away and Jensen

faced Brendan and patted him on the shoulder, encouraging his lapse into silence.

"Detective Little is here now. He'll make arrangements for you to get a police escort to your

shop if he feels it's safe. There are a lot of factors to consider though. Officer availability, the

layout of the building—"

"I know, you told me," Brendan griped. "But—"

"Detective Little will take care of you," Jensen cut him off with another pat to his shoulder. He walked out of the on call room before Brendan could tell him again how important it was for an

owner to manage his business personally.

He found Russ in the kitchenette smearing cream cheese onto a bagel. The detective gave Jensen

a displeased look as he came in the room.

"Are you really considering letting him out of here?"

"Of course not," Jensen replied. "But I figured I would let you play bad cop."

He grinned at him and Russ threw a wadded up napkin at him.

"Screw you, Ackles."

"Some other time, Little. I'm whipped."

Russ quirked an eyebrow. "If you're into that sort of thing."

He gave him a mild smile that made Jensen feel unease as Russ' even stare stayed on him. For

some reason he suddenly felt naked, exposed. He nodded at Russ and nearly ran into the

doorjamb as he exited the room. He crossed the bullpen and wondered if Misha was right about Russ having a thing for him. But it hadn't felt like it was sexual interest. Not exactly.

He immediately forgot the feeling as he noticed the door to the FBI office was open. Jared he

knew was at the motel getting a few more hours of sleep before he came in around noon. He

wondered if Gen had come in or maybe if he'd left the door unlocked. But even if he had, he

knew he had shut the door the last time he'd left the room.

Inside he found Misha standing in front of the third whiteboard. It contained a picture of

Brendan Foley with the words, "Chariel: Monday" written above it. Underneath the picture they had written the word potato and a question mark, which was their code for homosexuality since

potato was the first word Jared had thought of for some reason. But Misha

wasn't looking at

that. He was reading the mini profile of the Angel Slayer they had compiled at the other end of

the board.

"Misha," Jensen said softly, "you shouldn't be in here."

Misha didn't react. Either he had heard Jensen come in or he was so focused on the red colored

words that he couldn't be bothered.

"This is interesting," Misha said. "White male, thirties, Elton native, college educated, working knowledge of police procedures and basic knowledge of forensics, arrogance, contempt of

general populace, easily irritated but extreme control of outward expressions and actions, skill

in woodworking, job that explains out of town trips or prolonged absences, self-righteous,

intelligent, possible OCD tendencies." Misha turned to look at Jensen. "That sounds a lot like me."

"It sounds like ninety-five percent of all serial killers. And even I fit a lot of those

characteristics. Misha, you shouldn't be in here."

"I know. I was looking for you and the door was open. I saw it and couldn't help myself."

Jensen frowned at him. There really was no harm done reading the profile: it was almost

useless and the two killer theory was still floating in the ether and not written

down anywhere

yet. But all the other officers knew they were not permitted into FBI space unless they were

expressly invited inside. And certainly not someone who was as close to the case as Misha

was.

Misha took in Jensen's frown and apologized. "It's hard to do nothing, Jensen. It's my sister.

And I'm a police officer. I hate sitting back and doing nothing."

Jensen relaxed his features. "I know." He reached out and gave his hand a brief squeeze before dropping it. "But, you need to get."

Misha gave him a small smile. "Consider me gone." As they walked out of the office he asked,

"You're off duty now, right?"

"Yes, but I was going to stay for a few more hours and work on something. Why?"

"Oh. I was just wondering if you wanted to get breakfast."

"I thought breakfast was the one meal you refused to cook."

"Oh, I won't. I was going over to Nell's."

"Ah, I see. You sure know how to tempt a man, Officer Collins."

Misha went a little rigid and dropped his eyes to the floor.

"I was just referring to the allure of Nell's," Jensen murmured softly as he shut and locked the office door.

"I—I know," Misha stammered quietly.

"Did you?"

"Shut-up. Do you want to go or not?"

"What about Bunny?"

"I left her at home last night because I needed to do some paperwork catch up."

"I see."

"And after breakfast I can drive you back to the motel."

Jensen hesitated even though all he wanted to do was say yes. But he should stay in the office

and review the traffic camera feed taken two blocks from Foley's neighborhood. There were a

multitude of paths that didn't lead to Foley's home from that intersection, but it was possible

something would stand out and help connect two seemingly unrelated clues. Jensen gnawed on

his lip and ran his fingers over the knob of the office door. He did have to watch Brendan again

tonight, so he couldn't stay in the office all day and not get any sleep. And he could always

watch the footage tonight while Brendan slept.

Misha could see Jensen's resolve crumbling and casually threw out, "Since I left Bunny at home I

drove the Charger."

"Let's go," Jensen said.

Misha smiled and brushed past him a little closer than the space around them dictated was

necessary.

"I need to swing by my desk first. Be right back."

Jensen groaned inwardly. Misha was such a distraction. And he could not afford distractions with a case of this magnitude on the line. But he couldn't turn down a chance to spend time with

Misha. Well, he could, but he didn't want to. He knew his feelings for the officer were

approaching dangerous territory, and their constant talk about keeping things impersonal was a

joke. Jensen suspected Misha was probably holding himself back better than he, but honestly,

Jensen wasn't even trying anymore.

"God, I don't think I'll ever be able to drink an espresso again."

Jensen turned and saw Russ looking supremely annoyed as he stroked his trim beard with a

hand. He laughed at the detective's expression.

"Is he still going on about that machine?"

"When I told him he had to stay here he immediately called his employee and began walking him

step by step on how to turn the machine on. I think it boiled down to pushing the power button."

Jensen smirked. "I do not envy you having him during his waking hours."

"Ass," Russ retorted.

Jensen caught movement out of the corner of his eye and turned toward Misha as he approached

them.

"You ready?" Misha asked.

"Yeah, I have everything."

Russ was giving them a strange look. Right. Everyone thought they were still not on the best

terms. Jensen shifted his weight and awkwardly put a hand out toward Misha.

"Misha also worked the overnight shift last night, and Jared has our car, so he volunteered, very

kindly I might add, to drop me back off at the motel."

Jensen wondered if that sounded rehearsed even though it wasn't.

"Ty also hasn't relieved me of chauffeur duty yet," Misha added dryly.

Jensen chuckled. "Good thing I don't mind getting help from someone who was volun-told to

help me."

"Not that it should be like that," Russ said, giving Misha a hard look. "Jensen has earned his place here."

Misha turned to face Russ fully. "Has he?"

Russ tensed.

"I never said he hadn't. I acknowledge Agent Ackles has done a lot of work here. I'm doing my best to mend fences with him. Do you have a problem with that?"

Jensen watched as Russ and Misha stared each other down. He felt a little like...he was being

fought over? Maybe Misha was even farther away from the impersonal fuck buddy zone than he

was.

"Well," Jensen said, breaking up the staring match, "part of that fence mending involves breakfast and I'm starving. Russ, good luck with Brendan. Misha, are we walking or driving to Nell's?"

Misha looked away from Russ. "Drive. I get the blue plate special when I get breakfast there

and walking is generally not an option afterwards."

Jensen saw Russ force a smile. "That's true. It is a dangerous amount of food."

Misha nodded back, acknowledging Russ' attempt to smooth things over. "It's why I can only

visit Nell's for lunch."

"What is the blue plate special?" Jensen asked. "That's not on the menu."

Russ grinned. "There's a secret menu only for those in the know."

Jensen frowned. "How does one get in the know?"

Misha patted his shoulder. "You just did. Let's go."

Jensen gave a smile and a nod to Russ and followed Misha out of the bullpen. As the officer

opened the external door of the station, he looked back over his shoulder. The blue of his

uniform made his eyes bluer by comparison. The weak autumn morning sun haloed the back of

his head and blocked all else from Jensen's vision but this beautiful, snarky, reserved, slightly

insane man.

Jensen felt a moment of pure terror—until he realized it wasn't fear he was feeling. He wasn't

afraid at all.

He was so fucked.

Jensen picked up another piece of bacon from the "meat platter" and surveyed the seven plates

piled high with food. They'd been working on one order of the blue plate special for over half

an hour now and had barely made a dent in it. Misha was using his fork to scoop up some

oatmeal and then speared some scrambled eggs. Jensen made a face as he put the combination in

his mouth.

"Don't knock it until you try it," Misha said around the food.

"I didn't say anything." Jensen took a bite of the extra crispy bacon and crunched on it. "Hey, Misha?"

"Yeah?"

"There's something I've been meaning to ask you for a while now."

Misha swallowed uncomfortably. "Yeah...?"

"What is up with that house?"

Misha tried to cover his relief with a laugh. What had he been expecting? For Jensen to declare

his love and ask for Misha's exchange of faithful vow? Not that he had any love to confess or

anything. Right? *Shit.*

"It's my parents' house. Or, was. My mother and stepfather had differing opinions on interior

design, so they claimed rooms in the house and did what they wanted. The result, as you've

seen, is a nightmare. It makes trying to sell the place nearly impossible."

"So...that's not the house you lived in with..."

"My ex-wife? No. I sold that house during the divorce and we split the money. My parents

offered to let me stay with them until I found a new place. But I could never find a place I liked.

Or maybe I was just lazy. So, I just stayed with my parents."

"No wonder you couldn't get laid for four years."

Misha smiled and threw a hash brown cube at him. "Shut it."

Jensen cut another triangle from the massive stack of pancakes on the "bread platter." He

looked at Misha before he put the bite in his mouth and said, "Do I need to ask?"

Misha inhaled and then exhaled slowly, but it wasn't exactly a sigh.

"They died in a car accident in February. Hit some black ice and went off the road. Natalia

came home for the arrangements and to get away from the stress of her divorce. That's what I

thought the casket receipt was for at first, but she ordered it several months after they were

already in the ground."

Misha ran his fingers through the condensation on his water glass. His eyes stared unseeing at

the floating ovals of ice inside it. Jensen felt a cold pressure squeezing his chest. Misha had

lost his parents and his sister in less than a year. Jensen knew he wouldn't be so well put

together if he had lost so much at once. But then he realized Misha *wasn't* holding it together

very well at all. He didn't know Misha's hours exactly, but it hadn't been hard to figure out he

was doing a lot of overtime. He was still quick to respond with bitterness and anger when

anything reminded him of the Angel Slayer. He had started having unprotected, casual sex with a

virtual stranger after over four years of celibacy and self-control. Yeah, he was a paragon of

mental health.

"I'm the one that convinced her to move back here," Misha said dully. "With our parents gone, both of us divorced, I told her we should be near each other. I got her the interview with the

school board." He took in a shaky breath. "If I hadn't...if...she would still be safe in Arizona."

Without thinking Jensen reached across the table and took Misha's hand in his.

"Hey. You can't think like that. What happened to your sister is in no way your fault."

"I know," Misha said softly.

"Do you?" he questioned, squeezing his hand.

Misha looked up and met his eyes. Then his thumb brushed across the back of Jensen's hand.

For another few moments they held each other's gaze and kept the connection between them

tangible as they turned their hands palm to palm. Then someone cleared their throat and they

blinked and snatched their hands apart. They looked up and saw Felicia standing at their table.

She had her eyes averted, a faint blush on her cheeks, and a smile tugging at her lips.

"I came to see if you needed anything, but I guess you just want the check, huh?"

"You can just put it on today's tab. Thanks, Felicia."

"No, I was treating you," Misha said.

"Misha, I'm not paying for it. The federal government is."

"So, in a way, I am paying for it since I pay taxes."

"Good point."

"I'm not!" Felicia laughed. "I never report my cash tips."

She smiled at the police officer and the FBI agent. Then she stopped smiling.

"I never said that. I'll go get you some take away boxes."

She turned and walked away. Jensen smiled as he watched her leave. She still did have nice

legs. Then he looked back at Misha.

"Think that's true?"

"I think that's hardly the worst thing she's done."

Jensen smiled. He took a moment to examine Misha's face. He was smiling too, but sorrow and

guilt still haunted his eyes. Jensen realized that that look had always been there; he just hadn't

known what it was until now. He could also tell that Misha was done being vulnerable for the day and if he tried to reinitiate their interrupted conversation he would be walking to the motel.

He searched his brain, looking for a topic of conversation that Misha wouldn't interpret as too

personal. Fortunately Felicia arrived and saved him from blurting out something stupid.

"I put it on your tab, Jensen. Here's some boxes. Take this all with you. If Nell sees food come back on blue plate special orders, she forbids anyone from ordering it again for another six

months."

"Is that true?"

Both Felicia and Misha nodded. Felicia left them and Jensen and Misha began to fill the boxes

with the leftover food. The quiet between them wasn't tense or awkward, but Jensen did finally

think of something to say.

"Hey, Mish."

"Yes, Jen."

"You said...that night we first...um...the night we picked up the books from the library in

Rochester..."

Misha closed the lid on one of the boxes and gave Jensen a smug smile. "I have a pretty strong

recollection of that night."

"Right. Um. You said that you'd known I'd wanted to...um...well. Since the moment I first laid

eyes on you here. And it was true, so I didn't refute it. But, how did you know? You saw me for

all of two seconds as you walked out the door."

Misha laughed and stacked their Styrofoam boxes together. He slid out of the

booth and

indicated for Jensen to follow him. He walked over to the part of the counter he had been

leaning on the first day Jensen and Jared had eaten at Nell's. In a corner of the diner was a

mirror that the staff used to see around the blind turn that led to the kitchen. From the counter it

showed the row of booths lining the front windows, one of which was the booth he and Jared

had been sitting in. From where he'd been leaning that day, Misha would have had a clear view

of Jensen...staring at his ass.

Jensen cleared his throat and turned to walk out the door. Misha followed, chuckling softly.

"I'm now really surprised you didn't deck me when we met in the police station," Jensen

muttered as he took the to-go boxes from Misha and opened the passenger side door of the

Charger.

Misha slid into the driver's side and replied, "Well, honestly, by that point I'd kind of forgotten it. And I also didn't want to admit to myself that the first thing I thought when I noticed you were

checking me out was, 'I wonder if he's free tonight.' So, I blocked the memory."

Jensen smiled at him. "Hot for me from day one, huh?"

Misha pulled out onto Main Street and said, "Desperate for a distraction anyway."

Jensen felt that sharp stabbing pain in his chest again. His stomach churned with nausea as the

heavy breakfast soured in it. He set the boxes of food down on the floor to get the smell away

from him. He closed his eyes and hated himself for what he'd done to Misha. Because he

couldn't respect Misha as a human being or leave the victim of a brutal crime alone, he'd given

him all the distraction he needed.

"Jesus, Jensen, I'm so sorry," Misha said quickly. "I didn't mean for that to come out the way it did. Please...don't...don't take it that way. I—you're not a distraction. You're not some way for

me to punish myself or something if that's what you're thinking. You're—the best fucking thing

that's happened to me in a long time."

Jensen turned his head slowly to look at Misha. He was gripping the wheel tightly with both

hands and his eyes were intently fixed on the road. They turned onto Pine. Jensen kept staring.

Misha glanced at him, and then did a double take.

"What?" he asked defensively.

Jensen smiled and looked away. "Nothing."

"You are going to throw that back at me at some point, aren't you?"

"Don't worry. I'll save it for a special occasion."

Misha laughed softly. "Fuck you, Ackles."

"Hey, Mish."

"Yeah."

"Let's not go to the motel right away."

"Okay."

Misha passed the turn onto King and kept driving. They drove a little ways out of town and

passed into a light wood. Then Misha made a turn onto what barely passed as a road with only

two wheel ruts indicating cars had traveled here before. Jensen winced every time he heard a

rock or stick kick up against the car, but he didn't comment. Then the path split into several paths

where the trees lined the "road" very closely. One was so bad that Jensen did break his silence to tell Misha that if he let those branches scratch the car he wouldn't blow him for a month.

Misha took the clearest path, the one straight ahead, and after another couple minutes of driving,

they arrived at the end of the woods. Misha stopped at the tree line and Jensen could see Lake

Winnepesaukee in front of them.

Misha turned off the car and cracked the window on his side. Cold air trickled in, but it wasn't unpleasant. Jensen looked out over the lake. It was dark colored and just a little ominous, but

the sun was bright so it made the surface glitter. Then he looked around the place they were

parked. It was fairly open up by the lake, but the trees were dense about a hundred yards back

from the shore where they were parked. There were several pathways leading to the area, and

trees partially shielded the ends of these paths from each other. In fact, he could just make out

the flash of sunlight on another car about three spokes away through the dense line of trees; it

was impossible to see anybody in the car though. Jensen laughed.

“Oh my God, is this the local teen ‘hang out’ spot?”

Misha strummed his fingers on the bottom of the steering wheel. “It might be.”

He laughed again. “I guess you had to learn about it when you were stuck on Buzz Kill duty

during your early years on the force?”

Misha smiled. “I knew about this place long before I joined the police.”

Jensen gasped in faux-shock. “Misha Collins, did you bring me to your teenage make out spot?”

“No,” he said in a tone that clearly meant “yes.”

Jensen smiled as he looked out at the lake again. And then he shrugged his lips, whipped off his

seatbelt, and pulled on the mechanism that got his seat to slide all the way back.

“Okay,” he said. “I can take a hint.” He spread his legs and patted his thighs, inviting Misha

over.

“What!” Misha looked at him with huge blue eyes. “Don’t be stupid, Jensen.”

“I’m not. C’mere.”

“No way.”

Jensen leaned his head back against the head rest and just stared at Misha. And then he licked

his lips.

“Fuck you, Ackles,” Misha muttered as he unbuckled his seatbelt and crawled into Jensen’s lap.

Jensen grabbed his face and kissed him immediately, not even waiting for Misha to get himself

situated. By the time he was sitting squarely and comfortably in his lap, Jensen’s tongue was

fucking the hell out of his mouth. Misha hummed and rocked his hips.

“Fuck, yes,” Misha whispered, rocking harder and sliding his hands through Jensen’s hair.

Jensen moved his hands to Misha’s back and spread his fingers over the rough cotton of his

uniform shirt. He claimed Misha’s lips again and ran one hand up the back of his neck into his

hair to hold him in place. As hot as listening to Misha swear in the throes of passion was, he wanted those lips on him, that tongue playing with his, the heat and wetness of his mouth panting

into his.

Jensen let out a noise of surprise that Misha swallowed neatly when he felt the cop's hands on

his belt. He didn't think Misha would be the one to initiate more, but apparently once he got past

his preliminary reservations he was up for anything. They continued to kiss, sloppy, lingering

smacks, as they both worked the other's belt off and got their flies open. Jensen leaned forward

and kissed and bit Misha's jaw while he was distracted with pulling their cocks out of their

underwear. Jensen groaned when he felt Misha's hand on him, trying, with some difficulty, to

circle both of their above average in size penises. Jensen helped him out by grabbing the other

side with his hand. They let out low moans and quiet gasps of appreciation as they felt their

hands working their erections in tandem—relishing the ecstasy of the counter-motion on either

side of their trapped flesh.

Jensen forced Misha's face back to him and kissed him deeply. Misha leaned into it, swiping his

thumb across their cockheads to smear the precome down their shafts. Jensen got a hold of

Misha's upper lip and sucked on it before going for the bottom lip. Misha retaliated by rubbing

Jensen's nipple through his shirts mercilessly. He kept it up until Jensen had to let go of Misha's

lips and cry uncle. Misha worked his hand on their cocks, rolled his thumb around (a little more

gently) on Jensen's nipple, and kissed him in an endless string of bites and licks that were barely

kisses at all.

"Jesus Christ, Jensen." Kiss. "I have never, mmm..." he went in for a long kiss and tongue

fuck. "Wanted anyone the way I want you."

Jensen smiled and met Misha's tongue with his in a playful duel outside their mouths. "How

about that? Number one—" They kissed greedily. "On a list of four."

"Fuck you, Ackles." Misha's hand pumped faster and Jensen's followed suit. "Where do I rank

on your list of 'less than twenty?'"

Jensen pulled him in and kissed him hungrily, again holding the back of his head with a hand so

he couldn't even think about pulling away before Jensen was satisfied. Jensen still wasn't ready

when he let him go, but they did need air. He looked Misha in the eyes and rubbed his thumb

along the glans of Misha's cock. Misha's mouth dropped open and his eyes slid partway shut.

"You're not even on the list, baby. I had to make a brand new one just for

you.”

Misha closed his mouth and opened his eyes. He looked at Jensen for a long moment, rolling

their balls together while his hand increased the pace even more.

“That was so cheesy.”

Jensen grinned. “Yeah,” he agreed.

“Stop it, Ackles. I mean it.”

“Okay.”

He pulled Misha back down for another kiss, and Misha went at him like he was desperate to

have him. And Jensen didn’t think it was because they were both close to the edge.

Their hands worked faster and Misha pulled back with a reluctant groan.

“Wait, we need to find

something. I can’t get this uniform dirty.”

“Why not?” Jensen asked indignantly and licked the underside of his chin.

“Because. I only have three—heee—fuck, baby, easy! Oh fuck, oh fuck—I’m right fucking

there!”

Jensen sat back and stared in utter amazement at the sheer beauty of Misha Collins falling apart

in front of his eyes. He did at least angle their dicks so that their bursts of come drenched his

thin dress shirt and soaked into his undershirt.

Misha groaned anew with each gentle stroke of their hands and roll of his hips. It was a good

long while before their motions stilled. Jensen raised his hand to his lips and sucked off a bit of

come from the heel of his hand. He had no idea whose it was. Misha looked down at Jensen's

shirt like he was mesmerized.

"I have no idea why seeing you covered in my jizz is such a huge fucking turn on," he muttered.

"Evolutionary hold over. You're claiming a mate."

"Hnn. I don't know about that. But, at least it is all on you."

"Yeah, you're welcome by the way. And if you have three, why can't this one get a little dirty,"

he said as he plucked at a sleeve.

"Because you already got one dirty a couple nights ago as you may or may not recall."

"Oh, yeah," Jensen mused, a smile curling his lips at the memory. "Well, at least we matched my

erotic asphyxia kink with your role play kink."

"I do *not* have a role play kink."

Jensen gave Misha a look that made him blush, so he didn't argue the point.

"Still not as weird as yours though," he muttered indignantly and buried his face in Jensen's neck.

"Careful. You'll get your uniform dirty."

Misha sat up with a pout. "Take it off then."

Jensen ran his hand through Misha's hair. "I would. But you should probably take me back to the motel. We both have to work tonight and I need to call Gen before I go to sleep. And—"

Jensen stopped talking when Misha kissed him. It wasn't heated or lustful, but pleasant and

almost friendly. Like they were long time lovers who had all the time in world for other things

and for now just wanted to enjoy the presence of each other. Jensen put his hands on Misha's

stomach to keep him from leaning too far in and brushing up against Jensen's wet shirt, but he

kissed him with the thought in mind that Misha was going to have to be the one to pull away.

Misha must have had the same idea because Jensen lost all sense of time. Their lips became

numb with the near abuse they were putting them through. And even though the kisses were slow

and easy they had gone on so long they were gasping for air. Jensen's resolve failed and he

pulled back and leaned his head against the seat. Misha chased after him and pressed their lips

together.

"Don't stop, don't stop," he panted and wrapped his arms around Jensen's neck. "Don't stop."

Jensen couldn't respond when Misha slipped his tongue in his mouth. All he could do was lean

back and take it. He was willing to be a distraction for Misha if that's what he needed. It hurt,

to be sure, but he knew Misha was a grown man who could make his own decisions. He wasn't

worried that he was taking advantage of him or using him anymore, but he did yearn to be more

than just something that allowed Misha to stop thinking about his grief filled life for an hour or

two.

Misha moaned into his mouth and whispered against his lips, "Fuck me, you feel so good."

Jensen felt like he had no strength when he gripped Misha's arm in his hand. He couldn't speak,

so he didn't try.

"I mean it," Misha gasped, "Fuck me. Right now. I want you in me."

Jensen sucked in air around Misha's lips as best he could—the man wouldn't let up at all. Jensen

felt weak and dizzy and he didn't know why but tears gathered at the corners of his eyes. Misha

took his face in his hands and kissed the teardrops away—and Jensen found that he was sobbing.

"I'm sorry," Misha said. "I'm sorry. Are you okay? What did I do?"

Jensen felt embarrassed and brutally forced his breathing back under control

and his tears to

stop. He shook his head and tried to look away from Misha, but he held him still.

"I'm sorry," Jensen said and was mortified to hear his voice thick with tears. "I'm just so sorry that you hurt this much."

Misha sat back like he'd been slapped. "I told you I'm not using you like that."

Jensen stared at his collar and wouldn't meet his eyes. "We both know that's not entirely true."

Misha let his hands drop to his lap. He put his limp penis back into his pants and then clinically

did the same for Jensen before sliding back into the driver's seat. They sat in silence for a long time. The cold November air filled the car and chilled them both, but still they sat. At last,

Misha rolled up the window and started the car. He pulled forward to turn around and then

drove back down the path.

The drive back to the motel was only fifteen minutes, but it was one of the worst experiences of

Jensen's life. He knew this was the end of everything. It was for the best that it was because he

had reached the point where the thought had crossed his mind about asking Gen if working at the

Portsmouth RA was really so bad. Misha pulled into the motel parking lot and parked on the

side of the building closest to Jensen's room, but that was also not visible

from the main road.

He turned off the car, so Jensen wasn't sure if he should get out or not. Clearly Misha wasn't

intending on just driving away as soon as he dropped him off. But, Jensen didn't have anything

to say that would help the situation, so he stayed quiet.

"Jensen. You're not wrong. I do use you to make the world go away for a little while. And

that's not fair to you. But, you should know that *you* can make me forget everything. You're not just a warm body. You're fucking *you*, okay?"

Jensen glanced at Misha. He was twisting his hands on the steering wheel and staring out the

windshield. Then he whipped his head around and Jensen started slightly as they were forced to

make eye contact.

"And I'm so sorry, Jensen, but I'm going to be selfish. And I'm going to ask you to—not walk

away from me right now. I need you. And the circumstances suck. But. I can't think beyond

Bunny's next walk right now. I know I'm barely hanging onto my sanity by a thread here, but

you're like—a rope—that I can grab onto and if I really need it, tie it around my waist—and if

you don't stop me from making one more ridiculous analogy—"

Jensen was surprised into a laugh and placed his fingers on Misha's lips to

stop whatever he was

going to say next. Then he turned his hand and curled his fingers around his jaw so he could

brush his thumb over Misha's very chapped lips.

"I don't want to stop either, but I do have to ask one thing of you."

Misha nodded.

"This thing can stay impersonal if you need it to, but please stop reminding me of that."

Misha's brow furrowed a little, but not like he was angry or displeased—perhaps curious. But

he nodded slowly in acquiescence. He pressed a kiss to Jensen's thumb and then raised his hand

to take Jensen's. He pulled it away from his face and into his lap where he used his other hand

to play with Jensen's fingers.

"I know it's getting late, but I meant what I said at the lake. I need you now. I need to feel

connected to someone—no, not someone, *you*. So, please, I'm begging you: invite me inside,

take me to your bed, and—"

He cut off abruptly and focused on Jensen's hand. Jensen figured he had not finished the thought because while attempting to prove to someone that they were more than just a warm body telling

them "fuck me" might be a little crass. Though there was a masochistic part of Jensen's brain that wondered if he'd stopped himself from saying, "make

love to me."

"Come inside, Misha. It's about time Jared woke up anyway."

Misha let out a bark of laughter. And then he looked up and saw the actual glee in Jensen's eyes

at the thought of making Jared wake up yet again with his "O-shout" as Jared called it. He

laughed again for real and Jensen felt happy knowing he'd managed to brighten Misha's day with

something other than sex. Well, sort of.

"I would love to rattle the headboard with you and make Jared rue the day he ever complained

about all the pretty noises you make."

"Oh, Jesus," Jensen muttered and pulled his hand away from Misha as he opened the car door

and stepped out. He reached back inside and picked up the Styrofoam containers that had

miraculously survived their impromptu sex romp with only one corner getting crushed in a bit.

"I'm keeping all the food," Jensen announced as he rounded the corner of the building to walk

toward his room door.

"Where are you going to keep it? You don't have a mini fridge in there, do you?"

"No. But it'll keep until this afternoon when I'll be ready to eat again. Heck, I'll probably be

hungry again after I'm through with you."

"Mm, that sounds promising."

Jensen looked over his shoulder to smile at him as he unlocked the door to his motel room.

Misha walked inside and Jensen looked out at the street when he heard a squeal of tires. A blur

of silver flashed at the intersection before disappearing behind a building that sat closer to the

road. He might have wondered about the erratic driver, but he had more pressing matters on his

mind. He shut the door behind him.

Tuesday, November 12, 2013

Jared walked into the station ready for another day of playing cards with Brendan and was

immediately concerned when he heard raised voices coming from the on call room. He carefully

approached the room, getting closer to the wall so he wouldn't be visible from the door right

away. He wasn't being a coward, or an eavesdropper, he was investigating. Yeah,

investigating. He could recognize both Russ' and Gen's voices, but he couldn't understand what

they were saying since they kept talking over each other. He peeked around the door and saw

Russ practically cornered by Gen. Her eyes were bright and her face was

terrifying in its rage

—and it made her look beautiful. Jared swallowed and knew he'd never want that look directed at him. Based on what he was hearing though, the argument didn't sound productive, so Jared

decided to insert himself.

“Hey, what's going on?” Jared asked as he stepped into the room. Russ and Gen were the only

two people in it. The spot Brendan had been camping out in looked suspiciously empty.

“Russ sent Brendan home,” Gen said.

“What?!”

“I did not at all, Agent Cortese!”

Gen sucked in a breath at the formal address and faced Russ. “Then what happened?”

“I'm trying to tell you. Brendan made the decision to leave. I told him no. He threatened to file

a complaint against us and was citing false imprisonment. We can't hold someone against their

will!”

“But, he still believes us, right? Why would he choose to leave our protection?” Jared asked,

utterly confused.

“Russ told him he didn't need to worry unless it was a Monday,” Gen said with an angry glare.

“I did not! And I organized an escort and a surveillance duty as soon as I could. They followed

him home. Or at least, have gone to his home and are watching the townhouse. His car is still in

the parking lot.”

“Wait, I don’t understand, why did he know about the Monday time frame?”

Gen crossed her arms and didn’t say anything, but she did an arch an eyebrow at Russ. He

sighed in a defeated manner and leaned on the metal bar at the head of one of the beds. He

rubbed his forehead with a hand.

“It is my fault,” he said, his voice breaking with stress. “We were just talking. And he asked me

why the killer is called the Angel Slayer. And I didn’t even tell him about carving the names on

the victims. Just the names on the calling cards. And he wondered if the names meant anything

specific or if they were random. And I did tell him we had a theory about it. But I didn’t tell

him what, but he kept asking and he kept looking it up on his phone and the things he found on the

Internet were worse than what it really is, so I just told him it meant the timing of the murder. He

asked what his meant and I didn’t think there would be any harm in just saying Monday. I tried

to explain to him that that doesn't mean that's the only day he isn't safe, but he just said that since

Monday was past he needed to leave the station and go home for a couple of days, and then he

would come back before next Monday. I—Jared, I did everything I could short of handcuff the

kid to a bed.”

“You should have handcuffed him,” Gen muttered.

“I told you! We have no right to force him to stay. Free country we're all so proud of and all that. What was I really supposed to do? I couldn't give out details of the case. But I did tell

him that he was at the most risk when it wasn't Monday. But that didn't seem to get through to

him.”

“But, there's an officer on him now, right?”

“Yes, they're watching his home.”

“Does Jensen know yet?”

“No. He only left a couple of hours ago. I was hoping he just wanted to shower in his own

bathroom and get a change of clothes and would come back.”

“We should notify Jensen now,” Gen said.

“He will have just gotten into bed,” Jared pointed out.

“So? If Brendan doesn't come back he won't have to watch him tonight anyway.”

“Good point. But if I call him and he can’t get here he’s going to be pissed. I’ll just drive back

to the motel and get him.”

“No,” Russ said, “let me go. I’m the one who lost Brendan, so I should be the one to tell him

what happened in person. I’ll pick him up and ask if he wants to come back here or go straight

to Brendan’s.”

“Okay,” Jared said. “Um, knock hard and tell him who you are. He’s a really heavy sleeper.”

“Alright, hopefully we’ll be back with Brendan.”

Jared watched him leave and really hoped that Jensen was in fact at the motel and not at

Misha’s, and that if Misha was with him at the motel, Russ’ knocking and announcing his

presence would give them enough time to get Misha hidden in the bathroom. Not that they

deserved any help from him after the stunt they pulled on Sunday morning. It was bad enough to

have to listen to a coworker have sex through very thin walls, but how was he supposed to

function when those sounds had—well—they’d sort of—he’d felt—a little bit —arou—

“Jared.”

“Yeah?” Jared whipped around toward Gen, forever grateful to her for

disrupting that line of

thought.

“Do you think I was too harsh?” she asked, fidgeting slightly. “I really laid into Russ, but he’s

right. If Brendan wanted to leave there’s no way we could have stopped him. Short of doing

something illegal I mean. I hope I didn’t damage our working relationship.”

“Oh, no, I’m sure Russ understands. It’s a tense situation. He seemed really upset with himself as well and you were just pointing out what he already was thinking. I think he was trying to

convince himself more than you. Poor guy.”

Gen frowned at him. “I wasn’t *that* mean to him.”

Jared laughed softly. “Not you. Well, kind of you. But I’m curious how badly Jensen is going to

take this. You’ll notice I didn’t argue with him having to be the one to break the news to him.”

Gen made a sympathetic face. “Yeah, I can’t imagine how that conversation is going to go.”

Jared turned to leave the on call room and Gen followed him. They picked up some coffee in the

break room and took it with them to their office. Jared asked Gen for any new information she’d

gotten from Kim or the forensics team lately, though Jared’s private conversations with Dr.

Rhodes generally kept him up to date on what was happening. Gen only

added that more tips

and leads had come in regarding note cards, but all been ruled out as legitimate possibilities.

Jared opened his laptop and began going through the timeline he'd made in Excel again. After

talking with Jensen, he was itching to ask Gilbert Hannigan some more questions regarding his

whereabouts of the other murders. Especially after they'd realized that Hannigan fit the physical

description of the person who left the boot print in the woods at the Hernandez crime scene.

They had asked for Hannigan's full schedule for the past three months from his employer, even

though asking for anything beyond the Vanderpool time frame without a warrant may have been

slightly on the illegal side. But it had also proven that he'd had an alibi for a good part of

Thompson's disappearance, and could not have been present at Mueller's death as he had been

on an emergency call fixing someone's heat.

Jared's head snapped up as Gen cursed when she tried to keep her coffee from spilling all over

her desk. Jared took out some leftover napkins from a Nell's take away dinner in a desk drawer

and handed them over to her.

“Thanks,” she said, sounding embarrassed and weary. Maybe he and Jensen should find her

someone to have a little TDY fun with—it seemed to be helping relieve some of the daily stress

and tension he and Jensen were dealing with. At least, he had noticed a change in Jensen’s

enthusiasm levels when he’d started getting regular action from a certain K9 cop. And he

himself had been able to focus on the case better when he was given the opportunity to check out

for a couple of hours with Kim. He wondered who would be good for her? Russ would be too

weird since they worked on the case together. Ty was married. Who else did they know?

Maybe they should have made more of an effort to get to know the people they’d been seeing

everyday for the past two months.

“I’m sorry, I’m spazzing out,” Gen said. “I just—it feels wrong for Brendan to be out there, you

know?”

Jared nodded. She looked up at him and her dark eyes were anxious and her bottom lip was red

and swollen from worrying it between her teeth. Jared decided getting Gen some action on the

side wasn’t a good idea. He didn’t think anyone in Elton was good enough for her anyway.

“Do you know if anyone has checked in with the officers sitting on Brendan’s house yet?” Jared

asked.

“I’m not sure.” Gen suddenly got excited. “We can check with dispatch.”

Jared and Gen left the office and made their way to the front lobby. Rachel, Katie, and the

overnight secretary, Dylan, actually doubled as dispatch for the Elton PD. They kept track of the

officers in and out of the office and passed on the information of incoming calls to whatever

senior officer was on duty who decided who should be sent. When calls came in from 911, they

immediately assigned whoever was closest to the scene without consulting the senior

management. They had a computer dedicated to tracking the GPS installed in all the police

cruisers and could reach them all via radio. There was just so little criminal activity in Elton

that it had taken Jared a couple of weeks before he figured all this out.

Rachel was on duty and she raised an eyebrow at Jared and Gen as they approached her. “What

can I do for the G Couple?” she asked in her sultry voice.

“Do you know who has been assigned to sit on Brendan Foley’s house?” Gen asked.

“Yeah. Russ caught Mike on his way out and told him to follow Brendan

home. He's still there

as far as I know."

"Can you check?" Jared asked. "If he's still there."

"Sure."

Rachel picked up the handheld radio and turned the volume up on the device. A low crackle of

static came out of the speaker. She pushed the button on the side and spoke, "Home Base calling

Unit 81." She released the button and waited for an answer.

"This is Unit 81."

"Yeah, can you give me your twenty?"

"Still outside Foley's house on Beech Street."

Rachel looked at the agents.

"Can you ask if there's been any movement?" Jared asked Rachel.

"Unit 81, have you seen the subject exit the house?"

"No. Not by the front door."

"Is anyone watching the back?" Jared asked and Rachel repeated the question.

"Not that I know of. But, there are high fences in the back yards of these townhomes. And woods behind that. It seems unlikely he would try to leave that way."

"But what if someone tries to get in that way," Gen murmured.

“And you’re certain he’s there?” Jared asked.

Rachel looked back and forth between Gen and Jared and asked Jared’s question.

“Uh, yeah, Home Base. I followed his car through the back side of town, away from the lake,

and I did lose sight of him by the light in front of the rail road tracks. But, when I pulled into the

parking lot I saw his car parked in front of his address, and I saw him opening the door to the

house with a key. I’ve been parked here ever since. No one in or out by the front door.”

Jared turned to look at Gen and shrugged. At least they knew he had made it safely to his

townhouse. Gen pulled on the hem of her jacket with one hand.

“Can you ask him if he will get out the car and go knock on the door? Just get a visual on him

again?”

Rachel shrugged. “Sure. I guess knocking once can’t be considered harassment. But we’ll have

to be careful about how much we bother him. He definitely let everyone in the office know on

his way out that he was not going to put up with ‘false imprisonment’ or some such nonsense.

Personally, if it was me, I would have you lovely agents sleeping in a fort around me in a locked

jail cell.”

Jared smiled as he pictured that in his head. He had a feeling Rachel was seeing it differently.

“Home Base to Unit 81.”

“Go ahead, Home Base.”

“Could you go knock on the door and see if you can get an answer out of him. We’d like visual

confirmation that he’s still in his home.”

“Ten-four. Standby.”

Jared and Gen waited by the desk as Rachel checked her nails. A couple of minutes passed and

Unit 81 didn’t respond. Jensen and Russ came in the front station doors. Russ didn’t look like

he had a new asshole torn anywhere on his body, but Jensen’s expression was dark and, most

frighteningly, unreadable.

“What’s going on?” Jensen asked, alarmed at seeing Jared and Gen by the front desk.

“We had Rachel call the officer sitting on Brendan to ask him to knock on his door. He saw him

go inside and hasn’t seen him come out, but no one’s watching the back. So, we wanted another

visual.”

Jensen nodded and he and Russ waited by the desk as well. Three minutes

later a crackle came over the radio.

“Home Base, this is Unit 81.”

“Go ahead, 81.”

“Yeah, I went to the door and knocked several times, but he didn’t answer.”
As one, the agents

and detective tensed. “But, I did see movement at a window. A curtain was
pulled back and

then pulled shut more tightly. I guess he saw it was the police and decided
not to answer the

door.”

“Can he confirm that it was Brendan in the window?” Jensen asked.

Rachel relayed the message.

“I didn’t see his face, no.”

“We need to go over there. Now,” Jensen said.

“Let’s call him,” Russ suggested. “Before we go and break down his door
and then he’ll

definitely not come back with us.”

Jensen frowned but Jared had already pulled out his cell phone and was
dialing the number he

had saved for Brendan. It rang four times before going to voicemail. He tried
again with the

same result.

“Can we go now?” Jensen asked.

“Hold on, let me try his landline,” Russ said and pulled out his phone. He dialed the number and

put the phone on speaker and held it out so they could all hear. It rang two times and then was

picked up halfway through the third ring.

“Hey,” Brendan’s voice answered.

“Brendan. This is Detective Little. Have we reached you at your home?”

“It’s me. I made it home.”

“Good. We were worried when you left.”

“I’ll be back soon.”

“You will? We think it’s best you stay at the station.”

“I know.” He paused. “Tomorrow night.”

“I think tonight would be best, Brendan,” Russ said firmly.

“Okay. Whatever you like.” He paused again. “Can you pick me up at—”

Russ waited for him to continue. “Brendan? You want us to pick you up? Now?”

“Around eight.”

“Okay. We can do that. But stay inside and stay vigilant. If anything seems unusual, call us right

away. We are also going to leave the officer posted outside if you need help.”

“Okay. Thanks. Bye.”

“It’s not a problem but—” Russ pulled the phone close to look at it. “The

little shit hung up on

me. Well, there's some gratitude."

Jensen was scowling. "I don't like it. Why can't he come now? Why is he making us wait until

tonight?"

"Maybe he just wants to spend some time watching TV in his underwear," Rachel suggested.

"Home Base, this is Unit 81. Do you want me to try again?"

Rachel raised her eyebrows at the small group. Everyone deferred to Jensen. He sighed in

aggravation.

"No. Just leave him alone. But we're picking his ass up at 7:30."

"You want the keys to the Accent?" Jared asked.

"What for?"

"To go back to the motel. We can pick you up before we go get Brendan."

"No, I'm awake now. I'll just stay here."

"Jensen—"

"If I need a nap I'll go crash in the on call room. But like I said, I'm awake now. So, let's go

over some more witness statements from the Mueller scene."

The quartet left Rachel to her nails and to inform the officer to sit tight. Jared peeled off the

group as they got close to the office and walked to the stairs that led down to the basement. His

nose still wrinkled the first moment he was hit with the formaldehyde smell of the morgue, but it

took him less and less time to get used to it. He knocked lightly on the metal door and entered

without waiting for a response. Kim sat at a bench, wearing a white lab coat, and peering

through a microscope.

“Hey, Kim,” Jared said.

She turned around on her stool and smiled at him. “Hey. The report on the trace evidence from

both the Mueller and the Hernandez scenes didn’t yield anything significant. That’s why I didn’t

bother to come up and report on nothing.”

“Yeah, that’s what we expected,” he said as he moved closer to her. “A motel room and a forest

aren’t the best places to look for that kind of evidence.”

Jared bent at the waist to kiss her, but also to keep himself from touching anything else. Her

hands were gloved so she didn’t touch him either, but kissed him back.

“Oh!” She sat back. “There is one thing. There was some bark from an ash tree nearby at the

Hernandez scene. Now, that’s not too much to cause a stir—ash trees are common around here.

But that section of forest is predominantly spruce and white pine. I sent an intern out to check

and the closest ash was at least a quarter of a mile away. So, I figured we would check to see if

there's a place where ash grows and the soil composition we got from the dirt specimen found at

the Thompson house have any crossover."

"Oh, wow. You can do that?"

"Not us. But the regional geologic society has that kind of info in their databases. We're

waiting to hear back from them. It might give you a place to look into. Or if it's populated, a

potential pool of suspects."

"That would be amazing. Thank you, Kim."

She shrugged and feigned modesty. "Eh. It's what I do."

She grinned and Jared smiled back. As anxious as he was about Brendan being holed up alone

in his house, it was nice to have a moment of positivity. And Kim was always positive.

"Alright. I've got some work to do for another case, so scoot. But kiss me first."

"You're working on a case other than ours?" Jared teased as he complied with her wish for

another kiss.

“I would that I was done with yours.”

Jared sighed. “Yeah. Me too.”

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Jensen looked up from the notes he was taking and cross-referencing with witness statements

when Jared came back into the room with a large paper shopping bag. The smell of Nell’s

mouthwatering food wafted into the air and made his stomach growl.

“You can bring that right over here,” Jensen said.

“Ladies first,” Jared said, stopping where Gen was sitting.

“What ladies?” Jensen grumbled and scratched a dark line in the margin of his notes.

“I heard that.”

“You were meant to.”

Jensen glared at the mark on his page. He was going to have to rewrite this whole page or

continue the mark until it made a complete border. One or the other.

“You sure are grouchy when you’re hungry,” Gen said.

“And sleepy,” Jared chimed in.

Jensen turned a glare on them and they looked away. He looked at Russ.

“You got anything to

add?”



Russ put his hands in the air and shook his head.

Because he was being ornery, Jared came last to him with the food. He barely managed a thank

you. He was tired and hungry. And he was definitely going to have to go to sleep after installing Brendan in the bed next to him in the on call room. And possibly handcuffing them together. So

that meant he wouldn't see Misha. And he realized that was why he was really upset. His

subconscious had already figured out that he wouldn't see Misha tonight or in the morning, and

possibly not for the rest of the week.

"Um, hey guys?" a voice asked from the door at the same time someone knocked on the frame.

The group turned to see Katie at the door. "So, I just got a radio call from Henry, who took over

for Mike at the Foley house, and he says there's a man who walked up to the door and entered

with a set of keys. He's got him detained and wanted to know if—" she stopped talking as the

four people sprang to action grabbing coats and keys and ran for the door. "You guys wanted to

come talk to him," she said to the empty room.

It was 7:03 when Russ' unmarked vehicle careened into the parking lot of Brendan's

neighborhood. He cut off the siren when he stopped but left the lights flashing. Jensen and Russ

had to open the backdoors so Jared and Gen could get out, but then they were all sprinting for the

townhouse. The door was open and they pushed inside, walking down a narrow hallway and out

into a kitchen. Next to it was a tiny den where a scared looking young man was handcuffed to an

end table. Footsteps sounded on the stairs at the back of the kitchen and four guns were drawn,

which made the man on the couch squeak. A uniformed police officer stepped into the kitchen

and started when he saw the barrels trained on his head.

“Whoa! I’m Officer Henry Nossett, badge number—”

“I know you who you are, Hank,” Russ said, a little disgusted.

Everyone put their guns away.

“What’s going on?” Jensen asked.

“Well, I was watching the house, and Foley never came out, but I see this guy approach the door.

And he didn’t knock. He entered with keys. I thought it was possible he had taken them from

Foley or something. So I ran up to confront him and he said he was looking for Brendan. He

said he didn’t think he was home. So, I handcuffed him, called it in, and searched the premises.

I don’t think Foley is here.”

“Did you search every room?” Russ asked.

“Well, this floor and the upper one. I guess he could be on the lower level.”

“I’ll go check,” Gen said and walked back to the front of the house where a set of stairs led

down into a basement.

Jensen turned to the man on the couch. “Who are you?”

“My n-name is—Alex Burton. I’m Brendan’s boyfriend. Is he okay? Is he missing?”

Jensen didn’t know what answer to give just yet. Russ nodded to the officer and he took the hint

and un-cuffed him from the table. Alex rubbed his wrist and looked around at the agents. Gen

came back into the room.

“I didn’t find anyone downstairs.”

“Oh, God,” Alex breathed and put his hands to his mouth. “What’s going on? I thought he was

staying with the police! Then he calls me and says he’s going to stay with me a few days and he

never showed up—”

“Alex,” Jared said soothingly and put a hand on his shoulder. “Sit down. Tell us what you

know.”

Alex sat and Jared sat beside him on the couch. Alex took in a deep breath and then choked on it

and tried again. Tears were forming in the corners of his eyes. “I, um, I got a call this morning.

Brendan said he was going to stay with me because the police said it was okay.”

Russ drew a breath, but Jensen discreetly put out a hand to stop him from protesting that fact.

What Brendan had told his boyfriend about what the police had okayed wasn’t relevant at the

moment.

“He said he was going to swing by his place to pick up a few things and then he would come to

mine. When he didn’t show up right away I just figured he was showering or had decided to

take a nap. Then I realized he’d probably gone to The Daily Grind to check up on everything.

He’s been so worried about it the past few days. But, then it got late. And I tried his cell phone and he didn’t answer. And I stopped by the Grind, but he wasn’t there and Meredith said he

hadn’t been there all day. So, I decided to come here to check to see if he was sleeping and his

cell phone battery had died or something. And I had barely gotten in the door when the officer

came in.” Alex drew in another shuddering breath. “Is he—was he—where is Brendan?!” He

covered his face with his hands and sobbed. Jared rubbed his back and looked up at Jensen.

Jensen could feel his brain screaming in confusion and fear and guilt and terror that the Angel

Slayer had somehow gotten the drop on them. But outwardly he remained cool. He was even

impressed that his voice didn't shake when he asked, "What time did you speak with Brendan on

the phone?"

Alex wiped his nose with his hand and Gen brought him a paper towel from the kitchen. He

thanked her and blew his nose.

"Um. It was at ten. I remember because I was baking muffins for the shop, and I was watching

the clock so I knew when they needed to come out." He nodded as if reassuring himself of that

fact.

"When did we talk to him on the phone?" Jared asked.

"Around eleven," Jensen replied.

"And the officer said he'd arrived at the townhouse just behind Brendan at five past ten," Gen

reminded them. "So, that fits. He was here in the house until at least eleven. And you didn't

receive any other messages from him, Alex? He didn't answer any further calls? When was the

next time you called him?"

“I called him sometime after two, I think, when he hadn’t shown up. He didn’t answer his cell

phone so I tried his home phone.”

“What time was that exactly?”

“I’m not sure exactly, but I left a message on his answering machine. The time would be

recorded with that.”

Alex turned to the table beside the couch and pulled a base unit for a cordless phone closer to

him. The phone itself was missing, but there was a blinking red light on the machine. Alex

pushed a button and the machine asked that if he wanted to delete all messages to press the

button again. “Oh, shit, no.” He quickly pushed another button and the machine declared it was

doing an all message playback. An old message started playing. “Crap. How do I go back...?”

“Hey. It’s me. I made it home. Parents are thrilled. Thanks for staying at my place and taking

care of Mr. Fuzzy Pants. I know you and he don’t get along very well. But, I’ll be back soon.

And don’t forget tomorrow night is Fancy Feast night. It doesn’t matter what flavor, whatever

you like. Okay, so on Friday can you pick me up at the airport? I get in around eight. Thanks.

Love you! Bye.”

“Sorry, sorry,” Alex said, “it should play mine now—”

“Wait,” Jensen said and stepped forward to hit the back button on the machine. The message

played again. And they all heard it.

**“Hey. It’s me. I made it home.** Parents are thrilled. Thanks for staying at my place and taking care of Mr. Fuzzy Pants. **I know** you and he don’t get along very well. But, **I’ll be back soon.**

And don’t forget **tomorrow night** is Fancy Feast night. It doesn’t matter what flavor, **whatever you like.** Okay, so on Friday **can you pick me up at** the airport? I get in **around eight.**

**Thanks.** Love you! **Bye.**”

It was the same words, tone, and inflection Brendan had used when he’d spoken to them on the

phone earlier. Or rather, when someone had played bits of the message back to them to convince

them Brendan was safe at home. They were all silent for several moments. Alex looked around

at them.

“Um. Do you need hear the time of my message?”

“Officer Nossett,” Jensen said quietly.

“Yes, Agent Ackles?”

“Can you put in a call for backup and the forensics team? This is a crime scene.”

“Oh God!” Alex cried.

“And make sure to request Officer Collins and Bunny are sent here. We might need to search the woods.”

Alex had been taken back to the station. Gen had volunteered to go with him and get an official

statement. The townhouse was now roped off and crawling with police and forensic

technicians. What made it worse was that they didn’t even know what they were looking for.

Jensen had them concentrate on the windows and doors that led to the back of the house. He

trusted that the officers on duty had not seen anyone enter or exit the front, but now he wondered

if Brendan had ever actually made it to his home at all. The first officer did admit that he’d been

separated from him on the drive from the station and by the time he caught up he just saw

someone wearing the same clothes as Brendan enter the house.

Russ was leaning against the kitchen counter, his hand over his mouth. Ever since the discovery

that the phone call had been faked, he had been all but mute. Jensen watched a technician dust

the backdoor knob for prints. The Angel Slayer wouldn’t be that careless.

“Hey,” Jared said coming into the kitchen with Misha behind him. “Misha’s



here.”

Jensen felt a weird sensation tug inside his chest when he saw his—Misha. He didn’t want to bring him to another Angel Slayer crime scene. He pushed those thoughts aside and asked,

“Where’s Bunny?”

“I left her in the car. There’s too much activity going on in here right now. I didn’t want to bring

her in until we’re ready for her.” His eyes flicked to Russ but the detective just looked away.

“Are we searching the house for a body?”

“No. Well, I hope not. I don’t think Brendan’s here. I think he’s been kidnapped. And if he was

taken from here, he would have been taken out the back. Either by a window or the door and

probably walked or dragged through the woods some distance. I wanted to see if Bunny could

follow his scent. If we get a shirt out of the dirty clothes maybe she can pick up a trail in the

woods.”

Misha bobbed his head to the side and made a slight face. “We can try, but that’s not what she’s

trained for, you know? She’s not a bloodhound. She’s been trained to recognize certain smells

and then signal to me where she finds those smells. She’s not really a tracker. That’s an entirely

different set of skills. It's possible that if we give her the scent on the shirt and let her wander

the woods, she could wind up leading us to some kids smoking pot. That's what she's trained to

do."

"Who the fuck cares what she's *trained* to do, Collins," Russ snapped. "We need to know what

she *can* do. So can the bitch help us or not?"

"I have had enough—!" Misha started and stepped forward. Russ stepped away from the

counter and Jensen put himself between them. He put one hand flat in the middle of Russ' chest

and the other he used to push Misha back by the shoulder.

"Jared. Will you take Misha upstairs to Brendan's bedroom and find one of his shirts? Try to

make sure it's his and not Alex's. Then get Bunny and take her around back to the woods. I'll be

there shortly."

"Yeah, sure." Jared started up the stairs in the back and Misha glared at Russ as he followed

him.

The technician by the doorknob gathered up her supplies and beat a hasty retreat to the living

room. Jensen turned to Russ and saw the man leaning on the counter and squeezing the edge with

both hands, his eyes tightly shut.

“Hey, Russ, what’s going on, man?”

Russ opened his eyes and looked at Jensen. He shook his head and looked like he was two

seconds away from a total breakdown. “This is on me, Jensen.”

“What?”

“If Brendan is—I’m the one who let him out of the station. It was on my watch. If the Angel Slayer has him—” Russ shook his head with a bitter, self-hating smile. “I may as well have

killed him myself.”

“Hey, hey,” Jensen stepped close to him and put a hand to his shoulder. Then he raised it to his

face and made him look up and meet his eyes. “This is not on you. Brendan made the decision

to leave. There’s nothing you could have done—”

“But I shouldn’t have told him what the angel name meant—!”

“Maybe not. Hey. Listen, Russ. We know Chariel means Monday. We’ve got over five days to

find him. We can get him back alive.”

“Even if we find him and get him back alive—he’s probably already torturing him!”

“Russ. This man’s evil is not yours. Don’t take that on.”

Russ stared into Jensen’s eyes like he was desperate to believe him. He nodded minutely.

Noise alerted them that someone had come down the back stairs. Jensen dropped his hand and

took a step back. Misha was staring at them. Jared came in a moment later holding a green polo

shirt with “Brendan” embroidered on the upper left part of the chest.

“We’re going to go take Bunny around back now,” Jared said.

Jensen nodded and tried not to be annoyed, and pleased, with the jealous look Misha threw his

way as he left the kitchen. Jensen turned to Russ.

“Okay. We’ve got to reason through this. If you were the Angel Slayer, would you be more

concerned about getting him somewhere you could do your work? Or somewhere close by just

to hide him until there was a better opportunity to move him without being seen?”

“Well, if it were me,” Russ said, “I would look for a place where I could do both of those.”

Jensen chewed on his thumb. Then he snapped his head up. “There’s a townhouse in

foreclosure at the end of this row. It should be empty and it has a basement.”

“Let’s go see who the realtor is so we can get a hold of them to bring the keys.”

“Or we could just break down the door,” Jensen suggested.

“I like the way you think, Agent Ackles.”

**Wednesday, November 13, 2013**

Jensen stared at the body.

From the angle of his head, his neck clearly had to be broken. His face was sideways on the floor, but his neck and body were straight up and down. Two clothes racks had been emptied of

their Red Sox and Patriots T-shirts and used to hold his legs splayed open in a straight line with

shoelaces tied around his ankles. Burned across his perineum and anus was the word,

“sodomite.”

Jensen was biting his cheek so hard he tasted blood. His fingers dug into his shirt and his arms

felt weak from being clenched tightly where they crossed his chest. Brendan Foley had suffered

less mutilation than most of the other victims, but the damage to his mouth and lips spoke of cruel

torture before the end. An end that came too soon. Much too soon. The Angel Slayer had rules

—he wouldn’t break them. Even though he knew the police would catch on to him sooner rather

than later, he couldn’t kill Brendan before Monday; Chariel was his angel. The first thing Jensen

had checked was to see if a different name had been carved on his chest. But Chariel was there

in dark red marks, rust colored stains striping his chest. It had probably been done postmortem

like the others, but the blood flow suggested it had been within minutes of his death. Maybe

less.

The owner of the store had called the police in hysterics at nine o'clock when he came in to

open up for the day. Brendan had been missing less than twenty-four hours, but the result was

still the same. Jensen stiffly moved an arm to rub his forehead with a hand. He felt an

overwhelming weariness sweep over him. He hadn't had real sleep in over thirty-six hours and

he hadn't eaten in about twenty. He felt helpless. Useless. He wasn't doing anything to save the

people of Elton. A killer walked amongst them and laughed as he watched Jensen struggle.

Howled in amusement at his failings. Plotted his next victim's death and the dance he would do

on Jensen's grave when he was finally done.

"Jensen."

Jensen jumped a foot when the hand landed on his shoulder. Jared stood beside him and put out

a calming hand.

"Hey, it's okay. It's just me. Are you okay?"

"I'm fine."

“Maybe you should take a break until they get the scene processed—”

“I’m fine,” Jensen repeated harshly.

Jared nodded. He glanced at the body and then away. He swallowed thickly. This was the first

victim they had both known personally. It made it more difficult to just see him as another body.

“Why did he do it so soon?” Jensen asked, mostly to himself.

Jared shrugged. “He knew the longer he kept him alive the more likely he would be caught.”

“But, he’s been so meticulous about these names and the days and times. There’s no way we got that wrong. The angel names are when they will be killed. He can’t break that rule.”

Jared licked his lips and tilted his head. “Jensen, did you not see the name of this store?”

Jensen finally looked away from the body and met Jared’s tired hazel eyes.

“It’s called Monday Morning Quarterback.”

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"This is total bullshit!" Jensen yelled for the sixth time. "He can't just decide he's going to throw his rule book out the window!" He threw the book with the angel listings at the first whiteboard,

but it was so thin it fluttered open and fell ineffectually to the floor. Jensen cursed and kicked

the board. It slammed against the wall with a bang and a clatter.

"Of course he can," Gen said, her own voice raised. "There is no rule book for serial killers.

They do what they want because they're playing a game of their own invention which means they

can change the rules, break the rules, or stop playing altogether!"

"No." Jensen turned on her. "Not this guy. Not the one from DC. I am telling you. There are two of them. The original would never have cheated like this."

"So what if you two are right?" Russ cut in, indicating Jared as one of the "two" with an angry flick of his hand. "There are two of them. A student and a teacher. It doesn't change the fact that an innocent kid under our protection died today!"

"Of course it doesn't but it does mean we need to change the way we're going about this!" Jensen countered.

"Like what?" Gen asked.

"For one, we need to reinvestigate Gilbert Hannigan."

"Hannigan?" Russ asked. "He was cleared for Vanderpool's murder."

"For Vanderpool, yes. And Mueller's too. But no one else's. He doesn't have an alibi for any of

the other kills. If he's the second one, he could have killed them."

"But why Hannigan?" Gen asked.

"He's the best lead we have, Gen!" Jensen was shouting again.

Jared glanced at the door to the office. It was shut, but there was no way everyone in the bullpen

wasn't aware that a shit-storm was taking place in here.

"He has connections to two of the victims. He had an affair with Vanderpool and he openly

threatened Foley."

"He was also genuinely upset and surprised by Vanderpool's death. Even as a student, wouldn't

he know who his master's targets are?"

"Not necessarily."

"And he never threatened Foley. He denounced his lifestyle, but no one has said that he ever

made threats against his life or about trying to ruin his business."

"He fits the description of the size of man who would wear the boots found at the Hernandez

scene. He's five-seven and a hundred and thirty pounds."

"That is all circumstantial, Jensen. There's no way a judge would issue a warrant based on

that."

"I know!" Jensen turned away from her and ran his hands through his hair. He turned back. "But that doesn't mean we can't put a tail on him."

"Actually, it does," Russ said. "We can't put an official one on him without at least reasonable suspicion."

"We have fucking reasonable suspicion! And I'll tail him myself if I have to."

"Jensen," Gen said, trying to stay calm, "I know you're upset about Brendan. But we can't just start doing illegal investigations because we're desperate."

"Illegal—?!" Jensen turned to Jared. "You want jump in here, buddy?"

Jared opened his mouth and froze. He didn't know what to do. He forced himself to start talking

and hoped he'd figure out what he was saying by the end.

"I fully support the notion of two killers. We can't make the assumption that being cleared of one murder absolves him of all of them. But we can't go off half-cocked either. Kim is trying to

narrow down an area where the killer...rs...might be picking up certain kinds of natural trace

evidence. If she can narrow it down to a region, we might have a suspect pool. And names

might start standing out."

"Well, that'll be great when we have that info, but we do we do until then? There were no

security cameras at the store. But that store is two and a half miles from Foley's house! How

did he get Brendan from his house to the store with no one seeing fucking anything?!"

Jensen grabbed onto the back of his desk chair and squeezed his eyes shut. His knuckles turned

white with the strength of his grip.

"What's more disturbing than any of that is how tech savvy this guy has to be," Russ said.

"What do you mean?" Gen asked.

"That phone conversation we had with 'Brendan.' Those words weren't in order on the

recording. He had to play them back in pieces that fit with our conversation. He couldn't just

skip forward and ahead like that even if he had put the audio file on his computer. He had to

have had a program that he could type in the words so it would play the ones he wanted. There

were barely any pauses in the responses he gave us."

"Well, fan-fucking-tastic. We'll put out an APB for Stephen Hawking and Bill Gates. They seem

just as likely as anybody else."

Jared gave Jensen a look after that tirade. Jensen just turned his back on him and walked over to

the third whiteboard. He picked up the red marker and added to the profile: computer nerd. He

stayed at the board with his back to the room. Gen flopped down in an empty chair and glared at

the floor. Russ had a hollowness in his eyes that had seeped in with the news of Brendan's

death. Jared knew he held himself personally responsible for the kid's death. Really, his death

was on all of them. They'd had him, known he was the next target, and yet they couldn't protect

him. Jared knew that if—when—they solved this case, he was going carry Brendan Foley

around with him for the rest of his life. And anyone else the Angel Slayer got before they got

him. If they ever got him. Jared clenched his hand into a fist and berated himself for the

thought. They *were* going to get him.

There was a knock on the door and everyone jumped at the sudden disruption. The door opened

and Ty stood in the frame. He had his thumbs hooked in his belt and the expression on his face

informed them that everyone in the bullpen had been privy to the shouting and fighting that had

been going on for at least an hour. This two minute silence had probably been the first window

of opportunity Ty had had to barge in on them. No one said anything; there was nothing to say

regarding their behavior or their investigation or their frame of mind.

"Go home," Ty said. "It's after ten. Most of you have been up way too long to still have objective and rational thoughts crawling around in your brain. Get some food, get some rest.

Get some *sleep*. None of you are allowed to come in tomorrow."

"Are you kidding me?" Jensen growled menacingly.

"I have no authority over you, Agent Ackles, or the other agents. But none of you are thinking

clearly right now. We have a shit ton of evidence to be sorted through and the forensics team is

working on it. If any of it yields a breakthrough, you will of course be called in. But there is

nothing for you to do tomorrow other than be in the way. I'll have a team transcribe the witness

statements, gather whatever footage is available from Foley's neighborhood to the strip mall

where he was found, and I will see if I can call in a favor to a judge to get a surveillance detail

approved for Hannigan. When you come in Friday, all of this will be ready for you to review,

Kim's autopsy and tests should be complete, and we'll know how much leeway we have with

Hannigan." He waited to see if anyone would contradict his reasoning. "So, we're in

agreement? I won't see any of you back here until Friday."

"If *anything*—" Jensen started but Ty interrupted him.

"You, Agent Ackles, will be the *first* one I call."

Jensen threw a hand in the air in defeat and turned to gather his coat from the desk. "Whatever,"

he mumbled.

He walked out of the office and Jared looked after him, not sure what to do.

"Go ahead," Gen said. "I'll lock up."

"Thanks, Gen. See you guys on Friday."

He grabbed his suit coat and overcoat and checked his pants pocket for the key to the Accent as

he left the office. He hurried outside and then paused to put on his overcoat; it had gotten ten

degrees colder in the last day or so and the temperature was flirting with the

thirties at night. He

walked down the sidewalk to where they'd parked the car after returning from the crime scene.

Parked next to it was the K9 vehicle. Jared slowed down as he saw Misha and Jensen standing

in between the cars. He was too close to avoid hearing them talk and didn't know if he should

turn back or not.

"You coming in to work?" Jensen asked flatly.

"Called in sick today actually."

"Yeah?"

"Yeah. I've got the whole night and tomorrow off."

Jensen stepped forward into Misha's space and spoke in a voice laced with pain and guilt.

"Misha, please, I'm begging you: invite me to your home, take me to your bed, and—"

Jared couldn't tell if Jensen stopped talking or if by turning his head close to Misha he had

masked his words. Misha reached up and took his face in his hands. Then he kissed him, and

Jensen responded, standing right underneath the conspicuous spotlight of a streetlamp.

"Hey, do you guys remember where you are?" Jared called out quietly.

They pulled apart and Jensen let out a harsh laugh. "I really don't fucking

care," Jensen muttered and stepped around Misha to open the police car door. Bunny whined from the backseat and

Jared could hear Jensen greeting her before he shut the door. Misha looked at Jared.

"Take care of him tonight," Jared said, quite on impulse.

Misha nodded. "I will."

He walked around the car and got in the driver's side. The car started and backed out of the space. Jared remained standing on the sidewalk as he watched the SUV's tail lights disappear

into the night.

Jared rubbed his forehead with a hand. He wasn't sure if he was cut out for this. He'd thought

working criminal cases would be bagging corporate douche bags committing white collar

crimes. He'd been prepared for boring when he'd transferred. But boring just wasn't going to

happen anytime soon. Ty might not want them at work tomorrow, but he had little doubt that

Jensen, if not all of them, would be getting phone calls from Beaver, Kripke, and God knows

who else in the morning. He better get back to the motel and get what sleep he could tonight.

Friday, November 15, 2013

Jared strummed his fingers on the table in the conference room. The four principles on the Angel

Slayer case, Ty, and ASAC Beaver were all present for Kim's report. He was quite certain he

wasn't the only one who wished he'd decided to sit this one out.

"His tongue had been cut out of his mouth and his teeth were all pushed inward. Something—

very large—was shoved down his throat and is what broke his teeth, damaged his mouth, and

disfigured his throat. Inside his throat we found three bull testicles."

"Jesus," Gen said and sat back in her chair.

"Bull testicles," Jensen said, his voice dull and flat. "Is that a common item around here?"

"There are a lot of farms in the area; cattle are raised on several of them. But these were

removed with precision. Probably a butcher."

"So, I guess we'll go ask the local butchers if they sold any testicles recently. Seems like that

would be a purchase one would remember."

It was true and it was possibly a good lead, but Jensen's tone indicated that he didn't think this

evidence would pan out better than any of the rest had.

"He didn't die of a broken neck," Kim continued. "That was done postmortem. Probably as just an amusement to the killer. What killed him—are any of you familiar with some of the more

colorful theories regarding King Edward II's demise?"

"Hot poker up the ass?" Beaver asked.

Everyone turned to look at him.

"What? I majored in history."

Everyone looked back at Kim.

"Something like that. I'm not sure if the injuries did it or the shock to his system, but it wasn't an easy death. Though perhaps he may not have been fully aware of it. I found traces of Telazol in

his blood. It's an animal tranquilizer and would explain how they were able to get him from his

house to the store quietly and unnoticed. It might also explain how they were able to subdue

other victims when they were first kidnapped. The drug wasn't in any of their systems by the

time the bodies got to us, so my guess is they were only tranquilized when they were first taken

and not during the subsequent torture."

"I take it this drug is not available over the counter?" Russ asked.

"No. It's a controlled substance like ketamine. Most veterinarians have access to it."

Jared sat up straighter. "Well, there's two links to animals right there. The testicles and the

drugs. Maybe one of the killers has a day job as a large animal veterinarian."

"That's possible," Jensen said, showing a little more life in his eyes. "That would certainly give us a manageable list of names to look into."

"It would be a small number," Kim agreed. "But most large animal vets in this area specialize in equine care. They also mostly live in the countryside and none in Elton proper." Kim folded her

hands over her report and smiled uneasily. "I may have already looked into it."

"No, that's good," Jensen said. "Can you provide us with the list of names?"

"Yes. I included it in with the report."

"Is there anything else you have for us?" Beaver asked Kim.

"There's not much except I think he was killed sometime early Tuesday afternoon and only

brought to the store for staging."

"Early Tuesday afternoon," Jensen muttered. "While we all just sat here, he was already dead."

No one had anything to say to that.

"Thank you, Dr. Rhodes," Jim said. Kim nodded and stood up from the table. She gave Jared a

tight, reassuring smile as she left the room. "So. Where do we go from here? And what do we

tell the press?"

"I suggest we not release that we had Brendan in our custody, knew he was a target, and then let

him go," Russ said. Ty looked at him disapprovingly. "What? It's not lying. It's just not

exposing to the world what incompetent asses we are."

"Speak for yourself," Gen muttered under her breath.

"All right," Jim said. "We've got witness statements to corroborate, butchers and veterinarians to interview, parking lot security footage to review, and a whole hotline full of tips that need to

be sorted through. Agent Ackles, I leave you to delegate as you see you fit. I'm going to take Ty here and have a conference call with Kripke and the Deputy Director and try to figure out what

we're going to say to the media."

Everyone stayed seated, waiting to see if they were going to get the ass chewing they had been

waiting for all day yesterday that had never come.

"Well, don't just sit there mesmerized by my beauty. Git."

Everyone except Jim and Ty got up from the table. They filed out of the room, Jensen taking

Kim's report with him. They paused in the bullpen and he looked at his team. The day off had

done wonders for them physically, but mentally they were about to reach a breaking point. Jared

wanted to be strong for Jensen, but he wasn't sure how much more of this he could take.

"I'll take the parking lot footage," Jensen said.

Gen raised a hand. "Witness statements," she sighed.

"I'll get some of the junior officers to start making calls to vets on this list to set up interviews,"

Russ said.

"Guess that leaves me with the hotline," Jared said.

Jensen handed the list of vets to Russ and he called over a uniformed officer.

"Bradley, can you make some calls to the people on this list, see if the numbers are still current, and if they'd be willing to come to the station for an interview? I'd rather not have to drive all

over the great state of New Hampshire for these interviews."

"Yeah, sure. Should I tell them what it's in regard to?"

"Absolutely not," Jensen said as Jared and Gen said, "No," and Russ replied eloquently, "Are you stupid?"

"Okay, okay. Geez." The officer took the list and started to look over it as he walked away.

Russ looked at the group. "I'll start compiling a list of butchers and farmers in the area."

"Hey, Collins!" the officer with the list called out.

Misha carefully pushed his chair back from his desk so he wouldn't run over Bunny's tail.

"What?"

"Didn't you date Rina Nelson in high school?"

"Everybody dated Rina Nelson in high school," someone said from the back of the room.

Everyone sniggered.

"No, Brad, I dated Andrea," Misha said with a small frown.

"No, no, I remember it. It was that Sadie Hawkins dance. She asked you to go before Andrea

did—and man was she pissed. Especially since you wound up taking Rina."

Misha shook his head. "No, that was Danielle. Rina was a couple grades behind us."

"Oh. Well. That was hilarious. Andrea went with, who was it? Someone to really piss you off

for not taking her."

Misha eyes flicked to the group of agents and then back to the officer. "Don't you have some

work you need to do?"

"Yeah, yeah...oh!" The officer spun back to look at the agents. "It was you, Russ, wasn't it?"

Russ shrugged a shoulder. "I honestly don't remember who I took to all the dances in high

school, Brad. I never took the same girl twice."

The bullpen broke out into laughter and catcalls and even a "Russ, you dog!"

Russ shook his head and turned to the agents. "I'm sorry for this nonsense."

Jensen shook his head. "It's been tense in here for the last couple of days. It's probably best for them to joke while they still can. The media is going to be back on this case worse than ever."

Jared knew that was the truth. They had managed to suppress the sensationalism around

Mueller's death as much as possible, but the media had actually beat the police to the scene in

Foley's death and one blurry photo of his strangely positioned body had been circulated on the

Internet and all the twenty-four hour news channels. It especially gained notoriety as it was the

second death since the news that the victims were receiving notification of their selection

beforehand. There had been some rather unpleasant charges leveled at the Elton PD and the

FBI. Russ was probably right about not confirming that they had had Brendan in custody before

his death. They wouldn't be able to hide it, Alex obviously knew, and soon so would Brendan's

family. Jared was worried there might be a wrongful death suit in all their futures.

The group split up to do their assigned tasks and Jared holed himself up in interview room two

with an Elton PD borrowed laptop and a set of headphones. He spent the entire morning and the

better part of the afternoon reading e-mails, opening attachments of pictures of supposed Angel

of Death Cards, and listening to messages left on the tip line. Some were hysterical and nearly

impossible to understand. Some were clearly prank calls. A lot left too little description to

determine whether or not it was worth returning the call to ask for more details. Some had

enough detail to know they were fakes—the wrong kind of paper and writing utensil were

mentioned and more often than not the person mentioned the name of a very common, well-

known angel. The Angel Slayer hadn't even used those back in DC. There were also a lot of

anonymous calls regarding suspicious neighbor activity, sounds in the night, and even a sketchy

husband or two.

Jared was getting a headache from staring at the computer screen for so long. He wondered how Jensen was fairing with hours and hours of blurred surveillance camera footage. Maybe Gen

would want to switch with him. He felt like if he could print out the witness statements and read

them on paper it might actually give his eyes a rest. He played another tip line call and picked

up his Blackberry to type out a message to Gen.

"Um, hello. My name is Tameka Brown," a woman's voice spoke through the headphones. "I

heard about this case. And some cards with angel names on it. And that we should call the

police if we found one. I found an index card in my mailbox this afternoon. It just had one word

written on it. I can't even pronounce it. Tartar—tartar-oh-el. It don't sound like no angel I've

ever heard of. Unless it's the angel of tartar sauce." Jared laughed against his will at the joke because he was pretty certain Tameka Brown had been marked by the Angel Slayer. "I guess if

you want to know more you can call me at home." She left her number and Jared wrote it down

quickly. He checked the date and time the call had been made: yesterday evening.

Jared leapt out of his chair and sprinted down the hall toward the FBI office. Jensen was alone

in the room scanning through footage that was only displayed on a tiny window on his laptop.

He looked like he was much further along in his headache cultivation that Jared had been.

"Jensen!"

Jensen looked up and watched as Jared ran for the book with the angel

summoning rituals in it.

He skimmed the index and found the name Tartaroel. Well, Tameka hadn't been too far off with

the name after all.

"Jared," Jensen said. "What's going on?"

"We've got another one. We need to find Tameka Brown now. She's scheduled for Sunday."

Tartaroel

Saturday, November 16, 2013

Jensen leaned back in his chair, his elbow propped on the armrest, his thumb under his chin,

middle and index fingers against his cheek. His eyes flicked from person to person as they

spoke.

"There is very little question that the FBI will be handling this," Jim opened gruffly.

"The FBI technically handled the last target," Ty pointed out tactlessly.

Gen countered with, "We weren't the ones who released him."

Jared tried to play peacemaker and said, "Gen, no one released him. It wasn't anyone's fault, but

—"

"No," Russ interrupted him, "it was mine, which is why it does make sense for the FBI to take this target into their custody."

"And we will," Jim said in a matter of fact tone, "but the short notice on the weekend will make it impossible to transport her until tomorrow."

"But her day is tomorrow," Jared said with alarm. "And it is the teacher's turn, so he won't cheat like the last one."

"It doesn't matter," Gen said coolly. "We have her now. She can stay here and be transported tomorrow."

"We could transport her to Portsmouth at least," Russ suggested. "Just to get her out of Elton tonight."

"And put her where?" Gen asked. "Some random hotel room?"

"Why not?" Ty broke in. "You could stay in the room with her."

"That is a possibility," Jim mused, "but we need to make a decision soon. It's getting late."

"How many cars should be in the convoy?" Russ asked.

"Only the agents would need to go back to with her," Gen said.

General arguments broke out after that.

"Agent Ackles," Jim bellowed over the ruckus. "Do you have anything to contribute?"

Everyone quieted down and turned to look at him. Jensen straightened and dropped his arm

down to his lap.

"Well, I think we should send a couple cars out immediately. And then two more later this

evening. And then tomorrow morning we should send a large group of cars. And a little after

that send a single car."

"And what will that accomplish?" Ty asked.

"Tameka will only be in one," Jared said. "And there's no way the Angel Slayer will know which."

Jensen smiled and nodded at Jared. "Even with two of them, they won't be able to track them all

and we'll send them by different routes. We'll probably need to send a couple of actual decoys

so that there is someone who looks like her in the cars."

"Which grouping do you think Tameka should be sent in?" Jim asked.

"The large group tomorrow morning."

"I disagree," Ty said. "She should be in the first car. We should get her out of here immediately.

Today."

"Not the first car for sure," Russ said. "Because if he goes chasing after the first one, it won't be a decoy—it will be her."

"Good, then we'll catch him."

"Maybe. That's risky though. That's using her as bait almost. I think she should be sent in the

last, single car tomorrow. When the first two come out today they may figure out they're decoys.

And when the large convoy leaves in the morning, that will make them think that is the real one

and they will follow that. Then after that group is out of the area, we send the

single car, which

doesn't seem like it's an convoy at all, and it goes straight to Boston, bypassing Portsmouth

altogether so we can get her directly to the safe house."

"I don't know," Jensen said, "it seems risky to send her with only one or two of us."

"Exactly. And we," Russ circled his finger around the room, "certainly can't be with her. I think it's safe to say that he—they—somehow know us by sight if not by name. If any one of us is

visible in a car, it will be like a beacon that she is with us—even if we are spread out in three

different trips. But, if we send one single officer who has nothing to do with the case, in an

unmarked car no less, he'll just seem like somebody driving up to Boston for dinner or to go to

the airport or something. We can load her inside the car in the garage, and then she can lay down

on the back seat until they hit the highway. No one will know she's there."

"That seems like something out of a bad movie," Ty said.

Jensen laughed softly. "Believe it or not modern IOs still use that maneuver."

"So, Tameka will go in the fourth car?" Jim asked.

"I say no," Jensen said, "but, we can take a vote."

"Okay," Jim said, "show of hands for the first car?" No raised their hands.

"Second car?" Ty raised his hand. "Third?" Jensen and Jared raised their

hands. "Fourth car?" Jim, Gen, and Russ raised their hands. "Alright then. We

need to decide who is going in which group. And

we'll need to recruit some other officers to drive some of the cars. And I need to make sure that

the Boston field office is prepared to receive her."

"So what should we do with her tonight?" Ty asked.

"Just keep her at the station," Jensen said. "She's already packed a bag, so she can sleep in the

on call room. We can't very well take her home if we want the two decoys going out tonight to

have any chance at seeming legitimate."

"Who should go out in the first two convoys?" Gen asked.

"I'd say you and Jim. That way you can get to Portsmouth and make arrangements with your

team there and get in contact with Boston to make sure they're ready to receive her. Jared and I

will go in the morning, and Russ, you'll stay here. And make yourself visible. That way it can

also seem like all the convoys are potentially decoys. Now, what officers will we be able to

take with us, and who would you trust to take Tameka tomorrow afternoon?" Jensen directed his

last question at Ty.

"Well, either Kevin Bates or Peter McCormick. They're my other two detectives and have

plenty of experience. And maybe we should send Reggie. She's not a rookie, but is still fairly

new to the force and would seem an unlikely choice for such an important detail."

"Yes, but sending a senior detective and a young officer out together to Boston, that could seem

strange."

"Well," Russ said, looking at the table, "we could send her with Bradley. And while he's not a

detective, he has a lot of years on the force."

"And why would that be better?" Ty asked.

"Because Brad and Reggie—have taken trips to Boston together before."

Ty stared at him. "How do you know that?"

Russ half-smiled and shrugged a shoulder. "Everyone knows that, Chief."

"Why don't I know that?!"

Russ shrugged a shoulder again.

Ty grumbled under his breath and Jim looked around the table. "All right then. We've got a

plan. Do we feel confident with it?"

No, Jensen wanted to say, but he didn't want to disrupt their plans; they still had a lot of work to do arranging officers and vehicles to be used in the convoys.

"Okay, then. How many officers are on duty right now?"

“Not enough,” said Ty. “Russ, go out front and tell Katie to call in all the off duty officers.

We’ll need who we don’t send to cover their shifts. Tell them there’s an emergency meeting in

thirty minutes and if they don’t already have anything at the station, to bring in an overnight bag.”

“I’m on it.” Russ stood up and left the conference room.

"Jensen, exactly how much has Tameka been briefed on?" Jim asked.

"Enough that she won't be asking to leave protective custody anytime soon. I think she was also

freaked out by the fact that we showed up at her sister's house in the middle of the night last night

looking for her."

"Well, I don't want her scared out of her wits, but maybe a little fear will inspire a lot of

cooperation. All right, I also want to set up a phone...tree...or whatever. I want everyone

checking in with everyone every hour on the hour. Or, every thirty or even fifteen minutes—

whatever doesn't tie up the phones. Gen, I want you to create a chart and we'll fill it in as we get

the names of the officers. Jared and Jensen, I'm going to need you two to prepare a quick

presentation to get the recruited officers briefed and up to speed on what's happening. Hopefully

we can get the first convoy out in two hours."

Everyone murmured agreement and Jensen nodded to Jared as he stood up. Jared followed him

out of the conference room and they headed for their office.

"Do you think Jim wants PowerPoint?" Jared asked.

Jensen half laughed. "God, I hope not."

They stopped just before entering the office when a ruckus broke out in the front lobby as a

couple of officers tried to wrestle a man down the hallway that led to booking. Misha and

Bunny weren't far behind.

"I am suing!" the man in handcuffs yelled. "I am suing the whole damn police department! And you in particular," he spat at Misha. "And your little dog too!"

Misha didn't look impressed. "Yeah, that's original."

"Do you see my arm?!"

Jensen noticed for the first time that a towel had been wrapped on the man's arm and was

covered in bloodstains.

Misha shrugged. "I told you not to run."

The man started cursing, rather creatively, and the other officers once again started hauling him

off.

"I'll be right there," Misha told them, "I'll put Bunny in the yard."

Jensen patted Jared on the shoulder, "Uh, can you start without me? I just need to—"

Jared rolled his eyes. "Go ahead."

"It'll be quick, I promise."

Jensen ignored Jared's mumbled disbelief and followed Misha down a hall that led to the back

of the building. At the end of the hall was a door that opened out into a courtyard that contained

some outdoor exercise equipment set up over wood chips. There were also a couple of strips of

grass which Bunny made a beeline for when Misha gave her the "potty time" command.

"Hey, Mish..."

Misha turned around and smiled when he saw Jensen, and then his expression fell.

"What's wrong? Did something happen?"

Jensen stopped moving. What was showing on his face? He tried to relax his features.

"There's not another body, I think I would have heard, right?"

Jensen shook his head.

"Um. I probably shouldn't have, but I did hear that another person received a card—can you not

find them?"

"No, we found her. And we're going to get her to a safe house prepared by the FBI."

Misha nodded. "That's good. That's...good...right?"

"Yes, it is."

"Then, why do you look upset?"

Jensen racked his brain. Was he upset? A little. About what?

"I'm—going to be leaving. For a little while. I'll be back once Ta—the target is safely installed. But. It might take a few days."

"And?"

"And—um. Nothing."

Misha allowed himself a small smile. "Gonna miss me, Agent?"

Jensen knew that was his cue to act offended or make a joke, but he couldn't. "Yeah, I will."

Misha deflated with the confession, but he was still half-smiling. "Jensen."

"What?"

Misha pulled one corner of his bottom lip into his mouth and glanced over Jensen's shoulder.

Then he stepped close and used Jensen's tie to pull him in for a kiss. He pulled back sooner than

Jensen would have liked and smoothed his tie down with a hand.

"Be careful, okay? If you have the target, he'll be after you too."

Jensen nodded and dipped his head for one more kiss.

"I'll see you in a couple of days. Probably."

Monday, November 18, 2013

The silence was maddening. It was tangible, it was heavy, and it was suffocating them all.

Every muscle in Jensen's body was clenched so tight he was practically vibrating with the

strain. Jared was hunched over in his chair, face white, eyes blank. Gen was curled up in a ball

on her chair, shoes discarded on the floor; she had a hand on her head, eyes closed. Russ stood

in front of the third whiteboard, possibly staring at Tameka Brown's picture, marked with her

angel: Tartaroel, 21st hour of Sunday; and her crime: prideful, which had been burned onto her

throat. Or maybe he had his eyes shut. Jim stood in the middle of the room, not moving, not

speaking, barely breathing in the ominous stillness.

"One more time," Jim's voice was dry and weary. "Walk me through it."

Jensen swallowed and tried to get his arms at least to relax. They refused. So he spoke, trying

to ignore the ache in his body.

"After you left with Bates and Daniels, we prepped the second team. Gen was going in one car

and taking Officer Freeman as a decoy passenger and Hinkle and Johnson drove the car behind

her. They departed at eight p.m. and arrived in Portsmouth at five to nine. We verified this with

you and Gen via our phone tree. Overnight, Jared and I stayed here with Tameka in the on call

room. At ten o'clock the next morning, we reviewed the plan and discussed how she would get into the car and that she needed to stay out of sight. She understood. At eleven o'clock, Jared

and I were in the second car of three that left via a back road and stayed off the highway all the

way to Portsmouth. We had one of the forensic techs, Alyssa Anderson, as a decoy in our

vehicle. We checked in with you and Gen when we got to Portsmouth and verified that Boston

was ready to receive Tameka. We sent word back to Elton, and Russ escorted Tameka to the

garage."

Jensen stopped talking and looked at Russ. He turned around and crossed his arms over his

chest.

"I escorted Tameka to the garage. We got her arranged in the back seat of the SUV. The

windows were tinted and she was below the level of the window. Reggie and Brad were in

civilian clothing and had written instructions of the route they were to take and were directed to

make contact every fifteen minutes with either myself or one of the federal

agents. They

departed at exactly two o'clock, heading northbound on Main Street toward the highway. That's

the last I saw of them, but I did receive a check in from them at 2:45pm."

"I received the first check in 2:15," Jensen said.

"I got the 2:30," Gen said.

"And I got the 3:00," Jim finished.

"I never received the 3:15," Jared said hoarsely.

"So what happened in between me speaking with Officer Thompson at three and when we got the

call at midnight? Are we making the assumption that she was killed at exactly 9pm? So where

were they for six hours? What were Thompson and Yamamoto doing? Did they ever even make

it out of Elton? Were they accosted on the road and driven back into town and taken to the

motel? The desk clerk claims Officer Thompson checked them in, but he has no recollection of

what happened. Neither does Yamamoto. Kim confirmed there was Telazol in both their

systems. Are they still sticking to their story that they were driving and just got sleepy and when

they woke up they were tied in the bathtub of the motel room with the body?"

"They haven't wavered on a single detail," Jared said.

"Has anyone found the SUV they were driving?"

"No," Jensen replied. "It was Thompson's POV, not a police car; it didn't have GPS. But all three—Brad, Reggie, and Tameka, had bruises in a diagonal line across their chests, which is

consistent with seatbelt injuries when in a high speed car accident."

"Okay, so they were in a car accident, and what? The Angel Slayer just happened to be behind

them and took them all back to Elton to complete his work? Why didn't he kill the officers? We

searched up and down that stretch of highway and there was no sign of an accident. There was

no sign of them anywhere until the motel manager was tipped off to go check in the room. They couldn't have just vanished into thin air!"

Everyone was quiet, and then Jensen stood up slowly, wincing as his tight muscles protested the

movement.

"We're ignoring the most important piece of information we have here."

"And what is that, Agent Ackles?" Jim snapped.

"Either the Angel Slayer or his accomplice works for the Elton PD in some capacity."

There were no shocked gasps, and even the wide eyes were a token gesture of surprise.

Everyone had already been thinking the same thing.

"Or they have an inside man, but I can't imagine there's three of them. This was too orchestrated, too perfect. They knew in advance what the plan was.

They knew which convoy Tameka would

be in and what route they would take to get to Boston. And we have a large number of people

who work here who were privy to the information." He walked over to the whiteboard. "I hate

to say it, but our top suspects should be Bradley Martin and Reggie Yamamoto. They could have

faked the whole abduction and drugged themselves."

He wrote their names on the whiteboard. Gen uncurled from her chair.

"Let's not rule it out, but the way they were tied up and put in the tub, it seems unlikely they could have gotten themselves into that position. Besides that, the dose of Telazol in their systems was

high enough to knock them out for several hours. That would have severely limited the time they

would have had to torture Tameka, and we know that they took the time. She wasn't just killed."

Jensen wrote those facts next to their names but also wrote, "last ones to see Tameka alive; alone

together when they left with her." Below their names he started writing down the names of all

the officers present at the briefing. He crossed off several names as they were verified to have

still been with the FBI agents all Sunday afternoon. Two had left early to return to Elton, and

their names stayed up.

"You'll need to put the forensic technicians on there," Jared said. "A lot of the scenes were too clean for someone not to have good knowledge of forensics."

Jensen wrote down all the names he could remember, and Jared and Russ helped fill him in on

the rest. Three were half-crossed off because they had not been at the station when the plans

were being made and in theory would not know about the convoys.

"You'll have to put Dr. Rhodes up there," Jim said. "She is by far the most knowledgeable of forensic techniques and how to surgically dismember bodies. We also always took her at her

word when there was no information to be gleaned from the evidence we collected."

"Ty should be up here," Jensen murmured softly. He added the police chief's name to the much

too long list.

"Wasn't he here at the station the entire time?" Gen asked.

"Most people said yes, but they can't account for him every minute of every hour," Jensen

replied.

"My name should be on there," Russ said dourly.

Jensen looked at him and hesitated for a moment, and then wrote Russ' name on the board. He

capped the marker and turned to him.

"Where were you today?" he asked, almost casually.

"I was here in the station until four when the call came in that the convoy was missing and Brad

had missed his check in. I took my vehicle and went east. It's why I was so late getting to the

crime scene. We can check the GPS records of the tracker on my vehicle."

"We'll do that," Jensen said flatly.

Jared opened his mouth and then closed it. Jensen turned to look at him.

"What is it, Jay?"

"I think...M...Officer Collins needs to be on the list."

Jensen reacted. He knew he did due to the raised eyebrows and cocked heads aimed in his

general direction. He wasn't sure exactly what he'd done, but everyone had noticed. He knew

he couldn't discount Misha outright even though he knew it was impossible for him to be the

killer.

"On what grounds?" Jensen asked calmly. "He wasn't privy to the plans nor did he attend the

briefing."

Jared wouldn't meet his eyes and Jensen couldn't tell if it was because he felt bad for naming

Misha or if he couldn't look at Jensen knowing he probably would be too biased to listen to him.

"There was a lot of talk around the station, honestly," Russ said. "We're a

small station and

with so many of us involved in the operation, it probably got out just for people explaining what

was going on to people who were having to cover for the missing officers.”

“Well, that’s great,” Jensen said. “So now we have to put every single name of every single

employee of the Elton PD on our suspect list?”

Russ shrugged. “Maybe not the guy who brings the muffins in.”

“No, him too, I would think,” said Gen. “He could probably walk around and hear anything and

no one would even notice him because he’s always just there.”

Russ made a strange face. “God, do we talk that much? I suppose he could have—”

“No,” Jensen said. “This guy is police. Possibly forensics, but I’m leaning more towards an

actual cop.”

“So, do you want me to get a roster of all the employees?”

“That could—”

“That’s not the only reason why I suggested Misha,” Jared said.

Jensen turned to look at him. “What other reasons?”

“Well, let’s be honest. Killers, even serial killers, do tend to kill those they are familiar with.

Or those that trigger their killing tendencies. Misha’s sister is our first victim.

This wouldn't be

the first time a killer has staged serial killings in order to cover up a personal murder. Like the

DC Sniper."

Jensen clenched his teeth together and felt his jaw expand, but then relaxed when he spoke

again. "So, he staged an elaborate plan, almost ten years in the making, just to kill off his

sister?"

"He could have copycatted the original killer," Gen suggested.

"No. Those details were not public knowledge. They weren't something even someone in law

enforcement would have access to. The DC killer and the Elton one are the same person."

"So maybe he was in DC too," Jared said. "He goes on humanitarian aid trips all the time. If he disappeared from Elton for six months eight years ago, who would have noticed or thought it

was unusual?"

"There wasn't a disaster in DC eight years ago."

"Well, he might not have been truthful about where he was going."

"And eight years ago, those bodies were put in handcrafted wooden coffins, weren't they?" Gen

asked. "Didn't you say Misha does carpentry as a hobby?"

"He's the right age," Jared piled on. "You suspect that the Angel Slayer is the

same kid who

dissected those animals when he was fourteen or fifteen back in 1992.”

Jensen’s eyes shot over to Jared. He hadn’t shared that theory with anyone but Jared, but he

couldn’t deny it was true.

“He did find Hernandez’s body pretty easily,” Russ said.

“What?” Jensen said, more sharply than he meant to.

“Hernandez. Misha found his body in like an hour after he was sent out. To look in the middle

of the woods.”

“He had a cadaver dog with him.”

“And over ten square miles to search. Maybe he already knew where to look.”

“And Bunny did conveniently destroy evidence at the Mueller scene,” Gen added softly.

“That was more Russ’ fault than anybody else’s,” Jensen said.

Russ laughed a little incredulously. “What happened to it was all *your* fault for taking it out in the first place? And I’m telling you, she just grabbed it out of my hand. He has that dog well

trained. He could have signaled her even from the other side of the vehicle.”

“At the very least we should look into his alibis for the murders,” said Jared. “After all, we

know he was in the vicinity of the Lakeside Motor Lodge the night Mueller was killed.”

“We do?” Jim asked.

Jensen felt something twisting in his gut, but he wasn’t sure if it was guilt or panic. Either way it

was nauseating.

“We saw him there,” Jared said.

Which was a lie because Jared had probably only *heard* him. Jensen knew he should speak up,

say something to clear Jared from having to make false statements, but his brain wasn’t

functioning.

“He also did try to have his sister’s body cremated before we were able to examine it,” Jim

grunted in semi-thought.

“That was—” Jensen started, but he had no argument for that other than he had been a grieving

brother.

“I think,” Russ said, “that he might also have access to Telazol. I know the vet that Bunny goes

to has given him drugs before on the condition that he might need it on hand in the event one of

the police dogs is injured while on duty. It’s possible he may have stockpiled some over the

years.”

Jensen could feel a cold sweat break out on his brow. He didn’t want to hear

this.

“But...” Jensen cleared his throat and tried again. “Do you, any of you, really think Misha has

the temperament...or the capacity to do these sorts of heinous acts?”

Everyone was quiet.

“Everyone has it in them to kill,” Gen said.

“And most people are surprised when they learn the identity of a serial killer,” Jim said. “They

learn to hide it. Otherwise people would come forward and say, ‘Hey, my neighbor likes to

chop people up and eat them. You might want to look into that.’”

Jensen frowned at Jim’s flippant comment.

“Do you think he has it in him?” Jared asked softly, finally looking up and making eye contact.

Jensen opened his mouth to respond with a firm negative, but then he pictured Misha on top of

him. Pictured him holding him down, choking him, his eyes shiny with lust and excitement.

I'm the one who's messed up. I liked watching you struggle under me. I liked holding your

life in my hands.

Jensen clenched the marker in his hand. “I guess it’s not impossible.”

His voice didn’t even sound like his own it was so empty. Everyone was staring at him. He

could feel his eyes stinging. He turned away from them all and carefully wrote Misha's name on

the whiteboard. He took two seconds to compose himself and then turned back around.

"Do we have anyone else we should add to the list?" he asked.

"I'll go get the roster," Russ said, and left the office.

Jim looked at the agents. "While he's gone, I think we should discuss moving this whole

operation to Portsmouth. We're going to have to cut the Elton PD out of this investigation

entirely. We'll need to put in a request for all the forensic evidence to be moved to one of our

facilities and future evidence needs to be collected by our own people. I'll get another agent to

set up an interview with Officer Collins. We should probably interview all the staff here, but

none of *us* should be in charge of them. We can sit in, but we should let someone else do the

questioning."

"I think we also have enough reasonable suspicion to get a warrant for Martin's and Yamamoto's

cell phone records," Jensen said.

"Do we?" Gen asked.

"They were the last ones to have custody of Tameka. They were found in the motel room with

her.”

“Trussed up like a Christmas pig.”

Jensen shrugged. “I know the positioning was weird, but it wasn’t impossible for them to do that

to themselves. Brad is also the same age as—Misha. So, he fits the age profile. Reggie is young, but she could be his protégé. We already know they have an intimate relationship; they

could easily be partners.”

“That’s true,” Jared said. “They do fit the teacher/student paradigm.”

For some reason Jensen felt irritated by the comment. It was true, but he wondered if Jared was

just saying it because he felt bad for pointing out how well Misha fit the profile and the facts.

“I’ll speak with Ty about this,” Jim said. “It’s not going to go over well that we’re investigating

his people. Especially since we’ve got him on the list too. I’ll arrange for some transport to

Portsmouth for all of our materials. Unless, we think we can move it in our cars.”

“We’ve got to move the safe,” Gen said. “We’ll need a heavy duty van and lifting equipment to

get it out of here.”

“Okay then. It’s late. We’re—shit, demoralized,” Jim grumbled. “Everyone go home and

shower. Sleep—if you can. We’ll pack this all up tomorrow and until then, no

talking with the

staff. That includes Russ.”

“We’re not the only ones who have keys to this office,” Jensen said. “Should we leave our notes

here overnight? I can’t imagine that our suspicions aren’t going to leak before tomorrow. Hell,

half the station has to have figured out by now that there’s an inside man at the very least.”

“Well, we can put our most important notes in the safe,” said Jared. “But the evidence is stored

downstairs with forensics or in the evidence locker. We can’t just move it up here and break

chain of custody. So, we’ll have to wait for the evidence team to come tomorrow anyway.”

“They probably won’t make it out until the early afternoon,” Jim said. “I’ll get the ball rolling

tonight if I can, but this late at night, it probably won’t happen until tomorrow anyway. So, lock

up what you can in the safe and we’ll meet back here at nine to start packing up and sanitizing.

I’ll ask Ty to put a lockdown on the evidence locker overnight.”

Everyone nodded vaguely in answer. Jim stroked a hand down his beard.

“I know this is hard,” he said, his gravelly voice as gentle as it could get. “But we did the right

thing with Tameka. And even with Brendan. We just didn’t know we were

being played the

whole time. There's no fault in trusting the police and the people we have come to know. It's a

shame to find out that was a grave error."

"A grave error," Jensen repeated coldly. "Yeah. You could say that."

"I just did," Jim said, a little warning in his tone.

Jensen flicked his eyes over to Jim, but didn't apologize.

When the agents walked out of the office and locked it behind them, they were faced with a

quiet, solemn bullpen. The entire station had been hushed all day, but now it was silent. And all eyes were on them. They hadn't even announced that they were closing up shop yet and

beginning an in depth investigation into the Elton PD, but the seed of such a possibility had

already been planted in all of their minds. Some were glaring resentfully while others stared

blankly, too shocked to comprehend the awful truth. Jensen made a conscious effort not to make

eye contact with any of them. And God did he try not to, but he raised his eyes and caught sight

of Misha. He sat in his chair and watched with a neutral expression as the agents left the station.

Jensen felt sick again. He didn't believe Misha was the Angel Slayer. But he was going to have

to catch the real one in order to prove that to everyone else. He drew in a

shaky breath. Maybe
even prove it to himself.

Castiel

Tuesday, November 19, 2013

Jared peeled Marissa Mueller's picture off the whiteboard and folded the tape to stick onto the

back rather than try to peel it off and damage the photo like he had done on Natalia Smith's and

Davis Thompson's pictures. He was doing so very meticulously and keeping his eyes focused

on his task with his back to the room. Ty and Jim were not having a very pleasant nor private

conversation just behind him in the office. The door was even ajar, so he was certain everyone

outside was listening.

"This is insane, Jim," Ty said, doing his best to keep his voice at a normal volume. "This is how

desperate the FBI has become?"

"Desperate? We're following the evidence," Jim replied gruffly. "Don't turn a blind eye to this

because it's something you don't want to see."

"I'm not—"

"Tameka's abduction wasn't by chance. He didn't just happen to come across her. He knew

exactly where she would be and when. He brought her back to Elton knowing that half the force

was out in Portsmouth and would be checking along those highways. You have two officers that

claim they just fell asleep at the wheel and can't remember anything until they woke up hogtied

in the bathtub. You have over a dozen officers and forensic technicians who have been privy to

this information, had access to evidence, and in some cases, control of the information that was

reported to us."

"That doesn't mean any of them are involved with this!"

"But it does mean they need to be investigated! It seems to me that you would be eager to have

your people cleared. Why would you try to block this?"

"Because Brad and Reggie didn't do this! Kim is not a murderer! You're wasting your time

investigating innocent people when you could be looking at other scenarios. For instance, the

one common thread we have between the DC murders and the Elton ones is one of your own.

Why aren't you investigating Ackles?"

Jared turned his head at that. Jensen was still organizing his files on his desk and didn't bother

to acknowledge the fight.

“I’ll tell you why,” Ty continued, “it’s because it’s stupid. Jensen isn’t the Angel Slayer even

though he knows the most about the case and has links to both ends of it. You’re not investigating

him because it would be a waste of time and resources. Not to mention just outright idiotic. The

same goes for a large number of my people. You can rule a lot of them out with simple common sense.”

“And we are working on doing that, Ty, but that doesn’t mean we should ignore any possibilities

no matter how much we don’t want to acknowledge them. Will it make you feel better to know

that Dr. Rhodes is lower down on the list than Martin and Yamamoto? We’re not doing this

arbitrarily.”

“And I am telling you, it is not Brad or Reggie, no matter what kind of sick relationship you’re

pretending they have in your head.”

“You know your own people well,” Jim said. “I’m not refuting that. But someone has been

fooling you, the Elton PD, and us this entire time. You can’t ignore that. You can’t ignore that at

the very least there is a leak coming from the Elton PD.”

Ty drew breath to speak, but didn’t say anything. Jared could see his mind working furiously to

come up with a counterargument.

“And just so you know, Martin and Yamamoto are going to be investigated heavily, but the top

spot on our list is actually taken by Officer Collins. How well do you know him?”

“Very well,” Ty snapped. “His father was chief before me.”

“So, he’s been familiar with police procedure all his life then.”

Ty clenched his hand into a fist. He looked around the room. “Are you seriously considering

Misha Collins as a prime suspect in the Angel Slayer case?”

No one would meet his eyes. A silence stretched out around them. It was broken by a very

tentative knock at the door. Everyone turned to see Misha standing in the doorway, looking pale

and drawn. Ty blanched.

“Misha...did you hear...” Ty trailed off as it became apparent he had heard everything.

“Um, yeah, I did,” Misha said, voice thin and listless. “So, this is going to make this really

awkward.”

“What?” Gen asked tentatively.

“I, um, I...was leaving to take Bunny to our training site, and I found this on my car’s

windshield.”

He raised his hand and held up a white rectangle. The room went still; hardly anyone dared to

breathe. Jared glanced at Jensen—he looked stricken, his knuckles bloodless as he dug his

fingers into his palms. Nobody moved or spoke. Unable to take the oppressive tension

anymore, Jared crossed the room and held out his hand. Misha handed over the note card and

Jared flipped it over, confirming there was a single word written in black marker on it. He

walked over to his desk and dug out the angel summoning book from the box he had packed earlier. He flipped through the index until he found the name written on the card.

Jared faced the room and everyone's eyes were trained on him.

“Castiel, angel of Thursday.”

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“Well, I guess this takes Misha off the suspect list,” Jared said.

“Does it?” Gen asked. “He could have sent the card to himself for that exact purpose. We

weren't exactly making it a secret that we were going to start investigating the PD employees.

Besides, it seems awfully convenient that Misha just happened to be parked right where the

station's security cameras have a blind spot so that it's impossible to see if someone put a card

there or not.”

Jensen was barely following the conversation. From the moment he’d seen Misha hold up the

note card, he’d been burning hot and then suddenly chilled. His mind couldn’t stop repeating

over and over again that the last two people who had cards and came to them for help had

wound up viciously tortured and brutally murdered.

Misha was at his desk working, as far as they knew, because they had been holed up in the office

discussing what to do for the last couple of hours. Misha had been given strict instructions not to

leave without informing the agents, and Ty and Russ and been instructed to make sure he obeyed.

“Why don’t we just put him in a cell?” Jensen had snapped.

No one had answered him, but no one had reprimanded him either. It was now unavoidably

obvious that Jensen had developed an attachment to Officer Collins, though he hoped everyone

but Jared thought it was just friendship. If they knew they had been sleeping together, he would

get yanked off the case so fast he’d be back in DC before he could protest. And he was not

leaving Misha alone now. Not after he had been marked. Though Gen and Jim still refused to



take him off the suspect list, which Jensen couldn't blame them for. Marking yourself as victim

would be a clever way to slither out of suspicion. But the fact that it seemed like an obvious

move made him wonder if the Angel Slayer would do it—would Misha do it?

Jensen covered his eyes and shook his head. He couldn't imagine Misha doing any of it. But

maybe he was too close. Maybe he wouldn't be willing to see what was right in front of his face because he had feelings for the man. Then again, maybe since he knew him so well, he was right

to believe he was innocent.

“So what do we do?” Jim asked. “It seems like we can kill two birds with one stone: we need

to keep him protected and we need to interview him. If he stays at the station, we can ask his

whereabouts on the days of the murders and then keep him in custody while we vet his alibis—if

he has any. That way he'll be safe if he isn't our guy—and inactive if he is.”

“Unless he knows he's going to get caught now,” Gen said, “and he plans to commit suicide on Thursday.”

“He's not going to kill himself,” Jensen said, glaring at her.

Gen didn't respond with anger. She just dropped her eyes to the floor. “It's a possibility,

Jensen.”

“Either way, we agree that keeping him here is the best course of action,” Jim

said. Then he

growled in frustration. "So what do we do?" he repeated. "Do we keep our operation here or

continue with plans to move to Portsmouth?"

"We could take Misha with us to Portsmouth," Jared said.

"Yeah because the last time we tried to get a target out of Elton worked so well," Jensen

grumbled.

"Well, we would travel with him this time, of course."

"Maybe it would be best to stay here," Jim said. "Especially since we have some folks who are

coming down from Boston to assist us."

"You mean take over for us," Gen muttered.

"Assist," Jim said firmly. "And honestly it wouldn't hurt to have fresh eyes on the case."

"Is it alright with you if I ask Misha some questions, Jim?"

Jensen almost surprised himself when he spoke, but Jim didn't seem to think it was an odd

request.

"Sure." Jensen started to stand up. "I'll go with you."

Jensen only paused for a moment, but he had been hoping to talk one on one with him. He didn't

think Jim was coming along with the direct intention of keeping them from

having a private

conversation. Well, probably not.

“So, should we unpack?” Gen asked. “The moving team is slated to be here in another hour or

so. They said they would leave Portsmouth around one o’clock.”

“Try to get a hold of them and tell them to postpone the trip until Friday. We’ll decide whether

to continue our operations here or to relocate to the RA after we get through Thursday. Jensen.”

Jim nodded his head and Jensen followed him out of the office. They found Misha at his desk

doing his best to ignore the whispers surrounding him. Russ was sitting with him, hopefully

keeping him company and not just staring at him so he wouldn’t just suddenly disappear or

something. Russ nodded to them when they approached.

“Officer Collins, would you come with Agent Ackles and myself and answer some questions?”

Misha put down the pen he had been using to doodle cartoon dogs on a notepad with. “Of

course.”

He stood up and directed Jim to the hallway with the interview rooms. Russ stood up and put a

hand on Jensen’s arm to make him stay back.

“Hey, look, I know things are—God, is it impossible for me to continue working the case? This

fucker has threatened one of our own.”

Jensen couldn’t lift his head it felt like such a heavy weight was hanging from it. “One of our

own is this fucker,” he said miserably.

Russ shook his head. “Look, I know I was onboard with the idea last night—but—in the light of

day it’s ridiculous. None of us could do this. I mean. We’re more than just coworkers or a team

—we’re all family here. And this guy has targeted—”

“I know, Russ,” Jensen cut him off. “The whole idea is sickening. But, someone has to be

feeding him information at the very least.”

“Maybe it’s not intentional. Maybe this person doesn’t know. Maybe they’re just sharing details

of their day over dinner or something.”

“I’d like to believe that too, but we can’t just ignore evidence because we don’t like it.”

“Well, if you’re not ignoring evidence, why is Misha still under suspicion? He’s a target now!”

“Maybe. What if he sent the card to himself?”

Russ looked shocked. “You don’t really believe that, do you?”

“We have to be open to all possibilities.”

Russ' jaw flapped for a moment and then his eyes hardened. "If you're staying open to all

possibilities, shouldn't you be interviewing me? Aren't I still on your list?" he asked harshly.

Jensen gave him a wan smile. "Yeah, you are. We'll probably be along to question you before

too long. I would use this time to firm up your alibis."

"That's not funny, Jensen."

"I'm not laughing, Russ."

Jensen gave Russ' arm a pat and walked away. He found Misha and Jim sitting in interview

room one. He shut the door behind him and took a seat next to Jim. Misha sat across from them

in the center of the table. He had his fingers laced together and his hands resting on the table.

He waited expectantly—not volunteering any information. Smart man.

"Well, Officer Collins," Jim began, "I just want to get some information from you regarding

where you were on certain dates. Try to recall to the best of your knowledge and it would be

best if you could provide us with the name of someone who would be able to corroborate your

statement."

Misha nodded.

“Do you recall your whereabouts from September 10th to 12th?”

Misha stiffened. “I was on duty those days working nights. I was in the station all night on the

tenth and I made an arrest on the eleventh. I’m recorded as the booking officer on that day. The

12th I’m not sure of. That day is a little hazy because I was notified of my sister’s murder.”

Jim nodded and wrote these details down in the notepad he’d produced from his coat’s breast

pocket.

“And where were you during the days?”

“At my house. Alone. Either sleeping or watching TV. On the eleventh I went for a run from

approximately 2:00 to 4:00. I passed a neighbor on one of the trails. He might recall seeing me

since we don’t often cross paths on that trail.”

“Can I get a name?”

Misha told him and let his eyes slide over to Jensen while Jim wrote in his book. They

continued in the same vein through all the dates of every murder. Unfortunately after his sister’s

murder, Misha spent a lot of time at home alone where no one saw him or could vouch for him.

But, a good chunk of that time was also spent at work where he had plenty of witnesses. When

he wasn't out on patrol by himself. Jensen made a mental note to gather the GPS data from the

secretaries. At the very least they could corroborate the placement of the K9 vehicle with

Misha's memories. Of course, just because the car was there didn't mean the officer was.

"Now, one thing I need to ask you about in particular," Jim said. He'd been asking all the

questions. Jensen hadn't said a word. "You were seen at the Lakeside Motor Lodge on the night

of one of the murders." Misha's eyes whipped to Jensen and then back to Jim's face. His

fingers tightened slightly, but otherwise he kept his composure. "What were you doing there?"

"I guess this was night before Hernandez was found, correct?"

Jensen's eyes widened and Jim looked up sharply. Misha immediately realized he'd said

something wrong, but stayed quiet.

"Actually I was referring to the night Marissa Mueller was found at the Lakeside Motor Lodge.

Were you there multiple nights?"

"Oh. Um."

"Don't start lying now, son. Both Jensen and Jared saw you there."

Misha looked at Jensen. He knew that Jared had only *seen* him on one of those nights. But Jim

seemed to be under the impression that Jared had seen him in person both nights. Jensen gave a

slight shake of his head with the message, *Don't lie*.

“Honestly, sir, I’ve been to the Lakeside Motor Lodge several nights since Agent Ackles and

Agent Padalecki’s arrival.”

“Is that so?” Jim shifted and Jensen could tell he just barely refrained from looking at him.

“Yes, sir. The first time I was helping Jen—Agent Ackles –”

“Son, don’t try to fool me with any formality bullshit.”

Misha slumped a little. Not in defeat, it actually looked a little like relief.

“I was helping Jensen with the research material he gathered from the Rochester Library. I had

driven him there that night since Jared and Gen got stuck in traffic on the highway. A couple

weeks after that, I drove Jensen to the motel after—we had dinner together. Jared had their

rental car and I was off duty. And after that Jensen and I shared a few more meals together and I

would drop him off afterwards. I guess two of those nights happened to be nights before bodies

were found.”

“And where was Jared so often?” Jim demanded, turning his sharp focus on Jensen.



Jensen knew he couldn't throw Jared under the bus. And revealing that he was hooking up with

Kim wouldn't be any better than him sleeping with Misha. But he couldn't lie. He couldn't keep

the whole story from an ASAC. It might hurt the case if any of them weren't working with full

knowledge of what was going on. But he sure as fuck could stall on the way to getting there.

"Jared and one of the waitresses at Nell's—became friendly. And—"

"That's enough," Jim grunted. "I don't need any sordid details. We could say Misha was a saint

for being willing to chauffeur your ass around town while Jared was chasing tail."

"That's not exactly—"

Jim held up a hand. "I said I didn't want to know more."

"But you can't let this reflect poorly on Jared," Jensen said quickly, "He never neglected his

duties. He was never distracted by—"

"Agent Ackles, I have been pleased with both your and Jared's work. I don't think that Jared

having a lady friend in town would jeopardize his judgment or the case."

"Ye-ah," Jensen sat back in his seat. He looked up at Misha who was clearly giving him a look that said, *You told me not to lie but now you're lying by omission*. Jensen shrugged a shoulder

at him.

“So, it wasn’t uncommon for Officer Collins to be seen at the Lakeside Motor Lodge. The night

of Mueller’s death, were you there between the hours of one and five thirty in the morning?”

Jensen could tell Jim was expecting an immediate no, so he looked up when Misha didn’t

answer right away. He was looking up and to the right—remembering, not fabricating—and then

he said, “No. I was not.”

Jensen frowned. That meant Misha had left almost immediately after they’d had sex. Well, he

supposed that meant he’d fallen asleep almost immediately after they’d had sex, so there wasn’t

any real reason for Misha to stick around longer.

“Can anyone vouch for your whereabouts between the hours of 1:00 and 5:30am on October

25th?”

Misha shook his head. “I was at home. And then I got up early for an extended twelve hour

shift. I was driving to the station when we got a call over the radio requesting all available units

to report to the Lakeside Motor Lodge.”

Misha’s eyes flicked to Jensen and away, but in that instant Jensen had seen the memory of the

fear that had gripped him when that call had come. He’d been terrified

something had happened

to Jensen. Jensen wanted to reach across the table and take his hand, but all he did was shift his

weight in his seat to the other ass cheek. These chairs were ridiculously hard.

“Just a couple more questions, Officer,” Jim said. “You are familiar with this case, correct?”

Misha shifted uncomfortably in his chair, but Jensen didn’t think it had anything to with being

physically uncomfortable.

“I am. Most of us in the station are.”

“Relax, I just want to make sure my next question makes sense. Do you know why the Angel

Slayer might be targeting you?”

Misha’s brows drew together. “I don’t under—Oh. You mean what could be my crime?”

Jim nodded.

*Don’t look at me*, Jensen thought fervently as Misha spread his hands on the table and kept his

eyes on his fingers.

“Well, I guess that would depend on if he ever repeats any of his crimes.”

“He hasn’t so far,” Jensen said.

Misha glanced at him briefly and then looked back at Jim. “Well, I don’t know all the crimes that have been used. I know about—Natalia’s—and I saw Hernandez’s body. I could probably

guess at Vanderpool and Mueller's, but the others I don't know. Are they all biblical?"

"Maybe," Jim said. "What do you think would draw the killer's attention to you?"

Misha shook his head. "I don't know. I sometimes wear shirts that are a cotton/polyester blend.

Doesn't that violate Leviticus somewhere?"

"Everything violates Leviticus somewhere," Jensen muttered.

"I don't always pick up after Bunny when I take her on walks."

Jensen let out a small laugh and then frowned at Misha. He shrugged in return.

"What? Have *any* of his kills been for legitimate reasons?"

Jensen shook his head, conceding the point.

"Would you be willing to submit a DNA sample?" Jim asked out of the blue.

There was zero evidence to compare it to, but in theory Misha shouldn't know that. Jim was

looking for a reaction.

"Of course. But, I'm pretty sure I'm already in the database. All of the Elton PD staff are in

there. It's a requirement when we join the force, just like providing fingerprints."

Jim grunted and scribbled something in his notepad.

"Ackles, do you have any additional questions?"

“Where were you in the spring of 2005?”

Misha raised an eyebrow. Then he looked at the table and thought for a minute. “Well, that year

was the year the earthquake and tsunami happened in the Indian Ocean. I remember because...”

“You traveled there to help out?”

Misha shrugged and nodded. “And...that was the only trip I took that year. So. I guess I was

probably in Elton somewhere. My ex-wife would remember. I could contact her—”

“That won’t be necessary.”

Misha’s lips twitched and Jensen knew he was fighting a smile.

“That’s all I have, Jim.”

“All right then. I’m going to make a few phone calls to get some bodies here to help canvass the

people you’ve listed as potential alibis, Officer Collins. We’d like you stay at the station tonight.”

Misha repressed a sigh. “I understand.”

Jim stood up and left the room. He didn’t wait for Jensen and he closed the door behind him.

Maybe it was foolish to believe he didn’t know there was something going on between him and

Misha. He couldn’t be bothered to care about that now and leaned forward and put his hands on

the table. Misha withdrew.

“Misha...”

“What way are you leaning?”

“What?”

“What seems more likely? I’m a target or a suspect?”

“Are you asking my personal belief or what the team has been discussing?”

“Well, I can’t very well be told what the team is discussing.”

“Misha, I don’t believe it at all.”

Misha looked up, his blue eyes dark with worry and fear. He sucked in a deep breath.

“Do you mean it?”

Jensen tilted his head. “Of course. I’m not gonna lie, there’s a lot of circumstantial evidence

that points to you as a possibility, so I can’t refuse to allow the team to investigate. But as far as

I’m concerned this fucker has marked my—” he cut off abruptly and Misha’s eyes widened

slightly and his lips parted. “You’re a target of the Angel Slayer, and I swear on my life I will

protect you.”

Misha nodded, still staring. Jensen stood up suddenly.

“I’ll stop him.”

“Please do,” Misha said dazedly.

Jensen turned for the door, and then growled at the rational part of his brain to shut the fuck up.

He turned around and walked over to Misha. He leaned down and Misha tilted his face up to

meet him in a brief kiss. Then Jensen left the interview room. He checked his watch: 1:00pm.

It was fifty-nine hours until the clock struck midnight on Friday. There was no guarantee the

Angel Slayer couldn’t—or wouldn’t—attempt to kill Misha on any Thursday from now until

eternity, but he had a feeling the deadline was this Thursday. And that the student would not be

handling this one despite the target’s gender and lack of hour associated with the angel name.

Going after Misha was a personal vendetta. He wondered who in the Elton PD had it out for him. Everyone seemed to like him, though no one seemed particularly close to him. He hadn’t

preempted anyone’s promotion since he’d turned down the chance to become a detective. As far

as he knew he and his K9 dogs hadn’t sniffed out any dirty cops.

“Now there’s a thought,” Jensen murmured to himself. He needed to find out if any police had

been fired or dismissed sometime this year—possibly as the result of Misha’s work. Perhaps

the killer had started killing in his hometown because he had a grudge and

was unemployed.

Jensen hurried through the bullpen to find Ty.

### **Wednesday, November 20, 2013**

“Where do we stand?” Jim asked, pacing around the small room. They were still using the

office the Elton PD had allotted for them, but it was much more crowded as now there were an

additional agent from Gen’s squad and two from the Boston field office. Jared couldn’t

remember any of their names. Jim had introduced them briefly when they first came in the room

in the morning and the rest of the day had been spent catching the agents up on the case and the

evidence they had. Which, when it was all laid out at once was simultaneously a lot and yet

nothing at all.

The new agents had been asking a lot of questions, mostly ones that they had been asking

themselves for over two months now and still had no answers for. After they finally reached the

part involving Tameka’s disappearance and death, the other three agents were convinced that

someone in the Elton PD was involved and two were ready to arrest Martin and Yamamoto. The

third argued a strong case for the primary suspect—Misha Collins.



Jared had been watching Jensen for any sort of reaction, but he'd been withdrawn and tense from

the moment they had confirmation that the convoy with Tameka was missing. Now there was a

discussion starting up on sending all the forensic evidence to Quantico to have it reexamined.

Jared didn't bother to argue against it, but it would take such a long time before they got any

results back—and he doubted they would be any different. Kim was good at her job and all the

technicians were really well trained. For such a small town, Elton was really up to date with

the latest cutting edge technology. Of course, all it would take is one person to be able to sneak

in and change results or swap out samples. That was an argument against Misha—it seemed

more likely that if evidence was being tampered with, a technician was behind it. The problem

was that there barely *was* any evidence. Why would the Angel Slayer worry about changing any

of it? None of it led to him anyway.

The agents' discussion—argument—was disrupted when someone knocked at the door. Jared

was closest to it so he opened it. Kim stood outside holding a large manila envelope.

"Hi," he said, feeling a little better just seeing her. They had stopped their

little trysts together

about a week ago, but she made it easy to believe there was still hope no matter how desperate

the situation.

"Who is it?" Jim called out.

Jared stepped back and opened the door. Kim stayed outside but leaned in a little to see Jim.

"Hi. I know everyone in Elton has been banned from helping, but I thought I should drop this

off. It's the report from the regional geologic society. It didn't come from us."

"Does this have the information about the crossover between the dirt found on the boot prints

and the ash tree bark?" Jared asked.

"It does."

"What did it say?"

"I didn't open it," Kim replied with a bright smile. "Completely un-tampered with evidence."

The new agents didn't seem to understand why everyone else suddenly looked at their toes.

Jared took the envelope from her.

"Thank you, Kim."

"Sure. I'll, uh, get out of your way now."

She gave him a friendly smile and then turned and left. Jared shut the door and started to open

the envelope. The group began discussing which suspects they wanted to set as the highest

priority and whether or not they had any grounds for arresting anyone. One agent in particular

was adamant that they had reasonable suspicion of Martin and Yamamoto to make an arrest and

get warrants to search their houses. Everyone else disagreed and didn't want to reach too far too

fast in the event they were wrong. Jared listened with one ear and read the report.

At first it was disappointing. There were no areas where the soil composition and ash trees had

any significant crossover. Then came an analysis of the ash bark which indicated it was a tree

common all over New Hampshire and the northeast in general; essentially useless information.

Then there was a blurb on the specific composition of the soil found at the Thompson crime

scene. Though it corresponded with the previous analysis that it was from the Lake

Winnepesaukee shore, it further specified that it was Monadnock-Becket-Skerry complex, eight

to fifteen percent slopes, very stony—which of course meant fuck all to Jared. Except for the

fact that it stated only 1.5% of the shoreline in Belknap County was composed of this particular

soil. Also included was a map of that area.

"Hey Jensen," Jared said, not even noticing he was interrupting one of the Boston agents.

"What's up, Jay?"

"Do you remember the name of the street that was Hannigan's home address? It was something

weird, wasn't it?"

"Um. Hold on." Jensen looked at the floor and his eyes jumped back and forth as he thought.

Jared wondered if he was actually going through Gilbert Hannigan's statement in his head and

reading through the personal information at the top of the page. His memory was phenomenal.

"Um, Spokies Way."

Jared slapped the back of his fingers against the paper. "Guess who lives right in the middle of

the tiny section of lake shore that has the exact composition of the soil we found in Thompson's

home."

Jensen stared at him for long enough that Jared wondered if maybe he was waiting for him to

answer his own guess who question. Then he suddenly turned to the whiteboard and snatched up

a marker. He wrote at the top of the suspect list, "Gilbert Hannigan."

"I fucking knew it," he said.

"Now, wait, hold on," Jim said. "This doesn't prove anything. There's probably several miles in that area and dozens of people who live there."

"Plus, I thought we agreed that his reaction to Vanderpool's death was too genuine to be faked,"

Gen said. "At least I think so. I talked with him for an hour."

"He's not the teacher," Jensen said. "He's the student. And Vanderpool was one of his lessons."

"Well, what can we do with this information?" Jim said. "It won't get us a warrant."

"No, but we can talk to him," Jensen said. "Believe me, he's not bright. If we bring up that we did some science and analyzed the dirt we found and knew it was from where he lived, he might

crack."

"You seriously think he'll just confess to everything?" the Portsmouth agent asked skeptically.

"Probably not, though it's not impossible. What I'm willing to bet will happen is that he'll panic.

He doesn't make any of the decisions in this arrangement. He'll try to contact the teacher. More

than likely he'll go to meet with him. We can follow him straight to the Angel Slayer."

The new agents looked skeptical as all hell, but the others, the ones that had been working this

case with virtually no leads for two and a half months—there was a gleam of hope in everyone's

eyes. It was the closest they'd ever gotten to potentially identifying a suspect.

"This really seems like a long shot," the Portsmouth agent said.

Jensen looked at him, keeping his irritation in check better than Jared would have. "Do you have

any other ideas or plans that we should be working on?"

He put an empty hand in the air. "Nope."

"Well, then. Jared and I will go have a chat with Mr. Hannigan—"

"I want to come too," Gen said.

"I don't know. We don't want to spook him."

"I thought that was exactly what we wanted to do."

"Not before we can talk with him though. If he doesn't answer the door we'll get nothing out of

him. And seeing three agents coming to his house—he might think we're there to storm the place

or something. But, what you can do, if you're willing, is set up at a choke point. That way if he's

paying attention when he leaves, he won't see our car following him. And we can trade off so he

won't see one car for too long."

Gen didn't look particularly thrilled with the assignment, but she nodded her head. "Okay. But,

my car is kind of conspicuous."

"Kind of?" Jared snorted.

She narrowed her eyes at him.

"You can take mine," Jim said. "I assume you want to leave now?"

"The sooner the better."

"All right. You three go handle Hannigan. You other three, you're going to be on interview duty.

We've got several officers and technicians in the station now, and we'll pull them aside and start

interviewing them three at a time."

Jared, Jensen, and Gen gathered up their coats and checked their holsters to ensure their guns and

handcuffs were secure.

"I want you all to check in every half hour," Jim ordered on the way out.

"Yes, sir!" all three replied.

They were halfway through the bullpen when Ty approached them.

"We've got a problem," he said, and it brought all three up short.

"It's not a problem," Misha said testily. He stood with Bunny and Russ a little behind Ty. "I'm just going home to feed Bunny. I don't have any more treats here and she needs real food

anyway."

Jensen looked at him like he'd just sprouted a second head. "You want to go home? Alone?"

"Well, I'll be—"

"No fucking way," Jensen stated loudly.

Misha looked shocked for a moment, and then his features hardened. "I won't be gone long and I'll come straight back here. I—"

Jensen cut him off again. "I'm sure Brendan thought the same thing."

"This is different."

"How?"

"Well, for one thing, I'm a trained police officer with a firearm. Secondly, I have a trained

police dog that would smell or hear an intruder long before he was anywhere near me."

Jensen crossed his arms over his chest. "You're not going anywhere alone, Misha."

"There's not really much you or anyone else can do to stop me."

"We can hold you here—not in protective custody but under reasonable suspicion. We could

also consider you a flight risk."

A couple people sucked in sharp breaths. Jared ran a hand over his jaw and looked back and

forth between the two glaring men. He hoped Jensen knew what he was doing.

"You've had your twenty-four hours then," Misha stated calmly though his eyes were burning

cold. "Are you going to charge me with anything? Because if you're not



charging me, I'm free to

leave at any time."

Jensen closed his eyes and said wearily, "Misha, don't."

"Don't what? I'm talking about a few hours. Just to let the dog out and feed her and pick up

some more supplies if I'm going to have to stay at the station indefinitely."

"And someone else can't go? No one else can take care of Bunny?"

"Yeah they probably can, but I want to get out of here for a few hours."

"Okay."

"Okay?"

"Okay."

Misha looked a little surprised. "Okay then. Not that I need your or anyone else's permission."

"I'll go with you."

"What?"

"Jensen," Jared said. "We've got some place else we need to be."

"You and Gen can handle it."

"But—"

"I don't need a babysitter," Misha growled.

"I could go with him," Russ said.

"Or a police escort! Are you two serious?"

"Misha!" Jensen burst out, utterly exasperated. "Two people have died while under police protection and technically you still are a suspect in the case. Humor us, will you?"

Jensen looked at him with pleading eyes and Jared felt a little embarrassed watching them stare

at each other. Maybe they no longer did give a fuck who knew their relationship was well

beyond the scope of work colleagues or casual acquaintances.

"Fine," Misha relented. "But you were heading somewhere. You've got something to work on for the case, right?"

"Yes, but—"

"Then you go do that. You promised me you would catch my sister's killer. Do that. Russ can

go with me."

"I still think this is a very bad idea," Ty griped loudly.

"Everybody does," Jensen muttered.

"But it's settled, right?" Misha said, clearly still aggravated. "Russ, do you have everything you need to leave now?"

"Um, just let me swing by desk to grab my keys. Don't leave without me," he called over his

shoulder and jogged for his office.

"He won't," Jensen said darkly, eyes trained on Misha.

Misha's expression wasn't any more pleasant. Not that it was likely to happen under the current

circumstances anyway, but Jared didn't think Jensen was going to be getting laid anytime soon.

Jared and Ty glanced at each other and then at the floor. Apparently Jensen and Misha were

going to stare each other down until Russ returned. Thankfully the detective didn't drag his feet.

"Let's go," Russ said as he walked in between the two men, breaking their eye contact.

Misha turned to follow him, calling Bunny to heel. Jared whispered "hi" to her and she gave a

little tail wag, but could sense her master's temperament well enough not to get out of line.

Jared turned to Jensen.

"You ready to go now?"

Jensen's scowl lasted the entire length of the drive to Hannigan's residence. Not even

discussing their strategy for talking to him could do much to push Misha from his thoughts. Jared

hoped he wouldn't be too distracted to do what he needed to do.

The neighborhood wasn't exactly run down, but it was rural. Neighbors had a good bit of trees

and land between each other and the driveways were long and unpaved. They had to circle

around the streets for a while until they found an intersection Hannigan would have to pass if he

drove out of the area. Gen was stationed there and Jared and Jensen drove on to his house. As

they pulled up the drive and parked behind the large van marked with the logo of the company

Hannigan worked for, they saw movement in one of the windows.

The two agents got out of the car, buttoning their suit coats. They glanced at each other over the

roof.

“I swear to God if he’s running out the backdoor right now,” Jensen mumbled as he started

toward the door.

Jared smiled and then bit his lip to get his expression under control as he caught up with him.

“Twenty says he’s already making a swim for it in the lake,” Jared said.

“You’re on,” Jensen replied and held out his fist for Jared to bump it in a gentleman’s agreement.

They stepped onto the porch and knocked on the door. They waited about twenty seconds during

which time Jared looked for but didn’t find a doorbell. Jensen knocked again and announced

who they were in a loud voice. They waited; still there was no movement.

“God damn it,” Jensen sighed. “Don’t tell me I’m going to owe you forty bucks now.”

“Sixty.”

“How do you figure that?”

“Well, twenty for this, twenty for Mueller, and twenty because I knew Misha would come

crawling back to you.”

“When did we bet on that?” Jensen asked, slightly scandalized.

“Oh. Maybe that was a bet I made with myself.”

“You can’t collect on...internal bets.”

“Sure I can. Misha admitting he was a total douche and letting you fuck the bejeezus out of him isn’t worth twenty bucks?”

“Jesus Christ, Jared.”

“What? How many times have I told you—those walls are really fucking thin.”

“Put on your headphones then.”

“I—”

The door suddenly opened and they put on their stern, federal agent faces.

“Mr. Hannigan,” Jensen said, all business. “I’m Special Agent Jensen Ackles and this Special

Agent Jared Padalecki.” They both produced their credentials for his inspection.

Hannigan rubbed an arm and his eyes darted back and forth between them.

“Yeah, I remember

you.”

“We have just a couple of questions for you, if you wouldn’t mind helping us

out.”

“Um, I—” Hannigan paused, clearly caught off guard by the word choice. “You need my help?”

“Yes. Would it be possible for us to come inside?”

Hannigan pulled the door tight against his side. “The place is a mess. Um. I can answer a

couple of questions, but I was actually on my way out so...”

“This won’t take long at all.”

“I already told you everything I know about what happened to...Sarah.”

“Yes, we have just a couple of follow up questions. We know you were out of town on the night

of the murder.”

Hannigan visibly relaxed a little.

“But when we asked you about the last time you saw Sarah, I don’t believe anyone asked if she

was acting strangely.”

Hannigan’s eyes darted around again. “What do you mean?”

“Did her behavior seem odd to you?” Jared clarified. “We’re trying to ascertain if she had any

strange encounters before her abduction. It could help us identify a potential pattern of

behavior.”

Jared saw Jensen eye him sideways; that had been a slightly nonsensical

conclusion. But

Hannigan didn't notice—he was just shaking his head.

“No, no, I'm afraid I can't help you with that. She seemed fine. Her normal self. And like I

said, I hadn't seen her for over a week so...”

“Of course,” Jensen said, placating him. “We also needed to know if Sarah had connections to

any of the other victims. Natalia Smith, Davis Thompson, Daniel Hernandez —”

Hannigan flinched at Hernandez's name. “No. Why would I know? I wasn't that close with

her.”

“Well, that's not exactly true, is it? You had quite an intimate relationship with her.”

“But that doesn't mean I knew her friends or whatever.”

Hannigan was getting agitated.

“Fair enough.”

“You know, I really do have to go—”

“Just one more thing, Mr. Hannigan,” Jared said, giving his best I'm a perfectly harmless puppy

smile. “Then we'll let you go.”

Those were the magic words. Hannigan nodded.

“You see, we found some soil at one of the crime scenes and we had it

analyzed. It is a very

unique composition and specific to a certain area—to this area in fact.”

Hannigan tensed again and slid one foot back. “Is that so?”

“It is,” Jensen said. “And since you lived in the area, we were wondering if you’d noticed any

suspicious activity. Anyone walking along your property, or someone who doesn’t belong in the

neighborhood.”

Hannigan relaxed a hair. “Y-you think the killer has been around here? That’s —scary,” he said

awkwardly.

“It is,” Jensen replied gravely. “Do you know all of your neighbors? Are there any empty

houses around here? Perhaps gone into foreclosure or only used as vacation homes?”

“No. All up and down this street are people who have lived here for years. How big is the

area?”

“Pretty small.”

Jared looked at Hannigan. He had calmed down considerably. That wasn’t good.

“Well, I guess that means he must have just passed through, then,” Hannigan said.

Jared glanced at Jensen. They didn’t want him scared into flight out of the



country, but he

needed to be a little unnerved.

“Oh, no,” Jensen said. “We found the soil at more than one scene. He would have to frequent

this place. It seems unfortunate, but we’re probably going to need to investigate everyone on this

street. It may be hard for you to fathom anyone you know doing these things, but how well do

any of us really know our neighbors?”

Jensen smiled blankly and even Jared was a little creeped out by it.

“So. You’ll be around here a lot then.”

“Daily,” Jensen replied without missing a beat. “I hope we’ll be able to count on your help. If

you’ll keep a vigilant eye and let us know if anything seems out of place.”

“Y-yeah. I-I can do that.”

“Excellent.” Jensen pulled a business card out of his pocket. “I know you already have Special

Agent Cortese’s information, but don’t hesitate to contact me if you see or think of anything.”

Hannigan took the card reluctantly. “Sure.”

“Thank you for your time, Mr. Hannigan. We won’t hold you up any longer.”

“What? Oh, right. I’m, uh. I have an errand.”

Jensen and Jared smiled at him and then turned around and left the porch.

They heard the door

shut behind them. Jared was itching to talk but he waited until they were in the car and he had

started up the engine.

“Did you see the way he reacted to Hernandez’s name?” Jared asked as he backed out of the

driveway.

“Did you notice his boots?” Jensen said. “John Deere logo on the tongue.”

“Fucking hell,” Jared muttered. “I can’t stand leaving him behind. He’s—I mean he’s—!”

“Whoa, Jared!”

Jared braked hard as he almost ran through a stop sign. Fortunately no one was around. He

remembered to take a left so they could park partially around a bend and wait to see if Hannigan

left.

“Sorry,” Jared said.

“No, it’s okay. I understand, believe me. But he’s the small fry here. If we haul him in, the real killer might bolt. We’ve got him though. He’s not going anywhere. And maybe he’ll take us to

where we really need to be.”

Jared nodded. He parked the car and turned the engine off.

“How long do you think it will take?”

Jensen cocked his head to the side. “Well, either he’ll leave immediately, or he’ll stew and think

about it for a few hours until he can’t stand it anymore.”

“Twenty says he stews.”

“No way. Of course he’s going to stew. We’re going to be stuck in this car for hours.”

Jared laughed. “Then you might want to crack a window.”

“Why?”

“I had chili for lunch.”

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Jensen ran his thumb over the screen of his phone. The pad hovered over Misha’s name, and

then moved away. He looked out the windshield and sighed. They’d been sitting for almost four

hours with no movement from Hannigan. He was about to have to step out and pee in the

woods. He wondered how Gen was holding up.

“Don’t do it,” Jared said.

“What?” Jensen looked left. He thought Jared had been snoozing.

“You’ll just piss him off if he knows you’re checking up on him.”

Jensen frowned. “So? I’d rather have him mad and alive than screaming for help and no one

there to hear him.”

“Russ is there.”

“I know. Ah ha! I’ll call Russ.”

Jensen scrolled to Russ’ name. Jared let out another little sigh.

“What? You would check up on Kim. Or Felicia. Or whoever.”

“Well, that’s different.”

“Why?”

“Because. They’re...not trained police officers.”

“And they’re women?”

“I did not say that. I said they weren’t trained police officers.”

“What about Gen? Would you check on her? She’s a trained agent.”

“Well...”

“Mm-hmm.”

“But that’s not a fair comparison anyway. I don’t have that kind of relationship with her.”

“Unh-hunh.”

Jensen looked at his phone. Russ’ number was glowing back at him.

“Do you think you would?” Jensen asked to distract himself from touching the screen.

“Would I what?”

“Want that kind of relationship with Gen?”

Jensen could see a blush spread over Jared’s cheeks even in the fading

evening light.

“What? Why would you even ask that?”

Jensen shrugged. “I don’t know. You two get along really well. And you flirt all the time.”

Jared shook his head. “We do not.”

“Sure you do. It’s not the way you flirt with Kim and Felicia, when you’re trying to be suave

and clever. It’s more like...playground antics. Slapping and shoving at each other.”

“We do not—” Jared stopped and looked like he was thinking very hard. “Do we?”

“Lil’ bit.”

“Well—”

Jensen’s hand shot out and slapped Jared’s chest.

“Ow! What—”

He cut off as he caught sight of Hannigan’s van rumbling down the road. The dusk and the

distance was enough to hide them and Jensen quickly called Gen.

“Cortese.”

“Gen, it’s us. Hannigan just left in his vehicle. White van with Elton Heating and Cooling

written on the sides. The first three numbers of the license plate are three zero five.”

“I’ve got him. He’s at the intersection now. I’ll give him a few car lengths and then follow.”

“We’ll be behind you. Stay on the phone. Let us know if he takes any main roads that have

parallels.”

Jared started the car and pulled out onto the road while Jensen unfolded the map of New

Hampshire the rental car company had given them. It wasn’t quite detailed enough of Elton to be

particularly useful, but hopefully it would keep them from taking a completely wrong turn into a

dead end neighborhood.

“Okay, I’ve got him on Graff. He’s not heading back into downtown Elton. It seems like he’s

heading further out.”

“Any cars between you and him?”

“One.”

“Good. Do your best to—Jared turn here—to keep at least one or even two cars between you.

If you get on a rural road and no one else is around give him a lot of room. And keep your lights

off for as long as possible.”

“Got it. He’s turning onto East Side Road, following the lake.”

“Okay. Jared, right up there, take that to get on 28. Don’t drive too fast

though or we'll get
ahead of them."

They rode for several minutes in silence and Jensen wished Gen would update where they were,

but he assumed they must still be on East Side Road.

"Okay, the road is coming up on a T-section."

"That's 28," Jensen murmured. "We're close. Slow down Jared."

The car behind them honked and drove around them. They slowed at a yellow light at the

intersection of East Side and 28. There was fortunately one other safety conscious driver on the

road as he braked for the yellow light too. The light turned red.

"I see him Gen. He's the first at the light, right?"

"Yes. But I lost my cover. I'm right behind him."

"Okay. Is he turning left?"

"No signal, but he's in that lane—and yes, there he goes left."

"If you can, turn right so he won't think you're a tail. We can pick him up from here."

"Okay."

"Make a U-turn when you can and try to catch up."

"Got it."

They watched the van drive off down the road and Jensen clenched the map

in his hands. This

shouldn't be a long light, but it felt like forever. At last it changed to green and they inched

forward behind the cautious driver. Jared changed lanes and sped up.

"Do you think he'll recognize our car?" Jared asked.

"Maybe. But it is pretty dark now."

"Should I turn on my lights? It might be suspicious if we leave them off."

Jensen noticed another car from the opposite direction with their lights still off. "No, not yet.

Give it a little bit longer."

They caught sight of the van and there was a grey Toyota behind him. Jared changed lanes and

got behind the Toyota. They drove another couple of miles.

"Hey guys," Gen said over the phone. "I just reached a point I can turn around. I'm heading

back your way."

"We're still on 28—"

"No, look, there he goes. He's turning onto—can you read that sign?"

Jensen read the street sign as they followed Hannigan. Jared stayed back because they had lost

their cover.

"Fuck," Jensen said.

“What? What is it?”

“Gen, he turned onto Little Rock Run. Did you get that name?”

“Little Rock Run. Got it.”

“Jensen, what’s the matter?” Jared pressed.

Jensen rubbed his forehead and tried to tamp down the nausea that was slowly starting spread

through his whole body.

“We’re heading towards Misha’s house.”

Jared stared at him for long enough that Jensen worried they were going to drift off the road, but

he didn’t try to get him to pay attention to his driving. Part of him didn’t want to make it to their

destination. Of course there were still a few roads between here and there Hannigan could turn

onto, but he was pretty sure he knew where they were being led. Jared faced forward again and

reached out to turn on the lights, but then stopped. The neighborhood was secluded enough that a

car following him through a few turns might scare Hannigan off.

“Hang back, hang back,” Jensen said as Hannigan made the turn onto Misha’s cul-de-sac. “We’ll

be trapped in there behind him. Give him time to park if necessary.”

“Should we...call Ty? Or Jim?”

“Not yet.”

“Jensen.”

“Not yet. We don’t know what he’s doing here. Hell, he could be here to go after Misha. He is

the next target after all.”

"Then why—"

Jared stopped talking and Jensen really wondered what he'd been going to say. Then from

around the bend they could see that the van's lights cut out. Jared pulled onto the street, but

didn't drive to the end. He parked the car and he and Jensen sprang from their seats, running

silently down the sidewalk, hands drawn up by their right hips. A dog started barking.

"Is that Bunny?" Jared asked.

"I don't know."

"It sounds like it's outside."

"He has a fence in the backyard. She could be trapped there."

They rounded the bend of the street and saw that Hannigan at least had enough sense not to park

in Misha's driveway, but the van was along the curb only one house away.

"Which one is Misha's?" Jared asked as they ran out into the middle of the cul-de-sac.

But Jensen didn't answer. He burst into a sprint when he saw the door to Misha's house wide

open. He heard Jared pick up speed behind him and trusted him to follow. They ran up the

driveway and into the house.

"What the fuck—?" Jared said.

"What, what?" Jensen asked, turning around, looking for—he didn't even know.

"What the hell is this place?"

Jensen turned to look at Jared. "Can we look at the foyer later?"

"Why is there a salmon colored bunny in a dress on the left and a boar's head on the right?"

"Not the time, Jared!"

Though Jensen did have to glance inside the living room—he hadn't noticed the bunny before. It

was creepy as fuck. He'd have to talk to Misha about "staging" when it came to trying to sell this place.

Shouting broke out somewhere in the house. The barking got more intense, but definitely was not

inside the house. Jared and Jensen took off through the foyer, plunging into the darkness of the

tunnel under the stairs. Two voices shouted warnings at each other. Jared and Jensen burst into

the kitchen, temporarily blinded by the sudden bright light. Two gunshots fired.

Both agents had their guns out and up, not even sure where they needed to be pointing them. In

the kitchen, Russ stood with his weapon drawn in a two armed stance. Partially behind the

island, a body lay on the floor, but Jensen could recognize him by the back of his head.

"Misha!"

Jensen dashed forward and slid to his knees next to Misha. He dropped his gun to the floor and

turned Misha over, looking for a wound.

"Watch his head!" someone said.

"Misha!"

"Jensen!"

Jensen looked up and saw Russ standing beside him, shaking visibly. "His head. He hit him on

the head."

Jensen followed where his hand was pointing and saw a frying pan on the floor a couple feet

away. Jensen pulled Misha's head and shoulders into his lap and ran his hands through his hair.

Almost immediately he found a knot on the back of his head. He pulled his fingers back: no

blood. That could be good, or it could just mean the pressure was building up in his skull and

damaging his brain.

"We need an ambulance! What happened?!"

"G-Gilbert...Hannigan came in. He attacked Misha. I don't think he even knew I was here."

Jensen turned and saw across the kitchen near the dining area another body on the floor. Jared knelt beside it, checking for a pulse. He looked up.

"He's dead," Jared reported.

Jensen stared in shock for a moment, and then he shouted, "Ambulance! Jared, please—"

"I'm on it." Jared pulled out his phone and called 911. "Russ, call Ty and get everyone out here."

"Right," Russ said, looking dazed. He pulled out his phone and drew in a shaky breath as he

tried to steady his hands to make the call.

Jensen returned his attention to Misha. He cradled his shoulders and pulled him closer, running

the back of his knuckles down Misha's cheek.

"Come on, baby. Wake up and let me know you're okay. I mean, I know you'll have a bitch of

headache, but...come on, baby...please."

Jensen bowed his head and hugged Misha tightly. A soft groan made him snap upright.

"Misha?!"

Misha groaned again. "Not so loud."

"Baby, open your eyes."

"No," Misha whined.

"Misha, please, look at me."

"Wha—who? Baby? Jensen!" Misha's eyes flew open. "There's danger! Don't —!"

"Shh, shh, we got him."

"What?"

"Hannigan. Did he attack you?"

Misha raised a hand to his head and then winced when he made contact.

"Fucker hit me with

something."

"A frying pan."

"A frying pan? That's—so—who does that?"

"Crazy fucking serial killer, that's who."

"Did you save me?"

Jensen let out a small laugh that was almost a sob. "No, baby. I wish I'd been here for you."

Misha raised a hand to cup Jensen's face. "Russ saved you."

Misha snatched his hand back and turned his head to look around the room. He winced at the

movement and saw Jared and Russ standing nearby. Jared had already made his call and Russ

was just finishing his, having to explain as much as possible to Ty before he was allowed to

hang up.

"Well, this is awkward," Misha muttered.

"Who fucking cares? You're okay. You need to go to the hospital to get your head—"

"Where's Bunny? What's wrong with her?"

Only now did Bunny's crazed barking return to his ears. He could hear her scrabbling at the

glass door at the back of the room. She must have busted through the screen door of the enclosed

porch.

"I'll get her," Jared said.

"Do you want to try sitting up?" Jensen asked.

"Um, okay, we can try if we move slowly—wait, wait, nope, nope."

Misha leaned back into his arms and groaned in pain. He turned into Jensen's body and buried

his face in his chest. Jensen wrapped his arms around him, careful not to jostle his head. Jared

came back in and Bunny's nails clicked frantically on the tile floor. Jared kept a hold of her

collar so she wouldn't jump on Misha, but he brought her close enough that she could snuffle at

his cheek. Misha turned his face toward her.

"Hey, girl," he said weakly. "Fat lot of good you did as a guard dog."

Bunny merely whined happily at hearing her master's voice.

"Jared, Jensen!"

Gen's voice echoed faintly from the foyer. Jared walked toward the hallway.

"In here, Gen," he called out.

Gen ran into the kitchen and looked around.

"What happened?" she asked.

"Misha and I were just talking," Russ said. "We were going to make shrimp scampi for dinner

—"

"So not planning on going back to the station anytime soon then," Jensen said disapprovingly.

"Scold me later," Misha mumbled, still turned mostly into Jensen's body, hand petting Bunny's

head where it rested on his stomach.

"Misha asked me to get a bottle of white wine from the basement to cook the shrimp in. I was

halfway down the stairs when I heard a scuffle. I ran back upstairs and Hannigan hit Misha on

the head. I drew my weapon and told him to surrender. He backed up and moved a hand to his

waist. I thought he might have a gun, so I just fired." Russ closed his eyes. "He doesn't have a gun, does he?"

"I didn't see one," Jared said softly.

"Shit," Russ whispered.

"Hey," Jensen said sharply. "You're not going down for shooting that fucker. I'll plant a gun on him."

"Jensen," Misha admonished softly.

"What?" he grumbled.

The faint wail of sirens reached their ears. The tightness in Jensen's chest eased a little. Help

was coming for Misha, but his eyes had slipped closed again.

"Hey, Mish, are you sleepy? How are you doing?"

"Well, my head hurts, Jensen, but other than that my day's been peachy."

"I mean it, you smart ass. You probably have a concussion. You need to stay awake."

A smile tugged at the corner of Misha's mouth. "Well, then keep me awake. You're good at that."

"Oh!"

Jensen looked up and saw Gen staring at them wide-eyed.

"Oh." She turned to Jared. "That explains so much." Then she noticed Jared wasn't shocked.

"You knew?"

Jared smiled and shrugged a shoulder. Gen frowned at him. And then punched him on the

shoulder. He shoved her back, and then froze. He looked at Jensen. Jensen

raised an eyebrow

at him.

A few minutes later the kitchen was filled with EMTs and police. Cameras were clicking

around Hannigan's body. Misha was loaded onto a gurney and getting his blood pressure

checked and his eyes assaulted with a mini flashlight.

"Pupils are even and reactive," one of the EMTs said.

Jensen breathed deeply. That was a good sign and Misha had stayed fully lucid since he'd

woken up. There was a good chance he was going to be okay but they needed to get him to the

hospital for an MRI as fast as possible. Russ had surrendered his weapon to one of the

detectives and was giving his statement again. Jensen looked around.

"Where's Ty?" he asked.

Gen wiggled her hand where she held her cell phone to her ear. "He went straight to a judge to

get a warrant for Hannigan's house. He'll get it signed and meet us there in twenty minutes."

"Great." He looked at Misha. The EMTs were unlocking the wheels so they could cart him out

of the house. "Or, can I meet you there later? I want to go with Misha—"

"Please don't," Misha said. "You're just going to be sitting in a waiting room

going nuts. Go be productive. You know you'll feel better doing that."

"I know, but—"

"Jensen. I promise not to die before the next time you see me."

Jensen had given his last fuck of caring if people knew about their relationship about half an

hour ago, so he threaded his fingers through Misha's hair.

"I'll hold you that."

Misha nodded, his eyes a brilliant blue in the clean white light of the overhead lamps. The

EMTs began to push the gurney away and Misha reached a hand up at the last moment, their

fingers brushing together. Bunny whined where she was tied up against the island.

"Shit, Bunny—"

"I got her," Russ said. "I'll pack some food and take her to the station."

"Thank you," Misha said tiredly and finally relaxed against the thin mattress of the gurney.

Jensen turned to Gen and tried to focus all his energy and thoughts on the task at hand.

"Okay," Gen said. "Detective Bates said he will run the investigation here. If we leave now, we should arrive at Hannigan's at the same time as Ty."

"Okay. Let's go then. Jared?"

Jensen turned around and saw Jared standing behind the kitchen island. He had his arms crossed

and a very serious, pensive look on his face.

"Jay?"

"Yeah?"

"You ready to go?"

"Yeah, yeah..." Jared looked around the kitchen once more, and then moved to follow Gen and

Jensen out of the house.

Jensen checked the safety on his weapon and holstered it. He was still feeling very uneasy.

Hannigan was dead—but that was only half their problem. Their only hope was that there would

be a clue to the Angel Slayer's identity in Hannigan's house.

Thursday, November 21, 2013

Jared sighed and put his hands to the small of his back and arched his back until he heard two

pops. He groaned and straightened, checking his watch on the downward sweep from a large

yawn. It was ten minutes past midnight. They had been searching Hannigan's home for—geez—

seven hours now. So far they hadn't found anything significant. An Evidence Recovery Team

from the Boston field office had come out and taken away Hannigan's computer and bagged up

several articles of clothing that had suspicious stains.

Jared looked up when he heard feet tromping down the stairs. Jensen appeared, looking

remarkably awake and alert.

“Did you find something?” Jared asked.

“No, why, did you?”

“No.”

“Oh. So why did you seem so excited?”

“I don’t know. I guess because you don’t look tired and zombie-like like the rest of us I thought

something good had happened.”

“I see. Well, something good has happened. We got one half of our murdering duo. Granted, it’s

the weaker half, but I know this place is going to reveal something.”

“You know it?” Jared asked, trying to sound optimistic as well.

Jensen’s jaw clenched as he swallowed thickly. “It has to, Jay, or...”

Jensen never finished his thought. A commotion broke out in the yard. Everyone on the main level of the house poured out the backdoor and rushed over to the technician who was waving

his flashlight in a far corner of Hannigan’s property.

“What do you have?” Jensen asked, being the first to reach him with Jared only a step behind.

“It’s a storm cellar. Or an underground bunker. I found the door underneath this shed; it’s on a

track so it can be pushed forward and back.”

Jensen smiled. “Hannigan wouldn’t have thought of that.”

“Is it locked?”

“Yes. But nothing these bolt cutters from the handy-dandy shed won’t fix.”

The technician grinned and bent over to cut the combination lock off the metal clasp of the hatch

door. In less than thirty seconds the door was open, revealing wooden steps descending into the

dark maw of the earth. The technician started to step down, but Jensen stopped him.

“Let me go first,” he said pulling out his gun. “Can I use your flashlight?”

“Sure.”

“Jared, behind me. Gen, cover the exit.”

Jared drew his weapon and got another flashlight from one of the nearby ERT members. He

walked two steps behind Jensen, gun held pointed down so his flashlight illuminated the stairs

for Jensen while he kept his gun and flashlight at chest height. There were about ten steps

leading to a dirt floor. None of them creaked; it must be a fairly new construction. Jensen

stepped onto the ground and swung left and right quickly, and then moved further into the space.

Jared paused at the bottom of the stairs, looking left and right with his

flashlight and seeing only

dirt walls.

“Clear,” Jensen called out.

“Clear,” Jared called back up the stairs. Then he shielded his eyes when light filled the room.

A long fluorescent light fixture hung only a couple of inches above Jared’s head from the ceiling

which was reinforced with wooden planks. The room was only about five feet by seven feet

with a narrow path between two shelves that lined the longer walls. On the shelves were clear

jars containing what looked like a piece of tissue suspended in preservative fluid. Next to each

jar was a piece of clothing or jewelry. The right side had nearly all of its six shelves filled

while the left side only had four on the top shelf. The back wall was plastered with newspaper

clippings with anything pertaining to the Angel Slayer case. Some were old and yellowed from

the Washington Post and must have dated back to the original killings. The obituaries of several

victims were scattered throughout the articles.

Jensen was examining the shelves on the right side, his eyes sweeping over each item and going

down shelf by shelf.

“There’s more than ten,” Jensen said. “A lot more. He did kill in between DC and Elton.”

Jared looked at the shelves on the left side. In one of the jars he saw what looked like a small

piece of skin that had a Chinese character tattooed on it. Brendan had had that mark on his neck.

“I think these must be Hannigan’s shelves,” Jared said. “It seems like he was relatively new to

the game.”

“Oh my God.” Jared and Jensen turned see Gen at the bottom of the stairs. She gathered herself

quickly and then said, “Well, at least this makes linking the cases much easier.”

“Can you send down a fingerprint person?” Jensen asked. “I’m not going to hold my breath, but

maybe he got careless when handling his trophies. We need someone to pull prints first and

foremost. And then the rest of us get to bag and catalogue.”

“Party in the serial killer’s creepy underground trophy case,” Jared murmured.

Jensen and Gen smiled at him.

“So, who’s going to make the coffee run?” Jensen asked.

Six hours later the cellar was photographed and emptied. Everyone who had been working the

scene was dragging their feet and rubbing their eyes like children that had

been kept up too late.

Jared leaned against the Accent with Gen close by while Jensen finished talking with the ERT

team lead. It was that strange time of early morning when the sun hasn't risen yet, but the world

is no longer completely dark. Just off to the east Jared could make out the first tendrils of

sunlight creeping over the horizon. Jensen shook the team lead's hand and then walked over to

the Accent.

"Okay. So, they're going to take the evidence over to Portsmouth for processing except for the

fingerprints. They managed to pull some full and partial prints off the jars, so they're going to

take those to the Elton PD facilities in order to process them right away. Then we can run them

through the system immediately. I don't know about you, but I want to be there when they do."

"Yeah," Jared said as Gen said, "I want to be there."

"Okay. I'm going to drive to the station now. Unless you want to swing by the motel to freshen

up first."

"No way," Gen said grouchily. "If I don't get to shower neither do you."

"You could use my shower," Jared offered.

Jensen laughed softly to himself and Jared shot him a look. He wasn't sure if Gen noticed or not, but she didn't respond to it. She just said, "Thanks for the offer, but I can't stand to put dirty

underwear back on after I get clean."

"You can wash them in the sink," Jensen said.

"What?"

"Yeah. Haven't you had lost luggage before? Just wash them in the sink."

"And how long do you think it will take them to dry?"

"That's true," Jared said. "The Lakeside Motor Lodge is not that fancy. It didn't come with

blow dryers."

"I think you just have to request one," Jensen said.

"Jensen, stop defending that hell hole. If we ever TDY together again, *I'm* picking the motel."

Jensen laughed. "Fair enough. Shall we?" He indicated the car.

"Can I catch a ride with you guys?" Gen asked. "I left Jim's car behind at Misha's. I hope

someone brought it back to the station for him."

The ride back to the station wasn't that long, but Gen did manage to fall asleep in the passenger

seat and Jensen was halfway there in the backseat. Why hadn't he made Jensen drive?

The trio shuffled into the station and were suddenly wide awake as they saw a large group of

people in the main lobby, some in the process of leaving the station. It was the three new agents,

Jim and Ty, and a few other officers.

“What’s happened?” Jensen asked.

“We’ve got a situation,” Jim said.

“Yeah, we’ve got a situation,” one of the Boston agents said. “We’ve let a fucking serial killer

slip through our fingers.”

Jared felt his jaw drop. “What are you talking about?”

“That cop! I told you we should arrest him and now he’s in the wind.”

“What are you talking about?” Jensen said sharply but kept his voice under control. “What

cop?”

“The K9 one! Whatever Collins. “

“Why do you think he’s a killer? He was attacked and hospitalized.”

“Yeah, kind of convenient. And the only witness wasn’t actually present to see it happen. And

now he’s gone.”

“What do you mean gone?” Jensen looked at Jim and Ty. “What the fuck is going on?”

Jim took in a deep breath. “It’s true, son,” Jim said. “Officer Collins checked himself out of the

hospital around 3:30am this morning against doctor’s orders. No one has seen

him since and

he's not answering any calls on his cell phone or at home."

"Can we stop discussing this?" the agent interrupted impatiently. "He's already got a three hour

head start on us, but maybe he's still at his house. Ames and I are going to drive out there with

some officers and search the place."

"How would he even get there?" Jensen asked. "He didn't have a vehicle."

"I don't know, maybe he took a cab or called someone to pick him up. He could have stolen a

car from the hospital parking lot."

"I think you're jumping to conclusions here."

"Maybe," the officer conceded. "But I think having him in our custody is better than not, right?"

"Yes, but only because he's still a target. Today is Thursday."

"Look. All the other cops on our suspect list are present and accounted for. He's the only one

missing. ASAC Beaver, do I have your permission to leave now to go to the house?"

"Yes, Lawson. You and Ames check the house." The agents and two officers walked quickly

out the door. "Pierson, take an officer with you and go the hospital. Try to find a witness who

saw Officer Collins leaving and get security to show you any camera footage

they have.”

“Yes, sir,” the Portsmouth agent said. He and another officer left the building.

“Padalecki, Cortese, the two of you are going to stay here and interview his work colleagues and

look through his financial records to see if you can identify any other properties he might own

and seek temporary sanctuary.”

“But, can we—” Gen started.

“We got a warrant issued an hour ago,” Jim said. “There’s also one for an arrest if anyone

comes across him.”

“On what grounds?” Jensen demanded. “Since when is it illegal for a person to be missing?”

“On the grounds that he had a fucking arsenal in his wine cellar. The warrant is actually for

illegal possession of weapons to buy us time on finding evidence against him as the Angel Slayer.”

Jared could tell Jensen was about one more accusation away from losing his shit.

“Those guns are probably his father’s!”

“His *deceased* father’s,” Jim corrected him. “And when he didn’t apply for licenses for himself, he was illegally possessing firearms.”

“That’s fucking low, Jim.”

“Jensen, we have got to entertain the possibility that Misha has been playing us all along. That

the fight with Hannigan was staged. Why else would he just disappear in the middle of the night

and not contact anyone? Did he contact you?”

Jensen’s jaw clenched and he shook his head. Then he closed his eyes and took in a deep

breath. When he opened his eyes again he was visibly calmer. Jared was amazed by his

patience; it actually wasn’t his strongest virtue.

“Okay. We’ll consider the possibility. While Gen and Jared look through his financials, I’ll—”

“You’ll not have anything further to do with this case,” Jim said.

Everyone’s eyes widened slightly.

“You’re going to go back to the motel and sit tight for now.”

“What?! Why—?!”

“Because, Agent Ackles,” Jim said gruffly. “It has come to my *unavoidable* attention that you

and Officer Collins have been engaging in a less than professional relationship with each

other.” All the color drained from Jensen’s face. “Your judgment has been compromised in this

case and quite frankly regardless of how this turns out, I don’t see you escaping this without a

formal inquiry into your behavior here.”

Jensen struggled to draw air into his lungs. Jared felt his chest constrict with sympathy and

empathetic pain, and a little unreasonable hatred directed toward Jim. Jim’s features softened.

“Jensen, I’m sorry. But my hands are tied on this.”

Jensen nodded.

“Go back to your motel. We’ll keep you apprised of what’s going on. I’m giving official

permission for you to know since I’m sure these two,” he nodded his head in Jared and Gen’s

direction, “will be doing so anyway.”

Jensen maintained eye contact with Jim for a couple more seconds and then looked away. He looked to Jared and Jared tried to show unfair he thought this all was on his face. Jensen held

out his hand and for a moment he thought he was asking for Jared to take his hand in solidarity.

Then he remembered he had the key to the Accent. He handed it over and Jensen turned and left

without a word.

Jim looked at Gen and Jared. “We should be getting an e-mail shortly that will have the

information we need to access his records online. I’ll let you know when it arrives.”

He and Ty walked further into the station, nodding at Rachel where she sat at

her desk. For once

she wasn't filing or painting her nails; she was biting them. Jared cursed softly and then leaned

back on the wall. He cursed again, louder, as he leaned on the corkboard and its multitude of

pushpins. He turned around and glared at the pictures of happy, smiling people.

"This is so messed up," Jared said. "Misha gets knocked unconscious and that's proof that he's

a serial killer?"

Gen moved closer so he could see her even as he kept his eyes roaming over the board.

"I mean, it's not a solid case, but it is true there aren't any witnesses that can corroborate that

Hannigan just attacked him. He could have faked it and tricked Russ into shooting Hannigan."

"Well, there's your witness right there, Russ. He said he heard a scuffle."

"But, it could have been an act."

"Okay, well, if Misha could have set up that scenario, the same logic says Russ could have done

the same."

Gen's brows drew together. "Do you really suspect Russ?"

"Do you really suspect Misha?"

Gen shrugged and gave a little shake of her head. "No, I don't."

“Yeah, me neither. But here’s the thing. Think about the layout of that kitchen. Hannigan had to

come in through the hallway that leads to the foyer. Jensen and I weren’t far behind him. He

wouldn’t have had time to go around the back, plus the front door was open. That means that

Hannigan came in the door that is right in between the kitchen and the dining area. There was a

bowl of partly peeled shrimp on the kitchen island. Misha was standing at the island peeling and

deveining shrimp when Hannigan came in, which means he was facing the doorway. How could

Hannigan catch him by surprise? How could he rush in, get around the other side of the island,

grab a frying pan, knock Misha out, and then run back to the other side in the space of time it

takes to go up and down half a flight of stairs?

“And Hannigan was found near the table. He was past the doors leading to the porch and the

foyer, which meant after he knocked Misha out, he walked to the far side of the room and trapped

himself without a way out. Why would he do that?”

“Maybe he panicked when he heard Russ coming up the stairs. Maybe he didn’t know there

wasn’t another way out.”

“Yeah, the stairs to the basement that are directly behind the kitchen island. Misha would have

had his back to Russ. And Hannigan would have come in the room and seen Russ. If Russ

pulled a gun on him, he would have backed up, passing the doors.”

Gen’s eyes jumped around as they looked at his face.

“So...you’re saying Russ orchestrated the whole thing?”

“Maybe. And now Hannigan is dead. Russ shot him and tied up that messy, loose end.”

Gen’s eyes lowered as she continued to think.

“And what evidence is there against Misha that doesn’t also fit Russ? He’s a cop. Heck, he’s a

cop who had much more knowledge and access to the progression of this case than Misha ever

did.”

“He’s also the one who was holding the dildo when it got damaged.”

“And he made a big show of turning his attention to another direction when he fell into Jensen at

the Hernandez scene—nearly destroying the boot print impression in the dirt.”

“He also knew which convoy Tameka would be in.”

“He’s the one who suggested she be in the fourth one—with a minimal detail.”

“Both Jim and I voted for that too.”

“I know, but he’s the one who planned it.”

Gen put a hand to her head. “Holy fuck. Do you think...” she trailed off, unable—or unwilling

—to finish her thought.

“I don’t know, Gen. I mean, it’s certainly no worse than the evidence they’re using to convict

Misha. I just think—” Jared cut off as a picture caught his eye. He’d noticed it before on a few

occasions because he was familiar with the scene. It was the tidal basin in DC, surrounded by

beautiful pink blossoms on a bright sunny day, with the Jefferson Memorial gleaming white in the

background. Jared had been down there many times himself when the cherry blossoms were out;

it was one of the most beautiful places in DC at that time of year. He hadn’t recognized the man

in the photo before—because he didn’t have a beard. But now that Jared looked closer, he knew

those dark brown eyes.

Jared pulled the picture off the board and studied it. There in the corner was the edge of a

banner. Most of it was cut off, but he could tell the sign proclaimed that is was the National Cherry Blossom Festival with the dates just legible at the end. The picture was taken in 2005.

Russ had been in DC in the spring of 2005—right in the middle of the DC Angel Slayer murders.

“Rachel!”

Gen started when Jared ran around her. Rachel looked up from gnawing off another nail.

“Do you know where Russ is? Have you seen him? He said he was going to bring Bunny to the

station last night.”

“Yeah, he did,” Rachel confirmed. Jared felt a modicum of relief. “But he left again early this

morning. He said he was going to go check on Misha at the hospital. He was the one who

reported that he’d gone missing.”

Jared tried to process that. Was he reading this situation all wrong?

“Rachel, can you look to see where he is? Please, I know it’s not procedure, but—”

“No, it’s okay. One moment.”

Rachel accessed her computer and Jared and Gen fidgeted while she worked.

“Hunh.”

“What?” Jared asked anxiously.

“His squad car is showing as being here at the station. Maybe he came back.”

“I’ll go check his office,” Gen said.

“Wait. Rachel, where is the K9 vehicle?”

Rachel clicked her mouse a couple of times. She raised an eyebrow.

“It’s showing to be in the general vicinity of King and Pine. I’m sorry; it doesn’t get more

accurate than that.”

“That’s fine,” Jared said, body tense with fear and adrenaline soaking his brain in nauseating

panic. “I know where he is. He’s at the Lakeside Motor Lodge.”

“Jensen!” Gen said in alarm.

“Gen, get Jim and Ty, tell them what we’ve found out and show them this.” He thrust the picture

into her hands. “Make them send a unit out there. And give me the keys to your car. I’m going

out there now and hopefully Jensen isn’t so pissed that he turned off his cell phone.”

Jared grabbed the keys from Gen’s hand and she darted toward the bullpen, calling out for Jim.

Jared had his phone to his ear and prayed as he listened to it ring.

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Jensen took the long way around the back of the motel as he’d been accustomed to do whenever

he and Misha came to drop him off at the motel. They could park at the back of the building,

which was close to his room but not visible from the main road, and get in a few more kisses

before they parted. He dragged his hand across his eyes for what had to be the hundredth time

on his short trip, but he wasn't going to let any tears hit his cheeks. He was certain Misha was

innocent, but he couldn't explain why he'd run. Or why he hadn't contacted him.

Jensen slowed to crawl as he spotted the Elton Police K9 SUV parked in one of the spaces by

the corner of the building. His first inclination was joy and relief: Misha had come to him. Then

he felt wariness—why had he not called Jensen when he'd found that he wasn't there? Surely he

wasn't just hanging out by the door; he didn't have a key to get inside.

Jensen parked beside Misha's vehicle and got out. He put a hand to his weapon to reassure

himself and then walked closer to look inside the vehicle. The driver's and passenger's seats

were empty. There appeared to be some bloody gauze on the floor on the passenger side. He

cupped his hands around his eyes to peer in the tinted windows of the backseat. He saw Bunny

lying on her side, unmoving. He grabbed the handle, but the door was locked. He knocked on

the window, but the dog didn't respond.

With cold dread filling his stomach, Jensen drew his gun and walked carefully to the corner of

the building. He looked around and didn't see anyone in front of his or Jared's doors nor did he

see anyone in the parking lot. To be sure, Jensen dropped to his knees to scan underneath the

parked vehicles to see if anyone was hiding behind them. It looked clear. He edged cautiously

closer to his room door. In his pocket, his cell phone vibrated with an incoming call. He

reached for it, knowing it was probably Jared and he needed to report seeing Misha's vehicle.

Then he heard a muffled cry come from inside the room. All other thoughts were abandoned.

His foot came up of its own accord and slammed into the motel room door. The cheap lock

snapped right out of the wooden frame as it splintered and the door flung open. Jensen stepped

forward with his gun up to keep the door from swinging back shut.

Misha was face down on the bed, stripped and bound. His arms were pulled up at a painful

slant with fishing wire attached from the headboard to his wrists; one of his wrists was

definitely bent in an awkward position. The angle of his arms was so severe that his shoulder

blades stood out starkly on his back, almost touching. His mouth was spread wide on a large

ball gag and he was blindfolded. His back was bowed in an extreme curve because his hips

were raised from the bed with his knees planted firmly on the mattress

directly beneath them.

His legs were splayed wide and held in place with a spreader bar buckled onto his ankles.

All this Jensen saw in a split second, and when Russ moved to duck behind Misha's body Jensen

just reacted. He couldn't fire his weapon without hitting Misha and he didn't even see the large

knife in Russ' hand. Not that it would have mattered. He would have done the same thing. He lunged into the room and threw himself across the bed and over Misha's body until he collided

with Russ at full force. His almost instantaneous attack must have caught Russ off guard because

he raised his hands to defend himself rather than threaten Misha or attack Jensen.

The two men crashed to the floor and Russ lost a hold his knife immediately, but in the struggle

he grabbed Jensen's wrist and slammed his hand into the nightstand, making him grunt with pain

and drop the weapon. Russ got in one punch to his jaw, and it was a hard hit, but Jensen barely

registered it. He fought back and used the advantage of being mostly on top to position his knees

over Russ' stomach and dig in. The man gasped as he lost his breath and Jensen punched him.

He grabbed him by his uniform shirt and held him in place as he punched him again and again.



He continued to hit him even after the man went limp under him. He only stopped because he

lost his balance when Russ' stomach unclenched and his knees wobbled.

Russ' face was bloody and already swelling, but he was still conscious. Jensen quickly pulled

his handcuffs out and closed one around Russ' left wrist. He dragged his body over to the heavy

dresser that housed the ancient forty pound TV and slipped the second cuff behind one of the legs

and secured it on Russ' right wrist. His arms were pulled down awkwardly behind him and he

wouldn't be able to generate enough leverage to lift the piece of furniture and slip free. Jensen

quickly frisked him, doing his best to ignore the way Russ' not swollen eye stayed focused on his

face, and removed a pocket knife, a lock pick set, and a thin piece of wire with wooden pegs

twisted onto the ends—a handmade garrote.

Then Jensen quickly stood and retrieved his gun, securing it in the holster and snapping the cover

into place. As he did so he noticed the spread on the desk: a black piece of velvet covered most

of the surface and laid upon it were scalpels, knives of all sizes, ice picks, pliers, hammers,

mallets, cruel looking metal instruments he didn't have names for, and on the far end was a wide

variety of glass, metal, and plastic dildos—some that were much too large to use without

resulting in permanent damage and one that had metal spikes lining it. He felt his stomach lurch

and was grateful he hadn't eaten in several hours. He turned his back on the desk. He knelt on

the bed and Misha flinched and screamed behind the gag when he felt the mattress shift.

“Shh, Misha, it's me. It's Jensen. It's okay. I've got you.”

Misha stopped trying to move away, though he really couldn't move, and tilted his head toward

Jensen's voice. Jensen didn't know where to start, but his arms looked to be in the worst shape.

He used the pocket knife he'd taken off Russ to cut the fishing wire holding his wrists up. He

carefully held his arms so that when the tension disappeared the limbs wouldn't just crash to the

bed. Misha pulled his arms under his chest while Jensen unbuckled the gag. He moaned when

the too large ball was pulled free and a large quantity of saliva dribbled onto the sheets. He let

out a small sobbing noise and sucked air in through his mouth, getting a large lungful. When

Jensen pulled the blindfold off, he kept his eyes closed and rested his head on the bed and just

concentrated on breathing. Jensen wanted to look into his eyes and know that

he was okay, but

he didn't want to force him to do anything, so he moved to his feet and unbuckled the spreader

bar and let it fall to the floor. Misha flinched at the sound.

"It's okay, it's okay," Jensen tried to calm him. "You're safe. I'm here." Jensen was nervous to touch him, but when he put his hands to his legs to help draw them together so he could lie more

comfortably on the bed, he didn't recoil. Jensen sat next to him and rubbed soothing circles on

Misha's back with one hand while he used his phone to call 911 with the other. When he was

assured help was on the way, he hung up and looked at Russ. He hadn't moved, and just kept

staring.

Jensen immediately turned to Misha when he felt him stirring. He helped the man turn over and

sit up, and then pulled him tightly to his chest when Misha leaned into his body. Jensen put a

hand to the back of his head, threading his fingers through greasy, sweat soaked hair and felt

utterly thankful for the feeling. His other arm circled him and pulled him even tighter. Misha

wincing and made a small sound of protest in the back of his throat. Jensen immediately

loosened his hold and pulled back to see if he had done any damage. The Angel Slayer did like

to beat his victims before the more creative torture began. Jensen felt sick at the thought and

swallowed back a sudden rush of bile. Anger flared through him hot and blinding. He focused

his attention on looking at Misha's body just so he wouldn't turn around and shoot Russ in the

face. Or the balls.

Then his eyes caught on it. The very first thing the Angel Slayer did to his targets was brand

them with their crime. Directly over Misha's heart, in letters no bigger than necessary to cross

the organ, seared red and black into his skin was a single word: Thief.

Jensen lifted a hand and just at the last moment remembered himself and didn't touch. He

gathered Misha close again, careful this time not to make his chest push together and aggravate

the wound. He placed his chin on top of Misha's head and murmured more nonsense that was

meant to be reassuring but just sounded hollow and obnoxious to his ears. And then he couldn't

keep it in anymore. He turned to look at Russ, keeping Misha shielded from his view with his

body.

"Why thief?" Jensen asked.

Russ wasn't even surprised that he'd been spoken to. He'd been watching

them unwaveringly,

just waiting to be acknowledged.

“Because he’s a thief, Jensen. He stole something very precious.”

Jensen clenched his teeth, trying to keep his cool. “And what was that?”

“Your attention,” Russ said, his tone dangerous. Jensen felt Misha begin to shiver in his arms.

“He took your attention from me.”

Jensen let go of Misha and pulled away slightly so he could remove his suit jacket, but Misha

leaned into him and began babbling. An incessant stream of “No, no, don’t leave me,” fell from

his lips. Jensen shucked out of his coat quickly and wrapped it around Misha’s shoulders. Then

he pulled the man close again and kissed the top of his head.

“It’s alright, baby. I won’t leave you. Help is coming. I promise you’re safe now.”

“See, he’s still doing it,” Russ said from behind him.

Jensen turned a glare on him.

“So needy,” Russ murmured. “So greedy. I couldn’t figure out why you gave so much of your

attention to him. He’s not that clever, you know. He’s not very interesting. Leads a dull,

meaningless life that he tries to pretend isn’t by traveling to see other people who have just

suffered the worst moments of their lives. To make himself feel better about his own pathetic

existence. I just didn't understand why you were drawn to him. Until I realized you were

fucking him." Russ sighed. "Always with the sex. So disappointing. I thought you would be

above that, Jensen, I really did."

Jensen gnashed his teeth together so he wouldn't point out all the sick sexual acts he had inflicted

on his victims. He wouldn't argue with him.

"You're so beautiful, Jensen. Not your body, I could care less about that, but your mind. Your

reasoning. Your intelligence. Your flaws. Your neurosis. Your determination. I saw you once.

In DC. At the third scene. God, I almost didn't leave when I saw you. I wanted to stay there

and have you hunt me down. It's all I wanted. You were perfect. But, self-preservation is a

strong motivator. And I left you."

Russ smiled and leaned his head back. "You have no idea how happy I was to see you in the

station that day."

Jensen remembered thinking Russ was hiding an erection the first time he saw him at the station;

he had an inkling how happy he'd been.

“You were here. In my hometown. Looking for me. But, I wasn’t going to do anything to make

you stay. No, you had to figure it out on your own. And you did. I never doubted you. You

knew it was me. You *felt* it was me. You said so.

“It was glorious, Jensen, watching you work. I didn’t even mind Jared all that much. He’s cute,

huh? Like a puppy. Thought about slitting Gen from throat to cunt a few times.”

Jensen tightened his hold on Misha and didn’t respond. Misha’s trembling had grown worse.

He should make Russ stop talking, but short of letting Misha go and knocking him unconscious he

didn’t think anything would work. And letting go of Misha was not an option.

“Oh, God, I almost got away with it too, you know? Hubris. That’s what I thought it was. I was

just going to kill Misha and sink his body in the lake. His disappearance would all but convict

him. But then, I thought, no he’s been *marked*. He has to be done proper. Self-preservation

should be strong enough to overcome hubris. Like it did in DC. But I couldn’t let this one go.

And now I know why. I didn’t care about keeping the Angel Slayer’s record intact—I **just**

**wanted to torture and gut that fucker for taking away what was mine! ”**

Jensen leaned forward into Misha, his heart pounding, actually horrified by the scream that had ripped its way from Russ' throat. His eyes were wild and he started straining at his restraints.

The bureau tipped forward. Jensen had one moment of paralyzing terror when he just knew Russ

was going to get free and kill them both—and then Jared burst into the room, gun drawn.

“Jensen! Are you okay? What happened? Where's Russ?”

Russ slumped back to the floor and the dresser settled back on its legs. Jensen clutched at

Misha's shoulders and looked at Jared. Jared was torn between keeping his eyes on Russ and

his curiosity and concern of Misha's condition.

“Is he okay?” Jared asked.

“I-I—” Jensen let out a shuddering breath. He was shaking almost as violently as Misha. “S-

sorry. You okay, Misha?”

Misha didn't move at first, but then he shook his head. Jensen felt his heart seize up.

“Jared, we can't wait for an ambulance. Can you stay with Russ while I get Misha to the

hospital?”

“Of course—” He stopped talking as sirens began to sound in the distance.

“Wait, that's not a

police cruiser. That's an ambulance. Did you call 911?”



“Yeah.”

“Okay. Then stay here. It will be best if he’s transported in the ambulance.”

A moment later the ambulance siren became muddled with the wail of police cruisers. Jensen

shifted so he could pull the sheet free and wrapped it around Misha’s lower body.

“No, not like that, Jensen,” Russ laughed from behind him. “He was meant to be a present, but

not all wrapped up. Can you imagine it—coming here and finding him in your bed—but fixed up

all pretty by me?”

“Shut-up!” Jared shouted. “You think if I shoot you in the face anyone is going to give a damn?”

“Jensen will. He’s got questions. Don’t you, angel?”

Russ started giggling and then he started laughing. By the time the ambulance and police arrived

he was in hysterics and Jensen had picked Misha up in his arms and carried him outside. He

nearly threw up when he had to surrender Misha to the paramedics. For the second time in

twenty-four hours he saw—his lover—strapped onto a gurney and taken away in an ambulance.

Ty and Jim were on the scene, looking utterly shell-shocked. One officer had broken down when

he found out about Russ and had to be sedated. Jensen had been given the

privilege of making

the official arrest. He and Jared made him lay face down and then stood on his limbs as they

removed the bureau so he wouldn't try to make a break for it or attack them. It also helped that there were six guns trained on him by very antsy and emotionally distraught Elton police

officers.

Once he was on his feet, Jensen told him his Miranda rights and tried to ignore the way Russ just

kept staring at him. He led him outside and saw that the other federal agents had been called to

the scene. Lawson, the agent from Boston who had been the most vocal and adamant about

Misha's guilt took a step forward. Jensen paused on the way to Ty's squad car. Lawson looked

at him, a distressed expression on his face. He struggled for a moment to find words, and then

looked like he was going to give up. Finally he said, "For what it's worth, I'm sorry."

Jensen nodded. "You were just doing your job. You don't need to apologize for that."

Lawson bowed his head. Jensen led Russ over to Ty's vehicle and deposited him into the back

of the vehicle.

"You know where to find me, Jensen," Russ said, almost dreamily. "Don't keep me waiting."

Jensen slammed the door shut in his face.

## **The Opposite of Closure**

### Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

### **Friday, November 22, 2013**

Jensen wrinkled his nose at the strong antiseptic smell of the hospital and read the numbers on

the doors as he passed them. He hadn't been able to see Misha last night because he'd developed

a high fever due to the stress his body had undergone and been placed in critical care. Only

family members were allowed to see those patients. He wondered if anyone cared that this

particular patient didn't have any family anymore.

Fortunately his fever had come down overnight and he had been moved to a standard room. No

one would tell Jensen the extent of his injuries, so he had no idea what to expect when he

reached room 3014. The door was slightly ajar and it was a private room, but Jensen knocked

tentatively anyway. He didn't get a response, so he stood awkwardly outside and glanced up and

down the hallway. He tried knocking a little louder. This time he heard some sort of vocal

noise from inside the room, so he pushed the door open and looked inside.

He didn't know why he'd been expecting Misha to look small and pale and battered; he was still

strong and tan and beautiful, though the bags under his eyes were dark and his lips were more

chapped than usual. There was surprisingly little bruising on what skin was visible. Perhaps

Russ had literally just gotten started and not managed to hurt Misha at all. Then he saw the short

cast on Misha's left wrist that covered part of his hand as well. His eyes scanned up Misha's

body, but too much of him was covered by blankets and an ugly sea foam green polka dotted

hospital gown for him to get a true assessment of Misha's condition. There was a small bruise

with an inflamed red center on the side of his neck, but other than that he was unmarked. He

looked further up and was met with the stunning clarity of Misha's deep ocean eyes.

He smiled softly. "Hey, Mish."

Misha looked away from him and Jensen felt that sharp stabbing pain in his chest which was an

all too familiar sensation when he was around him. Then he looked back and squirmed up in the

bed to sit a little bit higher.

"Hi, Jensen."

Jensen took a deep breath and considered that to be an invitation to come in. He walked over to

the side of the bed and pulled a chair close. He sat down on the edge of the chair to be closer to

the bed. Misha watched him the whole time.

"So," Jensen said with an apologetic smile, "I'm going to ask the stupid question everybody

asks. How are you feeling?"

Misha laughed softly and Jensen felt his spirits lift. He was thankful Misha could still smile and

even laugh. He had no doubt the psychological wounds would be the worst damage he suffered,

but maybe he would come out of this relatively unscathed.

"I'm alright. A little sore. I definitely had some muscles stretched and body parts bent in ways

they haven't been in years. In some cases, never had been before. I think I should actually thank

you."

"Yeah?" he asked, tilting his head with a confused smile.

"Yeah. You definitely got me loose and more flexible these past two months than I had been in,

oh, four and a half years."

Jensen laughed and then felt a sob welling up. He covered his eyes with a

hand and took in a

deep breath to compose himself. It was only a moment, but he could tell when he looked back

up that he hadn't fooled Misha a bit.

"So. Um." Jensen didn't know how to ask his next question. "I know it's none of my business, so you don't have to tell me anything at all...I mean, maybe I shouldn't ask—"

"Broken wrist," Misha said. "He smashed it with a rubber mallet. I think he was actually aiming for my hand and missed. It was how he got me to finally wake up. I think he dosed me

with too much Telazol and I was out for a long time. I don't think he touched me except to strip

me and tie me up while I was out. It's no fun when the victim isn't awake, right?"

Jensen shifted in his seat and wanted to reach out and take Misha's hand, but he waited.

"So, I guess I was very lucky that he didn't have a lot of time to work with. When I first came to, I could tell I was tied spread eagle on a bed, face up, but I was too groggy to understand what

was happening. That's when he smashed my wrist. It woke me up. Then he sat on the bed next

to me and used a lighter to heat up the metal brand in his hand. Talked the whole time about how

he'd shaped the metal himself. God does he love the sound of his own voice."

Jensen nodded agreement.

"So, then he branded me. It didn't hurt as much as I thought it would. I mean,

it hurt, but it

cauterizes the wound too, so. But anyway. Then he told me what it said. And as he—

repositioned—me, he just kept talking about my crime. On and on about what an obnoxious

worm I was for stealing you away from him. And how I was lower than scum for resorting to

sex to do it. Never mind that it was you who kept coming on to me."

Jensen cleared his throat and ducked his head.

"Not that I minded, but still. And then he just kept talking about how amazing and wonderful you

are and blah, blah, blah."

Jensen looked up at that and fought the twitch of his lips to form a smile. Misha was giving him a quirked eyebrow.

"Don't get a big head. Obsession leads to hyperbole. And he was— *is*—obsessed with you. He kept track of you, you know? Talked about how he followed your career at the Bureau. He was

angry that you worked counterintelligence for so long."

Jensen felt his heart stop momentarily. Russ had been stalking him for eight years? What if he'd

found out about his family or had done something to them in secret. He thought about the time his

brother's car had been damaged in a hit and run. And the time his sister had been made

uncomfortable by a guy who had kept bothering her at the Starbucks she

always went to until she

found a new place to get her coffee. Had that been Russ?

"Anyway. That was it. Just positioning me. Talking about you. Nothing happened."

Jensen opened his mouth and then closed it. Misha was lying. But if he didn't want to talk about

it yet, he certainly wasn't going to try to force anything out of him. Misha met his eyes, realized

Jensen knew he was lying, and then looked away. An awkward silence fell.

"So," Jensen said, clearing his throat yet again. "How did Russ find you, or..."

Misha laughed bitterly. "Oh, he was very kind. Offered me a ride home. He came by the

hospital and—Jesus—he played me like a fucking fiddle. Fed into my annoyance that I was

being babied because of a little knot on the back of my head. Pointed out how I'd be much more

comfortable sleeping in my own bed. Said Bunny missed me and was outside in the car. He

was clever enough to disappear while I signed myself out of the hospital. And then we started

driving back to Elton. I wasn't even paying attention that we were heading the wrong way

completely. And then suddenly something stabbed me in the neck. I had no idea what had

happened—it didn't really hurt that much and I went foggy right away. I



heard Bunny barking,

but then I slipped under. And...well."

Misha twisted the worn out cotton blanket in his hand.

"Um. Jen..." Misha's voice had grown quite thick and he was suddenly fighting back a wash of tears. "Where's Bunny?"

Jensen put a hand to his mouth and looked away for a moment. He pulled himself together and

reached out and took Misha's hand.

"Um. Russ drugged her. But. He gave her too much." Misha closed his eyes and sucked in a

sharp breath through his teeth. "I'm so sorry, Mish. She didn't make it. I—"

"Don't," Misha said and pulled his hand away.

Jensen looked up, shocked by Misha's sudden withdrawal.

"Don't what?"

"Don't care. Don't come in here and tell me my dog is dead and try to comfort me. It's probably best if you just left."

Jensen sat back, his mind reeling in denial. He was hearing things wrong.

"I'm sorry, I don't understand—"

"Jensen. I live here. You live in DC. You're not going to give up your job or transfer to frickin'

Portsmouth, New Hampshire. My life is here. This isn't going to be anything. It was always

going to be temporary. It was supposed to be impersonal. Let's not draw it

out, okay? We're not

going to do some long distance relationship. Those never work. I mean, you weren't thinking

that, were you?"

"I—" Jensen's brain wasn't functioning properly and he felt an odd pressure in his chest that

wasn't making it any easier to absorb Misha's words. "I hadn't really thought that far ahead," he answered honestly.

"Exactly. So. Don't make it worse, okay? We should just part ways while we can still do it

without being—you know, just..."

"Misha, this isn't something we need to talk about now."

"No, it's something we don't need to talk about at all. I'm not going to try to do some ridiculous back and forth bullshit—" His voice cracked and he had to stop. His chin quivered and he

fought to draw in a breath. Tears fell silently from Jensen's eyes as he watched Misha

completely break down.

"I can't, Jensen," he said, sobbing and gasping between words. "I can't...have you and then have it taken away. I don't *want* to go through that. To try and have it all fall apart—and it will—

would hurt too much. I'd rather just not try at all."

"Misha..."

"Please leave. Don't make me ask again."

Jensen withdrew and clasped his hands together to keep them from shaking. He stood up and felt

dizzy, but he forced himself to walk to the door. He paused at the threshold and said, "If there's ever anything you need, you can always...ask. Okay?"

He got no response but Misha's muffled crying. Jensen walked into the hallway and quickly

located a bathroom. He shut the door to the single toilet room and ran some water in the sink.

After a minute of splashing cold water on his face, he blotted himself dry with paper towels and

then looked at himself in the mirror. For the life of him he couldn't see anything reflected back.

Jensen left the restroom and then left the hospital. He was more than ready to leave Elton for

good.

### **Wednesday, November 27, 2013**

"Morning," Russ said with a bright smile when he was led into the interview room in shackles.

"Do you have any plans for Thanksgiving?"

The corrections officer escorting him in chained his wrists to the table and his ankles to the

floor. Then he stood in the corner of the room.

Jensen kept his casual pose, leaning back in the chair with his legs crossed, and one wrist resting

on the table. Russ scooted his chair closer to the table.

"Where's your lawyer, Russ?"

"I told him not to come. I'd prefer if he was gone too," he said with a nod toward the prison guard. "But, c'est la vie."

"Hm."

"I'm a little upset with you, Jensen."

"Are you?" Jensen said in a tone that indicated exactly how many fucks, flying or otherwise, he gave about that.

"You haven't been to see me. I've had a parade of assholes coming in here trying to talk to me

like they're my friends. Trying to scare me. Trying to flatter me. Trying to intimidate me.

Morons. They don't get it. They don't get me. Not like you do."

Jensen shifted in his seat, but didn't respond.

"You said you'd visit me. Why didn't you come sooner?"

Jensen shrugged a shoulder. "I don't recall ever telling you I would come see you."

The chains rattled as Russ pulled at both his wrists and his ankles.

"Don't try to play coy. It's beneath you."

"Apparently you have this perfect ideal of what I am constructed in your head. Maybe you need

to face the reality. I pee in the shower. I love Shark Week. I antagonize serial killers. I—bang

K9 cops for fun while on a job." Russ inhaled slowly, his eyes turning hard.

"And speaking of that," Jensen said leaning forward. "Why'd you kill the dog,

Russ? I mean, you've decided

you're going to waste the tax payers' dollars by actually forcing this thing to go to trial. How

much sympathy will you garner from the jury? I mean, your daddy didn't hug you when you were

a child so you kidnap, torture, rape, and kill people. Sure, that makes sense. But dogs? People

don't like it when you hurt animals." Jensen shook his head and tsked at him.

Russ sat back in his chair, looking very annoyed.

*Good*, Jensen thought pettily.

"Believe it or not, the dog was an accident. I didn't like the mutt, but I wasn't going to kill her. If for no other reason than it would be strange if both *he* and the dog went missing and I knew

nothing about it when she was in my care. But after I stabbed *him* in the neck with the needle,

she started attacking me from the backseat. I almost crashed the car, but fortunately had the

Telazol handy. I was just in a hurry to get her off me so I just drew some up in the syringe and

then stuck it in her. I didn't know how much I had given her." He shrugged. "Shit happens,

angel."

"Yeah. Speaking of shit, we're going to figure out who all those jars belong to. How many states

are going to be clamoring for your blood? Please say Texas. They always

treat serial killers so

well." Jensen smiled beatifically at him.

Russ smiled back and leaned forward again. He reached his hands forward, but was drawn up

short by the chains.

"If you can find them, I'll confirm it."

Jensen sat back. "Not interested. We've got enough on you. But, something tells me you didn't

kill the same after DC. What changed?"

"I killed differently before DC. They were all different. Similar when they were together, but

different in different cities."

Jensen swallowed and tried not to show a reaction to those words though he felt disgusted,

horrified, and involuntarily impressed.

"So. What made you go back to the angel names?"

"Pure chance. I was in Natalia's house, just killing time while Gilbert fucked her whore mouth,"

Jensen clenched his hand into a fist under the table, "and I wandered into her basement. And

guess what I found? A coffin. It brought on such a nostalgic feeling. And it made me think of

you. I couldn't help myself. It was right there. So, I decided to pull out an oldie but a goodie. I

knew I didn't want to do anything too similar so I needed a more obscure angel name. I gave

Gilbert a little more time and did some research. I found that book at the library." Russ laughed and Jensen cringed at the sound. "Why didn't you look at the checkout record for that book,

Agent? Only four people had ever checked it out. And I was one of them. You could have

wrapped this thing up three kills earlier."

Jensen closed his eyes and counted to ten. He'd known it would be a mistake to come here. He

only felt nauseated around this man. He opened his eyes.

"So why hide the brand?"

"I always hide the brands. Those three in DC—I don't know. I was experimenting. But I always hid the brands under the tongues. No one ever looked there. Not once was it ever reported. Or

if they were found, no one ever linked them together." Russ reached forward again, but again

was stopped by his shackles. "The crime is the important part, Jensen. It's the only thing that

matters."

Jensen bobbed his head. "Okay then. I guess you're totally right. They all had it coming."

"They did. You see it. You just don't want to admit it. Or can't admit it aloud in front of other people."

Jensen shook his head in disbelief. "Why do you think you know anything about me? Wait. You

know what? Don't answer that. I don't care."

"You do care."

"I really don't," Jensen said as he stood up.

"You'll come see me again," Russ said smugly.

"Well, the next time I see you, it'll be in Virginia."

Russ grinned. "You're going to bring me closer to you."

"Well, we're submitting paperwork to get you extradited to Virginia. You see, Russ, while New

Hampshire does have the death penalty, they very rarely sentence anyone with it. And even more

rarely carry it out. Virginia on the other hand—they're a bit more like Texas."

Russ' expression grew dark and Jensen smiled unpleasantly at him.

"See you in Virginia, Russ."

Jensen started for the door and the prison guard stepped forward to undo Russ' chains.

"You're going to take the death penalty off the table, Jensen."

Jensen whipped around. "Am I? Now, you're so smart, Russ, why the *fuck* would I do that?"

"Because I won't talk otherwise. You wanna know what the other cities are, who the others are

—I won't say a word if you try to kill me."

"We don't need you for that. You catalogued everything so well for us. I'm sure we'll be able to



figure it out."

"Not the victims." Russ' smile made Jensen's blood curdle in his veins. "Do you really think Gilbert was my only disciple? My first disciple? I have literally dozens of accomplices out

there. I had three in DC alone."

Jensen stared at him and then shook his head.

"You're bluffing."

"Nick Tirro. He helped me kill his mother. You investigated him, remember? But let him go

because he had an alibi for Father Dolan. Just like Gilbert had an alibi for Sarah Vanderpool.

They're all over the country, Jensen. Some of them may have continued my work without me."

Jensen ran a hand down his face. "Fuck," he whispered.

"Take the death penalty off the table. Bring me close to you. And we'll talk."

Jensen met Russ' eyes and stared him down. He knew he couldn't break eye contact first, but he

also knew Russ wasn't going to lose this. Finally he looked away.

"We'll talk," is all Jensen would concede and walked out the door.

### **Friday, December 6, 2013**

The key turned smoothly in the lock and the door swung open. Jensen stood momentarily

surprised. He'd gotten used to the rusted lock and sticking door of the Lakeside Motor Lodge.

He looked inside his apartment, waiting for a sense of disconnection or like he didn't belong to

come over him. Nothing happened. He had spent three months away from home, tracking a

killer he hadn't been able to forget about for eight years, witnessing acts more heinous than he'd

ever been willing to believe a human was capable of...and making a connection with someone

who had somehow made the experience bearable only to have his feelings flung back into his

face and summarily dismissed. He felt different. He didn't think who he was at his core had

changed, but his experiences in Elton were something that he would always carry around with

him. He thought that it would be reflected in other aspects of his life.

However, his living room with its blue and grey decor still had two pillows stuck at perfect

ninety degree angles in the corners and the TV remote sat squarely on the ottoman. His bedroom

wasn't even musty when he walked in to hang his garment bag in the closet and set his backpack

on the queen size bed. He did notice that the top left corner of his green bedspread was flipped

back revealing the striped under side. He thought it would bother him knowing it had been like

that for three months, but he found that he was able to push past that feeling

—though he still fixed

it before he left the room.

His kitchen looked small and inadequate compared to the only other one he'd been in lately, but

it was familiar and everything was in its place. He opened the refrigerator vaguely remembering

that there should be four bottles of Dogfish Head IPA in the door. It wasn't noon yet, but he

really didn't care. He'd spent two weeks in New Hampshire trying to get Little's extradition

papers in order, but the fucking mayor of Elton—who hadn't made a peep the entire time the case

had been ongoing—had put up a stink about the citizens of Elton not getting their day in court or

some sort of bullshit. After it pretty much became apparent Little would never receive a fair trial in Elton, Boston had stepped in and tried to make a claim on him, but the state of

Massachusetts had no standing since he'd never committed a crime there—as far as anyone knew. It

had been a long, obnoxious two weeks, but eventually Jensen had won his battle. It wasn't a

done deal yet; he still had some details to hammer out, but he felt confident enough that he would

get his extradition that he packed his shit and headed home. He'd been looking forward to

sleeping in his bed on his journey home, but now he wondered if it would

even make a

difference.

With those maudlin thoughts and a roll of his eyes he picked up a bottle of beer and then reached

onto the top shelf to pull out a plastic container. The lid said it was extra garlic hummus. He

turned it sideways and grimaced at the green and white fur colony that had exploded inside the

container. Well, letting it get to room temperature in the trash wouldn't help anything, so he put it

back in the fridge to wait until he knew he'd be taking the garbage out.

Jensen walked over to the drawer that housed his bottle opener and saw the base unit for his

landline phone blinking on the counter. The number four blinked at him as he took his first swig

of beer. He didn't think he'd even given this number out to four people. He pressed the play

button and the machine went through its spiel to announce the date and time of his first caller.

"Jenny, it's mom. I thought you left tomorrow. But I guess you left today. I hope you

remembered to get someone to come over and water your fichus. They're hardy, but they still

need regular water and sunlight. Okay, love you. Don't wait forever to call me back."

Jensen took a longer draught of his beer. What good did leaving a message on his machine after

he'd already left do? Besides, that fichus had disappeared when the live-in girlfriend had.

The machine beeped. "Jenny, it's mom. You father needs new underwear. What was that kind

you bought? Without the tags?" Jensen's brow creased in confusion. "Oh, wait, Hollis had

those. Never mind. Love you."

Jensen wondered why his mother still knew what kind of underwear his brother wore. Seemed

like someone needed to start doing his own laundry.

"Jenny, it's mom." Jensen laughed and walked away from the machine. Of course, all four were probably from her. This message was informing him of a dinner party she was planning with

their lovely neighbors the McKennas and that she would wait until he was back to plan it so he

could come. He knew for a fact that his mother didn't particularly like the McKennas, but they

did have a single daughter his age who was a doctor and a son who was a little younger who

was a lawyer. He wondered which one would also be showing up to dinner.

*Real subtle, Mom*, he thought as he waited for the fourth message.

"Hi, I'm trying to reach Jensen Ackles. My name is Tyler and I'm calling from the Four Legged

Warriors Adoption Program." Jensen turned to look at the machine. The what? "You submitted

an application to us a little over a year ago expressing an interest in adopting a veteran, and after

approval you were placed on the waitlist. We now have a six year old Weimaraner who

returned from a tour in Afghanistan who needs a forever home. If you're still interested, can you

please give us a call back?"

Jensen sought out a packet of Post-It notes and a pen to write down the number. He was a little

stunned by the call. He did remember putting in the application but he never knew it had been

approved. He thought a home inspection was required. Maybe Lauren had brought them out.

Regardless, now that she was gone, getting a dog was no longer on his list of priorities. The

least he could do though was call the guy back and tell them he wasn't interested in case they

were waiting on him. The message was only two days old.

He called the number and got put on hold a couple of times until he reached the person who had

called him. Before Jensen could say anything the man started talking about how wonderful this

dog was and how he'd seen quite a few military dogs in his day and this one was something

special. Before Jensen could interrupt him, the "but" came that he hadn't even been waiting for.

Apparently this dog was suffering from pretty severe PTSD, but that's why they had selected him

because he had experience in law enforcement and training in victim assistance. Yeah, human

victim assistance. He couldn't imagine there was much crossover in human and dog therapy.

The man was still talking, telling him he didn't have to make a decision over the phone, but he

was welcome to drive out to the facility to meet her first. The man asked if he could make it out

today even though he knew Jensen was about a two and a half hour drive away. This would be

time to tell him that his situation had changed and he was therefore no longer interested, but he

found himself agreeing to drive out and meet her first before making a decision.

Even though Jensen had just spent over an hour in a car, two hours on a plane, and forty-five

minutes in a taxi cab, he found himself getting ready for a two and a half hour drive out to the

fucking countryside. He hadn't even unpacked yet or picked up his mail from the post office, but

at least this trip would help him to assess if over three months of inactivity had done any damage

to his personal vehicle. Classic cars were beautiful, but they couldn't just sit around for long

stretches of time and still be expected to function properly. He forgot to take the hummus mold

out of the fridge when he left.

The "facility" was actually the large acreage of some guy's backyard. There was a lot of open space for the dogs to run around in and a portion of the yard not too far from the house had been

sectioned into large kennels. Jensen was greeted by Tyler and as he shook his hand he knew he

should just tell him that he couldn't take in a dog after all, but then he figured he had driven all

the way out here so he might as well see it. Tyler was excited, but also a little nervous.

"Is something wrong?" Jensen asked him, too tired to try to find a less direct way to ask his

question.

"N-no. Not really. Well, kind of. We've had Charlie for about six months now. She was a

bomb sniffer in Afghanistan for three years. It was a long time to be there, but her handler stayed

that long and she seemed well suited to the task. Then one day her unit was hit with a roadside

bomb. She was thrown from the vehicle, but she'd been wearing body armor and came out

relatively unharmed, physically. But her handler died. And the blast terrified



her. She's

suffering from severe posttraumatic stress disorder and is nervous around people, especially

crowds, and loud noises scare her. She's not a good companion dog for households with

children. And lot of the people who were on the waitlist were willing to come out and meet her,

but she's just so withdrawn and shy that no one's wanted to take her in."

Jensen looked at Tyler blankly.

"I'm not trying to guilt you into taking her. She is a special case and would need a lot of attention and special care. It won't be easy. I just want you to know up front what you'd be getting

yourself into. That's all."

"Okay, I understand."

This was a good thing. Now he could say no and it wouldn't come off like someone who had

simply changed his mind about adopting a dog and would just be another in a long line of people

who didn't want to deal with a traumatized animal.

When they reached her kennel, Jensen didn't even see her at first. Then he noticed the scrunched

up ball of silver-grey fur in the far corner of the four by eight foot cage. Tyler opened the door

and let Jensen step inside. He shut the door behind him, but didn't lock it.

"I'll give you a few minutes. Here." He handed him a brown squishy ball with a less than

pleasant odor through the chain links. "That's her favorite treat. Or at least it's the one thing she'll always eat."

"Thanks," Jensen said, way past the point of wondering why he was even here.

He took a step toward the dog and she scrunched up even tighter and whined softly—frightened.

Jensen sighed and stepped back. What the hell was he supposed to do? He stared at the dog that

stared warily back at him. Then he sat down on the ground, not concerned with getting his jeans

or T-shirt dirty, and leaned against one of the fence walls stretching his feet out. He could just

barely get his legs straight with his feet flat against the other side. He glanced at the dog and

then looked forward.

"I kinda sorta know how you feel," Jensen said. "Never been blown up, but, wanting to curl up and hide? Make everything go away? That's a feeling I can relate to. And maybe I shouldn't.

I've never had anything truly terrible happen to me. I've just been there to see the worst things

inflicted on other people. So, really, what right do I have to be upset by it? It didn't happen to

me. I'm fine. I'm perfectly fucking fine."

He glanced at the dog. She hadn't moved, but perhaps one ear was canted forward a little.

"Sorry. I cuss a lot. Bad habit." He looked away from the dog again. "I have a lot of bad habits. You'd probably hate living with me. Or maybe you'd only like me temporarily in an

impersonal capacity." He slumped back against the fence and ignored how the metal dug into his skin. "Do I sound bitter?" he asked the dog. "I am. It's pathetic. I think this is actually what a broken heart feels like. No wonder I never tried to get close to anybody. This sucks."

Jensen was rambling, he knew he was, but he couldn't stop talking. He wasn't even sure what he

was talking about most of the time. He talked a little about his family and a little about his

work. And he knew every now and then the mention of a blue-eyed asshole slipped in. It felt

good to say some of his problems out loud; to actually hear them said. Perhaps there was some

credence to the whole psychiatry bullshit after all. Not that he thought he needed a shrink.

Maybe he should get another fichus. The last one had been an excellent listener.

Jensen realized he must have been talking for some time, but Tyler hadn't come back yet. He

checked his watch but didn't note the time. How long would be long enough for him to be able to

just say he tried but he didn't think it was going to work out so he could leave? He glanced at the

dog again and raised his eyebrows in surprise. She'd left her corner and was now a couple of

feet away, laying down with her chin on her paws, watching him. For a moment he thought the

dog liked him, and then he remembered the treat in his hand.

"Oh, you just want this, huh?" he asked her. He held out the ball of—whatever—and she slowly

inched forward on her belly. When she got close enough he lowered the treat so she could take

it. He let her finish chewing before he stretched out a hand for her to sniff. Then he gingerly

petted the very top of her head with just his fingers. The slightest movement of her tail was the

only indication that she was okay with the contact.

"That's amazing."

Jensen turned and looked up to see Tyler standing at the kennel door.

"She's never come up to anyone on her own before. I think this is a good match."

"You think so?" Jensen murmured, wondering how he could break the bad news to Tyler that he

wasn't going to take her.

He contemplated how to say it all through signing paperwork and listening to instructions on

how to deal with a PTSD dog while she was traumatized further when she was given a bath. He

wondered if there was a certain etiquette behind backing out of an adoption application as he

helped load a large dog bed and a starter bag of food with a couple of food and water bowls into

his trunk. He wondered if he was going to have to get home before he admitted to himself that

he'd just adopted a fricken dog as he took the leash from Tyler. Charlie was hunched and

shivering from all the activity, her tail tucked between her legs, but at least she wasn't trying to

get away.

"That's a...unique car," Tyler said. "What is it?"

"It's a '67 Chevy Impala. I got it as a gift from a cranky old man when I was a teenager. Which,

isn't as creepy as it sounds. I know it's not the typical vintage car most people covet, but for

some reason—I saw this and just—fell in love."

Tyler nodded but Jensen could tell he didn't get it.

"Well, it does have a wide back seat, but I don't think I'll be able to get the crate in there. At least not without damaging something."

"I don't need the crate."

"A lot of dogs find them comforting, especially when their owners are away at work for long

hours."

"I'm not going to use a crate. I just need the blanket."

Tyler shrugged and retrieved a soft, thick blanket to lay on the backseat.

Jensen led Charlie to

the car and wondered how he was going to get her inside without freaking her out, but then she

hopped right in. Jensen shut the door behind her and then shook Tyler's hand.

"Not to be pessimistic, but if it turns out she's too much to take on, you can always bring her back here." Jensen nodded and Tyler smiled. "But, for someone reason, I don't think I'm ever going to see Charlie again."

Jensen grunted in response and got into his car. He started the engine and began the long drive

back to DC. He glanced in the rearview mirror and saw Charlie laying down, but shivering as

she kept her eyes on him.

"Don't worry. I won't fuck this up," he said. "I kind of know someone who might know a thing or two about dogs." He glanced back at her again. "Don't judge. I'm not using you as an excuse to talk to him."

Jensen leaned an arm on the side of the door and laughed softly to himself as he concentrated on

his driving. He hadn't just adopted a military dog for the sole purpose of having an excuse to

contact Misha, had he? He laughed sadly and looked in his rearview mirror to see Charlie still

watching him.

"I wish this was the most pathetic thing I've done in my life. But it's really not."

**Friday, December 13, 2013**

Jensen navigated to his personal e-mail account on the Internet as he tried to tune out the staticky

drone of elevator music buzzing in his ear. He was still dealing with the bureaucratic bullshit

that accompanied getting Little extradited and he really wished the New Hampshire State

Attorney's Office had more than one song to play when putting people on hold.

Jensen logged into his e-mail and tried not to be disappointed as he saw that his only new e-mail

was a forwarded post from his mother full pictures of amazing sculptures carved out of fruits and vegetables. It had been one week since he'd sent his e-mail to Misha, and he hadn't even

received a token link to some website that might have advice for him.

He thought back to the message he had sent. Had it been too desperate? Too pathetic? Perhaps

it been too casual. Too aloof. He'd spent three hours writing and rewriting that damn e-mail.

Then he'd finally realized that rather than trying to justify contacting him with questions about the

dog, he should just admit that he wanted to know how he was doing first. And then ask about the

dog. He'd tried to keep it short, but he filled in Charlie's back story and told a little bit about

their first night together. It hadn't gone well. An ambulance had gone by on the street outside

and Charlie had huddled petrified in a corner and peed on the floor. He was pretty certain he'd

made a mistake taking her in. She kept her distance from him and cringed when he tried to pet

her. She would do her business as soon as they stepped out on the sidewalk in front of his

apartment and then would shrink down and refuse to budge and go for a proper walk. He

actually really did need help with her.

But Misha hadn't responded. The first day he thought that maybe Misha just hadn't checked his e-

mail yet. The second he wondered if maybe Misha was trying to figure out what to say to him.

The third day he'd panicked and wondered if Misha had pushed him away because he'd known

something had been damaged so badly that he was actually dying as he lay in the hospital bed

and had expired shortly after. He'd nearly called Ty to ask after him, but then he'd overheard

Jared talking on the phone to Gen and wondering if it was a good thing Misha had already

returned to work. So, not dead and not incapacitated. Three days later Jensen realized he

needed to accept that he was being ignored or perhaps no response was the message Misha

wanted to send. He had been pretty clear at the hospital; Jensen should accept



his decision.

Didn't mean it didn't hurt like a bitch though.

"Agent Ackles?"

"Yes?" Jensen returned his attention to the phone and closed the browser on the monitor.

"I can confirm that the Attorney General did sign the extradition order."

"That's good to hear."

"Yes. So, as soon as we get it notarized and copied, we can fax it to the necessary parties and

arrangements can be made for transportation."

"Fantastic. Do you think you could get that fax out tonight?"

"Well, our notary has actually gone home already. But, we'll be sure to get it done first thing next week."

Jensen closed his eyes and counted to five. "Great," he said, hoping he didn't sound too manic.

"I appreciate all your help."

"Anytime."

"Unh-hunh."

Jensen hung up.

"Fuckers."

He looked at the time. It was barely past 4:30. Well, if the notary for the New Hampshire State

Attorney's Office could go home this early, so could he. He logged off his computers and put his

winter coat on over his polo shirt and jeans. Casual Fridays were awesome. He unzipped his

gym bag and took a sniff. It could probably go another week. He zipped it closed and dropped

it on the floor taking only his briefcase with him. The briefcase he'd only started carrying so as

to always have Little's paperwork on hand should he ever need to find a nearby fax machine in

case something went missing.

Before leaving he walked to the other side of his cubicle to say goodnight to Jared. He saw his

squad mate—and now, good friend—sitting back in his chair and talking to a woman with long

dark hair.

"Oh, hey, Jay. I don't want to disturb you, I just want to say—" Jensen stopped talking when the woman turned around. He broke out into a smile. "Gen!"

"Hi, Jensen."

Jensen took a step forward, but then paused. They hadn't hugged when they'd said goodbye in

Portsmouth, but then she took the two steps necessary to get close enough to hug him. He

laughed at his own awkwardness and she smiled at him.

"It's good to see you. What are you doing here?"

"TDY at headquarters."

"Oh yeah?"

"Yeah, I heard it's good for your career."

"Though not your health," Jensen laughed. "Good luck with that."

She shrugged a shoulder. "It's only ninety days. So, maybe it won't be too bad."

"Well, we'll have to go out some time. In fact, the buildings are close enough we could meet for lunch."

"I would like that."

"Gen is also considering transferring down here," Jared said.

Jensen flicked his eyes to Jared's grin and then looked back at Gen. "Is that so? What spurred that decision?"

Gen shrugged. "I don't know. I just think a change would be nice. And you two seemed to think

that the mid Atlantic is the be all and end all of places to live. I thought I'd check it out."

"Well, that's great. We'll definitely have to arrange a trip to the museums and the monuments to

lure you in."

Gen laughed. "There are probably other things that would make me want to stay more."

Jensen gave a slight nod of his head and tried not to laugh out loud.

"Okay then. I guess I'll leave one of those other things to work his magic then."

Gen tilted her head and then followed Jensen's eye line back to Jared. She stiffened.

"That's not—I meant like the climate and the career opportunities!"

"Oh. Of course. Well, if you have the time on Monday, we'll have to show you the best places

to get lunch around here."

She crossed her arms and gave him a little glare. "I'd like that."

"Okay."

Jensen looked at Jared again and he put his hands out in an "I don't know" gesture behind Gen's back.

"Well, goodnight," Jensen said.

"What, you're leaving? It's not even five o'clock," Jared accused good-naturedly.

"Yeah, well, I've got some under the table comp time from the work we did up north."

"Are you just going to go home?" Gen asked. "Jared and I were going to grab something to eat later. Would you like to meet us?"

"I would, but I've got to go home and feed Charlie and work and getting her not to pee in front of

my building door."

Gen titled her head in question.

"Right. I got a dog. She's an army veteran and is having some troubles adjusting to civilian life I guess. It's a work in progress."

"That's really nice."

"Yeah."

Jensen could see that Gen was dying to ask if he'd asked for any help of the dark-haired, blue-

eyed, gorgeous variety, but she refrained.

"Goodnight, Jensen," Jared said. "We'll see you Monday."

"Yeah. See you then."

Jensen left the office and felt a little improvement in his mood. He was happy for his friend.

Granted there was no guarantee anything would come of Gen's TDY, but at the very least it

would be fun to rag on Jared and tease him mercilessly for the next three months.

Charlie didn't greet him at the door when he got home. She never did. And it took a full fifteen

minutes to coax her from her bed in the corner of the living room even though he knew she

needed to relieve herself after being inside for over eight hours. She refused to go more than

three feet past the door to the hydrant and did double duty quickly. She pulled on the leash to go

back inside as Jensen struggled to bag up her business and drop it off in a curbside garbage can.

"Alright, alright," Jensen grumbled, letting her pull him inside and away from the moderately

noisy street traffic outside his building. It was cold enough that he didn't even want to try getting

her to walk a little. As soon as the leash was off her collar, she darted for her bed and curled up

on it. Jensen gave her a scoop of dry food in her bowl, but she didn't show the least interest in

it. Maybe he could get her to eat a treat or he could try bribing her with some wet food. She

liked wet food enough that he could usually get a hand on her and pet her while she was eating.

He was getting a can out of the pantry when there was a knock at his door. He raised his

eyebrow in curiosity as he made his way across the kitchen. It wasn't impossible to get into his

building without a key, but generally people buzzed his apartment in order to be let in. Perhaps

it was the building manager coming to tell him he couldn't have a dog. Wouldn't that be

awkward? He looked through the peep hole and couldn't see much as the person had his head

bowed down. Well, he was an FBI agent. He wasn't really afraid of home invasions.

Jensen opened the door and Misha looked up at him. They stared at each other. For a really

long time. Even Jensen thought it was a bit excessive for what the drama of the situation

warranted. After he considered if he should say hi or kiss him and then slap him, he settled on

doing what he really wanted to do. He reached out and grabbed his shoulder, hauling him

forward into a bone crushing embrace. Misha hugged him back, arms going high around his

shoulders, almost around his neck. Jensen bent his head and put his lips on Misha's T-shirt

where shoulder met neck. He inhaled deeply and immediately felt high with the sweet masculine

scent that was uniquely Misha. And cinnamon. Of course, just a hint of cinnamon.

"Hey, Misha," he said, words muffled by Misha's body.

"Hey, Jensen. I got your e-mail."

"Yeah?"

"Yeah. I tried to answer it a couple of times, but then just figured it would be easier to explain things in person."

"I see."

They were quiet for a few more moments, not ready to let go of each other. Jensen wanted to

know what this meant, what was going through his mind. If he still felt as hopeless about their

situation as he had that day in the hospital. But he couldn't ask. He didn't

want to know that

Misha really had come just to help with Charlie and then he was planning on leaving. He didn't

want to have to tell Misha he was going to tie him up and lock him in the closet because

considering recent events that would just be in poor taste.

Jensen opened his eyes. Behind Misha in the hallway were two rolling suitcases, a large duffle

bag, and a backpack. He pulled back and felt Misha very reluctantly let him go. He nodded his

head indicating the bags in the hall and smiled at Misha and his messy hair and his annoyed

expression at being let go.

"You planning on staying a while, Mish?"

"Yep," he said, almost defiantly.

Jensen laughed. "I can get behind that."

Misha tried to hide his shaky sigh of relief. "I'm glad to hear that. Frankly, I was expecting a

door in my face."

Jensen reached a hand up and brushed his knuckles down Misha's cheek. The man sighed and

closed his eyes at the touch. He opened them again when Jensen dropped his hand back to his

side.



"What changed?" Jensen asked.

Misha licked his lips. "Nothing. I just realized I'm *not* the kind of person who would rather not try something because I'm afraid it might not work. I would much rather try and fail than to give

up what I want."

Jensen nodded and felt a little perverse satisfaction in watching Misha shift nervously under his

mild gaze.

"This would be the part when you say something cheesy like, 'We're not gonna fail, Mish.'

Right?"

Jensen let him squirm a little longer, and then he grinned and leaned forward. He stopped just

short of kissing him and loved the small gasp Misha made when their lips brushed together.

"We're not gonna fail, Mish."

Misha surged forward and kissed him hard, wrapping his arms around his neck and pulling him

close. Jensen let his hands slide slowly around his waist, letting Misha have complete control

of the kiss. At one point Misha began talking in the kiss, and Jensen thought he may have been

apologizing for something, but he certainly didn't have enough cognitive ability at the moment to

understand any of it. He was aware enough to feel Misha's hands sliding over

his shoulders,

down his back, and over his hips. He moaned softly into the kiss, sliding his own hands down to

grab Misha's ass.

Then Misha stopped kissing him and pulled back. Jensen opened his eyes and could feel the

frown tugging at his lips.

"Why'd you stop?" he asked petulantly, but Misha wasn't looking at him.

"Hey," Misha said softly, sweetly, looking down. "You must be Charlie."

Jensen looked down and saw that Charlie had left her safe corner and had come over to see

Misha. He gently petted the backs of his fingers on the top of her head.

"You've got to be fucking kidding me. She only lets me pet her if I feed her," Jensen grumbled.

Misha smiled and leaned into Jensen's warmth, keeping up the gentle, soothing movement of his

hand on Charlie's head. Jensen wrapped his arms around Misha and rubbed his back. He settled

his cheek on the top of Misha's head and tried not to be jealous of a dog.

**Saturday, December 14, 2013**

Jensen opened his eyes.

Across the room he saw that IKEA dresser with its slant to the left. He really needed to get rid

of that stupid thing. Then his chest tightened. He realized the only reason he could see the

dresser was because of the wide open expanse of mattress in front of him. Had he dreamed

Misha had come to him yesterday? Had Misha decided he'd made a mistake and left him? He

turned and sat up, and promptly heard a grunt and a thump as something hit the floor. Jensen

turned to investigate and saw Misha scowling at him from an undignified position beside the

bed.

"Jesus, Jensen, why didn't you just tell me you prefer the left side of the bed."

Jensen laughed, never having been so happy to see a naked man sprawled on the carpet. He

reached a hand down and helped Misha back up onto the mattress, sliding over just enough to

give him room to sit on the bed, but forcing them to remain pressed tightly together. Jensen

immediately began kissing and sucking on the spot just below his left ear. Misha hummed in the

back of his throat and threaded his fingers through Jensen's hair to hold him in place. Hands

began to roam and their legs entwined, seeking to bring their awakening groins together. Misha turned and pushed his hands flat on Jensen's chest, making him lie flat. He stayed above him for

a moment, just looking at him, and Jensen dropped his eyes feeling almost

shy. His gaze landed

on Misha's chest.

Jensen raised a hand and traced the mostly healed brand over his heart. He'd ignored it last

night, but in the light of day he couldn't pretend it wasn't there. It had just passed the scabbing

phase and the reddish-pink marks were fading into white. Jensen could feel the raised texture of

the skin as he ran his finger over it. This was his fault. If he had gone with Misha to the hospital

the first time, Russ would never have gotten him.

"Hey," Misha said softly, catching Jensen's finger in his hand. "We might never have caught Russ otherwise."

Jensen frowned at him. He didn't like nor did he believe in psychics.

"It's okay," Misha said, leaning down. "I'm okay."

He kissed Jensen's lips lightly, and then kissed a trail over his chin and down his throat.

"Wait a sec, Mish."

"What?" Misha murmured around a mouthful of Jensen's neck.

"There's something we need to talk about."

Misha immediately stopped what he was doing and sat up. He gave Jensen his full attention.

Well, mostly. His right hand was circling a finger around and around his hip bone.

"What is it?"

"You should know something up front about me. I kind of told you before, but I've never really

been in a serious relationship. The closest I came was a ten month relationship. I don't know

what came over me, but I asked her to move in with me after only dating for six months. And

four months later we broke up. I don't—trust people easily. And I don't open up to them. And I

don't want to let them in because I'm afraid I'll just get hurt. There's a reason for it. A bad

experience I had when I was younger, but that's a story for another time."

Misha nodded solemnly.

"The point is, I don't move fast and I put 'walls up,'" he said, rolling his eyes at the term his last girlfriend had used. "I've been accused of intentionally keeping people guessing at what my true

feelings for them are. I guess because it keeps them at a distance. I like distance."

Misha took in a deep breath and let it out slowly. "I understand. I can get my own place. And

I'm sure I can find a hotel to keep my stuff in tonight..." Misha trailed off and cocked his head as he looked at Jensen's expression. "But, that's not why you're telling me all this, is it?"

"No. I just need you to understand what I'm like."

"Okay."

"So that you understand what it means when I say I love you."

Misha's jaw dropped. And then he snapped it closed.

"I'm in love with you, Misha. And I can't even contemplate living the rest of my life without you

in it."

Misha stared.

"I needed you to know how serious I am. So that you can make a decision about staying with me

based on knowing that for me this isn't a 'let's date and see how things go' thing. This is it—no,

this is everything for me."

Misha only looked slightly scared for a moment longer. Then he smiled and combed his fingers

through Jensen's hair.

"Okay. Sounds perfect."

Jensen blinked, startled. He hadn't known what he'd been expecting after that ill-planned speech,

but this wasn't it.

"I quit my job. Just closed on my parents' house. I've moved everything I own—or least wanted

to keep—down here. Got a ticket for speeding in a red car down 95 and couldn't use

professional courtesy to get out of it since I don't have my badge anymore. So...I came here with

the expectation that you would be everything I needed to start over. Which, is not quite as

romantic a declaration as yours was, but I don't want to date you either. I just want to be with

you. And I'm crossing my fingers that you're not a Steelers fan because that would be a deal

breaker."

"Redskins."

Misha made a sympathetic face. "Well, that's just embarrassing. But I guess I can live with

that."

He started to lean down to kiss him but Jensen put a hand to his face and pushed him back.

"Did you leave the Charger parked outside on the street?"

"Yeah. It said there was no parking limit on the weekends."

Jensen groaned. "Man, you have got to learn how to respect that car. That is my deal breaker."

"Okay. I'll make you a deal. You can have the fucking car if you will just shut up and kiss me."

"Okay."

Misha leaned down and Jensen pushed his face away again.

"Wait."

"Fuck, what?"

"How did you sell the house so fast?"

"Jensen, seriously?"

"But—"

"It was already on the market. I'd turned down the last offer. And after everything happened, I

asked the realtor to call them and see if they were still interested. They were. We expedited the

appraisal and the home inspection by doing an 'as is' sale. Three weeks and done. I was starting

to get worried about where I would stay since everything was moving so quickly and I would

have to move out almost immediately, but then I got your e-mail and figured I was set."

"What? So you weren't really nervous at all that I would turn you away?"

Misha smiled cheekily. "No, not really."

"Liar."

Misha shrugged a shoulder. "Moot point now. So. Can we kiss? And hopefully hump our way

to an orgasm if not outright fuck before breakfast?"

"So, you just came down here, homeless and jobless and just expected that I would take care of

everything?"

"Uh...yeah. Though you're clearly not taking care of *everything*." He rubbed his erection against Jensen's thigh.



"I'm not going to be your sugar daddy. I don't want a kept man."

"So, I'll find a job. Pretty sure Washington, DC has a police department."

Jensen made a face. "Ooo, you don't want to work for the MPD."

"Well, then what's a better option? Should I look in Virginia or Maryland?"

Jensen's eyes lit up. Misha sat back a little.

"Oh, God, what?"

"We got an e-mail the other day telling us they were going to open up agent applications again in

the next month or so. Even with the budget cuts they still have to fill a certain number of positions. I'm sure you'd have a shot. A good shot even. You've got pull with someone on the

inside." He smiled lewdly and rubbed his thigh against Misha's erection.

Misha laughed and leaned down, holding Jensen's hands to the bed so he could get his kiss.

Despite the arousal simmering just under their skin, they kept the kisses slow and lazy, tongues

entwining playfully. Misha moved to settle more fully on top of him, so Jensen took what he

knew would be his last opportunity for lucid thought for a while to say, "So, will you apply? To

be an agent?"

Misha brushed his fingers down Jensen's cheek reverently, and then bent down to kiss him.

"We'll see."

## **Glossary**

**10-4** - Message received and understood; one of many radio code abbreviations to expedite

messages and reduce erroneous transmissions. Another well known code is 10-20, which is

asking for a location. So when someone says, "What's your twenty?" they're essentially asking,

"Where are you?"

**ADIC** – Assistant Director in Charge; oversees entire field office, only found in extra large field offices: DC, LA, New York, Miami, and Chicago—and yes, it's not said letter by letter, it's said

the way it's spelled

**ASAC** – Assistant Special Agent in Charge; oversees a group of squads—and yes, it's not said

letter by letter, it's said the way it's spelled

**CR-2** – Divisions are given two letter designations, Criminal = CR, Counterterrorism = CT,

Cyber = CY, Counterintelligence = CI, Intelligence = ID The number is merely a counter and

not specific to any particular country or threat or investigation

**DNI** – Director of National Intelligence; a presidential appointee in charge of overseeing the

sixteen agencies of the United States Intelligence Community (USIC)

**EC** – Electronic Communication; official reports

**EEO** – Equal Employment Opportunity

**ERT** – Evidence Recovery Team

**IA** – Intelligence Analyst

**IO** – Intelligence Officer; a spy

**OPR** – Office of Professional Responsibility; basically if you do something stupid enough that it

requires a formal inquiry; also covers complaints of discrimination and harassment

**OST** – Operations Support Technician; fancy term for secretary

**POV** - Personally Owned Vehicle

**PNG** – Persona Non Grata; the political term used for kicking someone with diplomatic

immunity out of the country

**RA** – Resident Agency; a branch of the FBI underneath a larger Field Office

**SA** – Special Agent

**SAC** – Special Agent in Charge; oversees the field office or resident agency of assignment

except in extra large field offices: DC, LA, New York, Miami, and Chicago in which case they

oversee one division

**SSA** – Supervisory Special Agent; in charge of a squad of agents and analysts

**TDY** – Temporary Duty (Assignment); short or long-term but temporary assignment to a different

office/division

**WFO** – Washington Field Office; not to be confused with HQ (headquarters)  
which is also

located in DC

Please [drop by the archive and comment](#) to let the author know if you  
enjoyed their work!

# Document Outline

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Posted originally on the [Archive of Our Own](http://archiveofourown.org/works/1878732) at  
<http://download.archiveofourown.org/works/1878732>.

|                  |                                                                                                     |
|------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Rating:          | <a href="#">Mature</a>                                                                              |
| Archive Warning: | <a href="#">No Archive Warnings Apply</a>                                                           |
| Category:        | <a href="#">M/M</a>                                                                                 |
| Fandom:          | <a href="#">Supernatural RPF</a>                                                                    |
| Relationship:    | <a href="#">Jensen Ackles/Misha Collins</a>                                                         |
| Character:       | <a href="#">Jensen Ackles</a> , <a href="#">Misha Collins</a> , <a href="#">Original Characters</a> |
| Additional Tags: | <a href="#">slight homophobia</a> , <a href="#">Frottage</a>                                        |
| Series:          | Part 2 of <a href="#">The SPN RPFfiles</a>                                                          |
| Stats:           | Published: 2014-07-01 Words: 11951                                                                  |

## Timestamp: Action takes place between Angel Slayer and White Collar

by [emwebb17](#)

### Summary

After only two weeks of domestic bliss, Jensen introduces Misha to his family at Christmas dinner. It doesn't go over well.

### Notes

It's not necessary to read this to understand either Angel Slayer or White Collar as it has no bearing on the plot.

As mentioned in Angel Slayer, the nature of the story required me to fabricate the RP's families and histories. As this segment deals heavily with Jensen's family, there are a lot of original characters. This may push the bounds of an AU too far for some readers and make the story seem too disconnected from the actors. Read at your own discretion. Again, not reading this will not make reading White Collar difficult to follow.

**Tuesday, December 24, 2013**

Jensen exhaled deeply and strummed his fingers on the wheel of his Impala. He looked at the large single family home in front of him tastefully decorated with a few white lights and festive candy canes on the porch railing. A single electric candle gleamed out of each window. He put

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large single family home in front of him tastefully decorated with a few white lights and festive candy canes on the porch railing. A single electric candle gleamed out of each window. He put

his hand on the gear shift to put the car in park, but paused when it slid into reverse. He chewed on his upper lip and heard his passenger shift beside him.

“So, I’ve got some games on my phone,” Misha said. “But I need to know if I should start

something that will take a short time to play like Flappy Bird or if I should go with something

more involved like Angry Birds.”

Jensen huffed quietly.

“Is it odd that there are so many games about crashing birds into things?”

Jensen put the car in park and turned off the ignition. He turned to Misha who was looking at his new iPhone with a deeply furrowed brow. His finger tapped the screen and the phone beeped at

him in annoyance. Misha made a face at it and punched his finger against the screen a few more

times.

“Misha.”

Misha raised his head to look at him. “Jensen.”

“Look, I’m not worried about them not liking you or about springing the surprise of your gender

on them because I am out. But.”

“But.”

“I didn’t exactly tell them any details...about our relationship. I just said that I was bringing

someone to dinner.”

“And you don’t think that they might suspect it might be a romantic interest?”

“They might. My mom definitely will. But, I mean—I’m not bringing home the guy I’m dating

to meet my family at some random family dinner. I’m introducing them to the guy that I’m now

living with on a permanent and indefinite basis to Christmas dinner with no warning whatsoever.”

Jensen sighed. “I just don’t know how they’re going to react. And, honestly? Some of them will not react well. Probably my father.” He scowled.

“Especially my father.”

“And yet, still won’t even crack the top ten worst things that have happened to me all year.”

Jensen gave him a pained look. Misha looked contrite for a moment and then slid across the

bench seat. He cupped his jaw with hand and leaned forward to place a quick, but reassuring kiss on his lips.

“Jensen, I don’t blame you for not mentioning me to them sooner. I mean, it hasn’t even been a

full two weeks and we’re still feeling this thing out. I’m happy you didn’t even hesitate to include me in your family gathering. This is something we’ve decided to do together, and that means

we’ll have to face the reactions to our decisions together. And besides, you’re amazing. Which

means if they raised you, they have to be good people.”

Jensen blushed slightly and dropped his eyes. He did think his family was good people, but a

person certainly wasn't dictated by who their family was. He'd known plenty of assholes that had come from nice people and plenty of nice people who had come from assholes. He just hoped

that even if his parents and siblings couldn't blindly accept Jensen's sudden and drastic life

choices that they would at least have enough respect for him and Misha to let it pass for the

duration of one dinner. Or at least phrase their questions in as least an insulting manner as

possible.

“We could go,” Jensen said. “Skip dinner. We could go get Chinese and make out in the back of the car.”

“If you want to.”

Jensen frowned. “Aren't you supposed to say something like there's no point in delaying the

inevitable and we should just man up and face the consequences of our actions?”

Misha gave him an amused half smile. “That's not me, babe. I mean, if it's inevitable, there's no real need to rush into it, right? If it's definitely going to happen, who cares when it does?”

Jensen thought about that for a moment. “I suppose that makes a kind of sense.”

Misha smiled and slid closer, kissing Jensen's cheek and whispering, “But

that's not you."

Jensen inhaled deeply, catching the scent of his soap on Misha's body and the warm cinnamon-y

flavor of his breath. He turned his head and got his lips in a slightly awkward kiss. Then he slid his fingers into Misha's hair and turned him so that they could share a real kiss.

Something rapped on the window, and they started and pulled apart. Outside the window he saw

his younger brother, Hollis, grinning at them and waving a hand. He'd parked his Lexus behind

the Impala, so they were trapped in the driveway. Jensen heaved a sigh.

"Might as well do this," he mumbled.

Jensen opened his car door and Misha slid to his side to get out on the passenger side. Hollis

wrapped him in a big hug before he even had the door completely shut.

"I so won the bet!" Hollis said, his hazel eyes sparkling with glee.

"What bet?" Jensen groused.

"Well, when we found out you told Mom you were 'bringing someone' to Christmas dinner, we

all took bets on who it was going to be. Aldrich thought it was just going to be some poor sap

from work who had nowhere else to go. Connolly, Everly, and Mom all thought it was going to

be a girlfriend. I'm the only one who said it was going to be a boyfriend."

“Congratulations,” Jensen said dryly.

His little brother either didn’t hear the displeasure in his tone or ignored it because his smile didn’t waver. He just looked at Misha as he walked around the car. He nudged Jensen.

“He’s good looking. But everyone you date is.”

“You date a lot?” Misha asked. “I thought you said you weren’t a slut.”

Hollis laughed and Jensen scowled at him.

“I’m not. Not everyone marries their high school sweetheart.”

Misha shrugged a shoulder. Hollis’ jaw dropped. He leaned in close to Jensen.

“He’s married?” he hissed. “Dude.”

“Hollis, shut up. Misha, this is my little brother, Hollis. Hollis, Misha.”

“Misha? Are you Russian?”

“No.”

“Oh.”

Jensen repressed a smile as he watched his brother deal with Misha’s straightforward and

uninformative manner. They had only known each other about four months and been living

together less than two weeks, but Jensen had learned pretty fast that if he wanted a detailed

explanation from Misha he couldn’t phrase his questions as yes/no because that was all he was

going to get.

“Where’s your wife?” Jensen asked to distract Hollis from his intense scrutiny of Misha.

“She’s already here. She’s been here all day helping Mom and Everly cook.”

“You left her to defend herself against Mom alone?”

“You’re thinking of Lynn. Mom likes my wife.”

Jensen smiled and shook his head. “That’s not what I meant. Just be prepared for when Kristen

tells you that you two need to start trying for another baby.”

Hollis’ smile disappeared. “Fuck.” He took off for the house, a bottle of wine swinging wildly in one hand. Misha moved to stand next to him.

“So, the womenfolk are doing all the cooking? I had no idea your family was so…”

Jensen gave him a look, daring him to finish his sentence.

“...traditional.”

“Nice save.”

Misha pressed close and kissed him. “I hope they’re not traditional in other ways. Your brother seemed cool with us.”

“Yeah, it should be okay. Except for my dad.” Jensen kissed his lips, his cheek, his jaw, his

neck.

Misha chuckled and pulled away. “Easy. We should comport ourselves with restraint and

decorum. No need to let them think some fairy has corrupted you with the homosexual agenda.”

“Especially since it was the other way around.”

“True enough. Jesus, do you have any idea what it would have been like trying to introduce you

to my parents?”

“Would they not have been okay with it?”

“Well. It’s hard to say. My dad would probably want to take you hunting. If you could shoot a

deer between the eyes from hundred yards away he wouldn’t care who you were banging. My

mom would spend the whole time making really offensive comments involving stereotypes and

then asking if it was offensive. My sister would have just asked me when the pride parade was.”

Jensen smiled softly and brushed the back of his knuckles against Misha’s soft cheek. His eyes

were downcast and Jensen could tell he was swimming in happy and sad memories. He waited to

see if the sad were going to consume him and inched closer so he could pull him into his arms

faster if he needed to. Then Misha raised his head with a forced smile.

“My birth father would probably want to go to the parade too.”

Jensen cocked his head. He remembered Misha had told him that his father was technically his

stepfather, but he'd never spoken of his birth father before.

"Is he—still alive?"

Misha shrugged a shoulder and turned to walk toward the house. "I think so. I haven't seen him

since I was six, so..."

Jensen followed after him and processed this new information. He wondered if Misha wanted to

reach out to him since he was the only family he had left. Tonight wasn't the best time for that conversation though; they had enough to deal with considering the entire Ackles clan was waiting

inside to find out the results of their betting pool. Unless of course Hollis had already announced it with his big mouth.

Inside it was worse than Jensen had feared. The house was loud and chaotic with running,

screaming children, orders being delivered by way too many cooks in the kitchen, loud shouting at the TV as it blared a college football game in the living room, and Christmas music providing a

steady thrum underneath it all. Misha looked slightly overwhelmed. He'd stayed in Jensen's

apartment for the past two weeks, avoiding crowds--well, people--and more often than not Jensen

found him sitting in silence when he came home from work. The problem was that he didn't

know if that was just the way Misha was, or if he was still suffering the effects of his ordeal with Russ. He was going to need to find out soon; if Misha needed help he needed to be the one to



support him through it. Right now just wasn't a good time though.

"Jenny!"

Jensen cringed as his mother caught sight of him and passed off the wooden spoon she'd been

using to stir the contents of a pot to her daughter-in-law. She made her way out of the kitchen and Jensen tried to ignore the amused smirk Misha was sending in his direction.

"Jenny?" Misha whispered as Jensen took his coat from him.

"No. Unless you want to go by Dima."

Misha frowned at him, but then turned on a bright, happy smile when his mother reached them.

Jensen finished hanging their coats in the closet and enveloped his tiny mother in a big hug. It was amazing that she had birthed three sons over six feet tall and two more children not much

under that mark.

"Oh, I'm so glad you're here, honey. David! Turn down that racket!"

The volume on the TV dipped and Jensen could hear several sets of feet converging on the foyer.

He felt his chest tighten with anxiety and glanced at Misha to send him an apologetic look, but he now looked perfectly at ease and was smiling at his mother.

"Uh, Mom, this is my friend—Um. I mean." He cut off as everyone crowded into the foyer. His

oldest brother smacked his two kids to get them to stop squabbling. "Uh, everyone. So, I brought

—my boyfriend.” He paused and looked around. Everyone was carefully keeping their

expressions neutral. “To dinner. Um, this is my mother, Evelyn, and my father, David. That’s

my oldest brother, Aldrich, and his wife, Lynn. Those are their kids Kylie and Jamie. That’s my other older brother, Connolly, and his wife, Navya. That little troublemaker right there is Aadi and there’s a baby somewhere.”

“She’s taking a nap upstairs,” Navya said.

“Ah. That would be Brennen. And you met my younger brother, Hollis, outside. That’s his

wife, Kristen, and troublemaker number two is Ellia.” The little girl giggled at her title. “And this is my little sister, Everly. Where’s your boyfriend? Rick, Dick?”

“Richard,” Everly said with a narrowed eye.

“Right. Him.”

“He’s with his family.”

“I see. Everyone, this is Misha Collins.”

Everyone chorused hello at him and his brothers stepped forward to shake hands with him and his

mother gave him an awkward hug. Jensen only had a split second to recognize the look on his

father’s face. He had no time to intercept the question.

“Misha. Were your parents Communists?”

Everyone went quiet, more than a few pairs of eyes going wide, but nobody was looking at either

his father or Misha. Except for Jensen who leveled his father with a hard look.

“No,” Misha said. “They weren’t. I guess it is an unusual name. But I feel like I fit right in with this crowd. You all have such unique names.”

“Yeah, did you notice that our parents gave us all surnames for first names?” Hollis asked.

“They are not surnames,” his mother said.

Multiple conversations broke out and the moment of awkwardness from his father’s question

passed. Most of the women returned quickly to the kitchen, remembering they’d left things

unattended on the stove. His mother shooed his father back into the living room to turn off the TV

and instructed Jensen to get Misha a drink. Within moments they stood alone in the empty foyer.

Jensen exhaled through his mouth. He looked at Misha.

“So,” Jensen said.

“So,” Misha repeated.

“This is going to be awesome.”

“Oh, I can already tell it will be. Should I talk about how much I love Obamacare because

socialized medicine is the way a responsible government takes care of its citizens?”

Jensen grinned and wrapped an arm around his waist. “Maybe at the next family meal, okay?”

Let's just live through this one."

"Okay."

Jensen was surprised when Misha grabbed his face and pulled him in for a fierce kiss. It was hard and sloppy and only stopped because they heard giggling. Jensen's nieces were peeking at them

around a corner and then squealed and ran off when they were spotted. Jensen smiled at them, but then felt the expression fade when he faced Misha again. He looked very serious.

"I promise I'll get them to like me."

Jensen tilted his head, a little confused by Misha's severe conviction.

"I won't lose you," Misha breathed out, closing his eyes.

"Hey," Jensen said, putting a hand to his face and getting him to make eye contact. "You're not

going to lose me over anything."

Misha nodded, but he could see in his eyes that he didn't believe him. And he supposed Misha

was right. What if his family absolutely rejected Misha? Not that he believed they would, but if he had to choose between his family and Misha...he pulled the man close and hugged him

tightly. He petted the back of his head.

"I promise they'll like you," he said. "I love you. How could they not?"

Misha sighed and leaned against him heavily. Jensen rubbed his back soothingly. Maybe he

should have reconsidered using a hectic family dinner as a way to introduce Misha to his family.

He should have started with Hollis and Everly and then worked his way up, using his siblings'

approval to help pave the way for his parents.

"Jensen!" his mother called. "Dinner is on the table! Please come join us. David, for the last time, turn off that game! You don't even care about the teams!"

The noise in the house died down a little as the game was turned off and the Christmas music was

switched to instrumental and turned down to "mood-setting" levels. The children were quiet

enough as they were set up at the kids' table in the kitchen and began stuffing their mouths with chicken nuggets and yeast rolls. Inside the formal dining room, two leafs had been added to the

table to make it long enough to accommodate eleven people, and even then it was still going to be a tight squeeze. Jensen's parents sat at the ends of the table and he made sure to sit by his mother and put Misha beside him and next to Hollis and across from Everly. They were probably the

safest bets for who would treat Misha like he was a guest rather than a suspect brought in for an interrogation.

Every inch of the table was covered with steaming dishes of food and plates and flatware and

glassware and a decorative faux holly branch winding through a set of silver candles that gave off a pleasant glow. His mother always went all out for holidays, but this was nothing compared to

Thanksgiving. He gave his brother a look when he shorted him on the wine, and he filled his

glass higher. Jensen picked up the glass and took a couple of deep swallows. He had a feeling he would need a lot more before dinner was over.

“Everything smells delicious, Ms. Ackles,” Misha said as he put his napkin in his lap. “Thank

you for having me.”

“Oh, of course, Misha. We’re very happy to have you. Though very surprised. Jensen’s never

mentioned you.”

“Uh, well...”

“We haven’t known each other all that long,” Jensen jumped in. “Do we need to say a blessing?”

“Oh, yes, thank you for reminding me,” his mother said.

She reached her hands out and everyone took her cue and joined hands. Jensen wasn’t religious

and could do just as well without a prayer, but he was being a coward and delaying the barrage of questions that he knew was coming Misha’s way. The delay was short lived as his mother’s

blessing was brief and even the important business of serving plates and stuffing faces wasn’t

enough to curtail his family’s curiosity.

“How long has your family been in the States, Misha?” his father started out. Jensen barely

refrained from rolling his eyes.

“Um. All their lives. My mother does have Russian ancestry, but we weren’t Russian

immigrants. My mother just liked the name.”

His father narrowed his eyes slightly.

“So how did you two meet?” his mother asked at the same time his father demanded to know,

“What do you do for a living?”

Jensen and Misha glanced at each other. Neither was a question that had a great answer for

impressing the family of one’s significant other. Misha wisely deferred to answering his father

first. Or perhaps he was just assuming that was the easier question to answer.

“Well, I was a police officer with the Elton PD. Elton is in New Hampshire.”

“And that’s how we met,” Jensen said. “When I was in New Hampshire for that big case. Can

you pass me the mashed potatoes, Al?”

“You said ‘was,’” his father said as he spooned hollandaise sauce onto his broccoli. “Are you no longer a police officer?”

Jensen frowned at the mashed potatoes as he dumped a spoonful onto his plate. Couldn’t his

father pay a little less attention to detail?

“Um. Yes. I recently resigned.”

“Resigned?” his father asked, clearly implying with his tone that there was something more

nefarious to the story.

“Yes,” Misha confirmed. “Thank you,” he said to Hollis as the man cut off his father’s view of

Misha by passing him the rolls.

Before his father could speak again, Everly jumped in. “So New Hampshire. Wow. It must be

hard doing the long distance thing.”

Jensen deflated a little more. He knew his sister had been trying to help, but that was an entirely different can of worms to deal with. He set his utensils down and glanced at Misha. He gave a

little shrug as he took a bite of his beef tenderloin.

“Okay. Rather than reveal this in bits and pieces like we’re trying to hide anything, I think we just need to put everything out on the table. Misha was a police officer in the town in New Hampshire where I spent the last several months tracking that serial killer. That’s how we initially met. He wasn’t working the case itself, but the Elton police department is pretty small so we ran into each other on occasion.”

“Dude, you scored a hook up while working a case?” Hollis asked with a laugh.

Jensen shot him a look and his brother withered further under the slight glare from his wife.

“We...became acquainted and a relationship developed from that.” Jensen cleared his throat.

“Look, here’s the thing. The killer—I told you he was the one I had tracked during my first year in the Bureau. The one who had killed in this area. What I didn’t tell you is that—he knew who I

was. While we were working together, he knew I was the agent who had worked the case in DC

and he—had a slight obsession with me.”

“Slight?” Misha muttered.



Jensen squeezed his thigh under the table, but fortunately his comment had been hidden under the

soft gasps from his family.

“Jensen,” his mother said and reached out for his arm. “Does he want to—to—hurt you?”

“It’s okay, Mom. He’s in jail. He can’t hurt anyone.”

“Oh, Jenny. This is why I don’t like you doing this job. It’s too dangerous.”

“Mom, we can’t get off topic right now. The killer is in jail now, and we’re all safe. But at the time—he was keeping tabs on me. And when he found out that Misha and I were involved—

he...” Jensen glanced at Misha, mostly just to reassure himself that the man was really there by his side. “He targeted him.” He decided to leave it at that; his family didn’t need details.

“Fortunately, we were able to catch him before—before he...”

Jensen looked down at his plate. He couldn’t say before anything bad had happened because

something terrible had happened. And that was only what he knew about. He knew Misha still

hadn’t told him everything that had happened and he had no idea if he was even dealing with it or ignoring it. They’d been so wrapped up in each other the past two weeks, but not a whit of the

real world had penetrated their happy bubble. He wondered when they were finally going to sit

down and talk about it all.

“Anyway,” Jensen finally continued as his family had stopped eating to stare at them. “The whole ordeal made us realize...how strongly we feel for each

other. That's why Misha resigned his

position; he moved down here to be near me. And. We're living together."

"You're what?" Aldrich coughed out around an aborted sip of wine.

"Misha moved in with me two weeks ago. And I know we haven't known each other long, but

we know each other well. And this wasn't a decision we entered into lightly. So it's important

that you realize this isn't just some guy I'm seeing. He's—my partner, I guess. We're living

together with the understanding that it's a lifetime commitment."

"Lifetime?" his mother said, and then quickly glanced away as she took a bite of her dinner.

"Jensen, come on," Connolly said in that tone Jensen recognized as his brother's obnoxious "I'm a psychiatrist and I'm about to tell you what's wrong with you" voice. "If you two suffered a traumatic incident together, the endorphins make every emotion heightened. I'm not saying you

don't have real feelings for each other or that you even shouldn't be living together, but don't

pigeonhole yourself into a fairytale rescue happily ever after kind of commitment."

"Thank you, Dr. Ackles," Jensen snapped.

"Hey, don't yell at him," Aldrich said. "You're the one making snap decision based on emotion."

"How else do you decide if you want to be with someone if not emotion? Run them through a

series of pros and cons on an Excel spreadsheet? Tell me, how high was Lynn's score that you

knew she was 'the one.'"

"Jensen, please," his mother said softly.

"What? I've seen the chart. I just want to know what the cut off is."

Lynn put down her fork and looked at her husband. "You made one of your Excel spreadsheets

about me?" she asked icily. "Like the one you used to determine which house was the best choice

for us to buy?"

Aldrich shot a glare at Jensen and then turned to his wife. "No, it wasn't like that..."

"Jensen," Everly interrupted. "I think it's great you have somebody. And I'm sure you do know

how you feel about him. But...you haven't dated a guy in, like, years."

"So?"

"So, how do you know you're not just excited by the differentness or something and it's

confusing you?"

Jensen jutted his jaw to the side in annoyance. "Did you really just ask me that?"

"Hey," Hollis said, "Don't you think we should know the guy for more than thirty minutes before

we decide for Jensen who he's supposed to like?"

“Oh my God, that’s not what I was doing at all,” Everly groaned.

“I never said we were supposed to decide for him,” Connolly said, “just that he should reserve judgment.”

Jensen was hot with his anger, nearly feeling that blinding rage only the case in Elton had

managed to induce in him. He also realized he was near tears. Not because his family was

rejecting his capacity to understand his own feelings, but because he knew Misha must be feeling

like shit right now. He was embarrassed that his family was being so tactless and thoughtless.

“Jenny, honey,” his mother said, patting his hand soothingly. “We’re not trying to gang up on

you. This is just a lot for us to take in. You can understand why we would be skeptical.”

“No, Mom, I can’t. Do I often make rash decisions? Am I the one in the family who gets arrested overseas because I thought it would be a good idea to jump into the Trevi Fountain?”

“Hey,” Hollis said softly.

“Sorry,” Jensen shot his way. “I always get called the level-headed one. Al is practical and

Connolly is analytical. Hollis and Everly are the free spirits. I’m dependable, even-keeled

Jensen. Why on earth would you think that I’ve lost my mind now and just brought some guy

home like a stray puppy?”

“Because you’ve made poor decisions before when it comes to these—proclivities of yours.”

Everyone went silent and Jensen looked at his father, his mouth slightly ajar.

“Proclivities? Dad, how many times do I have to tell you that it’s not something I do for fun on the weekends?”

“These things only happen when you think that you like men.”

“Think that I like men. Or make the choice to like them that week? Dad. I know you don’t really believe in the whole bisexual thing, but—”

“Jensen, we don’t care what sexuality you choose to self-identify as. We are having trouble

“Jensen, we don’t care what sexuality you choose to self-identify as. We are having trouble accepting this blindsiding news because it’s just going to be Ty all over again.”

Jensen sat back like he’d been slapped. He stood up and peripherally heard the sound of his chair clattering on the floor. His whole body was tense to the point of pain.

“Fuck you,” he ground out.

“Jensen,” his mother gasped.

Jensen reached out and grabbed Misha’s arm. The man stumbled as Jensen pulled him from his

seat and marched him to the foyer. He heard his younger brother calling out to him to wait and his mother harshly scolding his father, but that was only background noise to the rush of blood

pounding in his head. He grabbed their coats out of the closet and followed Misha out the front

door who had had the sense to get himself moving in the direction Jensen wanted him to go before

he started dragging him around by his hair like a caveman.

“Jensen, wait!” Hollis called out from the door.

“Tell the family to enjoy their dinner,” Jensen spat out as he unlocked the Impala. “We won’t be coming over in the morning. Tell the kids they’ll get their presents later.”

He threw their coats into the backseat and then slid into the car, unlocking the door for Misha who got in quickly.

“Don’t hit my car!” Hollis yelled.

Jensen started the car and backed up into his parents’ front yard. He didn’t care if he left deep tread marks in the wet ground. The bumper scraped on the ground as they drove over the curb

and Jensen barely kept his speed in check as they drove through the residential neighborhood.

Once they were on the bypass heading for the highway, he gunned the engine and clamped his

hands on the wheel. His jaw hurt from clenching his teeth together so tightly. He realized he was having trouble seeing because dusk had fallen and he hadn’t turned on his headlights. He didn’t

think he could pry his hands off the wheel to turn them on though.

“Jensen,” he heard a comforting voice say. A hand touched the back of his neck and tried to

massage away some of the tension. “Jensen, baby, you need to slow down. Or pull over, okay?”

Jensen swallowed and listened to the voice. He pulled the car onto the large

shoulder and slowed to a stop. He killed the engine and bowed his head. The last light of the day faded to darkness and they sat undisturbed on the road that was completely devoid of traffic. Misha's hand

continued to massage his neck.

"Baby, are you okay?"

Jensen looked up and into Misha's eyes. He couldn't see them that well in the dark, but he could picture the bright blue clouded with concern. He tried to focus on his eyes to calm himself down.

He could feel it starting to work. And then Misha licked his lips. Jensen twisted his hand in

Misha's shirt and yanked him forward. Their lips crashed together painfully hard, but Misha

returned the kiss, giving Jensen what he silently asked for.

Jensen could feel that he was out of control. His hands pawed at Misha's hair, his clothing,

fingers twisting and grasping at any part of him he could get a hold of. He didn't kiss him so

much as devour him, sucking his lower lip into his mouth and biting it before thrusting his tongue into his mouth. Misha couldn't even respond because Jensen kept stroking his tongue inside him

over and over, trying to force his feelings and intentions onto him.

Jensen pulled back to breathe and found himself in awe at Misha's debauched appearance. His hair was a mess, his clothes askew, his expression was dazed, and he was almost breathless. But

he was willing and he was wanting. Jensen threw himself over the seatback, dragging Misha with

him into the backseat. He had Misha's sweater over his head before the man even pulled his legs

completely over the front seat. He couldn't be bothered with the buttons of the dress shirt and just pushed it up under Misha's arms. Then he furiously worked at opening Misha's fly while he

resumed his brutal kissing. Misha struggled with the belt on Jensen's pants and managed to look

down to get the zipper open while Jensen sat up enough to pull his shirt over his head. Then he

was back on Misha, pushing his tongue into his mouth, knowing he needed to be inside him

somehow since they weren't going to be able to do what he really wanted to do. He got their

dicks released from their underwear and sliding together, trapped between their bodies.

The frenzy eased just a bit as he felt his cock sliding against Misha's belly, the precome pulsing from Misha's slit easing the way as they rutted together. He cupped Misha's face with both hands and fucked his tongue into Misha's mouth in a slow but forceful rhythm. Misha slid a thigh

between his so that their bodies locked together. He grabbed Jensen's ass and pulled him down

into the writhing of their bodies. Jensen felt himself getting a little lightheaded; he needed air. But he was almost there, he was so close—he pumped his hips and Misha let out a high keening sound

that was muffled by Jensen's lips. And then Jensen pulled back just a bit as he groaned in needy pleasure and Misha arched against him, forcing their bodies together and sending a spike of

overstimulation through both of them. Misha was letting out small whimpers



from behind his

bitten lower lip. His eyes were squeezed tightly shut and Jensen watched as he shuddered through a prolonged orgasm.

At last Misha's body relaxed, but he panted heavily, his breath spilling over into Jensen's mouth.

Jensen lowered his head and kissed him, but had to pull back immediately as he needed to

breathe. He put his forehead to Misha's temple and they were content to lay still and pant until they could breathe through their noses again. Jensen shifted just enough so that they could both lay comfortably on the bench. Well, as comfortable as two grown men could lay on a car seat that wasn't long enough for them to stretch out on. Misha's hand found his arm, and then slid down

the sweaty limb until he found his hand. He tangled their fingers together and pulled it up to rest on his chest. Several long minutes passed in a silence that wasn't uncomfortable, but wasn't

devoid of tension either. Then Misha spoke softly, barely daring to break the stillness around

them.

"Do you think...if I...baked them some banana bread they would warm up to me faster?"

Jensen considered his words, and then he chuckled.

"I'm serious. I make really good banana bread."

Jensen started laughing and could feel himself on the edge of hysteria as he buried his face in

Misha's shoulder. His whole body shook with laughter, and then he could feel Misha join in with

him. They laughed together and when Jensen sat partially up to look down at him, he felt

monumentally better. The tightness in his chest he had been feeling since he'd introduced his

family to Misha had finally loosened. He used his free hand to brush the damp curls from Misha's forehead and smiled down at him. He'd had no doubts about asking Misha to move in with him,

and this moment confirmed for him that he'd been right to have no doubts.

He leaned down and placed a barely there kiss on Misha's abused lips. Between his wild kissing

and Misha's teeth, his lips were wrecked.

"Sorry, baby."

"Don't apologize."

Jensen struggled to sit up without elbowing Misha anywhere sensitive and they both made a face at the sticky sound of their torsos peeling apart. They struggled for a moment to right themselves, and then they were sitting on the seat side by side. Misha turned partially to face him and pulled Jensen close to lean against him. He played with Jensen's sweat-sticky hair and made no mention

that they should probably get dressed and move along before a cop found them. He also made no

mention of the elephant in the room. Well, car.

"So," Jensen said, leaning into Misha's touch. "I guess you want to know who Ty is and what

that was all about."

"I assume we're not talking about Ty Olsson."

Jensen let out a huff of laughter. “No. Definitely a different Ty.”

“Hmm.”

Jensen fidgeted. “So, you want to know, right? Why I caused a scene and literally dragged you

out of my parents’ house.”

“If you want to tell me.”

Jensen turned to look at him. “Do you not want to know?” he asked curiously.

“Do I want to know about some asshole who broke your heart? Honestly? Not really.”

Jensen’s brow creased and he raised a hand to chew on his thumbnail. Misha gently pushed his

hand down by the wrist.

“Why don’t you want to know? Don’t couples who are supposed to be in it for the long haul kind

of relationships want to know all about that stuff? I mean, I called you my fricken life partner. So doesn’t that mean we take windy walks on the beach and share everything?”

“Well, I’m not sure I’d want to take a windy walk on the beach; too much sand. As for knowing

everything about each other, I assume since we’re in an ‘in it for the long haul’ kind of

relationship that that means we’ve got plenty of time to learn about each other. If today’s not the day, it will be another.”

“Are you not worried it will change things though? My brother always says

he sees couples in

therapy because they hid things that they considered to be 'their own personal business,' but when the truth came out it completely changed their partner's opinions of them."

Misha settled back against the seat, but left his hand in Jensen's hair. "Unless your secret is that you're one of Russ' many disciples and you're playing an incredibly long game of torture to make

me suffer as much as possible, I really don't think there's anything that could change the way I feel about you."

Jensen turned his head to look at Misha. "That's not fucking funny."

"I'm not laughing."

Jensen looked away. "No, I'm not one of Russ' disciples. The skeletons in my closet don't

involve murder or criminal activity." Jensen shook his head with a self-deprecating smile. "In fact they aren't skeletons at all. Just humiliating memories."

"Do you want to share them tonight?"

"Not really."

Misha hummed. "And I'm okay with that. Aren't I the best boyfriend-slash-life partner-slash-proclivity you've ever had?"

Jensen groaned-laughed at the word his father had used. "You're the best anything I've ever had."

"I don't even think that's hyperbole."

"Shut up. It's not, but shut up anyway."

Misha leaned his head on Jensen's shoulder. He shivered and Jensen wrapped

an arm around his

shoulders and pulled him close. They should probably get dressed and turn the car on; it was

below freezing already and the temperature was still dropping. But it was peaceful and serene in the private world of the backseat of a classic car.

"What made you buy this car?" Misha asked, sounding sleepy.

"Well, I didn't buy it. It was kind of a gift. In high school and college I helped out a local man with his chores and stuff. You know, it started as one of those projects you do for the National Honor Society where you do outreach to the community. But, he and I—well, to say we became

friends wouldn't be entirely accurate." Jensen chuckled at the memory of Old Kim Manners. "He was a crotchety son of bitch."

"Sounds delightful," Misha murmured.

"He had his good points. Anyway, he let me drive his car to run his errands for him. And even though it was only supposed to be for a couple of weeks for school credit, I just kept going to visit him. For years. After he died I found out he had willed this car to me. I loved this car. I love this car. It's the kind of car that was meant for a different kind of man, I think, but it suits me too."

Misha twirled a finger on Jensen's thigh. "How many people have you had sex with in this

backseat?"

Jensen chuckled. "Including you?"

"Yep."

"Just one."

"Bullshit."

"Honest. I like this car too much to mess it up with something as disgusting as sex."

Misha sat up and looked Jensen in the eye. "I'm honored."

"Shut up. Jerkface."

Misha gave him a wink and picked his sweater up off the floorboard.

"Alright. Take me home."

Charlie needs to be let out and you need to sleep tonight off so that you'll feel better about facing your family again tomorrow."

Jensen paused as he was putting his shirt on. "I meant it. I'm not seeing them tomorrow." He put his head through the neck hole and popped out to find Misha giving him a look. "What? They were the ones out of line. And no amount of sleep is going to make me want to see them

tomorrow."

"But your nieces and nephew, they don't deserve to be punished for—"

"Misha. No."

"Okay fine. But you still need to go home and go to sleep so you'll be able to wake up in the morning with enough energy to give me a proper fuck."

Jensen smiled at him. "Now that is suitable motivation."

Monday, December 30, 2013

Jensen was more than happy to celebrate his first Christmas (and the week of vacation that

followed) with Misha privately in the comfort of their own home, where they could walk around

naked if they felt like it and make love whenever and wherever the mood struck them. Though

Charlie had taken to crawling around on the floor to get a good view of them as they went at it.

Jensen had thought it was weird, but Misha had just told him to shut up and fuck him harder

because pet ownership meant having an audience while having sex. Jensen hadn't been sure that

was a universal truth, but he successfully put her out of his mind. Most of the time. He still

couldn't bring himself to do it doggie style with Misha if she was in the room. Misha thought he was ridiculous.

He thought he was even more ridiculous for refusing to answer any of his family's calls or texts.

Jensen felt validated though. He couldn't believe he'd even had a moment of indecision about

having to choose between his family and Misha. It wasn't a choice. At least, that's what his anger told him and he was happy to listen to it and ignore the part of him that was crying in a corner

because his mom hadn't woken him up on Christmas morning with a cup of cocoa.

Misha had been silent on Jensen's familial moratorium for the first couple of days. Then he had

prodded him gently to answer a phone call or even just a text. By day four he was giving him

looks and refusing to give him blowjobs. He didn't put an outright ban on sex, he said he wasn't crazy after all, but Jensen didn't deserve any perks so long as he was being ornery. Of course

Jensen didn't mention to him that he liked rimming Misha almost as much as

he loved getting

blown by him. So he didn't really feel that deprived.

On day six Misha didn't give any looks or lectures, which should have set off some warning bells, but Jensen was still floating happily in the afterglow of getting drilled into the mattress.

"Jensen!"

"Wha?" Jensen murmured, turning over and actually getting aroused again just by feeling the soreness in his body. How had he ever thought he'd had good sex before Misha? He'd never

even had okay sex if he had to compare it with even the most lackluster session with Misha. Why

had they spent over thirty years apart? It wasn't fair. And fuck Russ for being the one to bring them together.

"Jensen! I'm taking Charlie for a walk."

"Okay."

"Are you coming to give me a goodbye kiss?"

Jensen raised his head, confused. "What?"

"Come on, I want one."

Jensen rolled his eyes and grumbled as he squirmed out of bed.

"Put some clothes on!"

Jensen paused in the door. He turned around, grumbling, and found a pair of boxers on the floor.

He pulled them on and realized they must be Misha's since they were a little tight around the



waist. He shuffled out into the living room feeling a little bit like a zombie on The Walking Dead.

Not that he actually knew what they looked like. He couldn't participate in the discussions at

work the morning after the show aired because Misha refused to watch anything that even had a

whiff of horror attached it. Apparently some bad experiences with Doctor Who as a child had left him permanently scarred. Jensen hadn't seen much (any) of Doctor Who, but he knew the special

effects were cheesy enough that it was embarrassing to be scared by the show at any age.

As he saw Misha standing at the door, Charlie shaking slightly (but not as much as she had two

weeks ago) by his side, he was grateful for whatever life experiences had made Misha into the

man he was today. No matter how ridiculous.

Jensen wrapped an arm around Misha's shoulders and pulled him close. He gave him a long,

thorough kiss with all the love and respect he had for him. When he pulled back Misha was

smiling at him.

"How's that for a have-a-good-walk kiss?"

"So-so."

Jensen tsked his displeasure and scowled at Misha's grin. The man leaned forward and pecked

him on the lips.

"I'll be back in about ten minutes."

He pulled the door all the way open and revealed Hollis standing in the hallway. Jensen raised his eyebrows in surprise.

"Thanks, Misha," Hollis said.

"No problem."

Jensen glared at the traitor's head as he led their dog to the stairs rather than the elevator. Jensen snorted. It was only impressive if he took the stairs on the way up. He looked at his brother who waved a cup of Starbucks coffee at him.

"Peace offering?"

Jensen took the cup and a step back into the apartment.

"You want to come in?"

"Yeah, thanks. But I can only stay a minute. I'm just here to deliver the message."

"What message?"

"Kristen and Lynn and Navya have asked that you and Misha come over to Mom and Dad's

tomorrow for an early lunch."

"What? No way. It's New Year's Eve. I'm not spending it at Mom and Dad's."

"Dude, neither am I. This is just lunch. Corn beef and cabbage and black eyed peas. You know? For good luck in the new year or whatever. It's supposed to be a short thing and then we

can all leave. I definitely am. I got reservations at the Four Seasons and Mom

and Dad agreed to keep Ellia overnight so I got us a room there too and it's going to be long night of bow chicka

wow wow."

Hollis grinned at Jensen's blank stare.

"Gross. Now go away. I'm still mad at them and I don't want to subject Misha to anymore of their bullshit. Not yet anyway."

"Hey, look if this was Mom's idea or something I wouldn't be here. But Kristen and Lynn and Navya arranged this. And I am not saying no to my wife. Are you?"

Jensen made a face. "Hollis..."

"Come on, Jensen. You said Misha is forever."

"He is."

"So, you're going to have to deal with this eventually. Just get it out of the way."

"I like Misha's reasoning on the subject of inevitability better."

"Well, I don't know what that is but I'm not not getting laid tomorrow because you're being

pigheaded. Get your ass and your hot boyfriend to Mom and Dad's tomorrow at noon, or I will

do horrible things to you."

"Alright, alright."

Hollis gave him a pat on the arm. "Thanks, bro. See you tomorrow."

Hollis started out the door and Jensen leaned against the jamb.

"Hey, Hollis."

"Yeah?"

"You know, you seem to be overly fixated on how attractive Misha is."

He shrugged a shoulder. "He's an attractive man."

"Mm-hmm."

Hollis smiled. "Let me put it to you this way, Jenny. You weren't the only Ackles who

experimented in college; you're just the only one who admitted it."

Jensen let out a small disbelieving laugh. Then he pointed in accusatory finger at his brother as he was getting on the elevator.

"That guy you went to Panama City Beach with for spring break your junior year!"

Hollis stuck his arm back out of the elevator and gave him a thumbs up. Then he snatched his arm in as the doors closed. Jensen shook his head. Then he gave an approving bob of his head even

though his brother couldn't see him. That guy had been hot.

Tuesday, December 31, 2013

Jensen put Misha's Charger (but who were they kidding, it was Jensen's) in park and frowned at

his parents' house. It was still decorated for Christmas. Misha put a hand on his thigh and gave it a rub and a squeeze.

"Come on. Try to go into this with an open mind."

"Oh, like they did?"

Misha shrugged, and offered him no further advice or comfort. That was Misha: supportive, but

not a crutch. Willing to go to the mat for him, but knowing when to let Jensen fight his own

battles. He really was the kind of companion he'd been needing all his life.

"Alright then. Let's get this over with."

Jensen and Misha each carried a bag of presents that had been stashed in the trunk and were

greeted at the door before they even knocked. Lynn took the bags from them and Navya grabbed

Misha by the arm and ushered him away.

"Hey, wait, what are you—" Jensen cut off as Kristen pushed him toward the study at the front of the house. She shoved him gently inside the small room and he saw that his parents and siblings

were already inside. They all turned to look at Kristen who held the knobs of the double doors in her hands.

"Well. We're all going to take care of preparing lunch. You all stay here and...talk. And nobody is eating or leaving this room until you've all worked everything out. Have a nice chat."

She stepped back and closed the doors on them. The doors couldn't be locked, but they all knew

it would be a bad idea if they tried to leave without doing what they were told. Jensen pulled the remaining dining room chair that had been moved into the study closer to the doors and sat in it.

He clasped his hands together loosely in his lap and looked at his family. No one seemed

particularly happy to be there; his father least of all.

"Well, Jensen, do you want to start?" his mother asked.

"Do I want to start?" he asked incredulously. "I did nothing wrong. You all are the ones who were out of line last week."

"I'm not the one who spoke crudely and disrespectfully to his father," Jensen's father said gruffly.

"No, but I'm not the one who tried to reignite the Cold War again over a name."

"It's an unusual name," he replied defensively.

"So is Navya but I don't remember you asking her what caste she was from or why she doesn't eat beef the first time you met her."

Jensen's father had the good grace to look a little abashed at that. Jensen looked around the room.

"None of you treated anybody else's girlfriend or boyfriend with such contempt the first time you met them. What did Misha do to deserve that?"

"Jensen," his mother said. "We were surprised. You hadn't dated anyone seriously since Lauren.

You hadn't dated a man since college. And now all of a sudden you were living with someone

you just met a few months ago. We were concerned. It was very out of character for you."

"I get that, Mom," Jensen said, his voice slipping into tired irritation. He ran a hand down his face. "I'm not saying that you guys had no reason to be confused or concerned. But was it really too much to ask that you have some manners? That you not call him a whim or an oddity or proof

that there was something wrong with me? That you not try to say that I

couldn't possibly have

real feelings for him since liking men was just an experimental phase in college for me? You have no idea who he is. Or what he's been through."

Jensen hesitated. He didn't want to divulge Misha's private affairs to his family without his

permission, but he felt an urgent need to make them understand how special Misha was.

"He's an Ivy Leaguer; went to Dartmouth. He trained police dogs when he worked for the Elton PD and has gone on several humanitarian missions including to Thailand after the tsunami and

New York after 9/11. He married his high school girlfriend and was with her for over fifteen

years until they realized they had grown too far apart to stay together. He went through a divorce and a long period of being alone. His parents died in a car accident earlier this year. They'd been buried less than a year when his sister was kidnapped, tortured, and murdered by the Angel

Slayer."

Jensen's mother put a hand to her mouth over a gasp.

"He was kidnapped and hurt by the Angel Slayer...because of me. He lost his dog to the

psychopath. A dog he had raised and trained since a puppy to be one of the best K9 officers I'd

ever encountered. And he was my rock while I was working that case. I know I don't talk about

it much and that's because it was awful. You want to hear it? It was a horrific experience and I felt helpless and useless and scared and having Misha to share all that with and not feel judged

was what gave me the strength to keep going. I needed him so much more than I wanted him.

And I..."

Jensen paused as his voice wavered. The catch in his voice was what caused the tears to fall from his mother's and Hollis' eyes. Everly wasn't far behind. Jensen swallowed and continued.

"My feelings for him aren't just residual appreciation or gratefulness that he was a convenient shoulder to lean on," he said, looking at Connolly. His brother wouldn't meet his eyes. "I love him. I am in love with him. And he's not just someone who makes me feel strong and

appreciated and useful. He makes me happy. I can't remember ever feeling so light and

just...happy as I do when I'm with him. Not even when I was a kid. I feel, for the first time in my life, that I've done something right by loving him. That I'm doing what I was put on this earth to do."

Jensen cut off, feeling embarrassed. God, he was bordering on trashy romance novel levels of

sappy here. He didn't know how to continue or what more he could possibly say, so he didn't

even try.

"Jenny," his mother said through her tears, "you've never said that you've loved anyone you've dated before."

"Because I never have, Mom."

"But you love Misha."

Jensen put his hands out in a "Well, yeah" kind of gesture, but didn't say anything.



"Jensen, I'm so sorry," Everly said, sniffing back tears. "What I said was stupid. And I really didn't mean it the way it came out. I like Misha. Well, what little I know of him. I'm sorry I

ruined it and we couldn't get to know him better."

"I didn't mean to imply your feelings weren't real," Connolly said. "I very much believe they are.

I was just worried that you felt more of an obligation to him than anything and that can be

dangerous. I really did speak out of concern for you, but I was total dick about the way I said it.

And the fact that I said it in front of Misha at all. I apologize sincerely. Your relationship with Misha is between the two of you and whatever you feel for each other is real and I should have

respected that."

"I still think you should have given us a little more warning," Aldrich said, "but you're right. We handled it poorly. And your guest didn't deserve to be in the middle of that."

Jensen ran his tongue over his teeth but knew that was the best apology he was going to get out

his oldest brother. Although using the term "guest" to refer to Misha was a little galling. He

looked around the room: his mother and younger siblings were still wiping away tears and seemed

to be onboard with the idea that Misha was an important and permanent fixture in Jensen's life

now. His oldest brothers he felt would at least be civil to them now. His eyes fell on his father.

His face was stony and he sat stiffly in his chair. Jensen sighed and looked at the floor.

“What, Dad?”

“Have you really thought this through?” the man replied with just a touch of condescension in his voice.

Jensen crossed his arms and sat back in his chair. “Whatever do you mean, Dad?”

“Choosing to make a man your—choosing to be with a man publicly. Just think of the stigma that

you’ll have to deal with in your everyday life. At work. At—”

“At work? Come on. Unlike a lot of the private sector, the federal government actually has laws that make it illegal to discriminate against someone for their sexual orientation. The Bureau

celebrates its LGBT employees by giving us a month of acknowledgement, just like the Hispanics

and African Americans and Native Americans get. They even have a potluck lunch during the

month,” he threw in with a facetious tone.

“They may not be able to fire you, but they can stonewall you from getting promotions. And they

will.”

Jensen shrugged. “Maybe. But I’ve got friends in high places and I don’t have any aspirations to be the ADIC.”

“Jensen. You’re not thinking this through. All you’re seeing is what is directly in front of you and not the hardships you’ll face because of this. A hardship you don’t need to bear because

according to you, you do have a choice. You can choose a woman and not have to deal with all

the problems that come with being—like that.”

“Jesus, Dad,” Hollis said softly.

“Look,” Jensen said. “One: Misha’s not a choice. It’s that simple. And two: let’s not pretend that you give a damn about what I’ll have to face; you’re just concerned about the stigma you’ll have

for having a ‘gay son.’ Well, I’m sorry if it will make things awkward at the country club when

you walk in a room and everyone stops talking or you’re worried about hearing sniggering behind

your back, but that’s your problem. And it’s not one I particularly care about.”

“Jensen—“

“David,” Jensen’s mother cut off his father. “I won’t listen to anymore of this nonsense. Jensen has found somebody he loves and who makes him happy. And that is all I ever wanted for my

children: for them to be happy. Misha is a part of his life, which means he’s a part of this family.

And you will be civil to him and treat him with respect or it will be you who is not welcome at

family gatherings.”

Jensen quirked an eyebrow and watched the silent battle that took place between his parents. All of his siblings were just as shocked to hear their mother make an ultimatum like that. Finally some of the stiffness left the man’s body and he turned his eyes to Jensen.

“Fine. Misha is who you’ve chosen to be with and I can’t tell you who you can and can’t be

with. As long as he’s good to you and treats you well, I will accept that he’s a part of your life.”

“Wow. That’s very gracious of you, Dad.”

“Jensen,” his mother said with just a touch of scolding. “Now. I think we can all agree that we were less than welcoming to Misha at Christmas.”

“I wasn’t,” Hollis said.

“And I think we can all join the others for a nice lunch to celebrate the new year and new

beginnings. I’m looking forward to getting to know Misha better, honey.”

“I’m glad to hear that, but guys, no questions about the case in Elton, okay? I’m dead serious, it’s off limits.”

Everyone nodded their heads in understanding. Jensen blew air out through his mouth. They

were all definitely in a better place than they had been, but he had no delusion that he wasn’t

about to sit through an awkward family meal while his family grilled his new boyfriend. There

had been similar inquisitions for the other Ackles brood’s significant others. Not all of them had passed the test. In fact only three of them had so far. Jensen’s and Everly’s boyfriends were the ones still on probation, and apparently Everly thought Richard would have a better chance at

making the grade if he could share some of the brunt of the Ackles offensive with Misha. Richard was also present at the table full of Ackles in-laws.

The lunch went about how Jensen expected it would. There were a lot of

questions for both

Misha and Richard that were nosy, slightly invasive, and bordered on awkward. One or two

inappropriate questions were carefully glossed over by requests for more black eyed peas. The

good news was that his family remained true to their word and no one questioned the legitimacy

or rationality of Jensen's and Misha's relationship. The better news was that Misha had

apparently charmed the pants off his in-laws while the Ackles had been in conference and already

had them in his pocket.

Hollis was the savior of the day as he made sure to keep lunch short since he had promised

Kristen a spa day in addition to a kids-free night. Jensen thought he might be able to slip out

quickly with Misha, but he should have known better. He was loaded up with several shopping

bags full of presents and leftovers and it took no less than half an hour to make that happen. In the meantime he was surprised to learn that his nephew and nieces had actually been playing with the

Xbox in the basement the whole time, and that they took to Misha like a fish to water. Ellia

actually started crying when she was told Uncle Misha had to leave. At last they were able to

break free and Jensen let Misha drive them home because all he wanted was

to slouch in his seat

and close his eyes for the forty-five minute trip back to their apartment.

He was so drained from the past week that he allowed himself to be grateful that Misha had opted

to stay home instead of go out for New Year's rather than be concerned that Misha seemed to be

isolating himself. They cooked a meal together, got Charlie to come out and play for a little bit, and then sprawled on the couch with the TV tuned to a New Year's special with the sound

muted. Charlie snoozed in her bed in her corner, and Jensen snoozed on Misha, nearly lulled into a full sleep by the soothing, rhythmic feel of Misha's fingers combing through his hair.

"Hey, Jensen?" Misha called to him softly.

"Yeah, babe," he replied in a barely conscious murmur.

"Who is Ty?"

Jensen's eyes opened and he was wide awake, but only for a moment. He relaxed back into the

easy comfort of Misha's body; his fingers hadn't stopped their petting.

"Ty Vaughn. He was a guy I dated my junior and senior years of college. Although, date is a

pretty strong word since he was in the closet. Not even our closest friends knew about us. And I was fine with that. At first. His family was not the kind of people who would accept a gay son

and I wasn't going to be the one to tell him how he should deal with them.

"I deluded myself into thinking that it was just college. That as soon as we

graduated and he

didn't need his parents' financial support anymore he'd be willing to come out to them. My first clue that wasn't going to happen should have been when he told me he was going to pretend to

date a girl our senior year so he had someone to introduce to his parents. He told me it was

completely impersonal and that the girl was aware of that. That nothing would happen between

them. I eventually found out he had been sleeping with her too, and the dating part wasn't pretend at all.

"After we graduated I kept asking him about moving in with me and told him that I'd told my

parents I was bisexual and ready to introduce him my family. Well, I mean they'd met him before, we were 'roommates' for two years, but they didn't know we were more than friends. He kept

putting me off and stalling. And then at a party for his parents' anniversary—a party at which I was present and not twenty minutes earlier had gone down on him in a locked bathroom—he

announced that he and his girlfriend had gotten engaged."

Misha let out a small noise of empathetic pain. He moved his head enough to kiss the top of

Jensen's head, but didn't jump in to ask any questions. Jensen was glad he could have this

conversation without having to look at Misha and continued.

"So, needless to say we had a huge fight after the party. He basically said he couldn't come out because his parents would disown him and he'd lose his inheritance. He needed to marry his

girlfriend to make them happy, but that didn't mean that we couldn't still 'hang out.'"

Misha's fingers tightened suddenly in his hair.

"Ouch!"

"Mm, sorry, babe. That was for Ty, not you." He soothed the hurt by resuming his stroking.

"I told him that wasn't good enough for me."

"Good for you."

"Yeah. And if I had just allowed myself to wallow in misery and listened to Wilco on repeat it

could just be a bad memory and harsh life experience. Instead it became a humiliating experience, the worst thing I've ever done in my life, and something that my dad can constantly throw in my

face about how homosexual relationships are always disasters."

"What did you do?"

"I showed up at the wedding."

"Oh, no."

"Oh, yes. First I found Ty while he was getting ready before the ceremony. He pulled me aside

to talk to me and tell me he'd made up his mind. I tried to convince him he was making a

mistake. That we were in love and blah blah. God. After being with you I don't even know if

what I felt then was actually love or just infatuation. But I had convinced



myself I was in love and would never be happy again if I couldn't have him. We had sex, partly initiated by him, and he

had the nerve to yell at me for staining his tux."

"Did you do it on purpose?"

"What? No, of course not. Well, I mean I obviously wasn't trying to be careful. I mean, well,

maybe. Okay, fine, yes. Totally on purpose. So he kicked me out so he could clean his tux.

And I found myself in the bride's suite."

"Oh, Jensen, stop.

"Nope. You wanted to know. So I confronted her. And I may have been slightly inebriated. I

accused her of being a backstabbing bitch for stealing him away when she was supposed to be

helping us. Turns out she hadn't known about me at all. Though she didn't seem all that

surprised to learn that I existed. She suspected that he might be bi or something, but she was

convinced that Ty loved her and wanted to be with her and he just hadn't known how to let me

down easy. So, of course, I told her that I'd just banged her fiancé the morning of her wedding.

"She had really tiny hands. So, the slap itself didn't hurt, but her engagement ring was loose on her finger and it had twisted around. I think you can still feel the scar on my cheek from a two carat diamond."

Misha moved his hand and stroked his thumb over Jensen's cheek. He could feel when Misha

found the very slight indentation on his cheek as he circled his thumb over it. Then he moved his hand back to his hair.

“Was that all?”

“Nope. So, I attended the ceremony. And you know, they don't do that ‘speak now or forever

hold your peace’ thing like they do on TV. So, I just had to pick a time at random. I stood up in the middle of the church and gave this amazingly awful speech about being true to yourself and

how lying always came back to bite you in the end and left everyone more miserable than telling

the truth. I outed Ty to everyone there. I begged him to follow his heart or some sort of bullshit like that.

“He was clever though. Told me he was sorry that I had misconstrued our relationship or thought

that he had feelings for me. Made it seem like I was some poor little gay boy who had fallen in

love with his straight best friend. And before I could say anything more damning, he grabbed me

by the arm and forced me out of the church. In the lobby he told me—”

Jensen stopped. As humiliating as the scene in the church had been, the last moments he'd ever

spent with Ty still made his chest hurt. It had dulled over the years from a sharp, crippling pain to an unpleasant throb, but it just wouldn't go away.

“He said to me, ‘What does it matter if I do care about you? What does it

matter if I care about

you more than the woman I'm marrying? I obviously don't love you more than my inheritance.

You can do better.'"

Jensen turned his face into Misha's chest and waited for the memory to induce the familiar pain.

What he felt was Misha's chest pressing against his when he inhaled, his hands rubbing over his

shoulder and side with loving concern, and his warm breath puffing over his scalp as the man

quietly cried into his hair. And it was there, the pain, but it was barely an echo of what it had once been. The memories weren't so much painful now as just embarrassing.

Jensen hugged Misha tightly and listened to his soft sniffles. He found himself smiling. All this time he had hated himself and Ty for what they both had allowed to become of their relationship.

He realized now he should be thanking Ty for not giving up everything to be with him. They

would have ended up resenting each other and going their separate ways anyway.

Besides, Ty had been right.

Jensen allowed himself to be guided upright and met Misha in a passionate kiss. He saw the ball

dropping in Times Square on the TV out of the corner of his eye as Misha pushed him back onto

the couch and settled on top of him.

He had done so much better.

Please [drop by the archive and comment](#) to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!

# Document Outline

- [Timestamp: Action takes place between Angel Slayer and White Collar](#)

Posted originally on the [Archive of Our Own](http://archiveofourown.org/) at  
<http://download.archiveofourown.org/works/5592652>.

|                  |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
|------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Rating:          | <a href="#">Explicit</a>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
| Archive Warning: | <a href="#">Graphic Depictions Of Violence</a>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
| Category:        | <a href="#">F/F</a> , <a href="#">M/M</a>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
| Fandom:          | <a href="#">Supernatural RPF</a>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
| Relationship:    | <a href="#">Jensen Ackles/Misha Collins</a> , <a href="#">Jared Padalecki/Alona Tal</a>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
| Character:       | <a href="#">Jensen Ackles</a> , <a href="#">Misha Collins</a> , <a href="#">Jared Padalecki</a> , <a href="#">Alona Tal</a> , <a href="#">Osrin Chau</a> , <a href="#">Matt Cohen</a> , <a href="#">Mark Pellegrino</a> , <a href="#">Genevieve Cortese</a> , <a href="#">Gil McKinney</a> , <a href="#">a few minor RP characters</a> , <a href="#">OC: Russell Little</a>                                                                          |
| Additional Tags: | <a href="#">Alternate Universe - Law Enforcement</a> , <a href="#">Switching</a> , <a href="#">Explicit Sexual Content</a> , <a href="#">male/male sexual content</a> , <a href="#">male/female sexual content</a> , <a href="#">Accidental Voyeurism</a> , <a href="#">past descriptions of violent attacks and sexual assaults</a> , <a href="#">obsession/fixation</a> , <a href="#">possibly dry white collar crime investigation exposition</a> |
| Series:          | Part 3 of <a href="#">The SPN RPFfiles</a>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
| Stats:           | Published: 2016-01-01 Chapters: 9/9 Words: 169606                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |

## White Collar

by [emwebb17](#)

### Summary

In the aftermath of the Angel Slayer investigation, Jensen decides to take on a boring, straightforward corporate fraud case involving warring hedge fund executives Mark Pellegrino and Matt Cohen. Of course, the case turns out to be anything but typical as a larger scheme

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[Explicit](#)

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[Graphic Depictions Of Violence](#)

Category:

[F/F, M/M](#)

Fandom:

[Supernatural RPF](#)

Relationship:

[Jensen Ackles/Misha Collins, Jared](#)

[Padalecki/Alona Tal](#)

Character:

[Jensen Ackles, Misha Collins, Jared Padalecki,](#)

[Alona Tal, Osric Chau, Matt Cohen, Mark](#)

[Pellegrino, Genevieve Cortese, Gil McKinney, a](#)

[few minor RP characters, OC: Russell Little](#)

Additional Tags:

[Alternate Universe - Law Enforcement, Switching,](#)

[Explicit Sexual Content, male/male sexual content, male/female sexual content, Accidental Voyeurism, past descriptions of violent attacks and sexual assaults, obsession/fixation, possibly dry white collar crime investigation exposition](#)

Series:

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## **White Collar**

by emwebb17

### Summary

In the aftermath of the Angel Slayer investigation, Jensen decides to take on a boring, straightforward corporate fraud case involving warring hedge fund executives Mark Pellegrino and Matt Cohen. Of course, the case turns out to be anything but typical as a larger scheme

begins to unravel and Jared is inadvertently roped into going undercover.

If that weren't enough, Jensen also has his hands full with trying to help New Agent Trainee Misha deal with the emotional and psychological ramifications of his ordeal with the Angel Slayer—who isn't through with Jensen yet.

Notes



### **Some quick notes:**

1. As with the first installment, the backgrounds and families of the main characters have been fabricated by the author due to the content of the story.
2. While this story does mainly deal with white collar crime, Jensen visits Russ Little (the Angel Slayer) in prison and their discussions do include much of the same descriptions of violent murders and rapes as were described in Angel Slayer.
3. A former victim describes a past sexual assault in minor detail; the specific chapter will be flagged.
4. There is a spoilery untagged couple and a possibly trigger-y untagged plot twist. If you are particularly sensitive to anything and would like to know these two things in advance, please contact me at [emwebb17@gmail.com](mailto:emwebb17@gmail.com). I also have a mostly inactive Tumblr account, [emwebb17](https://www.tumblr.com/emwebb17), if you feel more comfortable talking in that medium.

However, please don't ask for spoilers on anonymous because I will not post it.

5. And here is probably the one that will bug people the most and get me the most complaints. There is **HET SEX** in this fic. Jared and Alona get it on--more than once. If that's not your thing, please just skip it rather than griping in the comments about it; you have been

adequately warned.

6. Chapter 9 is a glossary.

### **Some inadequate thanks:**

I had three amazingly thorough and thoughtful betas who not only helped with flow and continuity, but also saved me from my endlessly fruitless struggles with homonyms.

[Mittensmorgul](#) on Tumblr, [MittenWraith](#) on AO3.

[Dinkydog](#) on AO3.

[AnonymousAngel](#) on AO3.

I commissioned art for this fic by the superbly talented Elena whose blog can be found [here](#). She made three beautiful pieces of art, which have been embedded in the story, and all of the chapter headers. Be amazed.



## **Week 1**

**Monday, July 7th, 2014**

Jensen opened his eyes.

Across the room he saw the beautiful, handmade ebony dresser that looked like it slanted to the left. The IKEA dresser had had the same problem.

Apparently, it was the floor. Jensen rolled onto his back and luxuriated in the wide open space of the king size bed, reaching his arms up in a stretch and wrapping his fingers around the wooden slats that matched the dresser.

He stretched his legs and then relaxed into the soft mattress. And to think, Misha had intended to just give these away when he'd sold his parents'

house. Jensen had all but pitched a fit and they'd managed to rescue the bedroom set and the dining table and chairs that the new owners had been kind enough to let Misha take back for free. Perhaps they hadn't known exactly how much quality, handmade furniture was worth, but either way, Jensen knew he'd gotten the better end of the deal even though the dining table didn't quite fit in the tiny space allotted for such frivolities in his small, expensive one bedroom apartment in Bethesda.

Jensen tried to enjoy being able to spread out completely and ignore the

only reason why he could do so was because the bed was empty. He felt a physical ache in his chest when he couldn't keep from thinking about Misha for more than three seconds. Eleven weeks. He'd been gone for *eleven* weeks and there were still seven fucking more to go. Ever since the man had shown up on his doorstep seven months ago, he hadn't spent a single night not wrapped up in his arms, or clinging to him like a security blanket, or sprawled on the far side of the bed because it was too hot to touch but still close enough that a flung out arm would find a hip or a shoulder or in one case, Misha's face. He had startled awake and been very ornery about the whole incident until Jensen had crawled between his legs and sucked him off.

There had been none of that for eleven weeks. Misha was busy all day every

day at the FBI Academy and while he certainly lived close enough to Quantico to visit on weekends, there were too many team building activities the new agent trainees had to do. Jensen was going to insist that Misha take a weekend off at some point though; he'd gone through the same training and he knew that not all of that team nonsense was mandatory. He might even insist that weekend be this weekend because this week was going to suck.

After Elton, the wrap up had been a nightmare. It still wasn't over. Little's trial was set to begin in October and mostly the prosecutors had to deal with getting ready for that, but Jensen was on their speed dial. So, he'd been more than happy to throw himself into the white collar crime world that his squad usually covered. The case he'd been assigned to take lead on was supposed to be pretty cut and dry: fraudulent securities. Simple. Except their investigation had been hampered at every turn and four months in they hadn't even met with any of the executive management of their suspected target company. They finally had a meeting with both the president and the CEO today, if it wasn't canceled. Again. Then at some point he had to drive out to the shooting range with Jared so he could unload his hurt feelings onto a paper dummy. And Friday...Friday he had another meeting with Russ. He hated seeing the psychopath, he hated talking to him, and most of all he hated being seen by him. He couldn't stand the way his eyes tripped over his body and lingered on vital parts.

And Misha was not here. This week was going to suck. He turned over and looked at the clock on the cheap nightstand. He'd asked Misha to build

matching nightstands for the bedroom furniture, and he'd replied that as soon as they moved into a house with an appropriately sized work room he'd get right on it. He scowled. Grief had definitely repressed a good portion of Misha's sass while they'd been in New Hampshire, and now that he was finally coping with his losses and recovering from his traumatic ordeal, more of his personality was shining through. And it was snarky as fuck. Jensen smiled. He kind of loved it.

The clock said it was just past six o'clock. He remembered their days had started pretty early at the Academy, but this might be too early to call. He wasn't worried Misha would mind being woken up, but his roommate had complained to him about the early morning and late night calls. It seemed

like if anyone was going to get one of the few private rooms in the dorms that it would go to one of the older trainees who'd already put in his time as a police officer. Jensen debated how much trouble he would get in if he pissed off Misha's roommate. Fuck it, he didn't care.

Jensen reached for his phone and started guiltily when it rang. He glanced at the door, wondering if Misha had somehow come home from class and was spying on him. No such luck. He picked up the phone and smiled when he saw it was Misha calling. He slid his finger across the screen and settled back into the pillows.

"Hey, beautiful," he gave by way of greeting.

"Morning, Jensen. So, were you about to call me?"

"Wha—uh, no."

Misha laughed and Jensen closed his eyes. The pang in his chest was back.

He missed him beyond what he thought might be psychologically healthy.

"It's okay. I just didn't want to waste any time, so I called you."

"Waste time?"

"Gil just left to take a shower. We should have at least fifteen minutes."

Jensen's eyes flew open. "Are you saying—no, you said don't waste time." Jensen plunged his hand under his boxers and gripped his soft cock

which was already tingling with the anticipation. "I was just thinking about that one night I sucked you off in bed."

Misha laughed. "That *one* night?"

"You know, when I hit you in the face?"

"Oh yeahhhhh..." Misha moaned softly. "That was good. If I recall correctly you finger fucked me too."

“I did,” Jensen sighed, recalling the cute, mewling noises Misha had made as he’d been teased and tortured for almost half an hour before Jensen relented and really started going to town on him. “Wanna do that now, Mish. Spread your cheeks, bury my face between them and taste every inch of you.”

Misha’s breathing hitched and then turned into a pleased groan. The sound of fabric shifting came through over the phone.

“Are you touching yourself, darling?” Jensen asked.

“Don’t call me that,” Misha ground out and there were more shifting sounds. “I’m gonna be the one to fuck you today. Face down, ass up. All mine.”

“No way, I’m busy eating you out.”

“Go ahead. I don’t see why we can’t both fuck each other in the ass this morning.”

Jensen was about to protest, but heck, he was right. “Hope you’re going to do a better job prepping me than last time.”

“Shut up, you dick. You’re the one that said you were ready.”

“And you believed me? I was totally lust-drunk. I would have let Charlie mount me at that point.”

“Well, that’s sexy. And romantic.”

Jensen stifled a giggle and enjoyed the slight friction burn as his dry hand pulled on his fully hard cock. Then he imagined Misha doing the same on his single bed less than fifty miles away.

“Oh, God, Mish, I want you. I wanna bury myself to the hilt and move in you until we melt.”

“Fuck, I love it when you get all poetical on me.”

“Shut your mouth.”

“Thought you liked it when I screamed.”

“Mishaaaaa,” Jensen whined as he felt a sudden jolt of pleasure shoot through his dick. This was going to be over embarrassingly fast.

Misha’s panting could be heard clearly over the line. “J-Jen...sen...fuck I can’t last this morning. Fuck, baby, tell me how good I’d feel.”

Jensen groaned and turned over, releasing his dick so he could hold the phone to his ear and humped the mattress. “Like home, darling. Like you’re mine.”

“Less poetical, more literal. I wanna feel your tight hole sucking me in deeper.”

Jensen groaned and worked his hips harder.

“Oh God are you fucking the sheets, baby?” Misha asked on a moan.

“Yeah...”

“Mmn, I can see it. Those hips working your pretty ass up and down, up and down...where am I?”

“Face down. Flat on the bed, knees bent and legs spread wide.”

“Yes, yessss...oh God I love it when you fuck me like that.”

“I know.”

“I’m on my back, babe. You’re riding me.”

“You got a hand on your dick?”

“Yup.”

“Finger your hole.”

“But...the phone.”

“Work it out!” Jensen shouted, desperate—he was going to leave Misha hanging any second now.

There was some shuffling on the other end of the line and then a keening moan filled his ears.

“Oh, yes! Oh fuck yes! Oh, God...fuck me...”

Jensen bit down on his pillow and his scream was muffled by the bulk of it as he shot his load into his underwear and rutted his way through a pleasant orgasm. For about a minute they just listened to each other breathe over the line. Then Jensen could hear Misha’s bed creak as he sat up.

“Best fucking wakeup call in the world,” Misha said.

“You called me.”

“Eh. I gotta shower and get ready for breakfast.”

Jensen laughed cruelly. “Still thinking the food at the cafeteria is pretty decent?”

“Shut-up. It is. Just, eleven weeks of the exact same thing over and over—and another seven more weeks of it to go is a little depressing.”

“If you’d visit me one weekend I’d take you out for steak.”

“If I visited you one weekend would we leave the apartment?”

“Nope. I will buy one and cook it for you then.”

“Mm, sounds like a good time.”

“Can it be this weekend?”

“I don’t know. I’ll have to check the schedule.”

“I’m just going to show up one weekend and fuck you on the floor of your



dorm.”

“Oh! How did I ever resist you for so long, you charmer you?”

“*Did* you resist me, Mish?”

Misha grumbled something.

“What?”

“Nothing. You got a busy day today?”

“Maybe. Depends on if that meeting gets canceled again.”

“You’re FBI, can’t you like, compel them to talk to you?”

“Legally? No. You been paying attention to your classes, darling?”

“Yes. And seriously, where did this whole ‘darling’ thing come from?”

Jensen shrugged. “I don’t know. But I like it.”

“I don’t. Find something else.”

“Sweetie pie? Honey buns?”

“Don’t you dare.”

“Fluffy bear? Cuddle slut?”

“Cuddle—?!”

“Pumpkin face? Angel lips—”

Jensen cut off abruptly and sucked in a breath. He clenched his jaw and started counting to ten to calm down.

“Hey, Jensen, baby,” Misha said softly, “Don’t let it bother you. It doesn’t bother me.”

Jensen finished counting and turned over on his back. He didn't respond right away, so Misha called out his name.

"I have to see him this week," Jensen ground out through his clenched teeth.

"Fuck," Misha breathed. "Can't those prosecutors handle any of their shit?"

"No, this is one of the regular ones. To talk about his...disciples."

"Baby, I know it's important to catch the sick fucks that worked with him, but maybe someone else should do it. He gets so graphic because he knows you hate it. He likes...violating you."

"I know. But he won't talk to anyone else."

"Then who cares? Just let him rot."

"But what if they're out there still killing?" Jensen rubbed his forehead with his hand. "I'll be fine. I can mostly tune him out pretty easily."

"Jensen..."

"It's fine, Misha. You have to shower, right?"

"Yeah."

"Will you be in your room at eight again tonight?"

"Yeah, should be."

"I'll call you tonight. Work hard."

Misha hesitated, like he wanted to say something else, but all he said was,

"You too."

"I love you, Misha. I..." Jensen trailed off. Why wasn't there a stronger word?

“I know, Jensen. And I don’t doubt it. And I miss you and I want you and I love you. And I need you to be safe.”

“I’m not working a dangerous case, babe.”

“I’m not talking about your case.”

“It’s a completely controlled—Misha, we’ve talked about this. I’m not going to stop interviewing Russ, okay?”

“Yeah, but I don’t have to stop asking.”

“No, I guess you don’t.”

They were quiet for a couple of minutes. Jensen rubbed the sheets with the fingers of his free hand and frowned as he held the quiet phone to his ear.

Noise on the other end alerted him to the fact that Misha’s roommate had returned.

“Call me tonight,” Misha said.

“I will.”

“Love you.”

“Lo—“ Jensen pulled the phone back. Misha had already hung up.

He rubbed his fingers over his eyes. They certainly weren’t a perfect everything is sunshine and rainbows kind of couple, but when they didn’t agree on something they could always discuss it rationally and work out a compromise. But on this—they were forever at odds. Jensen felt obligated to find Russ’ accomplices and inform the families of his victims that the instrument of their misery was behind bars. But Misha seemed to think that none of that mattered. Or at least, it shouldn’t be Jensen’s responsibility.

Jensen knew it stemmed from something that had happened when he’d been Russ’ prisoner, but Misha would not talk much about what had happened that

night. He knew it wasn't his place to pry or demand answers, but he had been nudging him less and less gently to talk to a therapist about it. His mind had come up with a hundred and one horrifying scenarios of what had happened to Misha that night—and he wasn't sure if the truth was not as bad as he feared...or worse.

Jensen heard the tentative clicking of nails on the hardwood floor by the door.

"He's still not here," Jensen said to Charlie.

She turned around and went back out into the living room. Jensen frowned. Wasn't she supposed to be *his* dog? He supposed it didn't matter so long as she didn't completely revert back to her cowering ways before Misha got back. It had taken several patient weeks of working with the war veteran before Misha had gotten the Weimaraner to come out of her shell and start acting more or less like a normal dog again. But with Misha gone, she was slowly withdrawing into herself. Jensen apparently wasn't good enough company.

He allowed himself to lay comfortably in his bed for a few more moments, and then he sighed and rolled out of bed. He discarded his soiled underwear in the laundry basket in the overstuffed closet he shared with Misha and headed for the kitchen to begin his routine.

Coffee, brush teeth, shower, get dressed, coax Charlie outside for short walk, get dragged back into building by scared dog, feed dog, clip handcuffs in holder to belt, check safety on service weapon, holster gun, holster Blackberry, check on dog in corner, recheck safety on weapon, re-holster gun, put credentials in left suit jacket pocket, put lanyard with work badge around neck, pour leftover coffee into travel mug—he was about to walk out the door when his Blackberry buzzed. A small smile appeared on his lips instantaneously as he saw Misha was calling him.

"Hey, Mish, what's up?"

"Go back and check the coffee machine."

"What?"

"Before you get down to the parking garage—go check the coffee machine."

Jensen obediently walked back into the kitchen and verified that the machine was turned off.

"Is it off?"

"Yep."

"Okay, get you car keys, babe."

Jensen walked back into his bedroom to get the keys to his Bu car off the dresser. He'd almost walked out the door without them.

"Thanks for the reminder."

"Sure. Are you out?"

"Yeah."

"Lock the door."

"I know," Jensen growled.

"Now check it," Misha said, unperturbed by Jensen's surliness.

Jensen gripped the doorknob and gave it a shake: locked. "Okay, it's locked."

"Alright, head on down to the car then."

"I'll lose service in the elevator."

"It's alright. Love you."

"Lo—"

Jensen frowned. He got hung up on again. He took the elevator down to the

parking garage and walked over to the two year old Ford Taurus he had been assigned. It wasn't the most stylish or powerful car out there, but it

served its purpose. Jensen checked his pockets—and there were the car keys. He paused as he opened the door, wondering if he'd left the coffee machine on, but then he remembered checking it with Misha. He got in and started the car. He hesitated with his foot on the brake before pulling out of the spot, momentarily panicking that he's forgotten to lock the door. No, he'd locked it. He remembered telling Misha. Jensen let out a soft laugh.

He rubbed his forehead and smiled as he thought about what Misha had done for him. Lauren had tried to help him break his obsessive compulsive tendencies by rolling her eyes and telling him that he'd already taken care of everything and he just needed to trust her. That had really chafed at him; it was one of the reasons he'd become so unhappy with her so quickly after they'd moved in together. Misha was trying to do the same thing by breaking him of his habits, but he was doing it by trying to teach Jensen to trust himself.

Jensen pulled out of the parking garage and activated a Bluetooth call.

Misha picked up on the second ring.

"Hey, Jensen. Did you make it out okay?"

"Yeah." Jensen chewed on his lip as he made the turn onto Wisconsin Avenue. "How'd you know today would be one of those mornings?"

"You're anxious. About the interview? Right?"

"Yeah, a little bit."

"Mm-hmm. Sorry to end the call so fast, but I've got to head out or I'll be late. And you know—no phones in the classrooms."

"Yeah. Thanks again."

"Anytime. Love you."

Jensen didn't reply and waited. The display on his dash indicated the call was still connected.

"Mish?"

"Yes, Jen?"

"Love you."

Jensen could actually hear Misha's smile over the phone, and then he hung up. Jensen chuckled and changed the radio to the local rock station to hear what outlandish story the DJs were talking about this morning on his distance-short, time-long commute.

Driving through DC at any time of day or night was an exercise in patience and most drivers failed miserably. Jensen wasn't one to succumb to road rage—it really took someone doing something really stupid to set him off—

but he'd found that he was much more prone to getting annoyed with the traffic he'd experienced all his life in the weeks that Misha had been gone.

It was strange how quickly being with Misha had become what was normal and routine even though he'd spent over thirty years without him. And wasn't that a travesty in and of itself? Jensen had spent more than one dry administrative meeting imagining what his life might have been like if he had gone to Dartmouth, or more realistically since he hadn't had the grades to get into an Ivy League school, if Misha had gone to Virginia Tech and they'd met when they were younger. He would be embarrassed about daydreaming like a teenaged school girl, but those meetings were really boring.

The traffic crawled slower and slower until it came to dead stop. Jensen blew air out through his mouth and settled back in his seat, getting comfortable for a long wait. Being stuck in his car with nothing but the radio for company didn't bother him because he was worried about getting to work on time, but because his thoughts inevitably turned to Misha.

Living with Misha had been tumultuous. Not the actual living with him part; that had been astoundingly easy to adjust to. He never once felt like there was

someone in “his” apartment. Misha was there and it never seemed odd. He didn’t know if that was because they were in a honeymoon phase or what, but they made love every night and had sex almost immediately when he got home from work and basically fucked all the times in between. Jensen wondered if it was healthy for two men in their mid-thirties to screw like horny teenagers, but exercise was exercise. He had begun to wonder if they were traumatizing Charlie, but she had gotten

better by having Misha stay with her all day every day. And Misha had stayed in every day and never ventured out unless Jensen could go with him. It had only just started to dawn on Jensen that that might not just be new town jitters when Misha had left for New Agent Class.

As it turned out Misha had applied to the FBI over a year prior to his sister’s death and had already passed the first two phases when the hiring moratorium was put in place on the federal government. When it was lifted when Congress finally approved the new budget in January, the hiring process had been kicked back into gear and Misha had been called in to complete phase three and his physical fitness test. He’d passed easily, of course, and had been slated to be in the first new class of agents. He’d been shipped off to Quantico at the beginning of April, meaning they’d really only had three and a half months living together. The end of December and beginning of January had been filled with drama of the Ackles Family variety, so he’d had his attention focused elsewhere rather than on Misha.

For eleven miserable weeks he and Misha had been apart, only seeing each other once the third weekend he’d been gone. They had to survive on emails and phone calls and quick phone sex while Misha’s roommate was out of the room. It was its own circle of hell. It was while they had discussions during some of their emails that Jensen realized Misha knew nothing about their neighborhood. Not even the fact that there was a CVS

on the corner of their block. Misha had kept himself isolated, which didn’t seem to be his nature whenever they were out together. It was finally occurring to him that Misha’s behavior was a little odd and that he had never actually gone to see a therapist after his ordeal with Russ. And now that he was gone and they had such little contact, it was impossible for him to tell how Misha was really doing. He made up his mind to make that surprise trip



to Quantico on Saturday; he needed to talk with Misha in person.

Even with the cushion of time Jensen had built into his schedule, the traffic was bad enough that he arrived at the office almost twenty minutes later than usual. The lights were on over their section of cubicles on the sixth floor and Jensen correctly assumed Jared had beaten him to work. He dropped his briefcase on the floor by his desk and then pushed backward in his chair and into Jared's space which was now directly behind Jensen's desk. He bumped into Jared's desk and found him slumped in his chair,

scowling at his monitor. It was the same scowl he'd had on his face for three months now.

"Morning, Jared."

Jared grunted in reply.

"You know, I think Abel was supposed to be secondary on this case I'm working, but he's still tied up with the DC Mistress thing."

"So? Nothing's moving on your case. I'm sure you're not overworked."

Jensen glared at the side of Jared's face. "Thanks, buddy."

"You're welcome, pal."

Jensen counted to ten. He knew Jared was still very upset, possibly heartbroken, but it had been three months. He could attempt to be civil at work at the very least.

"I was informing you of this because I thought you might like to be my secondary. I finally have a meeting set up with Cohen and Pellegrino today, so I thought you could come along and help me out. I'm sure Jake won't mind."

"Hn."

Jensen clenched his hand into a fist but kept his cool. "Are you working on anything pressing at the moment?"

“One of the guys on the healthcare fraud squad asked me to cross check some of their guys with the list we compiled out of the Portman case.”

“Sounds time consuming.”

Jared sighed heavily. He opened his mouth to speak, thought better of it, and remained silent as he scrolled through the rows and rows of names and addresses on an Excel spreadsheet.

“How about this,” Jensen tried. “You come with me to this meeting, and we’ll go to the gun range when it’s done.”

Jared raised an eyebrow but kept his eyes on the screen. “I would like to go to the gun range.”

Jensen slapped him on the shoulder. “Atta boy. Meeting’s at ten, so we’ll leave at nine. It won’t take that long to get there, but I need to fill you in on the details a bit.”

Jensen didn’t wait for a reply, if there even would be one, and pushed himself back into his space. They had about two hours before they had to leave which gave him just enough time to go through his e-mails and read the report Osric had written for him on the CEO and President of Cohen & Cohen, Mark Pellegrino and Matt Cohen respectively.

Jensen parked in the “No Parking” zone in front of the business complex and threw his parking placard (which was just a piece of paper that looked like a high school achievement certificate) onto the dashboard. He exited the car, buttoning his jacket as he slid the keys into his pocket. He waited for Jared to join him, but he didn’t get out of the car. Jensen ducked down and saw him slumped in his seat, glaring at his phone. Jensen thumped the roof of the car and Jared started in alarm. Then he quickly put his phone up and got out of the car.

“Sorry,” he grumbled.

Jensen put a hand on his shoulder to keep him from walking ahead of him

into the building.

“Hey. Get your head in the game. We’ll go to the range after.”

Jared nodded and closed his eyes. He inhaled deeply and then exhaled.

When he opened his eyes he looked focused. He gave Jensen a nod and they made their way up the stairs and into the lobby. They double checked the floor they wanted to visit on the directory on the wall before making their way to the elevator bank. Cohen & Cohen owned five floors out of the twenty story building, and they went to the fifteenth floor which was their main entrance. The front office was spacious and bright due to the

abundance of windows. The view was mostly other buildings, but also some clear sky and trees farther out. There were no skyscrapers in DC and Jensen liked it that way. New York and Chicago always made him feel like a rat in a maze.

A pretty woman with mocha colored skin and black curly hair smiled brightly at them from her place behind a long counter. She wore all black, which made her figure stand out starkly against the large, white sign on the wall behind her that read “Cohen & Cohen, established 1948” in large, swooping black font.

“Can I help you gentlemen?” she asked in a pleasant though practiced voice.

Just as they pulled out their badges to introduce themselves, the phone rang. She held up one manicured finger and answered the phone.

“Cohen & Cohen, this is Megalyn speaking. How may I help you?”

Jensen turned to Jared and mouthed, “Megalyn?”

Jared smirked and turned away from the woman so he could mutter softly.

“You and your boyfriend really have no place making fun of other people with weird names.”

Jensen made a face at him and Jared bit his lip to keep himself from smiling

as he turned back around to face the receptionist as she placed her call on hold.

“How can I help you two?”

They held out their credentials for her to read, and Jensen took point.

“I’m Special Agent Jensen Ackles and this is Special Agent Jared Padalecki. We have a meeting with Mr. Cohen and Mr. Pellegrino today.

And today I really do hope they intend to make it.”

“Oh, yes of course. I’ll contact Mr. Cohen’s assistant and he’ll come down and escort you up. You can have a seat over there if you like.”

“Thank you.”

Jensen and Jared made their way over to a small waiting area by a corner that was mostly windows and took a seat in the plushy, black leather chairs.

Jared picked up a copy of the *Wall Street Journal* from the table in between them and pretended to thumb through it.

“So, how long do you think we’ll sit before they cancel again?” Jared muttered.

“If they cancel again I’m taking hostages and forcing them to take me upstairs,” Jensen grumbled back.

Less than five minutes later a young man in a suit that probably cost more than Jared’s and Jensen’s suits combined greeted them with an anxious expression and fidgeting hands. Jared and Jensen exchanged looks, but followed him to the internal elevator system that connected the company’s floors and rode it to the top floor. The young man escorted them into a large room that was more apartment than office. There was a kitchenette in one corner complete with a stove and refrigerator, and at the other end was a living room set nicer than the one in Jensen’s home. Toward the back was a heavy wood desk that faced several large windows and had an unobstructed view to the south; Jensen could see the Washington Monument. They were

escorted to two seats in front of the desk, which put their backs to the window. It made Jensen feel uneasy for some reason.

“Mr. Cohen will be in shortly,” the man informed them. “Can I get you anything? Tea, coffee, water?”

“We’re fine, thank you,” Jensen answered for them both.

The assistant nodded and then left the office, leaving them alone. They sat in the stillness in silence, occasionally thumping a rhythm out on a chair arm or making a popping noise with their mouths. After a couple of minutes, a door they hadn’t noticed before by the living room area opened.

A young, handsome man in his mid-twenties entered. He wore a dark grey suit and had his dark brown hair gelled into a perfect businessman coiffure.

Jared and Jensen stood to greet him and shake hands.

“Thank you both for coming. I’m Matt Cohen. I’m the president of Cohen & Cohen. Please, have a seat.”

Cohen sat down behind the desk and Jared and Jensen retook their seats.

Jensen let his eyes wander over the young man’s face and body. He wasn’t sweating, but his face was pinched and his shoulders were tense. He was very uncomfortable. Whether it was due to the potential embezzlement taking place under his nose or guilt remained to be seen. Jensen pulled out a small notepad and pen and got as far as, “Mr. Cohen,” when the man interrupted him.

“Please, call me Matt. My father—and grandfather—were Mr. Cohen.”

Jensen decided to avoid the situation by not addressing him personally again. “Thank you for seeing us. We were also expecting the CEO, Mark Pellegrino?”

Matt’s lips twitched down into a frown before he schooled his features. “I wanted the opportunity to speak with you alone first. He’ll be joining us in

about a half hour or so.”

Jensen raised his eyebrows. “I take it that means you have suspicions regarding your Chief Executive Officer?”

“Not so much suspicions,” Matt hedged, “as the fact that he doesn’t trust me. So, I don’t trust him.”

“Can you tell us where this mutual mistrust comes from?” Jared asked.

Matt made an aborted sighing motion, like he was consciously trying to stop himself from sighing in frustration yet again.

“The short version, on his part, is my age. My father died quite suddenly last year, and I had only just graduated from Wharton. He didn’t feel I was ready to take over as President and has been pushing back against my leadership, especially with the board of trustees. In the beginning, I did defer to his greater experience, and he decided to make a lot of changes to the way things were run under my father. For the most part I agreed that my father’s old fashioned practices needed to be updated, but I feel like he did too much too fast. He brought in unvetted ‘experts’ to take over key positions and forced many of our executives into early retirement.

“As much as I am accused of being a bleeding heart, I did see the merit in some turnover in staff. Especially among the older crowd that was resistant to new ideas. But then...then I noticed some oddities in the way business was being conducted.”

“Such as?” Jensen asked, wondering if the whole fraud case was merely an in-fight between the president and the CEO.

“We don’t do penny stocks here. All of our clientele have extremely lucrative business ventures and accounts. When we invest in securities and commodities, it’s not about wheeling and dealing to the ‘next big thing’

rocking the market. We’re about finding steady though appropriately risky investments for our clients. Lately though, I’ve noticed that a lot of our clients are being told to invest in certain commodities that belly up or

disappear almost in days. This results in our clients losing some money, but not enough to concern them. After all, risk is part of the game.

“I did think it was odd that this seemed to be happening across the board with our clients, almost like it’s going through a roll call of our client list.

But, I’ve personally looked into the investments they’re being directed to and they all seem to be legitimate startups—even though when they fail, they’re basically untraceable to another company or individual.”

Jensen broke in with, “Cohen & Cohen came to our attention as a potential ‘pump and dump’ scheme—what you’ve just described—because two of your clients were listed as investors in confirmed fraudulent commodities.”

Matt’s jaw ticked as he clenched his teeth. “Shit.”

“You must keep records of which brokers work with which clients; have you noticed that all the clients losing money work with one or two brokers in particular?”

Matt shook his head. “No. I looked into that as soon as I noticed the trend.

Basically, this has happened to all of my brokers.”

“Do you have any assistants that aid the entire office?” Jared asked. “Or is it common for brokers to assist each other without documenting their involvement?”

“Well, if the latter is happening, I suppose I wouldn’t know about it. But it seems unlikely as brokers work on commission. No one would help someone else if they weren’t going to get a cut of the pie. As for assistants, we have several secretaries and office workers that handle administrative matters and copying and filing and what have you. They could potentially have access to the information in the files, but they couldn’t possibly make an unauthorized investment. And none of the clients have complained about having investments made on their behalf that they didn’t approve.”

“Do you have an auditor or anyone on staff at all who has access to the

clients and doesn't rely on commission?" Jensen asked.

Matt smiled humorlessly. "Well, I do."

Jensen flicked his pen over his notepad, but didn't actually write anything down.

"As do I," a voice startled them all by chiming in.

All three men's heads turned to the office door as a tall, impeccably dressed blond man strode into the room.

"My CEO," Matt informed the agents stiffly.

Jared and Jensen stood up to shake the man's hand as he approached them.

Jensen was surprised by his height; it wasn't often that they came across someone who could match them eye to eye as it were.

"Mark Pellegrino," he introduced himself succinctly and gave just as efficient a handshake to Jensen. He turned to Jared, and Jensen noticed that the man's eyes flicked up and down quickly, resulting in a small smile and a slightly extended handshake. Jared either didn't notice or didn't care that he'd just been assessed as a potential sexual partner—because really, Pellegrino didn't know enough about him to want anything else at this point

—and glanced back at the chairs they had been sitting in. There were only two and neither of them knew if they should sit since Pellegrino wouldn't have a place to sit.

"Let's move this to some place more accommodating," Pellegrino said. He turned to walk toward the living room set up without consulting Matt or

waiting for Jared and Jensen to agree. Jensen glanced at Matt. He looked irritated, but rose from his seat and followed his CEO. Jensen exchanged a look with Jared as they trailed after him. Mark waited for them to choose their seats—Matt snagging one of the arm chairs while Jared went for the couch. Jensen was going to sit beside him to present a united front, but Pellegrino smoothly sat down on the couch next to Jared—not so close as to



be invading his personal space, but not far enough away for Jensen to squeeze in without making it comically awkward. Jensen sat in the other arm chair and met Jared's eyes, giving him a small smirk before he schooled his features. Jared's face was passive, but his eyes were basically telling Jensen that he was flicking him off on the inside.

"You're early, Mark," Matt started not at all subtly.

"And a good thing too," the man replied. "You're missing a key bit of information that will help direct your investigation in the right direction."

Matt didn't say anything, but his fingers curled around the arms of his chair. Jared took the opportunity to scoot a little farther away from Mark by turning toward him.

"What information is that, Mr. Pellegrino?"

"Call me Mark, Jared."

Jared swallowed and Jensen scratched his nose to hide a smile.

"Mark," Jared said tonelessly.

"You're all going off the assumption that our clients were led into making the decision to invest in certain securities and commodities."

"Are you suggesting they all randomly picked bad commodities?" Matt asked with a barely concealed sneer.

"Of course not. But you're assuming that the advice came from our brokers. Most of these clients came in with the idea to invest in certain things themselves. In fact, three or four of our brokers had told us that it was odd that the clients came in with *outside* advice from some new website. You see," Mark addressed the agents, "that's what they pay *us* for."

So, I looked over their files to see if there were any commonalities. At first it seemed like a bit of a hopeless endeavor, but I did notice that about twenty percent of them use the same bank. It's not much, but it's something. I thought the FBI might be interested in looking at anything that might be a

lead.”

“We are,” Jensen confirmed. “What bank is it?”

“It’s called Potomac First. It’s not a national bank, but a local one. One that might be more likely to have personal interactions with their customers.”

“We’d like you to provide a list of your clients who mentioned the website and who use this bank, which specific commodities that failed that they invested in, and the names of any of other financial institutions that the other victims used to conduct business.”

“I’ll get my assistant to begin pulling the information right away.”

“Thank you.”

“I’m happy to do anything that will assist in solving this mystery and bringing the guilty to justice.”

Jensen cocked his head slightly at the odd sentence.

“Anything but share this information with your business partner,” Matt said icily.

“Matt,” Mark said, completely unruffled as he crossed his legs, his foot brushing Jared’s shin. “You know that when I said I looked through the client’s files I meant my assistant did. He just gave me his findings this morning. This is the earliest I could have brought it to your attention.”

Mark and Matt stared at each other and Jensen and Jared exchanged looks again. Well, this investigation was going to be a delight.

“Well,” Jensen said, a little more loudly than was necessary but succeeded in drawing both businessmen’s eyes to him, “if you would get us the client information as soon as possible we would greatly appreciate it. In the meantime, we’ll—”

“I had another idea I’d like to discuss,” Mark said, interrupting him smoothly.

Jensen raised his eyebrows. “Yes?”

“I think an undercover operation would be the best way to ferret out any suspicious characters or nefarious plots.”

Jensen kept his features schooled even though internally he was guffawing at Mark’s turn of phrase.

“I can understand how that sort of operation may benefit this case, and we certainly won’t eliminate any options this early on, but at this time we have no plans to—”

“I’m sure Jared could do it,” Mark said, turning his full attention on Jensen’s partner and giving him a Mona Lisa smile.

“Uh...” Jared intoned dumbly, clearly caught off guard.

“Mr. Pellegrino.” Mark turned his attention to Jensen. “If the FBI decides to run an undercover operation, it will not be because you requested it.

Furthermore, the real FBI doesn’t work the way it does on TV. A quick montage and scene change doesn’t make everything prepared for that kind of operation, and the handsome lead is not the one who goes undercover.

We have agents especially trained in these sorts of matters and one of them would be tasked.”

“Besides,” Jared said, finally finding his voice, weak though it was, “people have seen me here. They would know I’m a Fed.”

“All people know is that two people in suits came in for an interview. One of you got the job.”

“We introduced ourselves to the receptionist as FBI.”

“I’ve been meaning to fire her.”

Jared gaped at him for a moment, and then turned to Jensen for help.

“We appreciate your input, Mr. Pellegrino, and we’ll take it under advisement. Now, if you can provide us with the information your assistant pulled on your clients and the recent activity on their accounts, we’ll get out of your hair and begin our investigation.”

Jensen stood up and Jared swiftly followed. Matt stood as well and Mark must have decided he’d lost the argument since he got to his feet and led the way to the main office doors. Outside in the hallway they encountered two anxiously waiting personal assistants who immediately attached themselves to the side of their respective boss. Mark gave orders to his assistant to bring the client files down to the sixteenth floor copy room and he scurried off. Matt’s assistant eyed Jensen and Jared with barely disguised hostility until Matt asked him to retrieve the information on the banking institutions that had a relationship with the company.

“I apologize for Dylan’s behavior,” Matt said softly as they entered one of the elevators. “He’s a little on edge because of the rumors—” Matt glared at Mark who ignored him “—that this incident has us considering hiring a completely new administrative staff as a precaution. He probably thinks you were interviewing for his position.”

“A little fear can be a great motivator,” Mark said as the elevator arrived on the sixteenth floor.

Matt opened his mouth but the doors slid open and Mark ushered Jared out with a hand at the small of his back.

“Matt, please take Jensen to the copy room. That’s where I told Brock to meet you.”

Jensen began to follow Matt, and then hesitated, confused as Mark led Jared in the opposite direction and toward the large open space of the office.

There were several desks scattered throughout the room and a few low partitions, but no true cubicles. Nearly three score people were milling about, chatting softly, laughing, while a couple appeared to actually be sitting at their desks and working.

“Hello, everyone!” Mark called out. Everyone in the room quieted down immediately and gave Mark their undivided attention. “How’s the market today?”

There was a chorus of negative, positive, and neutral responses.

“Could be worse, but could be better then.”

The crowd murmured assent like Mark had just delivered some inspirational oration.

“Everyone, this is Jared Bell. He’s going to be QC-ing our process and acting as a fact checker. You asked for one, and I’m delivering.”

There was a generally positive response to Mark’s announcement, if one didn’t look at Jared’s shocked expression or Jensen’s positively livid one.

“Don’t look so surprised, Jared,” Mark laughed. “Though I guess I should have told you that you had the job before I told all of them.”

The office workers laughed and Mark clapped Jared on the back.

“Alright, back to work. You’ve wasted enough of my money as it is.”

“You mean your clients’ money!” someone called out jokingly.

“Same difference,” Mark shrugged, earning a few more chuckles. He started to lead Jared back toward Jensen and Matt, and Jensen met and held Mark’s eyes all the way across the floor. Mark smiled mildly when he reached them. “Just laying down the foundation. Should you decide to use it,” he added innocently, putting up a hand like the decision was completely up to Jensen.

Jensen turned away from him and Matt was giving him an apologetic face.

“Where are the files?” Jensen asked, massaging his throbbing temple with two fingers.

Twenty minutes later Jared and Jensen were loading two cardboard file boxes

into the back of the Taurus. Jensen slammed the trunk down and Jared looked on blandly.

“Well. That was an experience,” Jared said dully.

Jensen was too annoyed to even acknowledge Mark Pellegrino.

“You don’t think he could, I don’t know, force me to do it somehow, do you?” Jared asked.

“No way. The FBI doesn’t take orders from private citizens. He’s just one of those overly privileged rich guys who has never been told no in his life.

Don’t worry. We’ll solve this the old fashioned way.”

“The old fashioned way?” Jared asked, quirking a smile as he opened the passenger side door. “You mean getting someone who knows computer stuff to find it out for us?”

“Exactly. Now get in the car.”

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Jared looked down the sight of his gun and unloaded the entire eighteen round magazine of his Glock 19 into the paper target at the end of the firing lane. Next to him Jensen flicked the switch that sent the target rushing back along the zip line to where they stood. Jared removed his protective earmuffs and eyeglasses and let his eyes roam over the hole where the paper target’s heart used to be. Jensen set his earmuffs down on the counter and then took the target out of the clip. Jared reloaded while Jensen examined the paper face on which Jared had drawn exaggerated lips and eyelashes.

“So, I see when you said you’d ‘gotten over it’ you were...”

“Full of shit,” Jared mumbled and cocked the gun. Instead of putting his safety equipment back on, he set the gun down and leaned against the counter.

“She said she didn’t think it was even worth trying.”

Jared closed his eyes and sighed heavily. It still made his chest squeeze tight to remember the things Gen had said. He had been convinced that he was more than half in love with her and she didn't think he was worth the same effort as a Netflix subscription.

"You know," Jensen said, softly, carefully, "Misha said something similar to me too. When he was in the hospital in Elton after...everything. He said that he was so scared of the relationship failing that he'd rather not try at all."

Jared looked up at Jensen. He'd thought it had been strange that for about a month after they had caught Russ that Jensen hadn't said a word about Misha. He'd started to wonder if something had gone wrong between them, but then Jensen had announced that they were living together and Jared assumed everything had been rosy from the start.

"I didn't know that you two had—" Jared groped for the right expression

"—stopped seeing each other after we solved the case."

Jensen's expression was composed, but sad. "Yeah...he, um, wasn't ready to deal with relationship stuff on top of everything else that had happened to him that year. And finding out about Bunny and a colleague's betrayal and —whatever it is that Russ did to him..."

Jared bit his lip to keep from asking the obvious question: What had Russ done to him? Jared had the sneaking suspicion that even Jensen didn't know.

"But anyway," Jensen continued, "he said he realized that being in a relationship wouldn't be a burden, but a help. Or at least, that's the way I choose to interpret it. Otherwise he's simply using me as a way to escape his past and not think about it and I—I, um. So, when did you last speak with Gen?"

"Three months ago. That phone call I told you about." Jared put the safety glasses back on.

"And you never tried calling or emailing her about it again? After she's had

some time to think? To settle into Boston? She might be ready—”

Jared plopped the earmuffs over his ears and Jensen’s voice became a garbled drone. He clipped another target (without embellishments) on the line and sent it flying to the back of the lane. Jensen stepped back and put his equipment back on, scowling unhappily. Jared ignored him and picked up his gun. He practiced shooting the target twice in the chest and once in

the head over and over until the magazine ran out. He removed his safety equipment again as the target zipped up the line. There was only one hole in the chest, but it was fairly large, and the head shots were all over the place, though at least all inside the head. It was still shitty shooting. He groaned in frustration.

“I’ve got to get over this, but I don’t know how,” Jared admitted as he ejected the magazine to make sure it was empty and that the chamber was cleared of all rounds.

“Well, if you won’t take my *good* advice to call Gen and talk to her again —”

Jared frowned at him as he holstered his empty weapon.

“Then take the bad advice of the fastest way to get over someone is to get under someone else.”

Jared laughed softly and tossed his targets in the recycling bin behind them.

“Are you telling me I need to get laid?”

“I am telling you that you need to get laid.”

“Well considering how you nearly ripped Bob’s head off a couple of days ago, I’d say you probably need to get laid soon too.”

Jensen grinned. “I’m surprising Misha by driving down to Quantico this weekend.”

Jared smiled, catching Jensen's infectious happiness. "Yeah?"

"Yep. There's a Holiday Inn a couple miles up 95 and an IHOP across the street."

Jared laughed. "Sounds like it'll be—sticky."

Jensen laughed and Jared was pretty sure he blushed too. He really was happy that Jensen and Misha had found each other. They seemed good for each other. Of course they'd been apart almost as long as they'd been

together since Misha had moved in, but at the very least Jared could say that Jensen was undeniably happy when his boyfriend was around. If he ignored moments like the one not long ago when Jensen had accidentally voiced his fear that Misha was repressing his trauma rather than dealing with it. Jared wished he could say or do something to help, but he was at a loss of how to even broach the subject.

"So, uh, are you going to take Friday off?"

Jensen's expression immediately sobered, his mouth tightening with some strong emotion.

"No. I'm not going until Saturday. I have to make one of my 'visits' to Russ."

Jared made a face, but didn't respond right away. Jensen sighed in annoyance.

"Not you too."

"Come on, Jensen. Don't act surprised. All he does is upset you. Which upsets Misha, and everyone else, honestly. He's not giving out any useful information. You're just giving him an undeserved amusement."

"We arrested Nick Tirro, Greg Hampton, and Pamela Paulson. The three people who helped him with the DC murders. That's not nothing."

"I know, you're right, it's not. But he hasn't given you anything since you got

the prosecutor to agree not to seek the death penalty. You keep visiting him, almost every week, and he teases you with information but never gives you anything. He just likes seeing you. He's obsessed with you, Jensen.

He—”

“You think I don't know that?” Jensen snapped. “You think I can sit in that room with him without my skin crawling as he smiles at me and pulls against his restraints to try to touch me? I'm not doing it for fun!”

Jared lowered eyes. “I know. I'm sorry.”

They were silent for a moment as they focused on checking their weapons again.

“Look, man,” Jensen said, “find your balls, okay? You'll need them either to call Gen or get some strange. Just stop moping; it's bad for you.”

As crass as it was, it was good advice. He could either fix things with Gen or move on from her. He couldn't try to hide himself from it forever by wrapping himself up in hurt and bitterness.

“You're right. Enough is enough. We've got a case to focus on and I need to handle my own business.”

“Glad to hear it,” Jensen said as they gathered their belongings and began the walk down the long corridor to the front office. “And, hey, this case may help you solve that problem. It's very similar circumstances to Elton when you think about it.”

“How so?” Jared asked dubiously.

“Well, there's this guy who could potentially be a suspect in the case, but he's also totally into you. Maybe Pellegrino can be your Misha.”

Jensen flashed him a shit-eating grin and dodged the hand Jared thrust at him.

“Ackles, do not think for a second that I won't shoot you in this empty

corridor and then tell everyone it was an accident.”

Jensen laughed and Jared scowled at him.

“Besides, it wouldn’t be the same. Misha wasn’t into you. You had to crawl at his feet for weeks for him to pay attention to you.”

Jensen tsked. “Not at all. Misha wanted me the moment he saw me.”

“You know I can have that information verified, right?” Jared asked with a laugh. “Shall we call him?”

“Okay, maybe not the *first* moment. But if he ever says that it was all me and he eventually gave into it—he’s totally lying.”

“Sure, sure,” Jared placated Jensen. He knew Jensen was a little sensitive about the fact that he was so completely and utterly wrapped around Misha’s finger, so occasionally, he let it slide.

The two men signed out of the firing range and walked together to the parking lot. After dropping off the Files from Cohen & Cohen at the office, they had driven separate cars to the range. Jensen gave him a friendly pat on the back and a look that he knew meant, “Call Gen.” He just waved goodbye to the agent he now considered to be his best friend and got into his Bu car. He absently checked his phone before turning the keys in the ignition, and then fumbled it as he saw he had a message. Excited he opened his voice mail, wondering if Gen had decided to call him.

“Agent Padalecki,” Mark Pellegrino purred in his ear. “It was a pleasure to meet you this afternoon. I hope we can resolve this case quickly and discreetly. And if there’s anything I can do for you, anything at all, please don’t hesitate to reach out to me.”

Jared let out a small huff of laughter. One because it was kind of pathetic how much he’d been hoping that had been Gen, and two because he’d never been *propositioned* before. And while that message could be taken totally at face value, he wasn’t some naïve little straight boy who couldn’t recognize when he was being hit on. He supposed he felt flattered. Mark was rich,

powerful, and good looking—but Jared just couldn't fathom being attracted to the guy. He supposed his bicuriosity didn't require any thought after all. Of course, maybe Mark just wasn't his type. Jensen was an insanely beautiful man, but he couldn't think of him like that because he was like a brother. Thinking about Misha in that way was just wrong—you don't scam on your brother's girl or your like-a-brother's man. Rules were rules. Matt Cohen had been cute. Tall, nice cheekbones...

Jared shook himself. What the fuck was he doing sitting in a dark, empty parking lot thinking about men? He was going to blame all this on Gen and call it a night.

Wednesday, July 9, 2014

The next day Jared was the first one on his squad to get to work, which

wasn't unusual. Osric arrived second, beating Jensen, and groaned when he saw the boxes of files and requests for research on all the victims, the stocks they bought, and the banks they used.

"I can't believe you dupes walked out of there with paper files," Osric grouched as he gave the boxes a baleful look on his way to his desk.

Jared just grinned and continued to search through the CHS database to see if there were any sources belonging to other squads that they might be able to task. They had about ten minutes of blissful calm to work before their SSA entered the space, cursing up a blue storm.

"Padalecki! I mean, sorry, Padaducky, I need to you see in my office.

Now!"

Osric peeked over the divide, clearly curious about what he had done, but Jared gave him no clues. He walked into Bob's office and saw Jensen was already seated.

"I take it you told him about what Pellegrino did yesterday?" Jared murmured as he took a seat in the chair beside Jensen.

“Are you two completely incompetent?” Bob started before he even got the door slammed shut. “You just let some bozo executive task Jared with an undercover mission?!”

“We didn’t at all,” Jensen protested. “We told him in no uncertain terms that neither of us was qualified for such an operation and that he didn’t have the authority to request one. I told him the Bureau would assess the situation and come to the decision of whether or not—”

“It doesn’t matter what you *said*, it only matters what you *did*. And you didn’t leave there with the situation under control. He’s already called asking the backstopping unit for Jared’s cover story so that he can make him work credentials!”

“So tell him to fuck off,” Jensen shrugged.

Jared barely refrained from looking at Jensen and rolled his lips in to mitigate any expression he might make.

“Mark Pellegrino doesn’t have the authorization to task the FBI,” Jensen continued. “It doesn’t matter what he wants.”

“Oh, doesn’t it? Did you know that he happens to be friends with Louis Freeh? You know, the former Director of the FBI? The one who still works in high profile investigative matters and can call in all kinds of favors?”

Jared’s lips parted in shock. “Are you kidding? Pellegrino asked Freeh to ask for me to be placed undercover at his company?”

“Yes!” Bob roared like that was what he’d been explaining to them for an hour rather than having just told them.

Jared saw Jensen cover his face with a hand and mumble something.

“So,” Jared said, still stunned, “I really have to do this?”

“‘Have to’ is a phrase I’m sure *they* would never use. But, yes, you have to do this. The backstopping unit is working on your cover now, and, Ackles, you’re going to be his quasi-handler since you’ve already been seen at Cohen

& Cohen. This case is starting to get a lot of attention; you better be certain you don't fuck this up. Starting tomorrow you're going to get a crash course in UC matters. So today you better get your shit in order because Jared is going to be stuck at Cohen & Cohen for most of this. I hope this serves as a lesson to the two of you of how not to fuck up a simple interview! Now get out!"

Jared and Jensen stood and left the office without offering up anything else in their defense. Bob wasn't in the mood to hear it, and honestly, Jared wasn't sure there was anything they could say to refute Bob's claims that they'd messed up. Although, he wasn't convinced that they had. Jensen had a dark expression on his face and looked like he might bite the head off of the first person who spoke to him. Jared felt a little bad for being a coward and letting Osric take that bullet, but as he listened to Jensen bark out questions to the IA, he felt he'd made the right decision.

Thursday, July 10, 2014

Jared groaned as he turned the flashcard over and saw that he'd confused his AFID birthday and college graduation dates. Again. None of the documents were official yet (it would still be a few days before they were), so he had some time to get this information memorized. But he had to have it down so that he wouldn't come off as suspicious and encourage anyone to go looking into his past.

They weren't doing a full cover on him. He had a social security number and name and address and place of birth, but if anyone actually tried to look up Jared Bell of Rockville, Maryland, they would hit a dead end. He technically had the names of his "parents" and some other facts, but they weren't supported by any official documentation. The reasons for the light cover were because they had to do it on such short notice and fortunately the situation wasn't considered high risk. If anyone discovered Jared's true identity, nobody was worried he'd be "disappeared" like the agents who risked their lives infiltrating the mob or motorcycle gangs.

Jared picked up the card with his fake social security number on it. He said the number out loud and turned the card over.

“Yes,” he whispered, making a small fist pumping gesture.

“Everything going well, Mr. Bell?”

Jared looked up and saw Jensen come into the room with a grin on his face.

He was trying to be obnoxious, but honestly Jared was thankful that he wasn't still scowling and slamming things around. That probably had something to do with the fact that Bob was out of the office today.

Jared sat back in his chair with a huff. “Why Bell?” Jared griped. “Of all the names that he could have pulled off the top of his head, why did he pick Bell?”

Jensen shrugged, but Jared could tell it was a pretense; clearly he knew something. He sat down and slid a box across the table to him. Jared caught the box and closed his eyes as he inhaled the delightful smells of pizza from Wise Guys down the street.

“I decided to do a little digging into our hosts,” Jensen said as he opened his own box. “Cohen is clean. Straight from high school to college to the company. No arrests of any kind, even for minor infractions one might incur in one's youth.”

“Such as?” Jared asked with a raised eyebrow.

“*Nothing*,” Jensen replied. Jared vowed to pry that story out of him the next time they went drinking. “Pellegrino is pretty squeaky too. Nothing outside a few ethically questionable actions, which are of course perfectly legal, to advance his career. I did find out he used to be married to a woman named Tracy. She died of an illness several years ago.”

“Oh, that's sad.”

“It is. I get the impression he really loved her. Got a huge statue-type grave marker for her in a graveyard near her hometown in New Jersey.”

“Well, either he really loved her or he felt guilty about something.”

Jensen chuckled. “Definitely a possibility. But I’m going with love.”

“Why?”

“Her maiden name was Bell.”

Jared took a moment to process that, and then he groaned and sat back in his chair, pizza abandoned.

“Are you kidding me?”

“Nope.”

“Maybe it was just the first name that popped into his head,” Jared said.

Jensen nodded. “Yeah, maybe. I don’t think he meant anything by it. In fact, I don’t think he wants you to be an undercover agent just because he wants to watch you bend over and pick up pens.”

Jared made a face at him.

“I think he genuinely wants to find out what’s going on with his company.

An undercover agent would help, and you’re just a bonus.”

“Lucky me.”

“Could be,” Jensen said with a cheeky grin. “Just be responsible and use protection.”

Jared made another noise of disgust and had to set aside the pizza again.

“Can you not?”

Jensen chuckled. “Sorry. But in complete seriousness, don’t be afraid to use his interest in you to your advantage.”

Jared frowned and picked at a pepperoni slice on his cooling pizza.

“Wouldn’t that be suspicious? If I suddenly reciprocated?”

“Depends on how arrogant he is. But, I just mean if you show signs that you’re ‘wavering’ or something, it might make him try harder and focus on giving himself opportunities to please you. Potentially you could use that to do some snooping in areas that otherwise would be off limits.”

“Should we focus so heavily on him though? I mean, you’re the one who said you didn’t think he was dirty.”

“I don’t. But, I’ve been wrong before.”

Jared had just picked up his slice to take a bite, but then put it back down as he thought about how Russ had yanked them around for weeks.

“I think we shouldn’t rule out that this is an inside job,” Jensen said. “It’s entirely possible that it’s a hacker or someone who has access to their bank accounts, but it just seems like someone at Cohen & Cohen is doing something to get all these people to invest in the same commodities.”

“Yeah, but isn’t that something they would know? Pellegrino and Cohen both said that there isn’t anyone who has worked with one hundred percent of the victims.”

Jensen shrugged one shoulder. “Which means one of them is lying, one of them is the one doing it, or someone is covering their tracks very well.”

“Oh is that all? Well, you’ve narrowed it down so much we might as well wrap this up.”

Jensen slightly rolled his eyes. “Eat your pizza. You’re cranky when you’re hungry.”

“I’m not cranky,” Jared muttered, but tore off a large bite of his pizza with his teeth. He chewed it noisily while Jensen ignored him by messing with his Blackberry.

“Hey. So when are we supposed to get those new Samsung phones?” Jared asked, wiping his mouth with a napkin.

“I don’t know, last year? Which means we probably won’t get them until next year.”

“The exchange will probably be a nightmare.”

“No kidding.” Jensen picked up one of Jared’s flashcards. “So...what is your mother’s maiden name?”

“Waller,” Jared said and took a sip from his perpetually present water bottle.

Jensen bobbed his head. “Good. Now, what’s the difference between a security and a commodity?”

Jared slumped down in his chair. “I hate Mark Pellegrino,” he grouched.

Friday, July 11, 2014

Jensen’s knuckles were white as he clenched the pen in his hand too tightly while he signed his name on the visitor’s log. The guard on the other side of the bulletproof glass accepted the clipboard and Jensen’s driver’s license via a metal drawer that slid between the two sides of the wall. He put a numbered visitor badge in the drawer and slid it back to Jensen. He was instructed to take a seat on one of the hard metal benches in the room until a guard came to get him.

Jensen clipped the visitor badge onto the lapel of his jacket and sat down stiffly on a bench. His hands were in fists where they rested on his thighs and his spine was ramrod straight. He didn’t want to do this; he didn’t want to be here. He wished he could just do what Jared and Misha wanted and stop making these visits, but the possibility that there were other killers out there—potentially still active killers—was more than enough reason for him to suck it up. Of course, if he never got any new information, what was the point of continuing with something that left him feeling depressed and violated for several hours if not days afterwards? Without Misha around to comfort him, the cold, wrong feeling he got from his talks with Russ lingered well past the visits.

“Agent Ackles?”

Jensen looked up and saw a guard he'd never seen before. He stood and shook hands with the man. He looked young and very green.

“My name is Garner. I'll take you to the prisoner now.”

“Thank you, Officer Garner. Will you be the one staying in with us?”

“Oh no,” the young man said with a nervous smile as he opened two doors in succession with different keys. “This is only my second week on the job. I'm still learning the ropes, acting as escort, that sort of thing.

Michelson will be the one in the room with you.”

“I see.”

Jensen discreetly exhaled the tension in his body. Whenever he had his visits with Russ, the man was in full wrist and ankle shackles and then chained to the table and the floor. A guard armed only with a nightstick stood in the room with them, and that room was adjacent to the guards'

office in which anywhere from two to five other guards were only a few feet and a door away. Even still Jensen felt nauseated and unsafe when he was in the small room with Russ. Knowing that an experienced guard would be in the room made him feel marginally better than if the new kid was given this duty. Jensen liked Michelson in particular. He was steady and had a good head on his shoulders. He also took his job very seriously, which Jensen heard was because there had been an incident with an escaped convict out of the prison he used to work at in LA.

Russ was already seated and chained to the table when they arrived and Jensen couldn't ever figure out if Russ getting there before or after him made him more nervous. Jensen swallowed the bile rising in his throat and kept his eyes averted as he walked into the room and took a seat in the metal chair on the other side of the table. He pulled it out to create more distance between him and Russ, but pretended like he only did so that he could cross his legs. Russ just smiled at him with amusement, like he knew how he made Jensen

feel. Well, of course he did. Jensen couldn't hide it and Russ loved it.

Russ wore a navy blue jumpsuit with his prisoner number stitched onto the right breast. His hair was cut short and he'd started shaving once he'd entered prison. It was both easier and harder to deal with him without the beard. On the one hand, it made it easier to pretend this was a different man than the one Jensen had worked with and trusted for months in Elton.

On the other, it made him appear younger and handsomer and even more capable of brainwashing and manipulating people. His brown eyes glittered with delight as they moved over Jensen's face. Jensen placed a notebook on the table and cleared his throat.

"Good afternoon, Little."

"We've talked about this, Jensen."

Jensen made eye contact. "Russ."

"Good man," Russ replied. "That's how adults talk. We make eye contact.

We address each other by our proper names."

"Oh, so you want to do this how mature adults would?"

Russ grinned. "I want to do a lot of things that mature adults do."

Jensen clenched his jaw and held back an angry retort. "Really, Russ?

What happened to everything being about sex is cliché and disappointing?"

Russ laughed. "Well, that was when I was still on a steady diet. They don't fight it here, you know? The little bitches figure out who's strong and offer themselves to you. It's really not any fun."

"You're a 'strong one' inside, Russ? Are you sure the former enforcers for the drug cartels in there with you aren't making you their little bitch?"

Russ' smile didn't waver. "Are you worried about me, Jen?"

Jensen ground his teeth together and actually took the time to count to ten.

Then he exhaled slowly. “Please, Russ, if you won’t call me Agent Ackles, Jensen is my name.”

“Of course,” he said softly.

“Quite frankly your sexual exploits inside don’t interest me—”

“They don’t? Not even a little?”

“The only thing I care about is finding and incarcerating your other disciples. You promised you’d be helpful if I spared you, Russ. You’re not holding up your end of the bargain.”

“I’m not? Hmm. Three arrests and my testimony at their upcoming trials would indicate otherwise.”

“But they’re not the only ones, are they? You told us there were people all over the country. Were you lying, Russ? To make yourself seem big and important since you’ve always been *little* all your life?”

The first flash of irritation flickered in Russ’ eyes.

“They’re out there. I don’t lie.”

Jensen snorted.

“Not anymore. What’s the point now that I’m caught?”

“Because you’re an asshole, Russ. You’re a sociopathic asshole who likes to jerk people around. You’re bored in jail and these visits are the only thing you have in your life that makes you feel like you have something still worth living for. I frankly don’t care about your mental wellbeing. If we only do this to keep you amused, I’m going to stop. Our little chats don’t amuse me and you’re not being useful to me. I see no reason to continue

coming to see you.”

“Really? You think I’m that dumb? You think you can fool me into believing you don’t want to be here with me? That you don’t want to know why you’re so special. Why you were chosen by someone like me?”

For the first time, Jensen felt the tiniest flicker of pity for the man in chains across from him. He let all of the contempt and sarcasm drain out of his features and met Russ’ eyes.

“No, Russ, I really don’t care.”

Jensen stood up and Russ moved, causing his chains to clink loudly.

Michelson took a step forward, and Russ stopped moving.

“Wait, Jensen, wait!”

“What is it, Russ?”

“You keep coming because you think I can give you useful information about unsolved cases.”

It was a statement and not a question, so Jensen didn’t respond.

“That’s all you want? Information and you’ll keep coming to see me?”

Jensen felt a wave of dread pass through him. It was pretty much the same deal that had had him visiting Russ ever since he’d been transferred to Virginia. It wasn’t something he felt that he could turn down, but then again for the past few weeks Russ hadn’t given him anything useful.

“Not just any information, Russ. You have to give me the kind of information that will lead to an arrest. Or to the recovery of any missing persons. Or to solving a cold case. No riddles, no clues to follow. Just facts that get results. That will make this worth it. Nothing else will.”

Russ sat back in his chair and his hands fell to his lap. He was moving his arms minutely and Jensen had the sneaking suspicion that he was massaging an erection.

“Sit down, Jensen,” Russ commanded softly.

“I told you—”

“Sit down or you get nothing.”

Jensen glanced at Michelson; he could tell that the man was judging him for letting the psychopathic killer boss him around even this much. He repressed a sigh and the embarrassment he felt at having someone witness this, but he sat back down in the chair.

“I’ll offer you a deal,” Russ said.

“That’s not how this works, Russ,” Jensen said, getting exasperated. “I’m here. That’s the deal. That’s all you get. If you want me to keep coming back, you have to give me useful information in return.”

“What I am getting out of it if we don’t talk, Jensen? You come in, I tell you what you want to know, and then you leave—that’s not giving me anything. That’s not enough to make me want to rat out my disciples. Your pretty face simply isn’t enough. I’m never going to get parole or time off for good behavior. I’m here until I die; I know that, so there’s nothing else I need from you. You got the death penalty off the table and that’s why I gave you the DC disciples. But I have no reason to sell out those others who trust and love me if I’m not getting anything for it.”

“What do you want from me?” Jensen snapped, his carefully won control fraying at the edges.

Russ smiled and Jensen shuddered.

“What I want from you, Jensen...mm, I probably can’t have that. At least not until you admit that you want it too.”

Jensen clenched his hands together and his whole body tightened with discomfort.

“But, if I can’t have that—I want every other part of you. You’re going to talk to me about your life.”

“No. No way. I’m not talking about my family or my job or even my fucking dog. I’m not going to do that.”

“You got a dog?”

Jensen let out a noise of aggravation, unable to continue repressing his reactions to Russ.

“Russ—”

“I’ll make it easy for you today, Jensen. I’ll give you some very important information, and all you have to do is tell me about your dog. Nothing more.”

“That’s it,” Jensen stated firmly.

Russ sat back in his chair again, but his hands were above the table at least.

“That’s it.”

“She’s a Weimaraner.”

“Those are the grey ones?”

“Yes. She’s about four years old and her name is Charlie.”

“Charlie?” Russ sighed. “I hate when people use gendered names with the wrong sex just to make it sound cool or edgy.”

Russ gave him a disappointed look. Jensen almost punched him.

“I didn’t name her. And I think Charlie is a reference to the Army code for the letter C. She was an Army dog and served in Afghanistan for a couple of years.”

“Ohhh. She sounds more impressive than people who go after the fact to clean up and take all the credit for saving the world.”

Jensen knew that was a slight aimed at Misha, but he creased his brow like he

was mildly confused.

“I guess,” he replied. “She’s a little antsy because of her time overseas, but she’s a good dog. I haven’t had her long so I don’t have much to say about her.”

“Why did you decide to get her?”

Jensen hesitated. He didn’t know how much information Russ could mine from this story, but he knew this simple request for information about his dog was a way for him to learn more intimate details of Jensen’s life. He considered lying and saying “just because,” but he wanted to see how serious Russ was about the information exchange.

“My ex-girlfriend had put us on a wait list to adopt a former military dog.

The wait list was so long that we had broken up and I’d forgotten about it by the time they called me. I went out to visit the place and decided to take Charlie home.”

“Ex-girlfriend. You cheated on her with the little thief?”

For a moment Jensen didn’t know what Russ was referencing. Then he remembered the fading, white brand over Misha’s heart. His blood ran cold and he squeezed his left hand into a fist so hard he heard something pop.

“No. We had been broken up for six months before I went to Elton.”

“But the thief turned you gay?”

“No. I’m bisexual.”

“What’s the thief up to?”

“That has nothing to do with my dog, Russ.”

“What’s the thief up to, Jensen?”

“I don’t know,” he hissed. “He dumped me.”

The hard look on Russ’ face melted into pleased amusement. “Really?

Man, I knew he was stupid, but that’s ridiculous. I mean, I could see you kicking him to the curb once you found out what he’s really like, but I can’t imagine he wouldn’t cling to you like a parasite for as long as he could.

Maybe he felt—used. Unclean. Maybe he felt it would be wrong for someone as pure as you to touch him anymore.”

Jensen was on his feet before he realized it and he just barely managed to get his body to turn and press his hands onto the wall rather than strangle Russ. He could be lying. Probably was lying. It’s what he did. But the implication that he’d done something to Misha, that he had violated him, hurt him—it was more than he could bear. He turned around and was somewhat gratified that Russ’ eyes widened in mild fear at Jensen’s expression.

“Still hung up on him, huh? Just find some tail and you’ll get over it.”

“Give me something useful or I’m leaving and never coming back, Russ. I won’t even attend your trial.”

Russ held up his cuffed hands in a placating gesture.

“Okay. You earned it. Do you remember that on the night of Marissa Mueller’s death, Leanne Woliczak was killed by her boyfriend? The man the locals so colorfully referred to as the Squirrel Licker?”

Jensen didn’t remember that the deaths had occurred on the same night, but he did remember hearing the Squirrel Licker scream in the holding cell for hours. He gave a curt nod.

“Squirrel Licker kept saying he was framed, didn’t he? Guy wasn’t lying.”

Jensen slumped against the wall. “What did you do?”

“Me? Nothing. I was at the Mueller scene, remember? But I had Hannigan do it to make up for the sniveling mess he made at the police station over his

slut's death."

Gilbert Hannigan, the Elton disciple, had been having an affair with Sarah Vanderpool which resulted in Russ killing and dismembering her. Jensen remembered it perfectly.

"If that's true, why did you tell him to change the pattern? Why frame someone and not let the Angel Slayer take credit?"

"Hannigan needed to be taught a lesson." Russ shrugged. "I didn't like Leanne and putting the Squirrel Licker behind bars was, quite frankly, doing everyone a favor."

Jensen looked at Russ' face carefully, looking for any signs of deception.

"That's the truth?"

"Ask the Elton PD about the ligature marks on Leanne's body. Her legs and arms were tied crossed behind her body. The accelerant used to start the fire was poured in a circle around her body then on her hair. The fire was started in her hair."

Jensen straightened against the wall. "You could have read the file. You still worked there."

Russ shrugged again. "Why would I lie about this?"

"Because it won't actually give us anything. Because you could pretend to be helpful and then laugh that you helped set a guilty, crazed, squirrel-licking murderer free."

Russ contemplated for a moment then made an "a-ha" face. "I did read the report on Leanne's death just to make sure Hannigan hadn't left any evidence behind. He was the worst disciple I've ever had, honestly. Dumb as a box of hair. Squeamish. Was more interested in raping the victims than punishing them. It's why I had him do the male victims. To temper some of that desire. Didn't always work, of course."

"Russ."

“Right. In the report it mentioned that during the autopsy, Kim discovered some marks on her neck underneath the burned skin. It didn’t say anything about a pattern or meaning. They might have figured it out by now, or maybe if they look again they’ll realize that it makes really blocky letters spelling out ‘ardilla.’”

“Ar-dee-ya?”

“It’s Spanish for squirrel.”

Jensen made a doubtful face.

“I told you Hannigan was a moron.”

Jensen chewed lightly on his bottom lip as he observed Russ. He was calm, not fidgeting, and making eye contact. Michelson cleared his throat.

“I think time is up,” the guard said.

Russ remained seated as two other guards came into the room to unlock the chains from the table and escort him back to his cell.

“See you next week, Jensen.”

“What will you give me next week? Why should I come?”

Russ pretended to think by tilting his head up and making a “thinking” face. As the guards led him out of the room he said over his shoulder,

“Look up the Lubbock Lady Killer. Name the media dubbed a killer in Lubbock, Texas. It might make for an interesting cold case.”

Jensen exhaled shakily as the door was shut behind him. He didn’t need to look up the Lubbock Lady Killer murders. He’d heard about them when he’d been at the academy. Those kills were old. Russ wouldn’t have been more than eighteen or nineteen when they had occurred. They had been gruesome, but there hadn’t been any angel imagery or theme of divine punishment. Then

again, he said that he'd hidden the brands under the victim's tongues most of the time. The Lubbock Lady Killer murders were still one of the biggest unsolved mysteries in the country. Russ could be yanking his chain, but the possibility that he could have some information on the cold case was more than enough to get Jensen to come see him again next Friday. He was just petrified at what Russ would ask for in exchange.

After he turned in his visitor badge and had his driver's license returned, he asked one of the officers if there was a room he could make a private call.

They led him into one of the rooms where prisoners met with their lawyers, so there were no two way mirrors or recording devices. He sat down heavily in one of the chairs at the banged up table and thumbed through his contacts on his phone. He found Ty Olsson's number and tapped it to connect.

"Who is this?" Ty said in lieu of a greeting. "This is a private number. If you want the main police station office, you need to call—"

"Ty, Ty! It's Jensen. Ackles. From the FBI."

There was a long pause. "Jensen? Well, it's been a while since I've heard from you."

"Yeah."

"There's not a problem with Little's case, is there?" he asked, tone suddenly full of trepidation.

"No, no, nothing to worry about there. He's still incarcerated and his trial date has been set for October."

"Still won't plead guilty?"

"No. He wants to drag this out as long as possible."

"I see. Do you need something from us? All of the evidence was transferred to your office already."

Jensen sighed and rubbed his forehead. "No, this isn't about the Angel Slayer

case at all, really. I've been talking with Russ, trying to get him to tell us about other murders or disciples he's had around the country."

"How's that going?" Ty asked dryly.

"Well, depends on his mood, I guess. Sometimes he's helpful, most times he's not. But, uh, I have to ask you about an incident that happened when I was there."

"What incident would that be? You need someone to back you up with the Feds regarding your—thing—with Misha?"

"What?" Jensen blushed. "Uh, no. That's not a problem."

"Glad to hear it. Have you heard from him? I don't want to alarm you, but he just up and left one day. I mean I understand, I wouldn't be able to live here anymore if all that had happened to me, but he kind of just disappeared."

Jensen was stunned. Misha hadn't told anyone in Elton where he was going or what he was doing? That seemed odd that he'd cut ties with Elton so completely after living there his whole life.

"I, uh, yeah, I've heard from him. He's living...down here now."

"Down there," Ty repeated and Jensen could hear the question in his voice.

Jensen cleared his throat. "With me."

"Ah. I see. Well, I'm glad to know he's okay." Ty paused. "He is...okay, right?"

"Yeah, yeah. He's good. It's just, it was kind of hectic when he moved in and my family was a little resistant to the idea of him moving in so suddenly and he got into the FBI Academy and that process kind of took over his life and he's at Quantico now, so it probably just slipped his mind to let you guys know what was going on."

"I see," Ty said in a neutral voice. "As long as I know he's okay, I can pass

on the message to everyone else. So, if not about Misha, why did you call?”

“Um. Right. While I was there, the, uh—I never knew his real name. The Squirrel Licker?”

“Chad Lindberg.”

“Right. Well, he was arrested for killing his girlfriend and setting her on fire.”

“Yes,” Ty said carefully.

“Does he still maintain his innocence?”

Ty inhaled so deeply Jensen could hear it over the phone. “He does. He even agreed to go back on his medicine so he could talk calmly with us. He

claims that someone roofied his drink and left him passed out in the backseat of his car while Leanne was murdered. That’s why he doesn’t have an alibi.”

“Did you—did anyone ever determine if the marks on Leanne’s neck meant anything?”

“How did you—never mind. Kim and one of the techs did have an argument about whether they were letters or not. Kim said no because why would he write armadillo on the back of her neck?”

Jensen sighed and slouched down. “Ardilla, not armadillo.”

“What?”

“Russ told me that Hannigan carved ‘ardilla’ into her neck. It’s Spanish for squirrel.”

There was silence on the other end of the line. Jensen waited, and then checked the phone to see if they were still connected.

“Ty? You still—”

“That shit pissing manure pile! Little did this?!”

“I think Hannigan did. But under Russ’ orders.”

“Son of a sour-titted bitch!”

Jensen quirked an eyebrow. “Yeah. All that and more.”

Ty cursed up a blue storm for nearly ninety seconds before he calmed down enough to say, “I’m going to have to make some phone calls and get some people on this immediately. We’ll have to get a statement from Little. I’ll call you about setting that up next week.”

“Okay.”

“Shit a brick.” Ty sighed heavily. “Thank you, Jensen. I know dealing with him can’t be easy, but if Chad is innocent...”

“It’s worth it,” Jensen said.

“Alright. Take care. I’ll reach out to you next week.”

“Okay. Talk to you then.”

They disconnected and Jensen stayed sitting in the chair. He wished that potentially rescuing an innocent man would be enough to make him shrug off the wrongness that seeped into his skin like a cold fog, but all he felt were phantom fingers tightening their hold on him.

The feeling didn’t lessen any during the drive home and Charlie must have sensed he was off because she wouldn’t leave her corner to greet him when he got home. He did his best to put on a calm, friendly voice, but in the end he had to drag her out by the collar to get her moving. Once she was on her feet and out in the open, she seemed aware that she needed to go outside and meekly followed him down to the front of the building. He didn’t even attempt to take her for a walk around the block; he just let her do her business on the strip of grass out front and then left it there when he realized he was out of disposable poo bags. A part of him was actually hoping someone would confront him about it because he was spoiling for a fight, but no one did. He considered calling Misha, but considering his mood and the reason

for it, all they would do is fight and that would ruin his plans for the weekend.

As he was unlocking the door to his apartment, he glanced down and noticed Charlie's tail giving the barest of wags even though she was still hiding behind his legs. He followed her gaze down the hall and saw his neighbor's kid getting home from school. It was after six o'clock; kids today really had too much going on with school, extracurricular clubs, and work. However, Kathryn seemed to take it all in stride and was responsible to boot.

"Hey, Kathryn," Jensen called out.

Kathryn turned and pushed a lock of blonde hair behind her ear. She smiled when she saw him and walked over to reach out a tentative hand to Charlie.

"Hi, Mr. Ackles. How is Charlie today?"

"Ah, well, a little nervous today. Probably because I'm in a weird mood."

Kathryn looked up with a concerned expression. "Are you okay?"

"Yeah, yeah. You know, just sometimes work feels like work."

Kathryn laughed. "Yeah. I like school and everything, but sometimes I'm just like, no."

Jensen smiled. "Exactly. Oh, I'm glad I caught you. I'm going to visit Misha this weekend. Just a short overnight trip. I was wondering if you could feed and walk Charlie while I'm gone. Same payment as last time."

"Yeah, no problem. I'll be here. Although, what time are you leaving tomorrow? I have a swim meet in the morning and won't be done until noon. So, I wouldn't be able to take her out after 5:30 or before 1:00."

Jensen grimaced. "I don't know how you do it. Wake up at the ass crack of dawn to go jump in cold water."

Kathryn just grinned.

“Okay, well, I’ll take her out around nine or ten and leave then. So if you don’t get back until one she’ll be fine.”

“Alright, sounds good. I’ll take her for a walk around noon on Sunday, so give me a call if you won’t be back in time for dinner.”

“Will do. You’re a lifesaver.” Jensen gave her a wink and she blushed as she rolled her eyes and walked back to her door.

“Goodnight, Mr. Ackles.”

“Goodnight, Kathryn,” Jensen said with a chuckle.

Saturday, July 12, 2014

Misha hopped up and grabbed a hold of the pull up bar. He adjusted his grip a couple of times, then crossed his legs at the ankle and began a set of

twenty pull ups.

One, two, three, he could feel his body already relaxing into the rhythm.

Four, five, six, muscle memory began to take over and his brain could start to shut down. Seven, eight, nine, he felt the burn begin in his muscles, giving his mind something other than his life to focus on. Ten, eleven, twelve, how many more weeks until he could see Jensen again? Thirteen, fourteen—he could force his body to be under control. Seventeen, nineteen...his control and nobody else’s. If he could just get strong enough, fast enough, he could forget it all. He could get over it. Because there was nothing to get over. There was fucking jack all to get over. Why was he so pathetic? Nothing had happened. Jensen had saved him.

Look at you. Just as sick as I am. What would Jensen think if he knew?

Misha gasped and his eyes flew open. His sweaty palms slipped on the bar and the momentum of his weight coming down bore him to the ground with a loud thump. Misha’s quiet hiss was his only verbal acknowledgement of the pain he was feeling in his buttocks and back. He felt a hand on his shoulder.

“Misha! You okay?”

Misha looked up into the concerned eyes of his roommate. They had decided to go to the gym together before stopping by the cafeteria for lunch.

“Yeah, yeah.” He patted his backside. “Plenty of padding. I just wouldn’t recommend trying it.”

Gil smiled and held out a hand for him to grasp so that he could stand up.

“Did your arms give out? You must have been on like your fortieth pull up.”

“Really? I lost count.”

Gil’s concerned expression was coming back.

“I was just in the zone, you know?” Misha preempted any more questions after his wellbeing. “Then my hands got sweaty and I slipped off the bar.”

Gil smiled. “Yeah, been there. I did gymnastics in college and I didn’t get enough chalk on my hands before a rotation on the parallel bars. Totally slid right off and almost crashed into the judges’ tables.”

Misha smiled. “I hope they gave you a ten.”

Gil smiled wryly. “They did not. Come on,” he said, clapping Misha on the shoulder with a comforting hand. “Let’s shower and get some grub.

We can still make it back to the dorm to change before the study session.”

Misha groaned and made a face as he followed Gil to the locker room. “I don’t know why I’m putting myself through this. I’m an old man. I should be sitting at a desk eating donuts.”

Gil snorted. “Please. If your sex life with your boyfriend is in any way as athletic as it sounds over the phone, you better make sure you keep doing your cardio.”

Misha laughed and ignored the heat flaming through his face. He really

couldn't believe how good a sport Gil was about his highly inappropriate conversations with Jensen when he thought he was being quiet.

"I didn't mean the exercise, I meant the studying."

"Sure you did. Now don't follow me into my stall."

"I wouldn't. Not all non-straight men are so horny they go after any guy—
oh. Oh, I see. I'm in your stall. Apologies. Can I borrow your shampoo?"

Gil rolled his eyes but handed over a bottle that had some cheap brand of shampoo and conditioner in one. Misha squirted some into the palm of his hand and then handed the bottle back to his roommate. He found an empty stall and got the curtain pulled shut and the water turned on with one hand.

He held his hand awkwardly as he undressed, only dribbling a little bit onto the floor. Then he held the remaining shampoo out of the spray as he allowed the lukewarm water to cascade over his tired muscles. It wasn't as nice as the shower he shared with Jensen (and it certainly wasn't as nice as that luxury shower in his parents' former house), but it was good enough for now.

Good enough for now.

That had become his new motto. He wondered what would happen when either or both of those things weren't true anymore.

Misha shook himself from those thoughts. If he dwelled on what would happen if—and he could never quite bring himself to fill in the if—he more often than not found himself in a funk that had gotten him in trouble twice already with the academy instructors. In New Agent Class, no one was allowed to have an off day. You followed your schedule and your instructors' orders and you did it with enthusiasm.

Misha lathered up his hair and used the residual suds to soap down his body and wash away the sweat. After a quick, but thorough rinse, he changed into his spare workout outfit—regulation grey top, blue bottom—and waited for Gil to finish. The young man was singing softly and Misha never teased him

for it because he thought that would make him too self-conscious to keep doing it. He had a nice voice, and Misha enjoyed listening to it. It was a way to feel like he wasn't trapped at Quantico all the time. He knew that was a bad mentality to have about his situation, but he couldn't help but feel that he wasn't the same person who went through the police academy in his twenties. Then, the militaristic style of training hadn't bothered him; now he felt like he was just going through the motions until he could escape.

"You okay, Misha?"

Misha started as his vision cleared and he looked up at Gil who was not only out of the shower, but dry and dressed.

"Yeah. Geez. I must be more tired than I thought. Maybe I should skip the study session and take a nap."

"Well, you can probably afford to. I've just never been good when it comes to written tests, you know? I have to scrape and scour for every single point."

"Don't worry," Misha said, giving him a cheeky smile. "So long as you know which way to point your gun, you'll be fine."

Gil scoffed. "I'm not trying to be a New York City cop, here."

Misha laughed, and then shushed Gil. "Quiet. I don't want Donnie hearing you talk shit about New York. Last time I said something about it I got a twenty minute lecture on how awesome the city is. His accent actually got thicker."

Gil laughed. "Is that possible?"

"You want to find out, you go right ahead."

"I think I'll pass."

They laughed at each other's stories of their experiences with their fellow new agents as they walked across campus to the cafeteria. The food was decent, but repetitive. That afternoon Misha couldn't even bring himself to eat what was "freshly" prepared and made himself a salad and sandwich at

the self-serve bar. He honored his promise to Gil to make him leave before he succumbed to his desire to get some of the soft serve ice milk even though he kind of wanted some himself. Their dormitory was the closest one to the cafeteria, so their walk to their room was a short one.

They took the stairs to the fifth floor (because Gil was a sadist) and Misha was pleasantly surprised to find that he was less and less winded every time he did it. The hall was empty except for one figure in jeans and a T-shirt about midway down near their door. Misha was focused on Gil's story about his niece, so he didn't register the shape of the back and those bowlegs right away. As soon as he did he burst into a sprint and Gil let out a soft noise of surprise behind him. Jensen must have heard his feet pounding on the floor because he turned in just enough time for Misha to throw his arms around his neck and for his boyfriend's arms to encircle him.

Jensen laughed as he stumbled back and leaned into the wall next to them to steady his balance. Misha couldn't stop moving his hands over Jensen's wide back—from the gentle slope above his ass up to the nape of his neck, his fingers sliding in the fine hairs and making Jensen shiver. He turned his face into Jensen's neck and inhaled his soft, masculine scent.

"I'm so happy you're here," Misha breathed. "God, I knew I missed you, but...shit. I *missed* you."

"Same here," Jensen replied, his hands still and resting at an appropriate place on his mid back. Misha had no time for propriety and slid his hands back down and plunged them into the back pockets of Jensen's jeans, under his phone and wallet and gave his cute ass a little squeeze. Jensen let out a huff of laughter and gently pushed him back. He made eye contact and nodded, indicating something behind them. Misha turned and saw Gil.

"Oh, Gil, this is—"

"Jensen, right?" Gil interrupted, offering Jensen a hand and a smile. Jensen shook hands with him. "I believe I've heard that name screamed once or twice."

Misha grinned as Jensen flushed red. He cleared his throat.

“Sorry about that. He always says he’s alone.”

“I do not,” Misha said.

“It’s alright,” Gil laughed. Then made an odd face. “Mostly. Anyway.

I’m going to change clothes, and then I’m going to go to the study session.

I should be gone for a couple hours, but put a sock on the door in case I come back early, okay?”

Jensen looked down at the floor, so Misha gave him an affirmative answer.

They stayed in the hall while Gil changed and Misha appreciated the fact that his embarrassment couldn’t stop Jensen from brushing his thumb over his cheekbone. Misha turned his head and caught Jensen’s thumb with his teeth, giving him a look from underneath his lashes.

“Hang on, babe,” Jensen scolded him teasingly.

Misha let go and waited patiently, utterly behaving himself (minus one hand which had migrated to Jensen’s back pocket again) until Gil gave them an amused smile and hurried back down the hallway to the stairs. Misha dragged his teeth over his lower lip as he backed into his room, pulling Jensen after him, and debating what he wanted to do first. Jensen actually decided for him by grabbing his face and kissing him hard. It was just a

press of lips to make contact and they both groaned—just from a closed mouth, slightly unpleasant kiss. Misha took another step back and stumbled over the corner of Gil’s bed. They lost their balance and fell in increments of knees and butts to the floor—Jensen’s back pressed against Misha’s bed and Misha straddling his lap. And that was good enough for Misha. He kissed Jensen for real and pushed his exercise shorts and briefs down enough to free his half-hard dick.

“Mm, Mish, not complaining—ahhnn, fuck. But um. Bed?”

Misha kissed Jensen's chin, then his jaw, then his neck as he used his hand to roughly pump himself to full hardness.

"Thought you said you were going to jump me and fuck me on the floor of my dorm," Misha murmured.

"Mm, well, that's hot in theory but we'll kill our backs."

"Shh," Misha whispered against his lips and slipped two fingers into his mouth. Jensen sucked the digits, getting them wet, and then Misha returned his hand to his cock. He started jacking himself hard and fast and sat up on his knees so he could look down at Jensen. Jensen's eyes were wide as he watched him. Misha painted his thumb over Jensen's lower lip, and then slid his hand around to his neck. Jensen licked his lips and Misha moaned softly as he stared at the man he loved and touched himself. He slid his hand up onto Jensen's scalp, grabbing a hold of his short hair.

Jensen let out a noise between a gasp and a hiss as Misha yanked his head back and forced him to remain motionless while Misha pleased himself on top of him. Jensen's breathing grew shallow, mirroring Misha's. His pupils were dilated and Misha could feel the bulge of his erection when his knuckles grazed it on the downward strokes. The fact that Jensen was so turned on only ramped up Misha's arousal. He pumped his fist harder and let out a small noise of want as Jensen whined desperately in the back of his throat. Misha's grip on Jensen's hair tightened as he felt the first wave of his orgasm hit him. He kept his eyes open and breathed harshly as he saw his come soak into Jensen's T-shirt. He finally gave in and closed his eyes to the sensations overwhelming his body, his hands loosening their grips.

Just as he stopped moving, Jensen let out a needy sound and grabbed

Misha's hips. He pulled him down so that Misha's ass cradled his erection and ground up into his body. And then he was coming too. Misha could tell it wasn't a mind blowing kind of orgasm, but that kind of throbbing, easy pleasure that comes from just barely getting enough stimulation to tip over the edge. Jensen exhaled and let his head fall back on the mattress.

Misha settled his weight in Jensen's lap and waited for his boyfriend to open

his eyes. When he did he smiled lazily at Misha.

“Hi.”

Misha chuckled. “Hi.”

“Fuck, that was...”

“Sorry,” Misha said, feeling a little embarrassed. “I just—I don’t even know what came over me.”

Jensen rubbed Misha’s arms. “No, don’t apologize. You were fucking incredible.”

Misha’s face heated as he realized how crazed he must have looked. He reached a hand up and threaded his fingers gently through Jensen’s hair, rubbing his scalp.

“I didn’t hurt you, did I?”

“Not in any way I didn’t like,” Jensen grinned accompanied with an eyebrow waggle.

Misha groan-laughed and plopped a hand on Jensen’s face. “Stop.”

Jensen grasped his wrist gently and pulled his hand down. “Misha, I was right there with you. I didn’t just want you, I *needed* you.”

“Yeah, but, you didn’t get anything!”

“I came, didn’t I? In my only pair of jeans I might add. Oh, I probably should get my bag; it’s still in the hall.”

“Are you going somewhere?”

“Nope. I came to get you. I’m going to take you to a motel on the side of the highway and fuck you all night long.”

“Ah. Ours is a relationship founded on romance.”

Jensen grinned and Misha answered his smile, leaning down to touch their foreheads.

“You don’t have any mandatory training this weekend, do you?” Jensen asked.

“Nope. I’m all yours.”

“All mine. I love that.”

“So do I. Let me change clothes and grab a toothbrush.”

“Okay.”

They remained sitting, hands roaming reverently over each other. Jensen tilted his head up to kiss Misha’s lips.

“Gonna have to move, Mish.”

Misha sighed. “I know.”

He forced himself to his feet and offered a hand to Jensen to help him up.

They leaned into each other’s space for a long, reacquainting kiss. Then Jensen pulled back and gave Misha’s butt a slap.

“Get moving. You got any tissues I can use to clean out my pants?”

“On the nightstand.”

“Of course.”

Misha pulled his clothes off and searched through his wardrobe for jeans and a T-shirt, completely at ease with his nakedness around Jensen.

“Hey, can I actually leave?” Misha asked, hopping into his jeans sans underwear since he figured he wouldn’t be wearing clothes for long

anyway. “I didn’t fill out one of those forms for permission to leave campus.”

“I know Dan,” Jensen said, making a face as he stuck a hand down his pants and presumably cleaned up the mess in his underwear, but with Jensen, he could very well be going commando. “He put you on the off campus list for me.”

“Good. Because I was going with you whether I was technically allowed to or not.”

Jensen smiled, tossed the used tissue in the trash, and then buttoned up his jeans. He made a face as he looked at his shirt.

“Can I borrow a shirt?” Jensen asked.

Misha had anticipated his request and had already pulled out his AC/DC t-shirt which was big on him and would probably fit Jensen pretty well. He tossed the shirt to him and felt a warm, pleasant sensation in his belly as Jensen donned his clothes.

“We ready to go?” Jensen asked as Misha zipped up a few toiletries into plastic bag and then sat on the bed to put on his socks and shoes.

“Yep. Just let me get my shoes on.”

Jensen leaned against Misha’s desk and Misha heard paper rustle as he picked something up. He finished tying his second shoe and turned to look at Jensen. He had a smile on his face as he read something in one of Misha’s notebooks. Misha sucked in a breath as he recognized the notebook and vaulted across the bed to snatch it out of his hands. Jensen saw him coming and moved easily out of the way, holding him at bay with one hand.

“You’re a poet, baby?” Jensen smirked as he continued to read.

“It’s not—” Misha reached for the book and was denied. “It’s just for when I get bored. It’s not like a thing or something.”

“Through glass that squeaks and over bricks that dart/Stairs and glass and stairs/Past a pit, past a door and a door and a door closed./Through more glass and more stairs/A straight, meandering path and a crossing/The

destination—a hollow, empty town.”

Misha frowned and scrabbled for the book again. Jensen let him take it.

“Is that about the walk from Jefferson to Hogan’s Alley?”

Misha looked up and met his eyes. “You can tell?”

“Well, it is an obnoxious walk.”

Misha smiled and closed the book. “I told you; sometimes I get bored.”

Jensen pretended to pout. “So, you write about walking around on campus, and not me?”

Misha held the book behind his back. “On that page.”

Jensen grinned and advanced on Misha. “Am I in there?”

“No!”

Misha laughed as Jensen lunged at him and they fell onto his bed, grappling for the notebook. Misha took the opportunity when his arm was free to throw the notebook across the room. He grabbed Jensen by the shoulders when he tried to go after it and pulled him back onto the bed.

“I’m going to read it eventually,” Jensen said, but allowed himself to settle back against Misha’s chest.

“Maybe. Maybe you won’t want to after I scare you off with what I need to tell you.”

Misha was surprised when Jensen’s body went completely rigid. He pulled out of Misha’s embrace and turned to face him. His expression was serious, but open.

“What do you need to tell me? You know you can tell me anything, right?

You know that I want to know. That I want to help you carry any burdens

or...”

Jensen trailed off and Misha was confused for only a moment longer.

Russ. Jensen was talking about Russ. Like he would tell Jensen anything about what had happened that night. He shoved him playfully on the shoulder.

“Why so serious?” he asked. “I meant it as a joke, like I would scare you off with talk of marriage.”

Jensen sat back even farther, breaking contact. Okay, so maybe talk of marriage would scare him off. His face was neutral as he looked at Misha.

“I—Why would we discuss that?”

“Office assignments came out.”

Jensen’s eyebrows shot up. “Already? I thought they didn’t do that until graduation.”

“They changed the policy, and they told us all where we were placed. And you know I ranked everything on the east coast even remotely close to DC as high as I could—”

“And?”

“And I’ve been assigned to New York.”

Jensen let out a long sigh. “Yeah. We knew that was a possibility.”

“Yeah. So, I talked to the HR people about what it takes to get a hardship transfer or to be assigned to a specific office, and a relationship isn’t enough.”

“Yeah...” Jensen said, like he already knew all this information. Misha suspected he did.

“It has to be legal in some way. I’m not even on the lease for your apartment, so we have nothing legally binding us together.”

“Right,” Jensen agreed carefully. Misha could see his eyes jumping around as he studied his face. “But...if we had a legally binding relationship pending...”

“If we were married or had plans to be married within ninety days of graduation, I could request to be assigned to WFO.”

Misha could see that Jensen was trying to be very careful and neutral with his expressions, which was driving Misha nuts because he couldn’t tell if he was trying to cover his fear that Misha would ask for the marriage or his excitement that he wanted it.

“So...” Misha said, trying to draw Jensen out. He wouldn’t take the bait.

Misha huffed out a breath. “So, should we get married? Or at least engaged? I don’t want to marry you for purely logistical purposes. I mean, being able to stay near you and be afforded certain legal rights would be nice, but that’s not why people should get married.”

“I agree,” Jensen said, still giving off nothing.

Misha scooted forward and looked Jensen hard in the eyes. “Everything about our relationship is unorthodox and moving very fast. But I meant what I said that first morning in your apartment. I think you meant what you said. This is it.” He waved a hand between them. “This is everything.”

Jensen nodded, a smile finally pulling at the corners of his mouth. Misha relaxed slightly.

“So, when I ask you to marry me *now*, it is because I need it to get an assignment close to you, but I wouldn’t ask at all if I didn’t really want it.”

Jensen’s smile widened and turned a little smug. “You asking me to make an honest man out of you, Mish?”

Misha narrowed his eyes. “Reconsidering it now.”

Jensen laughed and moved forward enough so that he could lean in and kiss Misha. “We should get married. For a lot of reasons.”

Misha nodded and kissed him back. “We should.”

“Alright then,” Jensen said and stood up. He held out a hand for Misha and they laced their fingers together as they stood in the small dormitory room at the FBI Academy in Quantico. “Now, I think it’s time we headed out so we can get pancakes and I can make love to my fiancé tonight.”

Misha grinned and poked Jensen in his side. “Make love? So sappy!”

“Says the poet,” Jensen shot back.

Misha smiled and leaned against Jensen as they made their way to the door.

“Fiancé,” he mused aloud.

“But don’t think we’re having some sort of big ceremony,” Jensen warned.

“Justice of the peace; a quick in and out.”

“So, like when we have sex,” Misha said innocently.

Jensen glared at him. “Careful, Mish. You know how I love to prove you wrong.”

Misha smiled and nuzzled his nose against Jensen’s cheek as he whispered,

“I do.”



Week 2

Monday, July 14, 2014

Jensen clicked through the Excel spreadsheet Osric had made for him, looking for patterns or anything hinky that stood out as odd. He was impressed with the kid's data mining skills, and felt a little bad for thinking

of the twenty-seven year old as a kid when he himself was barely over five years older than him. Osric just exuded such a sense of happiness and excitement about life that was beaten out of most people by the time they reached adulthood.

Jensen shook himself and scrolled back in the sheet as he realized he'd let his mind wander and hadn't been paying attention to what he had been staring at. He glanced at the time on the computer screen. He made a face of disbelief when he saw that it was only 10:30 in the morning. It felt like he'd already been at work for hours. Clearly it was just going to be one of those days that dragged on and on. The cause was probably the perfect weekend he'd spent wrapped around Misha, and now he was back to a reality where he might not see him again until he graduated. Six more weeks. It was nothing really. Less than two months. About the life span of a butterfly. He had his niece to thank for that particularly random

knowledge.

"Jensen!"

Jensen jumped and banged his elbow on the arm rest of his desk chair as he instinctually went for the gun on his hip. He cursed softly and shook the sting out of his arm. He glared up at Osric's grinning face. His dress shirt was an alarming shade of pink.

"Morning, Jensen."

"Osric. Any particular reason why you're popping up like a goddamn Whac-A-Mole?"

"I was just wondering if the spreadsheet is what you were looking for. I was here all weekend mining that information from those files. Though surprisingly, it was all very well organized and pretty easy to find the important bits."

"I appreciate the effort. You didn't happen to notice anything while you were pulling it out, did you? There's so much here and counting how many times a name is mentioned is exhausting."

Osric gave him a “are you really that old?” look. “Seriously? Please tell me you’re not doing this by hand.”

He leaned over and looked at the notepad next to Jensen which was full of tally counts next to names. Osric groaned softly and took over Jensen’s mouse.

“Jensen, the software can do this for you. See this tab called data? Click that and then click this button called ‘filters.’ Then uncheck everything and check the name you care about and...voila! This dude is mentioned in twelve files.”

“Ohhhhhhh.”

“Jensen, no. I know you’re better with technology than that.”

Jensen shrugged. Osric sighed like a put upon grandchild explaining an iPad to his grandfather. He pulled up another office chair and sat down next to Jensen.

“Let me give you a crash course in Microsoft Excel.”

“Thank you, Osric,” Jensen intoned teasingly.

“Yeah, yeah. I don’t know how they let you people carry guns.”

Jensen smiled, and then focused as Osric began rapidly clicking buttons and tabs and formulas. Thirty minutes later he was still clueless how to do anything but the filter function and was rescued by SAC Kripke himself.

Osric went still as a hunted mouse in tall grass. The SACs had the same kind of stature as a colonel in the Army, second only to the general.

“Good morning, Jensen.”

“Eric. This is Osric Chau; he’s an analyst embedded on CR-2.”

Eric shook his hand and Osric still looked nervous as hell.

“Nice to meet you. I hope you don’t mind if I interrupt you; I’d like to speak with you, Jensen, in my office.”

“Um, sure.”

“Is now a good time?”

Jensen knew that wasn’t really a question. “Yes, of course. I can come up now.”

“Great. Can you grab your partner too?”

“Yes...” Now Jensen was a little nervous.

Eric smiled. “Relax. This isn’t about your current case. We’ll let that one run its course for now.”

“Mm-hmm.”

Jensen waited until Eric was out of sight before he tossed the pen he’d been using to take notes onto the desk. He rubbed his forehead with his hand and leaned heavily on the chair’s arm.

“Is...everything okay?” Osric asked tentatively.

“Yeah, it’s fine. So, I’ve gotta go to this meeting. Can you...”

“Let me see what I can glean from the spreadsheet.”

“Thanks. You’re the best. No requesting a transfer. Ever.”

“At least not until you do.”

“Exactly.”

Osric grinned and shut down the spreadsheet on Jensen’s computer so that he could open it on his own. Jensen locked his computer, stood up and turned so that he could peer over Jared’s shoulder. He was looking at articles on *The*

Drudge Report.

“Working hard?” Jensen asked.

Jared clicked over to a tab explaining stocks and commodities before turning around guiltily. The guilt disappeared when he saw Jensen.

“Oh, it’s just you.”

“Don’t say it like that. It’s not *just* me, it’s *me*.”

“Unh-huh.”

“Anyway, I have to interrupt your dedicated undercover research. Eric wants to see us in his office.”

“Eric? Eric, who? Powers?”

“No, Kripke.”

Jared’s eyes widened. “The SAC?”

“Yep. Don’t worry, I don’t think we’re in trouble or anything. Of course, I don’t think we’re getting an award either. There’s only one reason why he’d want to see us both.”

A muscle in Jared’s jaw jumped as he pressed his teeth together. “The Elton case.”

Jensen nodded. “The Elton case.”

The SAC’s office was smaller than one might expect, but it was bigger than anybody else’s in the building except the ADIC’s and had a lot of windows. Of course the view and the light were hindered by the fact that the blinds on the windows had to be set at a maximum forty-five degree angle at all times to block potentially prying eyes. Eric was at his desk and gestured for the two agents to take a seat in the chairs in front of his desk.

Jared and Jensen sat, waiting patiently for Eric to finish an email. When he finally turned to them, the smile he gave them was stiff and he wouldn't even look at Jensen.

"Thank you for coming. I don't want to want beat around the bush, so I'll get right to the point. As you know, the curriculum at Quantico includes case review during classroom sessions. The instructors there have been anxious to include the Angel Slayer case since it involves a recently active serial killer as well as a cold case resolution."

Jensen shifted in his seat, but didn't say anything. Jared glanced at Jensen and then back at Eric.

"That's understandable," Jared said since Jensen was staying quiet. "It was an important case and I think there's a lot to be learned from it."

Jared looked to Jensen again, like he was checking to make sure he hadn't overstepped his bounds. Jensen gave him a curt nod.

"Exactly," Eric said, nodding. "It's a learning opportunity. It will be addressed with utmost respect and with the goal of educating new agents that no case is typical."

"The Angel Slayer case is like any other case worked in the Bureau,"

Jensen said. "You don't need my permission to use it as a case study. So... why are we here?"

Eric folded his hands, and then refolded them. "The instructors like to use guest speakers when they can. To have agents who worked the cases to present them and be available to answer questions. They've requested the two of you present the Angel Slayer case. They've arranged to have all the current classes combined into two sessions, so you would only have to commit to one morning or afternoon each, some time before the first class graduates."

Jensen could already feel his head shaking. He looked up and met Eric's eyes. Then he dropped his eyes and shook his head again.

“Jared?” Eric asked.

“Um. I...it’s still pretty fresh.”

“I think that’s the point,” Eric said. “I understand the case was personal for you as well, but I think you would be able to provide a very important perspective.”

Jared nodded and looked to Jensen. He gave him a little shrug. The case was going to be discussed regardless of who did it, so as long as Jared thought he would be okay with it, then Jensen thought he should do it.

Jared kind of bobbed his head and then faced Eric.

“Yes. I think I could, uh, give a—um, do a case study for a class.”

“Excellent. Glad to hear it. So, I’ll send your contact information to—”

“You said the classes would be combined,” Jensen interrupted. “I assume class 14-6 will not be attending the lecture.”

Eric looked a little confused. “I think all of the classes have been slotted to attend one of the sessions.”

Jensen felt his body begin to quiver with tension, like a tightly drawn bow string. It was taking everything he had to keep himself in check.

“That’s Misha’s class. You can’t possibly ask him to sit in and listen to it presented like some sort of clinical analysis. You can’t turn him into some sort of freak show in front of his peers—the people he has to trust and work

with until graduation. You shouldn’t present the case at all while he’s still there. He graduates the third week of August. You can do the lectures starting in September.”

“Then four classes would miss the lecture. On top of that, with the budget so up in the air right now, we don’t know when we’ll start having New Agent Class again after the fiscal year.”

“Even better. The case isn’t a year old yet. Little hasn’t even gone to trial.

You can put off presenting this case until 2015.”

“Perhaps, but there are dozens of students there now who can benefit from
—”

“I don’t care about those people!” Jensen shouted. Out of the corner of his eye he saw Jared sit up straight, ready to restrain him probably. “I only care about one. He wasn’t just a victim; he lost family to that psycho. He lost almost everything he had and he doesn’t deserve to have it thrown in his face and put on public display to all of his classmates!”

“Jensen,” Eric said, his demeanor stern, but not angry. “I do understand the personal nature of—”

“Do you? You actually asked me to be one of the people to give the lecture! Was I supposed to get up on that stage and clinically present facts of a case that nearly destroyed a man’s life? A man who is like family to me now? Who will be family when we get married? Would you be okay giving a lecture on the man who tortured your wife, Eric?”

Eric was silent and Jensen slumped back in his chair, still thrumming with anger but also feeling exhausted. Jared fidgeted beside him and then turned partially toward him.

“So, is that like a speculative thing or did you two make it official?”

Jensen glanced at him. He couldn’t tell if Jared was trying to make things less awkward or if he couldn’t contain his curiosity.

“We got engaged this past weekend.”

“Really? That’s awesome, man!”

Jensen couldn’t help the small smile that tugged up the side of his mouth.

“Thanks.”

“Who asked who?”

“Well...that’s open for debate.”

“Jensen,” Eric cut in. “I’ve accepted that you won’t teach the class, and that’s understandable. But Jared can and will. Your—fiancé can be pulled out of the class for that lecture.”

“Oh come on, Eric. You can’t single him out like that. Don’t they have other cases they want to present? Can’t they present one section with the Angel Slayer case and the other with a different case? Then they can just rotate them out and Misha’s class will have graduated before it was their turn for the Angel Slayer case.”

Eric considered the notion. “I could suggest that idea to the instructors. To be honest, the instructors may not even be aware of who Misha is and his connection to the case. You’re right; I apologize for my callousness. I’ll ensure that Misha isn’t singled out and that his class is not presented with the Angel Slayer case. Jared, I do need to ask that you be prepared to present the lecture tomorrow.”

“What?” Jared asked, very alarmed and justifiably so.

“I think it would be best if you could get one in before you begin your undercover work. We don’t know yet how long the operation may take.

The instructors have already prepared most of the slides and the important points they want to hit on. You’ll be speaking from experience, so you won’t need to worry about having a lecture prepared or an outline.”

Jared grumbled softly but didn’t protest. Jensen felt a headache coming on.

It wasn’t fair. The weekend had gone so well and now Monday was here pissing in his cornflakes.

“Thank you for your time, gentlemen,” Eric dismissed them gently. “I’m sure I’ll be kept apprised of your progress in the securities fraud case.”

Jensen got to his feet with a bare minimum of politeness and walked out of

the office, Jared trailing after him. They were silent as they walked down to the hall to the stairs. Once they were inside the concrete privacy of the stairwell, Jared spoke.

“I don’t have to, you know. If you don’t want me to, I’ll tell them no.”

Jensen sighed audibly and turned the corner to head down one more flight of stairs. “I don’t mind the case being taught. And as long as you’re cool with it, I don’t mind you beefing up your promotion packet. I’m really only concerned about Misha.”

Jensen opened the door to their floor and Jared followed him not back to their desks, but to a small conference room. Jared shut the door behind them and Jensen flopped into one of the run down chairs crammed tightly around the spot stained table. Jared sat catty-corner to him at the head of the table.

“You think he can’t handle it?” Jared asked softly.

Jensen hesitated before answering, but he needed to talk to someone about it because Misha certainly wouldn’t. Of course, it’s not like he’d tried very hard either. He’d skirted around it once on Saturday, and then he’d let Misha deflect and distract him with kisses. He hadn’t bothered to ask again.

“I think if he was dealing with what happened to him then knowing about the lecture wouldn’t be a big deal. I still don’t think he should have to sit through it though. It wasn’t just his family; Elton was small—he knew most of the victims personally. He knew Russ personally. I wouldn’t want to listen to some jackass talk about it like it was just any other case and listen to people ask stupid questions about it.”

Jared smiled. “Am I the jackass in that scenario?”

Jensen laughed softly. “I guess technically, yeah.”

“But the bigger issue here is that you don’t think Misha is dealing with what happened to him. Is he repressing? Or trying to pretend it never happened?”

“Worse. I think he’s convinced himself that nothing *did* happen to him. I

mean, he acknowledges he was kidnapped by Russ, but he acts like the guy didn't do anything to him. He even said once that Russ never got the chance to lay a finger on him. And I said, 'What about your broken wrist?

What about the brand?' And then he acted like those didn't count for anything. Not compared to what the others went through. I can't tell if those physical wounds are all that happened and he thinks it's not even worth thinking of it as an assault because relatively speaking it wasn't that bad, or if something worse happened to him that he doesn't want to admit to so he brushes the other stuff off as not being a big deal to make the worse stuff also not be a big deal." Jensen groaned and dry washed his face. "Did that even make sense?"

"Yes," Jared said, and then leaned back in his chair. "Has he spoken with a therapist?"

"He won't go."

"Have you asked him to go?"

"Yes. But, I haven't pestered him about it. Maybe I should."

"Maybe. But you know, maybe he is okay. Maybe nothing did happen."

Jensen chewed on his lower lip. "Maybe. I mean, he doesn't exhibit any signs of trauma. He doesn't flinch away from," Jensen focused on the wall and not Jared because friend or not this was awkward as fuck, "sexual contact, and he doesn't have flashbacks when we do things that are...not strictly missionary. He doesn't talk about the case or Russ, except to tell me he doesn't want me seeing Russ in prison. It doesn't seem like it consumes him or is eating at him."

"But."

"But what?"

"There must be a 'but,' Jensen. You're saying he's acting fine, but there's a reason why you're concerned."

Jensen flicked his thumbs with his index fingers. “On a bullshit, gut

instinct reason—I just feel like something is off with Misha. To be fair, I never knew him when he was ‘normal Misha.’ I only met him after the tragedy happened, so who knows if this is just the way he is having recovered his former self? But, I don’t think that’s true.

“And on a more concrete, have some kind of evidence reason—Russ once implied that he did something to him when he had him. I decided to pretend that Misha and I parted ways after the case, so as far as Russ knows I haven’t even spoken to him in months. But he said something last Friday and it upset me so much that I went off on him. He might decide not to mention him again if he’s worried I’ll stop seeing him if he upsets me too much.”

Jared twisted his hands and bit his lip. “What did he say?”

Jensen shook his head. “Nothing definitive. Nothing like, ‘I raped him,’ or something. But. He said that Misha wouldn’t want to be with me because he felt ‘unclean.’ Based on what Misha told me happened, I can’t imagine even with a victim’s mentality that he would interpret anything as making him ‘unclean.’ Which makes me think I don’t know everything that happened.”

“Maybe he did something while he was unconscious. The doctors at the hospital told him what must have happened, but he has no memory of it, so he doesn’t think it’s a big deal, but the idea of it is gnawing at him.”

“Possibly. But, he—” Jensen’s faced heated up as he thought about what he was about to share with Jared. “Um. When we were in Elton, we didn’t really use protection, per se.”

“Meaning?” Jared asked with an arched eyebrow.

“Meaning we didn’t use protection. I’m allergic to latex, so we opted not to use the latex condoms he had on hand. And after that, well it seemed pointless.”

“Jensen Ackles,” Jared said with faux shock, “I never.”

“Shut up. Anyway. When he came here after the case, I pulled out some of the non-latex condoms I have and asked if we should use them. He said he

would never do anything to put me in danger, and that we didn’t need to use them. I assume that means he wasn’t worried about STD’s so...”

“Jensen, come on. You said he didn’t come to you for three weeks. That’s enough time to get tested for everything. Also, Russ used dildos, not his own body. Plus, oral sex doesn’t—”

“I get it! Stop.”

“Sorry. Have you ever...asked him outright what happened?”

“Not really, no. I just keep telling him that if he needs to talk, I’m here.

And I would understand and I wouldn’t judge and blah blah.”

Jensen dropped his head down onto the table.

“Maybe you need to sit down and say, ‘Misha, tell me everything Russ did to you while you were his captive.’”

Jensen raised his head. “Do I have that right? Does anybody?”

“The right to ask? Sure. To demand he answer? No. You can ask him to be totally honest with you and he can choose to tell you the truth, lie, or tell you he doesn’t want to talk about it. There’s nothing you can do about his reply, but I think you need to ask.”

Jensen considered Jared’s words. It was true; he had never explicitly asked Misha to tell him what had happened. The worst that could happen was that Misha would say no. Well, no, the worst case scenario was Misha lying about it and then thinking he needed to try to hide his problems better and withdrawing from him. That thought scared him more than anything, but was he willing to sacrifice Misha’s wellbeing to stave off his own insecurities?

“Fuck me,” Jensen mumbled and rubbed his eyes.

“How about I check on him?” Jared asked.

“What?”

“When I go to Quantico for the lecture, I’ll arrange to meet him for lunch.

I’ll explain why I’m there and ask if it bothers him. I probably won’t be able to ask him anything outright, but at least I’ll get to spend some time with him and get my impression of how he’s doing. It might help to have an outsider’s perspective.”

Jensen nodded. “Maybe. But you can’t let him know we talk about him.”

Jared moved his head, but it wasn’t exactly a nod. “I won’t lie to him, but perhaps I won’t start with, ‘Hey, Misha, how’s class? Good Salisbury steak, huh? So, did Russ ever sexually assault you?’”

Jensen grimaced. He knew Jared was aiming for humor, but the thought that it could be a reality left him cold and unsteady. Jared cleared his throat.

“So, yeah, none of that. But...”

“Yes, thank you,” Jensen said. “I think it would be good for him to realize he has friends other than me. I talked to Ty Olsson last Friday—oh, apparently Hannigan killed the Squirrel Licker’s girlfriend—and he said that no one in Elton knew where he was. That he just up and left. I’m literally the only person he knows here and talks to. Maybe the academy is helping. I think he’s made friends with his roommate. His young and attractive roommate. He didn’t mention that part.”

Jared just laughed at Jensen. Jensen would have been offended by his friend’s lack of concern, but in all honesty, infidelity wasn’t something that worried him when it came to his relationship with Misha. He stood up from the table and kicked Jared’s foot as he walked by.

“That’s enough entertainment for you for one day. Let’s go see if you can pass for a Wall Street wannabe yet.”

Jared moaned and reluctantly joined him in his trek back to their desks.

Jensen picked up the notebook of quick facts a financial analyst had prepared for Jared to study from. He held it out to his pouting partner.

“Isn’t there another way we can do this?” Jared bemoaned.

Jensen smirked. “You could seduce Pellegrino.”

Jared snatched the notebook out of his hand. “I don’t like you today.”

Jensen patted his shoulder and returned to his own desk.

Wipeout was on TV, so Jensen was parked on the couch with Charlie on the cushion next to him, snoring lightly with her head on his thigh. Misha had a strict no dogs on the furniture rule, which Jensen mostly obeyed, but tonight he broke the rule because she had been regressing so much. When he had patted the cushion next to him and called her name, Charlie had perked up and trotted over. Even crippling fear couldn’t overcome the joy of doing something forbidden and getting away with it.

His personal cell phone rang and Jensen had to stretch his upper body to extremes so as not to disturb the dog as he reached for it on the end table.

He just managed to get his fingertips on the device and scooted it close enough to pick up.

“Hello?” he answered quickly, not checking the caller ID because he thought he would miss the call.

“Happy Bastille Day!”

Jensen frowned. He pulled the phone back to check the screen. “Hey, babe. Is that...a holiday that I should have bought a gift for?”

Misha chuckled in his ear and Jensen slipped down into the embrace of the couch, imagining the man was there with him.

“Nope. It’s a French thing.”

“You’re a Federal Agent now, Misha. You can only concern yourself about Murican Things.”

“Technically not an agent yet. And we here at the FBI are dedicated to diversity amongst our employees.”

“Not white Frenchies.”

“Not all Frenchies are white.”

“Babe. Can we talk about something else?”

“Yes. I appreciate you’ve ditched darling, but babe is mine. Find something else.”

Jensen rolled his eyes. “How you doing?”

“Fine.”

“So, you just called to hear my voice?” he asked with a teasing tone.

“No, I called to tell you that we had to run six miles today and do an obstacle course and my body was so sore it was torture.”

Jensen grinned. “Are you saying that’s my fault?”

“You know it is.”

“As I recall you were just as enthusiastic as I was.”

“Mmm. Recollections of sexual escapades. Never gets ol—oh, sorry, Gil,”

Misha’s voice faded at the end. Then it returned louder. “I promised him I wasn’t calling you for anything naughty.”

“So, again, why are you calling? Anything in particular or a just because?”

“Just because. Or maybe I’m looking for a little sympathy and over the phone coddling.”

Jensen's hand stilled where it was petting the top of Charlie's head. "Why?

Is—Did—Why?"

"Today was mace day."

Jensen relaxed even though he groaned with empathy. "I'm so sorry. That sucks. Seriously they did it on a Monday?"

"Yep."

"Anyone throw up?"

"One guy. And a woman almost broke down. She didn't make it to the three minutes before we could flush our eyes."

"Did you get some milk at dinner?"

"Yeah. This is the second time I've had to do it. Had to do it for police training too. No one gets a pass."

Jensen winced. "Sorry, Mish. Can I do anything for you?"

"You know what I'd really like you to do?" Misha's voice grew sultry and Jensen licked his lips in anticipation.

"What's that, baby?" he asked softly.

"I'm on my bed, curled around my pillow—and I want to pretend like you're here to let me fall asleep on you."

Jensen laughed. "Yeah? You under the covers, all tucked in?"

"Mm-hmm."

"One arm behind my neck, the other on my chest?"

"Yep. Phone balanced on my ear."

Jensen smiled. “Don’t need a phone. I’m there. I’m with you.”

He heard snuffling over the line.

“You did good today, sweetheart. You deserve to relax and get a good sleep.”

He heard some sleepy humming.

“Are the lights out?”

“Nn.”

“Alarm set?”

“Nn.”

“Good. Then it’s just you and me and that beautiful bed you built. Didn’t know it was for us at the time, did you? But it is. It’s our bed that we share now, and will share as husbands.”

Misha sighed softly.

“You asleep, Mish?”

“Mm.”

“I love you. Goodnight.”

“Love you too. Night. And Jensen?”

“Yes?”

“Tell Charlie to get off the couch.”

He glanced down at the dog, her brow raised and eyes shifted toward him as she must have heard her name over the phone.

“Okay, I’ll tell her.” Jensen shook his head at the dog and mouthed, “You can stay.”

“G’night, babe.”

“Sweet dreams.”

Jensen waited until Misha disconnected from his end, and then he turned off the phone. Charlie raised her head and gave a small thump of her tail.

“Yes, that was Misha.” Her ears perked up. “But he’s not here. He’ll be home soon though.” He scratched the top of her head and she settled back down against his leg.

Jensen checked the time; it was barely past nine o’clock. He chuckled as he remembered his academy days. He’d reached a point where he went to bed

at five o’clock if there wasn’t something on the schedule forcing him to be awake and active. Never let it be said that training to be a special agent was all fun and 80’s music montages.

Tuesday, July 15, 2014

Jared walked around the familiar Quantico campus. It had only been three years since he’d been there earning his stripes. It felt longer. He felt older.

He wasn’t sure if he felt any wiser. He tried to imagine Gen walking around in her assigned khaki cargo pants and navy blue polo shirt. Then he frowned for thinking about Gen at all. If she didn’t want him, then he was going to have to learn not to want her. Jensen was right, he needed a distraction. A human distraction. Lately all he did was go to work and the gym and then back home. Where was he supposed to meet... *people*?

His dilemma had to be put on hold as he entered the lecture hall and was greeted by the two instructors who ran the criminal profiling and behavioral analysis classes. They had agreed to meet an hour before the class so that Jared could review the slides and add anything if he thought it was important. As he perused the slides, he was fairly certain that he could handle the presentation with minimal issues. He found that he wasn’t so much upset and disturbed by all the reminders as he was just furious with Russ. He suggested that he cede the discussion of Russ’ profile to the instructors because he

didn't think he could handle talking about him without adding his own color commentary.

"One other thing," Jared said, "you need to go into these slides and change the names of the victims to pseudonyms."

"Why?" Barry, the behavioral analyst, asked. "All the families have been notified. This is pretty much public knowledge now."

"Well for one thing, the last victim is still alive. You shouldn't be using his name without his permission, which I know you don't have. Secondly, that man is currently attending New Agent Class here."

"What?!"

"The fuck?!"

The two men responded with the appropriate amount shock, but Jared felt someone should have told them before now.

"Why the hell are we presenting this case at all if he's here?" John, the criminal profiler, said, looking aghast.

"Believe me that was brought up and discussed. Management felt the case was too important to ignore."

"Not as long as he's here. We can teach it after he graduates. Damn."

"They've told us that they've arranged it so that his class won't rotate into this lecture before he graduates, but obviously people are going to discuss it outside the lecture. That's why you should use pseudonyms, especially for him."

"Of course," Barry replied. "We've got plenty of time to change the names on the slides. It will just be a matter of us not slipping up or confusing the names."

"Then just change it to victim one, two, et cetera. There's no need for names at all."

“Well,” John said, “we actually like to use names. It makes them seem more real, and not just a body or a statistic. It’s important to remind the agents that everything we do is about saving real, living people. And that we should never reduce them to objects.”

Jared conceded the point and together they invented false names for the victims and inserted them into the PowerPoint slides. Not long after that, three classes of twenty-five students each began to file into the auditorium.

Jared had never been particularly nervous when doing public speaking, but he’d never been in a position where he was addressing a group as an authority on something. It was a little daunting.

Once everyone was seated the lights went out and they started right on time. Jared clicked through the slides, never looking at the crime scene photos or autopsy pictures any longer than necessary to know what he

needed to talk about. It was pretty easy to talk since he wasn’t trying to remember notes or facts; he was just speaking from memory and using the slides to remind him of little things, like the fact that the number of pieces Mary Ann Willis aka Sarah Vanderpool had been chopped into was twenty-eight. He found himself glossing over and rushing through how they finally solved the case—the important part he supposed—because in reality they had just gotten lucky that Jensen had been suspended and sent back to his motel room.

He ended the presentation with a quick summary of Russ’ extradition and his impending trial date. Then the other two instructors came on and asked if there were any questions. Dozens of hands shot up. Jared was told they would only have about five or ten minutes for questions at the end, but since he had rushed through it he now had over fifteen minutes to kill. He looked out into the audience and couldn’t see anything since the house lights were down and there were spotlights shining onto the stage. He put a hand up to shield his eyes and pointed to the first hand he saw.

“Yes, you.”

“I had heard on the news that the Angel Slayer has potentially been active for

almost two decades. Is that true?”

“It’s a possibility. We do know that he committed the murders in DC in the spring of 2008. He cooperated with authorities and we were able to arrest his three so-called disciples. Two of them confessed, but the third is denying it. With only Little’s word to go by, the Arlington police have been contacted to go back over the evidence they have in custody to see if they can find a link. Um, you?”

“Did you really not know that the guy working with you the whole time was the killer?”

“No,” Jared snapped, “we just decided that if we let him kill seven people catching him would be more prestigious.”

“No, sorry, I meant—were there any clues that looking back on it may have clued you in sooner?”

“Hindsight is twenty-twenty. If I examined everything he said and did with the knowledge of who he is, then I’m sure I could point to it and go, ‘Oh, of course, he was self-referencing or trying to cover up evidence.’ But at the time, nothing set off warning bells. He’d been doing this for a long time and he knew enough about police work to know what not to do. You? Can we do something about these lights?”

“Going back, you said we know he did the Elton murders and the DC murders, but you also said he claimed to have done more all over the country. And that he had trophies in the cellar for more victims than there were in Elton and DC combined. Have you identified any of those...pieces, people?”

“Not yet. The samples were degraded by the preservation fluid so we can’t do DNA typing. Analysis does seem to indicate that some are quite old and would not be additional pieces from the Elton victims. We’ve put out a nationwide notice to police department cold case squads, asking them to see if there are mentions of a brand on the tongue of any unsolved serial murder victims. So far we haven’t received any hits.”

“Have you asked the Angel Slayer himself?” someone called out.

“We’re currently working on negotiating the information from him, but we have nothing to negotiate with. He gave up the DC disciples for taking the death penalty off the table.”

The audience grumbled a little, and Jared wiped the sweat from his forehead. They needed to turn the lights on the stage down.

“Unfortunately that’s all we have to offer him. He’ll never be eligible for parole and he’ll never be housed in anything but a maximum security prison. He won’t give up the information unless he gets something that he wants.”

“What does he want?” another voice asked.

Jared turned his head, searching for the asker.

“Please, raise your hand,” Barry said taking a step forward.

“I don’t know,” Jared replied honestly and faced Barry. “Can we pull the house lights up? I can’t see anyone.”

“Okay, I’ll ask.”

Jared saw another hand. “You.”

“Why did the killer choose a location he knew he would get caught for his last victim? You said no one knew it was him yet. That he wouldn’t have been spooked from you finding the picture on the corkboard. Why risk it?

Especially if he could put the blame on the last victim by making him disappear and seem guilty?”

“Little was much too arrogant and too much of a narcissist for that. He would never let someone take credit for his work. He didn’t want to get caught, but he also couldn’t let his promise of a kill—by delivering an angel card—go unfulfilled.”

“So why not do it at the victim’s home like the others? Or an empty motel room?”

Jared swallowed and took a moment to collect his thoughts. “The last one was meant to be personal. Little had developed an obsession with one of the agents on the case. He claimed he was going to leave the last victim as a present for him.”

There were disgruntled murmurs through the room.

“Did something happen that made Little decide it was time to send him a message? Or did that victim hold any personal significance?”

“Hands, please,” Barry reminded them again.

“Well, the last victim was another police officer. So, we both knew him.

So, it would be personal. I think the victim could have been anyone. By that point Little’s obsession with J—the agent had reached a breaking point.”

“What about the agents?” the voice who had asked what Russ wanted in exchange for information spoke again.

Jared shielded his eyes and squinted. “What about the agents? What do you mean?”

“I mean, how are the agents who worked the case coping with the aftermath?”

The houselights finally turned on. Jared found himself looking at Misha.

His palms turned clammy and his stomach started slingshotting itself around his torso. Jensen was going to kill him. Or kill somebody. Jared realized he was staring, and had been for some time. He cleared his throat.

“Um, you asked about the agent? What?”

“How are you and the other agents dealing with the aftermath? In other words, do cases like these have lasting effects? What should we expect if we

work something similar?”

That last part was bullshit. Misha was just asking the first part, and he probably only cared how Jensen was doing. But if Misha wanted to know that he could very damn well ask his boyfriend—no, his *fiancé*—himself.

“It stays with you,” Jared replied, thinking that the last question was legitimate and the students could benefit from the answer. He did feel a little like an imposter offering up the advice though; he knew there were people in the audience older than him who already had years of law enforcement work under their belt. “I don’t think it’s something that will ever let go of me completely. But you have to learn to accept the things you can’t change. You can’t let yourself drown in what ifs and if only’s. As long as you did everything you could, even if you couldn’t save everyone, it was enough. You should never take on the guilt of the monsters responsible for the crime. The killer is the responsible party and no matter how they imply that you were complicit, it’s not true.”

“Did Little imply you were responsible for any of the victims?” someone asked, but Jared ignored her.

“The agents are doing okay,” Jared said to Misha via the class. “We’ve talked about it and we’ve even spoken with a psychologist. We take care of ourselves *and* each other. You know who I’m concerned about? The last victim.”

Jared moved his eyes so it wouldn’t seem like he was focusing on Misha.

“Apparently the victim that survived packed up his belongings and blew out of Elton without telling anyone he knew where he was going. He cut all ties and didn’t even drop them a note to let them know that he was okay.

He brushes off the attack like it was nothing and refuses to talk about it even with his loved ones. My concern is for him, and I would hope that he knows no one would blame him for anything that happened to him.”

Jared glanced back at Misha. His face was completely, eerily blank. But then, that was often his default expression. He liked to tease him for his

“pensive” resting look, but now he wished he had a little more to go on.

“Well, that’s all the time we have for the lecture today,” John said, stepping to the front of the stage. “If you have more questions, you can ask us during our next class together. Thank you to Agent Padalecki for coming down here to give us an insider perspective on a truly compelling case.”

The audience clapped for him politely, and then a buzzing broke out as everyone began to chat on their way out of the auditorium. No one seemed to be in much of a hurry since they had a break in the schedule for lunch.

Jared picked up his notes from the podium and put them into a briefcase he had borrowed from a squad mate so he would look professional. When he turned around he saw that Misha was still in his seat. Jared walked down the stairs at the front of the stage and stood in front of Misha, seven rows away.

“You still want to get lunch?”

“Will you take me off campus?”

“Of course. How long you got?”

“Only an hour.”

“Well, then we’ll have to stay on base. There’s fast food up by the commissary.”

“That’ll do.”

Misha stood up and walked out of the row. He smiled when Jared reached him on the way up the ramp to the exit.

“It’s good to see you,” Misha said. “It’s been a while.”

“It has. And I’m glad you’re still happy to see me and not angry with me.”

“Why would I be angry? Because you called me out for being a dick?”

Misha shrugged. “You can get mad at the truth, but it doesn’t help.”

They made small talk as they made their way to Jared's car and drove out of the FBI academy and onto the circular road that enclosed the Marine base.

It wasn't until they each had a foot long Subway sandwich and were seated in an empty corner that Jared felt comfortable broaching the subject again

—now that they had food to focus on and could use it to distract themselves if need be.

“I'm sorry you had to sit through that,” Jared started. “You weren't supposed to. You were supposed to cycle through a different case presentation but graduate before it was your class' turn for the Angel Slayer case.”

Misha shrugged and picked up a stray pickle that had fallen from his sandwich and popped it into his mouth.

“That's government efficiency for you, I guess.”

“Are you okay?”

Misha nodded. “I'll admit at first I kind of felt a panic attack coming on. I was so certain that everyone knew who I was and everything that had happened. But as you went through it, it was actually kind of cathartic to see it presented as a case study. Because the reason we can is that we got him. He's captured and in prison where he can't hurt anyone and we can learn from him to improve ourselves and be better investigators.

“I guess I also compartmentalized a bit. I didn't think about the emotion the case stirred up, but I focused on each new scene and victim and the evidence and the circumstances and I tried to determine if we, the Elton PD, should have known. I know you kind of answered that question, that when

looking back it's easy to find your mistakes, but we knew him better.”

“Did you see anything? You weren't privy to all the evidence before.”

“True. Some of it was new to me. I didn't see anything that would have led me specifically to Russ except...”

Jared waited, and then prompted him. “Except?”

“After we knew that it had to be a police officer and that, frankly, it had to be someone from Elton—I think a part of me did suspect him. But the reason why was nothing I could go to anyone about or could be used as evidence to start investigating someone.” Misha let out soft, bitter laugh.

“You know, I actually went home with him from the hospital that night because I thought I would be clever and ask him some questions to see if I was right.”

“Why did you suspect him?”

Misha smiled wryly. “I could tell that he had a thing for Jensen.” Misha looked up and his smile widened as he looked at Jared.

Jared smile too. “Jealous boyfriend vibes?”

“Pretty much. Russ and I were never what you would call friends, but we got along fine. Until Jensen came along. And then all of a sudden we were posturing and glaring at each other.”

Jared laughed. “Are you sure you didn’t just *want* him to be the killer at that point?”

“It was probably some of that. But like I said, when we knew it had to be someone with the Elton police, Russ jumped to the front of my mind because he was the only one who had this intense interest and focus on Jensen, like he had known him from before.”

Jared grinned and took a large bite of his sandwich. “Rusth whas da on-‘ee on obsessed wi’t Jenhen?”

Misha threw a chip at him. “I wasn’t obsessed.”

Jared swallowed and took a sip of his soda. “No, you were just in love.”

Misha looked down and blushed. Jared didn’t even feel sorry for teasing him.

“Whatever,” Misha grumbled. “Speaking of being in love, what about you and G—”

“Unh-uh. Don’t deflect. We’re still talking about you.”

“What is there to talk about?”

“How you’re doing. How you’re coping. How you’re not coping.”

Misha set his sandwich down and brushed his hands together. Then he settled his arms on the table and met Jared’s eyes.

“What makes you think I’m not coping? Do you and Jensen talk about me?”

“No. Not in the way you’re implying. We’re not two friends discussing a third behind his back. My best friend is talking to me about how he’s losing his mind with worry over the most important person in his life.”

Misha’s confrontational demeanor abated. His eyes softened into worry.

“What do you mean ‘losing his mind?’”

Jared realized he may be overstepping his bounds. Probably was betraying part of Jensen’s confidence. But he couldn’t let these two continue like this.

“I think he’s worried that he’ll lose you.”

“Lose me?” Misha asked incredulously. “Where would I go? He’s all I have. All I want. I’m worried that he’ll leave me when—”

Misha cut off abruptly and played with an empty straw wrapper.

“When what? What happened, Misha? Russ obviously did something to you, and you’re not dealing with it.”

“And how should I deal with it?” Misha snapped. “Should I tell everyone so that people can give me a pass because they know how awful I am?”

Should I go on Dateline and divulge the intimate details of my life to the world so that I can ‘confront it and heal?’”

“At the very least you should admit that something happened to you. That you’re not okay. That you need help and that you need Jensen.”

“I do need Jensen. And he knows that!”

“Maybe. But—”

“He doesn’t need to know why. And there is no why. Nothing happened.

Why does everyone think that he did something horrible to me that I’m hiding? Was being drugged, stripped, tied up, humiliated, branded, and beaten with a sledge hammer not good enough for you people? Was that not enough of a harrowing ordeal? Do you all think that something worse must have happened to me because otherwise I’m being some kind of pathetic baby for being upset about what *did* happen to me?”

Jared sat back in his seat, appetite gone from the bitter taste in his mouth.

Misha was flushed and tears hovered in the corners of his eyes. Misha buried his face in his hands and groaned softly. Jared wanted to reach out to him, but he didn’t know if his touch would be welcome.

“I’m sorry, Misha. You’re right. I’m being an asshole. But, please know it comes from a place of love and concern.”

Misha made some sort of scoffing sound. Then he sat up and wiped his eyes. He balled up the rest of his sandwich in the wrapper and shoved it into his half-eaten bag of chips.

“You better take me back. I have to be in class on time.”

Jared nodded. “Okay.”

The drive back to the Academy was tense. Jared knew he was going to get reamed out by Jensen when he heard about this. A bad part of him wished that Misha was so intent on hiding his pain from Jensen that he wouldn’t tell

him about their lunch.

Jared dropped Misha off close to the building he had his next class in.

Before opening the door, Misha turned to Jared.

“Jared, I do appreciate your concern. Both yours and Jensen’s. And this has made me understand that my behavior has indicated that I’m not okay.”

“That doesn’t mean you need to start hiding it better,” Jared said.

“No, I know. I think it made me realize that maybe I’m not as okay as I wish I was. Maybe I can look into seeing one of the counselors here.”

Jared hummed softly. “And will you actually do that?”

Misha gave him a wry smile and a small shrug. “Thanks for lunch, Jared.

It was good to see you. If you have to come back down for another lecture, we should do it again.”

“Okay.”

Jared blew air out through his mouth as he watched Misha walk away.

Halfway to the door he was greeted by one of his classmates and smiled at him as they went in together. At least Misha appeared to have friends at the academy. Eighteen weeks was a long time to feel utterly isolated. Jared strummed his fingers on the wheel. Maybe Misha was right. Certainly what they knew had happened to him was more than enough to make someone become withdrawn and cautious.

The hour long drive back to the field office gave Jared nothing but time to debate whether or not he should tell Jensen about his talk with Misha. At the very least he knew he had to tell Jensen that someone had royally screwed up and had Misha’s class attend his lecture. He understood the man would be justifiably upset, but he hoped he didn’t do anything that would result in disciplinary measures. Jensen didn’t have the best temper to begin with, and it was only exacerbated when a situation triggered his protective instincts.

Jared waited until it was almost time for them to leave the office before he worked up the nerve to tell Jensen his news. Then he pushed his chair slightly back from Jensen's as he waited for the man's reaction. Jensen kept his attention focused on his computer, but Jared could tell by the jumping

muscles in his jaw that he had heard him. He tried to wait him out for a response, but Jared knew he would lose if he ever played a game of chicken because he caved almost right away.

"Jensen, are you okay?"

"Is Misha okay?"

"What?"

Jensen finally looked at him. "You said you spoke with Misha afterwards and that he handled it okay, right?"

"Y-yes. As far as I could tell."

"Well. Then what can I do? Either it was an accident and complaining about it just gets people in trouble who made an honest mistake. Or it was done on purpose and anything I complain about they won't care about because they already decided they don't care. As long as Misha wasn't hurt by it, then what can I do?"

"I—"

"Anyway, you're going under tomorrow, right? Are you ready for it?"

Jared didn't appreciate the topic being brushed aside, but he did know that it was technically none of his business and if Jensen didn't want to talk about it he couldn't make him.

"As ready I can be," Jared replied. "Honestly, I'm just going to pull the

'I'm brand new to all this and don't know what I'm doing' thing. That's really my only strategy. Do you have any idea of who I should focus on when I get inside?"

“Other than Pellegrino?”

“Yes. Why not Cohen?”

“Well, it wouldn’t hurt to do some research on him as well, but I just don’t get a feeling of corporate crime mastermind from him. I’m not sure he’s much more than a pretty face.”

“Maybe he uses that as a disguise. Plays the guileless, innocent president who’s being hosed by his CEO. Or they could be in on it together.”

“I just can’t buy that,” Jensen said. “If they were in on it together, they never would have contacted the FBI with information that they had noticed a trend in their clients’ portfolios crashing.”

“But we would have found them eventually, right? Because of the known commodities frauds. We would have followed the trail and come across Cohen & Cohen along the way.”

“True.”

“So, perhaps that was a way of casting suspicion off themselves. So like during the meeting when we told them there were known fraudulent commodities used by their company they could be all like, ‘Whaaaat?’”

Jensen finally cracked a smile. “I feel like we’re dissecting the latest gossips written on the boys’ bathroom walls than a federal case.”

Jared shrugged. “Human nature doesn’t change much with age, just the environment and the consequences.”

“Wow. That’s deep.”

“Fuck off. Okay, so let’s assume Mark and Matt are innocent for the moment. Where should we focus our efforts?”

“Well, the last couple of days I’ve been sorting through all the information in the files they gave us.”

“You’ve been sorting...”

“Yes, fine, the information Osric digitized for us and helped me figure out how to use in Excel. You little shit. Anyway, I found something interesting. One is a broker named Harris Teigan. He only has a couple of clients who were defrauded, less than most of the other brokers, but he is listed as having been consulted on at least a third of them. As far as I can

tell being consulted is something that the brokers are required to do, so that there’s a second opinion, of sorts. However, most of the cases don’t list who was the consultant even though there is a note indicating that a consult was completed.”

“So far all we know,” Jared said, “this Teigan consulted on everything and pushed the bad commodities.”

“Possibly. Secondly I would also look at Ella Vasquez. She flies under the radar because she doesn’t directly involve herself in the advising or trading or anything like that.”

“So what’s her role?”

“She’s the IT specialist. She has administrative access to everyone’s accounts. Including the accounts the brokers use to access the markets and make trades.”

“Hm, but if she was changing what they were investing in, wouldn’t they have recognized that the commodity names didn’t match with what they had entered?”

Jensen shrugged. “Maybe. But I never trust anyone who knows how to use a computer really well.”

“I heard that,” Osric called out dryly from the other side of the divider.

Wednesday, July 16, 2014

Jensen scowled at the taillights blocking his path. Every damn morning.

He ought to move to the Helena Resident Agency where the only thing that might impede his morning commute was a stray buffalo. Jensen took another sip of coffee from his travel mug. He must be pretty pissy if he was considering moving to Montana. And he knew why he was. He'd missed his morning phone call from Misha because he'd been in the shower. By the time he'd seen the missed call on his phone, Misha had already sent a text saying he'd had to leave early to work on a project before class and wouldn't be able to talk until later. Later. Later, later, later. He was ready

for their life together to start *now*.

The radio cut out as the Bluetooth on his phone connected a call to the car's speakers. He saw that it was Ty Olsson from Elton calling. He answered, somewhat concerned that something had gone wrong with the Squirrel Licker case.

"Hey, Ty."

"Mornin', Jensen. How are things down south?"

"Slow and boring; I'm sitting in traffic."

"Well, then I assume I have your rapt attention."

"What's up?"

"We've reopened the case on Leanne Woliczak. Based on Little's evidence and Chad's story, there's enough doubt in the case to overturn the verdict."

"He was already convicted? You guys moved fast in New Hampshire."

"Small town," Ty countered. "Anyway, we won't be able to completely vacate the conviction until Little testifies, so we've had to subpoena him."

"Will he be able to do it from Virginia?"

"We're looking into it. The last thing we want is for him to come back here. He might not make it back out alive."

“So, what’s your argument for not sending him up there?”

Ty chuckled. “Good point, and good riddance I guess.”

“Would his testimony in Elton conflict with his trial dates in October? I wonder if we’d have to delay the proceedings. Again.”

“Shit,” Ty muttered. “That’s probably why he confessed to Leanne’s murder in the first place. So that he could fuck with his own proceedings.”

“Yeah,” Jensen sighed, “that thought had crossed my mind. But, freeing an innocent man is more important than not delaying his conviction. It’s a sure thing, no matter what bullshit his lawyer is feeding him, and in the meantime he has to stay in jail. So, it’s not like he’s running loose somewhere.”

“God forbid,” Ty murmured. “Anyway, I just wanted to update you on the situation.”

“Thanks, Ty. I appreciate it. Keep me updated on anything else that comes up.”

“Will do.”

The call ended and Jensen checked his surroundings. He made a face.

He’d barely moved two blocks. Seriously, fuck DC traffic.

At the office, their squad was in a tizzy as everyone tried to put themselves in a place of importance as one of the trained undercover agents gave Jared some last minute tips. Today was going to be his first day at Cohen & Cohen as Jared Bell. He wasn’t going to be wearing a wire or a camera.

Not yet anyway. They needed to identify a suspect before they could justify using surveillance techniques on the people in the office. Pellegrino had told them he didn’t mind them conducting surveillance on his employees, but a private citizen had less restrictions on what he could do than the FBI.

When at last the UC agent declared that Jared’s preparation was “Fine, I

guess,” Jensen managed to herd everyone out of the small conference room and shut the door. The quiet was welcome to his ears and he suspected Jared appreciated it even more. He was wearing a suit and tie, and had already grumbled about the fact that he had to wear the same clothes as his regular job at an undercover gig. He fidgeted with his tie and then looked at Jensen, holding out his arms as if asking for his approval.

“Jared, I know you’re freaking out, but there’s really no reason to be.”

“You think?” Jared mumbled.

“Well, not to be dismissive, but this isn’t exactly the mafia you’re trying to infiltrate. If you get discovered, you just leave the operation. You won’t be outfitted with a brand new pair of concrete shoes.”

Jared exhaled slowly. “True.”

“Also, the case isn’t riding on this. You being on the inside will definitely help and perhaps make it easier to identify any leads or suspects, but the case won’t be ruined if you’re discovered. Some of those securities have already been flagged as fraudulent, so anyone running the scam has already been alerted to the possibility of an investigation.”

“So, you’re saying this is pointless?”

“No, of course not. I’m just saying there’s really no reason to be nervous.

Just be yourself. An adorable puppy that people trust blindly because you’re so cute and lovable.”

Jared tsked at him. “Like you’re one to talk. You blue steel your way through interviews.”

Jensen grinned and shrugged. “We all have our assets; we should use them to our benefit.”

Jared’s shoulders relaxed the slightest bit. “Yeah, I guess I don’t really need to be super spy on this thing. Just enough to appease the higher ups.”

“You could also use the experience to your advantage. Learn some of the secrets and tips about trading. Maybe you can figure out how to make us a fortune and we can retire early.”

“Like I’m sharing my trading money with you. You’ll be rich from the book.”

“What book?”

“Misha didn’t tell you?”

Jensen’s chest tightened. It seemed like at every turn he learned that Misha was keeping something from him.

“We were joking around one evening before he left for NAC. I think you were out on a beer run or something, and he brought up how he could make a fortune by writing a book about the Angel Slayer. Insider perspective, the

morbid fascination humans have with people being victimized. We were pretty sloshed when we talked about it, but I think there was a chapter entitled ‘He was overcompensating for more than just his last name being Little.’” Jared laughed. “There were a lot of tiny dick jokes.”

Jensen relaxed minutely. “It was a joke?”

“Yeah, it was a joke. Although, writing a book probably wouldn’t be a bad retirement plan. We’d have to wait until he’s convicted, but after that...”

“Do you think he should see a therapist?”

Jared stuck his hands in his pocket and didn’t seem surprised by the abrupt change in topic. “Yeah, I do. But not until he admits he needs to.

Otherwise it won’t do him any good.”

“Do you think he’s...do you think he’s not okay? I mean, is he...not...”

“I get what you mean. And I do think he’s okay. He’s not going to go off the deep end. He’s not going to hurt himself or anyone else. Not right now. But if

he lets it fester...you know, to be honest...it seems like he's not stressing about what Russ did to him. I kind of get the vibe that he...feels guilty about something."

"Guilty?" Jensen sighed. "In Elton he did mention that he felt responsible for his sister coming back--and that's why she was available for Russ to target."

"Yeah, I think he feels guilty about something involving you."

Jensen's brow creased in confusion. "For what? He was a little harsh with me in the hospital after everything went down, but under the circumstances, there was nothing to even forgive. We've moved past that."

Jared shrugged. "I don't know, man. He's just really paranoid that you're going to leave him."

"I would never...I can't..."

Jensen stood up straight. Why on earth were they having this conversation?

"Anyway, if you fuck this up, the investigation will be fine. But, try not to fuck it up."

"Thank you for the speech, sir. I am adequately inspired."

Jensen shook his head, smiling. "Come on, your ride is waiting downstairs."

Jared shook out his limbs one last time. "I wish you were coming with me."

"Hey," Jensen turned and met his eyes. "I'm here. I got your back."

Jared nodded, a small smile curving his lips. "Thanks, man. I know."

With one last pat on the back, Jensen sent Jared off to begin his first day as an undercover agent. He wondered if it would be his last. Then he told himself to have a little faith. Jared was a good agent and he was great with people. The question, of course, was if he was a good liar. That remained to be seen.

Jensen made his way over to his desk and sat down in his chair with a grunt. He wiggled his mouse to wake up his computer and then sighed.

The government removed all the games from their computers and blocked most websites that had “game” associated with it anywhere. He supposed he could attempt to do some actual work.

“Hey, Jensen,” Osric said as he popped his head over the small divide that separated their sections of the faux-cubicle.

“Yes?” Jensen asked, facing him.

“You wanna come take a look at this?”

“Sure,” he replied, not even caring what “this” was.

He walked around the desks and over to Osric’s side. His desk was an organized mess with a few pictures and statuettes of things Jensen assumed were from video games since that was predominantly what Osric talked about if work wasn’t an option. Jensen stole the chair from the desk behind

Osric’s and pulled it up close.

“What’d you find?” Jensen asked, looking at the Excel spreadsheets covering two monitors.

“Well, nothing,” Osric replied.

Jensen looked at him. “So...what did you ask me to come see?”

“Nothing. I mean, the fact that I found nothing. I didn’t find any patterns involving securities, stocks, trading times, brokers, banks, residential addresses, names, ages...nothing like that. And there’s no information missing as far I can tell, so no one tried to hide anything. I didn’t see anything that indicated that clients were pushed toward the fraudulent securities. Like, there was never a whole bunch at once. In fact, sometimes months would go by before one was hit. If someone was trying to guide clients toward investing in the bad securities, they were doing a pretty bad job of it.”

“Hmm.”

“There is one curious thing though.”

“Curious is good. I can work with that.”

“Well, you see, two of them have the same bank account number.”

Jensen cocked his head. “Like a joint account?”

“No. Different banks. You see, it’s not impossible for two people to have the same account number at different banks. It’s just a string of numbers after all. But it’s usually a string of at least ten or more numbers. That’s at least ten *trillion* different combinations of numbers. The odds that two banks issued the same number to two people is kind of, astronomically unlikely.”

“Which banks?”

Osric turned to his computer and searched through one of his spreadsheets.

“Um, one is a SunTrust account, and the other is Potomac First.”

“Potomac First. Pellegrino mentioned that bank as being suspicious. Not that we can trust him. Who owns the Potomac First account?”

“A guy named Radek Podvodnik.”

“Hmm. You wanna do an open source search on him? Nothing that would require Assessment level requirements though.”

“Sure thing. While we wait to get more leads from Jared, we might have better luck researching this from the other end.”

“Meaning where the securities themselves come from and how were they entered into the stock market?”

“Yep.”

“Yeah.” Jensen sighed. “I hate having to work on Wednesdays.”

Osric smiled. “You get it done on Wednesday, it tends to clear up your Fridays.”

“You think so? I tend to find that the more work I do on Wednesday, the more work accumulates for Friday.”

Osric laughed. “Then you’re doing something wrong.”

“Apparently,” Jensen said dryly.

He left Osric to his work and returned to his desk. He unlocked his computer and looked at the internal messaging system box that listed his frequent contacts. The little circles showed a variety of colors indicating whether people were online, active, away, or busy. He grinned when he saw that next to Misha’s name was a green icon. Apparently today was a classroom day and the new agent trainees were all logged onto the network. He opened up a chat window.

Hey, sweetheart. What are you all doing?

Misha replied almost immediately. **Database searches. Do we really need seventeen different kinds of databases?**

Jensen smiled. *Maybe. I don’t know. The IAs and SOSs do all that stuff.*

So why are they teaching it to us?

Buraucracy? Who knows.

They’ve only been doing it for an hour and I’m about to fall asleep.

We could have chat sex. >:)

Don’t they monitor these conversations?

I don’t know. I’ve never tried to have chat sex before. But I have called my boss an idiot.

Well, knowing my luck they will monitor new agents and I'll get tossed out and we'll have spent thirteen weeks apart for nothing.

spoilsport

Oh, yes, heaven forbid I try to keep my job. You come up with a new nickname yet?

Still agaisnt sweetheart?

It sounds condescending.

Sugar. We both like suger.

It makes you sound like a Southern grandmother.

Well, we're tying it out this week.

You really suck at typing, you know that?

Blow me, sugar.

If I were there...you know I'd be under your desk.

Jensen smiled and leaned back in his chair, repressing a longing groan of amusement. He sat back up and typed. *God, I want you. All the time. And*

not just for sex.

The greatest compliment of all. ;) <3

Don't send me hearts.

8===D~~

Jensen laughed loudly and then cut himself off as the people around him glanced over at him. His fingers tapped lightly on the keys as he contemplated a response, but Misha beat him to it.

Did Jared start that “thing” yet?

Today’s the first day.

How do you think it’s going to go?

Jensen pursed his lips as he considered his response. ???

This is the greatness I’m aspiring to as a Special Agent with the F-B of I?

Go back to your databases.

Love you too, babe.

Bye, sugar.

I don’t think I’m feeling that one.

Deal with it for now.

Jensen opened up an email to check back in with the cyber squad who was helping them trace the origins of the fraudulent securities. He was halfway through composing it when his chat box pinged.

Still bored.

Jensen smiled, and replied.

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Jared inhaled deeply as he walked into the office building on Virginia Avenue. He exhaled slowly as he made his way to the elevators. He could do this .

*Jared Bell. Jared Bell. Bared Jell—wait, shit.*

He got onto the elevator and rode it up to the fifteenth floor. When he stepped out into the lobby of Cohen & Cohen, Megalyn had indeed been replaced. The girl—woman, he corrected himself—was short and petite, pretty in a

cute sort of way, with gorgeous blonde hair in large curls that hung just past her shoulders.

“Uh...hi,” Jared began eloquently.

The woman raised an eyebrow at him, but she was giving him a friendly smirk. “Hello.”

“I, uh...I work here.”

“Do you?”

“Yes?”

“Is that a question?”

“No! I’m new. My name is Jared B...B-Bell.”

“Good morning, Mr. Bell. I’m Alona Tal.”

“You’re pretty name. I mean. That’s a pretty name.”

Alona smiled at him like he was a puppy who’d just been dunked into the bath and was *not* happy about it.

“Thank you, Mr. Bell.”

“Jared.”

“Jared. I’ll call someone down to escort you to security to get your badge.”

“Th-thank you.”

Alona picked up the phone and Jared turned partially away so he could roll his eyes at himself. The fuck was his problem? When Alona finished her call, Jared turned back to her with a smile.

“So, you’re new here too?”

“Yep. I started on Monday.”

“Are you new to the area?”

“No. I’ve lived here a few years. I just wanted a more stable job than retail could give me.”

“Yeah.”

Jared had nothing else to say, so he stared at her. Alona was polite enough not to call him a creeper and pull out the mace. Fortunately a person from security rescued them after only a minute of excruciating awkwardness.

“Maybe I’ll see you around,” Jared said as he followed his escort to the internal elevators.

“Sure. Maybe we’ll bump into each other in the cafeteria or something,”

Alona replied with a small laugh.

The elevator doors closed and the man, who had yet to introduce himself, pushed the button for the seventeenth floor.

“Don’t even bother,” he said, staring straight ahead. “There’s a waiting list on that one.”

“A what?” Jared asked.

“At least five other guys have called dibs on getting first crack at her.”

Jared made a slightly annoyed face. “Don’t you think she can decide for herself who she wants to talk to?”

“That’s not it how it works,” the guy said dismissively as they got off the elevator.

Jared decided not to bother continuing the conversation. The man was clearly an asshole and he had nothing more to say to him. He was, however, forced to

stay in his company as he verified his employment, entered him into the system, took a truly hideous picture of him with his eyes shut and mouth half open, and then printed out his badge. When he was done, Jared wondered if someone was going to show him to his desk (did he have a desk?) or was he just supposed to wander around like a confused, newborn moose. It turned out neither was the case as Mark was waiting for him when he left the security office.

“Oh, uh, hi. Boss,” Jared added with a small, ironic laugh.

Mark just smiled at him. “I like the sound of that. Come with me, Jared.”

Jared followed Mark to the internal elevators, feeling a little uneasy and totally *not* blushing because...well, whatever. Because. Mark was wearing a dark suit that wasn't quite black, and tailored to fit his body to his a T.

Mark pushed the button for the nineteenth floor.

“Were you able to get in the internal system easily?” Mark asked.

“Uh, yeah. I've got my badge and my username, and they gave me instructions on how to login to my account and email for the first time.”

“Excellent.”

They stepped off the elevator and Mark led them to a decently sized office that appeared to be amongst some storage rooms.

“I apologize for the isolation,” Mark said, “but we didn't have any other offices available.” He shut the door once they were inside. “I wanted you to have a place where you could work without the worry of people walking up behind you. In case you're working on anything case related.”

“Oh. Thank you.”

“I've explained to the employees that due to the fraud we're experiencing, you've been hired to evaluate our operations and security procedures to look for gaps or inconsistencies. As such, everyone has been informed that

you will be asking questions about their everyday work roles and functions. You should meet with little resistance and suspicion.”

“Uh, again. Thank you.”

“Of course. Despite our differing managerial styles, Matt and I are both dedicated to having this resolved quickly and discreetly.”

“We’re investigating this from all angles.”

“I feel confident being in your capable hands.”

Jared smiled and nodded, and couldn’t quite decide if that was intentional double entendre.

“Now, I’ll take you on a tour of the building myself. Show you the lavatories, the cafeteria. I also want to personally introduce you to most everyone; just to emphasize that your presence and eventual questioning are completely sanctioned by management.”

“Great. Let’s get started.”

Jared spent most of his first day trailing behind Mark, meeting more people than he could possibly remember, learning where every single bathroom and supply closet in the company was, and in general being prevented from actually talking to anyone. He’d eaten lunch with Mark because the man had offered to buy his meal for him on his first day. He’d reminded Mark that he wasn’t actually one of his employees, but the man had just smiled and put a hand on the small of his back as he’d led him to the gourmet cafeteria on the second floor of the building.

Eating lunch with Mark had afforded him one interesting event. They had eaten in Jared’s office, and Matt had come in asking to speak with Mark.

They’d stepped out into the hallway, but the door had remained cracked open. Jared had crept closer and listened to them argue, very heatedly, about what Jared would be doing and what kind of access he had been given. It seemed like Matt thought he’d been given too much access and Mark implied

that he had him under control. He'd slipped back to his desk before Mark had come in, apologizing for the interruption.

By the end of the day, Jared hadn't learned much about the employees of Cohen & Cohen and very little about what it was they actually did all day.

But with the promise that Mark sadly wouldn't be able to work with him as closely the next day, Jared thought perhaps he might be able to begin his investigation. On his way out, he saw Alona still at her post.

"Long hours?" Jared asked.

Alona shrugged. "Since it's my first week I don't want to come off as a slacker. But, I'll be leaving soon."

"Okay. Have a nice night."

"You too. And maybe tomorrow, we can try that bumping into each other in the cafeteria thing."

"Uh. Yeah. Sure. That'd be great. Goodnight."

Jared took the Metro back to WFO, and was surprised to find Jensen still sitting at his desk, scowling at an Excel spreadsheet.

"You know, I hear if you stare at those things long enough, the cells all blur together and give you the answer you're searching for."

Jensen looked over at him with a small frown and then rubbed his eyes. "I hate computers. How was your first day?"

"Frustratingly unproductive. Mark wouldn't leave my side the whole day so I couldn't talk to anybody."

Jensen snorted in amusement.

"Shut up. I think he does that with all his new employees. He had to keep up appearances."



“Sure, sure. All his employees with a nice ass, killer abs, and eyes like the sun blazing through green glass.”

“Oh my God, bite me. And when did you see my abs? And what did you say about my eyes?”

Jensen chuckled. “Don’t worry about it. So, do you think you’ll be able to find out anything useful?”

“Maybe. I’ve been given carte blanche to talk to anyone about their jobs, so it’ll kind of be like interviewing everyone like we would for official business.”

“Nice. No leads yet, I guess.”

“Not even close. I am making friends with the new receptionist. If she has access to personnel records, maybe I can get her to look into a few things for me.”

“So they did replace the woman we met?”

“Yeah. I hope they didn’t just fire her without warning though.”

“Is the new one as cute as the old?”

“That’s hardly relevant to the investigation.”

Jensen grinned. “She’s cute then.”

Jared rolled his eyes and sat back in his chair. “She’s alright.”

### **Thursday, July 17, 2014**

The next morning Jared was ready to begin his investigation. He decided to start with the brokers since they had the most direct access to the clients and were the ones responsible for recording their decisions. Apparently when people’s boss tells them he’s hired an internal investigator, it made them a little paranoid.

Every person he interviewed was alternately prickly and tightlipped or nervous and accusatory. Every person seemed inclined to throw someone under the bus. Jared tried to explain that he wasn't trying to find out whom if anyone was responsible for the fraudulent securities; he just wanted to evaluate the process and practices. That seemed to have little impact on them and by lunch Jared felt more like the office therapist than the QC guy.

On his way to the cafeteria, he walked slowly through the Cohen & Cohen lobby on his way to the external elevators. He told himself he was just trying to build up the courage to ask Alona to join him for lunch, but really he was waiting for her to do the hard work. Which, thankfully, she did.

"Oh, hey, Jared."

"Hi, Alona."

"Are you heading to lunch?"

"Yeah. Just to the cafeteria. I still have a lot of interviews to do."

"I see. Would you mind some company?"

"No. I mean, yes. I mean, no, I wouldn't mind having company. If you'd like to join me."

"I would. Let me just set the call forwarding to Britt's desk."

"Do you not have anyone to back you up?"

"Nope. It's just me."

"What happens if you call in sick or go on vacation?"

Alona grinned as she came around the side of the large desk, wearing a dark blue skirt suit that accented her figure nicely. "Not my problem. Let's go to lunch."

The fact that Alona lampooned their lunch choices of market vegetable

chopped salad with petite herbs and champagne vinaigrette or braised Black Angus short ribs with carrot puree, chanterelles, and fava beans let Jared know that she wasn't caught up in the ridiculous pretentiousness that seemed to pervade Cohen & Cohen. They sat in a quiet corner avoiding the sunlight that made sitting by a window feel like they were ants under a magnifying glass. Alona had the salad and Jared had the short ribs, and they had to grudgingly admit that the food was good.

"So, Jared, you're here to sniff out the bad guys, right?"

Jared paused as he took a sip of his water. "W-what?"

"Is that why Mr. Pellegrino hired you?"

"Oh. Oh. No. I'm here to evaluate the process to see if there are any security gaps."

"Yeah, right. Everyone knows you're investigating the employees. At least you don't have to be suspicious of me, right? I'm brand new."

"That declaration in and of itself makes you sound suspicious."

"How so?" Alona asked with a laugh that lit up her whole face. She really was frickin' adorable.

"You're probing me for information, pointing out how you couldn't possibly be guilty. Classic signs of a schemer."

"So you think you should probe me instead?"

Jared smiled against the implication of her words. "I'm just saying that your beautiful smile and sweet eyes are not going to blind me to my work."

Alona delicately plucked a tomato from her salad and put it to her lips. She smiled and then gently sucked on her fingertip as she ate it.

"Aw. You think I'm beautiful."

Jared had a little trouble focusing on her words. "Um. Maybe." He cleared

his throat. "Or maybe I'm just using you. You have access to everyone's personnel files, right?"

"I do."

"Well then. Maybe I'm just trying to get on your good side."

"It's working."

"Yeah?" Jared asked with a little too much eagerness.

"Mm-hmm. You ever come across anyone suspicious, you come to me and we'll snoop together."

"Sounds like a plan."

Jared took another bite of his lunch feeling rather pleased with himself. His first source recruitment had been surprisingly easy.

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"Maybe it was a little too easy," Jensen said as he kept his cell phone tucked against his head with his shoulder. He typed into the search box on the Lubbock, Texas police department's homepage for another number to try. He'd gotten two disconnected numbers, one dial tone, and three endlessly ringing attempts. He hoped 911 served Lubbock well because the police department certainly wasn't making it easy to be contacted by their citizens. He tried another number with his office phone on speaker as Jared sputtered in his ear.

"You think so? Like, she's using me? How? She's brand new. She couldn't possibly be guilty."

"Unless she's working for the guy who is. Or she was hired by Pellegrino and Cohen to keep track of you."

"Shit."

"Jared, relax. I was mostly kidding. It was too easy of an opening. Just, be

aware of what she offers, what she asks of you, that sort of thing. It's entirely possible that you've got yourself a source. Did anybody stand out that you interviewed? Disgruntled employees or overly nervous ones?"

"Well, let's see. There's Gary who hasn't been able to concentrate since his cat died in May. He's worried that maybe he didn't pay attention to his work as closely as he should have, but his wife was trying to make him pick a new kitten because they need a new Tom for their prize show cat Persians bloodline. Or there's Candice, who has 'worked her ass off for this company' and is constantly passed over for promotions because she's a woman. Or there's Greg who knows that Terence is the one who is behind all this, and Terence just knows that Greg keeps his nose buried up the boss'

butts so that they can't see all the crap he's pulling."

Jensen smiled. "Sounds like an office full of delightful people."

"Oh, that's just the tip of the iceberg. Did you know that Alison and Embry were totally together, but then Jessica had to make a play for Embry and Alison was so angry that the whole fraudulent securities thing was probably faked because it would affect Jessica's accounts the most?"

Jensen laughed. "Sounds like high school."

"Dude. When I was in high school, we didn't have this much drama."

"Anything stand out at all?"

"Yeah, actually, that everyone is certain that they didn't mistakenly enter their clients' information or requests. They have redundancy systems in place, and are required to do a crosscheck before the investments are made.

It seems really unlikely that anything is being changed behind the brokers' backs."

"Which means that the brokers would be the best suspects."

"Yeah, I guess, but no one broker is fully responsible for each account.

And they don't work in pairs, they rotate who they work with and the same two people don't do the crosscheck on the same account twice. Or at least not until a complete cycle of brokers is completed, but that could take months or even a year."

"Well, Osric did say that they sometimes went months without hitting one of the bogies."

"Hm. I think I'm going to hit up the assistants and clerks next. Find out how much of this redundancy is actually done by the brokers and how much is pushed off onto their assistants."

"Sounds good. Will you—"

"Hello?" A voice asked out of the speakerphone.

"Oh, I gotta go. You coming back to the office tonight?"

"Nah, got roped into a company happy hour."

"Hello?" the person on the speakerphone asked, irritation growing.

"Gotcha. Talk later."

Jensen fumbled with his cell phone and picked up his desk phone.

"Hello? Hello!"

"Yes. This is the Lubbock Police Department."

"Hello. I'm Special Agent Jensen Ackles with the FBI. We've recently become aware of some new information regarding the Lubbock Lady Killer case and I'd like to—"

"Lubbock Lady Killer? Son," the elderly sounding woman said, "that's a cold case. Over fifteen years old."

"Yes, ma'am, I'm aware. But we've gotten some new evidence that might require it to be reopened. I—"

“Well, you’ll have to talk with Tracy. He’s the only one who does cold cases here.”

“Um, okay, can I—”

“One moment.”

Sticky elevator music began to play in Jensen’s ear. He sighed heavily and looked up at the ceiling.

He’d decided to take a break from reading through the information Osric had pulled from open sources on the prominent managers and owners of the Potomac First bank and do some research on Russ’ hint about the Lubbock Lady Killer.

Eight college aged women had been raped and murdered in Lubbock and the surrounding county over a four year period from 1995 to 1999. It was

possible there had been more, but the bodies hadn’t been found. Jensen suspected that if it had in fact been Russ that he wouldn’t have hidden his kills. He was too much of a narcissist for that.

The murders took place predominantly in September, October, April, and May. There were a couple of outliers, one each in November and February, but none from June to August or December to January. The women had been completely shaved and then waxed while they were still alive, including their heads and eyebrows. The description of the sexual assault was vague and the cause of death in each was suffocation. The bodies had been left in easy to find locations, staged in provocative sexual positions.

Lubbock had been terrorized for years even after the murders appeared to have stopped. Attendance at Texas Tech had declined steadily for nearly a decade before starting to rise back to pre-Lady Killer levels. The whole thing sounded right up Russ’ alley, but he tended to kill in spurts in one area. It seemed odd that he would have spread out his kills over a four year time period. Although, this would have been when he was still new to killing. Humans, anyway.

“Hello?” a man’s voice with a thick Texas twang suddenly rang in his ear.

“Oh. Uh. Hi. I’m Spec—”

“I know. FBI. What can I do for you? Something about the Lady Killer?”

“Uh, yes, sir. We’ve been given a credible lead that may identify the killer.

I wanted to speak with someone about the case and see if I could get some details that weren’t available to the public. Or if there were any forensic records that we might be able to use for comparisons.”

“Well, to be honest, agent, our forensics back in the 90’s weren’t so high tech. This case was the first that DNA ev’dence was even gathered up. All of it got used for testing and they didn’t think about saving any. And I’m not sure how useful what we have now would be for trying to match based on modern analysis.”

Jensen felt a little disappointment, but he’d been expecting that news. “Is there anything you can tell me about the case that was LES and not released to the public? Any theories or persons of interest you never broadcasted?”

“Welllll, I guess you know about the peculiarity of *when* they were killed.”

“Yes, it did seem to be confined to certain months.”

“Mm. Semesters. Best we figured it was a student, which is why they stopped after four years. The bastard graduated. Pardon my language.”

Jensen didn’t even register the language because he was kicking himself for not seeing the pattern himself. There were no kills during summer break, nor during winter break. It was a college town and all of the victims had been students or women who visited college hangouts. He’d thoroughly researched and memorized Russ’ life by this point, so he was well aware that the guy had gone to Texas Tech. Jensen had just thought that he’d picked the Lubbock Lady Killer because he’d heard of it having gone to school there, but it made sense that at the same time he’d been working on his degree that he’d been honing his craft.

“Can I ask about the sexual assault? It was very vague in the report I read, but do you know if the killer used prosthetic phalluses or if it was done pre or postmortem?”

Jensen could actually *hear* the man’s face of disgust.

“Prosthetic phalluses,” the words fit awkwardly in his mouth. “You mean like, a...”

“A dildo. Or other tools or utensils.”

“Well...I remember the cor’nor telling us they were pretty ripped up.

Never figured to ask what exactly had done the tearing.”

“Did the coroner know if the rapes had occurred while the women were still living?”

“I don’t quite recollect that part, but I do remember that he said unnatural things were done to the corpses. I just thought he meant the weird positions.”

Jensen refrained from sarcastically commenting on the stellar work of the Lubbock PD. It’s possible this guy hadn’t been the principal investigator,

but the whole handling of the case sounded a little too much like backwater incompetency for a town with a university that churned out engineers.

“I see. One last question. Do you remember if there were any marks on the body? Like brands? Or tattoos? Scarring? Particularly on or under the tongues?”

“I don’t recall there being any marks on the bodies; that seemed to be the point that, externally at least, they were pristine like dolls. They had cards with them. We kept that out of the papers to prevent false confessions.

Each girl had a piece of flowery stationary with her with a name written on it. It wasn’t the vic’s name, or any of her family members or friends. We never did figure out a connection.”

“What kind of names?”

“Just...girls names. I still remember them. Looked at them every day for years. Madeline. Ruth. Megan. Andrea. Jill. Catherine. Amber. And...I always messed up the last one. It wasn't Natalie, but, something like it...”

“Natalia?” Jensen asked, swallowing hard.

“Yeah, that's it. Good guess.”

“Yeah...”

It wasn't a guess. Of course it wasn't. Madeline was Russ' mother's name. He had two sisters named Ruth and Megan. Andrea...that was Misha's ex-wife and a girl that had probably used Russ to make Misha jealous when she'd gone to a school dance with him. Natalia had to be Misha's sister—either his obsession with Misha had started a long time ago or Natalia had rejected his advances. Jill, Catherine, Amber...they were probably women that had ties to Russ somehow. He'd systematically killed the women in his life by proxy.

“W-were,” Jensen had to lick his lips, but his mouth had gone dry. “Were any of the women embalmed and buried?”

“I think a couple were cremated, but most were buried. Even embalmed and in an airtight casket, I'm not too sure what the soft tissues would look

like after fifteen years.”

“That's a good point. Do you think any of the families would be amenable to exhumation?”

“My gut says not too many of 'em, and I wouldn't want to be the one to ask.”

“Yeah...”

“Son, why you bringing all this up again? You said you have a lead, but this case went colder than a witch's tit.”

Jensen repressed his snicker at the analogy. “Um. Well, I don’t want to reveal it just yet because it involves a current high profile case that I don’t want to disturb the proceedings on. I was just trying to assess if there was any credibility to the information. To see if it would be worth disturbing old wounds.”

“And?”

“And...I think there’s a good chance we might be able to give the families of those women some justice. I apologize for being cryptic, but the legal system moves slowly enough without introducing new charges.”

“Now ain’t that the God’s honest truth. Alright, Agent, you go about your Secret Squirrel-in’ all you like. But I expect the Bureau will pay us the courtesy of contacting us first before reaching out to the victims’ families with the same kind of vague nonsense we’ve discussed here.”

“Yes, sir, I understand. We absolutely will come to the Lubbock PD if we think there’s enough evidence to reopen the case.”

“I ‘preciate that. So many of you G-men get a little high on your horse sometimes. It’s good to know some of you have manners.”

“Uh...thank you.”

“Alright. You have a good day. I’ve got a meth head treed by a right ornery gander to deal with.”

“Uh...good luck with that.”

“Thanks.”

The Texas—officer, detective? he’d never introduced himself—hung up and Jensen put the phone back in the cradle. He rubbed his hands over his face and concentrated on willing away the anxious unease that was squeezing his chest and stomach.

Part of him hadn’t believed Russ. He’d done the DC killings, sure, but that had been it until he’d started killing in Elton. The thought that Russ had been

murdering several people every year for fifteen years had been too horrifying to really contemplate. Russ had been so evasive when being questioned that Jensen had really thought he'd just made it all up to save his life and to keep his attention. He was almost certain now that Russ might be one of the most prolific serial killers in American history.

Now he wondered about all of those women in Russ' life. Natalia he had decided to kill for real. As far as he knew, Misha's ex-wife was still alive in California, but what about Russ' mother and sister? Megan was still alive; Jensen knew because he'd interviewed her. However, they'd never been able to track down Ruth and Madeline had died, supposedly of cancer, about six years ago. Jensen couldn't help but wonder if Russ had killed his mother and sister. It was sickeningly feasible.

Jensen checked the clock on his computer. It wasn't even five o'clock yet.

Agents got paid an availability bonus due to long hours and the need to be available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. He would feel a little dishonest if he was to bail after not even eight hours of work, but he couldn't concentrate on something so routine as hackers stealing from rich people.

"To hell with it," he muttered, shutting down his computer. He could use a couple hours of annual leave.

He said goodbye to Osric and then gave a perfunctory announcement of his departure to his SSA.

"Hunh? What?" Bob grunted from his office.

Jensen didn't go back to make sure he knew he was gone. He had his

Blackberry. If they needed him they could call him. He texted Jared to let him know he'd left the office so he should enjoy himself at the happy hour, but since he was still technically working he'd couldn't drink. Jared had sent back a string of unhappy and sad face emoji. Jensen chuckled but didn't respond. He actually had no idea what the policy was on drinking while maintaining one's UC status.

Even when leaving work early, traffic did its best to eat his soul. It may have succeeded; it was so hard to tell when Misha wasn't around. Charlie refused to go more than a block on their "walk" and then hid on her bed in the corner and refused to eat. Jensen sat at the table and ate leftover Chinese food while staring gloomily at the full dog bowl. He checked the time: Misha might be eating dinner or at the gym or studying or working on a group project. Tonight he couldn't find it in himself to be a good boyfriend—heck, fiancé—and let Misha concentrate on himself. He connected to Misha's number and put the phone on speaker.

"Hi, babe," Misha greeted him.

Charlie's ear flickered.

"Hey, sugar. Oh, yeah. That sounds terrible out loud."

Misha laughed. "I'm glad we can agree on that."

"Well, it's back to sweetheart for the rest of the week then."

Misha sighed. "Fine."

Charlie had lifted her head and there was a hint of a wag in her tail.

"Did you call for any reason in particular? Or just 'cause?"

"Charlie won't eat."

"Ah. Am I on speaker?"

"Yes."

"Charlie! Come here!"

Charlie got up and walked over to the kitchen with cautious optimism.

"Did she come?"

"Of course," Jensen pouted.

The smile was clear in Misha's voice when he spoke again. "Good girl, Charlie. Now. Eat your dinner."

Charlie glanced at the bowl and then back at Jensen.

"Try again," Jensen said.

"Charlie. Eat."

The dog walked over to her bowl and gave the wet stuff a half-hearted lick.

And then another, and then she began to eat ravenously as if she just realized she was hungry.

"She eating?"

"Yep."

"Good. Now, what can I do for *you*?"

Come home. Jensen kept the words behind his teeth. "Just talk, sweetheart. Let me hear your voice."

"One of those days, huh?"

"Not really. I just..."

Jensen didn't know if he should tell Misha about Russ' connection to the Lubbock Lady Killer. Natalia was already dead after all, though his ex-wife wasn't. Of course, Russ was in jail so he couldn't hurt her. But he had disciples...Jensen decided to sit on it until Misha graduated. He wouldn't be able to move forward with reopening the case until he was certain that there were no more delays or barriers in prosecuting him for the Elton and DC murders.

"I just miss you. I keep thinking about every day is one day closer to us being back together, but all it does is remind me that we're not together currently."

“When did you turn into such a sap?”

“I’m not a sap,” Jensen grouched. “Don’t you miss me?”

“Only when I’m breathing.”

Jensen smiled and picked apart the rice in his General Tso chicken with his chopsticks.

“Who’s the sap now?”

“Both, babe. We’re both total manly-men saps. So, when you were in class, did you guys have to do joint projects with the IA class?”

Jensen listened to Misha chatter as he finished dinner, and while he cleaned up the kitchen. Then he took his phone to the living room and stretched out on the couch, still listening. Charlie hopped up onto the couch with him and settled her chin on his stomach so that she could listen to Misha’s voice. Misha talked until curfew, and then with lingering I love yous and reluctant goodbyes, they ended the call. Jensen looked down at Charlie.

She watched him with her big, soulful eyes.

“Yeah, I know,” he said,” scratching behind her ears. “Couple’a saps.

Don’t tell on us.”

Friday, July 18, 2014

“So, then,” Brock, Mark’s personal assistant, continued. “He says, ‘If the copy machine doesn’t work, it’s probably an operator error.’” He stopped his pacing and turned in incredulous look on Jared. “Can you believe it?”

Jared jerked out of his stupor, glazed eyes focusing on the kid again.

“Um...”

“Like, he said it like I wouldn’t understand what an operator error was.

And like, it wasn't. It was broken. And we needed to call in a repairman.

And he's not going to let me use the copier on his side because it's 'Only for Matt's work,' and that I should go downstairs to make copies. Do you see the kind of BS I have to put up with?"

"Um. Yes. It seems hellish. But, that doesn't answer my question."

"What was your question?"

"What's it like working for Mark?"

"Oh. Good. He's a great boss. He's very hands on, but not a micromanager. And I assist him with almost everything related to computers. That is something he's a little clueless about. So, I know for a fact that he has nothing to do with any of those fraudulent securities. I mean, it wouldn't make sense for him to sabotage his own company, would it?"

"No, no it wouldn't. But, being the boss does make it easier to embezzle money."

"He does not—!"

Jared put up his hands. "I'm not saying he is. Also, I'm not really here about that. It's not my job to catch whoever is responsible for that. I think the trace commission or SEC does that stuff. I'm just here to evaluate how the machine operates. I'm just curious if anyone outside of the brokers or their clerks have access to the client files or can manipulate where investment money is siphoned. It's not about if anyone has actually done it; I just need to know who can."

"Oh. Well. While Dylan and I do both have access to virtually all of the information related to the clients and their investments, it's all locked. We can view it, but we can't edit it. Nor do we have access to the program that does the actual transferring of money from bank accounts to investments."

"Who does have access to that program?"

"The brokers who are assigned to certain clients. And some of their clerks."

“Who is the gatekeeper to having access?”

“Gatekeeper?” the kid snickered. “This isn’t D&D, bro.”

“Yeah...who gives out the permissions?”

“The IT guys.”

“Okay. Well, thank you for talking with me today.”

“No problem. But seriously, remember that Mark is awesome. Like, super nice. Do you like him?”

“What?” Jared looked up from his laptop, bewildered by the question.

“Like, you look at him weird. He gave you a job. You should be grateful.”

“I am.”

“So you like him then?”

“Did he ask you to ask me that?”

“What? No!” The look on the kid’s face indicated that, yes, he did. “He’s just really concerned about employee morale. And he wouldn’t want anyone working for him who feels uncomfortable around him.”

“I don’t feel uncomfortable around him. I’m very grateful for my job and I appreciate his intense attention to detail.”

“Yeah.” Brock narrowed his eyes. “Okay then. When are you meeting with Dylan?”

“I already had my meeting with him.”

Brock’s face scrunched up into indignant suspicion. “I knew it! He said he wasn’t meeting you until after lunch. Look, whatever he said isn’t true.

Mark is—”

“Great. Yes, I know. Don’t worry, Brock. Dylan didn’t say anything about Mark that you didn’t say about Matt.”

Brock at least had the good grace to look abashed at that reminder. He hadn’t been terribly flattering of Matt’s character or managerial style.

“Oh. Well. Dylan exaggerates.”

“Thank you for your time, Brock.”

Brock nodded and left the office. Jared sat back in his chair and let his head fall back as he groaned softly. This company was full of nothing but yahoos scheming against each other to get ahead. He sat up when his Blackberry rang.

“Hello?”

“Hey, Jay, it’s Jensen. Can you slip out to meet for lunch?”

“Yeah. When?”

“You free now?”

“Yeah, I can take a break. I’ll meet you at the Subway three blocks from the building.”

“Okay. See you in a few.”

Jared shut down his laptop and locked his office when he left. There was nothing compromising in there, he kept his coded notes on a small notepad in his pants pocket, but he thought the charade of security might help maintain his cover. He was certain Mark and Matt had a key to the room and could go in and out as they pleased, but they wouldn’t find anything useful.

When he entered the lobby of Cohen & Cohen, he swung by the front desk.

Alona smiled at him when she saw him. She had on cherry red lipstick that

emphasized her perfect lips against her porcelain skin. Her hair was pulled up on one side with a flower barrette holding it in the place. The rest of her golden curls cascaded down to the white blouse with a fashionable lace collar.

Jared had never paid so much attention to the way a woman presented

herself before. He noticed women's clothes about as much as he did men's. What a person was wearing made no difference to who they were as a person, which was the most important part. He'd noticed Gen always wore the same blue and black business suits, and that she mostly wore jeans and a T-shirt when they had gone on dates, but he didn't think that was the same.

"Hi, Jared. Early lunch today?"

"Yeah. I'm actually meeting a friend, so I wanted to let you know I can't join you today."

"Ugh," Alona grumbled, not too superficial to worry about making any ugly face. "You realize this means the creepy guy in security is going to ask today. I swear, it's like they're all in a line, taking their turn."

"Yeah..." Jared decided not to confirm that suspicion. "Sorry about that.

But, can I take a raincheck for Monday?"

"Absolutely. But only if you take me somewhere out of the building too."

"I can do that," Jared said with a smile.

"I expect the same level of treatment as whoever this mystery lunch date of yours is."

"So, Subway sandwiches?"

"Oh. Not fancy then."

"No. Not fancy. Not a lunch date either. *He's* a friend."

“Don’t emphasize the word ‘he’ at me like that explains everything and makes a romantic rival an impossibility.”

“It is for me!”

“Sure, sure. Everyone says that until they’re tongue-deep in their college roommate’s lesbian best friend.”

Jared laughed loudly enough to make the two businessmen in the waiting room look over at him grumpily. Jared patted the top of the counter and stepped back.

“That’s an experience I, unfortunately, have never had.”

“Enjoy your lunch.”

“Will do.”

Jared turned and walked to the external elevators, pushing the down button.

One was waiting and binged as the doors opened. Jared stepped inside and turned around to look at Alona at her desk.

“Did you say romantic *rival*?”

Alona just smiled and the doors slid closed.

“What’s up with you?” Jensen asked and then took a bite of his sandwich.

Jared looked up from his meatball sub and debated whether or not they should waste their operational time to gossip about girls like a middle schooler.

“So, about the whole get under someone else thing you suggested...”

Jensen raised his eyebrows as he chewed.

“Would it be a bad idea to do that with someone who works at the company I’m pretending to work for because they might all be criminals?”

Jensen took a sip of his soda. “Is it the receptionist chick?”

“Yeah.”

“Is she cute?”

“Very cute. And funny.”

“Well, to be honest I’m sure you’re well aware of what the Bureau policy on that would be, so you don’t need to hear it from me.”

“No?”

“Hell no, more precisely. However...”

“However?”

“A little flirting wouldn’t hurt. A date or two could be passed off as intel gathering. If you hook up with her though...would it be worth the risk?”

“I’m not talking about ignoring reason to follow my heart here or anything.”

“No, I know. I mean, is she hot enough to risk getting in trouble?”

“It’s also not that shallow...”

“Dude. Just bang her if she offers. This is the first time there’s been two days together that you haven’t been moping over Gen.”

Jared sat back in his chair and scowled at his sandwich. “This isn’t about Gen.”

“Precisely. But, until you figure out what you’re going to do about Receptionist Chick—”

“Alona.”

“Alona. I can’t offer up any more advice on that subject. So, you got anything on the case?”

“Not really. The personal assistants to Matt and Mark have some serious beef, and I wouldn’t put it past either of them to try to sabotage the other to make their boss look bad. But, I don’t think they have the access or even the knowhow to pull off something like securities fraud. It’s more of a petty rivalry; not felonious enterprise.”

“Nothing panned out with the brokers?”

“Not really. The system they have in place seems to police them pretty well. There are a couple of people I might look into further, but for the most part, they would only be able to influence their clients’ investment decisions. And we’ve determined that basically every single broker sent a client to one of the bogies once or twice, but not repeatedly, nor even sporadically over time.”

“Do you have anyone else you need to look at?”

“Well I still need to interview the security team and the IT department.

They could potentially have access to everything, but they couldn’t secretly change where people are investing. The brokers would have noticed if what they submitted to the program had been changed.”

Jensen nodded and crunched on an apple slice; he’d taken the healthy option as opposed to the bag of chips that Jared had selected. Jared self-consciously bit into his chip.

“Have you made any progress with Mark?” Jensen asked.

“What kind of ‘progress?’” Jared asked with narrowed eyes.

Jensen shrugged. “Just, you know, wondering if you were using your wiles on him to give up his secrets.”

“I hate you.”

“Oh come on,” Jensen laughed. “Has he been bothering you?”

“Well, no, not really. He leaves me alone to conduct my interviews with everyone...and the weird vibe I get isn’t that he wants to sleep with me, but

he wants to know if I'm digging up any dirt on Matt."

"Is there anything to dig up?"

"I don't know if I could figure that out from my end. How's it going from yours?"

"Not great. The fake securities had layers of encryption on them that bounced them around from IP address to IP address. The cyber squad

wasn't able to determine a point of origin of them. However, I did notice that the investment rate at Cohen & Cohen was different than the other firms we're investigating. Cohen & Cohen doesn't have any patterns of investors being directed toward them."

"Yes," Jared said around a large bite of sandwich; Jensen made a face. "We have already established that like six times."

"I know and what I'm saying is that that is unusual. The other firms around the country have been able to pretty easily identify employees that seem to be in the know. I was talking to someone in the New York office and they think it might actually be a nationally executed scheme with a few smaller firms being unwitting prey as they just happened to pick up on those particular securities."

"So...it's possible everyone at Cohen & Cohen is perfectly innocent."

"Possibly. But, I noticed something else in the data Osric compiled. Yeah, a few people lost money on the false securities. They are victims of the large scam that was being run. But I also noted that some investors lost money on totally legitimate stocks."

"Isn't that how the stock market works?"

"Yeah, of course, but out of curiosity I checked how those securities did the day they were invested. All of them went down which explains the loss in money. Except one. One actually went up. By a lot. But the client lost money. I checked if anyone else has invested in that stock that day. Three others had.

Now, all three did make money that day because the price on shares had gone up by quite a bit. However, the payout that the clients got appeared to be less than what it should have been.”

“Is that something the brokers or clerks or even the clients themselves would notice?”

Jensen shrugged. “Maybe, maybe not. The amount of money missing was pretty miniscule. It would be hard to notice when you have a lot of money already. Especially if there is a constant fluctuation of other investments. I never would have caught it if there hadn’t been the slip up of the client losing money on a very successful stock. Most of the others have been

small amounts of money going missing from minimally succeeding securities.”

“So, we don’t have a securities fraud case here; we have an embezzler.”

Jensen nodded. “I think so. And I think they would have gone on undetected if some of the clients hadn’t taken advice from that website to try the fraudulent securities put out there by this national group.”

“So, everything I’ve been doing has been for nothing.”

“No, not nothing. It’s given you an idea of who’s disgruntled and who’s trustworthy. I think you should stay on and see if anyone noticed that someone started talking about sudden expensive purchases or extravagant vacations. Also, you’ll have to turn a more discerning eye on Matt and Mark. It took them weeks to arrange an interview with us after they contacted us about the fraudulent securities. They may have been reluctant to speak to us until they could cover up the embezzling.”

“So, you think I shouldn’t tell Matt or Mark about the embezzling and just keep acting like I’m investigating the fraud?”

“For now. The squad has a meeting later today and I’m going to present my findings to Bob. We’ll probably have to take this to the SAC or even the ADIC, but I think everyone will agree to a shift of the focus of our

investigation.”

Jared sighed and rubbed his forehead. “Fantastic. Now I’m undercover for real.”

Jensen grinned. “Now you do have to be careful about not blowing the investigation.”

Jared glared at him.

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Jensen felt a headache forming as he followed the correctional officer down the hallway, and he wasn’t even in the same room as Russ yet. He kind of wished there hadn’t been any evidence to support that Russ was the

Lubbock Lady Killer. Then he could have just blown him off and never gone back, believing that he was making up stories about other kills to keep Jensen hostage. There were too many coincidences though for him to ignore the possibility that Russ was responsible for those eight deaths. If he could tell the families of those women that their killer was behind bars for life, it might give them some measure of peace.

Russ was already seated and chained to the table when he arrived. The man smiled and leaned his arms on the table, putting himself as close to Jensen’s side of the table as he could. Jensen ignored his bid for eye contact as he pulled out his chair slowly and took a seat about a foot away from the table.

“Good afternoon, Russ.”

“Jensen.”

“So. You raped and murdered eight women when you were at college. And named them after your mother and sisters.” Jensen gave him a mock admonishing look. “You said back in Elton that the Angel Slayer didn’t have mommy issues.”

Russ grinned. “No, I didn’t. I just complained that you made the assumption.”

“So, will you write a confession for those murders? Did you have help?”

Russ sat back in his chair. “Hmm...I remember those murders. Lubbock Lady Killer. Stupid name. Angel Slayer is stupid too, but at least it has some gravitas.”

Jensen crossed his legs and didn't comment.

“Yeah, I was at Texas Tech when they happened. I remember that everyone on campus was freaked out. A lot of girls actually quit school or transferred schools. Which seems stupid in retrospect because as I recall only a couple of the victims were actually students. They tried to keep most of the details out of the paper, but there was a particularly curious member of the school paper who was fascinated by them and kept reporting on them. He even published some leaked photos so that everyone could see how the bodies were left. Can you believe actual papers refused to publish them? The

Internet was still too young back then for them to be splashed everywhere with a simple content advisory.”

“What leaked photos? Where did they come from?”

Russ shrugged. “I wasn't really friends with the newspaper guy. Bit of a nerd. Thought way too highly of himself. He probably would have been your type since you seem into the people who find glory by ‘helping people.’”

Jensen gave a slight shake of his head. “You know, between the two of us, you seem more interested in Misha than I am.”

“I'm interested in your appallingly bad taste in men.”

“Well, I can't argue with you on that. The only other guy I ever dated was a closeted douche bag. Anyway, the photos. Did you give them to the student journalist?”

“No. Even hypothetically I wouldn't take photos of my kills.”

“Just trophies.”

Russ shrugged again. “So, the guy published them. The killer was creative. Pretty twisted too. Completely shaved, eyes propped open, legs splayed wide...he was making art.”

“He. *You*.”

Russ shrugged. “Perhaps the Lubbock Lady Killer was only my inspiration. I was a student, Jensen. I had midterms and papers and projects and extracurricular activities. I had a pretty active dating life.

Who has time to kill? Even if it was only one a semester. One to settle the nerves at the beginning of the new school year, and one to celebrate the completion of a school year.”

Russ chuckled to himself and appeared lost in a memory. “I can imagine it,” he said. “Using a paralytic to keep them still while he fucked the whores. That way they wouldn’t be damaged. That way they would still look like the clean, pure good girls they pretended to be.”

“Why your mom, Russ? Why your sisters? Why Misha’s sister and girlfriend? What did these women do to you? Who were the others?”

“I never touched my mother or sisters.”

“You used those women as a proxy. You raped a woman you were pretending was your mother. Why?”

“Have you thought about asking her that?”

“She’s dead.”

“My sisters aren’t. Did you talk to them?”

“One.”

“And let me guess. ‘We had a normal childhood. Russ was a little strange and dad yelled a lot, but nothing happened to make Russ the monster he is.’ Is that what she said?”

More or less, but Jensen didn't confirm that for Russ. The psycho rolled his eyes.

"Quite frankly you should investigate both my sisters to see if they are going around killing anyone. I bet you couldn't even find Ruth, could you? She's good."

Jensen's stomach churned and he squeezed his clammy hands together. He didn't even want to entertain the idea of Russ' implication.

"We're talking about Lubbock, Russ. How did you pick your victims?"

"I rather imagine those girls had reputations around town, if you know what I mean. Seems like they put themselves in the path of danger. I didn't know much about townies though; I mostly stayed on campus."

Jensen pulled his chair forward, the metal chair scraping loudly over the concrete floor. He leaned on the table and Russ immediately mirrored him.

They were still two feet apart, but it was still way too close.

"Russ. Are you trying to say that you didn't commit these murders?"

"I'm saying I'm not about to confess to any more if I had."

"Then why direct me to those kills at all?"

"Because you're curious. You want to know more about me. You're enraptured with whatever I say." He reached a hand out but was pulled up short by the cuffs. "Are you as turned on as I am?"

Jensen pulled back and his chair clattered loudly as he stood up. Russ just laughed and waved a placating hand at him.

"Calm down," the psychopath giggled.

"No. We're done. See you at trial."

"Wait, wait! I have held up my end of the bargain!"

“In what way?!” Jensen shouted, losing his cool.

“You know—or at least think you know—who the Lubbock Lady Killer is.

You’re a good detective; you shouldn’t need a confession to make your case for you. I can even give you a tidbit that will help, though it’s just a guess because I know nothing about it.”

“What,” Jensen snapped.

“Well, college is a time when people experiment, right?”

Jensen gave a tight shake of his head and a short “so what” shrug.

“All I’m saying is that the Lady Killer may not have just been killing ladies.”

Jensen’s eyes rolled up into his head as he closed his eyelids and sighed in heavy exasperation. When he opened his eyes again, Russ was biting his bottom lip, his arms moving slightly, his hands out of view under the table—probably in his lap. Jensen turned away.

“Fine, whatever. Thanks for the tip. I’m not coming back.”

“You promised!”

Jensen spun back and angrily slammed his hands on the table. “I don’t have to keep my promises to you, Russ! You’re a goddamn psycho and the law says I can lie to you all I want to get you to confess to shit. But you’re not confessing. And you’re not helping me find all the other psychos out there who follow you around. You’re not helping me to save anyone. Solving cold cases, while noble, is not a good enough reason to continue putting up with you. You make me sick, Russ. You make my skin crawl. I don’t come here because I’m secretly fascinated with you. I certainly don’t come here to supply you with more masturbatory fodder.”

Russ smiled slyly at that.

“I came solely because I thought I could help people. And since I can’t...

I'm done."

Jensen stood up and walked to the door, nodding at the guard to indicate the visit was over and he could take Russ back to his cell.

"What about the Green Falls Killer? He's still active, right?"

Jensen knew better, he really did, but he stopped again and turned back. He put up a hand to stop the guard from unchaining Russ.

“What about him?”

“He’s one of mine.”

Jensen went very still. He stared at Russ. He looked back at him with intense, dark eyes.

“I could give you him.”

“Why?”

“Because he’s someone who can be arrested and prosecuted. Someone who can take the blame. Who’s not me.”

“You don’t think he’d turn on you?”

Russ smiled cruelly. “No.”

Jensen shivered involuntarily and did his best to mask his response to Russ’ crazy. He could actually feel it landing on his skin like someone was flicking paint at him.

“Alright, Russ. I’ll do some research on the Green Falls Killer, and then next Friday we’ll have a talk about it. And during the week, you better think long and hard about what will happen if you pull anymore bullshit.”

Russ giggled again. “Oh, Jensen, when I think about you it’s always long and hard.”

He laughed loudly and Jensen rolled his eyes. He couldn’t even be angry about that one; he had walked into it. He looked at Russ for several long moments.

“You think I can’t see through your everything is a joke façade? Do you really think no one can tell you’re scared shitless?”

“Don’t confuse angry with scared, Jensen. I’m angry I’m here. I don’t like

being here. I don't want to stay here."

"No prosecutor in the world will let you walk in exchange for another killer, no matter how heinous."

"I know."

Jensen kept up their staring match for another moment, but then the guard began to unlock Russ' cuffs. Jensen left immediately, not wanting to be in the room with Russ if he wasn't chained to the floor. He slammed the door on his way out because he felt like indulging his petulance.

His mind swirled with all his options concerning the Lubbock cold case and the currently open Green Falls case. And the Angel Slayer case. How much could be fucked up if he moved too soon on any of them? What if Russ was somehow able to warn his disciple that he was about to roll on him? What if it was a wild goose chase? What if Russ really had just been influenced by the Lubbock Lady Killer? That seemed really un-fucking-likely. And should he call the Lubbock PD and ask them about murdered or

missing men during the same time frame as the Lady Killer murders, or would that make them suspicious and start asking questions and lead them to Russ and delay his trial start date?

Jensen waited at the barred gate for the guards to notice him and buzz him through. He shut his mind against the roiling waves of confusion and hope and revulsion Russ instilled in him. Could he catch another killer? The Green Falls Killer was prolific, and brutal. If he could help get him off the streets, putting up with Russ would be worth it. Maybe.

### **Saturday, July 19, 2014**

Misha became aware that something was wrong. He couldn't move his arms or his legs. He tried again and looked down his body. He was tied to something by wrist and ankle. A shadow moved around the room. He couldn't see him, and he looked more like fog than a person, but Misha knew it was Russ. Misha pulled harder on his bonds. The hard surface he was on turned into an uncomfortable motel room bed. The picture on the wall over



the dresser—the tools were all there. He couldn't see them, but he could see them.

Shadow Russ moved closer and Misha pulled against his bonds. His heart was hammering in chest so hard he could hear it thumping against his ribcage. Shadow Russ sat next to him—hovered. Shadow Russ touched him. Misha couldn't scream, but it felt like he was. He pulled against the restraints again. Russ kept touching him and cooing at him like he was a frightened animal. He was calling him by name. He was calling him Jensen.

Then Misha was watching Shadow Russ touch him on the bed. But it wasn't him. It was Jensen. Jensen was tied up, frightened, crying and Shadow Russ kept touching him and whispering to him. Misha couldn't move to stop him. He could hear himself screaming in his head to move, to help, to stop the monster, but he remained motionless. Shadow Russ covered Jensen.

Misha started awake when he partially sat up. In the darkness he was disoriented and confused and scared. His heart was pounding as hard as it

had been in the dream. Dream. Misha latched onto that word. It had to be a dream. A shuffling sound to his right made him turn his head.

Gil turned over in bed, but remained asleep. Misha exhaled, remembering where he was and now almost completely certain it had been a dream. He turned to his nightstand to grab his cell phone, intending to call Jensen, but he stopped. If he called him up in the middle of the night, even if he didn't tell him about the dream, he'd know something was wrong. Misha hit the button on his watch that lit up the face. It was 4:30. Two hours. He could call Jensen in two hours and it would seem normal. Or no...It was Saturday, which meant he shouldn't call until closer to eight.

Misha flopped back against his pillow and pushed his damp hair off his forehead. It was okay. Jensen was okay. Russ was in jail. He'd never touched Jensen. Misha put his hand over his face and felt a strong urge to cry. He fought against it and tried counting his breathing. Two counts in through the nose, three counts out through the mouth. After a few minutes he felt calm.

Then he picked up his phone off the nightstand and tiptoed out of the room.

He walked down the hallway and slipped into the bathroom. It was quiet except for the steady drip of a leaky sink. He listened for several moments, and then convinced he was alone, sat on a bench in one of the shower stalls. He tapped Jensen's picture and put the phone to his ear. He wished he'd brought his headphones. It rang almost four full times before a groggy voice said, "Mish?"

"Hi, Jensen."

There was shuffling and grunting, and then a sleepy, "Hey."

"Sorry to wake you."

"It's okay. Is something wrong?" He sounded more awake.

"No, nothing's wrong. I just wanted to hear your voice."

"Ah. Will listening to me snore suffice?"

Misha chuckled. "It's okay. I'm good now. Go back to sleep."

"Wait, wait. I'm awake now. How are classes? Any more lectures recounting the worst experiences of your life?"

"Nothing like that. But, we were treated to something just as stimulating and exciting."

"What's that?" Jensen asked, sounding utterly confused.

"We learned how to give briefings."

Misha smiled as Jensen's laughter came over the line. He leaned against the stall wall and put one foot on the bench, hugging his leg to his chest.

"That is exciting stuff," Jensen said. "Very important stuff."

"Hm. How is the case going?"

"Okay. It looks like our case is actually not what we thought it was. It's a

good thing the CEO strong-armed his way into having Jared work there because now he really is undercover since we're investigating something else."

"How is our intrepid undercover agent doing?"

"He's doing okay. The job he was 'hired' for actually allows him to question people about their work. So, it's not too much of a stretch from regular interviewing. The real challenge will be him trying to investigate the people who know he's FBI without letting on that he's investigating them."

"I think he can do it."

"So do I. He's also found his rebound."

"His rebound?"

"To get over Gen. Apparently there's a cute girl who—"

"Why won't he just call her?" Misha asked exasperatedly.

"Why doesn't *she* just call him?" Jensen replied a tad snippily.

Misha rolled his eyes. Quite frankly he didn't know whether Jensen had formed a greater bond with him or Jared while working in Elton. But it was a credit to his character that he was quick to defend his friends.

"You're right. She was the one who could have handled it better."

"Or handled it all. She just ditched him. She doesn't deserve a second chance in my opinion."

"I ditched you," Misha reminded him gently. "You have me a second chance."

"That's different and you know it. There were extenuating circumstances."

"You don't know what her situation is like."

Jensen grumbled but didn't say anything discernible. Misha listened to him breathe for a few moments.

"Mish?"

"Yeah, babe?"

"Are you okay?"

"Yeah. I'm just...homesick."

"For...for what?"

"You, of course. You're my home."

There was shuffling on the other end and Misha imagined Jensen rolling over to hide his blushing face in the sheets. Or pulling the phone away so that Misha couldn't *hear* his eyes rolling.

"Just five more weeks, sweetheart. It's nothing. Be good and work hard and you'll be done and back here before you know it."

Misha smiled, savoring the promise. "You know, sweetheart is growing on me."

"Yeah? We'll put it on the possibility list. But I'll try something new next week."

Misha rolled his eyes, but he couldn't fight his smile.

"Hey...you're speaking in a normal voice. Are you alone?"

"I'm in the bathroom."

"So...you're alone."

"Yes...?"

"So am I. And guess what?"

Misha made a face, afraid to ask. “What?”

“I’m touching myself.”

Misha laughed. “You perv. Here I am trying to have a nice conversation and you’re jacking off like some creep in the back of the movie theater.”

“You like it,” Jensen said softly, the hint of a moan in his voice.

Holy shit. He was actually touching himself.

“You seriously think I’m going to have phone sex with you in a dormitory bathroom?”

“Aw, come on.”

“You just want me for sex, don’t you?” he asked with put upon offense.

“I want you for everything, Mish.”

Misha grinned and dropped his chin to his chest. His boyfriend—heck, fiancé—was so cheesy. He did his best to mask the amusement and the little bit of arousal in his voice.

“A sappy answer won’t work on me.”

“It won’t?” he asked with an arrogant tone, the effect of which was ruined by the hitch in Jensen’s breath and the soft noise of pleasure that escaped his lips.

“Shut up. Let me hear you moan.”

Misha watched curiously as Gil added alfalfa sprouts to the peanut butter and jelly sandwich he’d made at the self serve bar. His roommate looked at his perplexed expression and shrugged.

“What? They’re good for you and this is the only way I can stomach them.”

“I hear they cause impotence,” Misha said blithely and carried his tray with

tough Salisbury steak, mushy broccoli, and hard as a brick dinner roll into the seating area of the cafeteria.

Gil followed him and they sat with their classmates. They didn't have to sit together as a class on weekends, but most were content to sit with their classmates in small groups if they happened to be eating at the same time.

Gil and Misha took the last two seats at the end of the table and said hello to the four to six people they could reasonably have a conversation with at the long table.

Misha was a little tired from his impromptu phone sex-a-thon in the bathroom that morning, so he wasn't paying close attention to the topic of conversation at hand until a few words started to catch his attention. He looked up sharply when he heard the word slut.

"I know, man," one of the guys replied to the other's comment. "We represent the FBI now. She ought to know better than to shake her ass at any dick that walks by."

"Better than Hausfield. She acts all prudish when guys look at her, but then she tells stories about how she slept her way through all the guys in her freshman dorm."

"Seriously. Someone ought to teach them how to behave like ladies."

"Yeah, isn't that like a commandment? Thou shalt not be a whorish tease?"

"Blum in particular is gonna get it one day. And she'll have no one but herself to blame."

Everyone at their end of the table started when Misha stood up and slammed his tray down on the table. They stared at him with bewildered expressions. Without a word he picked up his tray and walked away.

"What's his problem?" he heard one of them mutter.

Misha kept his dinner roll, but left the rest of his meal on the tray as he put it on the discard cart. He bit angrily into the roll as he left the cafeteria and

aggressively tore off a piece to chomp on. He was down the stairs before he heard someone calling his name. He looked back and saw Gil following him with his disgusting sandwich in one hand.

“Hey, Misha, wait up.”

Misha slowed down and let Gil catch up to him. He looked concerned.

“Hey, are you okay?”

“Gil, if you were sitting at that table and can’t figure out what irritated me so much, I don’t think we’re going to make very good friends.”

“Wh-what? Oh, oh! Yeah, man, no. Those guys are creeps. I get it. I also get why you didn’t say anything. We have to work with those asshats for another five weeks and we don’t need any infighting or drama. But...you look... really upset. Like, more than just mad that those guys are misogynistic assholes upset.”

They pushed through the glass doors that led out to a courtyard. The sun was still shining brightly even though it was almost seven and the muggy heat clung to their skin, making them sweat immediately. Misha kept his eyes on the brick pathway as they walked slowly to the next building. He didn’t really want to get into his personal issues with Gil. He liked him and thought he could make a good friend one day, but thirteen weeks of living together just wasn’t enough to make him want to share his deepest darkest secrets with him.

“It’s nothing,” Misha finally mumbled.

“Okay,” Gil said. “If that’s what you want. But, I don’t mind if you want to talk. I’m not one of those guys who’s afraid to be open with another guy. Um...not, *open*. Well, I’m not necessarily opposed to that either, but...shit. What I mean—”

“Gil,” Misha said, unable to stop the small smile that formed at the man’s rambling. “I got it. It’s not a big deal. I just...have personal experience with —” Misha cleared his throat. “You know I used to be a cop, right?”

Okay, so I've just seen a lot of...victim blaming. Like, people saying that they deserved it because they were committing crimes and they needed divine punishment...but it's not divine punishment. It's just a k—attacker trying to justify his own sick perversions.”

Gil nodded. “Yeah, I get it.”

Misha scoffed and looked away. Gil didn't get it. He couldn't because he wouldn't explain it to him. So, he really shouldn't take it out on the kid.

“I know I'm green,” Gil said, “and I come from a pretty Stepford neighborhood in Texas, but I know plenty about victim blaming and slut shaming. High school football is so big in Texas that those players can get away with almost anything. They feel so...entitled, you know? That's the worst. When people do wrong and think they're doing right.”

“No...” Misha said tiredly. “The worst is when people do wrong and enjoy it.”

Gil's brow creased in sympathetic agreement. “Yeah...I guess those people are out there. But isn't that why we're becoming agents? So we can stop them?”

Misha vaguely nodded his head. “Yeah. I guess.”

“Misha,” Gil put a hand on Misha's arm and made him stop walking. “Why are you becoming an agent?”

“I...I applied a while ago, and sequestration essentially put my application on hold indefinitely. When I got the notice that I was selected for Phase

Three...things had changed in my life. I had quit my job as a police officer and moved away from everything and everyone I ever knew. I just...

needed to start over. Which is why I went crawling to Jensen,” Misha said bitterly. “God I hate myself for what I'm doing to him. Clinging like some sort of parasite, doing whatever he asks me to just so he won't leave me...”

Misha cut off and looked up at Gil in horror. What the fuck was he saying?



Gil didn't look disgusted by him, but he did seem perplexed.

"Misha, I have inadvertently listened in to enough of your calls with your boyfriend to know that what you two have is not just about all that kinky sex."

Misha blushed and a small laugh escaped as he looked down.

"I mean it. You two support each other. I hear you walking him through his morning routine, I hear you talking him through taking care of your dog, I hear you being the rock he needs to deal with—"

Gil cut off. Misha looked up.

"Deal with what?"

"W-well. I...I know you don't want anyone to know, especially with the current case studies, but...I was sort of able to piece together the clues..."

"Ah," Misha said, and nodded his head.

Gil lowered his voice to the point of almost being inaudible. "You were the Angel Slayer's last victim."

Misha didn't respond right away, his eyes back on the ground, but eventually he gave a slight nod of his head.

"Misha, I can't—most people...the fact that you're even standing means you're one of the strongest people on the planet. And because you have someone that loves you so completely and so *explicitly*," he emphasized in a teasing voice. Misha curled his lips in to fight a smile. "I envy what you have with Jensen, I really do. There's nothing selfish about it."

"Thank you, Gil," Misha said, his voice barely a whisper. "I...thank you. I am really lucky to have Jensen."

"Hmm," Gil hummed. "If you ask me, Jensen's the lucky one."

Misha looked up and Gil didn't give him a cheeky smile or a teasing wink.

He just let his eyes roam over Misha's face for a moment, gave him a soft smile, and then turned to start walking again.

"Phew, it's so muggy," Gil commented a little too casually. "Let's go find some a/c."

Misha followed him. *Oh, dear.*



### Week 3

**Monday, July 21, 2014**

“Well, I heard he’s only here because Pellegrino is banging him.”

Jared raised his head, looking away from his phone. He was sitting in a

bathroom stall, hiding from Brock and Dylan who were still dead set on proving that the other had nefarious plans. Two people walked across the bathroom floor and the conversation continued as they used the urinals.

“Well, that would explain it. He doesn’t know anything about trading or how investing works.”

“Yeah, fact checking my ass.”

“But if he’s sleeping with the boss, why he is monopolizing Alona’s time?

She’s eaten lunch with him, like, at least three times.”

“He’s a dick, I guess.”

“You think there’s any truth to these supposedly bad securities?”

The urinals flushed and the two men moved to the sinks.

“No. It’s just an excuse for Pellegrino and Cohen to have something to fight over in the office to amuse them.”

“Ha! You think he’s doing them both?”

“Wouldn’t put it past him.”

Loud hand dryers drowned out any other conversation, and then the bathroom door closed with a soft click. Jared sat stock still, radiating heat like a furnace. He was actually more upset about the fact that his attempt at studying trades and bonds and Wall Street and the stock market and all that bullshit hadn’t paid off one bit. Although being a party favor for the bosses to pass around was a tad insulting as well. He wondered if he should bring this up with Matt and Mark. Perhaps they could coach him on how to sound more knowledgeable. He was supposed to have given them a report on his findings first thing that morning, but it had been canceled due to a scheduling conflict with Mark. Jared was starting to suspect that Matt and Mark hadn’t been avoiding their interview with the FBI; they just really were that busy.

He decided it was about time for him to stop hiding, so he exited the stall and

washed his hands. He considered what he would say when he did have his meeting with the president and CEO. He couldn't reveal the information about the embezzlement, but he didn't have anything to offer up on the securities fraud unless he revealed the national scheme involved. He wasn't sure he wanted to get them worked up over that yet, so he supposed he could just tell the truth. He hadn't found any evidence of fraud yet, but he was still doing his interviews.

Jared checked his watch and decided to head down to the IT department early to start the interviews with them. Anything to keep him out of his office where prickly assistants might go looking for him.

The IT office was on the floor above the main lobby, and was quite large and spacious for only three employees. Each employee had their own terminal with at least two computers and three monitors. Two of the stations were empty, but the third was occupied by Ella Vasquez, the youngest of the IT specialists employed by Cohen & Cohen. She had on headphones and

appeared to be playing a first person shooter game on one computer while the other showed a scrolling string of numbers on one monitor and a running program with the message "processing" on the other. The status bar on the program was about halfway filled.

Jared cleared his throat, but the woman didn't turn around. He called out her name twice, but she seemed immersed in her game. Finally he reached out and touched her shoulder. She shrieked and turned around to defend herself which startled Jared so badly he yelped and jumped back. The girl clutched the back of her chair as she breathed hard for a moment, and then she pulled the ear buds out of her ears.

"Dude? What the fuck?"

"Sorry. Uh, we, uh, have a meeting. I tried to get your attention, but you didn't hear me."

The woman said something in Spanish with a hand to her chest. Then she turned the game off and indicated the other rolling chair in her space. Jared pulled it closer and then took a seat. He held out his hand.

“I’m Jared P-Bell.”

“Ella,” she replied, shaking his hand.

“I’ve been hired by Mark and Matt to review the process by which investments are made here to see where—if—there are any cracks in security or access. I understand that you and your colleagues developed your own money transfer program, similar to PayPal, to handle the transfer and investment of funds.”

“Me and my colleagues?” Ella asked with mild derision, but it wasn’t directed at Jared. “Yeah, no. Me. I developed the program. These other two idiots just help with unlocking people’s accounts and telling them to turn off and restart the printers.”

Jared smiled. “It’s really impressive that you designed the system on your own.”

Ella smiled.

“A system that controls vast sums of money and has no oversight from anyone but you.”

Ella’s smile disappeared. “Whoa, hey. It’s not like that. I don’t have control over the information in the program. That’s entered and manipulated by the brokers. I just maintain the firewall and develop patches to keep out viruses and hackers.”

“But, you could access the information if you made your own account.”

“Everyone uses a pin number to access their specific clients or the transactions they create. I could create a transaction, but I don’t know anyone’s account information. Even if I hacked my own system and stole bank account numbers, the program still makes a summary of all transactions and emails them to the broker and the client of how much money went where and when. These numbers can easily be verified by the clients’ banks and the number of securities or shares that are recorded as being bought. And trust me, the broker and sometimes the client always check.”

“Can you show me how the program works? How many steps are involved?”

“Uh...sure.” Ella narrowed her eyes. “If this whole thing is due to fraudulent securities, why does it matter how the money is transferred?”

“It’s not so much how the money is moving,” Jared improvised, “as it is where it’s going. For instance, a client thinks he’s investing in Stock A, but someone invests that money in Stock B instead. I’m trying to figure out where in the process someone would be able to make that switch without it being detected. Could your program do that?”

“Not really. The report generated would show the investment made in Stock B.”

“What if the report was manipulated?”

“I suppose it could be, but like I said, the brokers and clients check at independent institutions that the numbers add up. Whatever the clients think they’re investing in, they are investing in.”

“I see.”

So that meant the outgoing money was untouched. Maybe the discrepancies were clerical errors. That didn’t seem completely unlikely seeing as how most of the clerks at Cohen & Cohen spent more time on their smart phones than working.

“And after the money is invested, the returns then go directly to their bank accounts?”

“No. The program works as a kind of electronic middle man. It records how much is being invested where, then it accesses the bank accounts, and then it invests the money and monitors the results. After that point it depends on what the client wants to do next. When they don’t lose their money, some want to keep their investments in the same stocks, and some want to pull their profits and the initial investment amount back. The program then transfers the money back to their bank accounts.”

“So, every time a client makes money on an investment, it has to go through the program.”

Ella shrugged. “Yeah. The money comes in and out via the same path. In fact, the brokers have to click a confirmation button on all outgoing and incoming transactions. They can verify names, investments, even bank account numbers before they confirm the transfer of money in any direction.”

“This sounds like a well thought out program.”

“Thanks.”

She smiled and Jared smiled back.

“But you should know that I’m seeing someone.”

Jared blinked, surprised by the non-sequitur. “What?”

“Someone said you and Pellegrino were looking for a third. Ordinarily I might be interested, but my girlfriend would kill me if I had a threesome with two dudes.”

“Um. I’m not—” Jared shook his head. “Mark and I...No. Just...no.”

“Oh, okay. It’s not a big deal though, you know. Nailing the boss? It’s how I got my first job. It’s the world we live in.”

“I hope it’s not,” Jared said, incredulity dripping from his voice.

Ella shrugged. “Okay. You still want to see how the program works?”

“Y-yeah.”

It took about twenty minutes for Ella to show him the program. It seemed pretty straightforward and it would be difficult for anyone to manipulate the data without someone seeing the discrepancies.

However, if someone was going to find a way to direct money to somewhere it shouldn’t go, the investment program still seemed like the most logical



candidate.

Neither of the other two IT guys had shown up by the time the tutorial was over, so Jared just thanked Ella and left as quickly as possible. He still felt incredibly uncomfortable about the quasi-proposition, and he wanted to know who was spreading rumors that he was sleeping with Mark.

He went down to the lobby instead of up to his office because he wanted to talk to, apparently, the only sane person in the company. Alona smiled brightly when she saw him. Her makeup was all neutral and nude colors today, but with a shine and shimmer that highlighted and emphasized just as much as bright colors. She wore a light blue dress and her curls were, unfortunately, pinned up in a bun.

“Hi, Alona.”

“Hey, Jared. You doing all right? You looked a little piqued.”

“Yeah...”

He leaned on the high counter, but still had to bend over a bit to do it because of his height. Alona put her arms on her desk and leaned toward him as well.

“What is it?”

“Do you...do you think that it’s become common practice for people to use sex to get jobs? Or that like, transient orgies are the norm?”

Alona let out a snort of laughter. “Uh...not that I’m aware of. Not saying there’s anything wrong with people choosing the transient orgy lifestyle, but I don’t think it’s hit mainstream yet.”

“Hm. Have you heard any rumors here? About me. And Mark.”

Alona just gave him a cute grin.

“Goddamnit.”

Alona laughed. “It actually made me quite jealous. I realized I needed to step

up my game.”

“Believe me, you don’t,” Jared said emphatically.

Alona’s smile faded. “Oh.”

“No, I mean, you have no competition, so your current game is great. Or. I mean, you don’t need to come after me because I thought I was the one who needed to have game...I’m going to stop talking and you’re going to understand what I meant.”

Alona smiled again. “You know, I think I do. I don’t know how though because that was incredibly awkward.”

“Thank you,” Jared said dryly.

“Mm-hm. Anything I can do for you?”

“No...yeah. Can you tell me how long Ella Vasquez has been working here?”

“Yep.” Alona sat up and used the mouse to click through what must have been a fairly extensive set of folders. “Uh, hmm. She’s fairly new. She’s only been here a little over a year.”

“Hunh. That’s odd that no one has mentioned that the program they’re using to make transactions is basically brand new technology for them.”

“Well, if it’s a year old, technology changes so much nowadays that may seem like a lifetime ago.”

“I suppose. Do you have access to her CV? Specifically her work history.”

“I do...but I’m not supposed to share it.”

“Oh, right. Sorry.”

“But, um...if you think it’s important, maybe we can meet somewhere that’s not work. To discuss it.”

“I wouldn’t want you to get in trouble.”

“Or we could just meet somewhere that’s not work. To just...hang out somewhere that’s not work.”

“Did you not want to go to the cafeteria for lunch today? They’re serving bulgogi.”

Alona leaned on the desk again and just looked at him. He looked back.

“Oh! Oh. Right. Like, after work. Or a weekend. Like. Completely not work related.”

Alona gave him a smile like she thought he was cute but she was rethinking her interest in someone so dimwitted.

“I’d like that. Um. Would you like to get dinner? Tomorrow night?”

“I would, Jared. You can pick me up at eight.”

“Great. I’ll see you then. Well, actually I’ll probably see you again this afternoon. And when I leave tonight. And tomorrow morning when I come in. You sure do work long hours.”

Alona nodded. “You’re very lucky I find babbling endearing, Mr. Bell.”

The false name felt like a slap of water in the face. What on earth was he thinking? He couldn’t date someone involved with the company he was investigating. He’d have to cancel, but to spare her feelings he’d do it later and tell her something had come up. If necessary he could get Jensen to play the part of a sick friend. He gave her a stiff wave.

“See you at lunch.”

Then he walked to the internal elevators to head back to his office. His personal cell phone buzzed in his pants pockets. He pulled the device out and was so startled by the name that appeared on the screen that he refused the call just to get the phone to stop making noise. He had a weird sense of guilt,

like a kid that had gotten caught using his phone in class. Or someone who had just made a date and then gotten a call from his girlfriend.

Of course, Gen wasn't his girlfriend; she was an ex. And she had made it clear that a clean break was the best thing for them both, so why was she calling him? His thumb hovered over her contact information as he debated whether or not to call her back to see what she wanted. If it was work related she would have called his Blackberry. That meant she wanted to discuss a personal matter. But what was left to talk about? He wasn't generally a petty person, but he was hurt enough that he didn't want to talk to her even if she was calling to apologize. He definitely didn't want to talk to her if she wasn't going to apologize for the way she had handled everything. He put the phone back in his pocket.

The doors to the elevator opened and he stepped off. Immediately he was almost backed into the closing doors by Brock and Dylan. They had their arms crossed and one eyebrow cocked. They didn't look alike, and Brock was definitely taller, but they appeared eerily similar. Jared sighed.

"What is it?"

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Jensen stood his ground and waited for the tech guys to get the house lights on. It was his turn to deliver the case review on the Angel Slayer killings to a bunch of fledgling NAT's, and he was going to verify that Misha was not in the room. Of course, it wouldn't make sense for Misha's class to see the presentation twice, but he couldn't risk having to detail Russ' attack on Natalia in front of Misha. He'd rather quit his job.

The lights flashed on and Jensen strummed his hand on the podium as he scanned the room. There were about forty students, all wearing khaki cargo pants and dark blue polo shirts. It was hard to distinguish one from the other, especially the ones in the back, but he would know Misha from half a mile off in a snow storm.

"Good morning. I'm Special Agent Jensen Ackles. I was one of the lead

investigators on the original Angel Slayer murders in the DC metro area. I was called in to determine if similar killings in Elton, New Hampshire were a copycat or the same killer. I'll begin with the original killings in DC."

Jensen didn't need notes—he remembered every goddamned detail about all of the Angel Slayer killings—but he read off of note cards anyway. He deliberately made his presentation wooden and clinical, leaving out all the intuition and emotion that goes into working a case. It was important to teach those things to upcoming agents, but he couldn't do it with this case.

When he was finished, he could tell that he might have actually made the case boring if the glazed look in some of the audience's eyes were any indication.

"Currently, Russell Little is being held at a maximum security prison. His trial is set to start on October 6th." Jensen gathered up his note cards. "Any questions?"

Several hands flew up in the air. He barely refrained from making a face at them. He looked out at the room and pointed at a young man in the middle of the room.

"Yes?"

"Um. Well, we heard from other NAT's who had an earlier session of this case study, that one of the agents, was like, involved? With one of the victims? Is that true?"

Jensen put his hands in his pockets so no one would see him clench them into fists. "I meant were there any questions relevant to the case?"

The hands went up again, but the same young man spoke up.

"It is relevant though, isn't it? Getting involved while on a case is unprofessional. Right? Stuff like that can jeopardize a case."

"That's true."

"But you spoke very highly of all of the agents and police officers that

worked the case.”

“Because they did excellent work.”

“But, fooling around with a victim is unethical, isn’t it?” a woman to his right asked.

“Ah, I see the information you received was a little inaccurate. That’s another good lesson: vet your sources before you trust their intel. An agent became involved with one of the local police officers.”

There was a noticeable group deflation. Apparently everyone wanted gossip.

“But, it was a victim too? Wasn’t it?”

Jensen sighed. “Doesn’t anyone have a question about the methodology or psychology or forensics of this case?”

Everyone was silent and looked down at their notebooks. Jensen rolled his eyes.

“The agent became involved with a police officer who was not working the Angel Slayer case. At one point, Little targeted the police officer because he had an obsession with the agent. Little took the agent’s involvement with someone personally because he felt he had a connection with the agent. The police officer wasn’t already a targeted victim, nor was the officer likely to be one had the relationship not drawn Little’s attention. Just like with the third victim,” Jensen vainly attempted to steer the topic off of Misha and

himself. “Little killed his accomplice’s lover because he wanted to teach him a lesson. Russell Little thinks everything everyone does is because of him in some way. It’s classic Narcissistic Personality Disorder. Have you all had any forensic psychology training yet?”

“But, if the Angel Slayer was obsessed with him, or her, why did the agent get involved with someone if they were just going to put that person’s life in danger?”

Jensen frowned. Well, that hadn’t worked. “The agent was unaware of the

killer's obsession until after he had been arrested."

"But didn't you guys all work with the guy?" a voice said in the front row.

"Why couldn't any of you tell who he was?"

Most of the others shifted uncomfortably at the rather impertinent question.

"Russell Little has been killing for over a decade. He's killed in multiple jurisdictions with multiple methods and has eluded capture by local and state police as well as federal agents. He's smart, resourceful, and a sociopath—which means he can fake the proper emotions needed for any social situation."

"But—"

"Why are you so interested?" Jensen cut off the next question. "It was a personal relationship; it actually has very little to do with the case."

"Except the fact that the Angel Slayer got careless by going after someone he hadn't taken the time to stalk and plan for because he wanted to hurt the agent, and that's really the only reason why he got caught. If he hadn't, he might still be on the loose."

"I don't think that's the case. We were already closing in on him, particularly his accomplice, before the officer was ever given an angel card."

"Will it affect the trial?" a new voice asked.

"Will what affect the trial?"

"The personal relationship. Will any evidence or testimony be thrown out?"

"Whether or not you think two adults in a working relationship having a consensual personal relationship is inappropriate does not change the fact that it is illegal to attack, kidnap, and sexually assault a person. The victim is lucky to be alive, and his personal relationships have no bearing on his right to justice."

“It was the living victim?” someone asked with too much excitement in her voice.

“Are he and the agent still together?”

“Is he willing to talk to us?”

“Did they break up?”

Jensen could feel the heat in his face and he hoped it just looked like the lights were making him sweat. He inhaled deeply as discreetly as he could as he waited for the questions to die down.

“That...is definitely not relevant. Does anyone have any questions about the case?”

There was silence.

Then, “Was it you?”

Jensen grumbled and wrapped his arm tighter around Misha’s thigh as he buried his face in his stomach.

“They’re all assholes. It’s true what they say about the next generation.

Entitled brats obsessed with drama.”

“I’m pretty sure there are at least two other guys my age in my class alone,”

Misha mused as he carded his fingers through Jensen’s hair.

They were in Misha’s dorm room on his bed. Misha sat propped against the wall and Jensen’s legs were crammed up in the short bed because he wanted to put his head in Misha’s lap but the bed wasn’t wide enough to do it sideways.

“Whatever,” Jensen grumbled. “All the questions were from twenty somethings. I forgot how much of a dillweed we all are when we’re in our

twenties.”

Misha chuckled and gently ran his nails over Jensen’s scalp soothing him and making him shiver with sensation. He allowed himself to be lulled into a semi-conscious state, not caring that Misha would have to leave for class in ten minutes or so. Those ten minutes were so far away.

“Hey, Jensen...?”

“Yes, honey?”

“Geez. Better than sugar I guess. Do...do you think it’s possible that our relationship could affect the trial? That his lawyer could twist it and use it against us?”

“Honestly I think our relationship only weakens his defense. It proves that he’s not crazy or following orders from ‘something’ else. He made a calculated decision to go after you based on his personal whims.”

“Hmm.”

Misha didn’t sound convinced, so Jensen tightened his hold on his leg. He wasn’t sure who he was trying to comfort.

“How are your talks going? With him?” Misha asked, his tone carefully neutral.

Jensen sighed. “I’m pretty certain he’s the Lubbock Lady Killer. Do you remember hearing about those cases back in the late 90’s? You would have been in college.”

“Yeah, I remember those. They put out warnings at every college campus in case there were copycats. Didn’t you get those messages at your school?”

“I was still in high school, old man.”

“Bite me, Ackles.”

Jensen complied by turning his head and gnawing on his leg a bit.

“Knock it off. You’re going to leave a spit stain on my pants.”

Jensen stopped when Misha offered him a hand instead. He kissed Misha’s knuckles and then turned his hand over and kissed his palm. He put his head back down on Misha’s leg and held onto his hand as he unhappily continued.

“Well, he raped and killed eight women, and possibly some men, while he was attending school at Texas Tech. Apparently he was celebrating the beginning and ending of each semester. The sick fuck.”

“But...he didn’t go to Texas Tech...he went to UNH.”

“What?!” Jensen asked sitting up so quickly he startled Misha.

“Or...maybe that was Jake. Do you know where Russ went to school?”

“Mishaaaaaaaaa,” Jensen groaned. “He went to Texas Tech!”

“Oh, sorry. I didn’t remember.”

“Geez. Don’t do that to me.”

“Even if he did go to Texas Tech, he could just be fucking with you.”

“I know.”

“I mean, are you checking his facts, or just listening enraptured like a boy scout at the campfire?”

Jensen sat back on the bed, putting distance between himself and Misha and Misha’s accusatory tone.

“What’s got you so pissy?”

“You already know the answer to that.”

“Misha...” Jensen got to his feet so that he could walk around the room.

“Why are you being like this? We can solve unsolved murders and bring

some peace to families who never got an answer or an explanation. We could potentially get all his allies and stop active murderers. And we can do this with little to no effort and no danger. It's just a little uncomfortable.

That's all. And I'm willing to pay such a menial price for such great results.

There are eight families out there who could be told that their daughter's killer is caught and behind bars. There is any number of people out there whose lives can be saved by finding the disciples. Doesn't that seem worth a little discomfort to you?"

"No."

Jensen turned to look at him, shocked. "You wouldn't..."

"Yes, of course, I would. I just don't want you to."

"Come on. Don't be unreasonable."

"I'm not."

"Yes, you are."

"Fine." Misha shrugged. "I am. So what? I don't want you to do it. It's that simple. You love me, right? You'd do anything for me, right?"

"Seriously?" Jensen asked with mild annoyance. "You're playing the 'if you really loved me' card?"

Misha looked down at the bed and picked at a nit on the blanket. Jensen rubbed his fingers over his eyes.

"Alright, I gotta head back if I'm going to avoid traffic."

"You're leaving?" Misha asked, his head snapping up and voice tight with worry. "I thought you were going to stay until after the afternoon rush."

"Yeah, but, I gotta take care of Charlie. And I've got to get into the office

early tomorrow.”

He picked up his wallet and keys from Misha’s desk. Misha scrambled off the bed and approached Jensen quickly.

“Jensen—”

He cut off when Jensen turned to him and took his face in his hands. He could tell that Misha was scared that he’d gone too far and pushed him away for good. So, he leaned in and pressed their lips together softly, kissing Misha’s full upper lip and getting his lips to part. Then he sealed their mouths together in a lingering, deep kiss. When he pulled back Misha looked calm, or at least distracted. Jensen still cupped his face and Misha opened his eyes.

“I’m still kinda pissed,” Jensen murmured. “We’ll talk more later.” He placed another simple, gentle kiss on his lips. “I love you, Misha. And I would do anything for you. I would. I’ll stop the interviews. But. I want you to think about if you really want to do that to us.” He went in for one more kiss (that one was for himself), and then he released Misha and walked to the door.

He opened it just as Gil was opening it.

“Oh, hi. Jensen. It’s good to see you again.”

“You too.”

“I just came to get Misha. We’ve got another lecture on how to define ‘intelligence’ to go to.”

Misha laughed and Gil grinned, shooting him a wink. Apparently it was some sort of inside joke. Jensen frowned. Gil was too attractive to be shooting Misha winks and making him laugh.

“Drive safely, Jensen,” Misha said as he sat on the bed to pull on his boots.

“Thanks. Study...safely.”

Misha smiled. “Firearms are tomorrow.”

“Whatever.”

Misha laughed and returned to tying his shoe. Jensen realized he was stalling. He looked at Gil, gave him another forced smile, and then left.

Tuesday, July 22, 2014

Jared loosened the tie around his neck and pulled it off. He tossed it onto the bed and looked at his appearance again in the mirror over his dresser.

He was in dark jeans with a light grey button down tucked into them. The tie had just made him look too much like an Internet company founder. He took off the jeans and put on black slacks. Now he kind of looked like waiter. He put the tie back on. Now he looked like a caterer. He put on a black sports coat. Now he looked like he was going to his eighth grade dance. He groaned and turned to look at the person sitting on his bed. There was no one there. Jared scowled and marched out of his bedroom and into the living room. Jensen was channel surfing on the couch with his feet propped up on the coffee table.

“Dude.”

Jensen looked up. “Yeah?”

“You’re supposed to be helping me here.”

“Jared. You invited me over to your apartment not to watch a game or play a marathon game of Risk, but so that I can help you pick out your clothes for your date. Men don’t do that.”

“Yeah, you know what kind of men say shit like that? Men who think it’s gross to sleep with men. So, shut-up and help me out here.”

Jensen sighed and turned off the TV. He stood up and examined Jared.

“Well, first off, lose the jacket. And the tie.”

Jared complied and Jensen looked him over.

“Untuck.”

Jared pulled his shirt out of his pants.

“That’s good. The slacks indicate it’s a more formal occasion than going out with a friend in jeans, but the untucked shirt means it’s not too formal.”

“Yeah. That sounds about right.”

“You’re going to have to iron the bottom of that shirt now.”

Jared made a face. “Can’t I just wear a different shirt?”

“Are you kidding? It took you twenty-five minutes to decide on a color scheme. There is no time for changes. You have to meet her in thirty minutes, right?”

“Oh, shit. Yeah.”

Jared hustled back into his bedroom and dug in the bottom of his closet for the iron his mother had insisted on giving him. He’d used the thing maybe twice in seven years. He plugged it into the wall and then unbuttoned his shirt. He didn’t have an ironing board, so he just spread it out on the bed. When he straightened to get the iron, he saw Jensen taking a picture of him with his phone. Too late he put his hands up to cover his nipples.

“What are you doing?”

“Sending this to Misha.”

Jared’s jaw dropped open and heat crept slowly up his face. “What? Why?

Do you two have this weird fantasy to seduce me into a threesome?

Because, I’m flattered, sure, but I just think it would make our relationship really weird. Plus you and Misha are both so possessive, I feel like I’d be left out completely or possibly stabbed.”

Jared stopped rambling and in took in Jensen’s slightly confused but mostly

unamused face.

“Misha doesn’t believe you have muscles because you’re too skinny. But, thank you for making this weird for all of us.”

“I—it’s weird! Don’t put this on me!”

“Why was your first thought a threesome?”

“Apparently, it’s very common now.”

“Yeah, but not with people who are like...your brother. Gross, dude.”

“I know! That’s why I tried to get out of it politely!”

“You contemplated,” Jensen accused.

“I did not.”

“You did!”

“Okay, yeah, for like a second. But with Misha. Not you.”

“With who now?”

“See? So possessive.”

Jared grabbed the iron and began working on the tails of the shirt. Jensen’s phone pinged.

“Hunh. Misha asked for a threesome.”

“What?!”

Jared fumbled the iron and it crashed to the floor, causing him to dance away to avoid injury to his toes. He looked up at Jensen who was smirking and texting something back to Misha.

“You are such an asshole,” Jared muttered and picked up the iron.

“And you amuse me.”

Jared decided he was going to ignore Jensen until he could kick him out, but that lasted about three seconds.

“Do you think this is a bad idea?” Jared asked. “Going out with someone that’s involved with a case?”

“Well, a little. But, I certainly can’t throw stones. Sometimes, you can’t listen to reason.”

“But it was different for you. Misha technically wasn’t working on the case, and you weren’t undercover. Alona doesn’t even know my real last name.”

“That does put a spin on things. But, when you think about this date, is it really with the idea in mind that this could lead to something?”

“I don’t know. Anything could always possibly lead to something. Right?”

Jensen put his phone up and remained silent as Jared set the iron down and put on the warm shirt. He started buttoning it and glanced at Jensen between buttons.

“What?”

“Nothing. I just thought Alona was a rebound. But, do you really like her in a want to date her in a see where this goes sort of way?”

Jared tried to think of an answer to that, but his mind was blank. Well, not blank. He sat down on the bed and put his hands between his knees.

“Gen called me yesterday.”

Jensen raised his eyebrows. “What did she say?”

“Nothing. Or, I don’t know. I didn’t answer. And she didn’t leave a message.”

“Still mad?”

“Yeah. I am.”

Jensen nodded. Then shrugged. “I don’t know if I can really help you out here, buddy. Either you go out with Alona and let her try to get you to forget your anger, or you get over your hurt and talk to Gen and tell her you’re still in—that you want to try again.”

“I don’t want to try again,” Jared said grumpily.

“You don’t?”

“I don’t trust her anymore. I don’t get how you did it. I mean when I found out that Misha had actually dumped you after Elton and then you just let him move in with you on the first day he even bothers to contact you again...I couldn’t do that.”

“Different people, different circumstances. But look, there’s a very cute girl who is expecting you in twenty minutes, and you can’t be a dick who stands her up or shows up late. Just try to have fun tonight. There’s no commitment in one date. And it might help clarify a few things for you.”

“Like?”

“Like if you’re ready to move on or if you’re not going to get over Gen because you don’t want to.”

Jared fidgeted for a few moments.

“Dude, come on! Fifteen minutes and you still need shoes and to brush your teeth.”

“Oh, shit!”

Jared leapt off his bed and made a mad dash for socks and shoes. As he was hopping into his left shoe trying to brush his teeth at the same time, he saw the time on his alarm clock. He put his foot down and pulled out the toothbrush.

“Dude. I still have forty-five minutes.”

Jensen patted him on the shoulder. “Now you definitely won’t be late. Have fun.”

Jared shook his hands to try to dispel some of his jitters as he waited for Alona at the front door to her apartment building. They’d spoken over the intercom and she said she would come down to him. He wondered yet again if he’d dressed too formally, or too casually, or if he looked sloppy because

the shirt was untucked. He moved his hands to tuck in the shirt, but then the dark glass door opened and Alona emerged.

She wore a white sundress with a sunflower pattern and bright yellow high heels. She was still over half a foot shorter than him. Her hair was pulled back into a ponytail of loose curls that bounced playfully behind her. She was wearing that cherry red lipstick again. Jared knew he was supposed to be thinking about something or figuring something out, but he couldn’t remember what.

“You look...” He knew adorable and cute were not necessarily descriptors women wanted to hear from their dates, but she was cute and adorable. And not in a little kid or kid sister kind of way. “You look amazing,” Jared said.

Alona smiled and looked down. “Thank you. So do you. So dashing.”

Jared laughed. “Thanks. I don’t believe that, but thank you. So, the restaurant I made reservations at is about three blocks away. We can get a cab, or—”

“I can walk.” She held out her arm.

“I think I’m supposed to offer the arm.”

“Okay.” She dropped her arm. Jared just stared at her blue eyes. “Are you not going to?”

“What? Oh, yeah. Sorry.”

Jared held out his arm and Alona linked hers with his and stepped close to his

side. The first block and a half was just this side of excruciatingly awkward as neither spoke, but then Alona mentioned how nice it was to have a break in the humidity. They talked weather for the last block and a half, which was only slightly better. Fortunately they were able to be seated right away when they got to the restaurant so they didn't have to stand around waiting awkwardly. Now they could sit across from each other awkwardly. At least sitting there was water and bread to distract themselves with a bit. They didn't have this kind of tension when they ate lunch together. Then again, lunch at work was still in the friend league. This was the big leagues.

"So," Jared said, "um, we can do the whole 'tell me about yourself' thing.

Like, where you were born, your family, where you went to school."

Something flickered over Alona's features and Jared got the impression she wasn't a fan of that topic. But, isn't that what people talked about when getting to know each other on a date?

"Well," Alona said, looking down and unrolling her utensils from her napkin. "I was born here. In the DC area. And I have a brother. We were raised by both of our parents. I didn't go to college."

"Oh. I thought you said you had moved to the area a few years ago."

"Moved back. I moved back to the area. I left to, you know...get away from home. But, I came back."

"I see. Didn't think much of the world?" Jared asked with a smile.

"Just missed home, I guess. What about you?"

"Well, I—" Jared paused. Damn it. Why had he brought up this subject? He had to give her his alias information. "I was born in Pennsylvania and I went to school at Penn State. I'm an only child."

"Ah."

They both took the time to butter a piece of bread, take a bite, and then chew it slowly. The waiter saved them by arriving with their drinks, a beer for

Jared and wine for Alona. The waiter took their order and after downing a few gulps of their respective drinks, they smiled awkwardly at each other.

“So, this is kind of weird,” Alona said.

“I know. I’m sorry. I think it’s me.”

“No, trust me. It’s me. I apologize. How about we try to forget that we’re, you know, on a date, and then maybe we can relax.”

“Sounds good.”

“Okay.” Alona leaned over and dug around in her large purse. She pulled out a folder and set it on the table. Jared tilted his head, confused.

“What’s that?”

“It’s some information I have on Ella Vasquez.” Jared’s eyebrows shot up as Alona pulled a document out of the envelope. “So, I told you before she’s only been at Cohen & Cohen for a little over a year. Before that she worked for six other investment firms.”

“Six?”

“Yes,” Alona handed Jared the document. “All for around a year. Some more, some less. She’s only 29, which means she’s been bouncing around from one firm to the next since she graduated from MIT.”

“She graduated from MIT?”

“Yep. Top of her class. It’s kind of strange that she’s taking jobs as an IT girl at investment firms, and then never staying for long. But, she doesn’t get fired. So, it’s not like she can’t play well with others and has to take what she can get. In fact, a lot of companies have given her really good recommendations, some even saying they wanted to give her a bad one so that she wouldn’t get hired and could stay with them.”

Jared looked up from the detailed report. “This is all in her personnel file?”

Alona stared blankly for a moment and then smiled. “Yep. Cohen & Cohen are very thorough. You should see the file they have on you.”

“What do they have on me?”

“I’m just teasing. This information was on her resume, and they have a copy of her letter of recommendation from her last job. There’s nothing here every other employer wouldn’t have about their employees.”

“Right...” Jared looked at the document; it didn’t look like a resume per se, but then resume styles had really changed.

“What’s interesting is that the investment firms are all over the country.

Each one in a different state. She moves around a lot.”

“Some people are restless, I guess.” Jared handed the document back. “I appreciate you getting this information for me, but I’m just trying to figure out where there are weaknesses in the system. I’m not investigating anybody.”

“Oh, right. Of course not. I guess I got a little carried away.” She put the folder back in her purse. “I guess the idea of playing detective just sounded fun. Being a receptionist isn’t really the most stimulating job.”

“Oh, yeah, I...”

“Don’t go looking like that.”

“Like what?”

“Like you feel sorry for the girl with the menial job because she doesn’t have a college education.”

“I—” Jared felt his face heat up. “I’m sorry! I didn’t! I wasn’t thinking that you—”

She laughed. “It’s okay, Jared. I’m just teasing you. You’re pretty easy to fluster. It’s cute.”

Jared shook his head. “You’re a terrible person.”

“But you still like me, don’t you?” Alona grinned and Jared had to smile.

“Kind of. Thinking of you as some kind of film noir detective is kind of hot.”

Alona laughed. “Does that make you my ‘knew you were nothing but trouble’ when you walked in the door?”

“Maybe. I do have the legs for it.”

Alona laughed and Jared love the way her eyes lit up.

“I did kind of feel like a detective though,” she said, playing shyly with her napkin. “Like, when I saw that she moved around so much but her direct deposit information showed that she had an account at the same bank for ten years, I thought I was so clever for spotting something.”

“I hate to nitpick at your deductive reasoning, detective, but a lot of people keep the same bank when they move.”

“Well, with national banks, sure. But, this is like a local bank that literally only has the one location. And she’s originally from New Mexico, and her first job was in California. So, how would she have opened an account at that bank ten years ago, when she just moved to DC a little over a year ago?”

Jared cocked his head. “That is odd.” His brow creased. “Where she was born and her bank account information is in her personnel file?”

“I may have Googled her.”

Jared smiled. “Maybe you should become a PI instead of a receptionist.”

“It’s a thought.”

“So, what’s the name of the local bank?”

“Potomac First.”

Something about that sounded familiar, but Jared couldn't put his finger on it. His train of thought was derailed when the waiter arrived with their food.

"Oh, this smells good," Alona said. "Good choice on the restaurant. That is a definite point in your favor."

"How many points do I need to get?" Jared asked with a playfully suggestive quirk of an eyebrow.

Alona smiled and put her manicured finger to her lips to lick off a bit of sauce.

"More than you'll be able to earn tonight, but less than you probably think."

Jared grinned. "Okay, detective, we'll play by your rules."

"You're a smart man, Jared Bell."

"Well, smart enough anyway."

They both laughed, and for the rest of the evening the awkwardness was gone. Jared chose to ignore the fact that he was pretending to be somebody else because he decided that Jensen was right and that he needed to just keep this casual. He wouldn't ask her on a date again because that wasn't fair to her, but a little flirting in the office wouldn't hurt anyone if he had to leave suddenly or was revealed to be undercover. Or at least it wouldn't hurt as bad as being in a quasi-relationship with someone. Of course, she was already digging into a coworker's past just to impress him, so maybe he really shouldn't encourage her anymore at all.

After dinner and a shared dessert that was kind of torture for Jared to watch Alona lick chocolate fudge off her spoon with those lips (and women's cosmetics had really come a long way for her lips to still be so red after eating and never reapplying—and Jensen would give him a disapproving frown if he knew that Jared had noticed), by unspoken agreement they took a walk back to Alona's apartment that was much longer than three blocks.

They talked the entire time, but Jared would be hard pressed to remember

exactly about what. It had mostly been likes and dislikes involving movies and music and few other more superficial topics. Jared didn't mind though; they needed to keep everything on the surface.

When they reached Alona's apartment building, Jared stood in amusement as she dug through her huge purse to find her keys.

"I never carry bags this big," she grumbled. "It's the only thing I had that would fit that stupid folder."

Jared laughed softly. "Well, I do appreciate the effort, gumshoe."

"Ah ha!" She pulled her keys out triumphantly. Then she tilted her head.

"Did you just refer to me as chewed gum?"

"What? No. Gumshoe. It's like a film noir-y term for a detective."

"Oh. Okay. I've never heard of that before."

"You haven't? Hm. I guess it's not used much anymore."

"Well, now that I know you weren't calling me used up gum, I can truthfully say that I had a lovely time tonight."

Her ponytail swayed as she gave him a cheeky smile and Jared just wanted to kiss her, but should he walk her upstairs to make sure she got in okay first? Or should he really not do something that might suggest he wanted a second date?

"I think we will leave it here, though. You still need a few more points to get the invite upstairs, but you may kiss me."

"Oh may I?" Jared asked with teasing offense.

"Yes," she replied with poise and control. "You may."

Jared felt something that felt like a tiny elephant trampling down his spine.

He stepped forward without another witty word or doubtful thought and placed his hands lightly on her waist. He leaned over—quite far—and placed a light barely there kiss on those red lips. They were soft, not sticky at all, and they curved up into a smile under his.

“Come on, ace, you can do better than that,” she whispered.

Jared pressed his lips to hers more forcefully and then tilted his head the other way causing her lips to part slightly with the movement. It was enough for him to kiss her deeper, their tongues brushing in fleeting, uncertain touches. Jared wrapped his arms completely around Alona’s waist and straightened, bringing her feet a good six inches off the ground. She didn’t struggle against losing her footing and curled her arms around his neck. They kissed, unaware of their surroundings, for long enough that the need for a proper breath of air was the only thing that made them slow down.

Jared pulled away first, but gave Alona another peck on the lips. She

opened her eyes, and just gazed at him for a moment. Then she loosened her hold on his neck and he carefully set her back on her feet. He took a step back, but kept his hands on her waist. Her eyes were bright and her cheeks were flushed and he was pretty certain that his face must be completely red because all the blood had oddly gone to his head and not to parts south. Not that he didn’t find her attractive, but he was definitely feeling more giddy than aroused.

“Thank you for a nice night, Jared. I’ll see you tomorrow at work.”

“Uh. You’re welcome. Or, I mean, thank you too. For a nice night.

Goodnight.”

She leaned forward and stood on her tiptoes. Jared took the hint and leaned down to kiss her one more time. Then Alona used her keys to open the front door and slipped inside with a shy smile and wave. Jared stared at her door as the slow close hinge held him in a trance. When it settled in the door jamb, he turned with a goofy smile on his face and began walking in what he hoped was the direction of the metro. He wasn’t really paying attention to what was

going around him. He definitely wasn't paying attention to the voice asking him, What the heck happened to casual?

Wednesday, July 23, 2014

Jensen nudged his mouse with his elbow to keep the computer from going into locked mode when the screen flashed. He glanced at his list of instant messenger contacts; Misha was offline. He pouted and returned to sorting through the Google search results on his unclassified computer. The addition of a second monitor to his workstation, and thus giving him the ability to get rid of the switch, had definitely made work easier. It also made it easier to goof off on the Internet while still pretending to work, but he was actually working at the moment so he didn't feel bad about the forty minutes he'd spent perusing B&B's in the Rockies. He'd only stopped because he thought it might be a little too sappy to be looking up places to honeymoon with Misha. Then he'd gotten mad at himself for still giving into the occasional doubts regarding his behavior that being with a man gave him. It had his father written all over it, but sometimes it was just too

hard to shake.

Currently he was searching through what records he'd been able to pull on Mark Pellegrino from the three or four databases that he still remembered his password for. He had Osric busy working on the Cohen & Cohen data to see if he could find any more examples of the returns on investments not quite equaling the earnings.

What he had found so far on Pellegrino was that he had been the VP (one of many) at Goldman Sachs for many years and had left to begin work at Cohen & Cohen for the original Cohen right before the banks went bust in 2008. It was hard to say if that was a fortuitous move or not because even though the bankers and investment firms were vilified, they all got huge bonuses out of the deal. There weren't any reports red flagging any financial gains or inconsistencies on record, and he was up to date and accurate with his taxes. Jensen didn't have any exact numbers, but it was safe to assume that the guy was rich enough that embezzling a few thousand dollars here and there wouldn't make much of difference to him.

Then again, some people did it just to be richer even if they were already rich.

His desk phone hummed quietly at him and it took him a moment to realize that it was ringing. It was a good thing they lit up. He picked up the phone and answered, "This is Special Agent Ackles."

"Hey, Jensen. It's me."

"Hey, Jay. How's it going? Calling from the bathroom stall again?"

"Shut up, man," Jared grumbled. "You don't know what they're like. It's like I'm their therapist or something. One came in this morning and actually started talking about his mother."

Jensen snorted. "What did you say?"

"I told him that all parents love their children equally."

"That's nice. Do you really believe that?"

"I said love equally, not like. There's a difference."

Jensen sniggered and then turned his chair so that Loretta's narrowed eyes could only see his profile.

"Do you have time to talk?" Jensen asked.

"Not a lot, I just wanted to tell you something I found out about one of the employees here, and maybe you can start on that lead from your end."

"Oh, it's about work? I wanted to hear about Alona."

"Well, you can in a way. She's the one who got me the lead."

"How?"

"She looked through the person's personnel files."

“Dude. You do know that if someone does something illegal and gives it to us we can use it only if they’re not directed by us to do it.”

“I didn’t direct her to do it. She did it on her own.”

“I don’t know, you’re walking a fine line there.”

“I’m not going to ask her to do anything else. But, since we have the information, we might as well look into it. Most of it is open source knowledge anyway.”

“Alright, what is it?”

“You were right about looking unto Ella Vasquez.”

“How so?”

“She’s been with the company for a little over a year and she’s the one who designed—and is basically the only one who has control of—the program that is used to transfer money from investors’ bank accounts to the securities and stocks and then back again.”

“I don’t understand what you mean.”

“It’s like their middleman equivalent of PayPal.”

“Ah, gotcha. The person who has control of money routing does seem like a good place to start, but do you have any other reasons to suspect her?”

“She’s had six jobs in about eight years, moving from investment firm to investment firm. Maybe she skims a little here and a little there and moves on before anyone starts to notice.”

“That’s a possibility.”

“Also, Alona found something else out, which now that I think about it probably isn’t something one could find in an open source search so I wonder if I should be worried...”

“A little late for that now,” Jensen said dryly.

“Yeah...I’ve decided not to go out with her again. Aside from the fact that it feels a little...weird, like she’s not consenting to be with me but with whoever this Jared Bell person is, but her access to information is a little shady too.”

“Should we investigate her?”

Jared was silent for a long moment, and Jensen didn’t rush him.

“No, not yet,” he said finally. “She did just start working there a week and a half ago. I don’t see how she could be responsible for wrong transactions made six months ago.”

“Maybe when the guilty party found out Pellegrino was bringing in a QC guy, and they got an accomplice to come in and misdirect you.”

“Shit. That’s possible. Pellegrino announced it a full week before I even started.”

“I think you’re right about keeping your distance from her then. But...what did she get for you?”

“Oh, um,” Jared cleared his throat. Then he let out a soft sigh that he probably didn’t intend for Jensen to hear. Jensen felt sorry that the first woman Jared had been interested in after Gen was pretty much off limits

now. “So, what she found out is that Ella has a bank account with a local bank, but she never lived in this area until she got this job. So, it seems odd that she would have made a trip across the country just to open a bank account at a branch she’d never be able to access anywhere else.”

“What bank?”

“It was...ah, crap. What was it? There was something about it that seemed familiar. Like, it was mentioned during our initial interviews or something?”

“Local bank, local bank...” Jensen mused. “Oh, Potomac First?”

“Yeah, that’s it.”

“Yeah, that’s the bank that at least five investors had listed as a primary bank. It’s also the bank that had the matching account number with the major chain bank.”

“What matching account number?”

“Osric found that two investors had the same bank account numbers but at different banks.”

“That seems...unlikely.”

“Yes, it does. I’ve got Osric checking for any more of those mismatching return amounts. We’ve got about three years’ worth of data, so we’ll see if any of them predate her starting at the company. Can you get us an exact start date for her?”

“Yeah, no problem. Alright, I’ve gotta run. I’ve got to interview the other IT guys.”

“Okay. Thanks for the info.”

“Sure.”

“And Jared?”

“Yeah?”

“Stop hanging out in the bathroom. It’s weird.”

“I’m not in the bathroom.”

“I can hear your voice reverberating off the walls.”

Jared grumbled unintelligibly and then hung up the phone. Jensen smiled and

put the receiver down. He leaned back in his chair.

“Hey, Oz?”

“Yeah?” came Osric’s voice from over the thin divide.

“You got an ETA on the rest of those discrepancies?”

“Ehhh...Thursday afternoon? Friday morning. No later than COB Friday. I hope.”

“Okay. We’ve got dates on all of them, right?”

“Yep.”

“Okay. Can you keep the dates associated with the flagged transactions?”

“Already done.”

“Thanks, Oz. You’re the best.”

“Yes, I am.”

Jensen smiled. He looked back at the communicator window on his classified machine. Misha was still offline. He sighed and looked back at his unclassified computer. He reopened a web browser and returned to researching B&B’s in the Rockies. He didn’t even know if Misha liked mountains or snow; all he knew was that Misha had honeymooned in Palau for his first marriage, so they were not going anywhere tropical.

As he was narrowing down the list of potential B&B’s from one hundred to twenty-five (who knew there were so many fucking B&B’s in the country

let alone one area), he received an email on the unclassified side. Pulling up Outlook, he saw that he had received a reply from his contact in the Green Falls Police Department in Oregon. He’d sent them a message on Monday regarding Russ’ potential involvement with the Green Falls Killer in their jurisdiction.

He'd also sent a message to Detective Tracy in Lubbock informing him of the possible connection to the Angel Slayer. The man had agreed that the news shouldn't be publicized until they had more concrete evidence, but that he would look into disappearances of young men in Lubbock during the same four years. He hadn't heard anything back from him yet, but Detective Darcy in Green Falls seemed to be very much on top of things.

Thank you for reaching out, Agent Ackles.

After the news broke about the Angel Slayer last year, one of our evidence technicians came to us and said she thought that if the story about the disciples was true, that there were some signs involving the Green Falls Killer that indicated he might be one of the disciples. The pre-mortem torturing and the kills themselves are very violent and personal, and the postmortem dissections and desecrations are very clinical and "playful."

(Her word.) We haven't had a kill since the Angel Slayer was caught, so we haven't been able to check under the victims' tongues for a brand per your information. However, we might be able to exhume the most recent victim who was buried in November. It's possible there might still be enough preserved tissue to do an examination.

The evidence technician says she also suspects the killer could be a disciple because one of our police officers did suggest the theory that there might be two killers a couple of years ago. Unfortunately he was killed in a freak accident at home and without him the theory never gained more traction.

We now might also have to consider the possibility that that officer's death wasn't an accident. With someone as smart as Russell Little running the show, nothing should be ruled out as a coincidence.

We've been reinvestigating and reviewing the old cases since December under the assumption that these kills could be related to the Angel Slayer,

but we didn't come up with anything concrete enough to warrant reaching out to the FBI. Now that you've contacted us, I think some of our findings hold a little more weight.

Does the FBI intend to send any agents out here to help in our investigation? We would welcome any assistance you can offer. I can also say that I personally would be honored to work with you, sir. Your perseverance with the Angel Slayer is something to aspire to.

Detective Kyle Darcy Jensen strummed his fingers on top of the keyboard lightly, not sure how to respond. He definitely had no authority to send agents, or himself, out to Oregon. More than likely if the FBI did become involved then the Portland Field Office would handle it. He decided to test Russ and emailed the detective back, asking for details about the Green Falls Killer that had been kept out of the papers. Even if Russ had looked up the killer when he'd still been a cop, he wouldn't have had access to that department's internal records.

When he finished his email, he returned to B&B searching until he couldn't stand looking at one more living room with Victorian style furniture and a multitude of cat figurines. Maybe using the term B&B was the problem.

Maybe they just needed to find a lodge at a ski resort or something.

Regardless, he was done honeymoon planning and feeling restless. Jared was still conducting interviews, Osric was still data mining, and he...was still sitting on his ass.

Jensen logged off his computers and threw on his suit jacket. He stopped by Bob's office and the man was glaring grumpily at his computer screen.

"What," Bob grumped.

"We've gotten some intel on the case that Potomac First Bank may have some involvement. We don't have anything concrete enough to warrant using official investigative methods."

"And?" Bob still hadn't looked away from his monitor.

"And...I was wondering if you would mind if I left a little early. I was thinking about switching banks, going local, you know, to stop supporting the big corporations. I was going to get some information from local branches."

Bob looked at him over his glasses with a wry expression. “Why don’t you pick up a pamphlet for me too?”

“Yes, sir.”

Jensen took the elevator down to the garage and fortunately his Bu car wasn’t blocked in by someone else. It took him about twenty minutes to maneuver through the mayhem that was the DC streets layout and park at a meter a couple of blocks from Potomac First. He opted to pay the meter rather than put out his parking pass.

The building that housed the bank was pretty standard issue: off-white concrete with double glass doors and an ATM vestibule in between the outside and the inner lobby. The lobby was a lot of wood paneling and faux-marble which made Jensen’s eyes jump around uncomfortably from surface to surface. There was a short counter on the front left side with two teller windows, and the rest of the large space had been used to create open offices with only three walls that were about eight feet high, well below the thirty foot ceilings. There was an out of place ornate staircase at the back that led to the second level, which was open to the lobby. The stairs appeared to continue up to more floors.

Jensen paused just inside the doors, not sure where he should go.

Fortunately he was approached by a stunning black woman with hair shaved close to her head and full lips painted a provocative deep purple.

She gave him a friendly smile and stopped with her white high heels positioned in an elegant pose and her hands clasped together in front of her.

“Hello, sir. Welcome to Potomac First. What can I help you with today?”

“Uh, I was looking for information on opening an account with a local bank.”

Her smile grew. “Then you’ve walked in the right doors. My name is Grace Crenshaw. Will you follow me to my office?”

“Sure.”

Jensen followed behind her, forcing his eyes to look anywhere but the shapely curve of her hips and backside in a well-tailored navy blue skirt.

Her office was in the second row of cubicles, and after he took a seat she offered him water or coffee, which he declined. After introductions and general pleasantries were taken care of, Grace seamlessly launched into a practiced spiel about the different types of accounts they offered and the benefits of not using a big banking company. Jensen prodded her with question meant to glean what kind of personal information the bank required to open an account, but it was all pretty standard. He kept her talking, waiting to see if he would be pitched for a special kind of account or offer, but got no hits. If Potomac First or someone affiliated with it was doing something shady, it probably didn't have to do with their standard fare business.

“Are there any other questions today I can answer for you, Mr. Ackles?”

Grace asked, ever pleasant. “Would you like to open an account today?”

“I thank you for your very thorough answers; I am interested in Potomac First. However, today I was just doing research, so I won't open an account at this time. I am interested to know though if Potomac First, being a smaller bank, has the capability of managing large investment accounts.”

“Oh, you're interested in investing? Yes, we do have managers to help with those kinds of accounts and can supply you with referrals for hedge fund managers if you like. I can get you some information on that as well. May I ask what level of investing you'd be interested in?”

Jensen almost replied with a vague answer indicating he was new to investing and would just be dipping his toes into the stock market when he realized that that wouldn't be the type of fish anyone would want to hook.

“I'm interested in a bank that has the experience and capacity to handle not only large quantities of investments and trades, but large sums of money as well.”

“How large?” Grace asked with a fixed smile.

“Seven figures.”

“You know, I think you need to speak with Mr. Podvodnik. He handles all of our...premium accounts. Would you wait here a moment?”

“Of course.”

Grace left the cubicle and he could just make out that she climbed the stairs to the second level. Jensen tapped his thumbs against his legs and made sounds with his mouth while he waited. It was less than five minutes before Grace returned with a short man with grey hair, a few wrinkles, but very sharp eyes. Jensen stood up to greet him.

“Mr. Ackles,” the man said with a firm handshake and a slight eastern European accent, “it’s a pleasure to have you here at Potomac First. Would you join me in my office where we can conduct business in private?”

“I’d love to.”

“Thank you, Grace,” the man said as they left her cubicle. Jensen gave her a smile and she gave him the first genuine smile he’d seen out of her as her eyes swept over his body briefly.

Mr. Podvodnik led them toward the staircase saying, “You look quite strapping, but we do have an elevator if you need it.”

“The stairs are fine.”

They climbed the grand staircase and Mr. Podvodnik led them to an office on the left. It wasn’t as large or lavish as Jensen was expecting, but it looked like something a movie set designer would create for a “stuffy senior bank manager.” The bookshelves and desk were dark wood and all the furniture was covered in dark leather with brass studs. There was an antique-looking globe in one corner and a tall leafy plant in the other. The man’s desk had a large ink blotter in the center, a phone set at an angle to the left, and a fancy, wooden pen holder on the right. There was no computer as far as Jensen could tell.

Mr. Podvodnik gestured to one of the chairs for Jensen to take a seat in while he walked around his desk and sat in the imperious desk chair that was far too large for him. He looked a little bit like a cartoon villain because the back of the chair nearly dwarfed him.

“Now,” Mr. Podvodnik said, “tell me about your interest in investing.”

Jensen now saw the error in judgment in coming here on the fly unprepared, but he managed to recall a few things that he’d inadvertently learned while quizzing Jared to prepare him to go undercover. It appeared to be enough to convince the banker that he wasn’t talking completely out of his ass, and the man laid out several investment plans and strategies that could be of interest. Unfortunately since he knew nothing about investing, had no actual money to invest, and everything seemed legitimate, he found himself drifting in and out of attention and struggling not let his eyes droop. It was possible that Potomac First kept popping up because it was one of the few locally owned banks in the region and paranoid millionaires didn’t trust the big banks anymore.

“Well,” Jensen said, after the fifth plan had been mapped out for him,

“you’ve certainly given me a lot to consider. I’m going to do a little more research, but I like the personal attention you give here very much.”

“Of course, of course. If we don’t take care of our clients, we don’t have a business. Can I set up a time for you to discuss account management and transfer with one of our coordinators?”

“Oh, uh...you know, I think I’ll have to check with my secretary.”

The man chuckled. “I understand, I understand! My secretary knows my schedule better than I. And my wife too for that matter. Are you married, Mr. Ackles?”

“Engaged.”

“Well, congratulations. This would be the perfect time then to begin building up that retirement nest egg.”

“Exactly.”

They left his office and walked over to the staircase.

“Oh, before you leave,” the little man said, “I meant to give you this.” He pulled a business card out of his coat breast pocket and handed it to Jensen.

“There’s a lot to consider when selecting a hedge fund manager, and while there are some merits to the well-known big name companies, I prefer to deal with smaller, local firms. This company is one of my personal favorites as they provide personal attention, like we do here. They also are quite progressive and keep up with the latest technological changes. Sometimes I find older companies are a little stuck in their ways which can limit our clients’ success.”

“Well, thank you very much for your candor and time. I will definitely look into,” Jensen glanced down at the card in his hand, “Cohen & Cohen.”

“Excellent. Have a wonderful day, Mr. Ackles.”

“You too, Mr. Podvodnik.”

The man left Jensen at the top of the stairs and returned to his office. Jensen looked down at the card in his hand. He already knew that there was a link between Cohen & Cohen and Potomac First, so it wasn’t a surprise that the bank manager knew of the company. But was it odd that he was actively sending business over there? Maybe not. There could be some kind of referral-incentive agreement set up between the two. He’d ask Jared if he could find out.

Thursday, July 24, 2014

Jared discreetly played spider solitaire on his laptop while Brock paced around his office and ranted about Dylan and Matt. Apparently they were at some sort of retreat that was masquerading as a corporate executive seminar but was really just an excuse to drink and sit by a pool in The Bahamas. It didn’t seem like Brock was as upset about the farce or excessive spending of

money as he was that he and Mark hadn't been able to go.

"This is probably one of the reasons why we have QC problems," Brock said. "Our 'president' is rarely here doing business."

"Unh-hunh."

"I mean, he just graduated from business school. Don't you think that means that he ought to be here getting experience while the person who

already knows how to run a business gets to go on the retreats?"

"Well, it makes more sense to leave the experienced person in charge while the newbie gets some training."

"It's not training," Brock said exasperatedly. "I told you. It's just a ruse. It's just...what are you doing?"

Jared hid his screen. "Brock, I actually am busy doing my job. Why aren't you doing yours?"

"Oh, Mark is at the spa getting a stress relief therapy session. He'll be gone for another hour."

Jared perked up at that. Matt and Mark were both gone. Now might be a good time to do a little snooping on them.

"Well, then it sounds like you have time on your hands to glue all the drawers on Dylan's desk shut."

Brock's frown turned right upside down. "Do I need a special kind of glue?"

"Well, super glue will make it almost impossible to get the drawers open again, so you better stick with Elmer's. He'll be able to pull the drawers open, but it'll be an effort."

"Right...Elmer's...okay. See you around."

Brock ran out of the room and Jared shook his head, knowing the kid was

heading for the closest store that sold super glue. More than likely the drawers in the desk didn't fit together perfectly flush, so there was a good chance the glue bond would have enough air pockets in it to break after enough pulling. Or maybe not, but it wouldn't be his problem. He locked his laptop and pocketed his cell phone. He was on his way to the door when it burst open. Jared started back as Alona came in with a mighty annoyed expression on her face and slammed the door shut. She put her hands on her hips.

"H-hi, A-Alona."

"Oh, so now you'll say hi to me? What gives, Jared? We had a nice date, an amazing kiss, and then you barely even nodded to me when you came in yesterday and today, and you've skipped lunch. Did I miss something?

Because I could have sworn that our date was kind of awesome."

"I..." Lie, you moron. "It was awesome." That is not a lie, you nitwit. "I just, I didn't...I felt like maybe you would...I thought you thought I was using you and I didn't—"

"Using me? How?"

"To get information on employees. I didn't—"

"That's ridiculous! I did all of that on my own. I guess a date wasn't the best time to bring it up, but we were struggling for conversation in the beginning. I was just trying to break the ice."

"Oh."

"And I thought it worked. I loved dinner. I loved talking to you. And...I..."

that kiss..." Alona trailed off and dropped her eyes. Then she looked back up, anger flashing in her eyes and cheeks pink. "Well, don't make me say everything!"

"It was an amazing kiss," Jared blurted out. "Like you said. The kind where you just want more and more and..." His eyes swept over her. "More," he

said softly.

Alona crossed her arms and looked away as she shifted her weight. They were silent for ten painful seconds.

“So, you weren’t trying to give me the brush off?” Alona asked. “Because I wouldn’t put out?”

“What?! No!” Jared stepped forward and took her shoulders in his hands.

She looked so small with his stupidly massive paws on her. “No, not at all. I just...I didn’t want to go too far too fast when I think we’re both a little hesitant to make this something big, you know? I think we’re both looking for casual. For friendship.”

“Friendship?” Alona asked, looking up at him. “Is friendship all you want?”

Fuck no. “Maybe it might be best to stay friends for a while longer before we try something else.”

Alona nodded. They stared into each other’s eyes. And then they lunged for each other like they were in a bad sitcom. They stumbled back as their hands roved liberally and they kissed wildly. Jared wrapped an arm around her tiny waist and hoisted her up, clearing off part of his desk with the other. He sat Alona on the desk and they continued to kiss—though there was an awful lot of teeth involved for it to be just a kiss—and started pulling on each other’s clothes.

There was a knock at the door and they leapt apart as the door opened. One of the security guys stopped in mid-sentence as he took in Jared’s and Alona’s disheveled appearance and failed attempts at masking their deep breathing.

“Uh, I need to get back to the desk,” Alona said, “but I’d appreciate it if you would finish filling out your personal contact information for your personnel record.”

“Right, yes, I will get right on that.”

They sent each other tight smiles and then Alona walked out of the office.

Jared looked up at the security guy. He was smirking.

“All I got was an email request.”

Jared put up with the guy’s thinly veiled innuendo as he dropped off a list of potential interview times for their division—something which could have been emailed—and eventually got him to leave. He checked his watch. He wasn’t sure how long ago Brock had left, but he should still have some time to do some snooping in Matt’s office at least.

He took the elevator up to the top floor and stepped off into the quiet hallway. In theory there was nothing up here but Mark’s and Matt’s offices, and a shared space where Dylan and Brock sat. The access to the floor wasn’t restricted, but there was a chance the offices would be locked. Jared walked in the direction he had the first time he’d come to Cohen & Cohen.

He knew where Matt’s office was and he didn’t want to chance having to take the time to open random doors looking for Mark’s office. He also had no idea when either Mark or Brock would be back, but if he could get into Matt’s office he shouldn’t be disturbed.

Jared squinted his eyes as he tried the doorknob to Matt’s office, like that might protect him from anything bad that would happen if he were caught or the door was locked. The door opened easily and silently. Jared slipped inside and shut the door behind him. The lights were off, but the copious windows left him with more than enough light to see in the large room. He walked over to the chairs and couches, but there were no bookshelves or tables with drawers near it. The kitchenette was pretty standard and the bookshelves opposite the desk were full of notebooks on company policy, financial journals, and even a few textbooks. He supposed one of them could be hollowed out or labeled incorrectly to hide the contents, but he didn’t have time to sort through the notebooks one by one at the moment. He decided to tackle the desk.

Jared sat down in the comfortable chair behind Matt’s desk and took a moment to appreciate the view out of the large windows directly in front of him. It was a bit odd to have the desk set up so that the user’s back was to the

door, but the view did explain it. He shook himself from admiring the feng shui of the room and started opening desk drawers like he was in some kind of terrible caper movie. But of course the bad guy always left damning evidence against himself covered only by one sheet of paper in an unlocked drawer.

His rummaging produced only a couple of quarterly reports, some desk supplies, and a half-eaten can of unsalted almonds. Health nut. Jared opened the last drawer.

“Holy...”

He used a pencil to prod at the items in the drawer. Underneath the anal plug and the vibrator were at least a three month’s supply of condoms and lube. Jared grinned and shook his head, wondering if Matt was banging his secretary. Or if it was just for personal stress relief. Or if despite appearances there was a frisky lady in the office who was into “butt stuff.”

He’d never given much thought to anal sex for most of his life, but sharing a motel wall with Jensen and Misha on the other side for a couple of months had made him reluctantly curious. After all, who screamed that loudly if it wasn’t that good? He shut the drawer and put the pencil back.

Then he looked at the computer.

It was off and probably wouldn’t take too long to boot up, but it was most definitely password protected. The IT team required everyone in the company to have passwords nearly as complicated as he was required to have for the Bureau, so guessing Matt’s password was impossible.

Especially since he only had three tries. He looked around the room and tried to imagine that if he was embezzling from his own company, where would he hide the evidence?

It actually didn’t make much sense for Matt to embezzle from his own company. He didn’t have a salary, he simply kept whatever earnings were left over after expenses, employee salaries, and taxes. If he was skimming off the

top, he'd only be taking money he was going to get anyway. He supposed it could be a way to lower the taxes he had to pay, but the dollar amounts were relatively negligible. Mark was salaried and if he thought he was worth more than what Matt was willing to pay, he's the one who had motive to embezzle from the firm.

There were a few other places he could look through in the office, but his suspicion of Matt wasn't strong enough to risk getting caught. He'd only been in the office a few minutes, but the less time the better. He put his ear to the office door and listened. After a minute of silence, he cracked open the door and peeked outside. It was empty. He stepped into the hallway, closed the door, and walked to the elevator. He pushed the down button and began to sigh in relief until the doors opened and revealed Mark. He drew in a sharp breath and took a step back. Mark casually stepped off the elevator with one hand in his pocket and smiled at Jared as the elevator doors slid shut.

"Jared. What brings you up here?"

Jared remained collected and responded in what he thought was a normal tone. "I was looking for Matt."

"Matt and Dylan are away on business."

"Ah. That would explain why Dylan isn't at his desk."

"Brock didn't tell you?" Mark asked, a little too innocently.

"He's not there either." Jared hoped that the kid wasn't back from buying glue yet or his story would be shot to hell.

"What did you need Matt for? Is it something I can help with?"

"Actually, yes," Jared said with a nod, thanking his brain for kicking into gear and reminding him of the email Jensen had sent him.

"Then come with me to my office and we can discuss it."

Mark put a hand on his back, urging him to follow him down the hall. It would be good to go so he could learn where Mark's office was located, but

he didn't want this conversation to last too long. He resisted the nudge by keeping his feet planted, and Mark removed his hand.

"Actually, I have some of the last interviews scheduled not long from now.

My question shouldn't be more than a yes or a no anyway. Agent Ackles has been conducting his own investigation as well—"

"I'm pleased to know the FBI is working so diligently on this case."

Jared nodded. "Well, as I mentioned in my notes, we think there's a possibility that this is all tied to a wider national scheme. We don't have enough concrete evidence on that yet for me to discuss it with you, but we have been investigating other angles. Does Cohen & Cohen have a referral or incentive program set up with any banks?"

Mark's brow creased. "I'm not sure I understand what you mean."

"For instance, would a bank get a kickback if they referred one of their clients with a large bank account to your company?"

"Oh, no. We have nothing like that. Most of our business is by word of mouth through our clients."

"To your knowledge have you ever had any—difficulties—when dealing with Potomac First bank?"

"I'm afraid I wouldn't know the answer to that. I'm going to schedule a meeting with us and the company lawyer, Samantha Ferris. She would have records of any legally questionable dealings with other businesses."

"Thank you. That would be helpful."

"I'm more than happy to avail myself to the FBI. I have a conference call I need to prepare for, unless you have anything else?"

"No, we just needed to know if you have arrangements with other companies or banks that we should be aware of."

“Not that I know of.” He held his arms out. “We’re an open book here.”

“Thank you, Mark.”

“Have a good day, Jared.”

Mark turned and walked down the hallway. Jared delayed pushing the elevator button so that he would have time to watch where Mark was headed. He rounded the corner to the right and disappeared from sight. His office was not in the same position as Matt’s on the opposite side of the hall then. Good to know. The elevator doors slid open with a soft chime. Jared stepped on and began writing an email in his head to Jensen regarding his upcoming meeting with the lawyer.

Friday, July 25, 2014

Jensen waited outside the interview room while Russ was chained to the table and floor. The green corrections officer, Garner, if he recalled correctly, had picked him up again.

“Are you scared to see him?” the young man asked. “I mean, I’m not suggesting you’re a coward! I mean that I’m scared of him. I was just wondering if...”

“Yeah, I’m scared of him,” Jensen said looking at the grey cement block wall instead of the kid. “You’d have to be insane not to be.”

The conversation ended. About a minute later the guard in the room thumped on the door. The kid unlocked the door from the outside and let Jensen in, and then locked him in the room with the psychopath. Granted there was a guard in the room and on the other side of the other door were two more guards monitoring the situation, but it still made him anxious to be so close to Russ.

“Hello, Jensen.”

“Hello, Russ,” Jensen said blandly and sat down after pulling the chair out and away from the table.

Russ' eyes tracked the movement, but he didn't comment. He folded his hands together in a mockery of politeness.

"So, Jensen. What do you think? I'm growing the beard back. Do you like it? Or do you prefer me clean shaven?"

"I have no preference," Jensen said, already feeling worn out from just five seconds with him.

Russ pursed his lips and seemed displeased with Jensen's lackadaisical response. He looked Jensen over for a moment, but didn't comment on it.

"Have you been doing your homework?" Russ asked instead.

"You were never a suspect in Lubbock. The bodies will be long since decomposed past examining them for brands or other identifying marks.

The DNA evidence is gone so we can't compare it to yours. It's virtually impossible to prove you're the Lubbock Lady Killer without your confession."

Russ shrugged. "Why do you think I sent you there first? If I want to get out of the Angel Slayer killings with an insanity plea, I can't confess to more killings."

"You're not getting out of the Angel Slayer killings," Jensen sighed wearily.

"Did you look up the Green Falls Killer?" Russ ignored him.

"I did. The police think there's a distinct possibility that the pattern fits.

There hasn't been a kill since you were arrested, so they can't check the tongues unless they exhume the latest one. Did you kill a cop out there?"

"I've never killed a cop. We're America's heroes."

"Haven't been watching much of the news lately, have you?"

Russ shrugged. "There are bad apples in every barrel."

Jensen gave him a look. “Don’t say that like you’re not one of them.”

“I never racially profiled anyone I pulled over for a traffic stop.”

“I’m pretty sure I saw all of three black people in Elton while I was there.”

“I never used excessive force on a minority.”

“No, you just gutted people because the voices in your head told you to.”

“I don’t hear voices.”

“Not helping your ‘I’m crazy’ defense.”

“Do you want to know how I got started? Do you want to hear about my first kill?”

“No.”

Russ tilted his head, a small smile telling Jensen that Russ knew he was full of shit. He was curious. He hated himself for it, but he was.

“I started with animals,” Russ said. “You were right, Jen.”

“*Sen*,” Jensen almost hissed.

“Jensen. If you had been able to have access to the sealed file about the juvenile offender who had dissected those animal bodies, well, you would have seen my name. Case closed. You are so clever. I loved that you

thought outside the box like that. God, Jensen, when you went down to the old records room to find my file, I wanted to follow you down there and watch you search for me. I would have volunteered to take you, but I was worried I might not be able to control myself...”

Jensen swallowed and shifted, seeing his rape in Russ’ eyes.

“Of course that little thief took you because he had nothing else to do. He was so useless. Like that stupid dog. The town had five thousand people in it.

How do you justify a K-9 Unit? Oh, right, when daddy is the police chief we can get whatever we want.”

“Russ,” Jensen interrupted. “You’re getting off topic.”

“Right. Apologies. I guess he had nice eyes, but was that really enough to look past all that stupid? You two were down there forever. How hard is it to find a file?” Russ scoffed.

“Not hard at all. We found the empty drawer right away.”

“So what were you two doing?”

Jensen raised an eyebrow and gave Russ a pointed look. The psychopath’s face smoothed into blankness, only his eyes glittering coldly.

“When I hit you with the door...were you two...”

“Russ. You killed squirrels and cats. You were psycho when you were a teenager. When did you transition to humans?”

Russ kept staring at him grimly, and for a moment Jensen thought he was going to refuse to talk anymore and send him away. Then he said, “I was four.”

“What?”

“I was four years old the first time I was responsible for taking a man’s life.

At that age, it was an accident, of course. I was running in the yard, got tangled in the hose, the hose pulled on the leg of the ladder, and my uncle fell off. It was kind of like a comedy, only instead of my uncle thrashing in

the bushes and everyone laughing about it later, he had a broken neck and my mother just screamed and screamed. Technically, that was my first kill.”

Jensen clasped his wrist with one hand and compulsively curled the fingers of the other hand in and out of a fist.

“The first time I intentionally killed someone—I was seventeen. It was so cliché,” Russ let out a small laugh, the mask he’d been holding in place slipping. “It was a hooker. I picked her up, we had sex, and then I strangled her. Classic, am I right? I did cut her open afterwards to see what was inside, but all in all it was pretty standard.”

Jensen clenched his teeth. No murder was “standard.”

“I don’t remember her name or where I dumped the body. Hell, I barely remember what she looked like. Inside and out.”

“So why are you confessing to this murder?” Jensen asked, doing his best to keep his tone level.

“Am I? I could just be talking to keep your attention. It’s been well documented that you’ll only come if I give you information.”

Jensen must have passed his threshold because nothing Russ said made him feel any sicker or angrier than he already was. “You’re not lying. I know you’re not.”

“So? You’re law enforcement, Jensen. You know as well as I do: no body, no crime.”

“I may not be able to charge you with a specific murder, but this still establishes a pattern of murder and blows your insanity defense to pieces.”

“Does it? I think all we’ve established is that I’ve been suffering from mental illness all my life stemming from a traumatic childhood event.”

“You’re not getting out of this, Russ!” Jensen barked.

Russ smirked at his loss of composure. “We’ll see.”

“Tell me about all your other kills and your disciples, Russ. Tell me everything or I’m done. I can’t do this anymore. I can’t...”

Jensen stopped, realizing how weak he sounded.

“I’ve given you two.”

“No names. We can’t arrest anyone. We can’t even charge you. You’re useless.”

“I’m not useless,” Russ said, actually sounding offended.

“You could be making everything up.”

“I’m not.”

“Then why did you and your disciple put dirt in the victims’ intestines and then stuff them back inside the body?”

“Dirt?” Russ mused. “Hmm. That doesn’t make sense. I wouldn’t put dirt in the intestines. If I were planning to sink the bodies I’d use rocks.”

That was one of the pieces of information Det. Darcy had supplied him with that hadn’t been in the papers.

“If you were going to sink them. You never sank any of them.”

“The killer probably thought they were too pretty. Water rots and distorts flesh so quickly.”

Jensen’s eyes jumped around over Russ’ face. He was learning to read when he was batting his captors around like a cat with a mouse and when he was unhappy. Russ was unhappy.

“You didn’t let him sink the bodies...but with you gone...he’s probably started sinking his kills. He didn’t stop killing when you were arrested; he just changed tactics.”

Russ’ eyebrow ticked in annoyance. “Are you a little more willing to accept that I might roll on one of my disciples now?”

Jensen smiled. It wasn’t a happy smile, but it suited his mood. “Nick Tirro, Greg Hampton, and Pamela Paulson...you gave up your DC accomplices so quickly. They weren’t apprentices or disciples...they were alibis. You didn’t

care about them.”

“I was still new to the idea of recruitment. It was a trial run. Not bad to convince three other people to kill for me in only six months.”

“But you care about the Green Falls Killer,” Jensen skipped over acknowledging Russ’ self-congratulations. “You care enough to feel betrayed. Looks like you’re as petty as the rest of us.”

Russ shrugged. “I’m only human I guess.”

Jensen frowned at his turn of phrase.

“Agent Ackles,” the guard reminded them he was in the room.

“Yes?”

“Time is up. I have to take the prisoner back to holding.”

Jensen looked at Russ and leaned on the table. “Tell me his name.”

Russ glared at him. “Now if I do that, you’ll have no reason to come back next week.”

“Damnit, just...”

Jensen cut off as the guard stepped close to Russ. An additional guard came in from the other room to provide back up. Jensen backed up to the door and knocked on it. The rookie officer unlocked it and let him out.

“See you next week, Jensen!” Russ called out happily.

Saturday, July 26, 2014

Misha looked up from his notes when he heard the knock on his dorm room door. He glanced at Gil’s bed, but he had gone to the gym. Misha had opted

to study, and pretend like his body didn’t take longer to recover from field exercises than it used to. He stood up and walked the door, wondering who it

could be while trying to ignore the hope that it was Jensen.

Misha opened the door.

“What the fuck, Misha?!”

Misha stared dumbly at the woman in front of him. It wasn’t possible...

“I found out about your sister only after that shitfuckhead psychopath Russ was caught! You didn’t think to fucking call me?”

“Andrea?” Misha confusedly said his ex-wife’s name. “How did you get in here?”

“Don’t change the goddamn subject, you insensitive asshole! I loved Natalia too!”

“Seriously, do you have a badge?” he asked, looking around her shirt collar or waist for a visitor pass.

“And then I called Ty to find out what the fuck was going on. Guess what he told me?”

“Did you sign in?”

“Stop deflecting! I had to find out from Ty that you had been goddamn attacked! Attacked! That arrogant prickshit kidnapped you and tried to murder you! And then! You just fucking disappear! Ty hadn’t heard from you in months! Months, Misha! What kind of asshole does that?!”

Misha was still shocked to see the petite specter from his past and couldn’t get his brain unstuck from how she had gotten on base let alone in the building.

“How did you get past the military ID check station?”

“Please, Misha, I once snuck into North Korea. I can get into the FBI Academy. You actually were hard to track down because you weren’t

leasing a place, so you must be sub-letting or staying with someone. But I've found you now, and I am pissed!"

"Yeah, I got that, and we can talk and you can yell at me all you like, but you have to let me take you downstairs and sign you in or we could both get in big trouble."

Andrea's face scrunched up with anger and tears. "Asshole!"

Misha sighed. "I know. I know. Come on. Let's go downstairs, get you a badge, and then we'll come back here and talk."

Andrea nodded. Then she leapt forward and hugged him tightly. Misha hugged her back, feeling pressure release in his chest that he hadn't known had been there.

Fifteen minutes and an awkward conversation with the front desk monitor later, Andrea had a visitor badge and they were sitting cross-legged on Misha's bed. Misha kept his eyes focused down and tugged guiltily on the toe of his sock. Andrea just stared at him, refusing to break the uncomfortable silence just yet. When she did, she jumped right in with both feet. Just like he remembered her.

"Why did Russ target Natalia?"

Misha shrugged. "She was sweet and nice? Sometimes liked to talk about crystals and hippie shit? Turned him down in tenth grade? I don't know."

Andrea shuddered. "I hate that I ever went to that dance with him, but what if I'd said no? Would he have targeted me too?"

Misha shrugged again. "His reasoning only had an internal sense of logic.

Who knows what offended him or set him off? Nobody was attacked for a reason. Not really."

"But why did he target you? I'm sure he never asked you out. And going after a cop would be a stupid move."

“He’s a stupid guy.”

Andrea shook her head. “He’s not, actually. That’s the problem. Why did he target you and risk getting caught after all these years?”

Misha shifted his attention to his other sock, not wanting to look Andrea in the eyes. “He was jealous.”

“Jealous? Of your position on the force or the fact that people liked you and didn’t think you were a creepy pus-filled smegmahole?”

Misha’s mouth quirked up on one side. No one would ever accuse his ex-wife of being unimaginative.

“He was obsessed with one of the FBI agents assigned to the case. And I do mean obsessed. And since the agent liked me, Russ took it personally.”

“What? So what? I’m sure the agent liked Ty and everyone else too. Did Russ attack everyone he ever smiled at?”

Misha couldn’t stop his small smile. “He did a little more than smile at me.”

Andrea gasped softly, sounding absurdly scandalized. “Did he harass you?”

she whispered with affected shock.

Misha laughed softly. “He did, actually. But, it was mutual.”

“I don’t understand...”

“Jensen and I...well...we liked each other. And I mean that we liked each other on basically every flat surface in my parents’ old house.”

“What? I—” Andrea’s gasp this time was genuine. “Ho-lee shitballs. Is that why we got divorced? Are you a full on fan of Dorothy?”

Misha finally looked up and met her eyes. “Come on, you think I faked it with you all those years?”

“No. No one can fake liking pussy that much.”

Misha put a hand to his warm face. Somehow he also forgot how incredibly fucking direct Andrea could be.

“Yeah, well, yes. You know why we got divorced and it had nothing to do with the sex.”

“But this agent...Janson?”

“Jensen.”

“Jensen...he’s a man. And...you’re into it?”

Misha bobbed his head. “I was always a little curious to be honest. I fooled around with a guy in college a couple of times. So, I guess I’ve always been like a Kinsey 1 or something. But, sometimes that’s enough when it’s the right person.”

“Right person? Wait, wait...are you two still together?”

Misha nodded.

“And like...you’re together.”

“Yes.”

“And you have sex. With a man.”

“Andrea...” Misha groaned.

“Sorry. No, not sorry. It’s a lot to take in, okay? I mean, you. Sex with a man.” She paused. “Anal?”

“Andrea!”

“What? Come on! You can’t hold out on me on this. Is it good?”

“Yes,” Misha replied testily.

“Better than us?”

Misha contemplated his answer. “Do you really want to know?”

“Only if it’s not as good.”

“Then you don’t want to know.”

“Oh, nooo...” Andrea flopped over to her side, and then sat back up. “I’ve been with three guys since the divorce and you’re still the best I ever had!”

Misha smirked. “Oh yeah? Maybe it’s just me. Maybe I’m the best anybody will ever have, even myself.”

“Keep it up and I’ll tell this Agent Jensen what you said and you probably will only have yourself to have sex with.”

Misha chuckled. “I think he’d agree with me to be honest.”

Andrea made a face, and then she sobered quickly. It was actually quite comforting to see someone he was so familiar with behave in familiar ways.

“Can I meet him?”

“He’s not here; he’s at home.”

“What home?”

“Our home.”

Andrea’s face flickered for the first time with an emotion that Misha couldn’t quite identify.

“‘Our home?’ You’re living together?”

“We have been since I left Elton eight months ago.”

“How—how serious is this?”

Misha half shrugged. “We’re getting married at the end of August.”

“What?! Fuckin’ A , Misha! Married?!”

“Jesus, calm down, Ann,” Misha shushed the screaming woman as he glanced at the wall behind him. He knew the walls weren’t that thick. “It’s not that big a deal. And you can’t even be upset that I’ve moved on because you’re dating someone too. I saw it on Facebook. Granted, that was a while

ago. Are you still with him?”

“Yeah. Vinod. He’s nice and I like him, but he’s just not fun. Can you believe he refused to cross the border with me to party in Tijuana when he found out I didn’t have a passport?”

“Imagine that,” Misha replied.

“I know, right? Come on. Border Control aren’t real police.”

“No...they’re federal agents.”

“Whatever.”

Misha smiled. “It’s good to see you, Andrea.”

“Is it? Could have fooled me with the whole not reaching out to me thing.”

“I...I’m sorry. I have no excuse for it. Other than...last year was a very rough year for me.”

Andrea’s tough expression melted to sympathy. She reached out and took one of Misha’s hands. “I know, sweetie. And I’m so sorry. Are you okay? I mean, really?”

Misha looked into Andrea’s eyes. He’d never been comfortable lying to her, even little white lies, because she was such an open book and never hid any part of herself.

“I’m working on it,” he finally said.

Andrea gave his hand a squeeze. “Is there anything I can do to help?”

“You’re doing it. I appreciate having a friend.”

“Always, Misha. I still love you. Just because we fell out of love doesn’t mean I stopped loving you.”

Misha nodded. “I know. Thank you.”

They sat for several long moments, not talking, but joined at the hands and drawing comfort from each other. Eventually, Misha pulled back and Andrea let him go.

“So, is that how you pronounce it? Vih-node? You always date guys with weird names,” he teased her.

“Oh, what, like I should date guys with normal names like Russ? Ugh!”

Andrea shook her whole body out. “I still can’t fucking believe what a creepo-fuckturd he turned out to be. I mean, I kissed him once!”

Misha was laughing at her reaction, and then he stopped. “You what? You told me after the dance that you didn’t!”

“I was sixteen. I lied. Fucking sue me.”

“I can’t believe you ever kissed him. Even when we didn’t know he was a psycho-killer he was still an ass.”

“Yeah? I can’t believe you just up and left your entire life without telling anyone. We all do stupid things.”

Misha conceded sheepishly.

“Seriously, Misha, what were you thinking? Your parents were gone, Natalia...you left your friends, your coworkers, Ty...you were all alone.

Why would you do that to yourself?”

“I told you, I’m not alone.”

Andrea narrowed her eyes suspiciously. “Is he really real?”

Misha leaned back and picked up his cell phone from the nightstand. He scanned through his photos of Jensen until he settled on one of him kneeling down next to Charlie and smiling up at the camera. It made Misha smile just to see it. He passed the phone to Andrea, who took it with that momentary odd expression on her face again. Misha watched her expectantly, wanting to see her reaction to his beautiful fiancé. Her expression didn’t change for a moment, and then she looked up at him with amused disbelief.

“Okay, now I know he’s not real.”

“What? Why?”

“Because this isn’t an FBI agent. It’s an underwear model.”

Misha laughed and reached for the phone. He scrolled through the photos and showed his ex-wife a picture of him in bed with his soon to be husband.

It was a selfie, so it only showed them from the clavicle up, but it was apparent that they were at least shirtless, in bed, and pressed very close together.

“Well, shit,” Andrea murmured.

“He is beautiful, isn’t he?”

“Yeah...” Andrea used her finger to flick through more of the photos. “You really love him?”

“Very much.”

“Does he make you happy?”

“Yes.”

She harrumphed in displeasure. “Hey, I thought that puppy you picked up after the Haiti earthquake was a German shepherd mix or something.”

“Uh. She was. That dog with us is Charlie. She’s a Weimaraner. We adopted her from a retired army dog charity.”

“Well, that’s...sweet. Ugh, you two are so gross. So, do the two dogs get along?”

Misha took his phone back. He scrolled through his photos until he found one of himself from nearly five years ago, cradling Bunny the puppy like a baby in his arms.

“Bunny’s not around. Russ killed her.”

“W-what?” Andrea sounded stunned. “He killed a dog? Jesus fuck. Like, he’s a sick asspiss, a deranged monster, but who fucking kills a dog?”

“Bad people.”

They were silent after that, and the longer it stretched out, the more they

realized that they had nothing more to say to each other.

“Well,” Andrea said, slapping her legs with her hands, breaking the spell that had fallen over them. “I guess I better get out of your hair. Apparently you’re super busy becoming a G-man.”

Misha nodded, and then Andrea smirked.

“Although, you always were kind of a G-man. Maybe you can send Vinod a tutorial on how to find that particular spot.”

“I will not.”

“Fine.”

Andrea got off the bed with a flourish of legs and Misha followed her to the door. They made half-meant promises to keep in touch as they walked down to the front desk. After turning in her badge, Misha walked Andrea out to her car. They hugged tightly without any awkwardness. He’d always felt comfortable around Andrea and he was grateful that nothing could change that.

“Will you be around tomorrow?” Misha asked, spitting out her curly red hair from his mouth. “I have Sunday off.”

“My flight leaves first thing in the morning. My goal for this weekend was to find you and ream you.”

“Well, mission accomplished.”

“Take care of yourself, Misha. And if your supermodel husband doesn’t, you call me.”

“I have faith in him.”

“Hm. Well, I guess I do too, then.”

They pulled back and Misha opened her car door for her. Before she got in, she cocked her head as she looked at him.

“Would it be weird if I was at the wedding?”

“Um...maybe. Besides, I don’t think we’re going to have a big ceremony.”

“Okay. Keep in touch.”

“I will.”

Andrea stood on her tiptoes and kissed him on the lips. Then she used her thumb to wipe them off.

“That’s a sign of respect for this Jensen character.”

Misha snorted. “I appreciate it.”

Andrea got into her car and Misha watched her drive away with his hands in his pockets. He walked back to his dorm room and was pleased to find that Gil was still gone. He liked his roommate—friend—but he wanted to call Jensen. And he wanted to have his options open.

Misha flopped onto his bed and connected to Jensen. He checked the time: it wasn’t quite dinner time yet, so he should be at home. Misha wondered if he should have taken Andrea out to eat, but they didn’t really have any more to catch up on. While the split had been amicable and they still loved each other, she was still his ex-wife and he couldn’t help the slight bitterness he still had about the demise of their two decade relationship.

“Hey, Mish.”

“Hey, babe. What are you doing?”

“Nothing much. Contemplating whether to go out to eat or to order delivery.”

“You could cook.”

Jensen laughed. “You’re funny. I love that you’re funny.”

“Shut up.”

“Anything happening with you?”

“Uh...well...not with classes or anything, but...I had a visitor today.”

“What kind of visitor?”

“My ex-wife.”

Misha paused and listened. Jensen didn’t say anything.

“It’s kind of funny, she managed to get on base, into the Academy, and all the way to my room without anyone stopping her. She’s always had this amazing ability to go anywhere or get anything she wants.”

More silence. And then, “Should I be worried?”

Misha smiled and settled down against his pillow, one hand playing with the waistband of his official FBI sweatpants.

“Seriously? You’re jealous?”

“No, you just said that she snuck into the Academy. I’m concerned from a security standpoint.”

“Oh.” Misha’s hand stilled. “Well, that’s disappointing.”

Jensen chuckled lowly and the sound vibrated in Misha’s ear and slithered over his body causing him to shiver.

“What, you want me to be jealous? You want me to demand that you tell me how you belong to me? That I remind you that you’re mine? That I own every part of your body and soul and if she even looks at you the wrong way I’ll tie her to a chair and make her watch me put my claim on you?”

“Well. That escalated quickly. But, yes.”

Jensen laughed. “Okay. Is she still there? Should I bring duct tape?”

“You wouldn’t have to bring duct tape. She’d probably stay of her own

volition.”

“Hm, what little you’ve told me about her, I get the feeling that you and I have really only scratched the surface of your kinky sex repertoire.”

It was Misha’s turn to chuckle and he tried not to replace his memory of a blindfold and bondage night with his ex-wife with Jensen in her place. That just wasn’t nice.

“So...my roommate is gone.”

“Is he? What’s your point, Mish?” Jensen asked, sounding like he knew exactly what Misha’s point was.

“We could have phone sex.”

“Ah. Thank you for clarifying; I wasn’t sure.”

“Well, we don’t have time to beat about the bush, if you’ll pardon the expression. I don’t know when he’ll be back.”

“Okay. Let’s get started then.”

Misha hesitated. They’d had phone sex plenty of times, but it had always happened naturally, not with a “Get set, go!”

“Uh...what are you wearing?”

“A grey fur coat.”

“A grey fur...” Misha repeated, brow creased in confusion. “Oh! Get that dog off the couch!”

“She’s not on the couch.”

“Get her out of our bed!”

“You never shooed Bunny out of the bed.”

“That was different.”

“You’re just playing favorites. This is my dog and my bed and I say she can stay.”

“You want her in bed when I start describing how I to want to part your legs, crawl up between them, and mouth at you through your boxers? Get you hard and horny without even skin to skin contact? And then pull down the waistband just enough to see that delicious, flushed tip. To flick my tongue over it, barely touching it, tease it until I can taste precome. Then pull down your shorts enough to see the whole head, fat and hot, and wrap my lips around it and suck and lick—but just the tip. I’ll hold your hips down so you can’t thrust up. You just have to lay there and feel my tongue wrap around you and tease the slit and lap up whatever you give me. Until I take you in a bit more. And a bit more. And I’d go slowly, baby, so slow...

You’d feel your huge cock going into my mouth inch by inch, and yet all those inches left untouched would be even more sensitive to just the brush of moving air. And then, when I’d finally taken you in to the base, nose pressed against your freshly shaven skin, I’d let go of your hips and let you take over. And then you’d fuck me, babe. You’d fuck my mouth so good, the head going down my throat. You’d be wild for it by that point, desperate, needy, moaning, ruthless. And then you’d come, and pull out as you do so that I’d swallow the first spurt, feel the second fill my mouth, and then let the rest cover my face.”

Misha paused and appreciated the heavy breathing and soft whine he heard over the line.

“You want the dog to stay in bed while we do that?”

Jensen groaned. “Fuck you, man.” There was shuffling on the line and distantly he heard Jensen telling Charlie to get off the bed. He heard her nails click on the floor when she landed, and then the loud breathing was back in his ear.

“Jesus, Misha...” Jensen moaned and now Misha could hear the slick movements of his hand on his cock. “Oh, God...I’m almost there, honey.”

Jensen groaned again and Misha listened, mildly surprised that Jensen had just come without him, but he didn't mind. He palmed his erection through the sweatpants and closed his eyes as he tried to picture the sweaty, panting

mess Jensen must look like in their bed. Sprawled across the sheets, legs spread, hand fisting that beautifully large cock. Misha tilted his head back and sighed as he gripped his cock through the fabric of his pants.

Jensen caught his breath and groaned softly before saying, "I don't think honey is going to work out. It just sounds wrong when you're having sex.

That's like what parents call their kids."

"I don't know, I didn't mind it."

"Come on, why can't I just use baby? It was mine first, you know. You whined and complained and told me not to you call that."

"Exactly. That hasn't changed."

"So why do you get to use it?"

"Because it's my pet name for you."

"We can use the same pet name."

"No," Misha said, putting his hand under his sweatpants and lazily stroking his cock.

"You're not leaving me anything good. We're going to be stuck with 'Oh, yeah, domestic partner, just like that.'"

Misha laughed. "You know, Jensen, I love you for a lot of reasons, but not least of them is that you make me laugh."

"I feel like that's not meant to be an insult..."

"It's not...ah..." Misha exhaled when he swiped his thumb over the head of his cock. "Just keep talking, let me hear your voice."

“Doesn’t have to be dirty? I can talk about what I had for lunch today?”

“Honestly, you could read the DIOG to me and I think I could get off.”

Jensen laughed. “Come on, honey, no one can get off to that. No, no. Not feeling honey.”

“Well, the week is over, you can pick something else.”

“What are you doing?”

“Touching myself. Imagining it’s you. You know...it’s actually been a while since I physically bottomed. I just seriously want your cock in my ass. I need you in me, to fill me. I need you to just fucking...oh God...”

Jensen...I need you to...to...control me.”

“Misha...” Jensen said, sounding breathless again. “Who’s supposed to be getting who off here?”

“Jensen...talk to me...”

“I’m here, love, I’m here. We don’t have to be gentle today; do what you need to do.”

Misha’s hand convulsed around his cock and he moaned at his own roughness.

“That’s it, go on, Mish. I know how you like it. I love watching you jerk off. Did you know I watched you in the shower once? One hand pulling at your hair, your nipples, running over your body while the other gripped and pulled on your cock so hard...I saw how you like it a little wild, a little rough. So you know what I did? Can you guess?”

“I...” Misha’s hand sped up, which was difficult because he didn’t ease his grip. It hurt a little bit since his hand was dry but fuck if that didn’t just make it better. “I don’t...” And then he remembered. “That night in the kitchen...”

Misha had been cooking dinner sometime in January. Jensen had come home

from work. They'd said their hellos, and Jensen had gone to say hello to Charlie and change out of his suit. When he came back into the room, he hadn't said a word, just pulled Misha away from the stove and bent him over the kitchen island. He'd restrained his arms behind his back and Misha had protested that they didn't have time because he was cooking, that the chicken would burn. But Jensen had prepped him quickly, and it had been a wonder to realize how different it was from the first time.

The first time Jensen had had to take his time and work him open so slowly.

Now, a little lube, a little prodding, and he could take him in so easily. He wasn't sure a full two minutes had passed from the time he'd been yanked away from the stove to having his pants around his ankles and Jensen's cock buried to the hilt in his ass. He'd fucked him hard, wouldn't let go of his arms, and never said a word. Misha came from being turned on by the situation more than anything Jensen's cock or hand did. But he came fast and hard and Jensen had come inside him and then slapped his ass when he pulled out. He'd left him there and told him that he better check on dinner.

He hadn't even been able to revel in the aftershocks because he'd had to waddle, trapped in his pants, to the stove to get the chicken off the heat. It hadn't burned, but was perhaps a bit overdone.

Jensen hadn't complained when they'd eaten dinner though. He'd said it was delicious and made sure that Misha knew how much he appreciated him. And they'd been gentle later that night. Soft kisses and sighs and Jensen had arched against him as Misha had slowly thrust into him. He hadn't known then how Jensen had known he'd wanted that...he still wasn't sure how he'd figured it out from one jerk off session, but he supposed that just meant they were kind of sickeningly perfect for each other.

"That night in the kitchen," Misha repeated on a moan. "Oh, fuck, Jensen..."

I liked that so much."

"I know you did."

"Oh, fuck, oh...come...coming, Jensen..."

“God, I love the sounds you make when you come.”

Misha panted and tugged gently on his softening erection to draw out the orgasm. When he was done he pulled his hand out of his pants and let it fall onto his chest.

“Jensen. We need...”

“Yeah, I know. Do you want to go on a walk with Charlie and me tomorrow?”

“I’d love that.”

“Okay. Then don’t forget to charge your phone tonight.”

“I won’t.”

“Love you, love. Nope. See? Love won’t work either.”

“You didn’t even give it a chance,” Misha chuckled.

“I don’t know. I’ll think on it.”

“Okay. Bye. Love you.”

“You too.”

Misha let Jensen end the call, and then let his arm drop onto the bed. His eyelids drooped and he let them. His descent into a pleasant nap was disrupted when Gil returned from the gym. He nodded to Misha, and then paused and looked back at him, probably taking in his boneless appearance, the damp spot on his pants, and the awkward way he held one hand.

“Talk to Jensen recently?” Gil asked dryly as he dropped his gym bag on the floor and took off his shoes.

“Maybe.”

“I’m gonna take a shower and then get some dinner. Think you can get

cleaned up in time to go?”

“Yep.”

Gil picked up his towel and shower caddy. He paused with the door partially open. “You know...part of me hopes to find someone to love the way you two do, but...”

Misha looked over at him curiously.

“Part of me is scared to love that intensely.”

Gil inhaled, but then didn’t speak again, just left the room.

Misha looked up at the ceiling. “I know what you mean.”



Week 4

Monday, July 28, 2014

Jensen groaned as he searched through his pants and coat pockets. He'd left his frickin' keys upstairs. Damn it. Well, it was just as well he had to go back upstairs and get them; he couldn't remember if he'd left the coffee maker on.

On the elevator ride up to his floor, he palmed the outline of his personal phone in his right front pants pocket. He wanted Misha to call. He hadn't called that morning. They hadn't spoken today. They spoke every day. Even if it was only for a couple of minutes. If he couldn't talk in the morning, Misha always sent him a text to let him know. Jensen pulled his phone out to check if he'd gotten a text. Nope.

His keys were next to the coffee maker. Where he'd left them when he'd checked the coffee maker for the third time, which was definitely off.

Jensen pressed his palms onto the countertop and inhaled deeply. What did Misha always tell him to do? It was okay to check if something had been done, but once he verified it, he needed to trust himself. Well, clearly that was bullshit because he'd forgotten his keys. Of course he'd only forgotten his keys because he'd checked the coffee maker for the third time.

Jensen straightened and looked at the coffee maker. It was off. He felt his pockets as he ticked off each item: creds, badge, wallet, personal phone. Bu phone in its holster. Gun in its holster. Hand cuffs clipped onto the back of his belt. Keys were in hand. He walked out the door, checked that it was locked, and then went to the elevator. His young neighbor, Kathryn, joined him just as the elevator arrived.

"Morning, Mr. Ackles."

"Hey, Kathryn."

"Are you excited for another Monday?"

Jensen gave her an amused look. "Are you?"

"Every Monday is one week closer to me graduating and heading off to college!" She grinned and tossed her blonde hair over her shoulder.

"Why are kids so fast to grow up these days?"

"These days," the teenager snorted. "Like you weren't exactly the same in the olden days."

“Olden days? How old do you think I am?”

“Old enough to remember the 80’s.”

“And that’s old?”

“Old enough to remember the 90’s is old.”

“Come on, you were born in the 90’s.”

“In ’97, dude. By the time I was old enough to have memories that stuck, it was the aughts.”

Jensen rolled his eyes. “You suck.”

“Very mature,” Kathryn said as she stepped out into the lobby.

“Meh-meh meh-ture,” Jensen griped as the doors closed.

As much as getting sassed by a cute blonde who wasn’t even old enough to vote before 8:00am sucked, it had at least kept his mind preoccupied. As he crossed the garage to his car, his paranoia had started poking at him again.

He ignored it. He trusted himself. Misha had taught him that. He opened his car door (see? He had his keys) and sat down. He turned the car on and carefully fastened his seatbelt in place. He adjusted the radio even though it was mostly static because he was underground. He was stalling. He shouldn’t. He was good to go. He was an adult. He wasn’t codependent on his fiancé getting him through life. He could do this.

Jensen put the car into reverse and took his foot off the brake. His phone rang in his pocket.

“Oh, thank God,” Jensen sighed, putting the car back in park. He dug his phone out of his pocket and swiped his finger over the screen to answer.

“Hey, Jensen.”

“Hey, Mish. You didn’t call. Or text.”

“I know, I slept past my alarm and had to run to the shower. I’ve gotta run now or I won’t have time for breakfast before class. But I wanted to call and say good morning. So, good morning.”

“It is now.”

“Aw, babe. So sweet.”

“Shut up,” Jensen said with a laugh. “Alright. Go get some grub.”

“Love you, babe.”

“Love you too.”

Jensen put the car in reverse and started his commute to work. It wasn’t until he was parking in the garage at WFO that he remembered that he’d forgotten to be worried that he’d forgotten something. Ironic.

Jensen was the first on his squad to arrive (since Jared wasn’t around), and he appreciated the still and quiet of the office. It wouldn’t last long though,

so he decided to goof off on the Internet until people came in and he’d have to actually start working. He’d finally narrowed down his Rocky Mountain B&B’s to three. One was in Colorado Springs, one was in Denver, and one was in Bozeman, Montana near Yellowstone Park. He was leaning toward the last one, but was nature enough to keep them occupied? Wouldn’t they maybe want to go to experience some civilization as well? Then again, would they even step foot outside the bedroom? Maybe seclusion was the best way to go.

“Yo, Jensen.”

Jensen looked up as Osric rounded the corner. He sat in Jared’s chair and pushed it close to Jensen’s desk.

“Hey, Oz. Did you finish looking through that data?”

“Yeah, on Friday. I sent you an email. Didn’t you get it?”

“Oh. I haven’t checked my email just yet. I just got in.”

“Just got in. But...you’ve got like six tabs open on Firefox...on Bed & Breakfasts. Interesting. Retirement plan?”

“No,” Jensen grumbled and opened up his classified email. Osric had sent him a file at 7:31pm on Friday. Well past COB, but he had stayed late to finish so he wasn’t going to bust the kid’s balls over it.

“Vacation?”

“Yeah, kind of.” Jensen realized he hadn’t actually told anyone at work he was getting married. Hell, most of them probably didn’t even know he was shacking up with a guy who going to be joining them as an agent soon.

“Um, I’m looking for honeymoon spots.”

“Honeymoon? For you? Or someone else?”

“For me.”

“No way. I didn’t know you were engaged. Congrats. When’s the wedding?”

“As soon as he graduates from NAC.”

“He’s going to be an agent? Cool! So, I’ll get to meet him.”

“Yeah,” Jensen replied, grateful the kid hadn’t even flinched at the pronoun.

“So, the mountains, huh? I would have pegged you for the beach.”

“Nah. Sand is overrated.”

Osric snort-laughed. “Tell me about it. I had sex in sand once. Never do it.”

“So noted.”

“Okay, so as long as I’m here, let me show you what I found.”

Osric reached over Jensen and opened the Excel spreadsheet he had emailed him the night before. Jensen just scooted his chair back and let the kid drive.

“Okay, so I looked through everything for the past three years. I found seventeen instances in the last six months of clients losing money on the false securities. But, those are tied to the national scheme, so I put them aside. Then I looked at the discrepancies in the money earned versus what was returned to everyone’s accounts. There are thirty-six of those, which sounds like a lot, but works out to be out two a month, exactly. Like a schedule almost. And they all occurred within the last eighteen months. The other eighteen months of data we have before that there’s not a single discrepancy and only a couple instances of bad investments. Like, Cohen & Cohen was an amazing investment firm earning way more money than it was losing for its clients and with zero shadiness going on.”

“So, the problems didn’t start until the around the time Ella Vasquez started working there.”

“Pretty much. But, even still nothing was really that bad or noticeable. No large chunks of money going missing or anything. All routine stuff. Until six months ago when they got suckered with the fraudulent securities. I mean, if that hadn’t happened, I can’t see anyone noticing any of the other stuff.”

“So, the odds that Vasquez is responsible are pretty good.”

“I’d say so. If she’s the only one who has access to the program, that’s the only place where the figures don’t add up. Now, there is one more interesting thing. If you’ll look here, all of the transactions that result in money going missing have two deposits set up to their personal bank accounts. All the others only have one. And it’s the same bank account—

same number and everything. So, why would the clients make two deposits to the same bank account? It’s not like it’s checking and savings or something. They’re just making two deposits at the same time to the same account. But, the total being reported doesn’t add up to how much the program initially ingested. Something hinky is going on.”

“This is great work, Oz. I’ll pass it on to Jared and maybe he can dig into it a little more from the inside. Also, I think we’ve got enough to open an assessment on Vasquez. So, I’m going to get that process started and you go ahead and start pulling what you can on her at the assessment level.”

“Will do!”

Osric pushed Jared’s chair back to his desk and walked around to his side of the faux-cubicles. Before he disappeared behind the makeshift divide, he leaned over to Jensen’s side.

“Oh, yeah. Are you sure you’re gay?”

Jensen gave him a confused look. “I’m not gay. I’m bisexual. And, yes, I’m sure.”

“Really?” Osric questioned. “Because like when I first started working here, you saw me without a shirt on in the gym and you didn’t even look twice.”

“Okay. One? You look fifteen. So, no, not interested. And two...are you attracted to every woman you’ve ever interacted with?”

“No, but dude. I’m ripped. You had to have noticed.” Osric started flexing in exaggerated poses.

Jensen laughed and shook his head. “I’m sure you are, bro. But you’re not my type.”

“Hot bod’s not your type?” he said, rolling his abs to demonstrate his hard, flat stomach.

“Nope. I like my guys old and flabby. Like Bob.”

Osric laughed and Jensen chuckled, not quite believing he was having this conversation. They both stopped laughing at the same time as they saw Bob watching them from the door of his office. Osric slowly sank down into his seat and disappeared by the divide. Jensen focused intently on his computer monitor.

“M’not flabby,” Bob muttered before closing his office door with a thud.

There was a pause, and then Jensen and Osric burst into snickers.

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Jared read the email from Jensen and decided rather than trying to set up an appointment with Ella, he’d just go straight down to talk to her. Once again he found the IT “department” empty except for Ella who was playing some of kind of RPG game where her troll-elf type character was running around a castle slashing at things. She had her headphones on again, so he called out her name loudly. She still started wildly, but at least she didn’t nearly fall out of her chair. Jared politely ignored her annoyed glare and waited for her to pause her game and pop out her ear buds. She turned in her chair and waved toward the spare chair in her office. Jared took a seat and smiled at her. She raised an eyebrow in return.

“Good morning, Ella.”

“Good morning...?”

“Jared.”

“Jared. Right. If you’re having a problem with your password or printer, you can submit a service request.”

“No, no, it’s nothing like that. I just wanted to talk a little bit more about your money transfer program. I admit I’m not very good with computers or technical stuff, so I’d appreciate your patience with all of my dumb questions.”

Her eyes flickered up, but she didn’t quite roll them. “Sure. Do you need me to show you how to make a new transaction again?”

“Actually, it has more to do with the reports. I was given the investment data from the last three years so that I could look for trends or changes in productivity. And I did notice something interesting. There are several instances, over thirty, where the earnings returned from an investment don’t

match the amounts transferred back to the client. I also determined that these cases have only started happening in the last year and a half or so...

after Cohen & Cohen started using your new system. Now, I'm sure there's an explanation for it, so I was wondering if you could help me out?"

"Yeah, it's fees. Cohen & Cohen gets a cut, of course, otherwise there's no business. It takes the fees out before returning the money to the clients, rather than charging the clients the money after the fact the way they used to. The clients like it better because they don't have to actually make a payment to the company. I guess it makes them feel like they're not really having to pay or something."

"Well, part of the returns does go into a company account, but the numbers still don't add up."

"That account is the money that the client designates for Cohen & Cohen to hold onto for the next time they invest. The fees are deposited directly to the company and is not shown on the report."

"I see."

"You can probably check all the transactions with Mr. Pellegrino's figures.

It should show how much the fees were and when they were taken out."

"I'll check with him, thank you."

"Anything else?"

"Uh, one more thing. Do you know why some clients make two deposits to their accounts on the same transactions?"

Ella shrugged. "They probably want some to go to savings and one to checking."

"No, it's the exact same bank account number. So, they're making two separate deposits to the same account during the same transaction."



Ella shrugged again. "I don't know. You'd have to ask them why they have it set it up like that. The clients and the brokers put the info into the program. The program just carries it out."

"Well, thank you, Ella. You've cleared that up for me."

"So, we're good? No more interviews or anything?"

"Not for now, but it's good to know I can always come to you when I need to. I appreciate that."

He gave her a winning smile and she barely refrained from making a face.

She wanted him gone, he could pick up on that much, and the reason couldn't just be that she found him annoying. She'd been playing with the dangling earring in her right ear ever since he brought up the discrepancies in the numbers. If she wasn't lying, she was nervous about something.

Jared left her and replayed the conversation in his head. She'd been nervous when she'd told him about the fees being taken out thus explaining the differences in totals, but her speech pattern had been normal. It had been so even it almost sounded rehearsed. The real nerves had kicked in when he'd brought up the two deposits to the same bank account. Her answer had almost been defensive. She was kind of a terrible liar. He supposed she either hadn't been doing this long or had never been questioned about it at any of the other companies she had run the scam. But what was the scam?

Sure there appeared to be some missing money, but it was either going to the company or to the clients' bank accounts. And that was how the business was supposed to work. So unless one was getting more than they were supposed to, there was no crime. But that left him wondering if Cohen

& Cohen was skimming a meager amount of money from themselves, or if the clients were somehow getting a higher cut of the money. Maybe they should be investigating the clients.

Jared took the elevator down to the lobby rather than up to his office. It was close enough to noon that he decided he'd go pester Alona into taking an

early lunch. She was on the phone when he leaned on the high counter, so he took the opportunity to just take her in.

She wore a stiff white blouse with a formfitting black pencil skirt and had an actual string of pearls around her neck. To counter the severity of her outfit, her hair fell around her shoulders in golden waves and her makeup was neutral with just a little shimmer. His treacherous heart couldn't help but compare her to Gen. They were both quite petite, especially compared to him, but other than that they were night and day. Alona was light eyes and fair haired and her smiles were always peppy exuberant. Gen had that lush, dark hair and gorgeous doe eyes, and her smiles always held just a hint of mischief in them. Maybe that's why he was so drawn to Alona now

—she didn't remind him of Gen in the slightest. And yet...here he was still thinking of her.

Alona hung up with a chipper, "Have a nice day." Then she made a face.

"Moron."

Jared chuckled. "How's the world of reception?"

"Ugh, awful. You have to be nice to people even when they're rude wankers."

"Wankers?" Jared asked with a laugh.

"Oh, uh...yeah. I had a roommate who was British. Picked up a few insults."

"So, do you want to go to lunch early?"

"I don't know. You didn't call me all weekend."

"I...Alona," he whined softly. "I think we need to talk about what we're doing before we do anything."

"Why? Why can't it just...be? Why does it have to be something?"

"It doesn't! At all. I just...want to make it clear that we're both on the same

page as wanting to stay away from...something.”

“Gosh. American men are always so worried that the woman will always want to turn it into a house and kids in the suburbs.”

“American men?”

“I have some international dating experience. You Americans...men. You American men are just so sensitive.”

“M’not sensitive,” Jared mumbled, frowning.

“Mm-hmm. See that right there? Sensitive. Now, let’s go to lunch and if you need for me to go into detail about what we could do that’s not

‘something,’ I can...but we better pick a table that’s not near any children.”

She grinned and Jared ducked his head, breaking eye contact to avoid blushing.

“Alright then, let’s go.”

They opted to leave the office building and take the somewhat long walk to La Tasca. They managed to get a two person booth in a quiet corner because they were slightly ahead of the lunch rush. They argued playfully over what plates to order (she wanted some sort of gross-sounding Israeli couscous thing and he relented because she was pretty), but in the end had an eclectic assortment of vegetarian and meat dishes to choose from.

Their conversation was pleasantly banal, but not boring. He really enjoyed Alona’s thoughtfulness and sense of humor and the more he liked her, the worse he felt about lying to her about who he was. Neither of them asked much about families or personal history, they seemed content to stick with movies, sports, music, even a little politics, but when he had to change a story from “my brother” to “my friend” because Jared Bell was an only child, he felt that guilt kick in. The discomfort made him taciturn and after a while the conversation faded. Asking the waiter for the bill made them aware that the silence was completely uncomfortable.

“So,” Alona said, giving him a wry smile. “Let’s resort to our ice breaker.

How’s the case going?”

Jared’s eyes snapped up. “What case?”

“The whole investigating the company thing. I mean, come on, QC guy?

You were totally hired by Pellegrino and Cohen to snoop around the company. Possibly to spy on each other. We found out Ella’s past is little shady. Are there any other people we should be interested in?”

“Alona, you can’t—”

“Have a hobby? I totally looked into the whole PI thing and I can get licensed without having a degree if I have comparable work experience. So, I need some practice snooping around.”

“I don’t think that’s how it works,” Jared laughed.

“Oh, come on. What harm is there in me doing a little snooping on my own time?”

A lot of harm if it blows back onto the FBI. He considered his options. He was curious to know if there was anything shady regarding the clients who had double deposits, but that wasn’t enough to warrant an agent investigating them. Even if she didn’t know she was working for a federal agent, he still couldn’t direct Alona to do anything illegal because any evidence she uncovered would be inadmissible and might force eventual charges to be dropped. But...if he didn’t direct her to do it, he supposed if she dug up information on her own there was nothing illegal about using the information.

The check came and Jared picked it up before Alona could. She just smirked at him as he pulled cash out of his wallet.

“You always pay in cash,” Alona commented.

“Is that odd?”

She shrugged. "It's just not common anymore."

Jared smiled. "Maybe I don't like people to know my business."

Alona smiled. "Fair enough. But you know, if you're going to do date like things and pay, you really ought to do other date like things."

"Such as?" he teased.

"If you don't know I'm not going to tell you," she said airily and stuck her nose in the air.

Jared grinned. "Come on, gumshoe. Maybe if you work me over on the way back to the office I'll let something slip."

"So," Alona said as the ground floor elevator doors closed, "the accounts that have the double deposits were all made by the same six people over the last eighteen months?"

"Shh," Jared hushed her. "Not in the building."

"Sorry." She was quiet for a moment. "And most of them are relatively new clients?"

"Shush. But, yes."

"Well, that's suspicious. Give me their names and I'll do some research."

"I can't do that!"

The doors opened and Jared waved a hand at her to prevent her from saying anything else. He walked her to the desk and she sat down a little grumpily.

"Can I borrow some paper and pen?" he asked.

Alona gave him a notepad and a sparkly purple pen. She looked like she was trying to come up with ways to talk about the taboo subject without sounding like she was talking about it.

“Now listen to me, Alona,” Jared said as he wrote on the paper. “You are not to do anything illegal. I would never ask you to engage in any illegal activities.”

She narrowed her eyes, but only with suspicion, not anger.

“Do you understand that I’m not directing you to do anything?”

“Yeah, I got it.”

“Okay. I’ll see you later.”

He handed the notepad and pen back to her and she couldn’t even wait for him to turn his back before she flipped to the page he had written on. He had decided to write down his username and password for the money transfer program because it was so hard to remember sometimes.

Unfortunately, he left his note behind on Alona’s desk. If she saw it, logged into the program, found the accounts with the double deposits, and did a little research on those specific clients, well, there was nothing he could do about that.

## **Tuesday, July 29, 2014**

Okay, there was definitely something he could have done about turning a blind eye to Alona digging into this case, and at the top of that list was not going over to her apartment late on a Tuesday night so she could show him what she had found. It was nearly ten o’clock at night, and she had insisted that the meeting take place so late because she had to clean her apartment before he came over—because he insisted they couldn’t meet at his place because of his “roommate.” There was no telling what he might forget to hide in his apartment that would give him away; he just couldn’t take the risk. She had seemed just as reluctant to have him over to her place, but eventually conceded with the stipulation that he not show up before ten.

It was ten o’clock and he was standing outside her building, finger hovering over the intercom to call up to the apartment and let her know he had arrived. In theory he was just coming over to find out what she had learned, so why

did he have two condoms in his wallet? He ran a hand down over his face, pulling his cheek down and exposing the lower part of his eyeball to the muggy night air. He shouldn't be here. He shouldn't be accepting illegally obtained information on American citizens and he should not be contemplating sleeping with a woman who had no idea who she would actually be sleeping with.

And yet...he punched in her apartment number on the dial pad, and the door buzzed indicating it was unlocked within a matter of moments. Jared managed to shut down all of his doubts and worries as he rode the elevator to the twelfth floor. His hand had brushed his pocket, which had let him feel the outline of his phone, which had reminded him of the message he'd received less than an hour ago.

*Gen: You could just be really busy which would explain not answering your phone, but if you don't respond to a text then I'll know you're ignoring me.*

Damn right he was ignoring her.

Jared knocked on Alona's door and she answered wearing a small T-shirt and very short exercise shorts. Her hair was bunched up in a messy quasi-ponytail on the top of her head. He'd never seen her so unkempt, but she still looked amazing.

"Hey."

"Hi. I'm sorry I look like a bum, but cleaning took longer than I thought."

Jared shrugged. "I'm sure it wasn't that bad."

"Well, now you'll never know," she smiled, stepping back so that Jared could enter the apartment. It was apparent it was a large apartment, possibly with more than one bedroom and bathroom. Considering it was located near Logan Circle it had to be incredibly expensive. He had to wonder how much Cohen & Cohen paid their receptionists. Maybe he ought to look into retiring from the Bureau and working for Mark and Matt when the case was over. If they hadn't been arrested of course.

The apartment was sparsely furnished and decorated and had a slightly odd smell. Nothing bad, but it kind of reminded him of “newness.” Then again, she had apparently spent the last few hours scrubbing the place from top to bottom. There was a laptop sitting on the coffee table next to a spread of papers.

“Been busy, I see,” Jared nodded his head toward the pile of apparent research.

Alona shrugged. “Nothing else to do on a Monday night.”

“I see that. No TV?”

She shrugged. “I’m not really into TV. If I watch something I do it on my laptop. Netflix, Hulu, you know.”

“Right. Smart. Saves you an outrageous cable bill.”

“That is does. So, um, would you like anything to drink or...?”

“Water would be great actually,” Jared said swallowing around his suddenly dry mouth. As he’d walked farther into the living room, he’d gotten a glimpse through an open door down the hallway. He’d seen a bed with a white bedspread. He needed to stop thinking about sex; she had technically invited him here for work.

“Sure thing.”

Alona walked around the corner and he followed. His eyebrows shot up when he saw the dining room connected to a large, open kitchen and a balcony along the back wall. He let out a low whistle.

“This place is pretty great.”

“Thank you. I like it.”

Alona opened a cabinet, and when her shirt rode up exposing the soft skin on the curve of her lower back, he almost missed that she pulled out a glass from a mostly empty cabinet. She added ice to the glass and walked to the sink to



fill it with water. Jared sauntered casually into the room, pretending to admire the space. He opened one of the doors of a double cabinet and saw that there were two plates, two bowls, and one glass in it. The rest of the shelves were bare.

“Frugal?” Jared asked, letting the cabinet shut.

He accepted the glass of water from Alona and soothed his dry mouth.

“Waste not,” she shrugged. “Plus, most of the dishes are in the dishwasher. I told you it was a mess. There was a huge pile of dishes in the sink. But if you really want to know how disgusting I am, I can show you the pile of dirty laundry in the hamper.”

“I’ll pass, thanks.”

“Mm-hmm. Now, come here. I need to show you what I found.”

Jared followed her back into the living room and they sat down on the couch together. Something crunched under his weight, so he dug around in between the seat cushions and pulled out a bit of wrapping plastic. Alona laughed when she saw it and took it out of his hand.

“I bought this sofa a couple of weeks ago. I guess I didn’t get all the wrapping off it. Thanks for finding that for me.”

“No problem.”

“Okay, so, I looked up the six people who have had the double deposits,”

she said, putting her hands on a stack of papers on the end of the coffee table. “Don’t make that face. I know you told me not to, but I did, and you’re here now, so deal with it.”

Jared put his hands up. “Fine, fine. What’d you find?”

“Most of them are fairly new to Cohen & Cohen; only two have been clients longer than two years. Reading over the reports generated from the transfer

program, there's nothing terribly suspicious other than the totals not always matching up. Now, you said Ella explained that away as the fees being processed before the money is given back to the clients. But then why isn't that the case for all the transactions?"

"That's a good point."

"The reports only provide what has been deemed to be 'pertinent'

information, but it doesn't list all of the information stored in the clients'

profiles. So, I accessed the individual transactions so that I could see everything." She pulled out a folder from among the spread of papers. "The six clients we're looking at all have a box checked off to process fees—"

"Wait, wait," Jared interrupted her. "How did you get into the actual transactions? My account doesn't have access to that. Only the broker who made the transaction and his second has access to it."

Alona opened her mouth, but then closed it without speaking. Her eyes jumped around his face and then she put the folder in her lap.

"Well. Maybe it's one of those things that you don't want to know..." she finally said.

"Are you a hacker?"

"I have a skill set that can be useful at times."

"Alona..."

"Jared, just look." She opened the file and scooted closer to him on the couch so that they pressed side to side. Well, she probably did it so that she could show him the documents in the file. "So, like I was saying: these six particular clients have the button checked off indicating that they want to have their fee processed prior to transferring the money back to their personal and Cohen & Cohen accounts. None of the others have that option checked off."

“Well, that explains the differences in totals then.”

“It does, but Cohen & Cohen have scores of clients. You’re telling me that only six out of like three hundred choose to do this?”

“I guess that’s a little weird.”

“Not only that, but again, those six who chose that option are the only ones with two deposits to the same accounts.”

Alona bounced on the cushion. “Here’s the best part. It is the same bank account number. The report shows that. But when you look at the details of the transaction, the client has to enter in the routing number for the bank.

And they all have different banks like Wells Fargo and Bank of America.

Big corporate banks. And they only have one bank listed as who they bank with. But!”

Jared startled back at her excited shout. She grinned and put a hand on his thigh.

“But every single transaction that has a second deposit into the same bank account number, has a different routing number than the first deposit. And guess what? They’re all the same routing number for all six clients. And guess what bank it’s for?”

Jared waited, but Alona just looked at him excitedly. Apparently she wanted him to answer this time. What was she asking him? All he could think about was that something shady was definitely going on and that her hair smelled like apples.

“Bank?” he managed to get out.

“Yes! The second deposit goes to a different bank, which is not listed in their records, with the exact same account number as their other bank account which I don’t have to tell you is like fucking impossible for six people to randomly have the exact same account number at two different banks especially when all six people have their second account at...”

She waited excitedly again, and finally something clicked in his brain.

“Potomac First.”

Alona slammed the file down onto the coffee table. “First fucking Potomac.

Something’s going on here. Something really weird. This isn’t anything Cohen & Cohen is doing, it’s the clients. And it’s not embezzlement, not really. Because it’s their own money. But, they’re hiding where it goes.”

“Holy shit,” Jared said, picking up the file and looking at the first print out that showed the mismatching routing numbers in front of the same bank account numbers. “Good work, Alona.”

“Thanks.”

“But we can’t rule out Cohen & Cohen being involved somehow just yet.

After all, the program had to be approved to be deployed and someone has to be ignoring the fact that the numbers don’t match. Well, either that or someone is being lazy when double checking this information.”

“Even still, this is huge,” Alona said. “These people,” she tapped the file.

“They’re up to something. And when rich people try to hide where their money is going, it’s usually something really awful.”

Jared considered everything she’d said. She was right. There was something much bigger going on here than simple theft. Even if the “processed fees”

were being diverted away from Cohen & Cohen, most of the money belonged to the people who were shunting it into a different bank. It was entirely possible that there was a larger crime occurring, one that was potentially much more dangerous.

“Alona, I appreciate what you’ve done, really, but if you’re right and these people are involved in something bad, it’s too dangerous for you to continue digging.”

“What? Don’t be absurd.”

“I’m serious, Alona. I’m not going to risk you getting hurt.”

She scoffed. “You’re not going to risk me getting hurt? You’re a number cruncher, what do you know about danger?”

“Oh, uh, um...I just mean...I’ll need to go to Matt and Mark and let them handle this.”

Her face froze for a moment and then she shook her head. “What if they’re in on it?”

“Um, then, I should contact the police.”

“And do what? Tell them you have information showing people making technically completely legal and legitimate money transactions that you obtained illegally?”

Shit.

“Jared,” Alona scooted close again and took his hand in both of hers. They looked tiny. “Look, we don’t really know anything yet. Going to the police or the execs right now would be a bad idea. We should just take this knowledge, and...observe a little more.”

“Observe?”

“Yes. Jared, maybe you should stop digging. Just do what Pellegrino and Cohen asked you to do.”

“And you’re not going to stop digging?”

“I...”

She trailed off, her eyes searching his face again. She licked her lips and Jared’s eyes dropped to watch the movement. Then she surged forward and kissed him. He was surprised for about a second, and then he kissed her back, tongue plunging into her inviting mouth. She slid her hands into his hair and

he groaned softly as he leaned forward, tipping them back onto the couch.

“W-wait!” Alona said breathlessly. “Not the couch. Bedroom.”

Jared didn’t argue. He stood up and pulled her effortlessly off the couch and into his arms. He walked toward the door he’d seen the white bed in earlier.

“Take your hair down,” he said. “I don’t want to hurt you pulling on the rubber band.”

Alona worked the rubber band out of her hair and tossed it to the floor.

Despite being pulled up so messily, the locks cascaded smoothly down her shoulders. Jared entered the room and Alona reached out with a hand to close the door. He placed her in the middle of the queen sized bed and got on top of her, pleased with her bitten moan of pleasure as he settled his weight on her.

“Okay?” he panted.

“Yes, God...”

Jared kissed her again, his hands tangling in her hair to hold her still so that he could fully explore her mouth with his tongue. She squirmed under him and parted her legs, allowing him to settle between them. Alona moved her hands to his sides and tugged on his T-shirt. He sat up enough to pull it over his head and she wasted no time doing the same.

He couldn’t help the hungry groan and surge of arousal that made his already hard dick throb pleasantly when he saw her breasts. They were firm and with pale pink nipples pulled tight and hard atop the full mounds. They weren’t quite a handful for him, but they filled his palms when he gripped them gently, massaging them while he imitated the movement with his tongue against hers. Her nails pulled down his back, the artificial top coat making them thick enough that they didn’t scratch him, just drove him insane.

Jared pulled back to take a breath, and then kiss her cheek, her neck, and made her way down to her chest. He grabbed at one breast with a hand while he sucked on the other. Alona moaned and twisted under him, her fingers

twisting in his hair. He reluctantly left her breasts and moved lower, kissing and licking her soft skin. She was so unbelievably soft, silky almost.

He let one of his hands disappear beneath her shorts. She wore no underwear and his hand brushed through a trimmed bush, and then plunged into her hot, slick heat.

Alona cried out and arched against him.

“It’s okay, baby, I got you.”

He moved down swiftly, pulling her shorts off and over her smooth, perfect legs. He tossed the shorts off the bed and then pressed his hands to her inner thighs, parting her legs farther. He leaned over her and used his thumbs to part her lips. He blew softly onto her and she mewled and writhed. He moved forward and covered her with his mouth. Her hands were in his hair and her legs pulled up around his ears.

“Oh, God. J-Jared...”

Jared ate her out enthusiastically, loving the feel of her slick covering his face, the sharp, musky taste of her. He found her clit and sucked on it gently while his middle finger slid easily into her. Her hips thrust up and he moved with her so that she wouldn’t break his nose. That was a mood killer for sure. Worst sex he’d ever had.

He moved his hand faster and sucked more aggressively on her clit, rubbing his erection against the corner of the bed as her keening gasps were affecting his groin like a physical touch. Then she yanked sharply on his

hair twice.

“Wait wait wait.”

Jared lifted his head and wiped his mouth with the back of his hand.

“What?”

“I like my first orgasm to be on a dick. Numbers two through five can be oral

if you like. But get up here.”

Jared chuckled as he backed off the bed to his feet. He’d never been with someone who had her orgasms mapped out before. But he wasn’t about to argue with her. He unbuttoned his jeans and slid them and his boxers off in one go, awkwardly toeing out of his shoes so that he could step out of both.

He grabbed his wallet and extracted a condom before he stepped back toward the bed. Alona’s eyes were wide as saucers as she stared at his groin.

“Damn...” she whispered.

“What? You didn’t think I was proportional?” he asked with a cocky grin.

“No, not that, just...well...maybe. Let me”

She reached her hands out for the condom and he let her take it. He knelt on the bed and she sat up so that she could take his cock in her hands. He looked enormous in her small hands. She stroked him several times, seemingly becoming familiar with his length and girth. She gave his balls a squeeze or two and then kissed the head.

“Alright, let’s do this,” she said with a grin and ripped the condom packet open. Even with a magnum sized condom, quite a bit of the base was left uncovered, but it would do its job. Alona lay back down and pulled Jared on top of her. They tried to kiss, but they were laughing with excitement.

Jared put one hand under her knee and lifted her leg up and out. He lined up with his other hand, and then pushed in. He went slowly and Alona hummed and moaned nonstop as he sunk in inch by inch.

“Tachnis li...so big...” Her hands held his biceps and he could feel them shaking.

“You okay?” he asked, gulping air.

She nodded. “Yeah, I’m good. Come on, Jared, fuck me.”

Jared rocked forward and they both groaned. Then he pulled back and started



a slow pace as much for his own struggle to last as his concern for her. He built up in speed and her tight pussy stretched just enough for him to fuck into her with little resistance, the wet slap of their bodies joining challenged only by their harsh breathing. When he knew he was close, he slid his hand down to her ass and pulled her up slightly. The angle made his body make contact with her clit. Alona started letting out small, delicate grunts that grew louder and less restrained and then she threw her back and tried to temper her scream as much as possible. Jared felt her pulse around his cock and he came with a fantastically drawn out orgasm as he continued to pump in and out of her. Eventually he slowed, and then came to stop.

Jared panted hard, and was a little afraid to open his eyes. When he did he saw Alona looking up at him, her hair damp with sweat, cheeks flushed, and eyes bright. A fine sheen of sweat coated her heaving breasts and Jared leaned down to lick between the valley they created. He continued up her body until he reached her lips. They kissed, but had to break it off too soon because they both were still trying to catch their breath.

Jared managed to sit up and pulled out carefully. Alona let out a small sound and put her hand between her legs when he was gone. She massaged her fingers through her slick and watched him remove the condom and tie it off. She spread her legs again and brought her hand up to her lips, sucking her glistening fingers into her mouth. Jared tossed the condom to the side, not caring where it landed. He bent over and buried his face between her legs again. She moaned around a laugh and one hand tangled in his hair.

“That’s it. Good boy. So good...”

### **Wednesday, July 30, 2014**

Jensen snorted awake as his cell phone rang. Charlie yawned and grunted and then shifted against him, pushing him even closer to the edge of the bed. He futilely pushed back at her and groggily reached around the

nightstand for his phone. He felt like he hadn’t even slept that long.

Wednesdays sucked. He shut his eyes against the too bright screen and swiped his finger in what he hoped was the right place. It stopped ringing, so

he must have gotten it right.

“Hey, big boy,” he said, stifling a yawn.

“Uh...”

“Don’t shoot it down yet. I kind of like it. Hey, big boy,” he said in an affected sexy voice.

“Jensen.”

Jensen’s eyes flew open. Not Misha. He struggled to sit up.

“Uh. Hello? Who is this?”

“Jared.”

Jensen sighed in relief. At least it hadn’t been his boss or whoever was working the command post that night.

“Uh, hey, Jay,” he said, rubbing the bridge of his nose. “Why are you calling at...” he glanced at the alarm clock on the nightstand and instantly became irate. “Four o’clock in the fucking morning?”

“Oh, God, you’re right. I’m sorry. I wasn’t even thinking. I’ll let you go back to sleep.”

“Well, I’m awake now,” he grumped.

“Yeah, but it’s not really that important. Go back to sleep.”

“It’s important enough that you’re awake at this time of night. Morning.

Whatever.”

“That’s just because I just got home.”

“Just got home? From where, work?”

“No, I was—”

“Were you out partying and getting laid on a Tuesday night?”

“Well, not partying...”

Jensen was definitely awake now. “But getting laid? Who? Oh my God!

You slept with Pellegrino.”

“What?! No! Fuck off!”

Jensen laughed and settled back down into the pillows. He nudged Charlie and she grunted and kicked her feet back, not budging an inch.

“So, Alona I’m guessing? Unless...was it Gen?”

“No, it wasn’t Gen. It was Alona.”

“Okay. Good for you. But really, you could have crowed about this at a more decent hour.”

“It’s nothing to crow about! Jensen...I’m...I can’t...I mean, is it rape?”

Jensen blinked his eyes several times. “What did you do Jared?”

“No, no, I don’t mean like I forced her. Definitely didn’t force her.” He cleared his throat. “I just mean, she thought she was having sex with Jared Bell. A number cruncher from Pennsylvania. She didn’t consent to having sex with me.”

“I don’t know, dude. Not knowing someone’s name isn’t the same as not knowing the person. She likes you, not your past, however made up it may be. I mean, people—men and women alike—lie all the time to get people in bed. And then they move on with life. It’s not raping someone if you tell them you own a record label when you really work at Arby’s.”

Jared chuckled. “I guess not. But, this feels different.”

“Then why’d you do it?”

Jared sighed. “I wanted it. And so did she at the time.”

“Well, in my opinion, I don’t think you’ve done anything wrong. But, if it bothers you that much, don’t do it again.”

“Yeah...”

“Jesus, Jared, why did you call if you’ve already determined that you’re going to do it again?”

“Because I feel guilty.”

“Look, I can’t make you think about it differently if that’s how you feel—”

“No, not that. I...” Jared paused, then let out a soft frustrated sound. “I feel guilty about Gen. Like, I feel like...I cheated on her. I know we definitely ended things for good, but this is the first woman I’ve been with since Gen and I...it feels wrong. Not during, of course. Then it’s like...wow, Jensen, seriously I’ve never had it quite so wild. I mean it started out pretty typical but then rounds two and three were like—have you ever been deepthroated?” he ended with a whisper.

Jensen snorted. “Not to fuck and tell, but with more than one person. It’s not that hard.”

Jared was quiet for a moment and then he asked with a mix of awe and mild disgust in his voice, “Have *you* done it?”

“Don’t ask me that.”

“Sorry. Does Misha—nope, sorry. Not asking.”

“Yes, Misha. He’s very, very talented. You want to talk about wild sex? Let me tell you about some of my adventures with Misha.”

“No! Why do you think I want to hear that?!”

“Why do you think I want to hear about you and Alona?”

“Because...you’re a guy. Who likes girls.”

“So? You’re like a kid brother, Jay. I want to know about your sexual conquests up to a point. You have passed that point.”

“Ah.”

“So. Gen. You didn’t call out her name in bed with Alona, did you?”

“No. I didn’t even think about her until afterwards. And the only reason why I think I thought about her at all is because she texted me today. Or, yesterday.”

“What’d she say?”

“Letting me know that she knows that I’m ignoring her.”

Jensen massaged his temple with his fingers. It was too early for this kind of nonsense. “Jared. Jared.”

“Yes?”

“Do you want Gen?”

“What?”

“Do you love her, do you want her? Yes or no?”

“I...I really don’t know.”

“Well figure it out, bud, because sex will never be good again unless you’re over her or...or with her.”

Jared hummed sounding thoughtful. “Well, the sex will be good. Got that proven tonight. Just the after part kind of sucks.”

“Whatever, dude. Look, I’m going back to sleep. We’ll deal with your crisis of conscience—on both points—later.”

“Okay. Oh! There is something else. Alona—I mean I—shit.”

“Don’t tell me how, just tell me what,” Jensen sighed.

“We found something out about those double deposits. I won’t keep you up with it tonight. I’m still pretty wired so I’ll write an email detailing everything and it’ll be waiting for you at work in the morning.”

“Okay. Detailing the case, not the sex, right?”

“Tch. Yes, the case.”

“Alright then, type away. I’ll call you tomorrow after I’ve looked over it.”

“Great. Thanks, Jensen. Goodnight.”

“Night, Jay.”

Jensen put his phone back on the nightstand. He slipped down to settle back into bed. The dog kicked him again. He shot her a glare in the dark.

“Son of a bitch,” Osric said as he leaned over Jensen’s back to be able to read Jared’s email better. “Routing numbers. I don’t think I would have even thought to check those.”

“Well, fortunately, Jared’s on his game.”

“Yeah...” Osric straightened and Jensen turned his chair so that he could face him. “This is weird though. They’re stealing from themselves. Why?”

“Well, like Jared suggested, maybe to hide where the money is going. It’s possible nobody even knows that they own those accounts. I’m going to write up an affidavit to get the records on the account numbers subpoenaed.

Maybe we’ll find out that they belong to different people. Or we’ll get some

aliases to investigate that are involved in some shady dealings.”

“This case is getting crazy. It was just run of the mill fraudulent securities, and then embezzling, and now...hidden bank accounts with unknown purposes. You really picked a doozy for your first case back as primary investigator.”

“Tell me about it,” Jensen said with a humorless laugh. “After dealing with Little and all his bullshit, I just wanted a nice run of the mill white collar crime. Who even knows what these people are up to?”

“Drugs,” Osric said matter-of-factly. “It’s always drugs.”

“Usually,” Jensen agreed. “Did you ever find out anything about Podvodnik?”

“He’s Czech. He came over here for business school in...1981, I think?...and managed to get a work visa when he graduated. He’s a naturalized citizen now, fast tracked through marriage to an American.

They have a couple of kids. He founded Potomac First about fifteen years ago and hasn’t had any problems with the Federal Reserve. He’s never been audited by the IRS and he has no criminal record. He donates quarterly to multiple charities including an animal shelter. He seems pretty much on the up and up. Maybe he just thinks Cohen & Cohen does a really good job.”

“No way. Six people are using his bank to hide money? He knows about it.”

“Can we open a preliminary investigation on him?”

“Not yet. We’d have to find a way to articulate how we know that he knows about the six other bank accounts being duplicates. Right now it’s just a gut feeling. We need to find a link between him and the clients other than the fact that they have bank accounts with him. Now that we have their names, maybe we can run crosschecks and find something. Can you take care of that while I do the paperwork for the subpoena?”

“Yeah, no problem.”

“And throw in Ella Vasquez’s name too; I still think she’s involved somehow.”

“On it.”

Osric returned to his desk and Jensen pulled up the pony his squad used when drafting affidavits. It took more than a couple of hours to get it completed and signed off on, but he was able to get it filed at the courthouse not much past noon. He picked up some fast food Tex-Mex on the short walk back to WFO from the courthouse and chowed down awkwardly on his burrito as he read through emails from Detective Darcy

and Detective Tracy.

Tracy had discovered a series of unsolved missing persons cases that involved young men disappearing near the Texas Tech campus during the years Russ had been active. There were over twenty, so he was having a couple of officers comb through them to see if they could identify any similarities or patterns. He’d get back to Jensen when he knew more.

Darcy was a little antsy and wanted to know when he was coming out to help them. Jensen had contacted the Portland Field Office, and a gotten slightly hostile response from them informing him under no uncertain terms that they didn’t want WFO taking over their case. They were certain it wasn’t the Angel Slayer and they were closing in on a subject. They weren’t forthcoming with any information, but Detective Darcy did give him the name of the primary suspect. Jensen would drop the name with Russ on Friday to see if he would pick it up. Darcy also told him that they’d started dragging Lake Splendid, the large lake the Green Falls fed, despite the Portland office telling them it was a waste of time and they wouldn’t devote any of their own resources to the search. So far the Green Falls PD’s lone underwater evidence recovery team member hadn’t come up with anything.

But it was a big lake.

He wondered if Russ had a thing for water. Growing up on Lake Win—hell, whatever the name of that lake in New Hampshire had been—might have



made him seek out similar settings for his kills. The Potomac in DC, Lake Splendid in Green Falls. Lubbock was basically a desert, but he supposed even Russ couldn't pick a school based on being close to a body of water.

Should he start looking at any serial killings near large bodies of water?

That certainly wouldn't be any less productive than talking to Russ.

Jensen's hand squeezed involuntarily when he thought about his inevitably continuing meetings with Russ. His burrito overflowed and plopped onto his pants.

"God damn it."

"What's wrong?" Michelle, his squad's SOS asked him.

"Russ made me get burrito on my pants," he griped.

"Russ?" she asked, perplexed. "The Angel Slayer?"

"Yes."

"Got burrito on your pants?"

"Yes," Jensen said, side-eyeing her and daring her to contradict him.

"Oh. Well. He's a dick then."

"Yes, yes he is."

"Jensen!"

Jensen started as Osric popped up behind the divide.

"Oh, sorry. Didn't mean to startle you. I found an interesting connection among our six double dippers. Well, not interesting, just a connection. It's not even an unusual one I guess, but—"

"Osric. What is it?"

"They're all benefactors to the same charity. The Lilac House. Their mission statement is like, to help children that are the victims of human trafficking."

"Okay...so they support a good cause."

"Yes, but it's a connection. They're not just six random people who happen to have accounts in the same local bank that have weird transactions at the same local investment firm."

"Yeah, I get it. Is Ella Vasquez involved with the charity?"

"No. But one of the platinum supporters is Cohen & Cohen. And guess who is one of the founders?"

"Astonish me, Oz."

"Radek Podvodnik."

"Well. Seems like everyone knows everyone."

"Yep. I mean, it's not completely unreasonable. They meet at the charity, they meet Podvodnik there and learn about Cohen & Cohen. It makes sense that they'd have common ground. Then again it also makes sense that if they were all doing something shady they'd need a cover for it."

"Is the charity a front?"

"That's what I'm looking into next."

"Thanks for all the legwork. I'll call Jared and tell him what you've found."

"Maybe it's time he started looking a little harder at what Pellegrino and Cohen are up to."

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Jared sat behind his desk, his elbows propped on the top, his hands covering his nose and mouth as his eyes jumped back and forth between Brock and Dylan as they lobbed barbed insults back and forth.

“You can’t even type sixty-five words per minute,” Brock said, throwing his hands in the air. “You’re little more than a glorified stenographer.”

“Oh, that’s rich coming from a guy who booked a flight to fucking Georgia when your boss asked for tickets to Athens. And you booked it economy.”

“Hey! It was economy plus, alright?”

“Oh, my God,” Jared muttered.

They started yelling over each other and Jared didn’t even attempt to decipher what they were saying. He was starting to wonder if Matt and Mark dropped little comments and remarks just to make them paranoid and to go after each other for their own amusement. Kind of like the rich people who bet on how long the maids could hang from the curtain rods in Rat Race. He was saved when the door to his office flew open and an angel with golden curls appeared in a flourish of fuchsia skirt suit.

“Hi, boys. Sorry to interrupt, but you’re going to have to settle this yourselves or come back later because Mr. Bell and I here apparently have to go step by step through setting up his emergency contact page in his personnel file.”

Jared made a face. “Oh, sorry. I really did mean to—”

“Yeah, yeah, that’s what they all say. But if I’m here, you’ll have to actually do it. So...Brock, Dylan—beat it.”

The personal assistants looked like they wanted to argue, but one look at Alona with her crossed arms and arched eyebrow had them meekly filing out the door. Alona shut the door behind them and Jared gave her a grateful smile.

“Thank you for rescuing me.”

“I’m not rescuing you. Your file is incomplete and we are going to finish it together, right now.”

“O-oh.”

“Also...” Alona trailed off and walked closer. “I wanted to say hi. I didn’t blow you off at work today, I promise. Mr. Cohen pulled me in for an impromptu meeting to talk about the kinds of calls I get on a weekly basis.”

Jared tilted his head. “Is that a weird thing to do?”

“I don’t think so. He was asking questions like what the usual volume is, who calls most—potential clients or solicitors—what kinds of questions do they ask so they can update the FAQ on their website.”

“He oversees that himself?”

“I haven’t been here long but I think both Pellegrino and Cohen take a personal interest in the company. They even consult sometimes if the clients ask for it.”

“Really? Didn’t know that. So...they have influence over what the clients would do with their money.”

“Well, yeah.”

Jared hummed. “I just didn’t know what a CEO or president at an investment firm did.”

“Really?” Alona asked, her face doubtful. “You’ve worked at other investment firms.”

Jared’s heart thumped in a panic against his rib cage. He was talking to Alona like she knew he was FBI. “Uh, yeah, well, I mean...it was big investment firm. The titles of CEO and president are just ways of legitimately taking money from the company. They don’t really know how anything works; they’re too far removed from it. I just meant the way a small company works. One that is actually an investment firm and not a company’s whose business is swindling money.”

“Wow. Bitter much?”

“You think I’m making more money here than I was at AIG? I didn’t leave because it was a step up in my career. It was all about saving my mortal soul.”

Alona laughed and walked around his desk so that she could lean against it right next to where he sat in his desk chair. She dropped her eyes and fidgeted with her fingers.

“So, about last night...”

“Oh.” Jared sat up straight. “I...um, do you want...I—I’m sorry—”

“Sorry?” Alona asked, her head coming up so she could look him in the eye. “Did you...did you not...um. Did you not like it?”

“What? No, of course not! I mean, no I didn’t not like it. So, I did. I guess I just, um...”

“Didn’t want to make a big deal out of it.”

“Well...”

“That’s good!”

“It is? I mean, it is! It was just...a thing. A fun night.”

“Exactly! It was just two people, attracted to each other, so we had a good time. It really didn’t matter, like, if we thought the other was like, marriage material.”

“Oh, no. No, no. It was like...we could have been two strangers.”

Alona put out a hand with a look of pleased surprise, like she was glad he thought the same thing. “Yes! That is it exactly. It was like a one night stand, but with a guy that you still like to have lunch with and might not mind making it a two night stand.”

“Just what I was thinking,” Jared said, feeling relief flood through his limbs and ease his guilt a bit. “Um. Two night stand?”

“Or three. You know. Whatever.”

“Yeah. It’s whatever, right? Just two people—it doesn’t matter who they are.”

“Well, it matters a little bit.”

Jared’s eyes widened slightly. Of course there was a catch.

“I’d be a little angry with you if you slept with Milana.”

“Milana? In accounting? Pass.”

“Glad to hear it. Okay. So...we’ve got that cleared up. Let’s do your emergency contact info.”

“Oh...right.”

Alona turned around so that she could face his monitor. “Come on, pull it up. Do you even know how to get your personnel page?”

“Yes.” No.

Alona rolled her eyes, but she was smiling. “Okay, go to the shared drive and find the personnel database. It’s the file marked personnel.”

“Don’t be snooty,” Jared said, tweaking her side with his hand. She gasped and flinched away with a giggle.

“Quit that.”

Jared slowly navigated through the folders. He wasn’t sure what he would put down. He supposed could just make up a name and number, but it was a little too easy to check that. He could put down Jensen’s number, but should he use an alias for him? Even if he used a different last name, Jensen was such a unique name it would stand out if someone heard it associated with two different people. It was possible that Jensen was contacting people in the company through legitimate channels. But if he gave him a completely false name, there was a good chance he’d be able to let him know before anyone

potentially checked out the number. But why would anyone do that?

The only people who would have access to it would be Alona and the medical office. Was he just being paranoid because he did have something to hide that he assumed other people thought he did?

He typed in the password to access the database that would allow him to change his own information. Before he entered any information, he pulled out his phone.

“I, uh, don’t have the number memorized,” he said, telling the truth.

“Isn’t that sad? Like people used to remember dozens of numbers. Now we know like, our own and that’s it. If anyone ever had to call someone without their cell phone, they’d be screwed.”

“Pretty much. Oh.”

Jared saw that he had a text from Jensen.

I call as soon as you’re free talk

Jared shook his head. Jensen sucked at typing.

“Oh, hey, Alona? I, uh, have to make a phone call. It’s important.”

“Okay. Oh, now? Oh...um, okay. I can come back later.”

“I’ll make the edits, I promise. I have some meetings this afternoon. But, uh, I’ll see you on the way out and definitely we’ll do lunch tomorrow. And maybe this weekend we can...be two people who hang out again.”

Alona smiled. “I’d like that. Hanging out on work nights is definitely too much for me to handle anymore. I would have been asleep at my desk if I hadn’t basically had an intravenous drip of coffee.”

Jared smiled.

“I’m not as young as I used to be,” she sighed wistfully.

Jared cocked his head. “Oh, come on. You’re not older than me; you’re not even thirty.”

Alona just gave him a unreadable, pleasant expression. “Like I’m going to tell a stranger how old I am.” She pointed a finger at him. “Finish your personnel record.”

“Yes, ma’am,” he replied, with a touch of attitude on the ma’am.

Alona gave him a playful glare and then took her leave. Jared ran a hand down his face. He was probably the worst undercover agent in the history of ever. He dialed Jensen and sat back in his chair with a hand over his eyes.

“Hey, Jay,” Jensen said, smacking sounds coming over the phone.

Jared made a face. “What are you eating?”

“Bu’ito.”

“Ah. So, I’m answering your text.”

“Oh. Mm. Uh, ho’on.”

“Dude, you chew and I’ll take the time to tell you that I’m think I’m off the hook for the totally sketchy sleeping with someone under a false name thing. Maybe.”

“’Eally?”

“Well, I talked to Alona today and she said that we shouldn’t make a big deal out of what happened last night. That we were just like—two people who had a good time together. Like a one stand that might probably be a two or three night stand.”

“Hmm.” Jared heard something being slurped through a straw. “That’s weird.”

“Weird? Really? I just thought it meant that we were on the same page.

Like, we don't want anything serious."

"Well, if you were on the same page wouldn't that mean that she's not who she says she is either?"

"I...I guess. So, since she didn't mean that, I'm still the bad guy?"

"Maybe she did it mean it that way. Maybe she's married or something."

"Oh. I didn't think of that. She did say she needed a couple of hours to clean up before I came over. Maybe she was hiding all of his stuff."

"I don't know how to do it tactfully, but I'd find out. Sleeping with a married woman requires a certain amount of finesse."

"Oh, Jensen...you didn't."

"I didn't know when we started, but by the time I found out it seemed like it was a moot point because it had already been happening for weeks."

"Such a sleazeball. I'm gonna tell Misha and he's not gonna want to marry your cheating ass anymore."

"I wasn't the one cheating. I didn't have any responsibility to her husband."

"Come on, do you really believe that?"

"Well, I broke it off a few days later, so what do you think?"

"I think I'd be more impressed if you'd broken it off immediately."

"You don't understand, Jay. She was so hot. Like, Angelina Jolie hot."

"Well, I guess everyone gets one pass."

"Gee, thanks."

"So, do you have some information for me?"

“Oh, yeah. We found a connection among the six double dipping clients, the owner of Potomac First, and Cohen & Cohen. They all support the same charity. So, either they met there and networked which led to business deals, or they’re using the charity as a front.”

“Or to launder money,” Jared suggested.

“Very possible. I wanted to let you know so that one: you can tread more lightly around Pellegrino and Cohen because we really don’t know what they might be involved in, and two: maybe you need to start digging into them a little bit more.”

“Yeah, thanks for the heads up. I have a meeting with Mark in about an hour, and I was going to ask him about those six clients and the whole ‘fees taken out before returns come in’ thing, but maybe I shouldn’t let on that those six people have caught our eye.”

“Maybe not at this juncture. Let’s feel it out a bit.”

“Will do. This meeting will at least let me find out where Pellegrino’s office is. I think I’m going to try to take a look around it tomorrow or Friday when he’s gone.”

“Be careful, alright? If he’s really doing dirt, the fact that he knows you’re FBI will make him more dangerous if he catches you.”

“Don’t worry. I’ll be careful. I’ll send a report later of how our meeting today goes.”

“Great, thanks, Jay. Keep up the good work.”

Jared smiled to himself. The praise from Jensen meant a lot more to him than he thought it probably should, but he wasn’t just his friend and colleague. He was someone he admired. He was a brother now. He wanted to make him proud.

“And Jared?”

“Yeah?”

“Don’t let him catch you diddling the receptionist.”

“What?! I won’t! We’d never do it in the office. Sheesh.”

“Okay.”

“You and Misha never did anything at work, did you?”

“No. We were consummate professionals. Unless a quick blow job in an interview room counts...”

“I think it does.”

“Okay. Then we were not consummate professionals five times.”

“Five—?!” Jared was speechless. Damn. He’d known Jensen and Misha had been prolific during their two month acquaintance, but that was pretty impressive for people in their thirties.

Thursday, July 31, 2014

Jared laughed as Alona described the antics of a pet dog she used to have when she was very young. He wondered if perhaps “two people having fun” weren’t supposed to share childhood stories, but then he figured that

“two people having fun” wouldn’t care about what they were “supposed” to do. They were coming back from lunch and when they arrived at the lobby of Cohen & Cohen in the external elevators, they found Mark Pellegrino waiting when the doors opened.

They both sort of froze. Jared didn’t know why Alona did, but he felt a little bit like a teenager bringing his date home past curfew. But Mark smiled pleasantly at them.

“Hello, Jared. Hello, Alona. I’m happy to see my two newest employees are sticking together. But I do hope the rest of the company is making you feel welcome.”

“Oh, very much, sir,” Alona said brightly, stepping off before the doors closed. “We just both eat lunch later than everybody else, so we tend to go together.”

“Good. You will let me know though if there’s any friction with any of your coworkers. The one thing Matt and I can agree on is that everyone should have a comfortable working environment.”

“It is, sir. I’m very happy here.”

Jared stepped off and Mark stepped on. “And you Jared?”

“Yes, I’m...quite happy too.”

“Excellent. And thank you for your report yesterday. It was quite elucidating.”

Jared nodded and the elevator closed. Alona nudged him.

“Look at you getting private meetings with the boss. Oh! But, we already knew that, you go-getter, you.”

Jared shot her an unhappy frown at the reminder of the rumors floating around about him. She smiled and tapped his nose.

“See you later,” she said as she returned to her desk.

Jared walked over to the internal elevator and hopped inside. His finger hesitated over the button for his floor. Mark was gone. His office would be empty because Brock was taking a sick day, which he knew because Dylan had complained to him earlier that morning that he suspected Brock was given more leave than he. Jared pushed the button for the top floor.

When the elevator arrived, the hallway was empty. The doors to Matt’s office and Dylan’s and Brock’s shared office were closed. Jared walked swiftly down to the end of the hallway and turned right. The second door on the left was Mark’s office and it was much smaller than Matt’s. It was still a large corner office with a lot of windows and a sitting area and a kitchenette, but it was closer to the size of a small one bedroom apartment as opposed to an

entire half of a building. Jared gave himself a five minute time limit and set to work.

He checked all of the desk drawers and found one of them locked. He couldn't locate a key for it in the desk, so he moved on to bookshelves.

Much like Matt, Mark had a lot of binders that appeared to have quarterly reports dating back several years and journal and articles on investing and accounting. There was a door near the kitchenette and Jared cracked it open. It was a small closet full of boxes. A few were labeled as containing the quarterly reports dating back nearly a decade. Others were marked as old personnel files and employee and intern applications. There were also a bunch of boxes labeled with what looked like the names of charitable foundations. He stepped into the closet to read through them, and sure enough found one marked The Lilac House. Jared checked his watch; he was already at six minutes. He opened the box anyway.

Inside were documents detailing Cohen & Cohen's donations over the years starting in 2004. They appeared to be mostly tax documents and records detailing how much was donated each year. There were also a few pamphlets that related success stories of people the charity had helped rescue. Tucked down one side there was a simple blue folder that only had two pockets on the inside. Tucked into those pockets were lists of names, some of which Jared recognized as being the double dippers, but there were a lot of other names as well. They were all marked with various symbols that didn't make any sense to Jared. Some of the names were circled, but only two of the double dippers. Jared took out his phone and snapped pictures of the five sheets. Then he tucked the folder back into the box and put the lid back on it.

Jared walked quietly over to the closet door and peeked outside. The office was still empty and quiet. Just as he was about to step out into it, the door to the office opened and Jared leapt back into the closet. He didn't quite pull the door all the way shut, leaving a small crack, but he was worried to draw attention to it by making it move.

"Well, what did he say exactly?" the voice was angry and belonged to Matt Cohen. "You shouldn't have had a meeting with him without me there."

The door to the office slammed shut. “This is my father’s company. This is my company. I deserve to know what’s going on.”

“The simple matter,” Mark said, sounding calm, but irritated, “is that he had nothing to report. He doesn’t know what’s going on either.”

“If the problem is those national securities, then why is he looking into the program the IT department set up?”

“I don’t know. Maybe when those particular securities are tapped it sends out a virus or something and he thinks it came back to us.”

“A virus? Jesus, Mark. Why do you have this job? A fraudulent security can’t house a virus that could be transmitted by investing in it. Do you know anything about how investing works?”

“A sight more than you, Matt,” Mark snapped, his cool evaporating.

Jared crept closer to the crack and peeked out. He couldn’t see anyone.

They must be near Mark’s desk.

“Then why is he snooping around things that have nothing to do with fraud? I’ve had employees coming up to me and asking if there’s something going on. If we’re conducting an internal investigation because we suspect embezzling. Embezzling, Mark!”

“I heard you the first time, Matt!”

“What does he suspect? What did he say to you in the meeting?!”

“I told you! He just said what he said before: that the national scam is what brought them here, but some things don’t add up and he’s just being thorough.”

“Thorough? What does that mean? They suspect something, Mark! And you know what it is!”

“I told you I don’t!”

“I don’t believe you!”

“Well, that’s because you’re an entitled little shit.”

“Fuck you! My inheritance has nothing to do with the fact that you’re keeping secrets! I’m going to Jared tomorrow and talking to him. If he suspects you, I want to know!”

“God you are such a pain in the ass. If you do that it will make him suspicious.”

Jared’s brow creased. Shit. They were hiding something.

“Mark, I swear, if you’re jeopardizing my company—”

“It is not your company.”

“The hell it’s not!”

“Your father gave this company to me.”

“He did not!”

“And that includes everything that comes with it,” the man hissed.

A cold chill went down Jared’s spine at Mark’s tone. Every instinct in his body was telling him that Mark was dangerous and something was about to go horribly wrong. He listened for Matt’s response, but all he heard was a muffled voice and some heavy breathing. The sound of the paper tray on Mark’s desk scraping across the desk was followed by a loud crash as it and the lamp hit the floor. Jared bent down and removed the gun from his ankle holster. He stood up and grabbed the doorknob, ready to yank it open. He hesitated just long enough to crane his head to look out the crack in the door to get a sense of the situation so he didn’t jump out blind. Fortunately that was enough to make him not go through with bursting out of the closet like a heroic savior. His jaw dropped to the floor instead.

Mark was on top of Matt on the desk—but they weren’t fighting. Well, not

exactly. They were kissing and pulling at each other's clothes, but with a violence that he'd only seen in bad love scenes in action movies.

"I fucking hate you," Matt gasped as he tilted his head back and let Mark kiss his neck. He wrapped his legs around Mark's waist and pulled him closer.

"You're such a spoiled brat," Mark muttered and pinched a nipple through Matt's dress shirt.

Matt's moan almost covered up the sound of a zipper being pulled down.

The whirring noise brought Jared back to his senses and he ducked back farther into the closet. He put his gun back in the holster and hunkered down with his brain coming up blank with ways to get out of this. He reached out with a foot to shut the door so maybe at least he could block out some of the sounds, but the damn thing which had been so quiet before squeaked. He pulled his foot back and went still. Based on what he was hearing, neither of the two men having very aggressive hate sex in the next room heard it.

There was a momentary pause as they both breathed hard and keys jangled.

Then a drawer was pulled open.

"We-we don't have time for that," Matt panted.

"The hell we don't. Turn over."

There was a thumping noise followed by Matt moaning in pleasure. Jared put his hands on his head, but didn't quite cover his ears. That would be ridiculous, right?

"Oh, fuck, Mark! Mark!"

"Quiet down, you twit. It's just a finger."

Jared closed his eyes. Holy shit. A few minutes of thumping and groaning and whimpers later, Matt let out a noise that almost made Jared laugh. He put a hand over his mouth, and then his eyes went wide when he heard Mark say, "Pain in the ass, but you sure are fucking tight."

Then the unmistakable, rhythmic sound of someone getting a good pounding filled the office. Jared sat still, listening to the wet slaps, the gasping breaths, the soft moans...and he did his best to ignore them and the programmed responses the sounds of sex induced in him. Fortunately it was all over within a few minutes from that point and Jared licked his dry lips at the sounds of Mark and Matt finishing. He dropped his head to his knees as the whispering sounds of clothes being straightened made it through the door. Something metallic clinked on the desk and Jared assumed someone had picked up the lamp.

“Don’t think this distracted me,” Matt said, not sounding any less angry than he had before.

“Fine! Go talk to Jared. Tell him you want to know what he’s investigating.

If he suspects you or me of embezzling from the company, do you think he would tell you?”

“He might if he just suspects you.”

“Get out of my office.”

There were some grumbling noises, and then heavy footsteps on the thick, expensive carpet. The office door opened and shut. Jared could hear Mark arranging things on his desk and he wondered if he would be stuck here until Mark went home. Sometimes he stayed until eight o’clock at night. At least he’d eaten lunch. Fortunately, about two minutes later, he heard the man huff and slam a door drawer shut. Then his steps seemed to lead across the room. The office door open and closed. Jared waited and listened to make sure Mark wasn’t going to come marching back in. But if he’d gone to the bathroom, he wouldn’t be gone that long. Jared stood up and crept to the door. He peeked out and turned his head as much as he could. The office was empty.

Jared opened the door, stepped outside, and jumped at least two feet in the air as he let out a high pitched shriek. Mark stood right next to the door, rubbing his ear with a finger as he made a face of discomfort. Jared went absolutely still. Maybe he couldn’t see him if he didn’t move.

“Jared.”

“Um. Hi...”

“What are you doing in the closet in my office?”

Jared worked his mouth, his brain working furiously. Finally, he figured he’d probably have a shot at saving face if he didn’t try to bullshit his way out of this.

“I was searching your office.”

“For what?”

Jared inhaled, and then let it out slowly. He knew Jensen didn’t want them to know, but maybe the way Mark and Matt handled their responses to their suspicions would be a clue itself.

“We’ve discovered some discrepancies with the money transfers at Cohen

& Cohen. It appears to only involve six people, and they all have bank accounts at Potomac First. It looks like money is being embezzled, or at the very least diverted to secret accounts.”

Jared held back the charity connection. He didn’t have to fuck everything up.

“I see,” Mark said. “And you suspect Matt and I may be behind it?”

“We couldn’t rule it out. But to be honest, it looks like the clients themselves are taking advantage of the money transfer program.”

“Should we be concerned about the program?”

“Perhaps, but it only involves six clients. The other clients who have lost money were legitimate victims of the national fraudulent securities scam.”

“Should I be concerned about the woman who made this program for us?”

“Maybe. We’re looking into it, so please don’t do anything rash.”

“Like?”

“Like fire her and scare her off. We’re working the case.”

“Alright. I’ll let you work. Even if that means you have to investigate me, I suppose.”

Jared dropped his eyes and cleared his throat.

“I apologize that you had to be party to one of the more...seedier aspects of Matt’s and my relationship.”

Jared blushed. The sight of them on the desk flashing before his eyes and the sounds echoing like a phantom in his ears.

“N-no...I apologize. I should have just come out when...I was taken by surprise.”

“I can imagine.” Mark stepped closer. “Do you need any help coping with the situation?”

“Coping? No, I—” Jared looked up and found Mark directly in front of him. Mark’s hand grasped the remnants of his fading erection through his pants.

Jared squeaked and pushed away. Mark smirked at him.

“No! I’m not...I’m fine! Thank you. I’ll go now.”

“You can use the bathroom up here if you need to,” Mark said in a blithe tone as Jared hightailed it across the room.

“That won’t be necessary,” Jared replied hastily. He got his hand on the office doorknob.

“Oh, and Jared?”

Jared stopped and looked back.

“If you come in my office again without my explicit invitation or a search

warrant...there will be a reckoning.”

Jared swallowed. “I understand.”

He pulled open the door and darted outside. He made it to the elevators and could feel himself sweating. He swiped a hand over his forehead and made a face as it came back soaking wet. He slung the sweat onto the floor and jumped onto the elevator. He hit the button for the lobby.

When the elevators arrived at the Cohen & Cohen front office he was grateful to find it empty. He took a moment to get most of the sweat off his head and to straighten his hair. He walked over to Alona’s desk and leaned on the counter, smiling down at her.

“Hey,” she said, smiling up at him. “Couldn’t stay away?”

He shrugged. “Pretty much. Hey, so, you know that whole we should wait until the weekend thing?”

“Yeah...”

“How about we be two people who get together tonight?”

Alona tilted her head as she examined him. Then she shrugged and smiled.

“Sure. Your place or mine?”

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Jensen pushed the key fob to lock his car’s doors as he walked across the parking garage with a bag full of groceries. There wasn’t anything for him, of course, it was all dog food and treats. His dress shoes echoed dully in the heavy, concrete space. Just before he reached the alcove with the elevators, a woman approached from the other side of the garage.

“Oh! Hi, hi, I’m so glad you’re here. Can you help me? I’ve locked myself out of my car and I do not have a hanger on me. Can I get one from you?”

She was short and very thin. Her hair and eyes made her look Asian, but her skin was so sallow and sickly that he couldn't be sure. Her clothes looked old but clean, but her shoes were caked in dried mud.

"Um...a hanger?" he asked stupidly because he was so distracted by her odd appearance.

"Yes. Like a wire hanger that I can use to stick in the seal of the window and pull the lock up. I have an ancient car. Seriously. Not even from this millennium."

"Oh, wow. That is old."

"I know. I really ought to just bite the bullet and get a new car, one where it's like impossible to lock yourself out of it." She laughed and her voice sounded thin. "But I like not having a car payment."

"I understand that."

They stared at each other for a moment.

"So, do you have a hanger?" she repeated.

Jensen figured that he probably had a wire hanger or the equivalent somewhere in his apartment, but something was creeping along his spine and telling him not to let her in his apartment. Or to even let her wait on him to come back down.

"I'm sorry. I have all plastic and wooden hangers. It's better for the clothes."

"Oh. Well, maybe you have something else? We can take a look..."

"I don't think I do. You don't have one in your apartment?"

"I don't live here. I was visiting a friend. And we decided to go out to dinner but take separate cars rather than him having to drive me all the way back here after. He's already left, and I'm stuck here. Can I—"

“I can lend you my phone. And you can call him.”

“Oh! Yes. That will work.”

The woman started to walk into the alcove and Jensen held out his cell phone.

“We’re underground, but the signal still works down here.”

Her eyes shifted. “Oh. Right. Thanks.”

The woman took the phone and turned partly away from him as she dialed.

She put the phone to her ear and waited a few moments, and then handed it back to him.

“He’s not answering.”

“Is there someone else you’d like to call?”

“No, I’ve stolen enough of your time. I’m sure I’ll figure something out.”

“Okay. If you’re sure.”

“I am. Thank you.”

She turned and walked away from him and Jensen hurried into the alcove and repeatedly pushed the up button. This was ridiculous. He was an FBI agent. He should help a stranded woman get into her car or at least stay with her until she could get help. But something had felt wrong. He couldn’t pinpoint a reason or the exact feeling, but he didn’t want to stay near her and he certainly didn’t want to let her into the building or his apartment.

When he got to his floor he waited for several minutes outside of his door to see if she took the elevator up and followed him. No one came and he felt like a rude fool. He contemplated going back down again to check on her, but he could hear Charlie whimpering on the other side of the door. She could probably tell that he was outside and was upset and confused because he wouldn’t come in. He unlocked the door and found the dog had boldly come halfway across the room. When she saw him she trotted over with her ears

and tail down, but with a hopeful expression on her face.

“Hey, Charlie. How are you?” Jensen dropped to one knee and scratched behind her ears with his free hand. Her tail came out a bit and wagged.

“There’s my good girl. You want a treat? You want a puppy treat?”

She whined softly in the back of her throat.

“Yeah, I bet you do. Let’s go. Come on.”

Jensen stood up and shut the door behind him. He locked it and then threw the deadbolt, which he normally didn’t do until he was ready for bed. As he opened the bag of dog treats, he pulled out his cell phone and called Misha.

“Hello?”

“Hey, big boy,” he said as he knelt to give Charlie a treat.

“Oh! J-Jensen.”

Jensen straightened and dumped half the dog treats on the floor. Charlie started to chow down happily.

“S-sorry. This is Gil. Misha is changing clothes and asked me to grab the phone. Um. Here he is.”

“Hey, babe.”

Jensen moved to sit at the kitchen table and let Charlie eat the treats. He just wouldn’t give her dinner.

“Jesus. I kind of like big boy, but it’s way too embarrassing to accidentally use it with someone else.”

“Eh, Gil doesn’t mind. Besides, how many times would that happen?”

“I said it to Jared. And my brother.”

“Okay, yeah...let’s find something a little less suggestive. You’re calling a little early. Is something up?”

“No. No, not really. I just wanted to talk to you.”

“What’s with the ‘not really?’”

“Ah. Just...there was a woman in the parking garage who made me feel a little...”

“Careful how you finish that sentence,” Misha said, his voice flat.

“Oh, dude, no. She was giving off creepy vibes.”

“Creepy vibes?”

“Yeah, like she didn’t say or do anything weird. Exactly. I just...felt... weird.”

“Nothing wrong with trusting your instincts. Did she try to follow you?”

“No. And I waited outside the apartment door a few minutes, but she never came up.”

“Well, okay. Please don’t get serial murdered while I’m away.”

Jensen’s brow creased and he moved his fingertip around the tabletop in a meaningless pattern.

“Are we ever going to be able to make offhand jokes like that?”

“Well, I just did. Babe, I’ve got to run or the cafeteria will close and I’ll be SOL for dinner.”

“Oh, right, sorry.”

“It’s okay. I’ll call you when I get back at our usual time, okay?”



“Okay.”

“How’s Charlie?”

“Good.” The dog was sitting near her bowl, watching him and occasionally glancing up at the open bag of treats on the countertop. “Just fine, actually.”

“I’m glad to hear it. Try to eat something unprocessed, okay?”

Jensen let out a long-suffering sigh. “Fine.”

“Good boy.”

A tingle rushed down his spine, completely erasing any lingering discomfort caused by the woman. His groin tingled along with it. He cleared his throat.

“Talk to you later, Mish.”

“Love you.”

“You too.”

Jensen ended the call and set the phone on the table. He looked at Charlie.

“Do you think Pizza Hut is unprocessed?”

**Friday, August 1, 2014**

“You’re out of your mind,” Jensen stated firmly. “There is no way in hell the prosecutors or the prison system or, fuck, me, is going to let you out of this place even for a few hours.”

Russ shrugged. “Fine. Then let him keep killing. Did I tell you about the first one he did? I read about it online. They left some details out, but I can imagine them. Like...the instrument they used to sodomize her wasn’t a spiked dildo. Where would you even find one of those? You’d have to make it and that’s tedious. It was one of those cheap plastic drain snakes you can get at CVS for two-ninety-five for a pair.” Russ giggled. Well, that’s what I imagine could do that kind of tearing. That guy must be sick.”

“Russ...I don’t doubt that your work in Green Falls was masterful. No one is trying to belittle your reputation,” he said with as much sarcasm as he could cram into two sentences. “But you’re not offering a name. You’re offering a freaking storage unit. Even if we could get a search warrant based on your word alone, which is doubtful, it’s not going to be under a true name. If he’s better taught than Hannigan, he wouldn’t have touched anything in there without gloves. What good will opening the storage unit do other than warn him off?”

“Well...it’s not just a work space. I imagine it’s the trophy room. It will show you every single victim he’d had. Including the ones not on the police radar.”

“Formaldehyde ruins the tissues.”

“Well, it’s possible this fuck is dumb enough to put a picture of his kills next to every jar. Along with other personal effects.”

Jensen sat back in his chair, his eyes jumping over’s Russ’ face. His beard had grown back in more, giving him that more than stubble but less than a beard look that was popular among young Hollywood actors at the moment.

He was an attractive man—one who probably hadn’t had any trouble luring in male or female victims or seducing his disciples.

“How many?”

“How many what?”

“How many have the Green Falls killers killed?”

Russ shrugged.

“How many would you estimate?” he asked between clenched teeth.

“Forty-seven.”

“Shut the fuck up.”

The words had slipped out of Michelson’s mouth. Jensen glanced at the

guard, and he was staring at Russ with a mixture of disbelief and disgust.

Russ was smiling, seeming pretty damned pleased with himself.

“The Green Falls Killer has only been attributed with twenty-six kills,”

Jensen said.

“Hmm. Yes, I guess technically almost half of them wouldn’t count in the eyes of the law. The whole, it has to have at least taken one breath thing to count as being alive thing.”

“What?”

“Weren’t some of the female victims determined to be pregnant? Why wouldn’t they all be?”

“Fuck this,” Michelson muttered. He moved to knock on the interior door.

Another guard opened it. “You stay in with him. I’m not.”

The other guard looked on in surprise as Michelson walked past him, but he quickly entered the interview room and shut the door. He stood by the wall and looked to Jensen for guidance. Jensen ignored him.

“So, excluding the pregnancies, the number is twenty-six?”

“I’d guess more like thirty. Like I said, there’s a chance there are some victims that the police don’t know about.”

“And all of this information would be in the storage unit.”

Russ leaned forward on the table. “That, and I think this dumb fuck actually has all the information on his potentials list stored there.”

“Potentials list. The people he’s currently stalking and planning on killing.”

Russ shrugged. “You can’t do these things without a plan.”

That put a spin on things. If there was a chance they could identify targeted victims, then that completely changed whether or not the risk of allowing a deranged psychopath to fly across country would even be considered. If it was just to find bodies or confirm kills, they could live without that however much they'd like it. But if there were people at that very moment being slated for death—almost anything was worth saving a life.

Jensen shook his head. "No. Not good enough. We need a name."

"I'll get you a name if you let me take you to the storage unit."

Again, Jensen shook his head. "I'd be laughed out of the prosecutor's office. The Green Falls police and Portland FBI would refuse to take on the responsibility for you."

"I wouldn't try to run."

"Forgive me if I don't accept your word."

"I've been very honest with you, Jensen. You caught me, so I conceded."

"You've conceded nothing, you obstinate fuck."

Russ laughed. "I love how we share pet names."

"Jesus," Jensen muttered and looked away with a hard eye roll.

"Come on, it can't hurt to ask. Worst case scenario they say no and you're no worse off now than you were if you didn't ask."

"No, Russ, actually the worst case scenario is that they say yes."

"You think they'd fly us first class? Less people for me to potentially get my hands on." He wiggled his fingers the way someone saying, "Ooo, spooky," would.

"Your ass will be in coach. Next to an air marshal. Not me."

"You wouldn't go?"

“I’d go. I’m just not sitting next to you.”

“We’ll see.”

Jensen considered him a moment longer. “I’m not asking.”

“Well, that’s disappointing. I hope nobody dies because you’re afraid of me.

Wouldn’t that be a kick in the head if a kill popped up a few days later? A body you could have prevented.”

“You know the whole the United States Government doesn’t negotiate with terrorists thing? There’s a reason for that. And it applies to you too.”

“Yeah, but you know, sometimes they do play ball.”

“Russ, I’m leaving. You better think of something useful and try to get someone here to email it to me because I’m not coming back next week.

I’ve need a break and quite frankly the case I’m working on requires my full attention.”

Russ’ smug expression finally snapped. “Ask the prosecutor. Call the Green Falls police. Ask if they want him.”

“No. I don’t think I will. See you in court.”

“Jensen!” Russ screamed and tried to stand up but the cuffs on his ankles and wrists only let him get partway out of the seat. The table shook and Russ’ voice bounced off the walls and rang in Jensen’s ears, causing him to start back in his seat. The guard in the room was startled too. He pulled out his nightstick and approached Russ.

“Sit down prisoner. Sit down!”

The interior door opened and two other guards came into the room with batons drawn. Russ kept his eyes on Jensen, but lowered himself back into his seat.

“Just ask,” he said, feigning calmness.

Jensen stood up and adjusted his tie. He nodded to the guards and walked over to the exit. He knocked on it and the rookie guard opened the door with wide eyes.

“What did you say to him?”

Jensen shot him a look but didn’t reply. He signed out and got his cell phones back. He had no messages on his personal phone, but his work phone indicated he had a couple of emails. He clumsily entered his password twice to get past the generic screen and into the secure one. There was a traffic advisory for the Beltway and an email from Det. Darcy.

Apparently the Green Falls Killer had started sinking the bodies in Lake Splendid since Russ’ arrest. They’d found three corpses which meant that not only had he continued, he’d increased his frequency.

Jensen sat in his car in the parking lot of the prison for a long time. The sky began to darken around him. Finally he pulled out his phone and scrolled through his contacts. He tapped on a name and stared at the phone for a minute before tapping the speaker button. The sound of ringing filled the small space.

“State’s Attorney Office,” a young man’s voice said.

“Hi. This Special Agent Jensen Ackles with the FBI. I’d like to speak with USA Tigerman, please.”

“One moment. I’ll see if he’s available.”

Thirty seconds later the line picked up.

“Agent Ackles,” USA Tigerman said. “I hope the reason for your call is good news.”

USA Gabriel Tigerman had a bit of a baby face and a voice that was less than intimidating, but he lived up to his name in the courtroom and Jensen had utmost confidence in him.

“Well, it’s a little bit of both.”

“Does it involve Russell Little?”

“It does.”

“Then I doubt there’s anything good about it.” He sighed. “Lay it on me.”

### **Saturday, August 2, 2014**

Misha tied his shoelaces with the special double-tie but not a double-knot knot he’d learned as a kid. They were running an exercise today and he didn’t want to worry about something so primary school as untied shoelaces while pretending to take down a drug den. Nor did he want to have to pick at the knots when he got back and was dirty and exhausted. He knew today could possibly be brutal physically and mentally depending on what they had planned for the NAT’s, but it was actually welcome after three straight weeks of classroom.

Someone knocked at the door and Misha hopped off the bed to answer it.

He hesitated before opening it. He could only imagine who it might be after his ex-wife had found him and snuck in. He swung the door open, expecting anything—and let out a small noise of surprise when he saw who it was. He stepped forward into Jensen’s arms and his fiancé wrapped him up tight.

“Oh, this is such an awesome surprise,” Misha murmured into Jensen’s shoulder.

“I’m glad it’s a good one.”

“Always.”

Misha pulled back and cupped Jensen’s jaw so that he could trace his cheekbone with his thumb. He loved his face.

“Unfortunately your timing’s not so great. I have an exercise today.”

“Oh. Shit. Sorry. I should have called first.”



“No, I don’t mind.” Misha smiled slyly and nudged their lower halves together. “You just needed some, huh?” He laughed at his poor attempt at a sexy voice.

Jensen stared at him, face blank for a moment too long, and then he smiled.

“Yeah. That was it.” His hands stroked down Misha’s back. “Woke up this morning and just...had to have you.”

Misha leaned forward and kissed his lips. “I’m flattered.” He checked his watch. “Actually...we do have enough time for a blowjob.” He gave his eyebrows a quick lift. “Come in.”

Misha stepped back into the room and pulled on Jensen’s wrist. He resisted slightly.

“It’s okay, Mish. You’re busy.”

“You’re turning me down?” Misha asked with an arched eyebrow.

The door eased shut behind them. Jensen shook his head.

“No, not turning you down.”

Misha grinned and turned to walk to the bed. He grabbed his pillow and dropped it onto the floor, and then he positioned Jensen on the bed. He knelt on the pillow and made quick work of Jensen’s belt and the fly of his

jeans. Jensen was soft when he pulled him out, but even flaccid he was big.

Misha knew there was probably a term for this, but he could get hard just thinking about how both his hands couldn’t cover the thing and how wide his mouth stretched when he swallowed it and how fucking filled he was when Jensen slid into him. He was hard now as he stroked Jensen’s soft penis, knowing what it would become. He sucked the tip into his mouth and then took him all the way in. He was still working on being able to take Jensen in completely when he was hard, but soft he could swallow enough to almost get to his balls.

Misha was so focused on what Jensen would be like when he got hard that it took him a little while to realize that Jensen wasn't getting hard. He wasn't completely soft anymore, but by now he should be fully erect and leaking. Misha pulled his mouth off, but kept lightly stroking him with a hand as he looked up. Jensen was staring straight ahead, his hands balled into fists on his thighs rather than buried in Misha's hair.

"Jensen?"

Jensen looked down at him. "Yeah?"

"You okay?"

"Yeah. Why?"

Misha looked down at Jensen's lap and back up. Jensen's eyes looked down.

"Oh. S-sorry. I guess I'm a little tired. And I kind of have to pee."

Misha made a face and released his penis. "Okay, babe, I love you and would love to try all kinds of kinky things with you, but I will never, ever be into watersports."

"Oh, shit. Sorry. That's not—neither am I. This was the wrong time to bring it up."

"You're telling me," Misha muttered, feeling his erection give a pathetically hopeful twitch that they might continue. "But, when you gotta go, you gotta go."

Misha carefully tucked Jensen back in and zipped him up. He stood up and kissed Jensen on the lips.

"Come on. I'll take you to the bathroom."

"I'm not a kindergartener who needs a buddy," Jensen grumbled.

"I know, precious." Misha kissed the top of his head and Jensen swatted at him.

He got to his feet though and followed Misha out into the hallway. Misha took his hand and swung it gently for the short walk to the end of the hall.

Jensen seemed content to let Misha do what he wanted. Inside the bathroom there were no urinals, only stalls, so Jensen went into the middle one while Misha rinsed out his mouth in the sink.

“So, did you guys ever have to do the drug den take down?” Jensen didn’t respond. “We have an event in Hogan’s Alley today where there’s supposedly a whole gang of drug dealers holed up in a residential neighborhood. Did your class have to find the house or just plan the SWAT hit?” He got no answer. “Did you—”

“Misha! I can’t pee with you yapping!”

Misha grinned and turned on the sink. He waited quietly, letting the water run, and then Jensen accompanied it. Misha turned off the water.

“So, did you guys do the drug one?”

“Damn it, Misha.”

“You’re still peeing. Relax. Besides, married couples pee in front of each other all the time.”

“We’re not married yet,” he grumbled.

“Well, we’ve been living together for eight months.”

“Five, technically, because you’ve been gone for the last three.”

Misha rolled his eyes at himself in the mirror.

“I saw that,” Jensen said.

“You saw nothing.”

Jensen finished peeing and Misha said, “Remember, two shakes is hygienic,

three or more is just jerking off.”

“Shut up.”

Misha grinned and turned around to lean on the sink. He crossed his arms and his legs at the ankle. The door to the bathroom opened and Gil came inside.

“Oh, hey, Gil. I thought you had left already.”

“Hi. Yeah, I had, but...” he walked over to the far sink and picked up a wristwatch. “I left my watch. So, are you ready for the exercise today?” he asked, slipping on the watch. “I’m totally psyched.”

Misha smiled. “Yeah, the scenario sounds challenging. I hope I can keep up with you young’uns.”

Gil smiled and rolled his eyes. “Oh come on. You’re fitter than everyone in our class. I mean, your body is slammin’. That flat stomach and those thighs...”

Misha raised an eyebrow and waited for Gil to get his eyes above his neck.

When he did the young man blushed a pretty remarkable shade of red.

“Uh, well. I’ll see you out there.”

Gil walked quickly past him and out the door. Misha watched the door slowly shut with amusement on his face. The bathroom stall opened and Misha turned to see Jensen come out with a powerful frowning pout on his face.

“Seriously?” Jensen asked as he walked to a sink to wash his hands.

“He might have a little crush,” Misha said.

Jensen’s frown increased.

“Come on, it’s harmless. He’s like that cute little freshman who moons over the cool senior.”

“I’m sorry, by senior do you mean citizen?”

“I’m four years older than you, pal. Don’t act like it’s a decade.”

Jensen dried his hands on a paper towel and tossed it in the trash as he approached Misha. He ran his hand through Misha’s hair.

“I’m not the one going grey, babe.”

“Fuck you,” Misha laughed and pushed Jensen’s hand away. Then he pulled it back and wrapped it around his neck. He leaned into Jensen and was glad his fiancé was smart enough to pull him in for a tight hug.

“Are you okay, Jensen? You seem like your mind is a million miles away.”

“No...not that far away at all. I just...it’s nothing. I just wanted to see you, and now I can’t.”

“You can. The exercise is only supposed to last four or five hours. You could wait.”

“There’s Charlie at home.”

“You could call Kathryn,” Misha suggested, burying his face in Jensen’s neck.

“I could call Kathryn,” Jensen agreed, his voice rumbling in his throat and buzzing against Misha’s face.

“Will you?”

“Yeah. I’ll see if she can stop by. I’ll wait.”

“Thank you.”

“Sure, love.”

Misha tightened his arms around Jensen’s waist. “I don’t think I like that one.”

“Yeah, me neither.”

“Are you sure you just can’t be more careful about big boy?”

“We’ll put it on the short list.”

Misha stood happily oblivious to the passage of time and life around him as he remained in Jensen’s arms in a dormitory bathroom that had a bit of a funky smell to it. Then Jensen gave him a pat on the butt.

“Come on. You can’t be late.”

Misha pulled back and took Jensen’s face in his hands. He gave him deep, somewhat sloppy kiss, and then pulled back. He patted Jensen’s cheeks.

They returned to Misha’s room and he collected his stand-in service weapon, his badge, and his notes. Then with one final kiss to Jensen, he ran out of the dorm and out to Hogan’s Alley, arriving just early enough so as not to get any dirty looks.

The exercise was simple in theory. They had a search warrant to execute on a known address, but the suspect’s family lived with him. They were potential risks and hostages. It was also possible that some of the suspect’s known associates may already be in the house or could show up unexpectedly. Their mission was to arrest the suspect and find the fifty kilos of coke that their source told them had been delivered the night before.

“Okay. We’re going to have to have three teams each working their own warrant. Alpha Team you’ll be headed up by Lancaster. Beta Team will be led by Collins. And Charlie Team will be under Brigham. Leaders, come get your member lists, your suspect, your warrant, and assemble your teams.”

Misha waited to find out what team he was on, and Gil nudged him. He looked over at him.

“What?”

“Uh, Misha, I’m pretty sure you’re the leader of the Beta Team.”

“What?”

“He said Collins. That’s you, right?”

“Oh. Yeah.”

Misha walked over to their instructor and accepted his folder. Agent Cooper gave him a nod.

“I’m expecting you to wipe the floor with these pansy ass newbs.”

Misha half-smiled; like that wasn’t unnecessary pressure. He took his team over to the sitting area outside the “café” and they sat down to discuss their plan of action. One team departed for the neighborhood immediately and the other still stood in the parking lot, talking a little loudly for it to be

“discussion” and not an “argument.”

Misha handed out the summary of information and let everyone skim through it with their own eyes to see what they picked up on. He sighed as he looked at the neighborhood layout and the people potentially involved in the takedown. The suspect’s mother, wife, and two young children were thought to be on the premises.

“This would be so much easier with police dogs,” Misha mused.

“You think we could ask for some?” Blum, the only woman on his team, asked. “They always say if we think of something, we can always ask for it and if it’s feasible to supply it like in the field, they will.”

“Well, we already know the drugs are in the house. What would we need a drug sniffing dog for?” Hillenbrand replied.

“Not all police dogs are drug detecting,” Misha said. “And just because the drugs are known to be at the suspect’s residence doesn’t mean they’re in the house or somewhere easily searchable. Regardless, I think dogs aren’t feasible at this point and we don’t want to waste the time asking about them

because the instructor will more than likely take some time while he pretends

to find out if they are. I think we need to concentrate on finding a way to get the suspect's family out of the house. Any ideas?"

The group began throwing out ideas and Misha wrote them down. He poked holes in their plans and encouraged them to think of solutions. Out of the corner of his eye he saw an agent strolling down the street with a sign on his chest that said "Beta Team Grandmother."

"Williams, with me," Misha said and got up from the table.

Williams followed him immediately and his teammates watched them go up to the agent.

"Excuse me, ma'am?"

"Yes?" the agent replied.

"I'm Agent Collins and this is Agent Williams with the FBI."

"Oh, dear. What brings you to the neighborhood?"

"Ma'am, is your son Beta Badguy?"

"Why, yes, he is."

"Ma'am, we have an arrest warrant for your son and we will be entering his residence this afternoon to execute a search warrant."

"Oh my!" the agent said, putting his hands to his cheeks.

Williams choked back a laugh.

"We know that your daughter-in-law and children are at home, and it would be safest if they left before we entered the residence. We're going to need you to call her and ask her to bring the children to meet you somewhere."

"Oh, dear, you want me to betray my son?"

"Ma'am, this will happen with or without your cooperation. But I know you



love your grandchildren and wouldn't want any harm to come to them.

Even if your son loves them, you know his friends are dangerous men."

The agent deliberated for a moment. "Alright. I'll help you."

While the faux-grandmother was making a phone call, shots rang out in the model neighborhood, and the Charlie Team looked like they were finally looking over the details of the case. While the Beta Team waited for the mother and kid proxies to leave the house, they planned their entry. As the agents representing the mother and children of their bad guy came out of the house, the mother and children proxies of the Alpha team came out of their house with the suspect and his associates. The wife was holding a card that said critical injury, and two associates and one of the kids held cards that said dead. The Beta Team watched with relief as their family safely left the neighborhood.

After fanning out his team, Misha did checks with them over the radio.

They observed where the suspects and his associates were in the house through the windows, and Misha adjusted the plan accordingly. In less than ten minutes from the family leaving the house, the Beta Team made their move. All of the suspects were apprehended and cuffed within ninety seconds of first entry. After their debriefing with the instructor on the pros and cons of their mission, with more of the former than the latter, he pulled Misha aside and patted him on the back.

"Well done, Collins. We run this scenario a lot and while we've had teams finish faster, we very rarely have a team that succeeds without firing a single shot. That should be the goal of any operation. It's not really feasible of course, but having agents that have the patience and forethought to consider all possible angles and most importantly all possible outcomes is what makes this organization great. You're going to be one such agent."

"Thank you, sir."

"Alright. You and your team have earned the rest of the day off. Why don't you grab some grub and some R&R? I've got to go help with debriefing the

Alpha Team. Been a while since we had a team kill a civilian.”

Misha nodded and waited for the instructor to leave first. Then he informed his team that they were free for the day. Everyone suggested going to the Board Room for dinner to celebrate instead of getting the usual cafeteria

food. Misha made his apologies and fairly ran back to his dormitory. Gil was on the Charlie Team and they still hadn’t even gone into the neighborhood yet. He and Jensen should have time for at least one toss of the sheets before they had to worry about company.

When Misha opened the door to his dorm room he could sense immediately that it was empty, but he still looked around the small space anyway. He spotted the note on his desk, but thought there was a chance Jensen had just wrote it to tell him he’d run out to get some dinner since he didn’t know when Misha would be back. He unfolded the paper and saw Jensen’s neat handwriting.

*Hey big boy,*

*Sorry I had to leave. I called the Newtons and they said that Kathryn was out with friends to a movie and wouldn’t be back until late. I took Charlie out before I left, but that was a few hours ago. I had to go check on her; I know you understand. I hope your exercise went well. When my class did this one I was one of the team leaders. I actually found the grandmother outside and got her to call the wife to take the kids out of the house. Got the suspects arrested with no one getting hurt. In four minutes. Beat that.*

*Anyway, call me when you get back. I want to hear how it went and I’d love to have phone sex or phone (the next word was scratched out but Misha thought it said snuggles) whatever with you. I’m sure you did great.*

*Love you.*

*J*

Misha smiled as he read the note. He flopped onto his bed and tried not to be disappointed and upset that Jensen had left. Charlie was their responsibility

and her needs had to be seen to. But he could have stayed and left later and Charlie would have been fine. Then again, if he'd been on the

Charlie Team, who knows how late he'd have gotten back? Misha read the note again, and decided to call Jensen after he'd showered. He couldn't wait to tell him that he'd completely smashed his four minute record.



## **Week 5**

**Monday, August 4, 2014**

Jensen was a coward; there was no way around it. He'd gone down to Quantico on Saturday to tell Misha that he'd set in motion the plans to cater to Russ Little's demands. That he and a USA were actually considering giving into his demands to "go on field trip" to Oregon. He knew Russ wouldn't agree to go unless Jensen personally escorted him, and it was ridiculous to hope that Misha would be okay with that when he couldn't even stand him interviewing the man in a controlled environment. He thought if they could discuss it face to face he might have a chance to explain it, but he'd chickened out.

He'd felt guilty for feeling relieved when he found out that Kathryn couldn't take care of Charlie. It gave him an excuse to leave without having to see Misha again and lie to his face. Well, not lie exactly, but hide secrets from him, which was just as bad. He thought he'd managed to sound reasonably normal during their phone calls that night and on Sunday, and he'd justified continuing to hide the information with the excuse that there may be nothing to tell at all. The notion could be completely rejected and Russ wouldn't be allowed out. Why should he upset Misha when he needed

to concentrate on his classes for something that would never happen? It seemed like reasonable logic. But if that were true, why did he feel so shitty?

Jensen nervously checked his messages and emails when he got to work, but he'd received no contact from Tigerman's office. Yet. It was still early on a Monday morning though. They'd talked so late on Friday that Tigerman probably wouldn't even be able to get a hold of all the people he'd need to talk until today at the earliest. Then there would be some hem hawing, a lot of debate and argument. The Portland office and the Great Falls police would both have to be on board with the idea—it would probably take weeks to get everything sorted out. Which meant weeks of lying to Misha. Jensen groaned and ran his hands down his face.

"What's up?" Osric asked as he entered CR-2's workspace. "Were the subpoenas rejected?"

“The what? Oh, right. No, they went through. They’ll be served sometime today and we’ll receive the bank account records probably tomorrow or Wednesday.”

“Good. So, what’s with the groaning?”

Jensen sighed and leaned back in his chair. “Russ. The Angel Slayer. Who apparently is also the Green Falls Killer.”

“No shit.”

“Yeah. Or at least he trained someone out there to kill. He’s a little pissy that the guy changed tactics after he was arrested, so he’s willing to roll on him.”

“Well, that’s good. Isn’t it?”

Jensen made a noncommittal face. “Yes and no. If we can actually catch his disciple out there, that would be great because he’s sick and he’s killing a lot of people. But, Russ won’t help unless he gets to personally take me out there and show me their secret lair.”

“They have a secret lair?”

“My words. But really, it is that ridiculous.”

“Is that possible? To take a prisoner across country to...help in an investigation? I mean, I know on TV the police and FBI are always bringing in ex-cons to help catch the bad guys, but, we don’t really do that, do we?”

“Not really law enforcement, no. But lawyers...they cut deals all the time.”

“Whoa, wait. They wouldn’t let him go, would they?”

“No, no. Nothing like that. He’s not negotiating for reduced charges or less jail time. He just wants to get out of prison for even a day. He also probably wants to see the look of shock on his disciple’s face when he turns him in.”

“Nice guy,” Osric said with scoff. “So, you’re worried he’d somehow...

escape? If he went on the trip?”

Jensen shook his head. “No, that’s not a real concern. He’d be transferred through official transport, not civilian. He wouldn’t be let out of his shackles to even take a piss and he’d stay in a heavily guarded holding cell at the Great Falls police department. If possible we’d do the trip in one single day so he’d be back in his cell here in Virginia before lights out.”

“So, what’s the big concern?”

Jensen squeezed the arm of his chair and Osric’s eyes flicked over to it, but he didn’t comment.

“I don’t want to go,” Jensen said.

“At the risk of sounding like the super intelligent one here...So don’t go.”

Jensen gave him a wry smile for his comment. “He won’t go if I don’t go.”

“Why is he so obsessed with you? I mean, I’m not saying you’re not great, you are, but what’s so special about you?”

Jensen shrugged. “It’s just a fixation. I don’t think he even really knows why he’s so interested in it. He saw me when I was a green agent and working

what I think are some of his favorite kills. He remembers DC fondly and his personality is such that he ascribes everyone’s actions to be about him.

Because of him. The fact that I went to Elton after all those years to track down the Angel Slayer made him think that I was obsessed with him. Or that we share a connection. He makes stuff up in his head; it’s how he justifies his killings. He is a sexual sadist serial killer, but it’s not just because he finds it fun. He does believe that he has legitimate reasons for choosing who his victims are.”

“Wow. I knew the guy was a nut case, but he’s really not right in the head.”

“No, he’s not. Unfortunately, that doesn’t mean he’s dumb. And while I don’t think there’s any possible way he could escape, I can’t help thinking that

there's a reason why he chose this disciple. This town. At this time. I just feel like there's something he's planning that I can't see and I am extremely reluctant to do anything that is something he wants. No matter how much good it might do."

Osric lean-sat against Jensen's desk. "Look, Jensen, I obviously don't know him and I've never dealt with him. But I've read the news stories about the Green Falls Killer. He's...no one deserves that. We swore an oath to protect people when we took this job. I think if it can be done safely, anything is worth trying to save lives."

Jensen nodded, his eyes focused on the post-it note next to Osric on the desk.

"Well, technically we swore an oath to uphold and defend the constitution, not protect people. But, to serve America in all capacities is our responsibility." Jensen made a face. "I just don't want to be stuck with him all damn day long."

"I don't blame you. But, hey, you'd only have to do it one way."

"What do you mean?"

"He won't go unless you do, but once you get the information from him that you need, you don't need to give him what he wants anymore. You can bail and make other people deal with bringing back."

Jensen nodded as he considered. "That's true. It would piss him off to the point where he might refuse to help anymore, but I don't think I could keep doing this anyway. I might as well get one good catch out of him, and then sever all contact."

"And it's not just one good catch. He gave you all three of the people who helped him in your original case. You caught him and Hannigan in Elton.

You've completely solved the Angel Slayer murders. That's huge, Jensen. If you can also take out the Green Falls Killer and possibly bring some closure to the Lubbock Lady Killer murders, I think you've done more than just get 'one good catch.' You don't owe the Bureau or the public your sanity."

Jensen nodded again, appreciating Osric's words, but finding it hard to accept them. "Thanks, Oz. Though you know, technically, Jared's the one who figured out it was Russ from the evidence. I just walked in on him being a nutjob."

"That's true. Jared is actually the hero of the Angel Slayer case. Maybe you should tell Russ and he'll transfer his obsession like The Ring."

Osric laughed and Jensen smiled and shook his head.

"It's a thought, but I kind of like Jared. Wouldn't want to screw him over like that."

"Always keep your options open," Osric said as he stood and patted Jensen's shoulder. "I've got some work to do for Jake unless you need me for something."

"No, you do what you need to do. Until we get the bank account records, I'm not sure it would be wise to stumble blindly in a direction. I'm just going to pester Jared with texts until he tells me what's gotten him so jumpy. Something happened on Thursday but he's acting all cagey about it."

"Maybe he's in too deep," Osric suggested. "The brutal life of investment banking has changed him. He's not the same man anymore."

Jensen chuckled at the thought of Jared showing up at work one day with his hair cut short and slicked back and a suit that cost more than his monthly salary at the Bureau. It was like imagining a moose on ice skates.

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Jared entered the conference room about five minutes late, wincing slightly when the three occupants looked at him judgmentally from their seats at the long conference table.

"Sorry I'm late. I got held up."

He cleared his throat and joined Matt and Mark and a pretty woman in her

40's at the far end of the room. The woman stood up to shake his hand as Mark introduced her.

"Jared, this is our lawyer, Samantha Ferris. Sam has been handling our legal affairs since Cohen & Cohen went public ten years ago. Sam, this is Jared Padalecki with the FBI. The employees know him as Jared Bell and think he's here doing a QC inspection of the office."

"Nice to meet you, Agent," Sam said and they both took a seat.

Jared looked at Mark, a little surprised.

"I thought it best that our lawyer know exactly who she is talking to."

"I would have liked to know four weeks ago when he came on board, Mark.

This is the kind of thing your employees could potentially sue over."

"They all signed agreements that they have no expectation of privacy while working in the building. Just like the government does to its employees.

Right, Jared?"

"Well, it's more to stop people from looking up porn at work, but yes."

Jared glanced over at Matt. He was looking at him completely normally: no anger, no blushing, no glaring. Perhaps Mark hadn't told him that Jared had listened to them going at it like deranged bunnies on his desk the week before.

"So, Jared," Sam said, her voice a smoky alto that made him feel at ease.

"What's going on with the money transfer program? I think Mark explained it wrong."

Mark made a face at her, but didn't contradict her verbally. Jared took the next several minutes to fill her in on the national securities fraud scam and how some of Cohen & Cohen investors had fallen prey to it. He continued with explaining how they had discovered some discrepancies in the

accounting process that seemed independent of the securities. He did mention the six double dippers, but he left out the connection to the charity and the fact that the bank account numbers were the same, just with different routing numbers. He wasn't sure how to explain that one without exposing Alona. He didn't want to imply that the Bureau had hacked into Cohen & Cohen, and he wasn't sure that they would buy that Ella had set him up with an all access account.

“Is it really so odd that these clients are having money sent to two bank accounts? All six ‘double dippers’ as you call them all having accounts at the same local bank is a little odd, but that could be explainable by simple probability. Also, a lot of people split up their investments.”

“It’s a little more complicated than that. These six clients also have the ‘pay fees in advance’ option checked off. They’re the only ones that do. And the money that they send to their private accounts and the one they use at Cohen & Cohen doesn’t add up to how much money should be coming in.

I’ve asked Ella Vasquez if there’s a way to see the missing fees being put into the company’s revenue, but she says the individual transactions can’t be monitored because it’s all stored up with the fees taken after the fact and then deposited to Cohen & Cohen.”

“Well, that’s not good,” Sam said. “Mark, what the hell is this program?”

Mark gave a slight shrug of one shoulder. “We were given a pitch for it—

and it seemed like a good way to streamline and secure the transaction process. A client focus group liked the new method better than the old. Both the IT Department and the Security Team vetted it and gave it their approval. Vasquez came to us with a list of recommendations as long as—

Jared’s leg.”

Sam smirked and Matt shot Mark a suspicious glare.

“So, we bought it.”

“What do mean ‘bought it’?” Jared and Sam asked together.

“Vasquez developed the program and has sold it to many other investment firms around the country. She comes on board for a couple of years to integrate the program and help work out the kinks and train others on how to manage the program when she leaves. She’s more like a consultant than a true employee.”

“Have you determined if any of the other companies she used to work at have had similar discrepancies?” Sam asked Jared.

“We didn’t know she was peddling her program across the country. We knew about her long resume, but she implied in her interview that the program itself was fairly new technology.”

“So, we should fire her immediately and remove the program from our systems,” Matt said.

Sam tilted her head like she didn’t really disagree with him.

“I’m not sure that’s the best course of action right now,” Jared said. “It’s entirely possible that the program is helping these six people skim off the top from Cohen & Cohen, but we suspect there’s a bigger plan in action.

For one thing, the six double dippers began making their transactions almost immediately upon Ella’s employment. It doesn’t make sense that she’d been able to recruit people so quickly, and then never recruit anymore. The six clients are also hiding the money in undeclared accounts.

When people don’t want anyone to know money actually exists, it usually means something is being bought on the black market.”

“Well, this took an interesting turn,” Sam said. “What do you suggest my clients do? Allow themselves to be embezzled from while the FBI conducts an investigation into a possibility?”

“To be fair, we don’t know that they are being embezzled from. It’s possible that their goal is simply to mask where their own money is going, in which

case, Cohen & Cohen isn't the victim of a clearly articulated crime."

"Believe me, agent. I could articulate a crime against Ella Vasquez."

"And I'm asking that Cohen & Cohen exercise patience and discretion."

Sam stared him down for a long time and Jared felt himself starting to waver under her scrutiny. Finally she turned to Matt and Mark and put her hands out.

"It's up to you."

"Frankly I think the FBI has concluded its business here," Matt said. "You found the fraudulent securities, for which we're grateful, but we're also being defrauded by a woman—"

"Possibly defrauded. We have no proof that the program is actually skimming money."

"Regardless, I think we should have the option to pull the program and terminate Vasquez's employment as a private firm. We have an obligation to our clients and letting them continue to be exposed to a potentially criminal enterprise involving large sums of money is irresponsible and frankly unethical."

"You do have the option to do that," Jared said softly. "I just wish you would take the other option."

Matt opened his mouth, but Mark cut him off.

"Agent Padalecki. How strongly do you feel that something sinister is happening with these six clients?"

"That's not a valid reason—!"

"Quiet," Mark barked and Matt went rigid.

"As I said, people who hide their money usually have a criminal reason for doing so."

“They’re trying to avoid taxes,” Matt said. “That’s not a major crime.

That’s something you can pass on to the IRS for them to audit.”

“I don’t think it’s taxes,” Jared said.

“But you don’t know,” Matt retorted. “I think you’ve done your job and you need to return to the Bureau.”

Jared watched Matt closely. On the one hand he was young and inexperienced and desperately trying to exert control and influence over his own company. It made sense that he would not want to hand that control over or potentially undermine his clients and his father’s legacy. On the other hand, if he were aware of what those six clients were up to, now would be a good time to nip an FBI investigation in the bud. Jared looked at Mark. Mark was examining him closely with cool blue eyes.

“I think we should allow Jared to continue his investigation.” Matt opened his mouth and Mark turned to him and gave him a sharp look. “We’ll discuss it later,” he said in a low voice.

Matt’s mouth closed and the look on his face was pretty close to hatred.

Jared wondered if “talk later” meant “fuck angrily.” Mark looked at Sam.

“We’re not going to look into drawing up charges against Ella Vasquez at this time. We will cooperate with the FBI completely until they can present us with solid evidence to continue their investigation or it becomes apparent that they’ve hit a dead end. Jared, do you anticipate needing to continue your undercover work here?”

It would be easier to continue his acquaintance with Alona if he remained undercover. It wouldn’t make sense for him to continue to investigate the firm if he’d been fired. He didn’t want Matt or Mark, or especially Sam, to know about Alona’s involvement though.

“I think it would help for me to stay on a little longer, if you would permit me to. I’d like to speak with the brokers who most often handle the six double

dippers' files and I may be able to glean more information from Ella as well.”

“Then it’s settled. You’ll stay on as Jared Bell and investigate from the inside. We will get Sam to request an audit of our finances from our own financial institution. Hopefully we’ll be able to find those missing fees. I assume your partner has leads he’s working on?”

“Yes, he does. We’re covering this from as many angles as possible.”

“Thank you, I appreciate that. You can return to work now. Sam, thank you so much for coming down for today’s meeting.”

“My pleasure, Mark. Matt, it’s good to see you again.”

Matt gave a stiff nod of his head, but his expression was dark and preoccupied. Jared and Sam walked to the end of the conference room while Matt and Mark stayed behind. Jared held the door open for Sam.

“Jared?”

Jared looked back.

“Please make sure you close that door securely.” Mark gave him a salacious smirk as he loosened his tie.

Jared’s eyes went wide and he quickly turned around and walked out of the room. He pulled the door shut behind him hard enough that the double doors rattled in the frames. He glanced around and saw Sam down the hall, glancing back at him with a raised eyebrow. He turned back and tried to open the door again, but it was locked. He was relieved, but also a little scandalized to think about what might be happening on the other side of that door right then. This was like Misha and Jensen levels of wild, slightly inappropriate sex. Was this kind of thing common? He’d never felt that kind of wildness with Gen.

Well, no, that wasn’t entirely true. They just had taken a long winding path to admitting that they were dating, and then it was even longer before they slept together. And when they did, it had been an extremely wild two weeks. But

then she'd had to go back to New Hampshire and they'd been unable to arrange their schedules for them to meet for over three months.

They had spoken every single day and had even had a couple interesting forays into Skype sex. But then Gen had gotten her promotion, and promptly gotten rid of him like she'd just realized something was crawling

on her shoulder and swatted it away.

But say they had managed to work things out. Would they have had that kind of all encompassing love or lust or whatever to want each other all the time even when they were pissed with each other? Of course, maybe that was the only time Matt and Mark wanted each other. He was probably lucky he didn't have someone in his life that he was willing to have kinky office sex with. That really was kind of crossing a line.

A line that Alona was clearly willing to cross. After saying his goodbyes to Sam, Jared had walked into his office and was accosted from the side.

Alona leapt into his arms and it was easy to catch her slight weight, but he still lost his balance and stumbled back into the door. It slammed shut with a bang and Alona laughed as she kissed him.

"I haven't seen you all day," she said after letting his lower lip pull through her teeth.

"You saw me at lunch. And in the break room this morning. And when I said hi to you when I came in."

"Okay...I haven't kissed you all day."

"Well, that's not true anymore, now is it?"

Alona smiled and leaned down to kiss him again. He carried her carefully over to his desk and felt around with one hand until he found his chair. He sat and settled her into his lap. She pulled back, but left one arm looped around his neck.

"So, what did you have to rush off from lunch so early for?"

“Is that why you’re really here? To pump me for information?”

“You want me to pump you for something else?” she asked with an adorable grin that was incongruous with her suggestive words.

Jared inhaled slowly and tried to ignore how she smelled like sugar and clean linen. He was definitely at a crossroads here. And he was going to take the very well-traveled path.

“Of course, but not here and not now, missy.”

“Missy,” Alona pouted. “I haven’t been called missy since, well, ever I don’t think.”

Jared shrugged. Alona bounced in his lap and Jared hissed softly, adjusting her so that she wasn’t sitting on his semi.

“Come onnnn. Tell me something. We haven’t done any investigating since Tuesday.”

“I don’t have anything else to tell.”

“You don’t have anything for me to look into?”

“No, definitely not. Although, I guess it wouldn’t hurt to tell you that I learned today that Ella didn’t just work at all those companies on her resume, she sold her famous money transfer program to them all.”

“Really. That’s interesting. Did any of them report similar oddities in their transactions?”

“I don’t know yet. I’m going to have—” Jared cut off. He’d almost said he was going to have Jensen look into it. Then he’d have to explain Jensen.

And why some other random dude was investigating. God, he sucked at this. “I’m going to have to look into it, but I just found out today.”

“I could do it.”

“No. Thank you, but no. You’ve done more than enough.”

“But—”

“I’m serious, Alona. If Mark and Matt, or anyone for that matter, finds out what you’re doing, you’ll lose your job. It’s not worth it.”

“Can’t I decide what’s worth risking my own job?”

“But why would you?”

Alona shrugged. “What’s life if all you do is sit at a desk and answer phones? There’s nothing wrong with doing exciting things. I can always get another job.”

“Not if you get a bad recommendation.”

“Like I would ever list an employer who fired me on my job application.”

Alona gave him a “how stupid do you think I am?” look.

Jared conceded with a shrug of his lips. “Fair enough. But, I still don’t want you to do anything more. I’ve got it under control. Besides, it may turn out to be nothing, so why take the risk for no pay off?”

“You’re determined to be a downer today, aren’t you?” Alona sighed, sliding out of his lap.

“I guess so.”

“Well, then, you do your work and I’ll...do mine.”

“Alona,” Jared said, drawing her name out with a slight warning tone.

She smiled at him as she walked to the door. “You can come over tonight and tell me to behave myself if you like.”

Jared laughed and used one hand to partially cover his blushing face.

“Maybe I will.”

“Good. See you later.”

Jared’s smile grew bigger when she was gone and he shook his head. What was he doing? He started in a guilty fluster when his cell phone buzzed in his pocket. He fumbled the phone out and almost dropped it twice before getting it turned on.

“H-hello?”

“Jared? You okay?”

“Y-yeah. Sorry. I just ran for the phone. It was...across the room.”

“Oh-kay,” Jensen said sounding he didn’t really understand but he wasn’t about to ask for more details. “Did you have the meeting with the lawyer?”

“Yep. She had emailed me Cohen & Cohen’s legal records earlier to look through. It was a very small file. They’ve never been investigated by the SEC, they’ve never had a law suit brought against them. There was a case that was settled out of the court, but the records on it are sealed.

“The meeting we had this afternoon, I guess, was for Matt and Mark to fill their lawyer in on who I am really am and what I’m doing here.”

“They told her you’re FBI?”

“Yeah. But we all agreed, well Mark and I agreed and Sam, the lawyer, said she would do as we wished, that I should stay on here undercover. Matt’s not happy about it, but I can’t tell if it’s because he doesn’t want me snooping around because he’s in on it or because he just wants this all to be over. I’m going to talk with the brokers who have the six double dippers as their main clients and see if I can pick up on anything. Is there anything from your end you think I should look into?”

“We’re still waiting on the subpoenaed bank account information. Maybe ask if any of those six have suddenly decided to take an extended vacation.

There's no way they wouldn't know by now that attention has been drawn to those accounts. Also, lean on Ella a bit. Based on her residence history she doesn't appear to have a lot of money. It's possible she's a pretty low man on the totem pole and will be happy to roll on the people above her if she thinks things are getting too hot."

"Got it. Oh, shit, right. I almost forgot." Jared filled Jensen in on Ella's enterprising history. "If we could find out if this happened at other companies and there are clients there who have accounts with Potomac First, we might have enough to get search warrants for everyone involved."

"I'll get on that right away. Hopefully the companies will be cooperative."

Tuesday, August 5, 2014

The companies were not cooperative. Jensen thought that if the FBI called him and told him that he was potentially getting money embezzled from his company by a scam artist that he'd want to share a little information, but he'd been shut down across the board. He'd spent all of yesterday afternoon (and part of the evening since the west coast businesses were still open) and all of Tuesday morning having metaphorical doors slammed in his face. At best, two companies agreed to conduct an internal audit and then contact him if they found any discrepancies. He supposed that was better than nothing.

He returned to Google and his search of any news articles talking about The Lilac House. From what he could tell it was a totally legitimate charity with dozens of corporate sponsors and support from a lot of people both wealthy and of more modest means. That was a point in Cohen & Cohen's favor. If the charity was just a front for money laundering, more than likely businesses like Volvo and Wal-Mart wouldn't be listed on their website.

They also had their tax returns for the past five years posted. He'd downloaded the PDFs and sent them to Osric to see if he could make heads or tails of them. Jensen had his strengths, but interpreting tax documents just wasn't one of them.

He rubbed his face with a hand and then squished his mouth as he looked at

his computer monitor, not sure where to go next. He could try calling Vasquez's former employers again; the squeaky wheel did get the grease after all. Or he could work on a write up justifying opening preliminary investigations on the six double dippers, but he knew he barely had enough to justify the assessment he'd opened on them. He could look up more honeymoon locations since he couldn't really do anything until the subpoenas on the bank accounts went through. He could work on trying to find a pattern or connection to the notations made next to The Lilac's House's donors' names on the papers Jared had found in Pellegrino's office closet. Yeah, he should probably work on that.

Jensen clicked on the file that had the saved the attachments from Jared in it and was about to open the first sheet when he saw Misha's indicator turn green on the internal messenger. He completely abandoned being productive in order to talk to him. He still hadn't told him about potentially having to take Russ to Oregon, but as far as he knew that wasn't happening anyway.

Hey, boo.

Oh HALE no.

Jensen snickered softly as he could hear the exaggerated pronunciation of that phrase in his head.

Just trying to make you feel young

Then it should be "bae," I believe.

Jensen's brows drew together. *What the hell is a bae? What are you up to?*

Classroom stuff. We're researching interview techniques and methodologies.

Oh that's actually kind of fun You practice on each other right?

Learn to type.

I can either type good or fuck good cant do both **Type well**

You prefer typng?

NO

Tha't shwat I thought

Anything going on with you?

Jensen hesitated with his fingers over the keys. Now would be the time to mention that Russ was trying to manipulate people into letting him out of prison for a day. All he'd have to do is phrase it like he was complaining that Russ was being a dumb asshat and that he'd brought it to the USA's attention mostly as a joke. Then it would be out there and he wouldn't be hiding it and Misha might be irritated, but heck, he might find it amusing.

Yes, that was a good plan.

Do you like snow?

Jensen leaned forward and heavily rested his face in one hand. He was such a coward.

Not really. We got a lot in Elton and I grew up with it, but I'm not particularly fond of it. I prefer beaches and tropics and warm water.

Yeah, well, you and your wife went to Palau

The Lync chat indicated Misha was typing, and then stopped. And then typing, and then stopped. After a few moments the typing started again and finally a message came through.

So?

Clearly he had deleted a couple of responses before sending that.

I just don't want to go somethweew that is similar to where you wane tony uor honeymoon for our honeymoon

You'e planning iut hos neys?!

Jensen raised an eyebrow.

You're planning our honeymoon?

Did you not want to go on one?

I do! Are you thinking like a cabin in the mountains? Like there'll be snow outside but who cares because we'll be warm and toasty and sweaty and naked and stretched out on a bear skin rug in front of a roaring fire?

Jensen laughed out loud at the mental image that provided. He glanced around but no one was really paying attention to him.

Something like that.

I love snow, baby.

Glad to hear it.

Don't go anywhere. I want you to tell me more, but I've got to look something up for my group. Hang on.

Jensen's email pinged on the unclassified machine and he opened it while he waited for Misha to come back. Three messages had come in within four minutes of each other. It was a group conversation that he'd only been cc'ed on, so no one was waiting for his response. Apparently Darcy and the Green Falls Police Department had gotten the Portland FBI on board with Russ coming out to show them the storage unit. USA Tigerman was willing to let him go if they could plan a secure transfer and got the proper approvals. Virginia wasn't willing to pay for the private secure transfer, so they were in the process of asking Oregon and identifying a company that could do the job.

Jensen bit his lip. Things were progressing pretty quickly. Of course, it still hadn't been approved yet and was contingent upon finding a secure transport company that could be trusted and getting the funds to pay for it.

Money always held everything up. He probably still had a couple of weeks

before they had an answer, but since he was already talking with Misha maybe now would be the time to tell him that people were considering the possibility.

I'm back. So, where are we going?

I was looking at the Rockies near Denver. Or up near Yellowstone.

When?

It will depend on our schedules but in winter like december or january

There'll be snow as early as October, right?

Maybe

Then why wait? We're getting married in August.

I don't want to sit in front of a roaring fire in august even in the mountains

Yeah, but it'll be cold in October...

The trial starts in October

Fuck Russell Little for being a menace even in prison! Fine.

Anticipation is a good thing. Maybe we should not have sex from the wedding day until the honeymoon night.

Ill divorce you

Misha sent him a smug, grinning emoji face

Okay, we've got to go practice our interviewing skills. I'll talk to you later. Love ya!

He hadn't told Misha about Russ. He furiously began to type a quick explanation, knowing it was so full of typos it might be illegible. By the time he fixed most of them and hit send, he received a message that the user was offline and would not receive the message.

“Of course,” he muttered.

He sat back in his chair and wondered if he had done that subconsciously.

No, it had been done consciously, and it was unacceptable. He was committing himself to someone with lawfully binding marriage. Not to mention emotionally binding need. Lying to him was disrespectful and a downright shitty thing to do. He started drafting an email, and then thought he’d better tell him “in person.” He’d do it during their evening call.

His office phone rang and he let it go three times before answering. No sense in appearing to have nothing to do since it was probably a supervisor calling.

“This is Jensen.”

“Uh, hello. Agent Ackles?”

“Yes, this is he.”

“Hi. My name is David Roberts. I’m calling from Harbinger Hargrove in Mesa.”

Jensen recognized the name of one of the companies Vasquez had worked for, but he didn’t recognize the person.

“Hello, Mr. Roberts. What can I do for you?”

“Well, I received a request from my supervisor to conduct an audit of our system from June 2007 to April 2009 looking for accounts that had deposits made into two accounts. I thought it was a little odd since most of the clients deposit into a savings account and a checking account or into an internal account for reinvesting.”

“Oh, well, we were looking specifically for deposits made into what looked like the same account twice.”

“Yes, I was able finally to pull that out of him. We had five clients who did that on a pretty regular schedule of twice a month. And I noticed right away that even though the bank account numbers were the same, the routing

numbers were different.”

Jensen sat up straight. “Yes, that’s what we were looking for. Can you give me the routing number?”

“I can, but I can also tell you the bank. It’s called Salt River First.”

“Hm. So not Potomac First?”

“No. All of our clients use national banks or local banks. I don’t think Potomac First is out here.”

“It’s not. So, Salt River Bank is a local bank. Do they have multiple branches in the area or in the southwest?”

“No. As far as I know they only have one location.”

“Did you ever know Ella Vasquez?”

“I’m not familiar with the name.”

“She’s the IT specialist who designed the new money transfer program you use.”

“Oh. I’ve only been here for a few months. So, this program is all I’ve worked with. I didn’t know it was new.”

“Well, new-ish. She would have implemented it 2007.”

“Gotcha. I take it she worked here between June 2007 and April 2009?”

“That’s correct.”

“See, that’s why I didn’t connect right away what was so special about that time frame. Because I went ahead and checked more recent records, and there are now eight clients that do the double deposits into their regular account and into Salt River First.”

Jensen’s brow furrowed in thought. That was ballsy to keep skimming money

from a company once you'd moved on. Or perhaps this was the best proof yet that the clients were the ones doing the real crime and had hired Vasquez simply to provide them with the method.

"Um, I don't know if this is relevant," David continued, trailing off a little nervously.

"Please, tell me anything you know."

"Well, I told you I've only been here a few months, right? Well, when I came on I went through all the accounts to delete the inactive ones and to clean up the active ones. I noticed that a few accounts had the 'process fees before transfer' option checked. That didn't make any sense because Harbinger's cut can't be calculated if the returns aren't sorted by type. They charge different fees depending on the type of security. Also, I wasn't seeing these fees in Harbinger's records, so I figured the button must not be doing anything anyway, so I unchecked them all.

"A couple of weeks later, a little bit after the double deposits would have been made, I got called into my boss' office and reamed out by my supervisor because he had been reamed out by the brokers and execs who had received complaints from clients that changes were made to their accounts without permission. Everyone was just so worried about the clients being irate that they didn't want to hear why I had changed something, they just wanted me to change it back. So, I checked those eight

accounts back to the 'process fee before transfer' status.

"At the time I thought it was weird and suspicious. And now, I think that button must somehow be diverting money from the returns before it gets to where we would see it so that we never see how much comes back. Only what the program shows us. So, the money that goes into the two accounts doesn't add up to the return amounts listed by the securities themselves."

Jensen nodded out of habit. "That's pretty much what we've found out here.

Do you think you could provide me with a list of the clients that double deposit?"

“Um, well...I-I would have to ask my supervisor. I don’t know if that’s something we can hand over without, like, a warrant? Do you know?”

“A warrant is one way. But the president or CEO of the company has the discretion to release his own client list.”

“Oh. I couldn’t ask...I’m still on probation from the whole unchecking thing —”

“It’s okay,” Jensen said. “Don’t worry about it. Your information has been very helpful. If we need to get those names, we’ll go about it through legal channels and leave you out of it.”

“Thank you. Uh. Sir.”

“Thank you for doing the audit. Have a good day, Mr. Roberts.”

“You too. Bye.”

Jensen hung up and tapped a pen against his lips. Obviously whatever was going on at Cohen & Cohen was happening at other firms. Of course, that could have just been an indication that the program worked the same way everywhere, so that was just how it worked. But Harbinger Hargrove’s numbers weren’t adding up either and the money was going to another local bank, not amalgamating somewhere.

“Hey, Osric?”

“Yo.”

“Did you find in your research on Podvodnik that he owned more than one bank?”

“No. Just Potomac First.” His head popped up over the divide. “Why?”

“It seems like the same odd accounting is happening in other companies Vasquez worked for. Well, at least one. But the money is going to a local bank out there called Salt River First. And if it’s not his bank, then we don’t have a link other than Vasquez.”

“Hmm.” Osric looked to the right while he thought for a moment. “Can you send me the list of cities where she used to work again? I’m going to see if those cities have small single branch banks named after the nearest river.”

Jensen let out a small disbelieving laugh. “Osric, I appreciate it, but you’re way too busy to go looking for a needle in a haystack.”

“Actually Google’ll do most of the work. And I don’t mind. I finished with reviewing the tax documents and I really don’t want to go back to Jake’s project. It’s boring.”

“And this one isn’t?”

“Dude, there is something fishy going on here. I’ve got this feeling that we’ve stumbled onto something kind of huge.”

“You think so?” Jensen half asked Osric, half asked himself.

“Well, I don’t know. Maybe. Maybe it’s just boring ol’ embezzling. But, if Vasquez is doing it by installing parasitic software in investment firms all across the country, that’s still pretty cool.”

“That is true.”

“Oh. One more thing. The tax documents. They’re good. Totally legit. No way are they laundering money. I mean, even if they use Potomac First as their bank, which I don’t know that they do, everything is accounted for.

“I did find something a little too coincidental, but not really. They have three addresses listed for their physical holdings. One is their office, one is the temporary housing they have for rescued victims, and the third is for an animal shelter. The same one Podvodnik donates to.”

Jensen tilted his head. “That’s weird, isn’t it?”

“I thought it was. So, I searched around their website and apparently in 2005 when they went down to help the kids orphaned by Katrina not be taken advantage of, the coordinators felt really sorry for all the abandoned dogs too. So, they collected strays and tried to find their owners. The ones they

couldn't find owners for they brought back up here and adopted out to local families. They say the shelter is currently empty, but they kept the property in case they ever need it again. I checked and Podvodnik only made a onetime donation to it, so I guess The Lilac House must have hit up their higher level patrons for a little startup capital."

"Hm. Good work, Oz."

"Yeah, I just wish I could find a smoking gun or something."

"Well, we don't want it to be too easy, do we?" Jensen smiled and gave him a wink.

Osric grinned. "Don't try to flirt with me now. My feelings are already hurt."

Jensen rolled his eyes. "Go away. Find some banks."

Osric snickered and disappeared back behind the divide.

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Jared drew a line from a name that had two asterisks and a circle next to it to a name with similar markings on a third sheet of paper. He had printed out the pictures he'd taken with his phone of The Lilac House documents squirreled away in Mark's closet. Then he'd taped them all together and had used his alone time in his office to draw colored lines between names, trying to detect a rhyme or reason to the marks. His cell phone sat above the line of papers on speaker mode.

"I'm looking at the donation levels on the website," Jensen's voice said over the phone. "Our 'the check marks mean gold level donors' is busted."

"Well, what if this list is old? Someone could have upgraded or downgraded."

"No, it's too sporadic. Wait, wait, do all of the Pellmans have X's by them?"

"Uh..." Jared scanned the sheet. "Ye—no. Regina Pellman does not."

“Regina, Regina, Regina...ah. Hm. She’s literally the only person on the list with no marks next to her name. So, we still have three people who have the same marks as our known double dippers, and a couple that have the same but are missing one or have an additional one.”

“Yep. Are they in the same order? Like, Phil has a check, an asterisk, a double X; Lionel has a check, an asterisk, a double X, but...crap. Which page is Deborah on?”

“Um, I think the first...she’s asterisk, double X, check. And her name is crossed out. Crap.” Jensen sighed. “Maybe these marks don’t mean anything.”

“That is a real possibility. Maybe it’s just a check list of who showed up to the meetings and they used a different mark to take attendance each time. I wish there was any easier way to track who had what next to their name.

These lines are ridiculous.”

“Oh, Jesus.”

“What?” Jared asked.

“We’re morons. Open an Excel spreadsheet. Put the names down the rows and the type of marks across the columns. Then type in yes or no in the cells. Then we can filter to the yeses and see if the same people keep popping up or if getting one mark cancels out another.”

“Ah. You mean utilize technology like competent investigators?” Jared asked with a smile. “I’m on it. I’ll email it to you when I’m done.”

“Okay. You know, I don’t know if it’s a good idea or a bad idea, but you could always ask Pellegrino about it.”

“And let him know I was snooping in his office?”

“I thought he already knew that. Or has the ordeal traumatized you and you’re trying to repress the memory?”

“It’s not funny, Jensen. I *was* traumatized. It was bad enough listening to two people who hate each other use sex to hurt each other, but...” he leaned close to his phone and whispered, “it’s messed up that it was kind of hot.”

Jensen just laughed. “And Jared’s latent homosexuality rears its sparkly, rainbow head.”

“I do not have any latent homosexuality. Not that there’s anything wrong with that.”

“Of course not.” Jensen chuckled again. “Anyway, it’s up to you. But, maybe he knows something.”

“Yeah, they are his records. Do you—”

The door to his office swung open and Alona let herself inside, closing and locking the door.

“Uh...Alona. Hi.” Jared reached for his phone to turn it off but Alona pointed a finger at him.

“Don’t touch that!”

He froze. Shit. Did she know something? Know what? Alona crossed the small room and turned his office chair so he was facing her. Then she crawled onto his lap, circled his neck with her arms, and kissed him. When she pulled back, she smiled and wiped underneath his bottom lip with her thumb. She’d probably smeared her red lipstick on him.

“Don’t even think about looking at that phone or work for at least the next five minutes.”

Jared couldn’t stop himself from looking at the phone. Maybe Jensen had disconnected?

“I said,” Alona said, pulling his head back around. “Don’t even think about it.”

She kissed him again and Jared spared a glance at the phone, trying to

determine if he could tell if the call was still active. Alona was persistent though and his attention was easily diverted. He put his hands to her waist and pulled her closer. They made out for a good five minutes, Alona keeping herself far enough back on his lap that they weren't grinding, but Jared was still rock hard. When Alona finally pulled back and wiped her lipstick off his mouth again, his lips felt tingly and his body was warm and relaxed. Except his dick which was twitching desperately in his boxers.

"Mm, thanks, Jared."

"You're welcome?" he said with a confused laugh.

"So, I've got a thing at my apartment starting tomorrow. The building manager is painting the whole place and the fumes will be unbearable. But, it's still good tonight. If you want to come over."

Jared nodded, and then swallowed. "Yes. Yes, I'd like to come. Over."

"Good. How about after work you take me to dinner, and then we'll go back to my place?"

"Sure."

"I won't even make you give me any investigation secrets to further my PI career."

Jared let out an uneasy laugh and glanced at his phone. Alona didn't seem to notice and slid off his lap.

"Okay, then. Back to work. I'll see you at closing time."

"Sounds good."

He gave her a little wave as she unlocked the door and then slipped outside.

Jared sat in his chair, listening for any noise. He turned back to the desk.

"Jensen?" he asked hesitantly.



“Yeah, stud?”

“Geezus.” Jared let his head fall into the cushion of his arms on the desk.

“Were you listening the whole time?”

“No. I put the phone down and occasionally checked back in. I was really afraid of what noises I was going to start hearing, but apparently you have more decorum than your faux-bosses.”

Jared groaned. “Make fun all you like, but we’re still not anywhere even for all the crap I had to listen to in Elton.”

“Fair point. But, uh, what did she mean you don’t have to give her any secrets for her PI career?”

Jared sat up and rubbed his forehead. “Nothing. On our first date is when she gave me the info about Ella Vasquez. I told her not to do anything because she could get fired if Mark or Matt or anyone found out. She just joked that she’d start a new career as a PI. It’s kind of been a running joke.

Especially after she figured out the whole routing numbers thing.”

Jared sucked in a sharp breath, realizing his mistake way too late. Maybe Jensen didn’t pick up on it.

“Alona is the one who figured out the routing numbers were different?”

Jensen picked up on it.

“Um. Yeah.”

“Jared...how much does she know? Does she know you’re a fed?”

“No, no. She just thinks that I was hired by Matt and Mark not to do QC, but to try to find out if people were embezzling from them without their employees knowing they were investigating them. I think she just thinks it’s

fun. Or even a game. I don’t think she thinks there’s anything really serious

going on.”

“Did you tell her to do this? I got the subpoenas based on that information.

If it was illegally obtained, I have to go to the courthouse now and stop them from being processed. If it’s not already too late.”

“No, no, the subpoenas should be fine. She just accessed the money transfer program. I told her not to access anything she didn’t have permission to get into. But honestly, I think she hacked it a little bit. So, it’s definitely nothing I directed her to do. I didn’t even know she had those skills.”

“Has she done anything else?”

“No. Nothing. I’ve told her to stop and that I wouldn’t accept anything else from her. She was a little disappointed, but she hasn’t forced the issue.”

Jared gnawed on his lip nervously as Jensen mulled over this news.

“You’re walking a razor’s edge here, man, and if you slip—it’s not going to be pleasant when you fall.”

“I know.”

“I mean here, at the Bureau. I’ll back you up. But, maybe you ought to start putting a little distance between you. She helped you start to get over Gen, so maybe you need to let it go before it becomes something more.”

Jared nodded his head, and then realized he needed to speak. “Yeah. Yeah, I know. And don’t worry: I promise I won’t let her get more involved or ask her to do anything.”

“Okay. And hey, man. It’s okay. I don’t think you’ve done anything wrong.”

“Thanks.” Jared wasn’t sure about that. “I’ll work on the spreadsheet and email it to you later.”

“Okay. Talk later.”

Jared hung up and exhaled heavily. He put Alona out of his mind and printed out fresh copies of the marked up names list. It took him about forty-five minutes to get everything in and double check it. Then he emailed it to Jensen and spent a couple of minutes playing with the filter before giving up and deciding Jensen (Osrice) could do it. He collected the fresh sheets, shredded the ones he'd made a mess of, and took the elevator to the top floor.

Brock and Dylan were in their shared office, sitting at their own desks and appeared to be working, but there was thick tension in the air.

"Uh, hey, Brock. Is Mark in? Do you think he'd have time to meet with me?"

"When?"

"Now's good."

Brock gave him a look and Dylan rolled his eyes. Apparently the idea of someone requesting an immediate, unscheduled meeting with their bosses was a tremendous faux pas. Even still, Brock picked up the phone called Mark. He informed Jared with a frown that Mark would see him. Jared gave him a smile and walked down the hall to Mark's office. He knocked on the door and rather than being told to come in, Mark opened the door. Jared almost took a step back. He hadn't been prepared to suddenly be standing near Mark.

"Jared. My assistant says that you'd like to impose on me for a few minutes."

"Yes," Jared said dryly. "I heard him."

Mark chuckled and stepped back. "Come inside."

Once Jared was in and the door shut, Mark led them over to the small sitting area. Without thinking, Jared sat on the couch and Mark took the opportunity to sit next to him. He turned to face the other man and gave him a tight smile.

"Do I make you uncomfortable, Jared?"

"Um, honestly, a little bit, yeah."

“Why? Because you’ve never felt curious before?” Mark slid his hand over Jared’s knee.

Jared calmly removed his hand and scooted back a bit.

“Mark. Considering I’m an agent, and undercover, this would be highly inappropriate even if I were interested. And I’m not. I’ve never felt attracted to men.”

“Probably because you never let yourself consider the possibility. But you considered it last week in that closet, right over there. And it wasn’t wholly unappealing, was it?”

Jared cleared his throat. “I’m actually here today because of why I was in that closet. I was snooping, and you know it. But, I think I found something and I’d like to ask you about it.”

“In that closet? Ask away but I don’t know if I could tell you about anything in it.”

“Why not?”

“This office used to belong to Matt’s father. When he left the business to Matt, he decided to turn the upstairs conference room into his office and give me this one. Everything in that closet I presume was put in there by the late Mr. Cohen. Or his assistants or predecessors.”

“So, you don’t know anything about the marks next to these names?” Jared asked as he opened the folder he had slipped the pages into.

Mark took the folder from him and looked over the pages. A small frown pinched his brow and lips as he looked over the annotated names.

“What is the context for these names?”

“They were in a box containing documents and information for The Lilac House.”

“The Lilac House...why does that sound familiar?”

“It’s a charity that Cohen & Cohen supports.”

“Ah, yes, of course. I know it more as Lilac Night. The charity hosts a ball annually in order to drum up donations from its more...affluent patrons. I attended last year, but it was a rather drab affair. The silent auction made no sense. They offered up items like ‘Moroccan Spoons’ and ‘Romani Lilies.’ I suppose since it’s a charity they can’t exactly offer trips to Tahiti, but I found it easier just to write a check and leave.”

“Do you recognize any of the names?”

“Most of them, actually. But I have no idea what the marks mean. I didn’t make this list and it doesn’t look like Brock’s handwriting. I’m not sure I can help you. Although...”

“Although?”

“I did notice two of our double dippers are on here with the same markings next to their names.”

“I noticed that as well.”

“Well, they also have the same markings as this man, Warner Goddard.”

“Oh, I thought that was a company.”

Mark smiled. “It is a ridiculous name. And while I can’t tell you why they have the markings, I would say that if I were to group these three together I’d probably label them as racist assholes.”

Jared’s eyebrows went up.

“Other than that though, I’m not sure what they have in common.”

“Ah. Well, thank you for taking a look at it for me. And, I really do want to apologize for what happened last Thursday. I never—”

“Jared, it’s okay. I’ll admit it was actually hotter for me knowing you were

in there—”

“You knew the whole time?” Jared asked weakly, his face going up in flames.

“I have this office monitored with security cameras and motion sensors that turn on when I leave the room. As soon as you entered, a notification was sent to my phone. I watched you snooping the whole time I ordered my coffee downstairs. When Matt accosted me when I got back up here, I forgot to check the feed again and since I didn’t see you when we walked in, I assumed you had left. It wasn’t until we had crossed that point of no return when I heard the door squeak. When I realized the closet door was open, I knew you had to be in there. And by that point I couldn’t stop or Matt would have gotten suspicious and very pissy. Also, I was quite upset with you, so I figured you deserved a little embarrassment.”

“Thanks,” he muttered.”

“But, to my surprise, it wasn’t just embarrassment you felt.”

Mark put his hand on his knee again. Jared brushed it off and stood up.

“Mark. I realize unprofessionalism is not an argument that will work with you.” The man smirked. “And you view my heterosexuality as a challenge.”

He bobbed his head in slight acknowledgement. “Then I at least ask you to understand that even if you could get me to ignore those other two, I just couldn’t possibly do anything like that now. I can’t. I...” He sighed. “I recently had my heart stomped on. With a very sharp high heeled shoe. I can’t...I can’t...”

Mark stood up. “Say no more. I understand. Concentrate on your work and see if you can find any rats in my company. And when this is all over, we can revisit point number two.”

Jared gave him a look, but took the conversation as a win. Mark handed him the folder back and walked him to the door.

“Good afternoon, Mr. Bell.”

“Good afternoon, Mr. Pellegrino.”

**Wednesday, August 5, 2014**

Jensen looked up from his phone as someone placed a heavy file box on his desk. Another was stacked on top of it, and a third one was placed on the floor.

“What’s all this?”

“Subpoenaed bank records,” the courier informed him.

“Hard copies?!”

The man shrugged. “Can you sign here and confirm receipt?”

Jensen signed.

“Here’s your copy and the forms for the boxes for the chain of custody when you put them in the evidence locker.”

“Thanks.”

“Have fun.”

Jensen looked at the boxes, appalled. He hadn’t received actual paper for financial documents in years. Well, except for the pile Pellegrino had dumped on him, but Jensen suspected he’d only done that to keep him busy while he introduced Jared as a new employee. Osric peeked his head over the divide, took one look, and said, “No.” Then he disappeared again.

Jensen sighed and scooted the box on the floor closer. He pulled off the lid and then promptly put it back on. He pouted a few moments, and then took the lid back off. He pulled out the first folder marked with an account number and the dates 1/3/2012 – 6/30/2012, and began reading.

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“Hey, Jared,” Alona said, her voice one degree above freezing. “Are you here to cancel lunch too?”

“No, of course not.”

Jared leaned on the counter.

“Can you not lean? You get hand grease all over the top.”

Jared straightened. “Alona, I’m sorry. I told you...something just...”

“Came up. Yeah, I know.”

Her frostiness disappeared suddenly, like she couldn’t keep up the façade anymore. Jared leaned back on the counter.

“Look, Jared, if you think a five night stand is pushing the bounds of the just two people having fun thing, I get it. But don’t lie to me about wanting to see me. I can’t take that.”

“Alona, please don’t doubt that I want to see you. You can believe that I want to see you.”

He stopped, not sure what to say next. She waited, and then said, “But?”

“But what?”

“You want to see me, but...?”

Jared just looked at her for a moment, taking in the ponytail that curled out the end, the cat-like look of her subtle eye makeup, those red lips, and the slight crease of sadness and disappointment marring her smooth brow.

“But nothing. Something really did just come up and I’m sorry I had to cancel. But, I just figured that meant we could try again today or this weekend. Whenever is good for you.”

“Oh. Really? Because normally when a guy can’t tell you why—”

“Not can’t. Didn’t want to.” He heaved a sigh. “My toilet stopped up and overflowed. A lot. I had to find a twenty-four hour plumber to come out because I actually own, not rent. I didn’t want to explain to you that I was standing in a puddle of my own shit while canceling our date.”

Alona wrinkled her nose. “Thank you for sparing me.”

“Hey, I tried. You wanted to know.”

“And I regret it.” She smiled. “I’m sorry I doubted you.”

He shrugged. “No big deal. So, we’ll reschedule. Once your apartment is aired out.”

“Yep. Or...we could go to your place.”

“We might need to wait for my place to air out too,” he said with a laugh and she joined him.

“I completely understand. We’ll work it out. See you at lunch.”

“Yeah, see you.”

Jared turned to walk toward the elevators and rolled his eyes while making a face. What was wrong with him? He’d canceled their date in an invasive manner in order to make her suspicious and angry and probably happy that their fling was ending. And now he’d smoothed it all over with a literal (inexistent) pile of shit. Perfect.

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Jensen opened the door to Potomac First and was once again off put by the fake wood and marble that overtook every feature of the large lobby. Only one of the teller windows was manned and the first couple of cubicles were empty. Before he reached the second row, Grace emerged, looking sexy in a mauve formfitting dress that complemented her dark skin beautifully.

“Hello, again. Uh, it’s Mr. Eckles, right?”

“Ackles.”

“Oh, I apologize. Mr. Ackles. Have you decided to open an account today?”

Jensen pulled out his credentials and showed them to her. “Actually, I’d like to speak with Mr. Podvodnik.”

Grace’s eyes went wide. “Is he under arrest?”

“No, no. I just have a few questions. His information may help us with a case. He’s more like a material witness, not a suspect.”

“Oh, I see. Thank goodness. I’ll go get him.”

Jensen smiled and watched her climb the stairs, only feeling marginally guilty that he had a fiancé. Beauty was beauty and he knew Misha would have liked the view too. He didn’t feel guilty at all about lying to her though. It was easier to get people to cooperate when they thought they were going to be the heroes, not treated like a bad guy.

A few minutes later Jensen was seated in Mr. Podvodnik’s office while the man poured himself a stiff drink from the mini bar hidden inside the globe.

The lid closed with a loud metal clang and the man took a seat at his desk.

Now with the large chair and the tumbler of whisky he looked like a Bond villain.

“So. FBI. What can I do for you Mr...Agent Ackles?”

“I assume you’re aware that some account records were subpoenaed from your bank this week.”

“I must admit I didn’t know. When records are requested the legal department handles it. Often it’s for civil suits. One person claiming their money was withdrawn without permission; verification of funds in alimony or child support cases. These aren’t brought to my attention. I imagine though what you bring you is here is something that should have been brought to my attention.”

“Perhaps. It doesn’t involve you directly. We pulled the records on six individuals who have bank accounts with you that have the exact same number as the accounts that they have at a national bank.”

The man took a sip of his drink. “Well, I’ll admit that is peculiar. But, if they had the account at the national bank and then came to us and asked if they could choose their own account number here to make it easier to remember...” he shrugged. “We probably accommodated the request. Our routing number is registered nationally and that’s really all that matters so long as the numbers are unique within our own system.”

“There are few more interesting things about these accounts.”

“Such as?” the man asked archly, his fingers slipping slightly on the glass in his hand. He hadn’t put ice in the drink, so it wasn’t condensation. He was sweating.

“All six were opened within days of each other.”

“I don’t find coincidences interesting, Agent Ackles.”

“All of the accounts, despite being opened only a couple of years ago, have thousands of transactions involving the deposit and withdrawal of very small sums of money.”

The man shrugged. “We have no limit on how many transactions a person may make with their checking accounts.”

“For long stretches of time the accounts even sit completely empty.”

“There’s no law that states people have to keep money in an account. We do have a nominal minimum amount required to avoid fees, but if the client wishes to pay it, there’s nothing we can do but collect.”

“There are also a number of transactions where money comes out, but there’s no record of where it goes.”

“It was probably a cash withdrawal.”

“No, I don’t think so. All six accounts made these transactions on the same day at virtually the same time to something marked only as TTPT.”

“If they all have subscriptions or memberships to the same company or organization, the organization probably pulls fees from all their clients at the same time.”

“What is TTPT? I couldn’t find a specific business with those initials and there was no account number associated with it. The bank records literally just show money from the accounts going to TTPT, and that’s it. The money seems to disappear.”

“I’m sure it doesn’t, but I am not privy to what the bank’s clients do with their money.”

“I see. There was one more odd transaction, if you’ll permit me.” Jensen continued even though it appeared that Podvodnik was about to tell him no.

“One of the accounts, one time, made a small deposit to a charity known as The Lilac House. Within an hour, the money was returned to the bank account, and the same sum was then sent to TTPT and poof. Vanished.”

“People make mistakes. Fortunately whoever runs that charity is on top of things and was able to help correct the error.”

“‘Whoever runs that charity?’ Isn’t it you? Aren’t you one of the founders?”

The man took a large swallow of his drink and shifted. “Why, yes, I am.

But, I don’t run it. I have a bank to tend to. Perhaps our close acquaintance is why the error was able to be rectified so quickly.”

“Hmm. You know, I also noticed that The Lilac House’s routing number is Potomac First’s.”

“Do you find it odd that I would provide a bank account to the charity I helped found?”

“No, no. Not at all. What I do find odd is that you felt the need to defend every transaction made by these six accounts. If they are indeed random clients, wholly unassociated with you, why would you try to cover for them? It seems like most people would be happy if the FBI were able to identify a worm in their apple so that it could be removed.”

“I like to give people the benefit of the doubt, Agent Ackles. The United States Government is not known for its impartiality. Especially of late.”

“So, in your professional opinion, the transactions made by these accounts aren’t unusual? I’m clearly not an expert on the subject, so I wanted to get the opinion of someone who is.”

The small man’s shoulders relaxed a little and a tiny smile quirked one corner of his mouth.

“Ah, I see. I do have quite a bit of experience; I’ve been managing this bank for almost ten years and I managed larger banks for decades before that. I’m quite familiar with what is and is not normal transaction history and behavior.”

“And in your professional opinion?”

“What you’ve described to me sounds completely innocuous, Agent Ackles. Some accounts are more heavily used than others, some are used as stress tests for new businesses starting up—particularly online businesses—

and quite frankly, some accounts are owned by dimwitted people.”

Jensen smiled. “Thank you so much for explaining it to me. I hope I didn’t trouble you today.”

“Not at all! I’m proud to help the FBI.” He stood up and finished his drink.

“Would you like a glass?”

Jensen declined again as the man went back into his bar for another couple of fingers of amber liquid.

“I think I’ve taken up enough of your time. I’ll see myself out if that’s alright with you.”

“By all means, by all means. Have a good day, Agent Ackles. Oh, did you ever contact Cohen & Cohen?”

“I haven’t had the chance yet.”

“No matter, no matter. Perhaps it's for the best though. I doubt a civil servant such as yourself has enough disposable income to need their services. No offense.”

“None taken,” Jensen smiled again. “Good day, sir.”

“And a good day to you too.”

Jensen left the office and hurried down the wide staircase. As he crossed the lobby, Grace smiled at him.

“Won’t be needing that account after all?” she asked.

“Well, not getting one today means I get to come back another day.” He gave her a wink and she gave him a slightly scolding smirk. Jensen walked out of Potomac First with his phone already at his ear.

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“Hey, Jensen,” Jared answered his phone. “How’d the meeting with Podvodnik go?”

“Well, he’s a lying sack of shit. But fortunately he’s also an arrogant ass.”

Jared let out a small laugh and clicked a filter on and off on his spreadsheet.

“So what are you thinking?”

“He’s guilty of something. I’m not sure how entrenched he is in it, or if he’s simply being bribed to turn a blind eye to what’s going on.”

“So should we pursue him?”

“I don’t know. I know he’s involved, but I don’t know if following his trail will lead us somewhere new. I think he’s probably keeping his hands clean for the most part. What I’d really like to dig into is the charity.”

“The Lilac House?”

“Yes. I feel they’re somehow central to all of this.”

“Can we get a warrant for their records?”

“Based on what? Everything we’ve seen indicates that they’re totally legit.

Even though they were involved in a transaction with one of our persons of interest, they immediately gave the money back. That just proves that they’re not accepting bribes or dirty money. I don’t think we could possibly justify investigating them to a judge.”

“If we could though, what are you expecting to find?”

Jensen sighed heavily. “I don’t even know. Discrepancies in their finances?

Maybe their taxes only look good because they’re only showing the good records. I’d want to see if the money they’re giving to those in need is actually being received by those in need. Honestly I want to find nothing.

But at this point we haven’t found any other connection amongst the double dippers. And we still don’t know what the money is being used for. Unless we can prove they’re stealing from Cohen & Cohen, there is nothing illegal about having multiple bank accounts and making multiple deposits and withdrawals.”

“If they’re hiding the money from the IRS, that’s something.”

“That’s true. But asking for an IRS audit—we’ll be working this case until muttonchops are back in style.”

“Anything I can do from my end?”

“See if you can scrounge any more information on the double dippers.

Maybe something else will shake loose and give us another trail to follow.”

“Will do. I’ll check in again tomorrow.”

“Sounds good.”

Jared hung up and went back to work on his spreadsheet of names. For some reason the fact that three of the names stood out to Mark enough for him to mention them specifically, even if it was to call them racist assholes, was like a red flag in Jared’s face. He moved those three names to the top of the list, and then filtered the columns of marks to see if anyone else matched. No others had the exact same combination of symbols, but those three and an additional two others are the only ones who had dollar signs written next to them. He didn’t recognize the other two names. They weren’t double dippers, and he’d reviewed Cohen & Cohen’s files and transactions so much, he felt like he knew the names of all their clients. Of course, this list was from The Lilac House, and not everyone there was going to use Cohen & Cohen as their investor.

After deliberating for a few more minutes, Jared went in search of Eric Goldstein. He was in his fifties and had been working as a broker at Cohen

& Cohen for over thirty years. When Jared had interviewed him, he’d asked

why he’d never chosen to try to move up the ladder. He’d said that he enjoyed his work—watching the market, making predictions. He’d been a little bitter about the fact that computers now controlled everything, but he preferred working with clients in person as opposed to dealing with the time-consuming pressure of running a business.

Jared found Eric at his desk, carefully mixing honey into his tea. Even though most of the brokers worked in a communal bullpen type space, his seniority had at least gotten him a private office. He knocked on the open door and the man looked up at him. He smiled, which made his ethnic features a little more prominent.

“Jared, hello! Good morning to you. Hump day, hump day. Need my tea to make it through the morning. Come in, come in. Do you want to hear more about my trading secrets?”

Jared smiled and pushed the door partially closed after he stepped into the office. He was amused by Eric’s definition of “secrets” because as far as Jared could tell the man had told him and everyone in the office how he went about his business.

“Good morning, Eric. I wish I was here for some secret trading, but I’ve got a quick question for you that you may not be able to answer, but I thought I’d ask anyway.”

“Not be able to answer? Jared! I’ve been here for over thirty years. Did you know that?”

“Uh, yeah, you—”

“Thirty years. I joined on right after little Matty’s father took over for his father. Cohen & Cohen is a good family business.”

“Yeah, it is. I know. I just have questions about a couple of people, but they’re not clients here, which is why you might not know them.”

“Not clients? Why do you need to know about them?”

“I don’t really. It’s more like I came across their names and I was wondering who they were.”

“How’d you come across their names?”

“I found some old documents. Maybe they had come in for a consultation and decided not to invest with Cohen & Cohen.”

“A mistake on their part, let me tell you. Did I tell you about the time I turned one hundred dollars into a hundred thousand in two weeks?”

“Uh, yeah, you—”

“Two weeks! One thousand percent return. I won employee of the year.”

“That’s great, Eric. Have you heard of these two people?”

Jared handed him a Post-It note with the two names in question on it. Eric’s jovial demeanor dimmed somewhat as he looked at the names. He looked at Jared over his thick glasses, and then handed the note back to him.

“You found documents on these two? I would have thought these would have all been shredded.”

“It was an old box, shoved in a closet.”

“I see.”

“So, you recognize the names?”

“I do.”

“What do you know about them?”

“Well, not too much about them, honestly. They were clients here about ten years ago. I never handled their cases. I don’t know if I ever met them personally.”

“Why aren’t they clients anymore?”

“Well, Mr. Cohen—Matty’s father—decided one day he didn’t want to keep them on as clients. Their money was pulled from our accounts, we cut a cashier’s check, and sent them packing.”

“Did Mr. Cohen say why?”

“No, he never did.”

“So, you don’t know if they were stealing from the company or...?”

“No, I don’t think it had anything to do with Cohen & Cohen. I think it was more personal. He just felt that they were...the kind of people he didn’t want

to do business with.”

“That’s interesting.”

“Eh. I trusted Mr. Cohen’s judgment. Still do. If they were bad news, we’re better off without them.”

“I see. Are you familiar with Michael Valenti, Judith Bauer, or Martin Beranski?”

Well, Valenti and Bauer are clients here. I’ve worked them a few times.

Pretty typical rich people, but I don’t hold that against them since it pays my salary.”

Jared smiled.

“Beranski...that doesn’t sound familiar. Why?”

“I just found their names in the same box as the other two. I was wondering if there was a reason they would be grouped together. Since two of them are our clients.”

“I’m afraid I can’t think of a reason why their old files would be in an old box somewhere. The box didn’t give a clue? Wasn’t labeled?”

“Ah, well, it was labeled with the name of a charity.”

“Well, there’s your answer, son. They’re probably all patrons of that charity.”

“That’s a good point. Thank you for your time this morning, Eric.”

Eric waved him off. “Any time, any time. You come back whenever you like. I’ll tell you about the time I advised a US Congressman to sell his oil stocks. That kid was dumb as a box of hair.”

Jared laughed. “I’d love to hear it sometime. Thanks again.”

Jared escaped out of Eric's office before he had to hear the story about the Congressman for the third time. As he made his way to his office, he thought about what Eric had said. Two of the people grouped in with the three racist assholes had been dismissed from Cohen & Cohen for personal reasons, not business. It seemed to be a pretty safe assumption that all five were racist assholes. But these people also supported a charity that combated human trafficking, a crime that primarily affected minorities and non-Americans. Would racists really support that cause? Would it be a way to combat accusations of racism?

He had a feeling that The Lilac House was the thing casting a shadow on both his and Jensen's investigations. They couldn't see beyond it, and there was nothing they could do to illuminate the mystery. Legally they had no grounds to use investigative techniques to learn more about them. Legally they had no reason to look into them.

Jared found himself in the lobby instead of his office. Alona was wearing a sky blue bolero and white blouse. She looked young and summery and innocent. He approached the desk and leaned over the counter. She smiled up at him with pale, pink lips.

"Hi, Jared. Got more sexy talk about shit to share with me?"

He laughed and shook his head. "No. I'm just glad we were able to clear that misunderstanding up."

"Me too."

"And I want you to know that...I like you for you. I really do. Being two people just hanging out is more enjoyable because you're one of the two."

Alona smiled and dropped her chin shyly, and then looked back up.

"I just really want you to know that. That I like you, and not the help you've given me. Because while appreciated it, it's not why I hang out with

you. And I wouldn't want you to do anything else. I don't want you to break any laws and I don't want you to think you need to give me information on

anything. Okay?”

Alona wasn't really smiling anymore. Her brow was creased in mild confusion and she looked slightly annoyed but she nodded. “Okay. I understand.”

“Good. So, on a completely unrelated topic, have you heard of a charity called The Lilac House?”

“The Lilac House?”

“Yeah. They combat human trafficking. It's a great organization. If you're curious, you could learn more about them because I think the work they do is important. For your own personal benefit.”

Alona watched him carefully. “Okay...thanks for the recommendation.”

“Sure. Alright. Well, I've got to get back to work. I'll see you later.”

“Okay.”

Jared walked over to the elevators not sure whether he was smooth as ice or as awkward as a cow on a crutch.

Thursday, August 6, 2014

Jensen looked over the list of five names Jared had pulled from the pages of odd markings. With the other four double dippers, there was a total of nine people who were involved with The Lilac House. Eight of whom had a history with Cohen & Cohen, five of whom had questionable moral character, and three of whom were known racists. The real kicker was that six of them lived in the same affluent neighborhood in northern Virginia.

Two were in the only part of DC that was vaguely comparable to the Upper East Side in New York. One was in a wealthy suburb of Maryland. Jensen looked over the addresses and wondered if he should just go out and talk to them in their homes. There was nothing illegal about knocking on

someone's door.

His desk phone rang and he picked it up and tucked it in between his ear and shoulder so that he could type in the Maryland address to Google Maps for directions. “This is Jensen.”

“Agent Ackles, this is Gabriel Tigerman.”

“Oh, hi. How’s the request going?”

“Good. Excellent actually. You’re leaving tomorrow.”

Jensen froze and the phone slipped off his shoulder and clattered onto the desk. He quickly grabbed it and picked it up.

“Agent Ackles?”

“Sorry. I dropped the phone.”

Tigerman chuckled. “I understand. I’m shocked it went through so fast too, but apparently the governor or Oregon and one the state’s Senators got involved. The state is paying for the whole thing and demanding that he be brought out here immediately so we can find the Green Falls Killer. They don’t even care that Little won’t give a name and wants to take the officers to the site himself. They’re telling everyone to just cooperate.”

“That’s—but, the Elton PD has been trying to get him up to Elton for a few weeks now so that he can testify and clear a man’s name he allowed to take the fall for a kill Hannigan committed.”

“What can I say? A governor and a Senator have more clout. The company that’s doing the transport is Mooreland Security. They want to try to do this in one day, but they put enough cushion on it to extend into Saturday if they have to.

“You’re going to meet the security team along with four state highway patrolmen and two air marshals at the prison at five o’clock.”

“In the morning?”

“Yes. The transfer of custody should be completed by 5:30. The patrolmen

will escort the van to the Richmond Airport. From there you, the security team, and the air marshals will take him to a private plane that is scheduled to take off at 7:00. You should land at the Redmond Municipal Airport at 9:30am local time. Agents from the FBI's Portland office will meet you there along with a state patrol escort. It's a two hour drive to Green Falls from there. The Green Falls police department have prepared the station for holding him.

"Depending on how long it takes to get what we need from Russell, you'll either travel back by reverse route that night or first thing Saturday morning. The security team will be with you the whole time as well as air marshals, state and local police, and federal agents. Little has demanded that you go along or he won't play ball, but you told me that would be the case."

"And everyone is really okay with this? Everyone feels that it'll be safe?"

"Two of the three bodies pulled from the lake last week were in good enough shape that the M.E. was able to determine that they had brands under their tongues. Everyone is certain he's working with Little now.

Also...a girl has gone missing from a town on the other side of Lake Splendid. There's no evidence yet to suggest the Green Falls Killer snatched her, but there's nothing to suggest he didn't either. The whole area, the state, hell, even the nation is focused on what's going on there right now. Everyone is demanding that law enforcement stop him already. We're in that mythical ticking time bomb scenario here, Agent Ackles. We're willing to go to extremes. I know this is hard for you, Jensen..."

Jensen was startled by the USA's use of his first name.

"But if you can do this, if you can get him to help us catch this monster—I think that will do more to soothe your soul than he can torture it."

Jensen nodded and swallowed. His mouth had gone dry. He picked up his water bottle and took three deep draughts.

"I understand. And I agree. I'll be at the prison tomorrow at 4:45am."

“Thank you, Jensen. You’re a hero.”

Tigerman hung up and Jensen numbly put the phone back in its cradle. He leaned forward and covered his face, shivering uncontrollably. He wasn’t worried about tomorrow; he was worried about the phone call he had to make tonight.

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Jared grumbled as his apartment building finally came into sight. He was really starting to miss his Bu car. Commuting to work on the Metro everyday was not fun. The system always had some sort of problem: broken trains, broken switches, track work, messed up schedules. After dealing with that headache for anywhere from twenty-five to forty minutes, he then had a twenty minute walk to his apartment. He hadn’t chosen his apartment based on proximity to the Metro because he knew he’d be driving to work.

Unless some pervy CEO strong-armed him into going undercover. But what were the odds of that happening?

He was also in a foul mood because when he’d gotten to work a stranger had been at Alona’s desk. She was a temp called in to cover since Alona had taken a sick day. He discovered that he looked forward to going to work at Cohen & Cohen everyday so that he could see her. Without her there, he was just at a stuffy investment firm feeling like he was chasing his tail. And he had to eat lunch with Eric and hear about the Congressman. He was not in a good mood.

He approached the door to his building from the south side of the complex’s parking lot, so it was concealed by tall shrubberies until he was almost on top of it. That was why he didn’t see her until he was putting the key in the lock.

“Alona!”

“Hi, Jared.”

He stared, not only surprised to see her, but thrown off by her casual appearance in tight jeans and a pink T-shirt.



“Uh...what are you doing here? How did you find me?”

The address in his personnel record was a fake. She couldn't have found him through that.

“I saw your driver's once when you paid for lunch. You have a weird middle name.”

Jared frowned slightly. Tristan wasn't a weird name, and he didn't even have it on his driver's license. He paled. His true name was on his license.

If she saw Padalecki...

“It was my mother's maiden name. My parents thought it would be better than hyphenating.”

“Smart. “Padecki-Bell sounds kind of funny.”

He almost corrected her, but hell if she thought it was Padecki, she didn't need to know it wasn't.

“Um, so, what brings you here?”

“I independently and through no direction from you decided to do a little research on The Lilac House. And I thought we could be two people who get together and talk and I might bring up some things I learned about them.”

Jared looked at Alona and knew that this conversation was ridiculous and that she knew this conversation was ridiculous and that any defense attorney worth his salt would be able to sew up the loopholes they were trying to squeeze through. But there weren't any attorneys to worry about at the moment.

“Okay. Do you want to come up?”

“I'd like that.”

Jared let them into the building and skipped picking up his mail. He didn't

want to have anything with his true name on it in his hand. He tried to think about the state of his apartment. He didn't think there was anything sitting about or on the walls that had his name or occupation linked to it, but mostly he was wondering how bad the dishes in the sink were and if his bedroom was completely covered in dirty laundry.

He opened the door cautiously and gave his apartment a sniff. It smelled okay to him. He let Alona inside and watched her face to see if her nose wrinkled. She didn't seem disturbed by anything, so he counted that as an Alona point in his favor. His apartment was small, but more than big enough for one person to live in comfortably. Except the bathroom. He had to stoop a little to take a shower, but he had to do that at most hotels too.

Alona looked around the living room and partially open kitchen, but it seemed to be out of politeness. She moved to sit on the couch and started pulling documents out of her bag. Straight to business then. Jared slipped his shoes off and dumped his keys and wallet on a bookshelf by the door, then joined her on the couch.

"I'm guessing you found something interesting, and are not sick?"

She looked up, momentarily confused. Then she smiled sheepishly. "Yeah, not sick. Totally played hooky. But, I think it was worth it. I found some interesting things about The Lilac House."

"Please tell me they do help people at least."

"Oh, yes, they're totally legit. Well, at least the people actively working for it. All the money they raise through fundraisers and from donations goes to running the office, paying the salaries of the six full time employees, and the rest does go to supporting finding missing women and children, providing them temporary shelter, and reuniting them with their families when they can. It's all very valiant work on the surface, but when you dig a little deeper, there are a few things that don't add up."

"How did you—you know what? Never mind. What'd you find?"

Alona spread some documents detailing bank transactions out of the coffee

table as she spoke. “The Lilac House does all of their banking at Potomac First. They have four bank accounts. When the money from donations comes in, it is split between the expenses account and the services account.

The rent for leasing their office space, office supplies, employee salaries, things like that, all come out of the expenses account. The money they provide to help victims comes from the services account. All the money in and out adds up and goes where it is supposed to.”

“So what are the other two accounts?”

“I don’t know. One account receives money from some weird code, TTPT.”

Jared didn’t react to the code, but he recognized it as the one Jensen had said the six double dippers were using.

“This code, rather than an account number, makes multiple deposits into the account, and then a lump sum is transferred to their fourth account. That account only has deposits from the TTPT code and bimonthly has cash withdrawn from it.”

“Money coming out of an account of a legitimate charity.”

“Yeah, sounds like money laundering to me too.”

“But they’re not laundering the donations.”

“Nope. So where is the money coming from?”

Alona eyed him like she was expecting him to tell her. The fact that he now had a link between the double dippers and the charity—the TTPT code at Potomac First—meant that he did know what money was being laundered.

But he certainly couldn’t tell her that. As far as he knew, she didn’t know that he already knew about the code, so he shrugged.

“I don’t know. I mean, we know the double dippers use Potomac First too, but the money going to the charity isn’t coming from their accounts. At least according to what you found. It’s this code, or whatever. How does that

work? How can money come from a code?”

“Well, when a bank is privately owned, they can do pretty much anything as long as no one notices.”

“So, you think the real culprit here is the bank.”

“Maybe. Maybe they’re just being paid to be the middle man.”

“So who is masterminding the whole thing? The charity, the bank, or the double dippers? And where does Ella and the program fit in?”

“You don’t suspect Cohen & Cohen at all?” Alona asked.

“No, I don’t think they’re involved. I feel like they’re being used.

Otherwise, why would they need the program? They could just put the money directly into their Potomac First accounts and Cohen & Cohen could hide the records.”

“That’s a good point.” Alona leaned back against the couch and propped her arm on the back. Jared’s eyes were drawn to the hint of skin revealed along her navel as her T-shirt rode up slightly. “So, you don’t know anything about the six double dippers and Potomac First other than the fact that they have accounts there?”

Jared shrugged. “I only have information that I can get at the firm, and they don’t have client bank records. Honestly, most of what I know I got through you.”

“Right,” she said slowly, her eyes sweeping over him. She met his eyes again, and then leaned over to grab something else out of her bag. “There’s one more very interesting thing that The Lilac House does with their money. They report it in their taxes, so it’s not a hidden expense. It’s filed under leisure.”

“Well, what is it?”

“They rent a slip in the Port of Baltimore.”

Jared made a confused face. “What? Why?”

“They keep a boat there that was donated to them by a wealthy benefactor and claim they use it to have a fun activity for the people they help to do while they wait to be relocated or returned home.”

“Okay. I’m not seeing the nefariousness that you are.”

“The boat they own, as stated in their tax records, is a medium-sized motorboat that holds about twenty or thirty people. A boat that size can be stored in basically every marina up and down the Chesapeake Bay. Why on earth are they spending so much money every month to rent a slip in the Port of Baltimore that could house a coaster?”

“A coaster?”

“A coastal transporter. It’s a small cargo ship.”

“The slip wasn’t donated?”

“No. They pay for it. Every month. It’s also hardly convenient for leisure cruises if all the employees and charity recipients are in the DC area. A slip that size is generally only used for cargo vessels, especially in an industrial port like Baltimore’s. Why on earth would a charity need a slip for a cargo ship?”

“You think they’re exporting something?”

She shrugged a shoulder and looked down, her lips tight. “Or importing something.”

Jared looked over the papers spread over his coffee table. The slip in the port was weird, but he had the key to linking Cohen & Cohen to Potomac First to The Lilac House. It would be difficult to use Alona’s information directly, but they could probably go through the Federal Reserve and get them to open an investigation into the TTPT code. They had found that information through the subpoenaed bank records so they could present it as evidence. The fact that they knew there would be something to find would make them

feel more confident about forcing the issue. But, none of that involved Alona.

“Well, I should bring this to Matt’s and Mark’s attention. They’ll probably want to stop donating to that particularly charity.”

“You’re not...going to go to the police?”

“Um...n-no. I work for Cohen & Cohen, but I still don’t have any proof of embezzling. As far as the charity laundering money, we technically don’t know that for sure based on the records you have. Also, they’re your records so I couldn’t explain how I got them. Are you going to go to the police?”

“No. I know less than you do. The charity is shady, but there’s no connection to money from Cohen & Cohen except from legitimate donations. Unless... you know something you’re not telling me.”

Jared shrugged. “Nope. If I could figure out that money transfer program maybe I’d have something, but it seems like the link between the double dippers and the charity is the bank. And I don’t have any access to the bank.”

“The bank...” Alona mused, looking away, deep in thought.

“Alona,” he said her name sharply and she looked at him.

“I don’t know how you got this information, but it can’t be legal. You haven’t gotten caught yet because you’ve been hacking systems that were developed by IT people for private businesses. If you try to access bank records, even for a local bank, you’re going to be getting into much more serious system.”

“Who said I’m going to try to hack into the bank?”

“No one, and I hope that means no one is thinking about it either.”

“Relax, Jared. Nothing will blow back onto you.”

Jared cocked his head as he looked at her. Her demeanor was calm, her expressions nonplussed. It seemed like she thought she was protecting him.

“Alona...are you—”

She moved forward and took his face in her hands, cutting him off with a kiss.

“I think we’ve done enough business for tonight,” she whispered against his lips.

She kissed him again, straddling his lap and licking at the seam of his lips.

His brain was rapidly shutting down, and he gave up trying to concentrate on his thoughts completely when he accidentally let his lips part and her tongue swept into his mouth. He gathered her into his arms and stood up from the couch. She locked her legs around his waist and kissed his cheek and jaw as he carried her to the bedroom.

The one luxury he had was a California king sized bed, but with his height, it felt pretty standard. Alona looked small and delicate when he placed her on it. Then she got up onto her knees with a wicked grin and pulled him down onto the mattress. He laughed with her and they shed clothes quickly as they kissed and stroked their hands over every new inch of skin revealed.

Jared slid a hand between her legs and groaned softly when his middle fingers slipped easily between her wet lips, sinking into pleasant warmth.

She let out a small noise and worked her hips, rubbing herself against his hand. He started to sit up so that he could turn her—he wanted his mouth where his hand was—but she pushed back on his shoulders with her hands.

Then she kissed a trail down his torso and licked a slowly meandering trail up the long length of his shaft. Jared relaxed into the bed and let Alona blow him, taking in a fairly decent amount and using her hands on the rest.

He bent his knees and curled his toes to keep from fucking up into her mouth.

“Alona...I love your mouth.”

She pulled off with a popping sound. “I know. You stare at my lips all the

time.” She kissed the top of his penis and gave him a smile. “Condom?”

“Uh...bathroom. Under the sink. I’ll—”

“I’ll get them.

Alona hopped off the bed and disappeared out the door. He stroked his cock languidly and smiled when he heard her clattering around in the bathroom.

She was back a moment later, tearing a condom packet open with her teeth.

She crawled back onto the bed and Jared moved his hand out of the way so that she could roll the condom on. She took him in her mouth again, and then reached between her legs to get them wet. She sat up and lubed his cock with her own slick. Jared’s sigh was half moan and he could feel the heat in his eyes as he looked at her.

“Now, Jared, I’m going to tell you something and I don’t want you to be offended.”

“Well, shit. This can’t be good.”

Alona smiled prettily at him and continued to work his shaft in her small hand. “Relax. It’s mostly compliment. Here’s the thing. You’re big, right?

You know you are and it’s great. Actually in terms of girth, you’re not the biggest I’ve ever seen, but you’re actually in that Goldilocks zone of perfect stretch.”

Jared smiled. “I am feeling complimented.”

“But.”

His smile went away.

“You’re quite long. I mean, you’ve got to be at least eight inches right.

Close to nine?”



“Eight and three-quarters,” he said softly, kind of embarrassed he knew exactly.

“Right. Almost nine inches. And I’m small to begin with, and I have a somewhat...shallow vaginal canal.”

“Vaginal canal?”

“The thing is, every time you put this all the way in—and it does feel good, don’t get me wrong—this,” she tapped the top of his cockhead and his dick twitched and blurted out precome, “bumps my cervix.”

“Y-your c-cervix?” he stammered, suddenly mortified to be talking about medical terms for anatomy.

“Mm-hmm. Most men aren’t long enough to reach the cervix. And the few that are, some women don’t mind it. Now, it doesn’t hurt, but it’s not an entirely pleasant sensation either.”

“I’m-I’m sorry,” he said weakly.

“Oh, chooki, don’t apologize.” Alona moved forward and kissed his lips.

“You are perfect, really. I’m just suggesting that maybe if we try it from a different position, I’ll have a little more control and we can both feel really, really good.”

“What position?”

Alona threw her leg over his body and position herself over his straining cock. She grinned.

“What do you call it? Cowboy style?”

“Well, cowgirl in this instance...oh, God,” Jared trailed off into a groan as she lowered herself onto him. She bit her lip and balanced herself with her hands on his stomach to control her descent.

“Feels good, Jared.”

She took him almost completely in, but then stopped and began riding him slowly. Jared put his hands on her smooth thighs and stared up at her as she put her hands in her hair and closed her eyes. He liked watching her small, firm breasts bounce with her movement, which gradually sped up. He moved his hands up to rest in the juncture where her legs joined her hips and let his thumb settle over the top of her pussy. He applied the slightest pressure and Alona hummed and whined as the pad of his thumb began to graze her clit as she rose up and down. Her movement increased, but he kept his thumb at the same distance, providing just a bare minimum of stimulation. Alona grabbed his wrist and moved fast, but he wouldn't let her move his hand.

“Oh, God, Jared...please, come on, come on...”

“I like this position, Alona. You're fucking beautiful and you feel so tight and so hot.”

“Come on, Jared,” she whined again, pushing down harder. “Touch me, don't tease me. Please, oh, God...fuck...come on...please just a little more.”

Jared licked his lips and refused to give her more. The pleasure built up in his groin as he watched her lose control as she rode his cock, brushing up against his thumb, bucking harder to get more contact. Jared knew he couldn't last much longer—the look of her, the feel of her, those pretty sounds she made each time he moved his thumb a tiny bit were driving him crazy. He pressed his thumb down and grinded it in a circle against her clit.

Alona cried out and her rhythm fell apart into wild movements that when combined with the delicious clenching of her pussy pulled him over the edge with her into orgasm. They rode it out together, and she kept herself propped up by placing her hands on his chest. She panted heavily, but there was a smile on her face. Alona opened her eyes and he could have sworn a blush began to creep up onto her cheeks.

“Yee-haw,” she said softly. And then broke into giggles and moved to curl against him. She hid her face in his side as she continued to laugh and he took care of the condom.

“So how was that?”

“It was great.” She sat up and looked down at him. “It was never bad, Jared, don’t think that.”

“But, we got it down this time?”

“Yep. Well, until the very end and then I was taking you all the way in. But by that point I was so close I barely felt it.”

Jared made a face. “What does it feel like?”

“Hm...it’s mostly just a sensation of pressure. But also like something trying to go somewhere that it just can’t.”

“Ugh.”

“It’s not that bad.”

“But—”

Jared’s stomach growled loudly—and for some duration. He hadn’t eaten since lunch and physical activity, even if he hadn’t done most of the work, made him hungrier for dinner than usual. Alona gently slapped a hand onto his stomach.

“Oh, thank God. I’m starving, but I didn’t want to be the one who brought it up. Do you have any food?”

“Not really. But there’s a Chinese place around the corner from here. On a Thursday night, we should be able to get some in about fifteen minutes.”

“Perfect. I like sweet and sour chicken and wonton soup. I prefer steamed dumplings, but I’ll eat egg rolls if you prefer them.”

“No, dumplings are good.”

“Great. You order and I’m going to get cleaned up.”

“Okay.”

Alona pecked him on the lips and then hopped off the bed. She rather kindly picked up the used condom from the nightstand and took it into the bathroom with her and then shut the door. Jared lay still for a moment, staring up at the white ceiling and enjoying the feeling of post-orgasmic bliss. Then his stomach rumbled again and he got out of bed. He slipped on a pair of clean boxers and a tank top and then walked into the kitchen to find the take out menu. When he was done ordering, he turned and found Alona leaning against the kitchen entrance and watching him.

She was swimming in one of his dress shirts. She'd rolled up the sleeves, but most of her arms were still covered and the tails went well past mid-thigh. He was struck dumb by the sight of her in his clothes with her golden hair spilling around her shoulders in messy waves. He'd done that to her. He crossed the kitchen and picked her up princess style. She let out a squeal of surprise and then lightly hit his shoulder when he laughed at her. He sat down in one of the chairs in the breakfast nook with her in his lap and just kissed her. And kept kissing her, feeling no need to ever stop.

They kissed on and off between a few giggles and teasing words. Arousal was only a warm afterthought as the pleasure of holding each other and connecting emotionally occupied all of Jared's thoughts. He wasn't even going to think about how just two people hanging out weren't supposed to connect emotionally. They were interrupted by three sharp raps on the door.

Alona pulled away immediately and slid out of his lap.

"Food!"

Jared laughed and walked over to the bookshelf he'd set his wallet on. He opened it and only found a five in the billfold.

"Crap."

"Aw, man, are you going to make me pay?"

"No, no. I've got more cash in my bedroom."

"You hide your cash in your sock drawer?"

"No," Jared said as he entered his bedroom.

"I'm going to answer the door."

"Go ahead."

Jared flipped open the box he used to store his two watches and one pair of cuff links. He picked up the insert and grabbed two twenties from the money clip inside. Then he hurried back out to the front room, once again admiring Alona in his shirt as she stood at the open door. He pulled the door open wider so that he could pay the food delivery guy and found himself feeling like he'd been gut punched.

Gen stood in the hallway, her large dark eyes wide with the effort to keep the forming tears from falling down her cheeks. She looked at Alona and again and then tried to force a smile.

“I’m sorry. I should have called first.”

Gen turned and started to walk away down the hall. Jared felt crushing guilt. He felt his heart break as he watched Gen’s heart break. He felt like scum—like he’d been caught cheating. And then he was angry. He marched out into the hallway after Gen.

“Hey, no, wait! Gen!”

Gen stopped and turned around.

“Why are you here? Why did you come here?”

“You—you weren’t answering my calls. I wanted to talk.”

“Why? You made it clear you didn’t want me anymore.”

She shrugged, tears slipping down her cheeks. “I think I made a mistake.”

Jared’s lips parted—he felt surprise, hurt, bitterness—hope. Fucking hope.

Then he shook his head and let the anger come back.

“No. No. You don’t get to do this. You don’t get to dump me and stomp all over my heart and then come here and make me feel guilty for not taking that as a sign that I was supposed to pine away and wait for you.”

“I—I don’t mean to make you feel guilty. You’re right. I didn’t—I don’t...

I’m sorry, Jared. For the way I handled things. And for coming here tonight.

I should have taken your hint. I don’t think that you should have waited for me. I wouldn’t have in your shoes. I guess I just hoped that you—that we...”

Jared shook his head. “Don’t say it. It’s not fair.”

Gen wiped her cheeks with her hands and sniffed. “I couldn’t not come and at least try.”

“No, you didn’t have to come. You chose your career over me. Hell, I offered to move to Boston. I would have gone. I would have been happy.

I’m incredibly fucking adaptable. But you thought of me as a con on your promotion list. You thought of me as a nuisance, a distraction—that’s not what I want to be to someone.”

“You weren’t. I didn’t think that. I was scared that it was moving too fast.

Forcing you to leave your home and your family for someone you’d been dating for barely two months was nuts.”

Jared opened his mouth.

“Don’t you dare reference Jensen and Misha. They are the exception to the rule.”

“We could have been too.”

Gen swallowed and looked down at the floor. “Maybe we still can be.”

Jared shook his head even though she couldn’t see him. “I don’t know if I could trust you again.”

Gen flinched and Jared wanted nothing more than to go to her and comfort her and tell her that he didn’t mean to be so harsh with her. He was just angry and hurt and so fucking sad. She finally looked up.

“I understand. I’m sorry I bothered you.”

“Gen, you didn’t—”

He cut off as she turned and almost barreled into the Chinese food delivery guy. She ran down the hall and took the stairs rather than wait for the elevator. The delivery guy watched her go and then turned back to look at Jared. He looked beyond him to where Alona still stood in the doorway.

“Someone order Chinese?”

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“Baby, I swear to you I didn’t know it was going to happen this fast. I honestly didn’t think it would happen at all. I thought they’d refuse him. I didn’t mean to hide it from you. I was just waiting to see if they would even approve it, and then I’d tell you while they settled the details. I didn’t want to upset you if it turned out they said no outright. Please, Misha...baby...”

Jensen had been on the phone, explaining the same thing over and over for fifteen minutes, and Misha hadn’t said a word. The only way Jensen knew he was still there was because the line was connected and he could hear a tapping noise, like Misha was rhythmically tapping a pen or pencil on his desk.

“Fuck, Misha, say something.”

“What do you want me to say?”

Jensen exhaled in relief. He didn’t sound happy, but Misha’s voice was welcome after such a long, strained silence.

“Please tell me you know I wasn’t trying to hide this from you. Or lie to you. I wasn’t planning this behind your back. Tigerman said—”

“I know. You’ve told me five times what he said. The first conversation made it seem like it was a complete impossibility. I get it.”

“But...you’re still angry.”

“No, Jensen, angry is not a strong enough word.”

Jensen winced. His voice was so flat and emotionless.

“What do you want me to say?” Misha continued in the same tone. “You’re going to go whether I want you to or not. I’m not okay with you agreeing to do it even though you want me to be. What could I possibly say that won’t end up with us screaming hurtful things at each other?”

“Just tell me you know I didn’t do this with devious intent.”

“I believe that you believe that.”

“Misha...”

“Don’t go, Jensen. The only way out of this fight is for you to not go. I am pulling the if you really love me you won’t do this card. I’ve played my hand. Your move.”

Jensen leaned forward on the kitchen table and put his face in his hand. His chest was too tight and his stomach felt nauseated and his face hurt from trying to hold back his tears.

“Misha...I have to do this...”

“Then do it.”

The tapping stopped and Jensen knew Misha had ended the call. He slumped onto the table and let himself sob. He didn’t even know why he was crying. He was more angry and annoyed that Misha wouldn’t understand why he had to do it than he was hurt by the fight. He was upset he supposed. That must be it. So he sobbed at the kitchen table. Charlie was on her belly a few feet away, slowly inching closer, but she stopped just

short of him. Her ears were back and she trembled slightly as she watched him. Jensen didn’t have it in him to reach out and comfort her. He would have been content to cry until he fell asleep and shut out the world, but he had to pack an overnight bag and get ready for a 3:00am wake up call. He had a job to do and he couldn’t wallow in a puddle of his hurt feelings.

He sat up and waited nearly ten minutes for his body to calm down and the tears to dry up. He blew his nose and then picked up the phone to call Kathryn to ask about dog sitting. By the time he had to answer Kathryn’s friendly enthusiasm, he sounded like it was any other Thursday.

Friday, August 7, 2014

Russ yawned loudly, his wrist shackles clanking softly as he used a hand to

cover his mouth. “Sheesh. Why do you think they decided to do this so early?”

“Probably just to piss you off,” Jensen said tonelessly and looked out the airplane window.

He was in the aisle seat, so he couldn’t see very well out the windows on the other side of the plane, but the view was definitely better. Russ sat in the window seat and fortunately there was a third seat in between them. Russ was shackled at the wrists, waist, and ankles and then chained to both the floor of the plane and the seat he sat in. The security company the state of Oregon had hired was outrageously expensive, but he supposed if they were buying private planes so that they could modify them for prisoner transport then they were getting their money’s worth.

“Not a morning person, Jensen?”

Jensen ignored him.

“I swear, the service from this airline is terrible. Aren’t we even going to get any peanuts?”

He laughed at his own joke and Jensen leaned more on his arm, practically putting his torso in the aisle.

“What’s wrong, Jensen?”

Jensen scowled and ignored the look of pity one of the air marshals sent in his direction.

“Come on, Agent Ackles. I know you’re not happy to be here and you don’t like me, blah, blah. But you’re moodier than usual. Something happened.

What was it?”

He closed his eyes, trying to actively stop thoughts of Misha from entering his consciousness. He didn’t like to think about Misha when Russ was so near.

“Look, if you don’t talk to me, I won’t talk to you.”

“That sounds like a great fucking idea,” one of the guards from the security firm said.

“No,” Jensen said, repressing a sigh. “He doesn’t just mean for the flight, he means for the trip. If I don’t entertain him, he won’t take us to the storage unit.”

He looked over at Russ and the man was gazing at him with a soft smile.

“You’re so clever, Jensen.”

“What do you want to talk about?”

“Why are you so upset?”

“The case I was working on blew up in my face. We lost our source and half the evidence is inadmissible. I got yelled at by my SSA and they told me that if this trip is a bust they’re going to put me on an admin squad until I retire.”

“Oh, that doesn’t sound fun. Don’t worry, I’ll help you. The last thing you should be doing is pushing paper around. Of course white collar crime is beneath you. You ought to be on full time serial killer duty. Fly around the country taking point on every case.”

“That’s TV bullshit and you know it, Russ.”

“Yeah, well, maybe TV has the right idea.”

“Who are the other people in the Elton cellar?”

“What?”

“The cellar in Elton. There were more trophies and samples than there were Angel Slayer victims. You won’t tell us who they are and it’s stupid. You’re not going to get out of this with an insanity plea. You know that. And hell, even if you are found not guilty by reason of insanity, you will still be locked away for the rest of your life in a maximum security psychiatric facility for

the criminally insane. What difference does it make?”

“There’s a huge difference between a psych ward and a maximum security prison.”

Jensen looked away again. That was true. Russ would be more comfortable and at least 30% less likely to be raped.

“Come on, Jensen. I keep telling you you’re clever. Are you going to make me into a liar?”

Jensen looked at him. “Do you expect an answer to that that isn’t me punching you in the face?”

Russ grinned. “I’d love to have a physical fight with you. A fair fight though. No chains. And we probably wouldn’t be fighting, would we?”

There’d be biting and nails and rolling around aggressively, but it’d be because you’d be screaming for me like the cockslut you are.”

“Shut the fuck up, you psycho!” the air marshal behind them shouted. “No one asked to hear about your faggy fantasies. Leave the guy alone.”

“Oh, did you hear that?” Russ whispered conspiratorially, but loudly enough for everyone nearby to hear. “Faggy fantasies. I don’t think the air marshal there is fond of queers. If he knew about your proclivities...you think he’d shake my hand if I gutted your fudge packing ass?”

“Uh, um, um—” the air marshal stammered. “I’m sorry, sir, I didn’t—”

“Oh, he’s sorry now. I doubt it. You can hear the trace of an accent in his voice. Such a southern cliché: the redneck wants all them unnatural queerboys to die.”

“I do not!”

“Stop engaging him, Marshal,” Jensen said.

“Yeah, I’m busy. Imagining Jensen and me fucking on your bloody corpse.”

“Russ,” Jensen snapped. “Enough. If I get you a bag of peanuts will you shut the fuck up?”

“No.”

Jensen sighed in annoyance and stood up anyway to get the bag of cashews out of his carry on bag. He sat down and crunched on the nuts sulkily, concentrating on the salt.

“Do you know how much fat are in those?” Russ asked.

“Russ, I swear to God I will serve you nothing but hotdogs with sauerkraut on them if you keep this up.”

Russ slumped down in his chair, sulking. Jensen remembered a conversation at the Elton police department one night when the topic of

“the most disgusting thing I ever ate” came up. Even before he knew Russ was a loser and a psychopath he’d thought it had been a lame answer.

“Tell me about the other trophies,” Jensen tried again.

“I did, Jensen. If I couldn’t set up a permanent base somewhere, wouldn’t I bring souvenirs back?”

Jensen turned to look at him. “The Lubbock kills.”

Russ shrugged. “I also took a vacation to Thailand once.”

Russ complained about not having cabin service for five hours. The air marshals were more than happy to hand him off to the Portland FBI and Oregon State Patrol. The security team rochambeaued to determine who had to ride in the van with him and Jensen to Green Falls. He sang "Ninety-Nine Bottles of Beer on the Wall" the whole trip. He had to go through the song three and a half times. The security team begged to take a break from him before they set off for the storage unit. Everyone agreed they all needed a break and Russ was put in a holding cell at the Green Falls police department with no less than four armed guards watching him at all times.

Jensen had made some cursory greetings and then run off to find a bathroom. When he'd come out, he'd asked a young rookie if he could use one of their interview rooms and had been led to a small, square space that provided him the first real quiet he'd had in about ten hours.

He sat in a hard metal chair and breathed deeply. He continued the soothing motions until he felt somewhat centered again, and then looked up at the door. He didn't want to go back out there. He had a wall up in his mind, but there was chaos he desperately trying to ignore behind it. He couldn't focus if he had to constantly worry about cracks in the wall. He pulled his phone out of his pocket. It was about 3:00pm on the east coast. Past lunch and before dinner, but sometimes they had been let out of class early on Fridays.

Particularly toward the end of the training. Jensen took a chance and called Misha.

"Hello, Jensen."

The immediate tension between them had him sitting rigidly and clutching his phone so hard it hurt his hand.

"I'm kind of surprised you were willing to answer," Jensen confessed softly.

"Well, ignoring you would be petty. We're going to be together for the rest of our lives. We can't just—not talk."

"It makes me happy to hear you say that. That we'll still be together forever. No doubts, even though you're angry."

"I'm scared, Jensen. I'm fucking terrified more than anything."

Jensen sat up a little straighter—clarity suddenly coming to his mind. The emotion stronger than anger...He'd been so messed up inside because he didn't want Misha to be mad at him. He couldn't stand to make Misha feel that way. And while he probably was a little ticked off, that's not why Misha was so violently opposed to Jensen interacting with Russ. And this fear went beyond rationality. This fear was borne out of experience.

“Oh, Misha...what did he do to you?”

He was greeted with silence.

“Misha, my heart, please. You need to admit something is wrong. You need help. And I think you need someone who isn’t me to talk to about it.”

There were shuffling sounds on the other end. And then Misha’s voice came over the line sounding thin and scared and tired.

“Okay. Okay. I will.”

“Promise?”

“Yes. I promise.”

Jensen exhaled in relief. “Baby, I’ll be back tonight, hopefully, and I’ll come see you.”

“They won’t let you onto base that late.”

“Tomorrow then. Tomorrow.”

“Okay.” A snuffling sound, like Misha was rubbing his nose, tickled his ear.

“And you keep using baby. Couldn’t think of something else?”

“Snuggle bunny? Precious?”

“I liked ‘my heart.’”

“You can’t moan ‘my heart’ during sex.”

“Have you ever tried?”

“No.”

“Then you don’t know.”

“Yeah, I do.”

Misha let out a small laugh and internally Jensen made a fist pump set to bad 90’s music that ended in a freeze frame.

“So, how has it been so far?”

“Well...it’s not the most fun I’ve ever had in a day. Russ sang ‘Ninety-Nine Bottles of Beer on the Wall’ all the way from the airport to Green Falls.”

“He did not.”

“He did. For two and a half hours because we got stuck in construction traffic.”

Misha’s laugh this time was more pitying. “Okay, now I actually do feel kind of sorry for you. You didn’t bring that on yourself by agreeing to this.”

“Well, thanks for that at least,” Jensen said wryly.

“Jensen, I’ve gotta run. We were just taking a break from class and everyone else has already gone back in.”

“Ah, okay. Misha, I’ll be fine. Russ will be secured the whole time. And we will talk more tomorrow, okay?”

“Okay. Love you.”

“Love you too.”

Jensen hung up and clasped the phone in both hands, and then he lowered his forehead to his fingers. He exhaled in a rush. They still had some things to work out, but his mind was finally clear. There was a part of him that really didn’t like another person having this much power over him, but Misha only had it because Jensen gave it to him willingly. He looked up at the interview room door. Russ was on the other side somewhere. Russ who

had done something to Misha. Russ—who would be lucky if he made it back to Virginia with all of his body parts still attached.

Jensen returned to the bullpen and was met by a man about his age who had wavy brown hair and dimples. He stuck out his hand enthusiastically, and Jensen shook it, still not sure who he was meeting.

“I’m sorry I missed you coming in. I’m Detective Kyle Darcy. I really appreciate you coming out here, Agent Ackles.”

“I’m happy to do it if we can get this killer off the streets.”

He nodded and kind of looked like he was playing dress up in his sheriff outfit. He actually had a metal star clipped to his chest. Jensen felt a little self-conscious about his plain shield clipped to his belt. He wanted a star.

“So, are we ready to head out there? We’ve got a squad car that Russ will ride in the back of and give us directions. You and I will take him in that car. Three of my units, two state patrol, and four agents from Portland will follow us.”

“Okay. What’s the plan for when we get there? Will we leave him in the vehicle while we wait for the warrant? Should we bring him back immediately?”

“Oh, no wait, Agent Ackles.” He pointed to an older man in a tan Member’s Only jacket looking disgruntled about being stuck amongst a bunch of police riffraff. “We’re bringing a judge with us.”

Jensen nodded, impressed. “Nice. Alright, let’s go then. No sense in dragging this out.”

The caravan assembled in the parking lot and four guards marched Russ out to the squad car. He went everywhere he was told to without a fuss and always moved and offered his limbs in such a way as to make it easier for the guards to transfer him from place to place. Being shut up in the tight space of the squad car made Jensen feel a little uncomfortable. There was a metal barrier between the front and back seats, but he didn’t like having Russ behind him. It made his hair stand on end.

“Where we going?” Sheriff Darcy asked.

“Do you know the storage facility that’s just off the highway on the west side of the city? It’s pretty isolated, just past a brick yard and...an Exxon, I think it is.”

“Pay-to-Store?”

“That’s the one.”

Darcy looked at Jensen. “You know, we don’t really need him now.”

“You don’t know which unit,” Russ said tetchily.

Jensen sighed and nodded his head for the sheriff to head on. He radioed to two of his cruisers where they were going and told them to take point.

Darcy pulled out after the two police cruisers and the rest of the caravan followed. Jensen stared straight ahead and tried not to fidget.

“Why Green Falls?” Darcy asked. “Why did you come here and terrorize our town?”

“I didn’t do anything to you. One of your own crazy citizens did that.”

“You didn’t kill a single person out here? The Green Falls Killer is really just one man?”

“Jensen, he’s boring me.”

“You bore me, Russ. Consider us even.”

“It’s not too late for me to fuck this up and send you to admin hell for the rest of your life.”

Jensen sighed again. “Why did you pick Green Falls?”

“Familiarity. Isolation. A population full of sinners.”

Darcy let out a snort.

“Familiarity?” Jensen asked. “How so?”

“My father lived out here. Every summer my sisters and I had to come visit him for about a month. He took us fishing at Lake Splendid. It really is aptly named. If you have time you should see it, Jensen.”

“You really should,” Darcy chimed in. “It’s spectacular.”

Jensen gave the chipper sheriff a mildly amused side-eyed glance. “I don’t think I’ll have time this trip.”

“Well, you can always come back. You’ll probably get a hero’s parade.

We’ll set you up in the only suite in town.”

“There’s a suite in Green Falls?”

“Well, it’s the best room at Penelope’s Bed & Breakfast. Sure beats the HoJo down the way.”

“You know, I gotta say I’m pretty surprised by your positive attitude, Sheriff.”

“Why’s that? We’re on our way to catch the monster that’s been terrorizing this town—this whole area—for years. These storage facilities require that a valid form of identification be provided for long time storage. I doubt he has any forged documents. We’ll find out the guy’s name tonight. We also kept this whole thing a secret. Not that he’s coming—the governor blasted all over the media that he’s ‘taking a stand’ and ‘doing what the police aren’t willing to do’—but I don’t see that arrogant fuckface here with us, now is he? Anyway. All of Oregon knows the Angel Slayer is coming here to show us to the killer’s lair. They just think he’s not coming until next week. The killer may think he has time to clear out the storage shed. Heck.

Maybe we’ll find him there tonight.”

“When was the announcement made?”

“Mm, not until late last night. He couldn’t have come here before today,”

Darcy said confidently.

“It’s a twenty-four hour facility,” Russ said. “He could have come last night and emptied the place.”

Jensen’s stomach sloshed uneasily.

“But he didn’t. He’s a moron,” Russ said disdainfully.

Darcy snorted again. “You don’t speak highly of your so-called ‘disciples.’”

“He’s not a disciple, he’s a tool. There’s a difference.”

“So...do you keep a tool and a disciple everywhere you kill? You’ll give us the tool but protect the disciple?”

“No,” Russ said, looking out the window.

“He didn’t have a disciple in Elton,” Jensen said. “Hannigan was a tool and he was the only one.”

“Are you sure?” Russ asked. “The thief is the only victim who survived.

Maybe that whole scene was staged.”

“If you called him by his name rather than ‘the thief’ I might believe you.”

“Maybe that’s why Misha dumped you. Once suspicion was off him for good, he didn’t need to manipulate you for any more information.”

Jensen didn’t answer, knowing his silence would be interpreted by Russ as doubt and worry.

After another two minutes, they pulled off the highway and traveled down an isolated road to a large climate controlled storage facility. Jensen and Darcy got out of the car, but left Russ in the backseat until the officers and troopers were in place surrounding the car. The four Portland agents were all vying to be the one who stood closest to Jensen. He didn’t know if he found that flattering or weird.

The front desk of the storage facility was manned by a kid probably no older than nineteen who was reading a graphic novel at the counter. When he spotted the entourage, his eyes nearly popped out of his head and his jaw flapped a bit.

“H-here? It’s here? Which one—” He cut off as his eyes settled on the chained man in the center of the heavily armed circle of men. “Holy shit.”

“Brixton?” Jensen tried to get the kid’s attention by saying the name on the tag pinned to his shirt. “Do you have the keys to all of the storage units?”

He nodded, eyes still glued to Russ. He held up his hand and a few keys dangled from an orange stretchy curl of plastic around his wrist. “I’ve got a skeleton key.”

“Come with us then. Russ, where to?”

“Second floor, west side of the building.”

“What’s the unit number?”

“I don’t remember. I just remember where it is.”

“Stop being a pain in the ass.”

“I mean it. I don’t know the number. I didn’t buy it. I don’t pay for it. I’ve just been here before so I remember where we went. I think.”

Jensen turned on him and gave him a hard look. Russ put his hands up.

“No, I remember, I remember. I’m pretty certain I remember. It is definitely on the second floor.”

Everyone trooped upstairs and Russ looked around the hallways.

“These halls are color coded, right?” Russ asked as he looked at the kid.

The kid stared dumbly back at him. Jensen snapped his fingers in front of his

face.

“Brixton. Are the halls colored coded?”

“Y-y—color? Oh, yeah. Color coded. Cardinal directions.”

“Where are the purple ones?”

“North side.”

“Let’s go north,” Russ said.

The large group proceeded through the halls with Brixton leading them to the north wing. Once there Russ nodded his head.

“Yes, I remember. This way.” He led them down a wide hallway past several units and then seemed to stop at random in front of unit 281. He indicated with his cuffed hands at the large, metal door. “This one.”

“Are you positive?” Jensen asked.

“I’m certain. And I’m not lying.”

Jensen searched his eyes for a moment, and then figured he had nothing to lose if this took a Geraldo turn. He wasn’t the one who arranged this thing.

“Who has the warrant?”

One of the Green Falls officers stepped forward.

“Brixton, please give him the exact name and address of this location and how you identify this specific unit.”

The kid gave the officer some information, who then filled out the warrant on the back of another officer. Darcy then took it to the judge.

“We already filled out what we expect to find. Can you sign it, judge?”

The man signed on the back of the same officer who was destined to be

everyone's writing desk and then gave a nod to the group.

"Open it up."

Jensen turned to the kid. "Can you unlock the door please?"

The Pay-to-Store employee trembled as he approached the wide door. The padlock rattled in his hand. It took a couple of tries for him to get the key in the lock. He hesitated and looked back at Jensen, positively stricken.

"There's not a dead body in here, is there?"

Jensen stepped forward and turned the key for him. The padlock sprung open and he pulled it off the door. Darcy stepped forward and bent down to help him raise the corrugated metal door up into the ceiling. It was dark inside. The dim lighting from the hallway didn't do much to illuminate the contents, though Jensen could tell it wasn't empty.

"Are there lights in these units?" Jensen asked.

"On the wall on the left," Russ said.

Jensen stepped forward and felt blindly on the wall. He started when his hand hit something heavy and rectangular that swung when he touched it instead of a light switch. He grabbed the metal box and felt around until he found the large button in the center of it. He pressed the button. With a few rapid clicks and the hum of high lumen fluorescents, several large, very bright fixtures on shoulder-high stands flooded the room with light.

It was set up like the cellar in Elton, with rows of shelves that held jars with pieces of human bodies preserved in a liquid. Next to each jar was a piece of clothing or jewelry. There were four shelves, three of which were full and the fourth had two jars on it. Unlike Elton there was a lot more room around the shelves and it was filled with bookshelves and a table with a chair. The bookshelves contained notebooks with names and years marked on them. The table had a few tools on it and a laptop.

"Have fun," Russ said.

“Waller,” Darcy said, “get on the horn and get the forensic team down here. They’re waiting on standby.”

“Yes, sir.”

“Danvers, take Brixton to his computer and find out who owns this unit.”

“Yes, sir.”

“Agents,” Darcy addressed the Portland agents. “How would you like to proceed? Wait for forensics or do you want to begin looking for anything that might suggest where the Singh girl might be?”

The agents and other officers had a small debate that Jensen was not asked to be a part of. He didn’t mind. Most everyone, including the judge, had edged inside the room and were looking around like they were at Ripley’s Believe It or Not. He stood just outside the entrance on one side and Russ leaned against the wall on the other. There was about eight feet of space between them and no one else was around Russ, but Jensen wasn’t worried about him running. Aside from the fact that he wasn’t capable of more than shuffling in his chains—he’d had to be practically carried up the stairs because he couldn’t lift his foot high enough to reach each step—Jensen got the impression that Russ didn’t want to run. He had an agenda, but escape wasn’t it.

“Oh wow,” Darcy said, looking through one of the binders. “He’s detailed every single step of his process. From victim selection to learning their schedules to abduction techniques to holding sites to kill sites to dump sites.

He’s got three or four backup plans for every step, plausible stories if people see him certain places. He’s even developed algorithms that make records online that make it look like he was at certain places at certain times. I don’t think we ever would have caught this guy without Little rolling on him. This may truly be a case of the student surpassing the master.”

Jensen raised an eyebrow at that comment and turned to look at Russ, expecting to find him furious or plotting Darcy’s strangulation. Instead Russ

caught his eye and shrugged his lips while he gave a little shake of his head like he and Jensen were in together on a joke. Jensen narrowed his eyes. A narcissist never brushed off insults.

The sound of metal keys hitting the concrete floor drew Jensen's attention.

He looked down the hallway behind him and saw a young man picking up his keys. He gave Jensen a nod and began to unlock the padlock on the unit he was standing in front of. Jensen turned to the interior of unit 281. He needed to tell Darcy that they needed to get the whole building shut down to the public before forensics showed up. The sheriff was busy showing something in one of the notebooks to one of the Portland agents. Jensen felt a little bad that he couldn't remember which one was which, but they all had similar faces and generic Anglo-Saxon surnames.

"Et-hmm."

Jensen looked back at Russ as he was the one who had made the fake throat clearing sound. He was nodding his head forward and to the side. Jensen could feel that his face was pulled into confusion. Russ widened his eyes and nodded again, this time clearly indicating something behind him.

Jensen turned and saw that the young man who had dropped his keys was disappearing around the corner. He hadn't opened his storage unit, he'd just left. Maybe he'd noticed the police and hadn't wanted to stay. Jensen turned back to Russ and the man was giving him a look of exasperation.

Oh, fuck.

Jensen turned and took off down the hall at a dead sprint. He skidded across the floor as he reached the end so that he could make the corner. The fact that he'd suddenly checked his speed might have been the only thing that saved his life. The knife slashed the air just in front of face—where his neck would have been if he'd maintained speed. He pulled back out of instinct and threw his elbow hard into the face of the man. It caught him right between the temple and right eye and he stumbled back, dropping his knife. Jensen pounced on him in half a heartbeat and had no trouble securing his scrawny arms behind his back.

“Sheriff,” Jensen heard Russ say, “Agent Ackles could use your help.”

“What? Why the fuck are you alone? Why is no one over—Agent Ackles!

What’s happening?!”

Feet pounded down the hall as every officer and agent descended on him and his prisoner with guns drawn. Only one guard was bringing up the rear as he was hindered by Russ’ slow shuffle.

“What’s going on here?” the sheriff asked.

The man underneath Jensen’s knee screamed and kicked his feet on the floor. Not like he was trying to escape, but like a three year old having a tantrum.

“This man attacked me with a knife,” Jensen said. “And I think we’ll find that he’s the owner of storage unit 281.”

Everyone began murmuring and talking to each other like people do when

they think something needs to be said but don’t know what to say. When the last guard finally got close enough for the man on the floor to see Russ, he started wailing loudly. He screamed so loud that everyone else stopped talking. Amongst the wails a few words could be discerned. Mainly “why,”

Russ’ name, and something about following or obeying exactly. Russ shuffled forward a couple of steps and then squatted down to be closer to the man. He stopped screaming immediately and Jensen wanted to stand so he wouldn’t have to be so near Russ’ face, but he didn’t want to take his weight off the suspect.

“Because,” Russ said calmly. “You didn’t send me a card in prison. How was I supposed to know you cared?”

The man began to let out a pitiful, whining cry and dropped his head to the cement. He sobbed softly and all the fight went out of him. Jensen looked at Russ and clenched his teeth.

Russ had gotten a lot of mail in prison. A lot. But then, most serial killers

attracted the attention of curious weirdos, authors and script writers, journalists, and lonely women. Jensen had been informed that one woman had written Russ over thirty sexually explicit letters, but they'd never been given to him because the inmates weren't allowed to possess pornography.

All of his mail was opened and read before it was passed on to him, and he was pretty certain that someone would have pointed out if former disciples were contacting Russ. Or at least identifying themselves as such. It was possible that most of the people that had ever worked with Russ had been sending him letters. They potentially had the names, fingerprints, and DNA of all his disciples. Well, maybe the tools that were stupid enough to use their real names and not wear gloves. Jensen did not want to go through the stacks and stacks of Russ' fan mail.

Jensen looked away from the back of the as of yet unnamed tool. He found himself looking Russ in the eyes. The man was looking at him calmly, expectantly. Jensen wasn't sure what he wanted. Praise? A "well done" and a slap on the back?

"Sir? We can take him now."

Jensen looked up and saw a uniformed officer offering him a hand up.

Jensen accepted it and then two officers reached down and hauled the man up. They recited his rights to him, but he was still crying dejectedly and casting pitiful looks in Russ' direction. The man could have been a speck of chipped paint flaked off on the floor for all Russ noticed him.

"Well, this the very definition of a red letter day," Darcy said. "To be quite frank it's a little anticlimactic, but I'll take it. There's no sense keeping Little here any longer than he needs to be. Danvers and Waller, I'm going to leave you two here to keep the scene secure. I'd prefer if at least two of you," he said to the four Portland agents, "stayed with them so that we can back each other's agencies up that nothing was contaminated. The rest are going to escort Little and whoever this sad fuck is back to the station. We'll transfer Little back to the security team and the state troopers and get him out of our hair. Then we'll be able to focus on booking..."

“Diaz. Josef Diaz,” Danvers said. “That’s who owns the storage locker anyway.”

“Fantastic. Diaz. Let’s get him out of here.”

The two Green Falls officers and two of the Portland agents returned to the storage unit. The forensics team was just arriving in the parking lot when the rest of the group made it outside. Little was put into the back of Darcy’s squad car and Diaz into another. Jensen waited outside the car while Darcy talked to the head of the forensics team. He also stopped his forensic psychologist from going upstairs to examine the storage unit so that he could be on hand to interview Diaz if the man agreed to talk without a lawyer. They still had the pressing issue of determining if the missing local girl was his latest victim.

When everyone had their marching orders, Jensen got back into the police cruiser with Russ at his back. It was just coming up on three o’clock. That was plenty of time to drive back to the Redmond airport and get on a plane back home. They’d get in around two or three in the morning east coast time, but Jensen didn’t care. He wanted to go home and he wanted Russ back behind maximally secured bars. Not that he didn’t think the Green Falls police weren’t doing a stellar job, but he liked the fact that Russ’

prison had snipers and barbed wire and trained attack dogs.

When they got to the station the place was buzzing with activity.

Apparently word had gotten back that not only had the storage unit turned out to be legit, but that they’d caught the killer. Every on and off duty employee in Green Falls who weren’t working the storage unit crime scene were pretending to do work somewhere in the vicinity of the bullpen. There was a smattering of cheers when Diaz was brought in, but then people looked like around like they weren’t sure what the appropriate response was. It also could have been that the madman they’d been chasing for years turned out to be a skinny, greasy-haired crybaby with snot running down his face. He was hardly an intimidating figure as he collapsed miserably onto a cot in the holding cell.

The head of Mooreland Security was trying to talk loudly enough over the din of noise in the room for Jensen to hear him. He wasn't excited about the prospect of escorting Russ home immediately and wanted to wait another day. Jensen tried to convince him that it would be better to just get it over and done with. He had the man half-convinced they should go since the Green Falls PD's only holding cell was currently occupied. Jensen didn't want to leave Russ and Diaz together even if they were constantly monitored. Currently Russ was hanging out in the bullpen in between two Mooreland guards, watching the manic bustle around him with uninterested eyes.

Sheriff Darcy yelled out some instructions to a couple other people and then waved two more out the door. He stopped by Jensen on his way out.

"Agent Ackles, I don't know what you did, but I can't thank you enough for doing it. Like I said, if you ever want a free stay in the best suite in Green Falls, it's yours for life whenever you come."

Jensen smiled tiredly. "I am getting married at the end of the month."

"Well, you're always welcome in Green Falls. I'm going to leave you in the capable hands of my deputy. He'll be able to work out arrangements for you if you decide to stay overnight. I'm going to head back to the scene."

"Of course. Good luck, Sheriff. I don't envy you the circus you're going to have around here for the next several days if not weeks."

Darcy sighed. "Tell me about it. I don't even want to think about what it'll

be like when the media gets wind of this. Well, if you do leave this afternoon and I don't see you again..." he held out his hand and Jensen shook it.

"Thank you again for your help and flying out last minute.

Especially knowing now we snatched you away from a fiancé."

"What we accomplished today is well worth it."

"I agree, Agent Ackles. Have a safe journey home."

Jensen nodded to Sheriff Darcy and turned back to the Mooreland security

guard.

“I’ve stolen enough of your time.”

Jensen opened his mouth to plead his case one more time, but something about Darcy’s parting words made him stop. He looked at Russ. The man was watching him passively. He probably hadn’t even heard what Darcy had said over all the racket. Hell, Jensen had barely heard it. He turned back around. Darcy had turned away toward the exit, but he turned back when he sensed Jensen move. He stared at Jensen from five feet away. Jensen raised his hand. He didn’t even know what he was going to do with it, but Darcy saw the movement and reacted.

The sheriff pulled his gun out of the holster and grabbed a young woman with an arm across her clavicles as he backed up toward a wall. Not everyone noticed right away, but slowly the room became aware of the situation. Most people were in shock at seeing their sheriff holding a gun to the head of one of their own. One officer drew his gun, and then suddenly everyone had their weapons drawn. People starting shouting to calm down and to put their weapons away and to find out what the fuck was going on.

Jensen felt his own gun in his hand, but he didn’t have it raised. Darcy was staring at Jensen, but when he spoke he addressed Russ and everyone listened.

“You son of bitch. You set me up. You knew he’d know. You knew he’d know! You think you’re so clever and always in control, but in reality you’re just a fucking spoiled brat who’s mad he didn’t get his way.”

Darcy took a step toward the exit.

“Don’t move!” a rookie cop shouted.

Everyone in the room tensed and started shouting again.

“You’re nothing Russ! You got caught first! You gave into your desires the way you always said not to. You lost because you broke your own rules and now you’re going to take me down because I stopped following them?!”

Your rules are bullshit. I did three on my own. Without you. I didn't need your help and they never even found them! Never would have if you hadn't shown what a bitchy little attention whore you are."

"Darcy, I don't know what's going on," the deputy said, "but you need to put the gun down and we need to sort this out."

"Shut up, you fat fuck. I was doing your slut daughter next. I built a special fucking toy just for her. You wouldn't have recognized her goddamned face when I was through with her."

The silence in the police station was a crazy loud thing filled with shock, disbelief, and that panic that accompanies the wish to wake up from a nightmare. The woman Darcy held whimpered softly.

"Hush. You don't want to set off my temper."

She bit her lip and two silent tears fell from her eyes. Darcy took another step toward the exit and everyone shifted and tightened their grip on their weapons.

"Unh-uh! No one move!" Darcy didn't move the gun from the girl's head, but he turned to look at the people to his left. "None of you are—"

The crack of the gunshot was made louder by the heavy walls and low ceiling of the police station. The gun fell from Darcy's hand and the woman screamed and ran away as he crumpled to the floor, his brain matter and blood sprayed across the stark white wall.

Jensen lowered his weapon. Everyone stood motionless, not one person knowing what to do. Finally the deputy walked over to Jensen and he handed him his gun. It was procedure. As soon as the first step was taken, everyone in the office began the practiced motions of their trade as law

enforcement. Everyone except the Mooreland Security team who had no other job but to watch Russ, which they didn't do particularly well since the man had made it nearly fifteen feet across the bullpen to stand behind Jensen. Russ rested his chin on Jensen's shoulder.

“Thank you, Jensen. I couldn’t have taken him out without you.”



Saturday, August 7, 2014

Misha checked his phone again. He hadn’t spoken to Jensen since he had called him from the Green Falls police station yesterday afternoon. The news that the Green Falls Killer and his accomplice had been captured was all over

the TV and radio morning shows. Especially the news that one of the killers had been a cop who had taken a hostage and subsequently been shot. No one was reported as being hurt or dead other than the killer, but that didn't do a whole lot to soothe Misha's frayed nerves. He'd received a text from Jensen last night telling him that he was okay, but something had come up and he wouldn't be able to come home until Saturday. That had been before he'd heard the news. After hearing it, "something came up"

was not an acceptable explanation of the situation and he was going to tear Jensen a new one the next time they spoke.

He wasn't going to bother him though. He knew Jensen would call or text if he could, so there was no point pestering him while he tried to deal with the Green Falls fallout. That would only delay him getting home. So, he would be patient. No matter how much he hated it. Even if it meant taking his irritation and fear-induced anger out on everyone around him. He'd snapped at Gil so many times earlier that morning that even the mild-mannered Texan had given up on trying to be friendly and left the dorm to let Misha stew by himself.

By noon Misha couldn't take sitting in his dorm room waiting for Jensen to contact him, so he left thinking he might as well get lunch because that's what people did at noon. He wasn't hungry—even though he hadn't eaten breakfast—and found himself heading to the gym. He wasn't in the regulation grey top and navy bottoms exercise clothes, but he was in sweats and a T-shirt and was willing to risk getting reprimanded by a senior agent.

Misha went directly to a treadmill and didn't even bother to stretch. He started up the machine and began running at a fast clip, staring straight ahead at the wall. He preferred to run outside, but today he didn't want to have to worry about paying attention to where he was going or watching out for cars. He just wanted to run and clear his mind.

It worked as first. He could feel his mind racing around, trying to find something to focus on, but nothing was in the forefront. Eventually his mind calmed, so he ran and ran—and then his subconscious came out to play. He thought about Jensen. He thought about touching him, kissing him, getting him to make those little noises that embarrassed him but drove Misha crazy.

Misha liked it—so he did it even though Jensen didn't like it.

He pushed him and teased him. He made him do things that he didn't want to do. He forced him. Because he was selfish. Because he wanted Jensen for himself, to do things for him, to be an object that he could keep and use however he liked. Even if Jensen didn't like it. Even if he fought against it.

He just looked prettier when he was crying and being held down.

Misha slammed his hand down on the emergency stop button and jumped onto the edges of the machine. He leaned forward, struggling for breath. He squeezed the railings as hard he could to keep himself from screaming at the voice in his head. It wasn't his voice. It wasn't his. He knew it wasn't.

He stayed on the machine until he caught his breath then walked on wobbly legs along one wall. He caught his reflection in the mirrors and eyed himself as he lurched toward the exit. He stopped just short of the door and faced himself.

He stared at himself, taking in the parts, but not seeing the whole. He could see teeth that could break skin. He could see hands that could tear. He could see a chest that could heave with pleased exertion. He could see eyes that could be alight with desire at the thought of destroying something good. He saw someone who could use his body to violate, to torture, to humiliate.

Someone who got off on it. He was looking in a mirror, but he was looking at Russ.

Look at you...what if Jensen could see you now?

Misha attacked the specter. It broke up and dissipated. Misha could tell that he was panting again even though he wasn't running anymore. He kept

expecting to see his own reflection again, but all he saw was a brown cardboard rectangle breaking up the wall of mirrors.

“Misha? Are you okay?”

Misha turned and saw Gil standing at the door. His face was a mask of

surprise and concern. Seeing his roommate snapped him out of his fugue state. Misha looked back at the wall of mirrors and saw the shattered glass and the ten pound free weight he'd thrown at the mirror on the floor. Oh, shit. This could get him dismissed from class. Gil walked over to him and put a hand on his shoulder.

"What happened?" Gil asked softly.

Misha met his eyes, but didn't know how to answer him.

"What's going on in here?" a deep voice bellowed.

Three other people came into the room, including a senior agent who was one of their primary evaluators. Misha's heart leapt to his throat. It wasn't just a simple ingrained reaction to getting in trouble, he suddenly realized how much he wanted to be an agent. He didn't want to lose this chance. He didn't want—

"I said what happened?" Gilbert asked, putting his hands on his waist and looking at the mess on the floor.

"I'm sorry sir," Gil said. "I broke the mirror."

"How'd you manage that?" the man asked, frowning.

"I was using the free weights and when I went to put them back I misjudged the distance and totally slammed one into the mirror. I can't believe it shattered like that. Like, maybe crack, but I'm so sorry, sir. It just, like, exploded. Misha was nearby. Misha, I didn't get you with any glass, did I?"

Misha looked at Gil, his brain processing everything about three seconds late.

"Um..."

Gil took both of Misha's wrists in his and raised his arms, putting on a show looking him over for cuts.

"I'm really sorry, Misha. I should have been more careful."

Misha dropped his eyes, feeling ashamed not only for letting Gil take the fall, but for needing him to.

“It’s okay. I’m fine.”

“Are you sure?” Gil asked.

“Oh, quit coddling him, McKinney,” Gilbert said. “You should be worried about yourself. We’ve gotta fill out a 302 and then you’re going to spend the remaining two and a half weeks with me as your instructor after pissing me off for making me fill out paperwork.”

“Sorry, sir.”

“Nah, it’s fine. When I was here I broke three elliptical machines.”

“How?” one of the other NAT’s asked with a laugh.

“None of your business. Go do something productive. McKinney, let’s go.”

“Yes, sir.” Gil waited for Gilbert and the others to get a few steps away, and then he forced Misha to meet his eyes. “Misha, maybe you should get checked out anyway. Just in case there’s an injury we can’t see.”

Misha could see the deeper meaning in Gil’s eyes. The concern and the hope for his well-being. So, Misha nodded.

“Yeah, that’s a good idea. I will.”

Gil patted him on the shoulder and then followed Gilbert out of the gym.

Misha stood next to the pile of broken glass for several minutes. Then he ran his hands over his face and tried to remember in which notebook he had the contact information for the EAP counselors.

The whole walk back to the dorm he worried about Gil. If anyone dug into his story at all, there was no way it would hold up. Especially if they asked him to tell his version of events under oath. If he was caught, he would be

dismissed from the Bureau. No matter how small the lie or good the intentions, lying under oath was automatic grounds for dismissal. Of course, a 302 didn't require an oath. It was just an incident report. Gil was likable and at the top of his class. More than likely he wouldn't get more than a few annoyed sighs sent in his direction, but there was the possibility that trying to cover for Misha could ruin his career. Because Misha couldn't get his shit together.

It wasn't just his problem anymore. It was affecting people around him. He might be willing to accept his psychological torture like some sort of self-flagellation, but being responsible for hurting other people was unbearable.

It was worse than the idea of telling people what had happened to him. Or more accurately, what he had done.

It took him about ten minutes of digging through his notebooks and folders of notes and class materials before he remembered that the information he was looking for was in the welcome packet he'd shoved into the drawer of his desk the first day on campus. He pulled it out now and skimmed through the list of names, numbers, and emails until he found the one he was looking for.

Cindy Sampson was one of the full time EAP counselors employed by the Bureau and she was stationed at Quantico to be available for all of the agents, intelligence analysts, and staff operations specialist who had to spend weeks of their lives living away from home, eating crappy food, and stressing about not knowing where they would be sent more than a few weeks before the end of class. He used his Bureau phone to send her an email asking if they could meet on Monday. Then he picked up his personal phone, verified for the fifth time since returning to the room that he had no messages, and laid down on bed, clutching the phone in his hand.

About twenty minutes later, the phone pinged. He shot up straight and unlocked his phone, but there was no text or email. He glanced over at his Bureau phone on the desk and saw the indicator light blinking at him.

Sighing heavily he eased off the bed and picked up his second phone. Cindy had already responded saying she was on campus for the weekend and free if he wanted to meet today. He was tempted to put her off until Monday, but

then he thought he might convince himself over the day and a half that he was fine and would cancel altogether. So he wrote back that he could meet her in thirty minutes outside of Jefferson. He showered quickly and changed into fresh clothes.

Cindy met him by the west entrance and after shaking hands and greetings, they began walking along one of the sidewalks that led through the forest that surrounded the base. She was a very pretty brunette with dark eyes and a comforting smile. Even still he knew it would be impossible to open up to her completely. Like all therapists, Bureau counselors were bound to confidentiality about all topics discussed unless they believed he was a threat to himself or others. But Bureau counselors had one additional caveat that allowed them to break confidentiality. If they thought someone was a threat to national security, they were obligated to report it. Being batshit crazy wasn't just something a person had to deal with in their private life in the intelligence community, it meant they couldn't be trusted with secrets. It was why most Bureau employees hid their issues and refused to take medications that had any connection with mood stabilizers.

“So, Misha, I’m happy you reached out to me. A lot of NAT’s start really feeling the pressure when we get close to graduation. Fear of starting a high pressure career, often times in a new city far from home, can go from seeming like an adventure to ‘Oh shit what have I done’ really quickly.”

Misha half-smiled. “Fortunately, that’s not my problem. I used to be a cop, so I’m familiar with the responsibilities of the job. And I’ll be able to stay at my home because my fiancé is at WFO.”

“Oh, that’s wonderful. Is she an analyst?”

“He’s an agent.”

“Oh. That’s good. Other agents tend to understand the demands of the job better than non-agents. Even other Bureau employees don’t always fully understand how time consuming and stressful it can be.”

“Hmm. To be honest, none of that is what’s weighing on my mind.”

“Well, what is?” Cindy asked with a smile and a slight elbow budge.

“Wedding jitters?”

“No, no. There’s no doubts there. Honestly, what I really wanted is...

recommendations for non-Bureau therapists. Psychiatrists actually. I remember in the presentation during orientation that EAP can do that.”

“That’s true, we can, but you know we do keep professional psychologists and licensed therapists on staff. I’m one of them. Are you sure it’s something that I, or someone else, a male therapist, can’t help with?”

“It’s—it’s more that it might take some ongoing, serious therapy.”

She gave him a questioning look, but didn’t press him.

He let out a little sigh, but he was smiling. It sucked, but it was a part of his life now. Talking about it was just something he had to do.

“Okay, so, you’ve heard of the Angel Slayer, right?”

“Ugh, yes. I have a PhD in psychology, but men like that I still can’t understand.”

“I think it’s better that we don’t understand them.”

Cindy nodded her head agreement.

“So, um, well...I...I was kinda of his last victim. You know they caught him with his final victim, that’s how he was arrested. And—”

Misha stopped when he realized that Cindy wasn’t with him. He turned and saw that she had stopped walking a few paces back. She hurried to catch up to him.

“I’m so sorry. I was shocked.”

“Understandable.”

“I’m so sorry, Misha.”

“Yeah...um, thanks.” He let out a small laugh. “It’s kind of weird to say thank you for being sorry I was kidnapped by a psychopath.”

Cindy smiled. “Well, it’s the least I could do.”

Misha laughed again and glanced at her. “Your life gets different when you’ve got ‘nearly murdered by a serial killer’ in your party story repertoire.”

“Hmm. But I imagine it’s not really something that’s just completely in the past. A fun story to pull out occasionally to entertain with.”

Misha licked his lips. “No. It’s not.”

“I imagine that’s what you might need the serious, ongoing therapy for.”

Misha didn’t respond right away. They walked several minutes in companionable silence. Even though they were shaded from the sun by the trees, it was hot and muggy. Sweat rolled down the side of Misha’s face and his spine. He regretted putting on jeans. He regretted a lot of things.

“I thought I could handle it. I thought that I could pass it off as survivor’s guilt. But it’s not survivor’s guilt. It’s just guilt.”

“Guilt about what?”

Misha shook his head. “That’s, um...I can’t...”

“It’s okay. It’s okay.”

They walked together a few more minutes.

“I can get you a list of possible psychiatrists, but there’s one I will definitely recommend. His name is Sebastian Roche.”

“Sebastian Roche? Sounds more like a French porn star than a therapist.”

Cindy laughed. “He actually is a little unorthodox, but I think he’ll be exactly

what you need.”

“Well, at this point, I am willing to try anything to stop feeling like this.”

“That’s excellent, Misha. Wanting to get better is taking the first step to being better. A lot of people go through the steps of therapy because it’s expected of them or other people want them to. But, it really only works if

you’re open to it. Are you? Open to it?”

Misha put his hands in his pockets. And then immediately removed them as they started to sweat in the hot confines.

“Yeah, I am. Because it’s not just about me. It affects more than me. And maybe I’m supposed to get better for my own self, but I want to get better for the people in my life. I won’t pretend I’m not a selfish person, but I’ve always been happiest when I was helping other people. Helping people gives me a purpose in life. And that’s why I want to get better. So I can have a purpose again.” Misha stuck his hands in his pockets and looked down, ignoring the heat this time. “I want to get better for him.”

“Your fiancé?”

Misha nodded. “Is that a bad thing? To put that kind of pressure on him?

Like, he has to be strong enough for me?”

“Mm, well, that’s why it is better to heal for your own self. But, it’s not really realistic for humans. We’re so dependent on others no matter how much we wish we weren’t.”

“‘No man is an island,’ hmm?”

“Just because it’s a cliché doesn’t mean it’s not true.”

“I’ll keep that in mind when the shrink asks me about my relationship with my mother.”

Cindy laughed. “I wish I could tell you that that won’t happen because Freud

is pretty much debunked at this point, but Dr. Roche might very well ask you that.”

“Fantastic.”

“I’ll be sure to email you Dr. Roche’s information.”

“Thank you.”

They stopped as they came out of the woods next to the main road.

“Well, I’m going to go this way to head back to my office,” Cindy said, pointing up the road.

“My dorm is the other way.”

“I really hope you get the help you need, Misha. And if you ever need to talk to me or one of the peer counselors, please know that we are here for you.”

“I appreciate that. Truly.”

“Good luck.”

“Thank you.”

Misha watched her walk up the low grade hill for a few moments, but it was too hot to stand around outside being introspective. He started the walk back to his dorm—which was thankfully downhill—and tried not to panic about the idea of telling some total stranger (who was apparently a bit of a weirdo) all about his messed up problems.

His phone rang, creating a jarring countermelody to the already cacophonous symphony of cicadas. He forgot the heat and cicadas in an instant when he saw who was calling. He swiped to answer.

“Hey, baby, you okay?”

“Yeah,” Jensen said. “I’m good.”

“I’m glad.”

“That’s good too. To be honest I thought you’d start tearing me a new one for not filling you in on the details last night.”

“I thought about it, but I figured you had a good reason. You did have a good reason, right?”

“A reason...not a good one. I mean, just that what happened was bad.”

“I heard a cop got shot.”

“The killer. A disciple.”

“So that’s true. He was one of Russ’ lackeys.”

“There were two of them.”

“Two?”

“Yeah, but one's in jail and the other is dead.”

“I guess that would cause a bit of chaos, but why did you get sucked into it?”

“I’m the one who shot him.”

“Ah. That would do it.”

“There were a ton of witnesses though. It’s considered a justified shooting and there won’t be any charges.”

“You don’t sound happy. Not that taking a life—even if he was a deranged killer—is a happy thing, but...”

“Russ wanted me to do it. He orchestrated all of it. Somehow. He knew...

Misha...the woman in the garage. That I told you about a few days ago. I think she was one of his.”

Misha stopped walking, feeling suddenly chilled in the searing heat.

“What?”

“I don’t know for sure. The cop here just said something odd. Something about stealing my time. The woman said the same thing. That’s why I turned to look at the sheriff. I was confused by it. But he must have realized that Russ wanted him to say it so that I would recognize it. He thought Russ had set him up, which I guess he did, and that’s why he flipped out, took a hostage, and tried to get out of there. He thought I knew.”

“Jensen, you have to call the police immediately. Isn’t there security footage in the garages at our building? We need to find this woman.”

“It could be nothing.”

“You think it’s a damn coincidence?”

“No, no I don’t but...what am I going to tell them? A woman in the garage said something weird that a psycho killer in another state said?”

“Yes. Say that. I think with Russ we’ve gotten to the point that we can believe he’s capable of anything.”

“You’re right. I’ll contact someone about it when I get back. No one is going to work on a weekend for a hunch anyway. I’ll do it first thing Monday. I just want to get home and sleep in my own bed. I didn’t get done at the police department until after midnight—west coast time, and when I got to the motel I was dead tired. I couldn’t even shower or change clothes.

I just...fell on the bed and went right to sleep.”

“Are you feeling okay?”

“Better now. That I’m coming home.”

“When will you be home?”

“In a few hours. I’m calling from the airport.”

Misha felt his shoulders relax a little. “So, everything is going okay...with the transport?”

“I guess. I don’t know. After I was cleared I arranged my own flight home.

Middleburg Security said they would bring him back and one of the Portland agents is going to fly with him along with a couple more air marshals.”

“Won’t he be pissed?”

“So? We got what we wanted from him already. And...I’m done. I’m not doing anymore interviews. Even if he says there are more people out there...I can’t. At least, not right now. So, since I don’t need to keep him happy, I’m not going to be anywhere near him. He’s still in Green Falls because they want him to go over the evidence from the shed to verify the

identities of the victims. I doubt he’ll cooperate, but he’s not my problem anymore.”

Misha felt guilt and relief crashing against him like waves. The relief was a far bigger wave than the guilt though.

“I’m glad you’re coming home.”

“Me too. Oh, they’re boarding my flight. I gotta go. I’ll come down to Quantico tomorrow to see you.”

Misha nodded, tears wavering in his eyes. “I’d like that.”

“Bye, Mish. Love you.”

“I love you too.”

Jensen ended the call and Misha wiped the tears off his face. Keeping Jensen away from Russ was all he wanted. Well, that and to be with him.

And he would be as soon as tomorrow. Unless...

Misha changed his path and walked and then jogged and then ran toward the

dorm where the instructors stayed when they rotated in and out. He was disgustingly sweaty and panting when he entered the cool lobby of the main hall. The air was almost too cold as it hit his sweat. He shivered but otherwise ignored it as he found Agent Cooper's door. He rapped on it sharply several times and a few moments later, Cooper opened it, looking a little alarmed.

"Is everything alright? Collins, what's going on?"

"S-sir," Misha said, trying to catch his breath. He swallowed thickly. "Is it too late to get a weekend pass?"

Misha unlocked the door to the apartment in Bethesda and was greeted by a whining, excited, squirmy dog and her very wet tongue. Misha laughed and knelt down to be on her level.

"Hey, Charlie. Hey, little girl. Alright, alright, calm down. Sit. Sit!"

Charlie sat, but she didn't look happy about having to try to contain her zeal.

"Good girl. Where's your leash? We'll take you for a quick walk, okay?"

You wanna go outside? Come on. Be a good girl and help me find your leash."

Jensen had left it draped over the end of the couch. He didn't understand how the man could be OCD about everything in his life except when it came to the dog. Let her on the couch, on the bed, fed her treats at any time of the day, let her toys litter the floor so that when people got up to go to the bathroom in the middle of the night they got a giant chewed up pig ear right in the arch of their foot. Misha made a face still remembering how much that had hurt and clipped the leash onto Charlie's collar.

They took a walk around the four blocks of the neighborhood that wasn't on along the main roads. He didn't know what Jensen kept complaining about.

Charlie was totally fine and wasn't afraid to be outside or go past the sidewalk right in front of their building's door. More than likely Jensen was afraid for her and she picked up on that and responded to it. Apparently he

was going to have to start training the human as well.

When they got back Misha discovered that there was virtually nothing edible in the pantry or refrigerator. Jensen really had been eating nothing but take out. No wonder he'd gotten slightly pudgy around the middle. He decided to go shopping for some real food and cook a decent meal for him for when he got home. He knew he had time to do it because Jensen shouldn't be home for another three or four hours at least. Assuming he flew back into a Washington airport which is what Misha predicted because he wouldn't have a car at the Richmond airport and would need to take a cab or the Metro. Since he had so much time, he went all out.

He made fresh pasta from scratch and Bolognese sauce with extra basil because he knew Jensen liked it that way. He made a cheesecake, which might actually turn out like crap because he'd never tried it before, and put it in the refrigerator. He prepared a tray of buttered bread for toasting, with just the slightest hint of garlic because he didn't want to do anything that

would deter kissing or delay it with teeth brushing. He set the sauce on the warmer and put the uncooked pasta next to a pot of salted water that was ready to boil. He sat down on the couch, and then turned incredulous eyes on Charlie as she hopped up beside him.

"Excuse me. Just what do you think you're doing?"

She inched forward and put her chin on her knee, her tail wagging slightly.

Misha gave in and petted her head. "Spare the dog, spoil the man," he sighed. He glanced down at Charlie. "You're lucky I enjoy spoiling the man."

She raised her head suddenly, looking at the door. Misha turned his head, a large, goofy smile forming unbidden on his lips. Like he hadn't seen him or spoken to him in months. He stood up from the couch and let Charlie beat him across the room. The lock rattled, and then the door opened. Charlie partially blocked Jensen from coming in, so he knelt down to pet her.

"Hey, little girl. Look at you. You came all the way across the room on your own. You feeling good today? What's that smell?"

Jensen stood up and stepped inside. Misha had made it partway across the room, but he had stopped when he caught sight of Jensen's face, his emotions rendering him dumb. Jensen dropped his bag on the floor and shut the door behind him. He took one more step before he finally saw him.

"M—Hey. Hi, Misha."

"H-hi," Misha replied shyly.

Jensen laughed. "I feel like I just ran into my crush in the hall after history class."

Misha laughed too. "What, the jock has a crush on the weirdo outsider?"

"I wasn't a jock," Jensen said as he approached him.

"No?" Misha took a step closer too.

"Well, a little bit. But not like captain of the football team. And were you really the outsider weirdo?"

"Not really. More like the class clown. Though I tried to be a clown to cover up how weird I was. When the teachers called on me, I answered in an accent."

"What kind of accent?" Jensen asked, getting close enough to comb his fingers through Misha's hair.

Misha leaned into the touch. "You know, Russian, Indian...anything that would sound funny. But the teacher's couldn't really complain too much because I always answered correctly."

Jensen leaned in and gave him a prolonged, chaste kiss.

"Can I hear one?"

"I don't think it'll be as sexy as you're hoping."

“Everything about you is sexy.”

They kissed again and Misha forgot that they’d been having a conversation.

Jensen took his face in his hands and they kissed, lingering on every drag of lips and brush of tongues. Then Jensen’s hands moved to his back, stroking down his sides to his waist. He pulled their bodies together and Misha locked his arms around his neck. Jensen started guiding him backward and Misha pulled his lips away to speak. Jensen kept walking and moved his lips to his cheek, his jaw, down his neck.

“J-Jensen...din...dinner. Made. Ah...dinner.”

“It’ll wait.”

Jensen’s hands began pulling at his belt.

“But, it’s—mm,” he cut off as Jensen kissed his lips again. They reached the bedroom doorway and Jensen dropped Misha’s belt on the floor, hands returning to his shirt. Misha put his hands to Jensen’s waist to keep him back slightly, but all he did was open his mouth to him wider and let him inside deeper. They hit the bed and fell backward onto it. Unfortunately, the

bed was quite high off the floor and Misha’s back and only part of his butt hit the mattress, so they slid off awkwardly onto the floor. They started giggling and their first attempt to get off the floor failed.

“As I was saying,” Misha said as he held out his hands for Jensen to help pull him back to his feet. “I made dinner. And dessert. I don’t want it to be ruined.”

“Will we burn down the apartment building if we wait?”

Jensen kissed his cheek and pushed Misha’s shirt off his shoulders.

“No. Well, probably not. The sauce is on the warmer, but even on the warmer it’ll get overcooked and gross if it sits too long.”

“Will it last five minutes?” He opened Misha’s fly and pushed his pants

down.

“Yeah.”

“Great. ‘Cause I’m gonna last, maybe two.”

Misha laughed and let Jensen get him onto the bed. They shed their remaining clothes, allowing their fingertips to trail over every bit of skin that was revealed. They fumbled through the actions, so preoccupied with kissing that they couldn’t pay attention to much else. Jensen rolled to the side and pulled Misha partially on top of him. Their erections lined up and their soft groans were lost in each other’s mouths. Jensen took them both in hand and stroked them together. Misha gripped Jensen’s shoulder tightly, compulsively squeezing his deltoid muscle as they rolled together. It took longer than two minutes, but as promised, it was quick enough that the sauce would probably still be okay.

Misha panted and gave Jensen’s jaw weak kisses. Jensen put a hand in his hair and then ran his other hand down Misha’s spine. The feel of slick, sticky semen mixed with his sweat. He sat up partially and pushed his hand away.

“Oh, gross.”

“S-sorry,” Jensen wheezed. “Forgot.”

Misha faked gagging and then saw the reddened flesh on Jensen’s shoulder.

He pressed a finger against it and it turned white before turning red again.

“Whoops. I think you’re going to have a handprint shaped bruise there for a few days.”

“Worth it.”

“Yeah. So...what the hell happened in Oregon?”

Jensen sighed. Can we eat while I talk?”

“Of course.”

By the time Misha served dessert, his mind was reeling from the total mind fuck Russ had played on Jensen. He sat down heavily at the table and couldn't bring himself to do more than pick at the cheesecake. It was only so-so anyway.

“Do you really believe he orchestrated the whole thing? Or do you think he just got you to believe that he did?”

Jensen shrugged. “Either is possible. I just still can't get it out of my mind though. The woman in the garage. The fact that he may have been in contact with all of his disciples while in prison. Everything just suddenly seems like it's not in our control anymore. Like, he's exactly where he wants to be and is manipulating us all.”

Misha reached out and settled his hand on top of Jensen's.

“Baby, he only wants you to think that. The only power he has now is the power you let him have over you.”

“Do you really believe that? You're the one who wanted me to call the police about the woman in the garage immediately.”

“I know. I think we still should, just to be safe. But, we can't live our lives in fear of him. There's more than one way to kill a person, Jensen. We can't let him do this to us.”

Jensen nodded, looking like he was deep in thought. Then he covered Misha's hand with his other one and looked up to meet his eyes. He nodded again.

“You're right. He's in prison, he's staying in prison, and you and I...have our own life ahead of us. We can look out for each other. And take care of each other. And that man...shit, he's nothing, Misha. He's absolutely nothing and he was only something while I let him be.”

“Jensen, don't take this on yourself. You've saved an unknown amount of lives by dealing with him. By stopping Diaz and Darcy...Baby, I do believe it

was worth it. You were right. Don't doubt yourself. And if you want to keep interviewing Russ if you think you can save more, then I will support you this time. I know I only made it more difficult. And I won't do that again."

Jensen's brow creased and his chin trembled as he tried to speak, so he snapped his mouth shut, his jaw clenching tightly as he fought back tears.

"And, Jensen, if you want to stop...I'll support that too. It's not your responsibility. It's okay to not want to do it. It's okay to be afraid to do it.

And I will fight anyone who tries to force you to do something you don't want to anymore."

Jensen tried to smile, but his control broke and tears fell down his cheeks.

"I...I...if there are people out there that still need to be helped. If there are monsters still out there killing people. I could help. I should help." Jensen let out a sob and clenched Misha's hands tighter. "But I don't want to, Misha. I don't want to. I don't want to."

"Shh, shh." Misha got out of his seat and pulled Jensen into his arms. The man wrapped himself tightly around Misha's torso and sobbed into his shoulder. "It's okay, Jensen. You don't have to. It's over. We're done with Russ. It's over. And it's okay. You're not a bad person. You're the best man I've ever known."

Jensen cried harder and Misha held him tighter. His kissed the top of his

head and then rested his cheek on it. He rubbed his hands up and down Jensen's back and let him cry. Misha knew he'd be miserable tonight, but everything would look better in the morning. Once Jensen realized he was finally free, he'd be whole again.



Week 6

Monday, August 11, 2014

Jensen clicked on the print icon again, and again nothing happened. He growled softly and Jared stopped talking over the phone.

“Something wrong?” Jared asked.

“Fuckin’ technology.”

“Yeah, okay, well while you deal with that, I’ve got to get to into the office.

Though I’m not sure why I’m going anymore. We have the connection we need.”

“Obtained illegally.”

“But not by FBI direction. Is there any reason for me to stay?”

“No, I guess not, unless...how far back do their digitized records go?”

“Not that far actually. Only about ten years or so.”

“Well, maybe before you leave, you can look into the old paper records. See if there are any names on the Lilac House list that match old clients and if there are any shady transactions.”

“But why? Ella only got here a year and a half ago.”

“True, but maybe she just modernized their techniques. Podvodnik has owned Potomac First for fifteen years. Maybe he’s been laundering money for rich people through The Lilac House for that long.”

“Mn, okay. Alona has access to the old filing room, she can get me in. Any idea yet on what the money is being laundered for? Is it just for evading taxes?”

“I don’t think so. After the money comes back from the charity, it all went into one account. It wasn’t distributed back to the same number of incoming accounts. Also, the withdrawal from the final account is a lump sum in cash. So, unless a bunch of one percenters are meeting to split up a wad of cash on alternating Thursdays, I can’t imagine the money is going back to them. I think they’ve devised a way to use their own money to make a purchase that doesn’t leave a paper trail back to them that they bought it.”

“Drugs.”

“Yeah...but this seems a little extreme.”

“Any theories then?”

“Not really.”

“Any theories on how to find out?”

“Well...we’ve never actually talked with the six double dippers. I could just —”

“Call them up and ask them what they’re using their secret hidden money for?”

“Well, not exactly. We have their addresses. Maybe I should just drop by and have a little chat. Stir up the bushes a bit and see if any snakes slither out.”

“You want some backup? I could come out with you. Call in sick.”

“Nah, I’ll be okay. Even if they get spooked they won’t do anything to a federal agent on their own doorstep. You go ahead and look through those old records and see if we should add any other names to our persons of interest list.”

“You got it. Be careful.”

“I will. You too.”

“Yeah, those old files could be covered with spiders.”

“I meant with Alona. The apparent hacker genius PI wannabe.”

“Oh, right...yeah...things have cooled off between us anyway.”

“Why?”

“Well, the night she brought the evidence about The Lilac House’s finances, we, uh, engaged in a little post-information sharing activities—”

“Good lord,” Jensen said, putting a hand to his forehead.

“And, uh...Gen showed up.”

Jensen sat up straight. “Wait, what? Gen? As in Genevieve Cortese?”

“Yeah, that would be the one. Anyway, there was a bit of scene in the hallway, and Alona left not long after. Friday it was a little awkward at work. It’ll probably just get worse when I just go to her today to ask her a favor getting into the records rooms.”

“Wait, wait, this happened on Thursday? What did she say? What did you say? Why didn’t you tell me until now?”

“Well, it was late Thursday and I knew you had to get up early to deal with the whole Russ thing. And I wasn’t going to call you with my personal bullshit while you were dealing that psycho and...his bullshit.”

“I appreciate the concern, but, dude. What happened?”

Jared sighed. “She cried. That’s not fair. If she was angry I could be angry too. But she cried.”

“So. You take her back?”

“No. No, no. No, there was no—no.”

“Sooooooo...no, then?”

“Look, I’m not going to take her back just because she apologized for getting scared and handling the situation poorly and that she thinks she made a huge mistake and wants to try again.”

Jensen scratched his eyebrow. He continued to listen to the silence on the

other end of the line. Then he rubbed an eye with a hand. Finally he said,

“What?”

“I...I don’t know. I mean, she kind of said everything I wanted to hear her say for months now.”

“So, what’s the problem? Alona? Do you, you know...have love type feelings for her?”

Jared was quiet for a moment. “N-no. I don’t really think I do. But I think I could. I just don’t see why I should jeopardize what I could have with Alona for someone who may ditch me again when I become inconvenient.”

“Well, one reason why is because Alona doesn’t even know your real name.

But. It’s going to come down to trust. And if you really can’t ever trust Gen again, then it won’t work no matter how much either of you try.”

“I just...” Jared let out a huff of determined breath. “Look. I pictured marrying Gen. We hadn’t known each other long, but I had one of those

‘she’s the one’ type feelings. And I saw a house and kids and three dogs and waking up next to her and growing old with her. I was in, man. We weren’t even living together or anything and I was thinking about engagement rings. And then she ended it. So easily. How could she be ‘the one’ if she didn’t feel the same way about me? That’s how it works, right? Two people

can only be ‘the one’ if both people feel it?”

“I don’t know, man. I think the whole idea of ‘the one’ is movie sentimentality.”

“Isn’t Misha ‘the one’ for you?”

“If we had never gone to Elton, and I had never met Misha, I think I would have eventually met someone else and gotten married. I would have loved that person and been happy with them. The people you meet in life are based on circumstance—you don’t meet everyone alive on the planet.

Someone could be happily married and yet there's another person who they never met who would have actually been better for them. But that doesn't mean who they are married to isn't a valid, happy relationship. You meet people and some affect you more than others. And those are the people you choose to be with. You don't worry about the person in Iowa you never met."

"Who's in Iowa?"

"No one, Jared. It's an analogy."

"So, you're saying I'm right to let Gen go. Because there is no 'the one.'"

"No. I'm saying that you met someone who has affected you in a way that no other woman has before. So, maybe you ought to consider cutting her a little slack because no one is ever going to be perfect and people will make really stupid mistakes. Honestly, Misha..." Jensen cleared his throat and glanced around. No one was looking at him, but he lowered his voice anyway. "Misha hurt me. He full on pulled my beating heart out of my chest and then slapped me across the face with it like it was a dead fish."

Jared huffed out a laugh, which was the reaction Jensen had been aiming for.

"There were times when I imagined him coming to me and apologizing, groveling to be taken back—and sometimes I would and sometimes I wouldn't. When it actually happened, there was nothing terribly dramatic about it. He did make a bold assumption that I would take his ass back, but I did, so I guess he assumed right. And the thing is, Misha apologized for

hurting me, but he didn't apologize for doing it. Because he had to do what was best for himself at the time.

"It's hard to make sacrifices for other people. Not everyone can do it easily.

And it's not fair to judge someone for not being able to do what you could do. I know you were willing to give up your whole life here to go to Boston to be with her, but not everyone is capable of that. No matter how much we love someone. I don't think I could have moved to Elton for Misha. But maybe we could have found a compromise if he hadn't decided to come here.

“Ah, sorry, I’m rambling. I guess I’m just saying that you can’t hold it against people for not behaving or reacting the way you would to situations.”

Jensen listened to the silence on the other end and tried to distract himself from the worry that he’d really pissed Jared off by clicking the print icon again. He heard Jared inhale.

“Wow. Okay. That...actually makes a lot of sense. Thanks.”

“Um, sure. Any time. So, are you going to call Gen?”

“I can’t think about that right now. I need to finish at Cohen & Cohen, and maybe tell Alona the truth, and then I can—”

“Jared, you can’t tell her just because you stop working at Cohen & Cohen.

As long as this investigation is ongoing, you can’t compromise it by revealing what you did there. We could still be working this case weeks, or even months after you stop working there undercover.”

“Oh. Right. Well, you know what? I’m done with women then.”

“Switching to men?” Jensen asked with a snort.

“No. Just...giving up. I don’t need love. I am an island. Is that the phrase?

Every man is his own island or something?”

“No...I don’t think that’s it.”

“It doesn’t matter. Oh, gotta go. The Assiterrors are looking for me.”

“Assisterrors?”

“Brock and Dylan. They’re assistants and terrors.”

“Why not terrortants?”

“Because that sounds stupid.”

Jensen rolled his eyes.

“Okay, later. Tell me how the meetings with the double dippers go!”

Jensen hung up the phone with a shake of his head. It was kind of amazing no one had figured Jared out yet. Looking at his screen, he saw a message indicating that his document had been successfully sent to the printer. He gave a small fist pump and stood up to walk around the cubicles to where the printers were located. He looked over his list of names and addresses, and Osric came up to use one of the classified printers.

“You know, you can keep lists on your phone,” Osric said as he inserted his access card into the reader.

Jensen side-eyed him. “I like crossing things off lists.”

“You can do that on a phone too.”

“People have become too reliant on technology. There’s nothing wrong with doing things in analog on occasion.”

“That’s not the correct use of that term.”

Jensen glared at him as he walked by and Osric just gave him a friendly smirk. Jensen swung by Bob’s office on his way out.

“Bob, I’m going to do some interviews.”

“You taking anyone with you?”

“No.”

“Oh. Should you?”

“Don’t worry, Bob. I got it.”

Bob grunted and Jensen took that for consent to his plan. He got into his Bu car and drove to one of the DC addresses. Parker Lennon lived in Spring Valley, a neighborhood that was in the northwest corner of the district near

the Potomac River. The average income for the area was well over six figures. These people weren't millionaires like could be found in New York's pricier neighborhoods, but they definitely had a lot of disposable income. Jensen found a parking spot on the street a block away, but put his parking placard on the dash just in case the area was permit parking only.

The sidewalks were clean and the small lawns in each yard were green and well-maintained even in the summer heat. Lennon's home was a three story, narrow brownstone with a kind of mini-turret on one side. He walked up the steps to the front door and rang the bell. He heard footsteps from within, and then the door was opened by a young black woman in an actual maid uniform. Jensen pulled out his credentials.

"Hi. My name is Special Agent Jensen Ackles. I'm with the FBI. I'm looking for Parker Lennon."

"Meestor Len-non is at work," the woman—girl—said with a thick accent.

"I see. Is there anyone currently home?"

"Miz Al-lee-son is here."

"May I speak with her, please?"

"One moment."

The girl shut the door and left Jensen on the stoop. Jensen puzzled over how old she was. At first she had looked to be in her twenties, but there was just something about the way she carried herself and the way her face moved when she spoke that she seemed a little younger. Maybe eighteen.

He waited for five minutes before he started to wonder if the girl had forgotten about him. Three minutes after that, the door opened again, wider this time, and the maid indicated for him to come inside.

Jensen stepped in and looked around the brownstone. The floors were dark wood and the walls painted dark browns and maroons. The ceilings were stark white and gave an odd sensation of being trapped in a box. The

furniture was heavy and ornate and knickknacks that looked cheap but probably cost more than his car littered the space. Quite frankly it reminded him of the gaudiness that had been Misha's mother's side of the house in Elton. Only without all the pastels.

The maid led him to a room on the front of the house that he was certain must be an actual "sitting room." He bet they called it the parlor. A woman in a cream colored silk robe was standing by a large bay window with her back to Jensen. Her blondish hair was cut short and looked styled with a whole slew of products.

"Miz Len-non. Meester Ackles."

The woman turned from the window, the sunlight hitting her at just the right angles. She put a hand to her bosom in a mockery of surprise.

"Well, I am quite surprised to find the FBI darkening my door, although a face as pretty as yours really just brightens it. I hope you can forgive me for looking a fright; I just woke up moments ago."

Jensen nodded slightly. She was wearing enough makeup to last his sister for a year and had probably been up for at least a couple of hours to apply it.

"I hope I'm not disturbing your morning, ma'am."

"No, not at all." She crossed the room and held out a hand, palm down.

"I'm Mrs. Lennon."

Jensen shook her hand awkwardly, refusing to kiss it.

"Won't you sit down? Nicole, will you please bring us some coffee?"

"Oh, I don't—"

"Yes, ma'am," the maid said and left with a little curtsy.

Jensen tried not to make a face. Rich people were weird; who made their maids curtsy? He sat down on a stiff and very uncomfortable Victorian style

chair upholstered in an itchy burgundy fabric. Mrs. Lennon lounged in a casually carefree manner on a divan that he knew was meant to accentuate her figure and make her look graceful but was probably also as uncomfortable as fuck.

“Now, Agent...”

“Ackles.”

“Agent Ackles. What can I do for the FBI?”

She smiled and it wasn't too hard to read between the lines of her offer.

Jensen just gave her a bland, polite smile.

“I wanted to speak with your husband, Parker Lennon.”

“Oh, my. He's not in any trouble, is he?”

“Oh, no. Nothing like that. He's just a client at the investment firm Cohen & Cohen. It recently came to our attention that some of their clients have fallen victim to some fraudulent securities.”

“Heavens. I don't know anything about our finances. Parker handles all of that. Is Cohen & Cohen responsible for it?”

“We don't believe so. It's a national scam that originated in LA. Our counterparts out there are handling the dismantling of that group. We're just trying to identify the potential victims, and see if they noticed anything unusual happening if and when they invested in those securities. For instance, did they notice that for some reason it appeared that two separate transactions were made to deposit the money into their accounts.”

“Well, I'm afraid I can't help you with that. Like, I said, Parker handles the money.”

“Oh, I'm sure you handle a bit of the money yourself.” Jensen gave her a grin that she responded to exactly the way he intended her to. She laughed a little

loudly and sent him a flirty look.

“Oh, Agent, he wouldn’t still be husband if he didn’t let me play a little bit.”

Jensen managed a polite laugh. “So, you definitely know where your money is kept. Which bank...”

“Oh, yes. We use Bank of America. Sometimes I’m forced to use their platinum card when my black AmEx isn’t accepted.”

She laughed again and he smiled and nodded.

“Do you also have an account with Potomac First?”

Something happened to her face around the eyes and mouth. It was very subtle, but she suddenly looked a little plastic. Then she smiled bigger and shook her head.

“I’m not familiar with the bank. I certainly don’t have a card for it, I know that much. Is it related to the fraud—um—the fraud?”

“That bank was more susceptible to the breach because they didn’t have the same resources as the national chains. I just wanted to check to make sure that wouldn’t be a problem for you and your husband.”

“Oh, no. Not us. I’ve never heard of that bank. So. Oh! Nicole. You can set the tray over here.”

The young girl carried a heavy, silver tray laden with all the accoutrements usually associated with tea trays on British dramas.

“Agent Ackles, do you take cream or sugar in your coffee?”

“Just a little cream.”

“Okay, Nicole?”

Jensen sat awkwardly while the young maid poured his coffee, added a dab of cream from a tiny, delicate porcelain pitcher, and then stirred it with a

teeny tiny spoon. She handed him the cup and saucer and he thanked her.

He took a sip of the coffee (which was really damn good) as he watched

Nicole prepare Mrs. Lennon coffee without direction. Apparently she had done this many times before. Mrs. Lennon dismissed her without thanking her, and gave Jensen another smile before blowing lightly over the contents of her cup.

“Now. Where were we? As I said, I don’t know much about the finances, but if you want to wait to speak with Parker, you can. He should be home from work in a few hours. And I’m sure we can find some way to pass the time.”

She took a sip of her coffee, trying to be sexy was Jensen’s best guess, but the liquid was too hot and she burned herself, cursing as she spilled the drink. She’d had so much cream put in it that it barely discolored her robe, but it was enough to upset her.

“Nicole!” she shouted. “I need some club soda immediately!”

Jensen offered her a napkin from the tray and she gave him a tight smile as she began dabbing at the spill.

“She always makes it too hot. I tell her again and again not to serve it so hot. I swear. It’s impossible to find good help these days.”

Jensen didn’t comment on Nicole’s competency; he found the coffee to be perfect.

“So, where did you find Nicole?”

Mrs. Lennon looked up, not masking her frown well, and then returned to dabbing.

“She was recommended to us,” the woman muttered.

Nicole came into the room with a glass of club soda and a napkin. She began to help clean Mrs. Lennon’s robe. The woman looked up at Jensen.

“I’m sorry, I’m going to have to change. So, if there’s nothing else you need?”

“No, no. I’ll just leave my card for your husband and he can contact me at his leisure.”

“I’ll be sure to let him know you stopped by.”

Jensen stood up and handed Mrs. Lennon his card.

“I’ll see myself out. Thank you for the coffee, Nicole. It was perfect.”

The maid looked up at him, and since Mrs. Lennon was still focused on her robe, he gave the girl a wink. She smiled, but then rolled her lips in to hide it. She went back to work on Mrs. Lennon’s robe. Jensen felt he was definitely no longer needed or wanted in the room, so he headed for the foyer. He glanced around the place on his way out, not sure what he was looking for. Just as he got to the door he heard noise above him and looked up. A light skinned woman in a maid uniform was carrying a basket of laundry across the landing upstairs. How many maids were needed for a relatively small house? He shook his head and left.

The other DC address was in the Palisades, only a five minute drive from the Lennons. However, no one answered the door at the Denison’s. He decided to drive out to Potomac, Maryland which was to the northwest of Bethesda, about fifteen minutes from his apartment on the DC border. The residents in Potomac were the Pellmans, one of the people identified by Pellegrino as racist assholes.

When he pulled up into the driveway of the large house, no less than five Latino men were working on the landscaping. They paid him no attention as he walked up to the door. He rang the bell once, and then again a few seconds later. Heavy, footsteps came from within. When the door opened it was by a thin, severe looking woman in purple dress pants and a white blouse. She didn’t look like she was heavy enough to make the kind of noise he had heard, but her shoes were heeled, so maybe she’d been clomping in them.

“Yes?” the woman asked sharply.

Jensen pulled out his credentials hurriedly, a little afraid of what the woman might do if she thought he was selling something she didn’t want.

“I’m Special Agent Jensen Ackles with the FBI.”

The woman raised an eyebrow, but she didn’t look impressed.

“I was looking for Rebecca Pellman.”

“That’s me. What’s this about?”

“I don’t know if you were informed, but the investment firm you use—”

“Recently discovered some fraudulent securities. Yes, I know. Cohen & Cohen reached out as soon as they found out about it. They’re responsible; that’s why we chose to invest with them. However, since we never invested in one of the bad securities it didn’t affect us. Is that all?”

“Um. Do you have a bank account with Potomac First?”

“No.”

Jensen stood still, a little thrown off his game. Behind the woman, Jensen saw a little boy with a dark head peek his head around a corner to look at him. He smiled at him.

“Is that your son?”

Rebecca Pellman glanced back and the little boy gasped and disappeared.

She turned back.

“Hardly.”

Jensen’s brow creased slightly. Even if the kid was a friend of one of her children, that was an odd reaction. Unless it was because the little boy’s skin had been a little too tan to be white. Well, Anglo-Saxon white.

“Is there anything else you need? The situation at Cohen & Cohen doesn’t affect us, so we can’t help you with your investigation. But thank you for your concern. Good day.”

The woman shut the door in his face.

The fuuuuuck?

Jensen was tempted to ring the bell again, but he didn’t know what he would say to her. He walked back to his car, pondering the conversation. It was hard to tell if she was hiding someone, or if she was just a bitch. He decided to save the six addresses in Virginia for tomorrow and returned to the office to deal with some of the administrative nightmare of squaring away the use of their illegally obtained material on The Lilac House from their “anonymous” source.

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Jared closed the bottom drawer on the final filing cabinet in his row. He stood up and looked over the top of the cabinets to the row on the other side. The top of Alona’s head barely cleared the top of the cabinets.

“Find anything?” Jared asked.

Alona tilted her head back to see him. “Nothing past 2010.”

“Where are all the old records? These are only four years old. Even if they don’t keep everything, for tax purposes most companies would keep records at least seven years back.”

“Well, there is another storage room upstairs. When I was there I was looking for some old insurance files for an employee, but I didn’t see any filing cabinets. It was just boxes, so I don’t know if client records would be stored like that.”

“Is it locked?”

“Yes, but I have a key.”

“Do we still have time to check?”

Alona checked her watch. “Eh. The calls are forwarding to Britt; she can handle it a while longer.”

Jared and Alona left the filing room and walked over to the elevators. On the way, Drake from the IT department smiled at Alona, and gave Jared a glare. He ignored him and held the doors open for Alona to step onto the lift. Alona was wearing a white top with a skirt that came to her knees, but was very full and kind of flouncy. It apparently also had pockets as she put

a hand into the folds of the fabric. She pulled out a set of keys, but something else was in her hand she quickly stuffed it back in her pocket and her face turned pink.

“What was that?” Jared asked as they stepped off the elevator.

“Nothing. Well, something I meant to give to you earlier so you could put it in your desk.”

“What is it?” he asked with a laugh.

“Nothing! Now, shh. We don’t want to bother Mr. Cohen or Mr.

Pellegrino.”

Jared just noticed that they had gotten off on the top floor. Alona led them around the corner toward Mark’s office, but then opened a door across the hall. The room was medium sized and mostly full with stacked boxes and a couple of overflowing bookshelves.

“Sheesh,” Jared said as he shut the door. “This looks like a fire hazard.”

“Probably is. Apparently the late Mr. Cohen didn’t like computers and liked to do everything by hand. When the company was losing clients because they couldn’t keep up with the changing market, he brought in Mark Pellegrino as a consultant to get their systems and practices updated. He brought the company into the twenty-first century, and that’s why Mr.

Cohen hired him on as CEO before he retired.”

“How do you know all this?”

“I do talk to people other than you. And people here like to talk. They’re so snoopy.”

Jared shot her a look, which she ignored.

“So what’s in your pocket?”

“Nothing.”

“You said it was for me.”

“I thought you said we were looking for something,” she said, trailing a hand over boxes as she wove between the stacks. “At least these are all labeled.”

“Oh, come on. Show me.”

She sighed. “Fine. But, this is kind of an awkward place to show you.”

“Is it a sex toy?” Jared ask with a laugh.

Alona kind of tilted her head.

“Oh my God. It’s a sex toy.”

He hurried over to her side. “What is it?!” he whispered.

“It’s not really a sex toy. It’s just a condom.” She pulled out two packets that looked like normal squares, except there was a little rectangular section attached to the top of each.

“A condom?” he asked, feeling disappointed. He took one in his hand and squeezed the top portion lightly. A liquid-y gel moved around under his fingers. “Is this lube?”

“Yeah. It’s a new kind of condom that comes with a lube packet attached to

it.”

“How is this exciting?”

“Well, straight guys don’t usually carry around lube with them. So, if you have these on hand, we don’t have to worry about it.”

“Why do we need it? We haven’t before. Is it bad? Have I been hurting you?”

“No, no. You get me plenty wet,” she said with a grin and turned away to hide her face, looking at boxes again.

“So, why the lube?”

“Well...I thought maybe we could try having sex in a way that wouldn’t matter how long you are. Like...you know, you can go as...et-hmm. Deep as you like and not worry about running into anything.”

“But...if it’s slipperier...won’t I just...run into something harder?”

“Not if there’s nothing there.”

Jared looked at her. Her face was quite red now. “I don’t get it.”

“Geez, Jared. There’s more than one option when it comes to women, you know?”

“You want this much lube in your mouth?” he asked, utterly perplexed.

She jutted her jaw out to the side in annoyance and heaved a sigh showing she was trying to be patient with him. “Okay, you have three options with women.”

“Three...three...oh! OH! You mean...” He leaned forward, bracing an arm on the stack of boxes next to her. “You mean like,” he whispered, ‘butt stuff?’”

Alona gave him an unamused look. “Anal, Jared. Say it with me: anal sex.”

“No, no, I can’t say it. I think of anal sex and all I can see is my best friend banging his boyfriend.”

Alona stared at him for a long moment. Finally she said, “I don’t know how to respond to that.”

Jared waved his hands. “No, sorry. I mean...I just spent a month listening to them bang through the walls, you know? Like...in my head anal sex is like this loud, wild headboard slamming kind of thing.”

Alona let out a small laugh. “And that doesn’t interest you?”

“I...” Jared tilted his head. “Well...” He looked back at her. “You’d want to try it?”

“Well, I have actually done it before, so it wouldn’t be like a first time thing for me. But if you’re not comfortable with it...”

“No! I mean yes. I mean, I could try it. We should try it. We could try it now.”

He stepped forward to kiss her, mostly joking, and she slapped playfully at him.

“Do not! Stop, Jared!” she giggled. “We are up here conducting an investigation. Behave yourself.”

Jared grinned and stepped away to look at the dates marked on another set of boxes, smacking her ass as he went by. She jumped and let out a squeak, and then glared at him.

“You put those condoms away and we’ll see if you can come over sometime this week.”

“If not you can come to me,” Jared said, finding a box marked as the second quarter from fiscal year 2003.

“I don’t know...” Alona said hesitantly. “I don’t think I’d want to run the risk



of seeing anymore exes.”

Jared set the lid of the box aside and winced slightly.

“Yeah, about that. I’m sorry you had to see that.”

“It’s okay. We all have baggage. I still got my Chinese food, so it wasn’t a total disaster. What are we looking for?”

“Any clients that made deposits into two bank accounts. Or the same bank account with two different routing numbers.”

“Right. Jared, there are thousands of pages here.”

“I know. But, if there are more people involved in this, or used to be involved, we need to know their names.”

“Who is ‘we?’”

Jared’s eyes widened, but he was looking at the paperwork and had his back to Alona. “You and me.”

“Oh. Right.”

They searched through the boxes for close to an hour before Jared finally came across something. A man named Donald Sirano made deposits to two different bank accounts semi-monthly for most of 2004. The name stood out because it was the same surname as one of the double dippers. This didn’t look terribly suspicious though. The bank account numbers were different, and he’d been told before that a lot of clients deposited money into different savings and checking account. He pulled out his phone and scanned through his notes until he found some of the screenshots he’d taken of the reports from the money transfer program. He compared the routing number he knew to belong to Potomac First to the numbers in the 2004 file.

It was the same. So, he was making deposits to Potomac First, but he wasn’t trying to hide it. Maybe ten years ago they didn’t have the technology to hide it. Or they thought laundering it through the charity was enough to keep their hands clean. Or, it could be completely innocent. He took a picture of the

man's accounts and name anyway.

"Have you found anything?" Alona asked, coming up beside him. "I probably should get back to the desk."

"Oh, right, of course. I don't want to keep you here too long. I found someone who might be related to the double dippers and he had an account with Potomac First. It's not much, but it is a connection."

He put the files back into the last box he'd opened and put the lid on. Alona turned to walk to the door, but he gently grabbed her arm and pulled her back.

"What?" she asked, laughing.

"Come on. We can hide out and kiss in the closet a little bit."

Alona laughed again and stood on her tiptoes to receive his kiss. He licked into her parted lips and wrapped his arms around her waist so that he could pick her up and stand up straight. She giggled as she tried to kiss him, arms around his neck and feet dangling off the floor. He pushed some of the

boxes onto the floor and set her on the remaining ones that put her at just right the height. Her legs spread to allow him to stand between them and he cupped her face as he kissed her repeatedly, biting her lips softly. Her nails dragged against the fabric of his shirt. He pressed in closer and his erection pressed against the thin material of her panties. He could feel her heat. He put a hand on her knee and slid it up her leg, his fingers seeking the wet crux between her legs. She pushed back on him slightly.

"Wait, wait...are we—mm. Are we really going to do this in a storage room at work?"

Jared pulled out one of the condoms. "I don't know about you but I can't wait to try."

Alona's face fell open into scandalized shock, but she was also amused.

Then she recovered and nodded.

“Let’s do it,” she said before kissing him again and then sliding off the boxes. She leaned forward onto the boxes and looked over her shoulder at Jared.  
“You know what you’re doing?”

“Um. Yes and no.”

“I’ll help you. First you’re going to have to take your jaw off the floor.”

“Shut up,” he grumbled.

He pushed her skirt over her hips and knelt down behind her. He fingered her through her panties, grinning as she gasped and whined softly. He pulled the light blue fabric down her thighs and leaned forward to lick at her. She hummed and squirmed, the boxes shifting precariously.

“Come on. We don’t have time for a half hour of foreplay. Just open the packet and start with one finger.”

“Right.”

He kissed the pale, flawless globe of one of her butt cheeks as he opened the packet. She giggled.

“Did you just kiss my ass?”

“Hush.”

He put more lube on his finger than he thought was probably needed, but like hell if he was going to risk making this terrible for her. He rubbed his fingers through her natural slick and she moaned and shifted her hips appreciatively. Then he drew his hand up, up...he wasn’t sure if he would need to use one to pull her cheeks apart so he could see—and then he felt it.

“Oh.”

“There you go. Start easy.”

Jared circled his finger around the tight bud for a moment. Was this weird?

Nah. He pushed his finger in partway. She jumped slightly.

“Does it hurt?” he asked in alarm.

“No, no. It just startled me.” She let out a soft laugh. “I guess I’m nervous.

It’s been a while since I’ve done this.”

“Do you not like it?”

“Well, it didn’t hurt. It wasn’t mind blowing. I don’t have a prostate like your best friend.”

“Don’t talk about him.”

“I thought you couldn’t think of anal sex without thinking of him?”

“Of him with his boyfriend. Fiancé. Whatever. Not with me. I’m not involved in this scenario...oh, wow.”

Jared’s finger slid all the way in and it was definitely different. The texture was different, it was a little tighter, but the biggest different was the way the muscle clenched around his finger. The vagina didn’t do that.

“Well, you’re involved in this scenario,” she said a little breathily. “How is it so far?”

He pushed his finger in and out and it glided smoothly. “Kind of awesome.”

“Great. Now, try a second finger.”

“Are you sure?”

“You think you’re going to get your massive cock in there without working it open a little bit first?”

“Wh-eh. No. Sorry.”

“It’s okay. Keep going. Feels good.” She moved a hand between her legs and

lightly fingered her clit as he worked. Two fingers went in okay. He could even scissor them and feel her start to stretch out a bit. Fitting a third seemed impossible.

“It’ll go,” Alona said, undulating her hips against her fingers and back onto his. Come on, chooki, I’m feeling good. Make me feel better.”

“What’s chooki?” Jared asked as he eased in a third finger and watched her face carefully to make sure she didn’t flinch with pain.

“Just a pet name. You want me to call you shnookems instead?”

“No,” he said smiling, pushing his fingers inside her heat and finally feeling something clawing in him to hurry up and get his cock inside her. “I’ve just never heard it before.”

“It’s Hebrew.”

“You’re Jewish?” he asked.

“Is that odd?”

“I guess I just don’t picture Jewish girls with blonde hair.”

“We come in all colors, hon.”

“Alona...”

“Yes?”

“Are you ready? Can I...” he trailed off, losing his words at the thought of sinking into something so hot and tight.

“Go for it, schnookems.”

He gave her a smile and stood up. She adjusted herself on the boxes while he undid his fly and rolled on the condom. He used the remaining lube to slick up his length and positioned himself behind her.

“Go slowly at first,” Alona said. “Also, I’m not sure how steady these boxes are.”

“Okay.”

Jared lined up and pushed against her entrance. He was met with resistance so he stopped immediately.

“Um...I don’t think this will work. I think I might be too big.”

“Jared, if you got three fingers in, it will go. You just have to apply pressure and keep going until...well, it pops in.”

“Pops in...” he repeated on a wheezy breath.

He tried again and pushed gently, slowly.

“Come on, Jared, you’ve got to put a little chutzpah in it.”

He laughed and the movement made his lower half push forward a little and then—

“Oh, God,” Jared said excitedly. “I’m in!”

“Okay, kinda of killing the mood. Just give me a second.” He froze, worried he’d hurt her. She shifted a bit and then settled on her forearms. “Okay.

Keep going.”

Jared put his hands on her hips and slowly guided himself inside. He kept going and going, and then he felt himself snug against her ass, his balls pressed against her warm skin. He was completely sheathed inside her. It

felt like he might have discovered a new kind of drug.

“Jesus, Alona...this feels fucking amazing. No offense with the Jesus thing.”

Alona laughed. “You are such a weirdo. Now come on, fuck me.”

“Does it hurt?”

“Not at all. So come on.”

Jared began to move and he realized he might never have had real sex before in his life. She was so amazingly tight, even when he got up a rhythm. There was no sense of getting pushed back out like with vaginal sex, it was more like getting sucked back in each time. He leaned over her and kissed her neck as he continued to fuck into her ass. He slipped one hand around her hip and rubbed his index finger over her clit. She bit her lip to hold back her moans and pushed back against him. Their pace increased with unspoken synchronicity and Jared increased the pace of his finger when he felt himself getting close. Alona started letting out soft little cries of pleasure and Jared drove in harder.

“Oh, Ja-Jared...coming, coming!”

Jared groaned and came with her as her body stiffened and gripped him tighter. He pumped in and out a few more times, riding out the orgasm.

Then he pushed in one final time, trying to memorize how hot and wet and tight it felt. Then something shifted and Alona let out a squeal as they tilted forward. The front edge of the bottom box bent under their weight and tipped them and the other boxes forward. They both yelled out in surprise and hit the floor with a thud, other boxes falling down around them. They lay there for a moment, papers floating down to settle around them. Then they looked at each other and burst out laughing.

The door swung open. “Is someone in here?”

Alona and Jared scrambled to their feet, adjusting clothes and hair. Jared shoved the condom into his pocket and Mark walked far enough into the room to see them.

“I heard a commotion. What happened? What are you two...” He trailed off as he took in their flushed faces, labored breathing, and disarrayed clothing.

He pursed his lips in annoyance, clearly figuring out what they had been up

to.

“Ms. Tal, can you return to your post?”

“Y-yes, sir.”

Alona straightened her skirt and scooted toward the door. She looked back at Mark.

“A-am I going to be fired?” she asked in an uncharacteristically timid voice.

Mark’s face softened slightly. “No. But we will need to discuss the level of professionalism that is expected at this firm.”

“Yes, sir.” Alona ran out the door.

Mark looked back at Jared and his face hardened again.

“What are you doing in here? Aside from the obvious.”

“I was looking for older records that—”

“I thought I told you not to snoop anymore unless you had a warrant, Agent.”

“I’m not snooping. And I wasn’t in your personal office. This is where the old records for the company are stored. I was looking for a pattern of—”

“Save it. I think you’ve been here long enough that if you were going to find something, you would have found it. I don’t think Cohen & Cohen requires the services of the FBI any longer.”

Jared sighed. “Mark...”

“No, don’t ‘Mark’ me and try to convince me of anymore bullshit. You ‘just got out of a bad relationship and couldn’t even fathom being with someone else.’ You’re a coward and that’s worse than most things.”

Jared drew himself up, lips tightening with anger. Mark was just pissed that



he'd slept with Alona instead of him.

"You shouldn't let your personal feelings influence the case. Dismissing me now—"

"No," Mark said, stepping close, "you shouldn't have let your personal feelings influence the case. You can be assured I will be informing your superiors of this disgraceful behavior."

Nauseating worry made Jared's whole body feel a little weird. This was not good. This was so not—

"Unless..." Mark said, stepping closer and sliding a hand around Jared's waist to grab his ass. "You can convince me not to."

The worrisome feeling mostly went away. Jared stepped back.

"Seriously? You're going to report me unless I sleep with you?"

Mark gave him a smile.

“I think I’ll ‘resign’ from Cohen & Cohen.”

Mark shrugged and stepped back. “Suit yourself. It’s your career.”

“Yeah, you just propositioned a federal agent and attempted to blackmail him. How do you think that’s going to play out for you?”

Mark pushed his lips together and thought for a moment. “Okay, so I won’t tell your superiors about Alona.”

Jared huffed and kind of rolled his eyes.

“But you’re going straight to your office, packing up your things, and you will not be returning here as Jared Bell.”

Jared nodded. Mark started to turn to leave, but Jared called out to him.

“Mark, tell me. Are you or Matt involved in any of this at all?”

Mark shook his head. “No. We run an investment firm. We obey all the laws. We make more than enough money that embezzling would be foolishly risky.”

Jared examined his eyes. He believed him. Mark tilted his head.

“Is there something more going on? More than just fraudulent securities or avoiding paying our fees?”

Jared knew he couldn’t really tell him anything.

“If we need to speak with you or anyone else here again, we will contact you in a formal capacity.”

Mark looked at him thoughtfully for several long moments. Finally he seemed to determine that he wouldn’t get anything out of Jared, so he walked toward the door.

“Good luck with your investigation, Agent Padalecki. And do call me if your curiosity ever gets the best of you.”

Jared couldn't help the small smile that escaped him. It was kind of flattering, but if he was ever going to fall down the rabbit hole into an alternate reality where he might maybe possibly consider dabbling, then he knew he'd never pick a guy who was so cocky and used to getting his way all the time.

Jared cleaned up the mess he and Alona had made before going down to his office. He didn't really have anything to pack up as he'd never brought in any personal effects or done any actual work for Cohen & Cohen. He did have to take his laptop and badge down to the security office to return them.

The guy who had originally brought him on board was so happy and smug that he was leaving that he didn't even ask why. He'd probably make something up to spread rumors about later. As he entered the lobby, Alona quickly put a person on hold and hopped out of her seat.

“What happened?”

Jared held out his hands. “I got canned.”

“Th-that's not fair. He didn't fire me.”

“He brought me on as a favor honestly. And since the whole securities thing has been cleared up and we haven't found anything wrong with the company's practices—he doesn't need me.”

“Nothing wrong? Did you tell him about the money transfer program? And the routing numbers?”

“He knows a little bit, but he thinks it requires a cyber expert to investigate further. And I didn't want to get you in trouble, so I didn't tell him everything. It'll be alright.”

“So, what, you're just going to stop investigating?”

“I don't really think there's much to investigate.”

“That’s bullshit. You know that’s not true.”

“Honestly, Alona, I had fun playing detective with you, but come on. We were just messing around. Nothing’s going on here.”

Alona’s face turned into a stony mask. It sucked to see it, but this might convince her that he was a big enough jerk that she never wanted to see him again. And that was probably for the best. She didn’t say anything in response, and he didn’t know what else to say. So, he just gave her a weak smile and walked to the elevators. Of course, it took an awkwardly long time for a car to arrive, and when it did it was filled with people coming back from a late lunch. He shuffled around and got onto the elevator. When he looked back inside the lobby of Cohen & Cohen he couldn’t see Alona.

The doors shut. Once he was outside he called Jensen.

“What’s up, Jay?”

“Well, my tenure as Jared Bell is officially over.”

“Did something happen?”

“No...Mark and I just decided that I wasn’t really accomplishing anything, so we decided it was best to end it. Since I’m not really qualified to do that kind of work anyway.”

“Is...there a problem? Do we need to get Bob to start working on some damage control?”

“No, no. Nothing like that. It really is okay.”

“Oh, okay. Great, then. I think we’ve probably done everything from the inside that we can. It’ll be good to have you back in the office.”

“I’m looking forward to it.”

**Tuesday, August 12, 2015**

“Security alert!” Abel called out.

Jensen looked over at his fellow agent, and then to where he was looking.

Jared was giving him a bitch face.

“Yeah, there’s some rando-stranger wandering around the office,” Osrice chimed in.

Everyone else on the squad razzed Jared as he walked to his desk.

“Ha, ha,” Jared said. “Amazing how someone who doesn’t even work here gets more done than you slackers.”

“Ooo!” the group called out in exaggerated offense.

Jared plopped down in his chair and Jensen gave him a smile.

“What?” Jared asked warily.

“Nothing. It’s good to have you back.”

“Hey, Mr. Undercover Agent,” Johnston called out, “how’d someone as tall as you blend in anyway?”

Everyone snickered and Jared frowned. Jensen didn’t think he actually looked upset; he was just pouting because he was being teased.

“Yeah, it’s great to be back,” he mumbled. “How long do you think I’ll have to put up with all the ‘clever’ comments?”

“Probably most of the morning.”

Jared sighed.

“Unless, we’re not here.”

Jared turned around, very interested. “Where will we be if not here?”

Jensen held up his list. “Interviews. I got six more people on my list. You wanna come?”

“Hell yeah.”

“Alright. Let’s go.”

Everyone booed Jensen as he took away their plaything. Jared just smirked and flicked them off. They took Jensen’s car and drove out of DC and into Virginia. All six of the people on the list lived within ten or fifteen minutes of each other in McLean. Four of them were in the same neighborhood.

They drove up to the first address and found a huge house. It wasn’t quite a mansion, but it had been built long enough ago that the size would have been extravagant then. Despite its years, it was impeccably maintained with green lawns and colorful flowerbeds. Curtains hung in every window and the paint wasn’t chipped or flecking anywhere. Jensen rang the bell and they waited for the door to open.

When it did, they were greeted by a girl who couldn’t be more than fifteen or sixteen. She wore a maid uniform similar to the one Nicole had worn.

Her skin was so dark it made the whites of her eyes and her white teeth flash noticeably in her pretty face.

“Hello,” she said, the trace of an accent that Jensen couldn’t quite place in her voice. “Can I help you?”

They showed their credentials and introduced themselves. She led them inside to a sitting room and curtsied before going to find her employer.

Jared had an odd look on his face as he watched her go. He turned back to Jensen.

“Is that weird?”

“Very weird. Especially considering one of the people in DC had a young girl for a maid as well.”

Jared shrugged. “Summer employment?”

Jensen’s brow creased. “Maybe.”

Sounds from the hallway alerted them that someone was coming to the room. They stood up just as a middle-aged white man in khakis and a pastel pink polo shirt entered the room.

“Gentlemen. I’m not sure if I misunderstood, but Jeanette said that you’re from the FBI?”

“Yes,” Jensen said and both he and Jared pulled out their creds again. The man glanced at them and then introduced himself as Warner Goddard. They shook hands and Goddard indicated that they should take a seat on the black leather sofa.

“So, what can I do for you?”

“We’re investigating the trail of some fraudulent securities that were deployed nationwide,” Jensen started. “Unfortunately, Cohen & Cohen was one of the companies affected by the fraud and we understand you’re one of their clients.”

“Yes, I am. We received a notice from Cohen & Cohen regarding the situation, but the letter also stated that none of our investments were directly affected.”

“I’m glad to hear that. Did you check your accounts after you were notified?”

The man put out his hands and shrugged his lips. “No. We trust Cohen & Cohen to handle it. I also have an accountant and lawyer who do most of that stuff. I was told we were unaffected by it, so I believe them. And I knew that other people would catch it if it weren’t true. Are...you here to tell me it’s not true?”

“No, we don’t believe you have been affected by the fraud. However, we were wondering if you could tell us a little bit about the new money transfer program Cohen & Cohen started using a little over a year ago. As we understand it some people have noticed some odd things happening.

Multiple deposits made to the same account in the same transaction. Fees being assessed before the returns even come in.”

Goddard shook his head again. “I honestly wouldn’t know. I really do trust my accountant with all of that.”

“Would it be possible to speak with him?”

“Sure, sure.” Goddard stood up, so they did too. “If you leave me your information, I’ll make sure he gets in touch with you. If there’s nothing else...” he tried to lead them toward the door.

“Just one more thing,” Jared said. “It’s also come to our attention that a charity called The Lilac House was recently targeted by the same group that was pushing the fake securities.”

Jensen glanced at Jared. He hadn’t brought up the charity at the other visits because he wasn’t quite sure how to do it without some clumsy exposition, like Jared had just given. But, Goddard didn’t even react to it beyond a vaguely sympathetic face.

“A charity, huh? Seems like nothing is sacred these days,” Goddard said.

“We saw your name on a list of donors and—”

“I really don’t know anything about it. My wife is the one who writes those checks. She supports a lot of charities. I can’t keep track of them all.”

“Seems like with your wife and your accountant around, you don’t need to keep track of any of your money,” Jensen said.

The man’s eyes narrowed slightly. Jensen gave him a smile like he’d been making a joke. Goddard gave him a polite laugh and then tried to get them to head to the door again. Jensen took out a business card and gave it to Goddard.

“If you would ask your accountant to get in contact with us as soon as possible that would be best. We want to make sure nothing has happened to your accounts.”

“Thank you for stopping by agents. Have a good day.”



The door shut behind them before they were barely outside.

“Damn,” Jensen muttered. “I hate giving out cards just to have them immediately thrown in the trash.”

Jared chuckled. “Oh, so my ‘that guy is totally sketchy and acting guilty and hiding something’ conclusion isn’t because of my uniquely extraordinary powers of deduction?”

Jensen laughed. “Not this time.

“So, you want to take odds on that being the shortest interview of the day?”

Jensen snorted. “I’m sure a couple won’t even let us in the door.”

That turned out to be true at two of the houses. They were stonewalled, very politely, on the porch and then asked even more politely to get the hell off their property. One house was answered by a teenaged girl who informed them that her parents were both at work. They couldn’t talk to her since she was a minor, but they did hear the girl yelling for someone to make her lunch before she shut the door. They were greeted by more maids at the doors of the last two houses; one was a white woman in her twenties and the other was a teenaged Asian girl who could barely speak English. The homeowner said that she was an exchange student and was just playing dress up.

In that house they were taken into the kitchen to talk because the matriarch was hosting a luncheon later and needed to provide directions in the kitchen. The chef appeared to be an Arab woman and she was wearing a

uniform and cooking classically French foods. She had a slew of helpers, also in uniforms, and they were girls and boys with a variety of brown skin tones, the oldest no older than fifteen.

“No, dear, not like that,” Mrs. Pritchett said, her southern accent so thick Jensen felt like honey was being poured over his ears. “Cucumber sandwiches must always be sliced diagonally. There you go. Now, agents, you said something about Cohen & Cohen? I remember Mr. Cohen. Very nice man. I hope his son is handling everything okay. It’s just such a shame

to have this sort of thing happen when he's just taken over. It must just hurt his poor heart. Diana! Red wine does not go in the refrigerator, darling!"

"Yes, it is unfortunate," Jensen said. "You know I'm curious, are all these children...the chef's children?"

"Oh, gracious heavens no, pumpkin. What a thing! Flora would go crazy if they were hers. She teaches classes when she's not catering. Adults and children alike. These are her students."

"Hm," Jared said. "You're okay with students—children at that—catering something so important as today's luncheon?"

"Well," she shook her head, clearly trying to think of another lie. "It's for charity, dear. The luncheon is for charity. We would hardly be good philanthropists if we turned our nose up at the people we were helping."

"Oh, so is this gathering for The Lilac House?" Jensen asked.

"Yes! Why you've heard of them. It's a fantastic organization, isn't it? They save children all the time."

"I thought you said these children were students?"

"Well, they are. The Lilac House provides activities until they're placed.

Why should these children have to suffer more than they already have by being shut away with nothing to do?"

"Yes," Jared said. "I can see how working in a kitchen and serving people all day is a fun activity."

Mrs. Pritchett narrowed her eyes at him, but her smile was still in place.

"Well, agents, again, thank you for coming to talk to me about Cohen & Cohen, but as I've said that's my husband's business and he's at work today. Now, I've got a lot to take care of before the guests arrive, but I'd be happy to give you each an éclair to take with you."

Jensen saw Jared perk up and open his mouth to thank her, so he cut him off with, “No thank you. We appreciate it, but we’re not allowed to eat the car.

Bureau policy.”

“Why that’s wretched of them. How are people supposed to work?”

Jensen shrugged. “Thank you for your time, ma’am.”

The teenage Asian girl took them back to the front of the house and told them to have a good day in broken English. Jensen felt like his feet were made of lead as they walked away from the house. His vision was a little cloudy around the edges and the walk to the car, which they’d had to leave two blocks away because the street in front of the house and the driveway were filled with the vans of the companies providing the tent and the chairs for the entertainment. When they reached the car, Jensen didn’t unlock it.

He just sat on the hood, feeling too heavy to think or move or do much of anything. Jared didn’t comment but sat beside him.

The hood was really too hot to sit on, but they both ignored it. It was just past noon and still a couple of hours away from the hottest part of the day, but it was sweltering. Jensen sweated under his suit and shirt and tie.

Cicadas buzzed in a rhythm that faded in and out around them. Jensen wasn’t too sure how long they sat in silence. It couldn’t have been that long, it just felt like it.

“So, I guess...well,” Jared started. “Do we need to talk to the husbands or...?”

“No. We got what we needed to know.”

“We did?” Jared asked softly, looking down at the ground.

“The kids in there, and the ones at all the houses we’ve been too. The young women too. They’re not servants. They’re slaves. The money they’re

hiding and laundering through the charity is to pay the traffickers.”

Jared let out a heavy breath.

“And those are just the kids we saw. The ones we didn’t see? The ones locked in upstairs bedrooms—they’re being kept as sex slaves. Maybe not every house has one like that, but I bet at least half do.”

Jared made another heavy sigh. “I mean...I guess I knew what I was seeing. I just didn’t want to let myself see it.”

Jensen let out a heavy sigh of his own.

“So, what should we do now?” Jared asked.

“Well. I think we need to go back to the office and talk to the Crimes Against Children Unit. Find out if there are any known or suspected traffickers operating in the area. The name associated with the final account in the laundering process is probably a fake, so it won’t help to get a warrant. But the TTPT code is something only the bank could be arranging.

We could get permission to get surveillance on Podvodnik. We might be able to see him handing off the money to someone else.”

Jared nodded. “Do we think The Lilac House is involved at all? Or are they just being used unwittingly?”

“Podvodnik is one of the founders. At least some people involved must be in on it. And think about the format of the charity: it allows them to go to places that are rampant with human trafficking without arousing suspicions of why they keep taking so many trips there.”

“This is sick,” Jared said. “What, do they pick the weaklings out of the batch and then make a show of sending them back home for the charity?”

“Maybe.”

“This is sick,” he repeated, standing up to pace.

“It is. Makes you wonder if trying to be good is actually fighting against

human nature.”

“Well, I don’t think we need to be that dark about it. Come on. Innocent Images was absorbed by the Crimes Against Children Unit when they merged everything together. I know a couple of guys we can reach out to for information.”

“Okay.”

Jensen stood up and pushed away the heaviness so that he could focus.

They had work to do and there was no time to wallow in the melancholy induced by the reminder that humans could be truly evil to each other.

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Jared turned off his car and sat in the cool interior in the parking lot of his building. If he opened the door he was just going to be accosted with a humidity that had risen to over 80% even though the temperature had dropped slightly when the sun had set. It was after 9:00pm and he was only just now getting home from work. The news of their discovery had lit fires under the asses of several people who needed to be tempered and reminded that they needed hard evidence before they could bust down doors and rescue the kids like big damn heroes. It had been a long day of figuring out logistics and if the case would be transferred and soothing the egos of executive management who wanted to be in charge now that there was a (potential) human trafficking ring to bust in the area.

Nothing had been sorted out and they would be dealing with the same thing tomorrow. All he wanted to do was go home, eat a Hot Pocket, take a shower, and crash into bed. It wasn’t that late but he was bone tired. For some reason dealing with the constant reminder of the kind of people they were trying to take down was exhausting. Even chasing after Russ hadn’t been this bad. Russ was sick in an extreme he’s too messed up to be human way. But these people...these people didn’t bat an eyelash at stealing a child from their homes and owning them like livestock. It was a different kind of evil, and in a way it was worse.

Jared finally forced himself out of the car, grimacing at the wave of muggy air that clung to him like a wet, heavy blanket. He locked his car and walked toward the front entrance of the building. There was a girl hanging out by the doors, probably smoking. But he didn't see a cigarette in her

hand. And the closer he got he realized it wasn't a girl, just a small woman.

He almost stopped in his tracks when he recognized her, and then he practically jogged over to her.

“Alona.”

She turned when he spoke her name. She crossed her arms over her chest and didn't look thrilled to be there, but she didn't seem to be bitter or angry either.

“Hi, Jared.”

“Um. W-why are you here? Not that I mind, but—”

“I'm not here for that. This isn't a social call.”

“It's not?” he asked, truly confused. “What is it then?”

“I need to talk to you about Ella.”

Jared sighed and moved around her to unlock the door to the lobby. “Alona, I don't work there anymore. There's nothing I can do. If you suspect something you should tell Mark or Matt.”

“We don't know for sure they're not in on it.”

Jared started to answer that he did, but he actually wasn't sure. The company supported The Lilac House, not Mark or Matt individually, but how did he know that the two of them didn't have child slaves in their homes? He supposed he could find out. If he called up Mark and offered to

—no, nope. Not a viable plan.

“So go to the police.”

“I don’t want to stir up trouble if it’s nothing.”

“Then what do you want me to do about it?”

She huffed out an annoyed sound. “I—I guess I just need you to be a sounding board. Let me know if it really is nothing. Just let me tell you what I overheard.”

“Fine. Come on up.”

Alona took a step back. “I, uh, I don’t think that’s such a good idea.”

“Why not?” he asked, stung that she thought he might hurt her, even if just emotionally.

“Because if we go upstairs to your apartment with closed doors and—well, I’m mad at you. But I’m not that mad at you.”

She gave him a wry smile and Jared smiled and looked away, feeling a faint blush.

“Alright, fine. But at least come in the lobby where it’s air conditioned. I’m dying here.”

“You are such a wimp.”

“And I’m fine with that if it means I get to be in air conditioning.”

He held the door open for her and then sighed in relief as he felt the cold air surround him. He crossed the lobby and sat down on the low bench next to the mail boxes, letting his long legs splay awkwardly. Alona fought a smile as she joined him, sitting close, but not enough to touch.

“So, what’s this information I have to know?”

“I overheard Ella talking on the phone.”

“You ‘overheard her,’ huh?” Jared asked skeptically.

“Yes. I was in in the bathroom and she came in and started talking and must not have realized I was there. Don’t be an ass.”

Jared put his hands in the air. “Fine, fine. Completely innocent. What’d she say that was so damning?”

“She was talking to someone named Radek. Does the name ring any bells?”

Jared shook his head. “No—” Radek Podvodnik. “Uh...No. Did she indicate who he might be?”

“He’s the one she’s helping skim the money for. Or not skim, hide or whatever. She was complaining that it was getting too hot at Cohen & Cohen and she wanted to move the operation. It was pretty obvious she didn’t want to be talking at work and kept telling him to call her back. I couldn’t hear his side but after some arguing she eventually conceded to do one big, final transfer from everyone’s accounts to ‘cover the rest.’ ‘Cover the rest’ is a direct quote. My guess is that she did it today or will tomorrow and will definitely be gone before the week is out. I think if you don’t talk to her, she’s going to be in the wind soon.”

“What do you propose I do? Stop her after work one day and ask her if she’s doing anything illegal?”

Alona inhaled and looked frustrated. But oddly, not with him. Finally she nodded.

“You’re right. There’s nothing you can do. I should probably tell Matt and Mark.”

Jared chewed on his lip. It would be a bad thing if Alona got Ella fired and she disappeared before they could bring her in. But, if they picked her up before she got into work tomorrow morning, then Alona could tell Mark and Matt and they could get the program removed. Possibly in enough time to prevent the final payment from going through. It could be win/win—as long as they got to Ella in time.

“Yes, you should do that,” Jared said.

Alona scooted forward on the seat so that she could turn and face Jared more. “What, tell Mark and Matt? You want me to do that? Get her fired?”

“Definitely. If her program is doing something to illegally move or mask the movement of money, they should know about it so that they can protect their company.”

“What if they’re in on it?”

“I honestly don’t think they are. But if you tell them and they do nothing, then you should go to the police.”

“So...that’s your big plan?”

Jared shrugged. “I’m a program management specialist who was ‘let go’ by the people who wanted me to find out if something was going on in their company. It’s not my job anymore to tell them if I—we—you found something.”

Alona searched his face for a moment, her own carefully neutral. She nodded.

“Okay. I’ll tell Matt and Mark tomorrow. But not until after lunch. I hear they’ve got a special Greek menu planned. If I get fired, I at least want baklava to comfort me.”

Jared smiled. “I think you’re safe from that. Matt and Mark will be grateful for your help. I’m not sure how you’ll be able to prove it to them without revealing how much snooping you’ve done, so...well, maybe you will get fired.”

Alona punched him lightly and Jared chuckled. They looked at each other—in one of those kind of clichéd prolonged moments.

“See?” Alona said. “This is why I said we shouldn’t go upstairs.”

“Yeah. You know...we still could go upstairs.”

Alona stood up and moved in front of him. She put her hands on his shoulders and leaned down to look him in the eyes.

“I’m still kinda pissed at you for the brush off you gave me yesterday.

But...” She leaned forward and kissed him. He raised a hand to her cheek hoping to deepen the kiss, but she pulled back. “I’ll get over it. Eventually.”

She turned and walked toward the door.

“Let me know how it goes with Mark and Matt,” he said.

She kept walking, but raised a hand and waggled her fingers in the air. Jared sat for a moment, debating whether or not he should try to make the decision about telling Alona a partial truth so that they could be together or just completely cutting her out of his life. He decided he didn’t have the strength to decide that tonight. He checked his mail and took the stairs to his floor. He hadn’t been going to the gym as regularly the last few weeks, so he tried to exercise wherever he could. Once he was out of the stairwell, he called Jensen. He got his voicemail, so he left him a message.

Inside his apartment he dropped the mail on the coffee table and then pulled four Hot Pockets out of the freezer. He’d be full after three, but what was the point of leaving one lonely Hot Pocket in the box? He leaned on the counter and watched his sad dinner spin in the microwave. He picked up his phone and called Jensen again. He got his voicemail. When his meal was warm, he sat on the couch, turned on the TV and found a west coast baseball game still playing, and carefully nibbled around the edges of one of the ham and cheese pockets. After he burned his tongue on the cheese, he set the plate aside, casting it a baleful glare, and tried calling Jensen again.

This time he answered.

“Oh, my God, what, Jared?! Is someone dead? If they are, I apologize, but if they’re not dead can’t you wait for me to call you back?”

“Well, it’s kind of important.”

“Important enough to disrupt me three times during phone sex?”

Jared froze and made a face. *Oh, ew.* “I—”

“Oh, yeah, that feels so good—beep beep beep! There’s Jared!”

“Baby, calm down.”

Jared started when he heard Misha’s voice. “Misha?”

“Hey, Jared.”

“Why are you two having phone sex if you’re together?”

“We’re not,” Jensen said. “I conference called you in.”

“You two really do want a three-way with me,” Jared accused in a scandalized whisper.

Misha just started laughing.

“Jared. Not interested, pal. You’re going to have to explore your Kinsey 1 curiosity with someone else.”

“That’s not—”

Misha’s laughter dissolved into giggles.

“I hate you guys.”

“What’s so urgent, Jared?”

“Alona...Alona...Misha can you stop laughing?”

Misha laughed harder, but his voice faded, so he must have moved the phone away.

“Alona stopped by to see me today.”

“Really?”

“Is Alona the receptionist from the undercover job?” Misha asked.

“Are you telling him all the details of our case?” Jared asked Jensen.

“No. Just the details of your personal life.”

“Personally, Jared, I don’t think you should feel bad about sleeping with her. She doesn’t know your name or occupation, but she knows you. You know?”

“I guess. But that’s not what this is about. She said she overheard Ella talking on the phone to Podvodnik.”

“Wait, did she actually use his name?” Jensen asked. “Does she know who he is?”

“No, she said some guy named ‘Radek.’ I don’t think that’s a coincidence though.”

“Probably not. So, was that all?”

“No, she said that Ella was telling him that she thought the company was catching on, so she wanted to get out. But Podvodnik convinced her to make one last transfer from all of the accounts to ‘cover the rest.’ That’s the quote.”

“Cover the rest...if this is for human trafficking, that could mean that they’re bringing over more victims soon.”

“Ella is probably going to run after she makes the final transfer. I think we ought to pick her up and interview her.”

“Right now?”

“No...” Misha whined softly. And then, “Sorry. I’m not here.”

“No, I don’t have her home address, and even if we went into the office to make a request for it, I think it’d just be easier to wait for her outside Cohen

& Cohen and pick her up in the morning.”

“What if she made the transaction today and is on her way out of town tonight?”

“I don’t think there’s anything we can do then. If she was leaving today, she’s probably gone by now. If she doesn’t show up at work in the morning, we can look up her address and see if she’s still packing or getting ready to go. But if her plans were to leave tonight I think she’d be long gone by the time we got her address and went there.”

“Well, your logic is unassailable. Do you know what time she normally gets into work?”

“Usually closer to ten than nine, but she might be spooked enough to come in early.”

“Okay. How about we meet at the office at six, and then we’ll decide how we want to approach her before going to Cohen & Cohen.”

“Sounds good. See you in the morning.”

“Goodnight, Jared.”

“Goodnight, Jared,” Misha said. “Sweet dreams.”

“I hate you most of all Misha Collins.”

He snickered and Jensen groaned softly in annoyance.

“Hey, are you taking Jensen’s name?” Jared asked.

“Traditionally the one marrying into the more prominent family is the one who takes the name. My wealth is actually quite prominent, so really he should be Jensen Collins. Plus, Misha Ackles sounds weird.”

“But you don’t have a family,” Jared said.

“Jesus, Jared,” Jensen said softly.

“Oh, shit, I am so sorry.” Jared felt like he’d been socked in the gut with a battering ram that was somehow constructed out of pure embarrassment and shame.

“Jared, it’s okay,” Misha said. “Really. We actually hadn’t discussed it, but I just assumed we’d keep our own names.”

“You did?” Jensen asked.

“Okay, apparently I’ve opened up a can of worms; I apologize,” Jared said.

“I’m going to hang up before I say anything else that makes me want to sink into a hole in the ground.”

“Jared, really, it’s fine,” Misha tried to reassure him.

“Well, I’m still sorry. Goodnight.”

“Bye.”

“Bye.”

Jared disconnected himself from the call and glanced at his cooled Hot Pocket. He’d lost his appetite due to his asinine comment. He glanced at the plate again. Well, maybe he hadn’t. He picked up his dinner and chomped down into processed goodness. Gen had been appalled by his diet and had somewhat broken him of his bad habits, even when they’d been doing the long distance thing.

And now he was thinking about Gen. He twisted on the couch and allowed himself to face plant onto the cushions.

Wednesday, August 13, 2014

Jensen sat in the outdoor seating area of a coffee shop that was located on the bottom floor of the building that housed Cohen & Cohen. He’d easily be able to see Ella approaching and intercept her before she got inside. He’d been at

the café for about an hour and a half already. The coffee he had bought had gone cold. Jared was waiting in the car around the block because they didn't want any other Cohen & Cohen employees to see him.

It was coming up on nine o'clock and hardly anyone had come into the building who wasn't getting coffee. He wondered who all these people were in the world that they could show up to work whenever. Or maybe he just went to work too early.

He checked his phone for messages again, but like two minutes ago, he didn't have any. He wasn't really expecting Misha to text him—he would be in class by now. They had their last written test on Friday. He wasn't concerned that Misha wouldn't pass, but he knew that he'd be spending tonight and tomorrow night studying. They had agreed that last night would be their last late night until after the last test. And unfortunately due to Jared's call and question, they hadn't finished the night the way he'd expected it to culminate. Instead they'd talked about Misha Ackles and Jensen Collins and Jensen and Misha Collins-Ackles. Like Misha had said, they hadn't talked about it. Probably because it had never occurred to them that they would change their names.

Misha had suggested that maybe they should create a whole brand new name that was their own. He'd suggested Geemen and Awesometon and Drydraluxlaloud and Jensen was left wondering why he was marrying such an odd man. He'd played along a little bit and said that they should at least use a combination of their names if they were going to make a new name.

That had led to such duds as Allins, Colles, and Ackins. And then there had been Cackles and Cockles which had left them snorting with laughter until Misha pointed out that Collins was actually his mother's maiden name because he'd rejected his biological father's name but hadn't wanted to take his stepfather's name until he thought it had been too late to ask and now that he was dead he regretted not doing it. And...that kind of brought the whole night down. They'd decided to just keep their names as is. It would mean a lot less paperwork.

He checked his phone again, and then spotted Ella Vasquez coming down the

sidewalk out of the corner of his eye. He picked up his phone and cup, putting the former in his pocket and the latter in the trash as he walked over to the building entrance to intercept Ella. She spotted him approaching her and attempted to avoid him the way women do when they didn't want to have to deal with a man. He stepped to the side to block her path and her face pinched tightly with anger. He quickly pulled out his credentials.

"Ella Vasquez? I'm Special Agent Jensen Ackles with the FBI. I'd like to ask you a few questions—"

He saw her whole body tense and could sense the torque she was about employ to spin around and run away.

"Don't run," he said quickly. "You're not under arrest. I just have some questions."

She still looked poised to bolt.

"If you run, I will have reason to arrest you, and then you'll really be in it.

We've got bigger fish to fry, and if you help us, you might get out of this without too much of a headache."

He was lying through his teeth. Not a single person involved with this ring was getting off, but the lie worked. Ella nodded and crossed her arms over her chest.

"What do you want to know?"

"I think we need to have this talk at the field office."

She sighed. "Okay."

Jensen led her to the car, walking beside her close enough to grab her if she got stupid and made a run for it. When Jared spotted them he got out of the car and Ella recognized him immediately.

"Shit," she cursed softly. "I'm not going to be able to bluff my way out this, am I?"

“Sorry, Ella.” He opened the backdoor for her and then slid in after her.

Jensen got into the front seat and drove the ten minutes to WFO. They took Ella to one of the interview rooms on the first floor: a small cramped space that barely had enough room for a small table and four chairs. Ella sat down on one side and Jensen on the other. Jared remained standing because his legs always bumped the underside of the short tables in the interview rooms. Jensen turned on a recording device.

“Do I need a lawyer?” Ella asked.

“You’re not under arrest,” Jensen replied.

“So...does that mean, no, or...”

“What it means is that you’re not under arrest and you’re free to leave at any time. We would like for you to cooperate and answer some questions for us. Now if during the course of the interview you confess to illegal activity, we may have to reevaluate the situation. But, like I said before, we’re after the people who are running the operation. We’re willing to negotiate if need be.”

“So, let me get this straight. All you have are suspicions, which is why you didn’t arrest me. And if I start giving you information on the higher ups, all I really do is incriminate myself so that you can arrest me. Plus, anything he,” she nodded toward Jared, “found out while at Cohen & Cohen is invalid. Like illegal search and seizure or whatever. This is ridiculous. I

never should have come. I’m gone.”

Ella stood and Jared moved in front of the door, holding out a placating hand.

“Wait, Ella. The information I gathered is legal because Matt and Mark both knew that I work for the FBI and allowed me to go undercover there.

You don’t have an expectation of privacy in the work place. Especially if the people who own the company give permission for law enforcement to review their company records. We also lawfully obtained a subpoena to review the bank records of six clients at Potomac First.”

Her eyes widened and then cut to the left.

“Yeah, we know about Potomac First and the same bank account numbers with the different routing numbers. We know that these six clients are having their money laundered through The Lilac House.”

Ella started looking a little pale and glanced back and forth between them.

“We know that you’ve installed your program into at least seven different investment firms across the country. We know that Radek Podvodnik is involved and that you’ve been instructed to do one last money transfer before you leave Cohen & Cohen. We do have some questions, but we’d like you to fill us in on how the scam works.”

“Look, it’s not a scam, alright? We’re not stealing from anybody or manipulating the stocks or defrauding the investment companies. All of the clients are aware that their money is being put into two separate bank accounts. If they’ve provided account numbers that are not on the up, well, then that’s on them. I haven’t done anything illegal. My program works as advertised. So, I’m walking out of here.”

“Can you really live with yourself working for these people?” Jensen demanded loudly, startling Ella. “The fact that your part is technically legal is good enough for you? Who cares that these people are kidnappers and slavers, right? Not your problem.”

“Jensen,” Jared said softly, but Jensen didn’t want to calm down.

Ella rolled her eyes. “Dios mio. Come on, man. Don’t be so dramatic.

They’re rich assholes. Yeah, so what? I mean they hide a little money to avoid taxes or buy black market luxury items. Big deal. It’s not fucking life or death.”

“Ella,” Jared said getting her attention. “Do you not know what they do with the money after you hide it for them?”

She shrugged. “I don’t know. Drugs probably. Or they’re buying pet tigers or

something.”

“The ‘or something’ is people,” Jensen snapped.

Ella glanced at him, and then back at Jared. “What’s he talking about?”

“Ella. The money the clients are hiding is being used to pay human traffickers to bring stolen children into America to be used as slaves in their homes.”

Ella kind of scoffed and then glanced between them. “You’re joking...” She trailed off as she took in their faces. Then she slowly sat back down into her seat. “Are you guys serious?”

“Deadly serious,” Jensen said.

She stared slack jawed at the table for a moment, and then she sat up straight and waved her hands.

“Hey. I didn’t know about that. I swear. I was just hired to develop a program that would be desirable software for investment firms. That way a select few number of people at each location could stealthily deposit their own money into a different account. What they did with it after that I didn’t know.”

“You’ve been doing it for almost eight years now. You had no idea what they were doing with the money?”

“That’s what I said, isn’t it? Seriously, that’s messed up, okay? My family is from Colombia. I know how vulnerable kids are and the kind of horrifying shit that can happen to them. I would never be involved or helping if I knew

that’s what they were doing. And how do you know they are?”

“What can you tell us about Radek Podvodnik?” Jensen asked, ignoring her question. “You’ve been working with him since the beginning, right?”

Ella glanced back and forth between them and then slumped down in her chair.

“He recruited me out of MIT. Gave me some spiel about how the American government was overtaxing its citizens—I didn’t really care. I think it was just a speech to try to rouse in me a will to subvert the government in order to get me to work for him without asking too many questions. But seriously, I didn’t care about anything but the money. He said that he would pay me fifty grand a year on top of whatever salary I earned working at the companies I sold my program to.”

“What can you tell us about the last payment he asked you to do today?”

“How do you know about that?”

“Ella,” Jared said. “Please answer.”

She sighed. “The program is set up so that every two months enough money has been diverted from the six accounts—or however many there are depending on the location—to cover the cost of something. I don’t know what. I wasn’t even told about the minimums until about three years ago.

Someone at the company I was working for was poking around the program and asking questions. So I turned off the double deposit function for one month so he wouldn’t find anything if he snooped. At the end of the month Podvodnik lost his shit on me. I explained—well, after a lot of shouting back and forth he finally admitted that there is a minimum amount of money that needs to be deposited into the other accounts at the end of two months.

“He has to have time to consolidate it, launder it, and then withdraw it. He does it every three months. The amount he needs is different every month.

Usually it’s pretty low, but about once a year the amount is significantly higher. It’s why I adjusted the program to have the ‘assess fees before depositing’ function. Basically it hides exactly how much comes back from the securities so that when large chunks of money need to go missing from

the clients’ regular bank accounts, there’s no record that there was ever supposed to be that much in it. I thought it was tax related,” she finished with a shrug.

“So I take it this two month cycle is one that needs a very large deposit.

How much?”

“Twenty K.”

“Twenty thousand dollars? How are investment firms not noticing this kind of money isn’t coming back in from their clients’ investments?” Jensen asked.

“Because it’s chump change. They deal in the millions.”

“I don’t understand something,” Jared said. “Twenty thousand from each client, or total?”

“Total.”

“That’s not that much. Is that enough to cover the cost of a slave?”

“More than enough,” Jensen said. “The average cost of a human slave is around \$90-\$120.”

“That’s all?” Ella asked.

“These people don’t value human life, and there’s no shortage of commodity in desperately poor third world countries. I suspect the large lump sum once a year is when new shipments come in and they have to pay for the cargo containers, the crew to move them, the costs of storing and feeding them until they’re sold.”

“Do you really not know anything about where or who the money goes to?”

Jared asked.

Ella shook her head. “I know that it goes to Potomac First and that Podvodnik handles it from there.”

“Did Podvodnik handle the money at the other banks? In the other cities

where you worked?”

“I don’t know. I guess so. I don’t know how he launders the money. I’d never heard of The Lilac House until today. Am I...” She lost her voice for a moment and had to swallow. “Am I going to be charged with...slavery, or whatever?”

Jensen sat back and crossed his arms. He still wasn’t entirely convinced that she really didn’t know anything.

“No, you won’t be held accountable for any charges directly related to that,” Jared said, “but you were aware that your program was used in order to make illegal money transfers for eventual laundering. That is a crime.

But...if you help us...”

“How?”

Jensen answered. “You’re going to go into Cohen & Cohen today. You’re going to make the final transfer and let Podvodnik know that it was successful.”

“Then what?”

“We’ll handle that.”

“And what’s going to happen to me?”

“That depends on if you cooperate with us.”

“And if you don’t do anything stupid like try to run,” Jared added.

Ella nodded. “Okay. So, just go to work and make the transfer. Should I continue to go to Cohen & Cohen after today?”

“Yes,” Jensen said. “And convince Podvodnik that there’s nothing to be concerned about anymore. Tell him the QC guy finished his work and concluded that there was nothing suspicious and left.”

She nodded. “So, I can go now?”

Jared nodded. “We’ll escort you out.”

“And seriously, Ella,” Jensen warned. “Don’t go anywhere.”

“I won’t. I promise. I really, truly had no idea what I was supporting here. I want it to stop. I’ll help.”

“Okay, come with me,” Jared said. “I’ll take you to the exit.”

“How will I get back to Cohen & Cohen?”

“The Judiciary Square metro stop is less than a block away.”

“Great,” she said dryly.

Jensen patted Jared on the shoulder. “I’ll see you upstairs.”

“Okay.”

Jensen rode the elevator up to his floor and hurried over to his squad. He walked straight to his desk and peeked over the divide.

“Osric. Hey.”

Osric looked up. “Hey, Jensen. What’s up?”

“Did you ever find any information about local banks in the other cities?”

“Oh! Yes. I was going to confirm the last two before I showed you, but I’ve got four and that establishes a great pattern.” He hopped up onto his knees on his chair and leaned his arms on the divide. “Okay, so I found banks similar to Potomac First and Salt River First in four of the other cities. All less than fifteen years old, a small clientele, and they’re all single institution banks—no other branches anywhere. Now, they aren’t owned by Radek Podvodnik, but they show that they’re managed by a board of trustees. The board members all have other businesses that they manage and are basically just involved with the banks as another source of income. They’ve outsourced the

management of the banks to a small company called Professional Management, Inc.”

“That’s a little on the nose.”

“Business names that clearly state their business usually do better than ones with fancy names.”

“Okay. So, is there anything interesting about Professional Management, Inc?”

“Nothing especially in terms of business practices or lawsuits or complaints. They provide bank managers to local banks.”

“Is there something else?”

“Yep. Professional Management, Inc. is owned by Radek Podvodnik. And let me tell you—he has that information buried. But I was able to find it by cross-referencing tax documents with LLC filings and—”

“Jensen.”

Internally, Jensen jumped for joy that he was being spared the details of Osric’s epic week of research.

“Oh, hang on, Oz. Thank you for the information.”

“Sure. Anything to nail this bastard.”

Jensen gave him a nod and turned to Jared.

“Did she get off okay?”

“Yeah.”

“Do you think she’ll run?”

Jared shook his head. “No. I mean, I’m not at 100%, but I believed her when she said that she didn’t know about the trafficking. She seemed appalled and

like she genuinely wants to help put Podvodnik behind bars.”

“Well, all we can do with her is cross our fingers.”

“If you don’t trust her, why did you tell her to go through with the transaction?”

“Because I think she’ll do at least that much. We don’t actually have any proof of the trafficking part. We need to connect Podvodnik or the clients with paying for the children. If we scare him off now, he may just get careful for a while or change his MO. He may warn the clients and it’s possible they might dispose of the slaves they already have.”

“And by dispose you mean...” Jared trailed off.

“Yes.”

“So, do you plan to put Podvodnik under surveillance? Catch him when he gets the money and gives it to whomever is supplying him with the kids?”

“We can put him under surveillance. Probably will. But there’s a possibility that someone else makes a withdrawal from the bank and makes the delivery. More than likely that’s the case. I doubt Podvodnik is dumb enough to touch the money himself.”

“So how do you plan to link him to the trafficking?”

“We’re going to get a pen register and a trap and trace on Podvodnik’s phone and electronic accounts. If we can get records of him communicating with the nine suspects here as well as the list of names we got from Mesa—

and maybe Osric can wrangle a few more names from the other five businesses—that should show that a link exists outside of him simply managing the bank. Then we can monitor the communications and see if we can find out where he stores the kids before they’re sold or when the next shipment is coming in.”

“Don’t we have enough with the money laundering to get a title monitor on

him?”

“On him, but not the clients. We wouldn’t be able to access the conversations he’s had with them because that would be a violation of their rights.” It put a bitter taste in his mouth to acknowledge that those depraved monsters had rights. “Once we prove a connection with Podvodnik and the charity and the program and we have Ella’s testimony that they were complicit in the money transfers, then we’ll legally be able to listen to their

conversations as well. Until then, we have to slow play this. And hope that Ella doesn’t sell us out.”

Jared sat down in his chair. “If it weren’t for that pesky Constitution...” he sighed dramatically.

Jensen smiled. “I’ll start on the pen register if you do the trap and trace.”

“Aye, aye.”

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Jared walked up to his apartment building, half expecting to find Alona waiting outside. The space under the awning was empty though, and he tried not to acknowledge his feelings of disappointment and relief. Inside the lobby he opened his mailbox and let out a little sound of happiness.

“Costco coupons,” he whispered to himself.

He was so busy looking through that week’s deals that when he stepped off the elevator he didn’t notice that the hallway wasn’t empty. He got all the way to his door before he looked up and found Alona watching him. He jumped and put a hand to his chest, clutching his coupons.

“Criminey. How did you get in here?”

“Someone held the door open for me.”

“Oh. Politeness is going to get someone killed someday.”

“It probably already has.”

“Cheery,” Jared said as he unlocked the door. “Why are you here?”

“Can we go inside first?”

“Sure, sure. Come on in.”

Jared entered his apartment and dropped his mail off on the coffee table. He turned around and put his hands on his waist. Alona stayed by the door.

“So, what brings you here tonight? Overhear anymore secret conversations?

Or did Matt and Mark fire you and you want revenge and/or comfort sex?”

Alona gave him a mild look, but she was mostly smiling. “None of the above. I never told Matt and Mark. I wanted to know what you found out from Ella.”

“What makes you think I talked to Ella?”

“She showed up to work two hours late. Because some obvious looking fed intercepted her at the building door. I assume you must have...called the police or the FBI or something.”

“And if I did...I certainly wouldn’t be privy to what they talked about.”

“Come on, Jared. What did she say? Does she know what the final payment is for? When it’s coming in? Where?”

“Alona, I don’t know—”

“Oh, cram it. I know you’re a fed. That’s why I told you about the conversation Ella had with Podvodnik. What did she say?”

Jared’s jaw dropped. His mind was spinning with confusion and questions.

“H-how did you know I—how do you know who Podvodnik is?”

“I told you I overheard her talking.”

“You said to someone named Radek. You never gave me a last name.”

“That doesn’t mean she didn’t say it. Look, it’s unimportant. When and where is the next shipment coming in?”

“What do you know about the next shipment? What do you know about any of this? How did you—what makes you think I’m fed? Alona, you—”

“Agent Padalecki—”

Jared sucked in a breath.

“I know who you are. Okay? I know your name and I know you’re FBI.

Why do you think I told you about the conversation in the first place?

Because I knew it would help your investigation. Now, I’ve helped you.

You help me. What did she say? Do you know anything about the shipment? Is Cohen & Cohen involved? Do you have an open investigation to anyone running The Lilac House?”

“Alona...who are you?”

“Jared, just—”

“Tell me who you are or I’m going to place you under arrest and take you in.”

“Arrest me for what?” she asked incredulously.

“Interfering in a federal investigation for one. We’ll see if identity theft comes into play.”

“Stop posturing. I haven’t interfered with anything. You’d still be chasing your tails if I hadn’t provided you with information.”

Not entirely true, but also not entirely wrong either.

“Alona, for the last time—”

“No, that’s my line. What do you know about the next shipment?”

“Nothing! Okay? We know nothing. We don’t know when, where, what, who, how. Nothing.”

“Jared, you have to do something. You can't sit on this.”

“Why are you so worried? It’s just drugs. It doesn’t matter when we get it.”

“Drugs?! Oh, my God.” Alona turned and ran her hands through her hair.

She turned to look at him again. “Right, drugs. Okay. You guys do what you need to do then. I guess it’s good to know that it’s not anything serious then.”

Alona spun around and walked to the door. Jared ran after her and slammed the door shut before she got it open half an inch. She gasped and turned toward him as he leaned over her.

“What do you know, Alona? Do you know anything specific about what the money laundering is for? We’re assuming it’s drugs. Do you know it’s not?”

“N-no. I didn’t know either. I guess...” Alona took a moment to compose herself and then smiled. “I’m sorry. I got caught up in the whole PI thing. I guess I was hoping for some kind of international, scandalous story.” She shrugged. “Overactive imagination. I’m sorry I jumped all over you. I guess it makes sense that it’s drugs. It’s always drugs, right?”

Jared looked her over, taking in her calm face, her apologetic smile, and sincere eyes. But there was a tightness around those eyes and her smile.

There was something not quite right about this. Her story didn’t seem completely implausible, but he knew it was bullshit too.

“How did you know I’m a fed?” he didn’t see the point of trying to deny it at this point.

“I saw your ID, remember? When you paid for lunch once. Your last name

didn't match the name you introduced yourself as. So I Googled you to find out if you were a serial killer. When I saw that you were an FBI agent, I realized that you must be working undercover to investigate Cohen & Cohen. That's why I helped you. I thought it would be exciting if there was something more going on than just some fraudulent securities. I mean, I guess smuggling drugs is something, but I apologize for trying to go conspiracy theory on you or something."

She gave him another smile. She didn't look nervous or anxious. She just kind of looked embarrassed. Jared relaxed slightly.

"And really, if anyone should be mad it's totally me. I mean, you totally let me think you were some computer nerd from Pennsylvania and seduced me into your bed."

"I seduced you? I don't think..." He trailed off. Had he done the pursuing?

Alona patted him on the arm. "It's okay. Like part of me thinks I should be angry, but I'm not because I feel like...I know who I was with. You were you. You're actually not very good at the undercover thing."

Jared huffed. "I'm not trained for it. It was a last minute thing."

"It's okay. I'm glad I was able to help a little bit. I'll keep watching the news for a story about a big drug bust. And then boast a little on the inside."

She moved to open the door again and he stopped her.

"Alona...I still want to know who—"

His cell phone rang. He stopped and pulled it out of his pocket just in case it was Jensen calling. He looked at the screen and stared at Genevieve's name. Ignoring her was juvenile and stupid.

"I think you better take that," Alona said. She swiped her finger over the screen, answering the call. Jared started and halfway raised the phone to his ear and then he saw Alona opening the door to slip outside.

“Jared?” came Gen’s voice.

He couldn’t decide if he should stop Alona and ask her more questions. Her story made sense, but...

“Jared?”

He let Alona go and put the phone to his ear. “Hi. Gen.”

“Hey. Thanks for answering.”

“S-sure.”

Jared walked away from the door and sat down on the couch.

“I wanted to apologize for the other night. I shouldn’t have shown up without warning like that. I hope...I hope I didn’t upset your girlfriend.”

“She’s not my girlfriend.”

“She’s not?”

The hope in her voice felt like a vice squeezing his heart.

“N-no. Just a...” He stopped because he’d almost said source. And that was a sure fire way to get his ass fired if Gen reported him. Plus, Alona wasn’t actually a source. Not an official one anyway. “She’s just a friend.”

“A pretty good friend.”

“Yeah, well, you know. Um...”

“I’m sorry. I shouldn’t be asking. I just wanted to call to apologize and tell you I won’t do it again.”

“Do what?”

“Just drop by.”

“E-ever?”

“Well. It’s probably better than...well. I don’t know. Do you?” she asked in a small voice.

Jared licked his lips and thought about it. Never talk to Gen again? He didn’t want that. Gen must have interpreted his silence as a bad thing though.

“Well. I guess that’s my answer. So, sorry again.”

“No, no. Not my answer. I...I just think we’d have to take our time again.

Or something.”

“I understand. Goodnight, Jared.”

“Goodnight, Gen.”

She hung up and Jared tossed his phone onto the table and dry washed his face. That goodnight had sounded an awful lot like goodbye.

### **Thursday, August 14, 2014**

Jared did a second set of twenty reps on the pull-up bar. He had to cross his ankles and bend his knees because he was too tall for it otherwise. There were several other agents as tall if not taller than him at WFO. He really ought to make a case that they needed to install one of those adjustable bars so that the tall people didn’t have to squat to reach it and the short agents didn’t have to jump up and dangle off the floor like kids in gym class.

He got his feet under him and stood up and shook out his arms. He heard humming behind him and turned to find Jensen mumble-singing as he ran on the treadmill. He didn’t seem to be aware that he was doing it. Jared would have pointed it out to him and made fun of him for it, but he actually sounded pretty good.

“There you are!”

Jared started and turned toward the gym entrance. Jensen noticed the



movement and turned off the machine. He stood on the edges and looked over his shoulder, popping out his earbuds.

“We’ve been looking all over for you guys!” Bob yelled at them.

“What? Why? It’s 6:30am,” Jared said. “We’re technically not even on the clock yet.”

“Someone surrendered himself to us this morning. He says he’ll only talk to Jensen.”

“Who is it?” Jensen asked.

“Radek Podvodnik.”

Jared and Jensen exchanged looks. From his expression, Jensen was just as confused as Jared. Podvodnik had to know that they suspected him of something, but there was no way he would know that they knew enough to arrest him. The only reason they hadn’t was because they were trying to wait until they had more information on the upcoming shipment.

“Well don’t stand there holding your dicks. Get showered, get dressed, and get upstairs to interview room two. ASAP.”

“Yes, sir.”

They showered and dressed in record time and found Radek Podvodnik waiting for them in the biggest of the three interviews rooms. It wasn’t all that big, but the furniture fit with enough room for Podvodnik, his lawyer, three agents, and an SSA. Sort of. It was cramped. Jared remained standing.

“Mr. Podvodnik,” Jensen started. “We’re surprised to see you here.”

“Don’t answer that,” his lawyer said.

Everyone, including Podvodnik, looked at him. He shrank back a little.

“Sorry.”

Jared could see Jensen fight an eye roll and turn back to Podvodnik.

“Can you tell us why you’ve come here today?”

“Well, I received several phone calls in the past couple of days from clients who called in a panic telling me that they’d received visits from the FBI.

After I’d had my meeting with you Agent Ackles, I thought you had been persuaded by my arguments. Apparently that wasn’t the case because when the clients called, I recognized exactly who they all were. And I knew you knew more than you were saying. I decided to come in and confess and tell you everything I know about the operation.”

“Out of the goodness of your heart?” Bob grunted.

“For immunity of course.”

“Absolutely not,” Jensen said bluntly. “You want immunity on human trafficking charges?”

“I’m just the money guy,” Podvodnik shrugged. “I’m not involved in any other part. I don’t partake of the services myself. I don’t recruit the buyers, I don’t organize the pickups, I don’t know anything about where the kids are kept or how they’re treated. I was just asked to launder the money. I realize it’s for a despicable reason, but it was sadly a case of out of sight out of mind.

“Now, I can get you the names of all of the buyers I launder money for through Potomac First and The Lilac House. There is only one person at the charity who knows what is going on. I can provide documentation that shows they knew what the money was being used for and I believe there is even a way of proving that the people they have possession of came from the traffickers. That way if someone is missing, you’ll know if you need to look into murder charges or find out if they sold them to someone else.”

“Is that all?” Jensen asked. “We have their names. Including the ones from the six other cities you’re ‘just the money guy’ for.”

Podvodnik shifted, his eyes flashing. The lawyer glanced at him.

“In addition to the six you've found, there are four others. I can give you those as well. Also, I don't think you know who the inside man is at The Lilac House. And...I can give you the slavers themselves. I know when the next shipment is coming in. I know that it's actually the second half of one shipment. I don't know where they store the children. But if you catch the slavers and free the ones on the ship, you will be able to interrogate them and hopefully locate the ones that were brought in last week.”

Jared crossed his arms and looked around the room. Johnston and Bob were all looking to Jensen. It really was insane that Jensen wasn't an SSA.

Everyone always looked to him like he was in charge anyway. Jensen glanced at Bob, saw that he was looking to him, and turned back to Podvodnik, clearing his throat.

“We might be able to get you reduced sentencing. You have to understand why we can't let you walk away from this.”

“I'll tell you why you will. If they don't get the all clear from me, they won't come. They'll probably dump their current cargo in the ocean.

They'll disappear from this area and find new clients elsewhere. The batch of kids already here will starve to death before they're found.”

“You think threatening to be responsible for the deaths of dozens of children is going to grease the wheels with us?” Jared asked, a hard edge to his voice.

“I'm saying that I can give you over a hundred clients who have bought

humans to use as slaves in their homes. I can give you the money man at the charity and the one who makes the delivery of the cash to the procurers.

I can give you the date and time of the next shipment, and I can guarantee you that I can get them to think that everything is good and will go ahead as scheduled. What you do from there is up to you, and all I ask is to stay out of jail and to keep my reputation intact so that I can retire in peace to Boca.

Or wherever people retire. I don't want my wife or children to know about

this.”

Jensen crossed his arms and sat back in his chair. Jared knew he didn’t want to make the call without discussing it out of Podvodnik’s hearing. He cleared his throat and got Bob’s attention. Jared nodded his head toward the door.

“Mr. Podvodnik. We’re going to discuss this with our own lawyers. We’d like for you to stay here until we come back.”

Podvodnik inclined his head. “Of course.”

The agents filed out of the room and an FBI police officer was placed to guard the door. The group moved to another interview room and stood around the table to discuss the situation.

“Do we believe him?” Johnston asked. “Is this something we can even consider?”

“I don’t really want to,” Jensen replied. “Even if he’s never bought a victim for himself and really is only the money guy—he deserves jail time. And a lot of it.”

“So the question is, do we really need his information?” Jared asked. “We can get him without a confession, right?”

“Yes,” Bob said. “The money laundering is clearly documented. But what about everything else?”

“The nine households that we’ve identified as having or potentially having slaves are tied to the money laundering as well. We can also send Child Protective Services into their homes based on an anonymous tip. If they try to identify the children or explain where they came from they probably

won’t be able to. I doubt Nicole’s and or Jeanette’s names are actually Nicole or Jeanette.”

“Not everyone we saw was a child though.”

“We could get a warrant for the others based on the money laundering and

the association with other human slavers.”

“Okay,” Bob said, “so far we don’t need him. What about the six known and four supposed other cities where this is occurring?”

“Osric was able to find a connection between Podvodnik and at least four banks in the known cities,” Jensen said. “If we subpoena their records we should be able to determine that laundering is occurring there as well. My guess is that we’ll find the same TTPT code.”

“We should also be able to get Ella to tell us if there are cities that weren’t on her resume that we should look into,” Jared added. “She’s cooperating with us right now.”

“Okay.” Bob crossed his arms. “What about the person connected to the charity or the money courier?”

“The money courier should be easy,” Johnston said. “We put a watch on the account. As soon as money is withdrawn, we should have a location on him and at the very least get a picture of his face at the bank or ATM if not be able to get to him in time to arrest him.”

“The person at the charity should be fairly easy to smoke out once we access their records,” Jensen said. “And with the proof of the money laundering through their finances, we should be able to subpoena their records.”

“So, we can get everyone without Podvodnik,” Bob said. “Should we turn him down and just arrest his ass?”

“Well, we don’t have everyone,” Jared said. “The slavers themselves are an unknown. And will be wholly unconnected to the money trail we’ve uncovered if they get paid strictly in cash. Podvodnik says they need the all clear from him to proceed. If he’s in jail he can’t give the signal, and then

very likely they will dump the cargo or best case scenario, sell it somewhere else. There’s the matter of the kids that are currently being held

—somewhere—who will die if they are abandoned. And even if Podvodnik

doesn't give the all clear, if the courier picking up the money and dropping it off is enough of a signal, we still don't know when or where they will come in."

"I think we know where," Jensen said. "The slip in the Port of Baltimore that The Lilac House rents. What we need is the when."

"We could put round the clock surveillance on the slip," Johnston suggested. "After all, this is supposed to be taking place sometime soon so we wouldn't have people sitting out there for weeks or months. And we could ask the Baltimore Field Office for support."

"That still runs the risk of assuming that Podvodnik doesn't have to give the all clear," Jared said. "I know Podvodnik is scum, but I don't know if putting him in jail is more important than saving children's lives."

Everyone had their arms crossed now as they considered Jared's words.

Jared didn't like the idea of granting immunity to Podvodnik anymore than Jensen did, but all he could picture was a documentary he'd seen several years ago where twenty-one people had been found dead in a cargo container after being abandoned by their kidnappers. Sometimes bargaining with the devil was the way to prevent the most evil.

"Is there any way we can still get him charged with something but avoid jail time for him?" Jensen asked.

"He also had the clause about his reputation," Johnston grumbled. "He may not accept any charges at all."

"Well," Bob said, his mouth moving like he was chewing on his tongue or something. "I did an immunity agreement like this several years back. I got the attorneys to put in a clause that if we found out that he had lied about anything, and I mean anything, that it would void the agreement in its entirety. The guy kept his end of the bargain, got us what we needed, and he was going to walk. But then we found out that he'd lied about how many kilos of heroin we'd find in the safe house because he knew his girlfriend had stashed a couple. Because he said there were 56 bricks instead of 58,

we able to void the immunity and indict him with the rest of the scum.”

Jared looked to Jensen who still looked like he had a lemon tucked into his cheek. His friend rubbed the fingers together of one hand, but didn’t say anything yet.

“I think that’s good enough,” Jared said. “I’m willing to give him the immunity just based on the possibility of saving lives. If we can also have a way to potentially trip him up, that’s even better.”

“I agree,” Johnston said. “I think we have to do this because we don’t have time to try to figure out if he’s as important as he says he is.”

Jensen finally nodded his head. “Okay. I agree with you all. The kids need to be our priority. And we can keep tabs on Podvodnik if and when he leaves the area. And hell, maybe we can catch him in a lie.”

“Alright,” Bob said. “Get one of our lawyers and a USA down here to draft the agreement. And tell him we’re not signing anything until we can vet at least one piece of information he claims to have.”

“We’ll need Ella for that,” Jared said. “She can verify if the other cities and companies he names are ones that she knows about.”

“Okay, Johnston, get the lawyers. Ackles and Paladecki, go pick up Ella.

And if you have time, inform Pellegrino and Cohen about what’s going on.

Not everything, just enough for them to be able to take the actions they need to in order to secure their company again. I’m going to stay with Podvodnik and see if he’s arrogant enough to talk without signing anything.

I’ll check in with you all in a couple of hours.”

They all left the interview room and Jared and Jensen went down to the garage to get one of their cars. Jared frowned contemplatively the whole way to the car.

“Do you think Bob will ever get my name right?” he asked as he pulled open

the passenger side door.

Jensen smiled wryly. “Honestly I think he’s just fucking with you at this point.”

Jared narrowed his eyes and slid into the car.

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Jensen checked his watch as a way to disguise looking at Jared as they rode the elevator up to Cohen & Cohen’s lobby. He’d never met Alona before and he was very curious to see what kind of woman had Jared all twisted up. He was also curious to see if and how his demeanor changed while around her. Jared looked calm and collected, but when the elevator arrived on the 15th floor he drew up tighter than a piano wire. Jensen half-smirked to himself. This was going to be awesome.

They walked into the lobby, much as they had done six weeks ago, and approached the front desk. Behind the counter sat a very pretty girl with mocha colored skin.

“Agents! You’re back. Welcome to Cohen & Cohen.”

Jensen was pretty sure the woman’s name was some version of Megan, but he couldn’t remember. All he knew was that this couldn’t be Alona. He glanced at Jared and he seemed just as stunned to see the old receptionist.

“H-hi. Do you know what happened to Alona? Did she call in sick?”

Megan-something shrugged. “The temp agency just called me this morning and asked me to fill in.”

“Oh. Um. What’s the name of the company?”

“Temporary Solutions.”

“Clever,” Jensen said.

“Yeah. What can I do for you?”

“We’d like to speak to Mark Pellegrino or Matt Cohen. Both, preferably.”

“Do you have an appointment?”

“No.” Jensen smiled. “But we don’t need one.”

She gave him a tight smile and picked up the phone. She spoke softly to someone named Dylan—one of Jared’s chief tormentors if Jensen recalled correctly—and Jensen leaned sideways on the counter to look at Jared. He raised his eyebrows discreetly in the receptionist’s direction in question.

Jared just shrugged. He didn’t know where Alona was or why she wasn’t in.

Megan-something hung up the phone. “Matt and Mark are both available to meet with you. You can go up to the twentieth floor.”

“Thank you,” Jensen replied.

They walked to the internal elevator and made it to the top floor without running into anyone, which was a blessing since they didn’t have to explain Jared to anyone. The elevator doors opened and they were greeted by one of the personal assistants, Dylan, Jensen assumed. He led them to Matt’s office and knocked on the door. Matt opened the door himself and smiled broadly as he shook hands with the agents.

“Please, come in. I think I owe you both a debt of gratitude.”

They walked into the office and he led them toward the sitting area. As they passed the desk, Jensen nudged Jared and pantomimed jacking off and raised his eyebrows. Jared repressed a smile and pointed to the middle left drawer—the one with all of Matt’s—items.

“So,” Matt turned toward them and they straightened up guiltily. “Won’t you have a seat? I heard on the news about the FBI arresting the people responsible for those fraudulent securities. As unhappy as I am that it happened here at all, I’m a little relieved that it was a nationwide scandal and that we weren’t specifically targeted.”

“Yes, we were all grateful for such a fortuitous outcome,” Jared said,

unbuttoning his suit coat as he sat down on the couch.

Jensen sat down in the chair separated from Matt's by a round end table.

"Did you ever discover anything more regarding the suspicious activities with the money transfer program?"

"Or the charity?"

They all turned and watched Mark stride across the room. He gave Matt a challenging look at having started the meeting without him, and Matt just gave him a nonchalant smirk in return. Jensen glanced at Jared and he was giving him a little nod that he was pretty certain said, Yeah, they'll be fucking out this fight later. Jensen raised his hand to cover his smile by pretending to cough.

"Excuse me," Jensen cleared his throat. "We were able to uncover some illegal activities related to the money transfer program; that's why we're here today."

"Does it have something to do with that charity?" Mark repeated, taking a seat next to Jared on the couch.

Jensen kept his laughter in check as he saw Jared stiffen slightly as the man once again sat close enough that when he crossed his legs, his foot brushed Jared's shin.

"We're not at liberty to discuss the charity at this time," Jensen said. "What we can tell you is that Ella Vasquez is involved in a bigger scheme. The program wasn't skimming money from Cohen & Cohen; it was simply covertly transferring the individuals' money to two separate bank accounts."

"Except on a occasion when the money from the investment returns was diverted before being reported to Cohen & Cohen," Jared said. "Since you assess your fees based on a percentage of what is earned, there were a couple of times that your money was technically affected. It will be up to you if you decide to pursue criminal charges."

“Is there something larger going on than a few thousand dollars missing?”

Matt asked.

“Yes,” Jensen said.

“So, Vasquez would receive a harsher punishment if she is prosecuted for whatever else is going on.”

“That is correct,” Jensen said, focusing on the word “if.” Depending on what kind of deals got worked out, Ella might not receive more than a slap

on the wrist, but “if” she was fully prosecuted, it would be more jail time than defrauding an investment firm.

Matt looked at Mark. “Then I feel we should leave her to you to handle.

Though, I don’t want her working here any longer.”

“Of course not,” Jared said. “You can remove her from your security system and go back to the old way of managing your accounts and get rid of the program. We’re actually here to pick her up today as well.”

“You’re not worried word got around that you’re here and she’ll bolt while you’re with us?” Mark asked.

“We’ve actually already spoken to her. She’s waiting to hear from us on what happens next. We’ll be taking her with us when we leave the building.”

“In hand cuffs?” Matt asked. “I prefer if we didn’t have that kind of scene...”

“No, no. No cuffs.”

“More’s the pity,” Mark murmured.

Jared tsked and glanced at him. Jensen smiled and looked over at Matt. He looked pretty angry. Before Jensen would have assumed it was because he was disgusted by the man’s unprofessionalism. Now, he was pretty certain that it was jealousy.

“Well, we don’t want to take up too much of your time,” Jensen continued.

“We just wanted to inform you about Ella Vasquez. And to let you know that in the future some of your clients may be involved in an investigation, but that it has nothing to do with Cohen & Cohen.”

“Some of our clients?” Mark asked. “How many? Should we stop doing business with them?”

“At this time we don’t want to do anything that may alert them to an investigation. However, we do intend to move on them within a short time span, and we will do our best to keep Cohen & Cohen’s involvement to a minimum.”

“I think I would prefer for these people to be gone immediately,” Matt said.

“I appreciate your concern, Mr. Cohen, but we are asking for your patience and cooperation on this matter.”

Matt pursed his lips, glanced at Mark who gave a small shrug, and then gave Jensen a curt nod.

“If you believe that is for the best, we’ll sit tight.”

“Thank you.” Jensen stood and Jared quickly followed. “We do need to collect Ella and be on our way.”

Matt and Mark stood as well. They shook hands all around and Matt walked them to his office door and Mark escorted them to the elevators.

“I’ll be sure to tell Louis how pleased I am with Jared’s work,” Mark said congenially.

Jensen was a little confused by the wry look Jared sent the man.

“If I ever have any trouble again I’ll know just who to call. I’ll be happy to recommend you to any associates of mine who might have similar inconveniences.”

“Thanks,” Jensen said, not sure what else to say. It wasn’t like they were freelance contractors or anything.

“And Jared, do call me if you ever need advice exploring your options.”

Jared stiffened again and muttered, “S-sure.”

They stepped onto the elevator and Jensen waited for the doors to close before he asked, “What was that about?”

“N-nothing. He’s just talking about investing advice.”

Jensen raised an eyebrow.

“Because I knew so little about the stuff that everyone knew I wasn’t here because I knew anything about stocks and bonds and securities? It was a joke about how I pretty much sucked at being undercover.”

Jared pulled on his collar.

“Mm-hmm.” Jensen let it slide.

They got off on the seventeenth floor and found Ella sitting in her cubicle too upset to play a game or do anything other than chew on a nail. She jumped out of her chair when she saw them.

“W-what’s happening? Did something go wrong?”

Jensen shook his head. “Not from our end. Were you able to make the final transfer?”

She nodded. “I did it yesterday.”

“Okay. We’re going to take you in to the office again. We’d like to know if there are any other companies in other cities that you or anyone else installed this program.”

Ella nodded and picked up her purse. “There’s at least four others that aren’t on my CV. Which is how I assume you found the other ones.”

Jensen glanced at Jared and he nodded back. That was one confirmation that Podvodnik was telling them the truth. They escorted Ella out of the building and she got a few looks from employees who immediately began whispering in their wake. They deposited Ella into the backseat and Jensen started to drive them to WFO. Jared pulled out his phone and started searching for something.

“What was the name of that temp agency? Temporary Solutions?”

Jensen nodded and carefully navigated a traffic circle. Jared put the phone to his ear, and spoke a moment later.

“Hello. My name is Special Agent Jared Padalecki with the FBI. I wanted to check on the status of one of your employees. Ah, yes, certainly.” He

glanced at Jensen. “She’s getting a manager.” Jensen nodded. “Hello. Hi.

This is Agent Padalecki with the FBI. I was trying to locate someone that I believe might be one of your employees. You had her filling in at Cohen & Cohen as a receptionist for the past six weeks or so. Her name is Alona Tal.

Yes, I’ll wait.” Jared looked at his nails. “Yes, Alona, that’s corrected. Yes, she worked at Cohen & Cohen, but she wasn’t there today. Did she call in sick?

Unh-hunh. I see. Thank you for the information. If she contacts you, can you give me a call?”

Jared gave the manager his number at the Bureau and his cell phone number. Then he hung up and looked concerned and thoughtful as he looked at the phone in his hands.

“What’s up?” Jensen asked.

“She doesn’t work there anymore. She quit yesterday.”

Jensen smiled. “Maybe when you disappeared it broke her heart and she had to run away.”

Jared glanced in the review mirror, but Ella was biting her thumbnail and

looking out the window, completely oblivious to their conversation.

“It’s just...the timing is not really a coincidence.”

“What do you mean?”

“She knew I was a federal agent.”

“What?!” Jensen whipped his head to look at Jared.

His partner pointed forward. “Jensen!”

Jensen looked forward and had to slam on the brakes and very nearly plowed into a stopped Corolla. Ella squeaked in the backseat.

“You okay?” he asked her.

“Y-yeah.”

“Sorry about that.” He looked at Jared. “When did she find out?” he whispered.

“Just last night. Or. I only found out last night. I get the feeling she knew for at least a week. Or two.”

“When were you going to tell me?”

“Now?” Jared asked sheepishly. “When it happened last night it was late and I was a little stunned by her confession. I was going to tell you this morning, but you said you wanted to work out and I hadn’t been to the gym properly in a while so I figured it could wait an hour. And then Podvodnik came in and I just didn’t think about it again until now.”

“Shit, Jared. She could be in on this. Podvodnik could have come in as a distraction and she’s off warning the traffickers.”

“Podvodnik came in?” Ella asked.

“I don’t think that’s the case,” Jared said, ignoring her. “She came over last

night to ask me if we had found anything about the last payment for the shipment she'd overheard Ella talking about."

"Wait, Alona is who turned me in?"

"She knew about the shipment?" Jensen asked.

"Wasn't that part of the conversation? It's the information she supplied me.

I tried to pass it off like we were working on it but it wasn't a big deal because it was just drugs. She got really upset. Not like she was worried her deal was going to be ruined, but like she knew it was human trafficking.

And she was not okay with it."

"Do we know anything about her?" Jensen asked. "Do you think there are any fingerprints at your apartment?"

"Maybe. But...I don't know if she ever touched anything that would hold a print."

"Too bad we can't dust your dick for prints," Jensen muttered.

"You were sleeping with Alona?" Ella asked.

"Ella," Jensen and Jared said together.

She shrank back into her seat.

"What are we going to do about it?" Jared asked weakly.

"Well, fuck. We're going to have to tell Bob everything. And I mean everything. And let him make the call. Whatever we decide about her, we have to proceed with Podvodnik as planned and hope that this doesn't come back to bite us in the ass."

"I'm sorry I was so stupid," Jared said.

Jensen shook his head. "No...for some reason I have a feeling that whoever

she is...she's very good at what she does."

"Podvodnik turned himself in?" Ella tried again. "What are you going to do with me?"

"See if your stories match." Jensen turned into WFO's garage off of 3rd St.

"Ella, if Podvodnik claims to be 'just the money guy,' would you believe him?"

"I—I don't know. I mean, money is all he ever talked about with me."

Jensen nodded. He wondered how the immunity agreement negotiations were going.

Friday, August 15, 2015

The immunity agreement negotiation had not gone well. The lawyers had shown up by 9:00am, and they had still been hammering out details late into Friday morning after talking and talking all day yesterday and late into the night. Podvodnik did not like the 'you lie and it's all void' clause, which made Jensen suspicious as hell of basically anything he told them.

Eventually though they had managed to convince him that without agreeing to their version of the immunity agreement they had enough to put him away for the rest of his natural life and felt confident in their abilities to find the children without him. He'd signed and started giving up information.

They had 117 names in eleven cities, the financial director of The Lilac House, ten men and women who acted as money couriers in the other cities, a man named Phillip Long who was the money courier for DC, and because he didn't know she was already working with them, Podvodnik threw Ella under the bus as well. The squad was busy coordinating with other field offices to procure arrest warrants so that that they could make all the arrests on the same day. They didn't want word leaked so that people could bolt if they heard about the arrests in other cities.

They were planning the arrests for late Wednesday morning. The shipment

coming into the Port of Baltimore was scheduled for Wednesday at four o'clock in the morning. It wasn't completely unusual for dock work to begin that early, and it would be dark and secluded enough that the traffickers would be able to conduct their business unmolested. They'd gotten in contact with the Baltimore Office and the SWAT teams in both offices were coordinating the hit.

Jensen felt antsy about the whole thing. Four and a half days was a long time. It gave them time to plan and coordinate everything well, but it also left a lot of time for things to go very wrong. The only comforting thing was that everything Podvodnik was giving them was checking out.

Bob had been rather calmer about Alona than he'd expected him to be, but he just told them to keep an eye out for her. They had too much on their plate at the moment to devote any time or resources to her. They would deal with her and Jared after all of this was resolved. For now, Bob hadn't told anyone else. Jensen wondered if he was sitting on it because if everything went perfectly with the hit and arrests on Wednesday then there might not be a need to tell anyone at all. More than likely Jared would get in a shit-ton of trouble for sleeping with someone while undercover. He appreciated Bob protecting him, but part of him worried that this woman was out there and knew too much about the case. Jared seemed to trust her—or at least believe that she wasn't one of the bad guys—so he was going to rely on his trust in Jared.

“Hey, Jensen.”

“What's up?” he asked, turning around to face Jared.

Jared pointed at his computer monitor with a pen. “So, you know how Podvodnik provided us with a coded list for the types of slaves they're bringing in? A spoon for a chef, certain flowers for male and female sex slaves and their virgin status and whatnot.”

Jensen nodded.

“I think I know how they were advertising the new merchandise, or taking requests for what people wanted. Mark told me he went to one of The Lilac House's charity balls once. He said the silent auction was really weird

because the items being offered were like Moroccan Spoon or Romani Lily.

He thought the items were crappy because it was all about giving money to the charity, but for the people in the know...that's how they ordered or asked for someone who was good at cooking. Or if they wanted a female sex slave under twelve or whatever else was being offered."

Jensen made a face. "That's disgusting. A literal modern day fucking slave auction."

"Makes you wonder how the other cities did it then. Did they all fly in for the annual gala for The Lilac House? Or are there other charities?"

"You know, he never did indicate what he was using to launder the money through in the other cities. Son of a bitch, why didn't we pay attention to that?"

"I think we can shake him and make him give it up. We'll just say he'll be lying to us about the laundering thing by implying it was only the banks which will void his contract."

"Wouldn't hurt to try."

Jared put out a hand. He's being held here until Wednesday, right? Let's go have a chat."

"Okay."

Jensen turned around to lock his computers and his desk phone rang. He held out a finger as he stood up. "Hang on, let me get this. Hello? This is Ackles."

"Agent Ackles. This is the deputy warden at Locust Grove State Prison."

Jensen made a face. That was where Russ was being held. He wished he was being held in Red Onion or Wallens Ridge—supermax prisons—but Locust Grove was the most secure prison that was a reasonable distance from Arlington, where he would be prosecuted and face trial.

"What can I do for you, sir?"

“It’s Little. He’s been erratic and disruptive all week. We put him in solitary but he’s been scratching the walls until his nails bled and singing and talking to the guards—it’s unnerving everybody. When you didn’t show up for your appointment today—he flipped his shit. Look, I know it’s our responsibility to handle our prisoners, but he’s freaking everybody out. No one wants to go near him and legally we can’t just leave him in solitary with no food. He’s demanding to see you.”

“Let him starve, Warden.”

“Agent Ackles, please. Can you just come talk to him? If you tell him in person he might calm down. He keeps claiming that you disappeared. He thinks that you were kidnapped and murdered. He keeps saying that one of his people got you when he told them not to.”

Jensen clenched the phone. Holy shit. Was that even a possibility? One of Russ’ disciples would take it upon him or herself to take revenge on him for putting away their Messiah?

“We told him you’re fine and that you’re working a case in DC. But he’s insisting on seeing you.” The man swallowed loudly enough to be heard over the phone. “Agent, I realize this call is shameful. I’m embarrassed that I’ve lost control of an inmate and all my officers—but, I hope that impresses upon you exactly how desperate we are to be asking you this.”

Jensen nodded slowly, trying to calm his pounding heart.

“Okay. I’ll come. It’ll take me about an hour to get there.”

“We’ll tell him two so he doesn’t freak out worse if you’re late.”

“Okay. I’ll be there as soon as I can.”

“What’s up?” Jared asked after he had hung up.

Jensen stood up and donned his suit jacket. “Russ,” he said bitterly.

“Son of a bitch,” Jared muttered. “Are you going to see him? Don’t. Don’t give him what he wants.”

“I wish it was that simple. Apparently he’s scaring the shit out of everyone who works at the prison. Look, you go to talk to Podvodnik about how he’s laundering money in other cities. Take Osric with you. And I’ll go deal with that buttwart.”

Jared snorted. “Tell him ‘fuck you’ from me.”

“Will do.”

Jensen shook out his hands as he waited for the guard to come get him.

He’d tried to get a hold of Misha to let him know where he was going, but he hadn’t answered his calls or texts. Then he had remembered that today was final exams for the NAT’s. He’d be busy all day and wouldn’t be allowed to have access to his phone for most of it. He knew getting a text about the meeting wouldn’t make him happy, so he figured he would text him when he was done and let him know that he had gone to the prison and everything was okay.

Fuck, who was he kidding? Everything was not okay. He’d broken down like a baby last Saturday and ruined their night together. Misha had comforted him and held him all night. That hadn’t sucked, but he’d been too overwrought to make love to Misha properly, so all they got that weekend was a half-assed frottage session. He had felt better on Sunday—

he’d felt a little silly for his breakdown—but Misha had been there for him and supported him. He’d spent all week like he was over everything that

had had happened in Green Falls and that he didn’t need to be involved with Russ outside of the Angel Slayer trial.

He’d talked with Bob and the police detectives he’d been working with locally and around the country. Everyone had agreed that it was okay that he step back. The Lubbock police were going to give pictures of the trophies found in the Elton bunker to the victims’ families to look over. If they recognized anything, then that might be all the proof they needed to pin the Lady Killer murders on Russ. Or at the very least to let those families know

that the monster responsible for their unresolved nightmare was behind bars and never getting out.

It seemed like the only one who wasn't okay with Jensen stepping back was Russ, but his opinion didn't count for shit. Although apparently he could creep out a dozen grown men into giving into his demands just to get him to stop.

The door to the holding room opened and a guard Jensen recognized from his previous visits motioned him to follow him. He was a big, beefy guy; someone he felt more or less safe with as he was being led to the craziest fuck the Locust Grove Prison had ever had the misfortune of incarcerating.

He opened the door to the interview room and Russ was already sitting at the table. He smiled when he saw Jensen. There was no one else in the room, and Jensen stopped cold.

"Where is the guard?" he asked.

"It's me," the man said, his deep voice a comforting rumble behind him.

"No one else wanted to be in the room with him."

"Fantastic."

They both entered the room and Jensen saw through the glass of the interior door that three guards were watching what was going on from the safety of their office. Jensen crossed to the table, but didn't sit down. He gripped the back of the chair and his knuckles turned white. Russ had his hands folded on top of the table. Jensen could see that he'd done more than scratch his nails bloody; the tips of his fingers were shredded as well.

"Hello, Jensen."

"Russ. I heard you've been throwing quite the temper tantrum."

"I was worried about you."

"As you can see, there was no need."

“Hmm.”

Russ’ eyes roamed over him. Jensen felt sick.

“Do you have people out there stalking me? Did you put a hit out on me?”

“Jensen! No, of course not. I love you.”

Jensen flinched. In all his insane ramblings, he’d never actually said those words. Not like that anyway.

“I made it clear you’re not to be touched. That’s why I got so worried when you disappeared on Saturday.”

“Why? Were there other people in Green Falls?”

“No, just those two. Why didn’t you fly back with me?”

“I didn’t want to. I was done. I am done. We caught the Green Falls Killers and there was no reason for me to try to keep you happy anymore. I had work to do. I’m working a huge case right now—we’re swamped with getting warrants and making arrangements for an upcoming hit. I didn’t have time to bother with you this week.”

Russ’ hands tightened and he frowned a little. “I understand that. But today is our day. You missed our meeting. No case is worth skipping our meetings.”

“Every case is worth skipping our meetings. And you know what? I meant it when I said I’m done. I don’t care if you’re willing to tell me about a dozen killers in half a dozen cities killing twenty people every day. I don’t care. It’s not my problem anymore.”

“You don’t mean that,” Russ said. “I know your heart.”

“You don’t!” Jensen stepped around the table. “You don’t know me at all!

And we’re done indulging your whims. I know you hate being here. I know you’re bored. And playing games with your captors is all you have left to you.”

“You think so?” Russ snarled, leaning forward. “You think I don’t still have power?”

Jensen slammed his hands on the table and leaned down to look him in the eyes. “No, Russ. You don’t. Not even your own disciples respect you anymore. They’re not contacting you, they’re carrying on without you.

They realized that you’re no Messiah. You wouldn’t have gotten caught otherwise. They see you for what you are now, Russ. A sad little king on his pretend throne. You’re just a man. And there’s nothing extraordinary about you except your level of depravity.

“You’re nothing, Russ,” Jensen hissed leaning in closer. “And you don’t even realize that’s all you’ve ever been. Empty. Meaningless.”

Russ’ eye glittered dangerously with cold hatred. Jensen smiled to see it.

“You’re going to jail, Russ,” he said quietly. “You’re going to solitary for life. And you can scream your throat raw and beat your hands into nubs, but no one is ever going to care. You’re going to go mad. And I don’t even care enough to want to see it happen.”

There was a long moment as the air around them crackled with rage and anger and disgust and loathing and everything Jensen felt for the psychopath was finally mutual.

And then Russ lunged forward. He had just enough give in his chains that he was able to reach Jensen’s throat—because he’d been stupid enough to get that close to him. Jensen flinched back immediately, but Russ was still able to partially sink his teeth into his flesh. Russ’ sharp front teeth grazed over his skin and he let out a cry of pain and put a hand to his neck. The guards were rushing into the room and holding Russ down onto his chair.

Jensen pulled his hand back and was relieved to see no blood. Then he felt something cool on his neck. He touched the throbbing spot again and this time his hand came back with warm blood on it.

Russ started laughing maniacally. “You’re mine now, Jensen. I’ve marked

you. You'll always be mine. Go ahead and stop coming to visit me. I'm always with you now." He jerked against the chains and the guards and one of them pulled out his baton. "You're mine!" Russ screamed.

Jensen shuddered and stepped back. It sounded like when he'd screamed that he wanted to gut Misha back in Elton. The tall guard handed him a handkerchief and then went to help the other guards get Russ unchained from the floor and back through the office toward his cell. Jensen put the folded cloth to his neck and pressed, feeling the sting of the bite. He pulled the handkerchief back and on the stark white surface was a perfect bloody print of Russ' teeth.

Saturday, August 16, 2014

Misha took Charlie out for another walk. He'd gotten home at ten in the morning, hoping to surprise Jensen, but he'd been gone. It was now after four and Misha was starting to worry. He didn't want to ruin the surprise, but he also thought it was weird that Jensen would be gone all day on a Saturday. Though if he had errands to run it wasn't completely unusual.

He'd give him until dinner time and then try to track him down.

When Misha got back to the apartment, his key turned in the lock, but the mechanism didn't move. It must already be unlocked. He could have sworn that he'd locked the door. His hand went instinctually to his waist, but he didn't carry a gun anymore. And his fake gun that he was required to carry for class was back at his dorm. He gripped Charlie's leash tighter and opened the door slowly, scanning the room from outside before stepping in and looking around.

Jensen darted out of the bedroom, his weapon drawn but not raised. He sighed heavily when he spotted Misha and Charlie in the doorway. He holstered his gun.

"Jesus, Misha. I thought someone had broken in and dognaped Charlie!"

Misha's laugh was a little giggly due to dissipating nerves. He stepped inside and shut the door.

“Sorry,” he said as he unleashed Charlie. “I have been here all day though.”

“Oh, all day?” Jensen asked, sounding disappointed that he’d been away.

He crossed the room, patted Charlie on the head, and then kissed Misha.

Misha grabbed onto his arms, surprised by the intensity for a moment, then Jensen pulled back, slowly letting Misha’s lower lip slide between his own.

“Hey.”

“Hey yourself,” Misha replied. “Where have you been all day?”

“At work,” he bemoaned, circling his arms around Misha’s waist and kissing his chin as he pulled him toward the bedroom. “Please don’t take this to mean at all that I don’t want you here, but why are you here? I didn’t know they were in the habit of giving out passes two weekends in a row.”

He kissed him again.

“Mm. Well, it is the last weekend, so they were a little lenient. Plus, my EAP counselor wrote a note saying I needed the break.”

Misha leaned forward and kissed him, running a hand down his chest, thumbing a nipple through his dress shirt. Jensen pulled back and stopped walking.

“Your EAP counselor?” he asked gently, running a hand through Misha’s hair.

Misha shrugged. “I told you I’d ask for help. So I did.”

Jensen took his face in his hands and kissed him. He whispered against his lips, “Thank you, Mish. I know it probably wasn’t easy, but I’m so glad you asked.” He pulled back again and cupped his jaw, letting his thumb play over Misha’s lower lip. “I know you can take care of yourself. I know you’re strong. But, it’s kind of like watching you walk a tightrope. I know you can do it, but it just feels so much better to know there’s a safety net below you now.”

Misha nodded and ducked his head, but Jensen tilted his head back up.

“Don’t look away from me.”

Misha swallowed, a little overwhelmed by the intensity in Jensen’s eyes.

“So-so y-you were at work?” he stammered like a fourteen year old his first date.

Jensen smiled and leaned in, kissing his cheek. “Mm. We’ve got that takedown coming up on Wednesday.”

“Oh, right.” Misha kissed Jensen’s jaw and allowed himself to be pulled toward the bedroom again. “Think you’ll be ready?”

“Mm-hmm.” Jensen moved his hands to Misha’s ass and pulled him in so that their groins rubbed together, sparking heat and lust through his veins.

“All good. You pass your tests?”

“Won’t find out until Monday,” he moaned running his hands through Jensen’s hair. “But I feel really good about them.”

“What’s left for next week?” Jensen asked around Misha’s earlobe, his hands on Misha’s fly.

“J-just—yes, Jen...briefing exercise. Final PFT. Th-then...graduation on Thursday.”

They came to an abrupt stop as they hit the bedroom doorjamb by accident.

It didn’t bother Misha though and he hiked a leg up around Jensen’s waist and kissed him on the lips. Jensen took the opportunity to grind their lower halves together. Misha pulled back and kissed Jensen’s chin.

“You gonna come?”

“Well, I’m embarrassingly close right now.”

Misha chuckled. "To my graduation."

"Oh, yeah of course." He kissed Misha's eyelid and Misha giggled under the light touch. "Barring disaster on Wednesday."

Misha pulled back with a frown. "That's not funny."

"I know, I'm sorry."

He kissed him and put Misha's leg down on the ground so that they could start walking to the bed again. Misha kissed a trail down Jensen's jaw to his neck and continued kissing down until his lips hit an odd texture. He pulled back and found a gauze square held in place with medical tape. Misha forgot his lust and placed three gentle fingers on the bandage.

"What happened here?"

Jensen went rigid. Absolutely stiff as a board. He pulled away and actually took a couple steps away. He put his hand on the wound and glanced up, but then dropped his eyes and looked at the floor. It was guilty behavior.

But guilty of what?

"Jensen? What's the matter?"

He shook his head, eyes staying down. "It was just...I did something stupid."

"What, did you try cooking?" he asked with a smile, taking a step forward.

Jensen retreated and Misha stopped moving, his heart almost stopping as well. Did Jensen not want him? Not trust him? He stepped toward him again and Jensen stayed put. Misha gained confidence and walked close enough to touch him. He picked gently at the tape and then peeled it carefully off his neck. He gasped when he saw the bite mark, an angry red blemish, marring his beautiful neck.

"Jensen...what happened?"

Jensen let out a strangled laugh. "Would you believe me if I said I was

cheating on you?”

Misha felt waves of nausea washing over him. What was so bad that he thought cheating would be better than the truth? He put his fingers to the mark.

“Baby? What happened?”

Jensen struggled with not wanting to answer for a moment, but after looking in Misha’s eyes again, he relented. “Russ was making trouble at the prison. They asked me to come down to talk to him, to calm him down. So, I went yesterday. And I lost my temper and I got too close and...”

Jensen’s meaning finally sank in. Misha saw red. Literally his vision was awash with a sickly red haze.

“Russ bit you?” he snarled, hands digging into Jensen’s arm.

“Ow-owwww. Yeah...”

Misha grabbed Jensen by the wrist and dragged him out of the bedroom and then to the bathroom. He pulled open the medicine cabinet and the door slammed against the wall. He found the hydrogen peroxide mostly by feel because he still couldn’t really see that well. He grabbed a wad of gauze from the package under the sink. Then he dumped a quarter of the bottle of peroxide onto Jensen’s neck, not caring about his clothes. The liquid fizzed when it hit the wound and he dabbed at it with the gauze.

“Misha. I already thoroughly disinfected it yesterday.”

“Shut up,” he snapped.

He hadn’t meant to sound so mean, but even though he went quiet, Jensen didn’t seem hurt or offended by his tone. In fact, he seemed a little amused, which annoyed Misha on top of his aggravation. He dumped more hydrogen peroxide and let it fizz a little longer, the white bubbles rising up almost like it was sucking poison out of Jensen’s body. He dabbed it clean with a wet gauze, and then dry with even more gauze. He ran his fingers over the

wound.

“Misha, you’re growling.”

“I’m fucking angry.”

“Hmm.”

Misha stared at the marks and felt his blood boil. It wasn’t an expression.

He was pretty certain his blood was boiling and that’s where all the red steam in his eyes was coming from. It was going to scar. Russ’ mark was going to scar Jensen and be on him forever.

“No,” he said and ducked down to look under the sink.

“I didn’t say anything,” Jensen said.

“I wasn’t talking to you.”

“Right.”

“Ah-ha!” Misha stood up with a tube of Mederma. It was medication that helped reduce scarring. He unscrewed the lid and put some on his finger.

“Mish,” Jensen said, catching his wrist. “You’re not supposed to put that stuff on open wounds.”

“I won’t.” He pulled his hand free and began to massage the cream into the skin around the teeth marks. “Just the skin. You have to use this stuff like four or five times a day. That’s what it says on the packaging. No one ever reads that part. They just do it once.” He put more cream on his finger and rubbed around the top teeth marks. “Five times a day, Jensen. I’ll help too, but it’s most important in the beginning. You have to make sure the skin doesn’t pull tight. That is stays pliant. That’s how it won’t scar. You have to

—”

“Misha, Misha, Misha!” Jensen grabbed his wrist. “Hey. I will, okay?”

“It can’t scar, Jensen,” Misha said, his voice trembling. “You can’t—he can’t—it can’t scar, Jensen. He can’t leave his mark on you.”

“I understand.”

“I don’t think you do,” Misha said, trying to get at his neck again.

Jensen held his arm firmly. “Hey. Yes, I absolutely do know.” He put his free hand on Misha’s chest, over his heart—right where the brand that said

“thief” marked his body.

“Oh. Right.”

“Oh, right,” he mimicked gently. “Now you know how I feel every time I see it.”

Misha relaxed a little and Jensen released his arm. He went back to massaging in more cream. Jensen repressed a sigh and met his eyes. Misha nodded.

“I understand. I’ll look into what it’ll take to get it removed.”

Jensen leaned forward and pecked his lips. “Thank you, dear.”

Misha strummed his fingers on Jensen’s neck. Then he made a face. “No.

That’s like too 50’s sitcom-y.”

“And the search continues,” he said with a mock sigh of weariness.

Misha stroked his fingers lightly over the injury.

“Does it hurt?”

“Nah. Not too bad. But maybe you could...”

Misha looked over and met his eyes. He smiled and gave a quick raise of his eyebrows. Misha leaned forward and placed a very gentle kiss on the unmarked skin in the center of the teeth.

“Better?”

“Mm. Much. Now. How about you put a set of teeth marks on my ass?”

“Wha?” Misha laughed. “I—ah!”

He let out a shout as Jensen picked him up and literally tossed him over his shoulder. He backed carefully out of the bathroom and then carried him to the bedroom. Misha landed on the mattress with a bounce and looked up at Jensen. He was already halfway out of his shirt.

“Come on, Mish. Catch up.”

“Oh, yeah, okay.” Misha pulled off his T-shirt. “Hey, um, did you mean it?”

“Mean what?” Jensen asked as he pushed his pants and boxers down in one go.

“Can I put bite marks on your ass?”

Jensen grinned and slid onto the bed, covering Misha’s body with his and allowing his weight to settle on top of him. Misha moaned softly and went completely lax, like he was drowning in Jensen. Jensen kissed his jaw all the way to his ear.

“Put them anywhere and everywhere you like,” Jensen whispered.

Misha shivered and wrapped his arms around his neck.

“Careful,” he murmured. “If you let me, I will.”

Jensen covered his mouth with his and all semblance of conversation ceased.



Week 7

Chapter Notes

Misha recounts what happened to him the night Russ kidnapped him.

Tuesday, August 19, 2014

Jared thanked the SOS who had printed out the large scale versions of the maps she had made of the Port of Baltimore. He rolled them up and then hurried back to their squad area. The whole place was bustling with CR-2

agents and analysts as well as the agents from SWAT and Crimes Against Children who would be assisting them for the big takedown. Since there were so many arrests to make, they had canvassed the office for help and also had agents from other criminal squads as well from the counterintelligence and counterterrorism unit. The ratio of counterintelligence agents was greater than the other divisions. Those guys rarely got to make arrests, so an event like this was a great opportunity.

Coordinating the arrests across the country had created some serious logistical headaches as they'd had to teleconference with people all day on Monday to get all the kinks worked out. The ship was docking at four in the morning on Wednesday. After it was secured to the slip, a SWAT team and a few other agents would board the ship, arrest the crew, and hopefully find any victims alive and well if scared. Then at 5:00am, they would get the money guy.

Podvodnik told them even though the boat came in at four, the money wasn't brought over until at least an hour later. The crew needed time to secure the ship and get the cargo covertly off the boat and to a waiting truck that would take them to wherever the holding site was. The crew would contact Podvodnik when they were ready and could tell him how many victims needed to be paid for (in case some died on the journey). Then Podvodnik would call the money guy and he would withdraw that amount from the Potomac First ATM using a special code that allowed him to withdraw a large amount of money at one time. They had surveillance on the bank and knew the name and face of the money guy. As soon as he showed up and made a withdrawal, they would be able to arrest him. In order to not arouse suspicions, Podvodnik wouldn't call him until around 5:00am. They expected to have the arrest completed by no later than 6:00am.

Arrests of the clients would begin at 6:30am EST, which would mean some arrests happened as early as 3:30am PST. That meant agents across the country would be up very early preparing for their hits, but it would probably help since the subjects were all likely to be in their homes at that time of

night rather than at work. That leg should be completed by 7:30am EST--really, 7:00am, but they didn't want anyone getting antsy due to deadlines. Finally, at 8:00am, social workers and CPS agents would enter the homes and take any victims they found (as well as the subjects' own children) into protective custody.

Operation Scampering Librarians should be completed by no later than ten o'clock east coast time on Wednesday morning. From there the day would be devoted to processing the subjects, taking care of the victims, and tracking down those subjects who had not been in their homes. One couple from Chicago they knew was in Canada, but they decided it wouldn't matter if they heard about the arrests on the news and didn't come back

because they knew their friends to the north would extradite them. They'd already put in a call to the Canadian authorities asking them to deny the couple exit of the country to anywhere other than their home airport.

Jared carried the maps over to the two desks that had been cleared off to form a makeshift operations table. He unrolled the largest print out of the Port of Baltimore, and he and a few others verified that the points labeled on the map were correct. Smaller versions were handed out to all the SWAT

team members and the agents that would actually be entering the port, the slip, and finally the cargo boat. The Baltimore agents and SWAT team were in constant communication and verified that they had received electronic copies of the maps.

It was three in the afternoon and everything had been finalized and reviewed three or more times by five or more people. Management was giving them a thumbs up and the lawyers had come through with the arrest warrants and the search warrant for any vessel docking at slip 112 in the port. They were all being encouraged to go home and get some sleep so that they would be awake for the very early morning operation. Jared didn't know how anybody would be able to sleep though. Besides, neither he nor Jensen were leaving until Podvodnik got the call from the traffickers. They checked in one last time to make sure everything was good to go and that the money had been collected for the payment.

Jared looked over his shoulder and saw Jensen scrolling through all the records they had on Potomac First, Podvodnik, Executive Management, Inc., and The Lilac House. Once the plan had solidified and Jensen had done his part to be prepared and sign off on it, he'd sat down at his desk and not moved for hours. He was looking for any information that might be a clue to any properties that could be used to store the children. He didn't trust the traffickers to be cooperative, and he didn't like just waiting around for information when he knew there was a group of children being held captive somewhere, possibly starving to death.

Jared thought that Jensen probably also wanted something mindless to do to keep his brain preoccupied. He'd notice the bandage on Jensen's neck on Monday and it had taken most of the day to pull the story out of him. Jared had felt an odd sensation—like a staticky heat in his limbs when he'd found out that Russ had frickin' bit him. The feeling had made him restless and

he'd fantasized most of the rest of the day of going down to the jail and for some reason or other was totally justified in killing Russ: shooting him, stabbing him, bashing his head in repeatedly with a chair. During the fantasies the static subsided, but then came back when he realized he hadn't actually hurt Russ. He rather imagined that the sensation must be like what sociopaths felt when they had the urge to murder. It was like an itch that couldn't be scratched and could only be soothed by killing someone.

Violently. The feeling had mostly dissipated overnight and he'd been so busy today that he hadn't had time to think about it. He supposed that's what separated him from the psychopaths though.

Jared walked to Jensen and put a hand on the back of his chair. Jensen stopped scrolling and tilted his head back to look at him.

“Hey.”

“Hey. Find anything?”

Jensen shook his head. “Nothing worth wasting resources on. I called a couple places and when I asked if they were secretly storing child slaves there, shockingly they said no.”

“I’m sure we’ll be able to get the information tomorrow morning. And as far as they know, everything is still on course and there are no warning flags. More than likely whomever they pay to keep the kids alive usually is probably still doing their job.”

Jensen gnawed on his lower lip. “Yeah...I just have this...weird feeling about the whole thing.”

“It’s probably just anticipation. Nerves. Even excitement. My stomach has felt a little sloshy all day. I don’t know if I’m going to be able to get to sleep at all before we have to be back here. I’m thinking of just staying until go time and maybe snatching a nap on a cot if I can.”

“Yeah...I may consider staying here as well. But there won’t be enough cots for everyone if we all stay.”

“Jensen, Jared!”

They looked over to where Bob was beckoning them from the hallway.

Jared waited for Jensen to lock his computers, and they walked over to Bob together.

“Podvodnik says that he should be getting the call within the next fifteen to twenty minutes. Why don’t you two head on down and I’ll be there in a minute.”

“Yes, sir.”

Jared nodded to Bob and was a little surprised to hear Jensen answer Bob with absolutely no attitude. He must be hyper focused. They went to the elevators and made their way down to the first floor interview room where Podvodnik was spending most of his days. Over the weekend he had been kept in a hotel with a guard that had stayed in the room with him at all times and monitored his communications. He’d only called his wife to let her know that he was out of town on business.

The FBI Policeman who was guarding the interview room door nodded to

them and let them inside. Podvodnik was sipping from a Starbucks to-go cup and looking uncomfortable and irritated. Jared hoped they'd gotten his coffee order wrong.

They didn't greet him and he didn't offer up a hello. Jared squeezed his legs under the table and he and Jensen sat across from Podvodnik, staring at him. They sat for seven minutes in silence, and then Bob joined them. He took the last free chair and put it on the side of the table. Surprisingly, Bob had nothing to say either. They waited another eleven minutes, and then Podvodnik's cell phone rang. It was a burner phone that he had bought at the beginning of the month and shared the number with the traffickers.

They all got a new burners every month.

As the man pulled the phone out of his coat pocket Bob said, "On speaker," and tapped the table.

Podvodnik rolled his eyes slightly but set the phone to speaker mode when he answered and then laid it flat on the table.

"I'm here."

"Are the lights on?" The voice was soft and slightly accented like Podvodnik's.

"Yes, all of them, with no flickering."

"We'll call to check on the lights again tomorrow morning."

The call ended. Podvodnik put out his hands. "There. It is done."

"How do you know if he's on schedule?" Jensen asked.

"He would have told me that it was raining if they were behind schedule.

And that it was snowing if they were ahead of schedule."

"So. They'll be at the port tomorrow at 4:00am," Bob wanted one last

confirmation.

“Yes. As far as I know—they have a shipment and they’re on time.”

“I assume you’ll use some sort of similar code when you call the money guy.”

“Yes. I’ll tell him the lights are on and we need however many backup bulbs. The number of bulbs represents how many individuals are in the shipment so that he knows how much money to withdraw. May I return to my hotel room until I need to make that call?”

“No,” Bob said. “You’re staying here until nine o’clock tomorrow morning.

I want someone to hear every phone call you make with that phone.”

Podvodnik huffed. “I will only use it twice more. Once when they call in, which is not until after four this morning, and then one outgoing call sometime after five. I’m not needed here.”

“No, you’re not needed, but you’re going to stay.”

“There is no point in me trying to cover your eyes with wool. It would void my immunity agreement.”

“You’re still staying here. Ackles, Pasnucki, a word in the hall please.”

Jared and Jensen got up and followed Bob into the hall. He closed the door, but left it cracked so that they’d be able to hear if Podvodnik started talking.

“Okay. You two can head back upstairs and do whatever you need to do to feel prepared. They’re setting up cots on the fifth floor and I recommend that you two use them for at least a couple hours before you leave for Baltimore. Preferably longer.”

They both nodded.

“Alright, get out of here. I’ve got a babysitting gig to tend to.”

Jensen started to leave, but Jared hesitated. “Sir?”

Bob turned back.

“How come you can pronounce Podvodnik, but not Padalecki?”

Bob shrugged. He hooked a thumb over his shoulder toward the door and said, “He corrected me.” Then he stepped back inside and shut the door.

Jared turned a frown onto Jensen. He just shrugged.

“Just because he’s your SSA doesn’t mean you can’t speak up.”

“Thanks for telling me sooner.”

“I thought you knew.”

“Why would I know that?”

“Don’t get upset.”

“I’m not upset.”

“I think you need a nap.”

“Jensen, I will punch you in the balls.”

Jensen just laughed. “Fine, don’t take a nap. But that’s where I’m going.”

Jared grumbled but followed Jensen when he returned to the squad area to inform everyone that he was heading down to the fifth floor. Some people had already headed that way and most others were going to wait a couple more hours. Jared followed Jensen to the fifth floor and they found a couple of cots near each other in a corner. Jared’s feet stuck off the end, but it wasn’t nearly as uncomfortable as he’d been expecting. He stared at the ceiling, wide awake. He turned onto his side to talk to Jensen, but he had his phone to his ear and a soft smile on his face. Jared relaxed against the thin pillow and resigned himself to counting the lined pattern in the carpet squares.

He was asleep in thirty seconds.

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“Hey, puddin’,” Jensen said and smiled when Misha laughed.

“Okay, I think you already know my stance on this one, but go ahead and use it this week. I could use a little humor in my life.”

“Okay, puddin’. So, did you find out about your finals?”

"Aced ‘em.”

“Congratulations.”

“Thanks.”

“What’s left?”

“Well, today and tomorrow are the briefing exercise and the PFT. Half of us did one and half the other, and then we’re switching. I had my briefing today and I received very good feedback.”

“You definitely are good at explaining yourself. Even with a cock down your

throat.”

Misha snorted. And then whined. “Damn. Now I want your cock down my throat. And you know? I was never this horny before I met you. I’d calmed down. I was a man in my mid-thirties. Well past my supposed sexual prime.

And now I can’t go more than like half an hour without thinking about doing something truly unholy to you.”

Jensen laughed softly and glanced at Jared. He was snoring softly and drooling on the cot.

“Well, does knowing that you’re not alone in that make you feel better?”

“A little.”

Jensen settled down more snugly into the cot. “So, PFT tomorrow?”

“Yep. And it’s a good thing too. I’ll be able to concentrate on the physical exertion and hopefully that will keep my mind off of you. I know you’ll be busy, but please text me or something as soon as everything is over and you’re safe.”

“I will. Try. I promise I’ll try.”

Misha sighed. “I guess that’s good enough.”

Jensen wanted to distract Misha so he said, “Are you sure you shouldn’t be more worried about your PFT? You’re gonna be in an even older man tomorrow.”

“Blow me, Ackles. I run a faster mile than you.”

Jensen frowned. “I bench press more than you.”

“You only started doing that so that you can pick me up.”

“Worth it though, right?”

Misha chuckled. “You bet your sweet ass it is. So, what are you doing now?”

“Some of us are hunkering down for a bit, trying to get some sleep since we’ll need to be up at midnight. Ready to roll by one, meeting at the staging area by two, and set up in position at the port by three.”

“Sounds like it’s going to be a long night.”

“Not so bad. Just four hours. Four and a little bit and it’ll all be over.”

“I hope so. Well, I’ll let you go get some sleep. Be careful. I love you.”

“Love you too.”

Jensen let Misha disconnect the call, and then he twisted to settle a little bit on his side. Jared was still completely out. Like a light. Jensen closed his eyes and dreamed of running through a corridor with light bulbs that exploded when they were turned on.

### **Wednesday, August 20, 2014**

Jensen was in the mobile command post, which was parked several blocks away from the main entrance to the Port of Baltimore. He had just finished looking over the map with the Baltimore lead agent as they had radioed to all of their teams to make sure everyone was ready and in position. It was 3:30am and they’d received word from the port authority that a small cargo ship had been cleared for passage up the bay and was heading for the port with an ETA of 4:04am.

The Baltimore agent’s name was Connors and he was mostly interested in being seen as the guy who had pulled off the operation of the century.

Jensen was more than happy to let him feel in charge if it kept him out of his way. He stood up and slipped past Connors where he was hunched over the maps and probably annoying the shit out of his guys as he radioed them for the fifth time. The monitors in the large Winnebago-esque command post were along the backside and Jensen moved to stand behind the tech who was monitoring the slip, the dock from three angles, and the waterway that led

into the port from the bay.

“Have we got eyes on the boat yet?” Jensen asked the tech.

“Not on camera yet. There’s a bend in the entrance. As soon as the ship clears that, we should have a visual on it for the last ten minutes it takes to get here.”

“Great. Let me know when you get eyes on it.”

“Yes, sir.”

Despite feeling restless, Jensen forced himself to sit down. He didn’t want to be like Connors and constantly pestering his teams. He trusted them and knew they were ready. Waiting was always a part of the game. His Bureau phone buzzed and he pulled it out of his pocket. He smiled when he saw it was from Misha, and then looked up to see if Connors was looking at him.

He wasn’t. So he checked the message. After all, it looked like he was officially working.

**Good morning, babe. I don’t want to distract you, but I wanted you to know that I’m thinking of you.**

*What are you doing up so early?*

**Told you. Just wanted to wish you luck.**

*You have a PFT starting at 8 Get some rest*

**Can’t sleep. Worried.**

*Don’t be Everything is under control I’m not even netering the slip Safe and sounf in the CP*

**I’ll let you go. I don’t want to be a bother.**

*You’re no bother we’re waiting on the ship and oh yeah! Happy birthday sweetheart*

**Thank you. You already used sweetheart.**

*Isn't it on out shortlist?*

**Yes, I suppose it is. Thank you again. Now concentrate on your work.**

*I am aiMA*

**I know you'll do your best. It really is awful, isn't it? Those poor kids are probably kept in cages like animals.**

*Yeah sick isn't even the word for it*

**Text me again when you can. <3 U**

*Omg what areyou 12?*

**:)**

Jensen smiled and put his phone in his pocket. He looked up at Connors; he was still hovering over the maps like he could jump inside it like a video game.

Something made Jensen pause and think about what Misha had said last. He pulled out the phone and reread the last couple of replies. He frowned and put the phone up. That was nothing. He pulled the phone out again and scrolled higher up. Then he saw it.

*Those poor kids are probably kept in cages like animals.*

“Holy shit...” Jensen whispered.

He scrolled through his contacts until he found Osric's phone number. He should be working support back at the office as he'd volunteered for the overnight shift. He'd kind of wanted to bring the kid along, but there were already too many moving pieces. Osric picked up right away.

“Yo, Jensen, what's up? Everything okay?”

“Yeah, everything is good so far. I had a thought though...you said that Podvodnik donated money to an animal shelter that The Lilac House sponsored, right?”

"Yeah." It sounded like he was eating something chewy. “For the Katrina dogs.”

“Didn’t you say that it was closed or empty?”

“They said after they adopted out the last Katrina dog that they decided not to run it as a normal shelter and just keep it on hand if there’s ever another similar disaster.”

“So...it’s a facility that is privately owned by them and is completely empty. And has cages big enough to hold humans.”

There was a beat, and then the penny dropped. “Holy shit!”

“My exact thoughts. Find the address. You might hear me talking, but I’m radioing Bob. Stay on the line until I get back to you.”

“Okay.”

Jensen grabbed his radio and pushed the button to talk. “Charlie Papa to Lima 2.”

“Lima 2 copies, over.”

Bob was with the port authority in their offices, but he was on the same channel as all the teams so everyone heard the conversation.

“Bob, Jensen here. I think I know where they’re holding the kids.”

“What? Where?”

“The Lilac House owns a dog shelter that was sponsored by Podvodnik. It’s been empty for a couple of years now. But they completely own the property and it has running water and cages. I doubt it’s near anything else because

shelters are usually built away from populated areas because of the noise. I'm having Osric look up the address now."

"Sounds like a decent lead. We can look into it after the arrests are concluded."

"Bob, if those kids are there now..."

"But you don't know that they are, do you?"

"It's just a hunch."

"Lima 2, this is I-Team 4," Jared's voice came over the radio.

"Go ahead," Bob said.

"We don't know that all the investigating we've done hasn't somehow gotten back to the people involved in all this. The kids could be abandoned. They could be starving."

"I can hold down the fort," Connors chimed in.

Jensen didn't roll his eyes because even if Connors was only viewing him following a lead as a career opportunity for himself, he was making Jensen's case. There was silence over the radio for long enough that Jensen thought he'd won his case and then oscillated back to thinking Bob wouldn't let him go. Then the radio crackled.

"I-Teams, are you set and prepared and able to report to Lima-2?"

"I-Team 4 check," Jared said immediately.

The other four teams checked in affirmative.

"Charlie Papa, can you manage the Baltimore teams and the post solo?"

"Copy, Lima 2," Connors replied. "The Baltimore teams are ready and I

checked in with both SWAT teams. Everyone is good to go.”

“Alright, Jensen. I’m going to release you to follow this lead. Contact Johnston back at the field office and make sure he knows where you’re going. And don’t go alone.”

“I-Team 4 to Lima 2, I can go with him,” Jared said.

“Negative, Team 4; we can’t break up teams at this time. Jensen, good luck.

We’ll try to keep you apprised of the situation as best we can.”

“Copy Lima 2. Thank you.”

Jensen put down the radio and put his phone back to his ear.

“Osric, you still there?”

“Yep. I got the address. It’s in Westphalia, Maryland.”

“I have no idea where that is.”

“It’s not too far from the New Carrollton metro station. The metro's closed now, but I can Uber it out there and you can pick me up at the station. You can take the Baltimore-Washington Parkway most of the way. Then I can give you directions from the metro station.”

“Perfect. How long should it take me to get there?”

“Less than an hour. Maybe forty-five?”

“Okay, I should be there around 4:15 then.”

Jensen hung up and removed his blue coat with the large, yellow FBI printed on the back. He wasn’t wearing any armor or a bullet proof vest because the command post was not going to interact with the suspects until after they were under arrest. He patted the tech on the back as he passed and gave a smile to Connors.



“Thanks for taking charge,” Jensen said.

“My pleasure. Good luck, Ackles. I hope you find them.”

“Thanks.”

Jensen stepped down out of the mobile command post and jogged to his vehicle. He was on the road in seconds and drove nearly a hundred miles an hour all the way down the parkway. At that time of the morning it was mostly empty and fortunately he didn't have to stop and explain who he was and why he was driving like an asshole to the highway patrol. He made it to the metro station in just over thirty minutes and found Osric waiting in the Kiss and Ride parking lot. The analyst hurried to Jensen's car and already had his phone set to give directions to the shelter. Jensen peeled out of the lot.

“Fifteen minutes,” Osric said.

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“Fifteen minutes,” Connors said over the radio.

Jared copied the message and he and his partner, an agent named Benson from CT-1, moved slightly out from behind the cargo container they were stationed behind. They watched the small cargo ship glide slowly into the slip. The captain activated the reverse thrusters a few times to get the boat to slow down. A couple of crew members began mooring the ship to the dock.

It was almost 4:15. The tech in the command post had informed them that something had slowed the boat down when it had entered the port. It was possible it had been trying to avoid the other boat that passed by it, but there had been significant distance between them. It may have also been waiting to verify that their assigned slip was open. However, the port authority reported that they hadn't been contacted by the ship past the initial permission to enter the port. It had only idled for about four minutes, and then continued up the mouth and entered the port, maneuvering skillfully into the narrow slip.

All the teams were holding at the ready, waiting for the command from

Connors. They wanted to make sure the ship was secured and get an idea of how many crew might be present rather than rushing in blindly. Jared watched as two more crew moved around the decks while the first two had put out a short gangway and were securing additional moorings down on the dock. The captain came out of the glass-fronted cabin and called out a couple of orders. They waited another five minutes; they saw no additional crewmembers than the five already spotted. Every I-Team reported only seeing five. Two of the crew members were opening the cargo bay while a third nodded to the captain and returned to the dock. He began to walk toward the interior of the port.

“This is Lima-2,” Bob said over the radio. “Port authority indicates that most likely the subject is going to enlist a crane operator. We should move in before he leaves the area and brings someone back. Team 2, intercept the crew member on the dock. WFO SWAT move in on the boat. I-Teams 1 and 3 follow behind and provide back up. Baltimore SWAT and Teams 4 and 5, hold your positions, but be at the ready to follow in if the advancing teams hit trouble.”

Jared watched the first team move onto the dock with weapons drawn. They barked at the crew member to put his hands on his head and get down. He looked startled and mostly confused and frightened as he obeyed the

instructions. The agents had him down and cuffed in under a minute. SWAT moved swiftly past them as four other agents followed behind. They shouted orders to the crew on the decks. Everyone reacted like they were confused and scared. No one tried to make a run for it and no one pulled a gun.

SWAT boarded the boat first and cleared the cabin, the cargo hold, and below deck. They verified there were only the five crewmembers present.

They also reported that the cargo hold was only half full and after forcing the lids off of half the boxes at random that they were filled with bags of sugar. In order for SWAT to check the remaining boxes, Team 1 was called in to help the other two teams keep eyes and hands on the five crewmembers. The captain, while still following orders, was belligerently demanding to know what was going on. The leader for Team 2 showed him the warrant, but

didn't explain anything to him. As the minutes wore on, it started to become uncomfortably obvious that there were no captives on the boat and the crew seemed to have no idea what was going on.

Something made a clanging metal on metal sound behind him, and Jared turned to look down the path that led to the humongous maze of cargo containers looming a hundred yards away.

"Did you hear that?" Benson asked, looking in the same direction.

"Yeah," Jared replied.

"Damn. I was hoping you were going to call me crazy."

"Something could have just fallen over."

"Yeah...let's just move a bit in front of this crate so our backs aren't completely exposed.

"Okay. It's a little paranoid, but I'm kind of right there with you."

Jared and Benson moved to stand in front of the crate, keeping their position, but giving them better eyes on the scene taking place on the dock while leaving them less antsy about the darkness behind them. The sun wouldn't rise until almost 6:30, so all the light they had was from a few industrial sized fixtures balancing precariously on tall wooden poles. A few

moments later the SWAT team leader came out of the cargo hold and shook his head.

"Well, this was a bust," Benson sighed.

"Yeah...which is weird. If Podvodnik is trying to give up everybody in order to get immunity, why would he give us bad information?"

"Do you think he tipped them off?"

"I don't know. Why would he?"

“It can’t hurt him,” Benson said. “I don’t think. I mean, we’ve discovered nothing illegal here so far. If this is completely legitimate, it’s not like we can charge him for being connected to not illegal things.” Benson tilted his head. “Can we?”

“I-I don’t think so.” Jared looked at Benson and he just shrugged.

Jared wanted to radio Bob to find out what was going on, but he couldn’t clog up the channel just because he was curious. His cell phone buzzed silently in his pocket and he pulled it out wondering if Jensen was calling.

He was a little surprised to see it was Bob.

“Hello?”

“Jared, s’Bob. I called the field office and they talked to Podvodnik.

They’ve been with him for hours and he received no phone calls. He said it was odd that he hadn’t received a call from the traffickers yet. When we told him there was nothing on the boat, they said he got nervous. He said they must have figured out that they were being set up. Apparently he started asking for protective custody.”

“I hope they told him to go fuck himself.”

“I believe a similar sentiment was expressed to him.”

“They haven’t released him yet, have they?”

“No. They still want him to make the call to the money guy. Hopefully we can at least get him.”

“Yeah. And maybe Jensen is having better luck than we are.”

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“So do you think we’ll get in trouble for not having a warrant?” Osric asked as Jensen checked the sturdiness of the box he had piled on top of the trash

can against the tall chain link fence.

“Exigent circumstances,” Jensen said. “Reasonable suspicion. Blah blah.”

“Well, as long as we’re respecting the law,” Osric said dryly.

When they had arrived at the shelter, which was set at least two miles down a stretch of road that only had a farm equipment rental location along it, it had been apparent that it had not been in business for some time. The doors were locked and chained shut. The grass was overgrown and dry from many seasons of neglect. The road and the lot in front of the building were paved, so it was impossible to tell if any cars or trucks had recently traveled on them.

They had pulled at the doors and peeked in the windows when they’d first arrived. From what they could see there was a thick, undisturbed layer of dust settled over everything. They had knocked and pounded on the glass windows and doors, but had heard no noises coming from within. They’d walked around the side of the building and to the back. There was a large exercise yard surrounded by a tall chain link fence. By the gate a groove had been worn into the ground by repeated openings and closings, but it wasn’t possible tell if it had been opened recently. There was a thick chain and padlock on the gate, which was why Jensen had dragged a trash can to the sturdiest part of the fence next to the building wall and was trying to balance a crate on top of it.

“Give me a hand?” Jensen asked.

Osric helped him keep his balance while he hopped up onto the trashcan and then wobbled his way onto the box. He put his hands carefully onto the top of the fence and flung himself over. He landed at the bottom of the ten foot drop with an “oof.”

“You okay?” Osric asked.

“Yeah. Just landed a bit hard, but I didn’t twist anything. Do you want to wait there?”

“Hell no.”

Osric backed up and took a running leap, using the wall to propel himself up high enough to grab the top of the fence and swing himself over. He landed light as a cat on his feet. Jensen’s eyes were wide.

“The hell was that?”

“Parkour,” Osric shrugged.

Jensen shook his head and pulled out his phone to use the flashlight function. Osric did the same and they found the back door locked tight.

They both peeked inside and could see a hallway that led to the front and another hallway that led to a room that appeared to be lined with cages.

Jensen craned his neck to try and see inside any of the cages. He waved the light around, but nothing moved within. He called out through the glass, but he didn’t hear anything come from within. He backed up and looked at the door, and then around the yard.

“What are you thinking?” Osric asked.

“I’m thinking about taking that stick over there and smashing in the glass on the door.”

Osric looked back at the sizable limb that had fallen off one of the trees in the enclosure. He looked back at Jensen.

“Do you think we can get away with something like that without a warrant?

Without seeing anything inside the building?”

Jensen was considering that very thing. If they left now, no harm no foul.

But if he smashed in the doors of an animal shelter owned by a charity—

that would not make for good press. Undecided he walked back to the building and peeked in the window. Everything still looked quiet and empty.

He started to pull back, and then he leaned forward, smooshing his

face against the glass. Down the hallway with the cages, there was one cage with something sticking out. Something that hadn't been there before. He tried to concentrate on it but he couldn't get his face any closer and it was just barely in his line of sight. Then it moved. Fingers. Tiny fingers.

Jensen turned and ran for the tree limb. It was a little long for him to be able to wield it gracefully, but the end that had broken off the trunk was at least half a foot around and solid as a brick. Osric watched as he hauled it across the yard.

“Jensen?”

“Stand back!”

Osric ran out into the yard. Jensen grabbed the limb about mid-way down, and then swung it toward the door with all his might. At the last moment he shut his eyes and turned his head. The blow was enough to cause the glass to crack severely in the middle, splintering the glass to every frame like a delicate spider web. He pulled back and swung harder, again shielding his eyes as best he could. The glass broke and created a loud crash as it fell apart and exploded into the building. He felt a few small shards of glass blow back in his direction, but nothing dangerously large nor was he cut.

He and Osric stepped carefully through door, their shoes crackling on the broken glass. Now they could hear the crying and the whimpering.

Jensen floundered his hands on the wall as they walked toward the cages, and just at the entrance to a large room, he found a light switch. He flicked it on and both he and Osric flinched away from the light. When their eyes adjusted they found a room with forty cages big enough to hold large breed dogs. At least half of them had a child locked inside. There was no blanket for them to sit on, only cold metal bars that were left open so that their waste could fall through to the tray below. The whole room stank of urine and excrement. There were two bowls in each cage. Most were empty, but a few still held a drop or two of water. There was no food. No one had been to clean the cages or give them food or water in at least three or four days.

The children, both boys and girls and ranging in age from about sixteen to maybe five years old, all flinched away from them and huddled at the back of their cages. All except one. She was a pretty teenage girl, probably

African, and it had been her fingers that Jensen had seen. She was at the front of the bars, asking for help in English. Jensen went to her first and looked at the latch. All of them had padlocks. He turned to Osric.

“Call 911 and tell them to send an ambulance and to bring bolt cutters.”

Osric immediately began making the call. Jensen turned back to the girl.

“My name is Jensen,” he said.

“Andiswa,” she said, her voice strong and unbroken. “Police?”

Jensen nodded. “Police.” He wiggled the padlock. “Keys?”

She stuck a thin hand through the bars and pointed to the far end of the hallway. Jensen ran down the hall and noticed some of the kids had started to approach the bars. A couple started asking questions, but he didn’t recognize the languages. The cages went all the way to the wall and were empty at this end. He tried the handle on the door at the end. It was unlocked and he flipped on the lights. Inside was a storage room with a sink in the corner and shelves filled with canned vegetables, some bread, peanut butter, and a few other odds and ends. There was also a board on one wall that was covered in hooks. Hanging from each hook was a key with a numbered keychain. He grabbed a metal bowl from the shelves and dumped all of the keys into it. Back in the cage room, Osric was just getting off the phone.

“They coming?” Jensen asked.

“On their way,” he confirmed.

He held out the bowl to Osric. “Start unlocking.”

Osric grabbed a handful of keys and began looking at the numbers on the keychains and then the numbers on the cages. Jensen took the time to find the key that belonged to Andiswa’s cage. He unlocked the padlock and helped



her unfold her legs and step onto the floor. She wore a scrap of cloth that hung off her thin shoulders and barely covered her. She stepped forward and hugged him tightly, mumbling something in a language he didn't understand. He hugged her back for a moment, and then pushed her

back gently. He held out the bowl.

"Help me?" he asked.

She nodded and took a couple of keys. They had all twenty-six children out of the cages within five minutes, and he led them to the storage room and helped them all get a glass of water. He was certain he was hearing at least seven different languages. One little girl sounded like she was speaking Russian, but he was fairly certain it wasn't Russian but one of its relatives.

A couple of boys were speaking either Farsi or Arabic. There was more than one Asian language. No one seemed to know any English at all except Andiswa, and her knowledge was extremely limited. He tried to ask her if she knew who had brought her here, how many of them there were, how often they came, but she was struggling with understanding his questions.

Osric managed to speak to one of the little girls in Mandarin, but she was very young and was mostly too confused and scared to understand what had happened to her.

"She said something about her mother putting her on a train. And then it being dark and wet and that it was 'forever and forever.' She said there were many men, but then there was just one. A short man with a funny voice.

That's all I got."

Jensen turned to Andiswa. "The man who put you in cages," he started. He indicated the room with the cages. "The man who hurt you..."

"Hurt," Andiswa said, her eyes flashing angrily. "Man." She held up a hand at about her height, which was barely to Jensen's shoulder. "Old man.

Funny voice."

“A short, old man with a funny voice.” Jensen sighed. “Could be Podvodnik. Could be Danny Devito.”

“Oh! Hang on,” Osric said and pulled his phone out of his pocket. He opened the web browser and began searching for something. “There is a picture on The Lilac House’s website from the groundbreaking ceremony.

Podvodnik is in it. Where was it...ah! Here.”

Osric handed the phone to Jensen and he zoomed in on Podvodnik. He

showed the screen to Andiswa. She jabbed her finger at Podvodnik’s face so forcefully Jensen almost lost his hold on the phone. She said something in another language and then managed to get out, “Yes! Man!”

A teenage boy standing close enough to see the screen also looked at Podvodnik’s image and then pointed at it and started talking too. Well, it was more like hissing. Jensen looked at Osric.

“He lied,” Jensen said. “He’s not just the money guy. He knows exactly where these kids are. In fact, I’d say he’s the one responsible for taking care of them and he abandoned them when he decided to turn himself in. I guess he thought he could come back for them once he’d received immunity. He may lose the shipment that just came in, but he thought he’d still have them.”

“So, their testimony will be enough to void his transaction, won’t it?”

“You bet it will.” He turned back to Andiswa. He pointed to Podvodnik and then at the ground. “Man. Here?”

She nodded. “Here.” She said a word and pantomimed turning a steering wheel and repeated the word.

“A vehicle. He brought you in a vehicle. From the boat? Boat?” He searched on Google for an image of a cargo ship and showed it to her.

She nodded. “Boat. Swim. Ve-cul. Here.”

“He picked them up at the docks and drove them here,” Jensen said. “I’m

going to strangle him with my bare hands. I can't believe how close we came to letting this guy off."

"Why did she say swim?" Osric asked.

He shrugged. "I guess she doesn't know the word for float. A boat also

'swims' on the water." He glanced at the girl. "Maybe. Swim?" he asked.

She nodded. "Boat." She held up her hands with her wrists close together like they were chained. "Swim." She pretended to cough and sputter on water.

"Bad man," she said. "Mean man." She said a word in her language

and then spit on the floor.

"Why would he make them swim?" Osric asked.

Jensen thought for a moment. "Maybe he unloaded them before the boat ever made it to the slip in case they were ever hit with a surprise inspection from the port authority."

"So he chained them up and made them swim from the boat? How far? Did he drop them a mile off shore? Or would they already be in the bay or the port?"

"I don't know. Do you hear sirens?"

Osric cocked his head. "N—Yes! Just faintly. They should be here soon."

"Good. Can you go out front and meet them? I think you have the best shot at getting over the fence again."

Osric smiled wryly. "Yes, but the white man has the best chance of not getting shot on sight."

Jensen looked at him alarmed. "Oh. Should I go?"

"Nah, it should be fine. I think the ambulance beat the police here. They don't arm paramedics, do they?"

“I don’t think so.”

“I should be fine then.”

Osric ran down the hall and ducked back through the broken door. Andiswa watched him go and then looked back at Jensen.

“Help,” he said.

She nodded and helped a little boy open a bag of bread. He began eating it plain. Jensen pulled out his phone and called Jared. He knew it was probably a bad idea to disturb him during an operation, but it was almost five o’clock. They should have made the arrests by now. He also knew that

Jared wouldn’t answer if he couldn’t; he picked up on the second ring.

“Hey, Jensen. Find anything?”

“Twenty-six kids.”

“Holy shit. For real?”

“Yes. They were in cages. Osric and I got them out and gave them some water. The paramedics should be here shortly.”

“Oh, that’s such fantastic news. Especially since we got jack shit on our end.”

“What do you mean?”

“The operation was a bust. There were no victims on the boat and there’s nothing to indicate there ever were. The crew says they don’t know anything about it and have never heard of Podvodnik.”

“Are there any other boats in the port?” Jensen asked. “Maybe he just gave us the wrong slip. I know The Lilac House only owns one, but Podvodnik may own one himself. The rat bastard lied to us. The kids recognized a picture of him. He’s the one who’s been keeping them here.”

“Fuckhead.”

“Yep.”

“Man. There was one other ship in the port, but it was leaving this morning.

It was a big one too. Commercial. I can’t imagine they were smuggling people on it. It did make the boat we were watching stop. But that’s all.”

“Wait. The boat in the Lilac slip, it stopped? For a long time? Where?”

“Only a few minutes. At the mouth of the port. Then it came on.”

“Did we have eyes on it?”

“The command post did. He said he just saw the bow of it enter and then slow down.”

“So he couldn’t see the whole boat?”

“I don’t know, actually. What’s with the questions? What are you thinking?”

“One of the kids here said they made them swim.”

“Swim?”

“Yes. She said in between the boat and the vehicle that brought them to the shelter, they had to swim. You don’t think the boat stopped, dumped the kids overboard, and then came on?”

“I wasn’t until now!”

“Jared...how long ago was it?”

“The boat stopped just after four o’clock for about three to five minutes.”

“If they did make the kids swim, where would they have gone?”

“Unless they made them swim all the way back to the bay, they would come out in the cargo field. They’ve got hundreds, maybe thousands of those huge cargo containers stacked five high. It would provide cover, but you’ve got to

know where you're going otherwise you'd get lost in there."

"Well, if they've been doing this for years, I assume they know their way through. Shit. They're probably out by now."

"Not necessarily. If they had to get a dozen or more kids swimming in the port and then out of the water and lead them through the cargo field it would take a while. Plus the kids are probably gagged which means they can't move fast if they can't breathe. We might be able to head them off at the front. You take care of the kids. I'm going to radio the port authority and ask them if they can get me directions to the most likely exit."

"Okay. Jared. Be careful."

"I will. I got this."

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"What's going on?" Benson asked as soon as he hung up.

Jared held up a finger and picked up the radio. "Team 4 to Lima 2."

"Go ahead 4."

"I just got a call from Jensen. He found the kids at the shelter."

"That's fucking great news." Bob continued and Jared had to suffer through his rambling because he couldn't talk on the radio while it was active.

Finally he stopped talking and Jared jumped on the channel before anyone else could.

"Listen to me, Bob. Stay off the channel until I explain everything. The kids identified Podvodnik. He's not the money guy—he's running the whole operation. The kids also said that they made them swim. As in they were never taken off the boat at the slip. They made them go overboard and swim to the shore. We think there's a possibility that the kids were off loaded while the boat stopped in the entrance when it first arrived. They would be walking through the cargo field now. Can the port authority tell me where the entrance

is?”

Jared let go of the radio call button and waited. No one spoke. He waited a minute, got antsy, and radioed Bob. “Lima 2 are you there?”

“Yeah, 4, one moment. They’re looking over a schematic now.”

A few moments later, someone spoke over the radio. It wasn’t Bob so it was probably someone who worked at the port authority.

“Um...okay. So...the entrance to the cargo field is over here toward the main network of buildings. However, in looking over the map, if I was trying to smuggle a bunch of kids out of here, I wouldn’t take them that way. There’s just way too many people about, even at this time of the morning. Most of the field is bordered by water, but there’s a section on the south end that has an access road attached to it. We use it when workers need to quickly get to the far end to look at a container over there. It’d be a simple matter of cutting the outside fence to get a truck onto the access

road, and then back out to a road that leads down to the highway. We actually have had problems with needing to mend that fence from time to time. We just thought it was street artists sneaking inside to tag the containers.”

“Alright, listen up,” Bob spoke again. “Teams 1, 2, and 3, you’re going to stay with the suspects. Keep them cuffed and under constant watch. WFO

and Baltimore SWAT teams, you’re going to take the east and west paths through the cargo field down to the southwest corner. Teams 4 and 5, get your asses to a car and follow the main road out of here past the gate and then to the second left. That’s the access road. Follow it around to the corner of the cargo field. We’re calling in help from the Maryland state police to put up road blocks on either side of the road and along the highway. Copy, teams.”

Every team copied that they’d heard the instructions.

“Move out!”

Jared and Benson took off running. They met up with Team 5 at the point

where the dock turned into street. The closest car was Benson's and they piled in, with Benson gunning the engine before everyone was completely in the car. They almost missed the turn off, but Jared spotted it. They careened down the road, which was barely more than a path for a golf cart, at over sixty miles an hour. Benson's lights flashed on a dead end at a fence and a sharp turn. He slammed on the brakes hard enough to activate the antilock brakes and the car screeched to a loud halt just before running off the end of the path and into the fence. No one had put on a seatbelt and they all took a moment to heave in silent distress as they realized how easily they could have wound up going straight through the windshield.

"You think they heard us coming?" one of the agents in the back whispered.

The others groaned and hissed at him, but it got them moving. They exited the car, weapons drawn, and approached the small break in cargo containers that gave access to the interior of the field. Just as Jared spotted the hole in the fence, a man in black clothing leapt out from behind a bush and made a dash for a truck that was just barely visible in the darkness outside the port's bounds.

"On 'im!" one of the Team 5 agents shouted.

She and her partner ran toward the break in the fence and tackled the driver just as he was about to get into the truck. Jared and Benson crept into the cargo field. The metal walls rose up around them as high as a three story building. It was quiet and nearly pitch dark as the lights from the port just barely spilled over the top of the highest containers. Benson signaled that he was going down one row, and Jared nodded and continued along the back wall.

He walked as quietly as he could, the rubber of his tennis shoes absorbing most of the sounds of his tread. He glanced behind him, and saw nothing.

He stopped for a moment and listened. Wind blew through the containers creating creaking and moaning sounds. He started moving again, jogging silently and quickly down to a break in the aisle. He peeked his head around and pulled it back quickly. There was no reaction. He stuck his head around again and saw an empty row, though most of it was hidden in darkness and

shadows. His heart was pounding up near his throat, but he kept his cool and moved on. The wind blew again and it made a sad whining sound.

Jared stopped and listened intently. That hadn't been the wind. He heard it again. Muffled crying. Jared pressed close to the containers on his left and crept forward slowly, the sound getting slightly louder until it abruptly stopped. He reached the end of an aisle and poked his head around the corner. He couldn't see anything, so he listened. He heard nothing. He stepped around the corner instead of going straight. It was possible that Benson would be coming up the other aisle by now and he'd run into him.

Jared stepped into a thin sliver of moonlight.

He registered the flash just before the sound of a gun firing ricocheted through the metal maze. He ducked and turned toward the flash. He saw the silhouette of a man aiming down on him from about twenty yards away.

Jared's back was against a container. His options were to run side to side with no shelter or straight toward the gunman. He moved to the left, the gunman followed easy. A shot rang out. Jared flinched, but it was the gunman who fell. Jared straightened as he heard steps, assuming it was Benson coming from the other direction.

The person who stepped out from behind the container was much too small to be Benson. She moved forward enough that the glow from the lights bouncing off the top of the containers made her ponytail glow.

"Alona?"

She looked away from the man she had shot—effectively saving Jared's life—and turned her back to the long stretch of corridor. Jared's eyes caught the barest hint of black moving on black.

"Behind you!"

The gun went off and Alona cried out and collapsed. Jared ran forward and fired at the figure. The second gunman went down. Jared crouched down by

Alona's side.

"No, no, no," he said as he checked her neck for a pulse. He felt a steady heartbeat and she groaned and stirred.

"It's okay," she gasped. "Fine. Went through my side. Missed my liver.

Probably. Hopefully." She tried a laugh and then winced in pain.

"Hang on, I'll get you help."

Jared didn't even care why she was there. Didn't even question it. He fumbled his radio out of his pocket.

"Team 4 to Charlie Papa. We need medics in the southwest corner of the cargo field. Someone's been shot. Repeat, shots have been fired; the traffickers are armed."

"Don't bother with me," Alona groaned, fighting against the pain that was trying to drag her under. "The kids...I saw them...there's three more. That way."

"Alona, I can't—"

"Jared, go!"

Jared stood up and ran down the corridor. At the far end he saw two very small figures, child sized, hustle around the last corner that connected to the

aisle that led to the gap and the hole in the fence. Jared took off at a sprint.

He got to the end just in time to be blinded by the lights on the WFO SWAT team's guns. The team yelled out commands for the gunmen to get down.

One tried to fire on the agents, one tried to run, and the third tried to use a little girl as a hostage but she bit him on the arm. He was easily shot and the runner was tackled by a daring leap by a man from the top of a column of containers that was stacked only two high. The one who had opened fire was

already on the ground with seven or eight bullets in him. The Baltimore SWAT team came in from the other direction. Everyone quickly secured the area and ascertained that there were no more suspects.

Thirteen children were tied together with a coarse rope around their wrists.

Some were crying, but most were trying to talk, flailing their arms wildly, and subsequently jerking around the arms of the other children tied to them.

Jared couldn't understand what language they were speaking. None of them appeared to be wounded, though they were wet from their swim in the port.

"Where's Benson?" someone asked. "Was he the one shot?"

"No, it was—"

"Who the hell is this guy?"

Everyone looked and realized that the man who had jumped from the containers and detained the third gunman was definitely not FBI. He'd tied the gunman up, and also put down two guns and a large knife on the ground. He dropped to his knees and put his hands behind his head. Half the agents raised their weapons, but no one fired.

"Who are you?" The Baltimore team lead shouted.

"I'll not talk until you've contacted the Israeli Embassy."

"The Israeli Embassy?" someone repeated, utterly confused.

The sound of sirens could be heard faintly in the background, getting closer.

Jared ran back down the aisle to Alona. He knelt by her side and saw her trying to staunch the bleeding with her tank top. Jared removed his bulletproof vest and then his T-shirt. He used it to stop the blood flow on her back.

"It looks like the bullet went clean through," Jared said. "That's good."

You'll be okay. The ambulance is here."

"The kids?" she asked, voice strained with pain.

"All safe. The suspects are apprehended or dead."

"Good."

Jared kept pressure on the wound and struggled with what to say next.

Finally he just asked what he really wanted to know.

"What are you doing here, Alona? Who are you?"

She glanced at him, but then looked away.

"Let me guess," he said dryly. "You won't say anything until we contact the Israeli Embassy."

She looked back at him, a little surprised. Then she shrugged. Jared sighed.

He looked up when the flashing red lights of an ambulance bounced off the far end of the wall of containers, alternately lighting up the corridor in red and then darkness.

"Over here!" he called out. "Paramedic needed over here!"

A moment later two EMT's appeared in a flash of red. They began to run toward him. Jared looked back down at Alona. In the flashing lights he could see that she had broken out into a cold sweat and her eyes were closed.

"Alona? Alona?!"

He shook her, but she didn't respond.

"*Alona!*"



Thursday, August 21, 2014

Jensen was in the second to last row on the far end, probably in the worst seats in the entire room the graduation ceremony was being held in. Well, maybe the guy stuck behind Jared's tall head was in a slightly worse spot.

Misha's name (his birth name, which made Jared and Jensen snigger) was

called and while the audience clapped politely, Jared and Jensen shouted loudly and whistled. He could see Misha's eyes cut over in their direction, but he refused to look at them and walked stoically across the floor to the director. Director Comey handed Misha his certificate of graduation and shook his hand. Then then they froze in that position and turned to smile for the camera. Then Misha walked over to a table covered in fresh leather cases and badges. The director of the FBI Academy handed him his FBI credentials and his badge as a federal agent of the law. His service weapon would be issued when he went to his assigned field office. Then Misha returned his to seat.

It didn't take too long for the thirty trainees to complete their graduation and officially become agents. Then the director and an instructor gave some closing remarks, and the ceremony was adjourned to the small reception that was set up in the back of the room. Most everyone in the audience rushed forward to find their graduate, but Jared and Jensen hung back as they'd planned ahead with Misha. Misha made his way through the crowd and found them in the relative peace at the back of the room.

Jensen's face split into a grin so wide it almost hurt. He held out his arms and Misha moved right into them, hugging him tightly. Jensen pulled him in close.

"Congratulations, Mish. You are now officially an agent with the FBI."

Misha pulled back and smiled at them both. Then he tilted his head and a suggestion of pain tinged his smile.

"Is it weird that I have mixed feelings about that?"

"No," Jared said with a laugh. "I felt the same way. You spend eighteen weeks so intently focused on one thing, pushing yourself mentally and physically, and at the end of the long, hard climb up the hill—you've got a mountain waiting for you."

Misha stared at Jared, his smile completely gone. Jensen patted Misha soothingly on the back.

“Well, thank you for the words of encouragement, Jay,” Jensen said with a wry smile.

“Sorry! I was just—”

“It’s fine,” Misha said. “And I get it. You just put my feelings into words.”

The tension in Jared’s shoulders eased. “Okay, then. I guess I should just say congratulations.”

“Thank you. And congratulations to the both of you on the resolution of your case. The numbers are kind of hard to fathom. Over a hundred arrests, three dozen kids saved, countless more released from slavery, and no one hurt in the shootout at the port. Quite dramatic. Jared, I’m ecstatic that you’re safe, but I’m also very glad you weren’t there, Jensen.”

“It’s all thanks to you,” Jensen said, kissing Misha’s temple. “You gave me the idea to look for the kids at the animal shelter.”

“Well, looks like I’m going to be a pro at this, hmm?”

Jensen smiled and could tell that he was full on gazing at his fiancé, but it felt like his heart would hurt too much if he looked away. It also helped that Misha was gazing right back at him. They leaned in together and shared a sweet, chaste kiss. Then Jensen went in for a little bit more. Then he turned so that he could sweep his tongue into his mouth.

“Et-hmm!”

They pulled apart at the sound of Jared’s loud, annoyed, and slightly embarrassed throat clearing. Jensen gave him a sheepish smile, but Misha just grinned. Jared cleared his throat again, softer this time and indicated something behind them. They turned and saw the director of the academy, Burrman, and Misha’s favorite instructor, Cooper, approaching them.

“Agent Collins,” Burrman said as he stuck out a hand. “Congratulations.”

Misha shook his hand. “Thank you, sir.” Then he shook Cooper’s hand.

Burrman looked at Jared. "I recognize you. You must have graduated not too long ago."

"About three years ago, sir," Jared said.

"Are you an agent as well?" Burrman asked Jensen. "I usually have such a good memory..."

"Yes, sir, I am an agent. But I graduated over nine years ago."

"Ah, I was still an SSA in Tampa then. I'm glad Collins has good friends here to support him."

"This is my friend, Jared Padalecki," Misha said. "And then is Jensen Ackles. My fiancé."

Burrman and Cooper shook their hands and Burrman gave Misha a thump on the back.

"So, this is the fiancé at WFO. Starting from today, you have ninety days to make it official," he said with a chuckle.

Misha smiled. "It'll be official sooner rather than later."

"Well, WFO is lucky to get you," Cooper said. "You're the best trainee I've had the pleasure to instruct in quite some time."

"Thank you, sir. It was truly an honor to learn from you."

"Alright, alright. You got your badge. You don't have to suck up anymore."

Misha smiled and exchanged a few more pleasantries, and then Burrman and Cooper moved on. Misha leaned into Jensen's side and said, "Okay, so can we go get some real food? Real breakfast food. I haven't had non-rubbery eggs and crispy bacon in months."

"There's an IHOP a couple of miles up the highway," Jensen said.

"Oh, yes. The one near the Holiday Inn," Misha said, giving Jensen a sly

smile as they both remembered their sexy, syrupy weekend the previous month.

“You two are so gross,” Jared grumbled.

“Jealous,” Misha accused him.

“Misha!” They all turned at the excited voice.

Gil came up to them and hugged Misha tightly.

“Isn’t it great? I’m so glad we survived.”

“Me too. And I owe it to you, Gil.”

Jensen’s brow creased. That was an odd thing to say.

Gil pulled back, his expression way too soft and sappy to be looking at someone else’s fiancé.

“I didn’t do anything.”

“You did. I’m extremely grateful. Thank you. And thanks for being a great roommate.”

Jensen tried not to frown, but something had happened between Gil and Misha and he had no idea what it might be. Misha never mentioned any favor that Gil had done for him that made him feel like he was indebted to him. In order to take some of Gil’s attention off of Misha, Jensen spoke to him.

“Congratulations to you too, Gil.”

“Thank you, Jensen.”

“I think Misha told me you’re from Texas. Were you able to get assigned to Houston or Dallas or somewhere near home?”

“Actually, I got assigned to WFO,” he said cheerfully. “So, I’ll be able to work with you both.”

Jensen could tell that his smile was a little fake. “That’s great,” he said, trying to keep his tone neutral even though a guy who had a crush on his soon-to-be-husband was going to continue to hang around him. He glanced down at Misha and could see his thoroughly amused expression. The little fucker had known about Gil’s assignment and had just wanted to see Jensen’s reaction.

“Yeah, I’m very excited about moving here. Misha said he’d help me apartment hunt.”

“He doesn’t even know the area,” Jensen muttered.

“That’s why I said you’d help us, babe,” Misha said, giving him a pat on the chest.

“Oh. Well. I’d love to.”

“That’s great. Well, I need to get back to my parents. We’ll talk more later, Mish!”

Gil hurried off and Jensen grabbed Misha’s chin and made him look at him.

“Unh-uh. No. No Mish. You be sure to correct him of that.”

“Okay, I will. Promise. Now, can we please go get an omelet and some pancakes? And maybe a milkshake. And some sausage. I really want some decent sausage.”

The trio started to leave the room, deciding to skip the store bought cookies and punch available at the reception.

“Just to be clear,” Jared said, “when you say sausage, you don’t mean Jensen’s, right?”

Friday, August 22, 2014

Something disturbed Jensen from his cocoon of absolute bliss. He knew he was safe and comfortable and that the solid warmth pressed close to him was a man who made him happy and feel loved and laugh harder than his jokes

really warranted. And something was bothering him and making him wake up. The sharp elbow to his gut didn't help either.

"Jensen," Misha muttered into his pillow. "It's your cell phone. Answer it or turn it off."

"It's probably just Bob. Mad that I'm playing hooky."

"So turn it off."

"Fine."

Jensen grumbled and shuffled around until he could pick up his phone. The screen said that the number was restricted. He made a face. That probably meant it was something moderately important; a police department or someone in the Bureau whose number he didn't have saved in his contacts.

He swiped his thumb over the screen to answer and stayed propped up near the nightstand so that he could hang up quicker.

"Hello?"

"This is a phone call from Locust Grove Correctional Facility. An inmate is requesting to speak with you. The inmate is," the automated voice cut off and Russ said, "Russell Little." The automated voice returned. "If you will accept this call press one. If you do not accept this call, press two and the call will end."

Jensen sighed. If he didn't accept the call Russ might pitch a fit. When they first started their arrangement months ago, Jensen had told him that he wasn't going to give him his number, and if he somehow ever found it and used it, their arrangement would be off. Of course, since their arrangement

was off, Russ had no reason not to call him. He was going to have to change his number now.

He sat up and started to get out of bed. He might save everyone at the prison a colossal headache by talking to him.

“Where you going?” Misha mumbled sleepily.

“I just have to take this call really quickly. Go back to sleep. I’ll be back before you know it.”

Misha grumbled, but hugged a pillow and dozed off. Jensen pushed one on the keypad and left the bedroom. He pulled the door shut and walked into the kitchen to pour himself a glass of orange juice.

“Thank you for accepting the call,” the voice said. “Please standby.”

Jensen took a sip of orange juice and savored the taste—ignoring advice from every doctor he’d ever had that he should stop drinking juice altogether because it had too much sugar in it.

“Hello?”

“Russ,” Jensen said, infusing his voice with irritation and displeasure.

“Ah. I see you’re still angry with me.”

Jensen didn’t respond to that.

“You’re not going to come see me today, are you?”

Jensen put his glass down with a sharp clack. “You bit me,” he said testily.

“You’re right, you’re right. I was out of line. Although, you did upset me.

So, really, some of this is on you.”

“Yeah, sure,” Jensen said, taking the path of least resistance and another sip of his juice.

“I’m not a completely unreasonable guy, Jensen. I’ll give you a break. It seems like you need one. I think shooting Darcy took a lot out of you. And

you did do me that favor, so we can take a break. But I’ve got a lot more stories. And a lot more disciples. We’ll talk about them all. When you’re

ready.”

“Russ. I’m not—”

“Sh, sh. Not now, I know. When you’re ready we’ll talk about it all. All you have to do is give yourself to me. And I can wait. I’m much more patient than you think I am.”

Jensen felt nauseated. “Please stop—”

“Hush, Jensen. You’re upset and rightfully so. You just need to cool off for a bit, and I can respect that. So, you take all the time you need, and then you’ll come to me when you’re ready. I’m sure it’ll be sooner than you think right now. Take care of yourself until I can.”

Russ ended the call. Jensen turned off the phone and tossed it onto the kitchen island next to his glass. He rubbed his eyes with his fingers. Well, that was creepy as fuck. But it did give him a bit of a reprieve, and he was willing to take it.

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Jared stood by the nurses' station as a guard patted him down for weapons or electronic equipment. He’d been told that Alona had survived the gunshot after six hours of surgery to repair her liver which had been clipped by the bullet, but he hadn’t been given permission to see her until now.

Once the guard was satisfied that he had nothing suspicious on him, he led him down the corridor to the last room where another two guards were posted outside the door. The guard opened it for him and Jared stepped through, shutting it behind him.

Alona was sitting propped up in the bed, her face pale and drawn. Her hair was lank, her lips were chapped, and a large bruise had formed in the crook of her elbow where an IV had been inserted. The gown she wore was a dingy buttery yellow and did her complexion no favors. Jared still thought she looked pretty.

“Hey, Jared,” she said, her voice a little raspy.

“Hi.” He stared at her for a moment and then said, “So. Mossad.”

She shrugged like she’d been accused of taking the last cookie from the jar.

“Why were you here? How did you know about this case?”

“We’ve been tracking Podvodnik and his group for a while, but we didn’t have any solid evidence on him. We also had no legal standing to do anything about it since no Israeli citizens had ever been affected. We just tried to keep tabs on his people whenever he was in the area to ensure he never did try anything in our country.”

“Why would they have been in your area then?”

“They routinely kidnapped Palestinian kids.”

“Ah. And they’re not worth protecting, right?”

“I’m not saying that. We just had no standing or business getting involved with that. Just like the United States doesn’t involve themselves if it doesn’t involve American citizens or American soil.”

“Okay. So why did you get involved?”

“That group of thirteen kids you helped rescue on Wednesday. They’re Israelis. They were on a school trip. We think Podvodnik’s men mistook them for Palestinians. Our research told us that he operated out of the United States, but we didn’t know how he got them into the country or where they went from there. My partner and I were contacted because we were already in the country. I went to Potomac First to look into getting a job there to investigate him from the inside, but he wasn’t hiring and wouldn’t make an exception for a cute, flirty blonde. Before I left though, he gave me a business card recommending Cohen & Cohen if I wanted to get into investing. I thought that if he was pushing that company, then that must be the real front for the trafficking, not the bank. We managed to capitalize on the company needing a new receptionist ASAP. And...I guess you know the rest.”

“Not really. So, every time you brought me information on something...”

“My partner was using our resources to hack into whatever systems we needed to pull the information.”

“How did you figure out I’m an agent? I was stunned when you told me at the time so I didn’t question it, but I’m pretty sure you couldn’t just Google that information.”

“Oh, well. I pulled your prints from a glass you used when you visited my apartment.”

“You have access to an American database of fingerprints?”

She shrugged.

He let out a soft, humorless laugh. “Was that even your apartment?”

“No. It was our command post. I wouldn’t let you come over until so late that first time because we had to go out and buy furniture and get the place set up.”

“Wow.”

“I’d apologize to you for shagging you under false pretenses, but technically, you were doing the same thing, Mr. Bell.”

Jared smiled and rubbed the back of his neck. “Oh, yeah. That. Slightly different circumstances.”

“Sort of. But not really.”

Jared gave her a small smile. He stepped closer hesitantly. He managed to get close enough to take her small hand in his.

“How are you?”

“Okay. The doctors said the surgery went well and I should recover in a few days. And thank you. For saving my life.”

Jared let out a soft noise, halfway between amusement and bemusement.

“Thank you. For saving my life.”

“I guess we’re even.”

“Are you going to get in trouble?” he asked, unable to squash his curiosity anymore.

“Well, sort of. But not really. My partner and I are actually here with diplomatic immunity. But identity theft and interfering in a federal investigation and illegal possession of firearms—that’s more than enough to get us PNG’ed out of the country.”

Jared nodded. “Wow,” he said again, unable to think of a more appropriate response. If there was one. He made a feeble attempt at humor. “I guess that kind of puts the kibosh on our relationship. I mean, if you’re not allowed to step foot on American soil ever again.”

Alona smiled. “Yeah.” She tilted her head and gave his hand a squeeze.

“Also, it probably wouldn’t have worked out anyway. Since, you know, you’re in love with someone else.”

Jared stiffened. He swallowed with a little difficulty and Alona gave his hand another little squeeze, and then released it. Jared supposed they didn’t have any more to say, so he said, “Goodbye.”

“Goodbye, Jared.”

He turned and walked to the door. He paused before he opened it and looked back at her.

“Hey, is your real name Alona?”

The woman in the bed just smiled at him. Jared opened the door and left the room.

**Saturday, August 23, 2014**



Misha put his phone into the little storage locker, checking one last time that he hadn't received a text from Jensen calling him out on his lie. He'd told Jensen that he was driving to a lumber warehouse in Virginia to see if

he could find some good wood to build nightstands to match their bedroom furniture. The door to the room opened and a young man peeked inside.

"Agent Collins? The prisoner has agreed to meet with you."

Misha nodded and followed the young correctional officer down the hallway. His uniform said Garner and he looked like he'd started the job yesterday. He felt a little nervous about trusting him to monitor his meeting with Russ, but he figured a maximum security prison had enough protocol in place to handle the situation.

He felt awful for lying to Jensen. And he felt guilty for bluffing his way into a meeting by flashing his credentials which were barely two days old.

He'd actually thought that Russ might refuse to see him, or that he would come to his senses and leave. But here he was on his way to see the man who had killed his sister, tried to kill him, and was obsessed with his fiancé.

He hoped the meeting would bring him some closure even if it was an unmitigated disaster—which he highly suspected it would be.

Garner made him wait outside the interview room while he stepped inside and opened an interior door. Through the tiny window of the exterior door, Misha watched the guard secure Russ' shackles to the floor, and then to the table. Then he walked back to the door and opened it for Misha to enter. He had to take a deep breath before he felt steady enough to walk inside.

He felt like he was moving in slow motion as he entered the room. Russ'

eyes followed him carefully, his expression neutral, but his hands were folded so tightly together his knuckles were white. Misha swallowed as he looked at him. He realized he hadn't seen Russ in person—or at all really—

since the day Jensen had rescued him from the Motor Lodge Inn in Elton.

He hadn't seen him in prison. He hadn't been to any of his court dates.

Misha had only gone to court to testify before the grand jury—which Russ wasn't present for—so that the prosecution could prove there was enough evidence to charge him. In theory, he was never going to see him again.

He'd been assured that they had enough evidence to put Russ away without his testimony, so he could just try to put the man from his mind and never have to be in the same building as him let alone trapped in a small room.

But he'd gone to school with Russ all his life. As far as he knew, they'd

never been enemies. They'd never really been friends either, but before Jensen Russ had never shown him any animosity. He needed to know why he'd killed his sister. Logically he knew that there would be no rational explanation. Russ was insane and his own internal reasoning wouldn't make sense in the real world, but Misha still felt like he had to talk to him. Just to know that he had tried.

Misha pulled out the chair opposite from Russ and dragged it toward the end of the table closest to the door. He sat down in it and Russ just continued to watch him. So, Misha watched him back. They must have stared at each other for a full five minutes or longer. The interior door opening startled Misha so badly he jumped halfway out his chair, poised to run for the door. Russ smirked at his discomfort. The new guard told Garner that he wasn't experienced enough to monitor this kind of prisoner yet and sent him out the exterior door. Misha did feel slightly safer having the more experienced guard in the room. Russ looked a little annoyed, but he'd always had a kind of pinched disdain on his features, even as a teen.

“So. Misha. What brings you to my humble abode?” Russ asked.

“I just...wanted to ask you why you killed my sister.”

Russ sat back with a disappointed sigh. “Is that all? Why do you care? She wasn't even your real sister; just a stepsister.”

“She was a sister in every way that mattered. I loved her and she didn't

deserve to be tortured and murdered by a sick psychopath and his deranged sidekick.”

“Whoa, hey, hey. You come into my house and insult me? Do you expect me to answer your questions with that attitude?”

“To be honest, I don’t really expect you to answer them at all. You’ve become a little predictable at this point.”

Russ narrowed his eyes and leaned forward on the table, his chains clinking softly and reassuringly.

“I killed your whore of a sister because she went against the natural order of the world.”

Misha fought back his rage at hearing him use that word. He squeezed his hands together under the table and counted to five before speaking.

“Do you seriously think she was a witch? Just because she hung up a few crystals and burned incense?”

“Oh, no, of course not. All that Biblical bullshit was just part of the staging for the Angel Slayer murders. Once you pick a theme, you gotta stick with it.”

“So, why did you choose her?”

“She was unnatural.”

“How?!” Misha demanded, his composure slipping.

“Misha. There is a normal way to live life. The right way. She flitted through life like an airhead. She was a waste of a human being. An affront to the very mission we serve as a species. She had to go.”

Misha sat back in his chair. “You’re just making shit up.”

“Just because you refuse to understand that the way I see the world is the right way, doesn’t mean what I say isn’t the truth.”

“You’re so full of shit. You’re a pervert, that’s all. She probably turned you down for a date, so you thought you had the right to teach her a lesson by raping and killing her. Like every other misogynistic serial killer out there who blames their mom or ‘all the bitches in the world’ for not giving them what they’re entitled to. You’re such a textbook cliché, Russ. It’s a little disappointing that it took Jensen so long to figure out what a colossal loser was in front of him the whole time.”

Russ rolled his eyes. “I knew it. You had to bring up Jensen. You seriously make me want to strangle you, you dumb little bitch.”

“Hey,” the guard gave a verbal warning and put his hand on his baton. Russ ignored him.

“Jensen and I have a bond that you will never understand. Just because you were willing to get down on your cocksucking knees doesn’t mean he gives a single fuck about you.

“You have got to be the most pathetic fuck on this planet. You give up someone as—elevated—as Jensen, and then being the sniveling parasite you are try to attach yourself to him by assuming his life. Seriously, Misha?

You went through all the trouble of becoming an FBI agent—or at least impersonating one—just so that you could be like him? He and I are so far above you—you’ll never catch up. You’re lower than mud, Misha. You’re swimming in sludge like your cunt of a sister.”

The insult to himself and his sister barely registered. He was piecing together a very important point from Russ’ inane rant.

“He never told you,” Misha said softly.

Something in Misha’s voice or demeanor must have gotten Russ’ attention because his sneer dissipated.

“Told me what?”

Misha felt a perverse pleasure in knowing that telling Russ about his

relationship with Jensen would enrage the man. It would probably drive him mad with jealousy and hatred. Misha knew it was wrong to be so happy about what would amount to emotional torture—even though the guy was a psychopath—but he couldn't help but smile when he spoke.

“I didn't become an agent to follow Jensen, or in the hopes that we'd bump into each other. It was his idea. He suggested it to me. When we were in bed together. The morning after I moved in with him. Which was about a month after your arrest. We've been together for a little over eight months.

Almost a year if you count our time in Elton together.”

Misha leaned on the table and met Russ' eyes with a spiteful grin.

“Jensen loves me, Russ. We're getting married on Monday.”

Russ' whole body was trembling. His face was a myriad of emotions, his eyes looked a little wild because his pupils had constricted so small.

“You're lying,” he whispered.

Misha sat back with a laugh. “You know I'm not.”

There was a moment of complete silence and stillness. And then Russ screamed and leapt out of his seat. Misha stumbled up as Russ moved out of his chair, past the table. The guard started, surprised that Russ had that much mobility. His chains had been secured improperly and Russ was over the table and grabbing Misha's head in seconds. He didn't go for the throat; his hands grabbed Misha's chin and temple, pointing in opposite direction.

Misha had a split second to realize that he had maybe two more seconds to live before Russ snapped his neck.

The guard plowed into Russ' back, which shoved him and Misha into the wall, causing Russ' arms to bend so that he lost his leverage. They all crashed to the floor and three more guards poured out of the interior room and helped drag Russ off of Misha. He didn't fight them as they secured his bonds and began to drag him roughly from the room. His eyes stayed on Misha and his

voice was soft.

“I’m going to kill you,” he said.

Misha absolutely believed that if Russ ever had the opportunity, he wouldn’t be foiled a second time. The interior door closed and Misha sat on the floor, rubbing his neck even though Russ’ hands had never touched it.

The guard who had tackled Russ offered a hand and helped him up. Misha looked at the name on his uniform.

“Thank you, Officer Michelson. I owe you my life.”

“Anyone would’a done it,” the man shrugged off the thanks. “And besides, you’re going to hate me in three seconds.”

“Why?”

“I’m going to have to call your supervisor and report this incident.”

“Right. My supervisor.”

Technically he didn’t have one yet. He also was not here on official

business even though that’s how he’d gotten himself access to Russ. He was definitely going to get his badge and creds revoked and then be dismissed from the Bureau. Perfect. Russ was still finding ways to ruin his life.

Over two hours later, Misha was still sitting in an interview room, waiting.

His elbows were on the table and his face was in his hands. His mind was racing with so many thoughts that he couldn’t concentrate on a single one.

It was almost like having a blank mind, except it had caused a terrible headache to bounce back and forth between his temples.

The door to the interview room opened and a guard he hadn’t interacted with before poked his head in.

“Agent Collins? Your supervisor is here.”

Misha sat back in his chair and fidgeted nervously as Jensen came into the room. He shut the door behind him and put his hands on his waist. Misha played with the hem of his T-shirt.

“So. Imagine my confusion when I get a call from the Locust Grove Correctional Facility telling me there’s been an incident with ‘one of my agents.’ Imagine my surprise when I find out that my fiancé, who supposedly went shopping for lumber, is the agent in question. Imagine my terror as I’m told that my agent was attacked by Russ Little.”

Misha inhaled and exhaled sharply, fighting tears. “I’m sorry. I didn’t know who else to call. I didn’t want anyone to know that I had used my creds to get in. I didn’t want—”

Misha cut off as Jensen yanked him out of his chair by the arm. He wrapped his arms around him tight enough to make breathing a little difficult. Jensen put a hand to the back of Misha’s head and held him as tightly to his body as possible.

“Jesus Christ, Misha,” Jensen whispered. And that’s all he said.

Misha hugged him back. “I’m sorry,” he said lamely.

They stood in the room holding each other for a very long time. When Jensen pulled back he tried to discreetly wipe away his tears, but Misha

could still feel the wet patch on his shirt.

“Come on,” Jensen said, “we’re leaving. I already smoothed things over with the deputy warden. He owed me one. And I told him I’d take care of it on the Bureau’s end. Let’s just go home. There’s no reason for anyone to know this ever happened.”

Misha took his hand and squeezed it tightly. “Thank you,” he said, his voice pure gratefulness.

“Well, no one else,” Jensen said, his tone sharpening just a bit. “You and I

will be having a talk when we get home.”

Misha dropped his eyes to the floor and nodded. He allowed Jensen to lead him by the hand out of the prison. The hour ride back to Bethesda was mostly silent. Misha had a feeling he knew what Jensen wanted to talk to him about, but he didn't want to talk about it. So, he wasn't going to bring it up. If Jensen asked, Misha would tell him because he owed him that much at this point. Also, as much as he didn't want to tell him, part of him knew he would know the truth one day and he thought it would just be better to get it over and done with as soon as possible.

When they got to the apartment, Jensen didn't rush him. They took Charlie for a nearly half hour walk and then took time to prepare sandwiches and eat them in the kitchen. Before long though they were sitting on the couch in the living room, which was crammed into a tight space because the dining room table and chairs Misha had built took up too much of the room.

They really ought to just sell the set. It wasn't his best work; he could make Jensen something better.

Jensen sat on the cushion next to Misha rather than at the far end. He had one leg bent so that he could partially turn and face him, resting his arm on the back of the couch. Misha copied his position, except he left both hands in his lap so that he had something to hold onto. Something to focus his eyes on rather than Jensen's face. They were quiet again for long, protracted moments. Jensen must be waiting for Misha to begin, but once he figured out Misha wouldn't initiate the conversation, he started asking questions.

“Why did you go see Russ, Misha?”

“I wanted to ask him why he killed my sister.”

“Ah.” The tone of Jensen's voice suggested that that wasn't the explanation he'd been expecting, but that it made sense. “What did he say?”

“Crazy psychopath bullshit. But I didn't expect anything else.”

“Did it help?”



“Not really. But, at least I’ve done it. And that helps in a way.”

They were silent for a moment.

“Did you go for any other reason?” Jensen asked softly, eyes on his bent knee.

“No.”

“Oh.” Jensen nodded, and then looked up. He gave him a small smile and brushed the backs of his fingers over Misha’s cheek. “I’m glad you’re okay.

And I understand why you went and why you didn’t tell me. Just. Please.

Don’t lie to me...if you don’t have to. Just remind me that you’re a grown ass man and can make your own decisions whether or not I like them or agree with them.”

Misha nodded, and then gave him a hangdog look. “Not that I’ve done that for you for the past several months.”

Jensen shrugged. “I still did what I wanted to anyway.”

“Good point. I guess we’re both stubborn and willful.”

“Makes one wonder how we can stand to be together.”

“Must be the sex.”

Jensen laughed. “Yeah. That too.” He gave Misha a wink. Then he leaned forward and kissed his cheek. He started to get off the couch asking, “You wanna watch a movie?” but Misha stopped him with a hand on his arm.

“Jensen, wait. I...I think we should talk.”

Jensen sat back down.

“Or, well, I should talk. About that night in Elton. When Russ took me.”

Jensen drew in a sharp breath and inched closer so that he could take Misha's hand in his. Misha could tell that he was anxious, eager even to finally know what had happened. But he didn't push him. In fact he said,

"Misha, you don't have to tell me if you don't want to."

"Oh, believe me. I kind of really don't want to. But, I think I should. I think I need to."

Jensen nodded and waited quietly. Being patient and perfect...Misha squeezed Jensen's hand. He didn't think Jensen would leave him...but what if it made him see him differently? What if it made him a little disgusted?

What if he remembered it every time he looked at Misha? What if eventually the mere thought of touching him made him nauseated? He would leave him then.

Misha clenched his teeth and looked down. He couldn't tell him. He couldn't...Jensen moved even closer and pulled him into his arms. He soothed him and petted his head like he was a small child.

"Sh, it's okay. You don't have to tell me. You don't have to tell me now or ever. It's okay."

Feeling Jensen's arms wrapped around him made him feel secure, safe. He trusted Jensen, and he trusted him when he said he loved him through the good and the bad. Well, now was the time to give him some bad and see if his trust was well given.

"I don't remember anything after he drugged me. Of course. So, I don't remember how we got from my car back to your motel room. When I started to come to I was very groggy and disoriented. I couldn't quite focus my eyes and I couldn't move my arms or legs. I realized later that my wrists and ankles were tied to the bed and that I was stark naked. I was on my back on one side of the mattress and the drugs made me feel sick and there was movement and it was bouncing me and I thought I might throw up.

But, eventually, my head did clear a little bit and that's when I saw Russ...

“He was on the mattress beside me. And he was...he was humping the mattress. Like full on having sex with it and kissing the pillow and everything.”

He heard Jensen make a small noise of disgust.

“He was fully clothed. Thank God. But, he was going to town and he was almost done. Or, well, I don’t know if he...came,” Misha swallowed the bile in his throat. “Or if he was just done with that portion of his entertainment. But he stopped and sat up, and that’s when I saw that he had...” Misha buried his face in Jensen’s chest. “He had laid out one of your suits on the bed. He’d been pretending to have sex with you. Or pretending to rape you. While he was in bed beside me.”

Jensen’s body was rigid, but his hold on Misha grew tighter. Misha’s hands dug painfully into Jensen’s side and thigh. It probably wasn’t terribly pleasant for Jensen either, but he didn’t ease his grip.

“Once he saw that I was awake, he started talking.”

“Fucker does love the sound of his own voice,” Jensen muttered.

Misha nodded. “That’s definitely true. To be honest—I have a memory that I know what he said, but the drugs were still in my system and I really didn’t understand too much. I think he was mostly just complaining about the fact that I monopolized you. Or took you. Stole you, I suppose. And he accused me of defiling you. I think he actually used the word sully—I really can’t remember too clearly.

“I do remember the glow of heat. I couldn’t process what he was doing at the time, but he must have been heating the brand. I just remember the dull orange glow in my vision as he talked and talked about how I’d taken what wasn’t mine.

“Then he used the brand on my chest. I feel like that should have hurt and it probably did because I remember reacting to it, but I don’t remember the pain. I remember the smell though. It wasn’t entirely unpleasant. Kind of like cooking pork rinds.”

“Gross, Mish.”

He almost managed a smile. “Sorry, but it was mostly skin and fat crisping up. After he put the brand away he came back and started talking again. He talked about how I had no right to even exist near you because you were his. And that every part of you belonged to him. You mind, soul, blah blah.

He kept saying that the body was just a meat suit. That it didn’t mean anything. That he could use your body up and damage it and destroy it and it wouldn’t have any effect on your beauty. And then he started talking about...”

Misha cut off and felt his body seize up on him—his chest tightened, his face scrunched up uncomfortably, tears gathered thick in his eyes and throat.

“He started talking about what he was going to do to you. How he was going to...how he was going to touch you and...how, how...”

Misha broke off with a sob, shutting his mind against the memory of the gross, vile words Russ had used.

“Shh,” Jensen soothed him. “It’s okay. He didn’t hurt me. And he can’t anymore.”

Misha shook his head. “It’s not that...” He sobbed again. Was he really going to go through with telling him what had happened next? “He kept talking... talking about how he was going to spread your legs and worship your body and take you so hard you’d be screaming and crying and begging for him to make it hurt worse. And...” Misha closed his eyes and tightened his hold on Jensen. He wouldn’t let him run away from him. “And he was touching me, Jensen. He...” Misha swallowed yet another sob. “He was using his hand on —on my penis. And I had an erection. And he kept talking about how beautiful you’d look while he ruined you and he touched me and I...”

Misha broke down completely. His grip loosened and he slumped into Jensen’s lap.

“I came, Jensen.” The words barely made it out because he was heaving so

heavily with sobs. “He made me come while fantasizing about hurting you.

I’m—I’m so sorry. I so, so sorry. Jensen...”

Misha gave up on words and just let himself cry. He sobbed and he wailed and Jensen never left him. He just held him and rubbed his back and occasionally whispered soft, nonsensical words to him. And Misha let his sobs turn to muffled screams. All the anger and hatred he felt toward Russ for turning him into a monster poured out of him. He wanted the memory gone and he wanted Jensen to yell at him, to call him disgusting, and to tell him that he hated him. He needed Jensen to think that he was just as revolting as he felt. But he didn’t want that. He wanted Jensen to still love him and tell him everything was okay. He was so selfish. He was so incredibly selfish and he never should have dumped all of this onto Jensen.

Misha didn’t know how long he cried, and he didn’t know how long after he stopped crying that he just lay with his head in Jensen’s lap, staring at the wall. Jensen’s hands never stilled, one rubbed soothing circles on his back and the other combed through his hair. They stayed that way long enough for Misha to notice that the sun had shifted quite a bit in the room.

At last, Misha managed to find the strength to sit up. His tears had long since dried and his cheeks felt tight from the salt. He forced himself to look up and meet Jensen’s eyes. He would take his rejection with as much poise as he could manage.

Jensen raised a hand and attempted to pat down Misha’s hair a bit. And then he took his hand.

“Feel better?” he asked.

No, of course not. He felt like shit. Like he’d just hit the self-destruct button on his world. Plus he felt tired and achy from sobbing so hard. And yet...

the exhaustion from finally letting everything out did feel a little cathartic.

He gave a small nod of his head. Jensen gave him a little smile in return. He brushed his cheek with his knuckles again.

“So. What happened next?”

“Um.” Misha tilted his head, a little confused. “Next?”

“After that. Keep going. You can finish.”

“But...” He had finished. That was the horrible, shameful secret. “Um. He untied one of my wrists and I tried to hit him. That’s when he smashed my

wrist with the mallet. The pain was overwhelming; I couldn’t do anything as he turned me over. He tied me up, blind folded me, gagged me, and put that thing on my ankles. And you came not long after that.”

“Thank God I got there before he could do more.” Jensen cupped his face with his hands. “Misha, I’m so sorry. I’m sorry that I—”

Misha flinched out of his touch and Jensen’s expression became shocked and hurt.

“That’s it?” Misha asked. “Didn’t you hear what I said?”

Jensen shook his head, confused. “Yes...I...I’m sorry he did that to you. If I’d known I probably would have risked jail time and just shot him in the head. Or the nuts.”

“Jensen!”

Jensen sat back, confused by Misha’s anger.

“You—you know what I did and you’re just...you’re just...”

“What you did? Misha, what do you think you did?”

“I got off on it, Jensen! Russ was talking about raping you violently and I got off on it! I’m just as bad as he is! Worse because he at least admits what he is!”

Jensen’s face dissolved into compassion and sorrow. “Oh, Misha...baby, no...you didn’t do anything.”

Misha pulled away when he reached for him. “How can you say that?! How can you be okay with what I did?!”

“Misha...you were drugged. And you were scared and confused. And the penis—well, it’s kind of stupid and thinks friction is friction and doesn’t care where it comes from. You worked law enforcement for years. You know that it’s not uncommon for rape victims to orgasm during the attack.

You would never blame the victim for being attacked and say it wasn’t really rape just because they orgasmed, would you?”

“N-no, of course not. But...this isn’t the same.”

Jensen moved forward and quickly and aggressively pulled Misha into another hug, probably worried that he would try to avoid him again. But Misha was done with pulling away. If Jensen really...

“You—you really don’t think I’m a monster? That I’m sick like him?”

“No,” Jensen said firmly. “And you know that too. You know you’re not like him. It is not your fault that he assaulted you. It is not your fault that he knew what would hurt you the worst and took advantage of that. Misha, you have done nothing wrong. You are not sick or twisted. If you had a choice, if you had your will—would you have let him touch you or thought about hurting me?”

“No. No...” Misha tried to think of something else to say. “No.”

Jensen pulled back and caressed his face. “Misha, I am so sorry for what he did to you. And I’m sorry that you feel guilty about it and that you’ve carried that around with you for so long. You don’t deserve it. You’ve done nothing wrong.” Jensen took his face in both hands and shook him a little bit.

“You’ve done nothing wrong. Do you believe that? Do you believe me?”

Misha looked into Jensen’s clear green eyes. He was worried and upset, but not because he hated Misha or thought he was the same kind of vile filth that Russ was...he was just worried that he was hurting himself. Jensen didn’t believe he was a monster. Jensen didn’t believe he’d done a terrible,

unforgivable thing. And he believed in Jensen, so he believed his words.

Misha nodded. "I believe you, Jensen."

"You didn't do anything wrong."

Misha shook his head. "I didn't do anything wrong."

Jensen let out a small sigh that was clearly filled with relief. "I love you. I adore you. I admire you for being so strong. Please know that what happened to you will never affect what we have and what we are together.

Russ has no place in our relationship."

Misha nodded, fully in agreement.

"But..."

Misha stiffened. Jesus, there was a but?

"I think Russ is in your head," Jensen said gently. "And...I'm not sure seeing an EAP counselor is going to be enough to help you."

Misha relaxed. Yes, that made sense. That "but" was okay. He nodded at Jensen.

"You're right. I think I probably need some serious therapy." He gave Jensen a tiny smile. "The counselor I spoke to at Quantico actually gave me the name of a psychiatrist. I think I'm—I'm going to start seeing him."

"That's good."

"His office is in Arlington, so it's not too far away. His name is Sebastian Roche."

"Sebastian Roche?" Jensen said with skepticism. "That sounds like the name of a French porn star."

Misha put out a hand. "That's what I said!"



Jensen laughed. He leaned forward and kissed Misha, and then pulled back.

“Is this okay?”

“Of course. Never doubt that.”

Jensen leaned in and kissed him again. Misha slid a hand along his cheek, his fuzzy stubble tickling his palm. He opened his mouth to brush Jensen’s tongue with his, but the man suddenly pulled away.

"You know...I just thought of something..." Jensen said, a frown on his face.

"What?"

"I brought all of my suits back with me from Elton, Misha!"

Jensen leapt off the couch and ran to the bedroom. Misha followed after him and found him grabbing up all the suits in his closet in one big armload and then tossing them onto the bed.

“Which one was it?! You know, I know you were traumatized and upset, but couldn’t you have at least told me not to take home the suit Russ had humped like a dirty towel? Ugh.” Jensen made an exaggerated shudder.

“I’m going to have to burn them all.”

“It’s gone,” Misha said.

“What?”

“When I moved in, I found it. And I threw it away.”

“I still had it for a month!”

“Yes, but you never even noticed it was missing, so it probably wasn’t a suit you wore often or at all. Plus, I thought that when you found your suit crumpled up on the floor of the motel room after everything was over that you would get it dry cleaned or figure out something weird had been done to it and would throw it away.”

“The whole room was a mess, Misha. My clothes and toiletries were strewn everywhere and opened up. When they booked him at the Elton prison they found a pair of men’s boxer-briefs in his pocket. They were mine. Those I told them they could just throw away.” Jensen shuddered again like he could shake off the icky feeling.

“If it makes you feel any better, I don’t think he actually he got anything on it. Because even if he did, you know, he was still fully clothed. I never did have to look at Russell Little’s penis.”

Jensen snorted. “You mean Russell’s little penis.”

Misha snorted a laugh too. “God. We are thirteen.”

Jensen shrugged an uncaring shoulder at their immaturity. Then he made another face. “I should probably replace my entire wardrobe. Ugh, I’m so grossed out right now.”

“We can do that,” Misha said. “I actually did inherit a lot of money from my parents. We can throw everything away. Go shopping tomorrow. Buy us both new suits for Monday.”

Jensen raised an eyebrow, but didn’t comment on the fact that his soon to be husband was apparently fabulously wealthy. Nor asking for a prenuptial agreement.

“Okay. Let’s go shopping tomorrow.”

Jensen picked up the suits and tossed them onto the floor. Then he began to strip out of the jeans and T-shirt he was wearing. “I’ll get rid of everything.”

He shoved down his underwear and hopped around until he was out of his socks. He stood buck naked in their bedroom, his hands in fists planted firmly on his hips.

“Well. I feel better.”

Misha smiled as he looked his fiancé over—strong arms and chest, powerful

thighs. Just the slightest pudge around his middle that would probably come right off when Misha started cooking him healthy meals again. He crossed the room and kissed Jensen, running his hands over his chest, grabbing handfuls of his pectoral muscles, and then moving them down. He trailed feather light fingertips over Jensen's cock and it began to perk up immediately. Jensen was right—penises were stupid and loved any kind of friction.

He gave one last lick into Jensen's mouth and then pulled back with a smile. "Let's make love, Jensen. And don't make a face at that expression. I want you take me—nice and slow and as deep as you like."

Misha started to back up toward the bed.

"No."

Misha stopped, the suggestion of doubt and fear prickling the back of his neck.

"No, Mish. You're taking me. And you're going to do it rough."

Misha didn't take a step back, but he retreated in his mind. "What?"

"I think you need to do this. I think you need to be in control. You need to hold me down and fuck me and take your pleasure in me. And know that you're in control, that you're not hurting me, and that I'm not afraid of you.

I want you to test me—make me show you that I trust you."

Misha frowned. "That's not what I want. I don't want you to have to prove your love. That's ridiculous."

"I know. And if you were asking me to let you do it to prove myself to you, I'd be angry and kind of resent you for even suggesting it. But it's not your idea. It's mine. I want to be tested."

"Jensen..."

"Come on, Misha." He raised a challenging eyebrow. "Don't act like you

don't want to take me hard and rough. Wherever you like."

Misha gave him a bit of scowl, but he wasn't angry. "I might take you over the dresser so hard it won't just be the floor that makes it slant to the left."

Jensen laughed, his eyes shining with glee. Misha knew it was because he remembered Jensen's incessant whining about the uneven floor and how he'd thought it was his old IKEA dresser and it drove him nuts. He liked that Misha listened to him and thought about him. Well, of course Misha did. There wasn't really anything in the world he liked near as much as knowing Jensen.

Misha let his eyes roam over Jensen again. His cock was half hard just from anticipation alone. Misha looked at his thighs and was suddenly hit with a desire to shove them apart and take every part of Jensen for himself.

"Jensen," Misha said calmly, quietly.

"Yes?"

"Come take my clothes off."

Jensen obediently crossed the room and took the bottom of Misha's shirt in his hands. Misha raised his arms to facilitate Jensen removing the garment.

He tossed it to the side. Then he maintained eye contact as he worked open Misha's belt and the fly of his jeans. He sank slowly to his knees as he pushed the pants down Misha's legs. He helped him step out of them and removed his socks. Then Jensen slid his hands up Misha's legs, slowly, pulling lightly on the fine hair. He ran his hands all the way up the smooth, hairless part of his upper thighs and onto his hips. His thumbs grazed along the sides of Misha's erection, but he didn't touch him just yet. He hooked his fingers in the waist band of his orange colored briefs and pulled them down gradually. When Misha's cock sprang free he leaned forward and placed a light kiss on the tip, and then helped him step out of his underwear.

Jensen stood up and kept his hands to himself, watching Misha and waiting for instructions. Misha ran a hand appreciatively, possessively, down

Jensen's flank.

"Get on the bed. On your stomach."

Jensen obeyed and Misha grabbed the lube from the nightstand before crawling onto the bed with him.

"Lift your hips a bit," Misha said.

Jensen got his arms under his chest to keep himself propped up a bit and then raised his hips, balancing on his knees. His back was bowed in a sensuous curve of soft skin and beautiful muscle. It probably wasn't terribly comfortable, but he seemed content to stay put. Misha got between his legs, helping him spread them a bit farther apart. Then he put both hands on Jensen's cheeks and spread his ass open. Jensen sucked in a short breath and Misha gazed at the pretty pink pucker of Jensen's entrance for a moment. Their sex for the last eighteen weeks had been mostly virtual or rushed. He hadn't really had the opportunity to fully appreciate Jensen properly in a long while.

Misha bent over and lightly blew over the muscle. Jensen flexed and his entrance fluttered. Misha leaned down and began licking. Jensen jerked forward, but Misha pulled him back. He licked repeatedly at his hole, kissing it and sucking on the rim. Jensen groaned softly and wiggled his

hips. Misha moved his hands down and used his thumbs to pull his entrance open. Jensen groaned louder when the air hit his sensitive interior. Misha filled it with his tongue immediately. He pushed his face in as far as he could and licked inside Jensen, pulling him open wider and making humming noises of pleasure as he ate him out. His jaw started to ache with how forcefully he was going at him, but he hadn't tasted him here in so long...

Misha sat up, panting for air and Jensen was clenching his hands around the pillow that he was biting just as fiercely. There was a pillow biter joke in here somewhere, but Misha didn't have time for distractions. He popped the cap off the lube and drizzled some directly onto Jensen's entrance. The muscle flexed and Jensen pushed his hips down into the mattress. Misha smiled and used his middle finger to spread the lube around between his legs, brushing

over his hole, and letting the pad of his finger slip in a bit with each pass. Jensen swiveled his hips again.

“Come on, baby. Give me what I want...” Jensen it whispered so softly that Misha suspected he didn’t realize that he’d said it out loud.

Misha decided that testing Jensen’s trust didn’t mean he couldn’t be nice.

He pushed his middle finger inside and bit his lip to keep from moaning like a pervert as Jensen’s body sucked him inside. He put a hand on Jensen’s ass cheek to balance himself and fucked his finger in and out of Jensen’s hole.

“Fuck, you always feel so amazing,” Misha sighed.

Jensen let out a whiny noise and pushed back onto his hand. Misha easily slipped a second finger inside, but it was a little tight. Jensen hadn’t been stretched in a while. Even taking the eighteen weeks into account, Misha had been more inclined to let Jensen top since they’d moved in together than the near even switching they’d done in Elton. He realized it was because he’d felt guilty and dirty when he’d taken Jensen, feeling like he was indulging the monster Russ had exposed him to be.

Misha shook his head. Russ had no place in their relationship. He could just appreciate that Jensen’s hole was clenching tight and needy around his fingers. He leaned down and placed a kissed on his cute, bouncy butt cheek

as he pushed in a third finger. Jensen groaned and pushed back against him.

“Yes, fill me up.”

“Hush,” Misha said distractedly.

Jensen grumbled, but complied.

Misha watched his fingers disappear inside Jensen’s body. He pulled one cheek farther out so that he could see better. He turned his hand over and pressed his fingers up as he dragged them down Jensen’s insides, and then pushed them back in. Jensen twitched and one of his hands shot out and grabbed a slat of the headboard. He clenched it hard enough to make it creak.

Misha twisted his hand around as his fingers stroked him from the inside over and over, waiting until Jensen gave in and grabbed another slat with his other hand. He suspected Jensen would probably enjoy a little bondage, but they'd shied away from anything resembling it for obvious reasons. Well that, but also because Misha was pretty certain that Jensen was strong enough to break the bed.

Misha worked one hand in Jensen's body as he used the other to dribble a little lube onto his erection. He slicked it up using the loose circle of his fingers, doing nothing to lessen the wet sounds it created from reaching Jensen's ears. He pulled on the slats in his hands and the headboard pulled away from the wall. Misha supposed if he let him break the bed, then that would be a good reason to build a new bed. A sturdier bed. One with built in fittings for easily tying off ropes or neckties.

Misha pulled his fingers out and gripped Jensen's hips.

"Move forward," he panted.

Jensen shuffled forward, keeping his hands on the headboard and got his knees under himself. Misha was able to line up behind him easily and grunted like some kind of horny animal when his cockhead pushed against his entrance. He was a little embarrassed by the noise and glanced up Jensen. He seemed too far gone to have heard him, or to care if he had.

Misha repressed a laugh and rubbed Jensen's lower back soothingly as he breached his rim, and then slid all the way in. He shuffled forward on his knees so that he could push himself as far in as physically possible.

"Misha," Jensen moaned. "Hang on, don't move."

"Does it hurt?" Misha asked, concerned he'd gone too fast. He knew Jensen had felt a little tighter, but he had opened up so beautifully.

Jensen shook his head. "No. Doesn't hurt. Just wanna feel you."

"Fuck," Misha whispered, dropping his head back, trying his best not to let his ego push him into orgasm just like that. His fingers flexed over Jensen's

hips, his skin turning red and then white under the pressure.

“You wanna really feel me, Jensen?”

He dropped his head down toward the sheets and nodded. “Yes, please...

Misha...”

Misha pulled out slowly, concentrating on the feel of Jensen’s body gliding over his cock, the clench of his rim pulling at each retreating inch. He pulled out just enough that his head stretched Jensen’s rim wide, but stayed inside him. Jensen let out a desperate noise and pulled on the headboard again. Misha pushed back in, just as slowly, once again focusing on each sensation as Jensen took him back inside his body. It was an amazingly intimate moment and Misha loved every second of it, but Jensen had asked for Misha to take him. And he’d asked for it to be rough. Misha was nothing if not eager to please his lover.

Misha moved his hips faster, nothing too wild yet, just enough to get his cock moving smoothly in Jensen’s hole. Then he began to move a little faster, his hips slapping Jensen’s ass with quite a bit of force. Jensen moaned and spread his knees a bit wider.

“Move forward,” Misha demanded.

“Wh-what?” Jensen asked, seemingly confused by words.

Misha helped him move by supporting him under the waist. He got Jensen to get up on his knees and close enough to the headboard that he could still hang on to the slats. Misha moved in close behind him and circled his arms around his waist. He used the bounce in the mattress to help him fuck up and into Jensen, using his hold on his waist to pull him down onto the rough

thrusts. Jensen panted and let out small groans each time Misha slammed home.

Misha’s pace rapidly increased and he rested his cheek on Jensen’s shoulder —completely lost in the feeling of drilling Jensen as hard as he could in their



position. Jensen's knuckles were white where he gripped the headboard. His moaning got louder and longer and Misha knew if he kept at it for another minute or two he could get Jensen to come untouched. As much he enjoyed that, he also knew that it would feel better with a hand on his cock.

Misha moved one hand down and gripped Jensen's cock. He actually shouted out—sounding like it was partially surprise as well as pleasure. He began to thrash wildly, letting out harsh groans that were just shy of being screams. It went to Misha's head, and his groin, and he knew that he was about three seconds away from completely losing it. Jensen was right there with him—and then there was a sharp crack and their momentum sent them flying onto their backs. Fortunately they landed safely on the mattress and Misha could feel Jensen's cock twitching in his hand, hot semen spurting out and covering his fingers and wrist. Misha was able to get his feet under himself just enough to thrust quickly up into Jensen and then he was coming too—coming deep inside Jensen with an extremely satisfying pleasure.

They lay still, chests heaving as they both sought to catch their breath. For Misha it was a little more difficult since almost Jensen's full weight was on top of him. As their harsh panting evened out, Jensen raised an arm. Still clutched in his hand was a slat made of beautiful ebony wood.

"Um. I'm sorry I broke your bed," Jensen said meekly.

Misha chuckled and gently encouraged Jensen to roll off him and onto his side. He took the slat from Jensen's hand and looked at it, noticing the imperfections he'd created in the wood while he had been very much an amateur in woodworking.

"I was thinking of building a new bed anyway," Misha said and tossed the slat onto floor.

Jensen smiled and snuggled into his side—though he probably had a more manly word for it.

"Did that feel good?" Jensen asked.

“Yes. But everything with you does.”

“Do you trust yourself with me?”

Misha turned his head and looked at Jensen. He kissed his forehead.

“I feel safe with you.”

Jensen raised a hand and stroked Misha’s cheek. They leaned into each other and kissed.

"Love you."

“Me too.”



## **The Opposite of The End**

### Chapter Notes

Uh...I totally cast Octavia Spencer in my SPN RPF.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

**Monday, August 25, 2014**

Jensen opened his eyes.

Across the room he saw the black garment bag hanging from the ebony dresser—hanging out from the side a bit due to the slanting floor. They really needed to find a new place to live. With a bedroom big enough to hold the new bed Misha wanted to build. Jensen was kind of afraid that he was going to end up sleeping in some gothic four post monstrosity with gargoyles on it or something. As long as he could sleep on it and spread Misha out comfortably when he wanted to, he supposed it didn't really matter what it looked like.

His eyes focused on the garment bag again. It reminded him of the expensive, custom tailored suit Misha had paid an unjustifiable sum to have it completed the same day they'd bought it inside. He smiled. It was the suit he was going to get married in.

Jensen let Misha fuss with his green tie, and did absolutely nothing to fix Misha's blue one even though it was slightly askew. The tie kept tugging at Jensen's neck, so finally he swatted at Misha's hands.

"Quit it. Fix your own tie."

Jensen straightened his tie, loosening it just a bit. Misha attempted to fix his, but made it worse. They were next in line for the clerk's window at the Montgomery County Circuit Court. They both looked very suave and debonair in Jensen's opinion, and vastly overdressed for their surroundings.

Fortunately they'd be set for their dinner reservations at Komi, one of the best restaurants in DC.

The person in front of them moved away and they stepped forward. The clerk was a plump black woman with a pleasant, though no-nonsense face.

The name plate on the window declared her to be Octavia. Jensen gave her one of his best smiles. After all, he was in a good mood.

“Hello, Octavia.”

“Mm-hmm,” she said, looking him and then Misha over.

“We’re here to apply for a marriage license.”

“I’m going to need a completed application, identification from both of you in the form of a birth certificate, a driver’s license, a passport, a military ID, or an alien registration card, your social security numbers, proof of death or completed divorce in the event either of you were previously married, and \$55.00 which can be paid with cash, credit, or check made out to Montgomery County.”

Misha and Jensen hopped to and pulled out their paperwork. They didn’t want to run the risk of displeasing the woman. It seemed like it would make

for a very unpleasant day if they got on her bad side. She competently processed their paperwork and then swiped Jensen’s credit card. Then she made them both sign the application and the license.

“Now, that won’t be valid until 6:00am two calendar days from today. Then you have six months to have the ceremony, otherwise the license will be void and you’ll have to apply again if you still want to get married.”

Jensen tucked his card back into his wallet and Misha cocked his head.

“Ceremony. Do we have to have a ceremony?”

Octavia gave him a look. “Do you want the marriage to be legal?”

“Well, yeah...but isn’t getting the license it? Doesn’t that mean we’re... married?”

“Honey. This is just a license that says you’re allowed to get married. You still need to have it officiated.”

“Oh. And we can’t do that until Wednesday?”

“That’s right.”

Misha turned to look at Jensen. “Do we have time to come in before work tomorrow? Or could we try to do it during lunch?”

“I can’t this week. There’s too much wrap up going on with the Podvodnik case. Honestly, I don’t see having any free time for a while. Like weeks, if we have to do it on a weekday.”

“I guess we could hire a minister or something,” Misha said. “To do it on a weekend if we can’t do it with the justice of the peace.”

“Oh, no. We do it on a weekend and hire someone and my mother is going to want to come. And then she’s going to want to plan ‘just a small party.’

And then she’ll say if she’s coming there’s no reason why my siblings and aunts and uncles and cousins can’t be there. And then it would be an insult if her friends aren’t invited because she was invited to all of her friends’

children’s weddings. And before you know it we’ll be having a \$50,000

wedding and freaking out about whether the gardenias survived the power outage in the florist’s refrigerator. No, absolutely not.”

Misha smiled. “Well, we’ve got six months—oh shit, no. Ninety days to fulfill the Bureau’s deadline. But I’m sure we’ll both have a day we can take off come up sometime before then.”

“Yeah. I’m sure there’ll be time when I’m done with Podvodik, and before Russ’ trial starts in October. Or...maybe we can put it off to November.”

“But weren’t we considering October for our honeymoon? It’d be weird to go on our honeymoon before we’re actually married.”

“That’s true...”

Octavia was looking back and forth between them as they spoke.

“Lord, have mercy,” she said. “I got nothing against two people in love

getting married, but this right here is why two men shouldn't be in charge of it. Alright, here's what I'm going to do. I'm going to put in a waiver for you two. Hank should be back from lunch in ten minutes or so. He'll perform the ceremony for you and sign the license today."

Misha's face lit up and Jensen's heart thudded excitedly. It made him inexplicably happy to see how excited Misha was to marry him.

"You'll do that for us?" Misha asked.

"If I don't you two will just be back here two years later asking for an extension. You two go wait in those chairs over there. I've gotta go get this signed by Judge Bier before he gets back into traffic court. You two have rings?" she asked with an eyebrow arched judgmentally.

Jensen laughed nervously. "Yes, of course! Of course we have rings."

She pursed her lips and looked at him skeptically, and then turned and walked out of her office. Jensen waited until the door shut behind her. He turned back to Misha.

"Oh my God, we don't have rings," he hissed.

"It's fine," Misha reassured him. He reached through the window and took four paperclips out of a container on her desk. He led Jensen over to the chairs Octavia had indicated and they sat down. Misha unfolded the paperclips, and then carefully began to shape them into rings with a twisted pattern that was unbelievably sophisticated for office supplies. He used Jensen's finger to size one of the rings and then made adjustments. He was just finishing his own ring when Octavia came into the room from a different door. She had a cardboard box in her hand and walked up to them, digging through it with the other.

"Okay. I got Judge Bier to sign the waiver. Hank is brushing the crumbs off his shirt and will be here in a moment. At least you two are dressed for the part. Those suits are brand new, and you've got a blue tie on. I assume something borrowed are those paperclips you stole off my desk."

Jensen gave her a guilty look, but Misha just seemed pleased with himself.

“We don’t really have anything too old, although this thing has been in here a while.” She pulled out a truly sad looking bouquet of plastic flowers.

Jensen tried not to make a face at the prop. “That’s okay. I don’t think either of us needs a bouquet.”

“Speak for yourself,” Misha said and took the faded plastic flowers from Octavia. He put it to his face and inhaled like he was scenting a fresh bouquet of flowers. He looked up at Jensen with an expression of regret on his face.

“It smells like dust and spider legs.”

Jensen laughed. He full on threw his head back and laughed louder and longer than he had in a very long time. He hadn’t had any doubts anyway, but it was good to know that he was definitely making the right decision to marry Misha. He laughed until a man came up to the trio and asked who was getting married.

Jensen and Misha identified themselves and then followed him to a small room with a lopsided podium. The man pulled out a stack of three books from under the podium.

“Religious preference?” he asked.

They shook their heads.

“None,” Jensen said.

“Well, don’t need these then.”

The justice of the peace put the books back under the podium and Octavia let out a small, disapproving noise. Jensen turned to look at her.

“Are you staying?” he asked.

“I’m going to be your witness.”



“The state of Maryland doesn’t require witnesses.”

Octavia put a hand on her hip and gave him a look that made his balls shrivel up.

“Are you saying you don’t want me here?” she asked.

Jensen’s jaw flapped and Misha hit him lightly on the shoulder.

“No, that’s not what he’s saying at all. We’d love to have you here,” Misha said.

“Mm-hmm.”

“Okay,” Hank said. “Ready?”

Jensen and Misha faced the officiant, and he circled a finger in the air indicating that they should face each other. They turned and Jensen couldn’t help but grin when he caught sight of Misha standing there with his ridiculous bouquet. Misha grinned too and his nose scrunched up. Jensen knew he wasn’t going to be able to stop smiling for a long time. He reached out and took one of Misha’s hands in his.

“Okay. Well, since we don’t need to worry about any religious rites—do you both understand that marriage is a commitment made with one’s whole heart and mind to another person? That there should be no doubts as to why you are binding yourself to another human being?”

“Yes,” they both murmured.

“Do you understand that there will be hard times with the good? That good and bad fortune, wealth and poverty, sickness and wellness, happiness and sadness will all come and go, but your faith and commitment to your partner must remain constant?”

“Yes,” they said again.

“Will one of you present the other with a ring?”

Jensen went first and slid the knotted paperclip onto Misha's left ring finger.

"This ring," Hank said, "represents—what I hope will be a nicer ring," he muttered under his breath, "which will represent your commitment to each other and serve as a reminder of your faith and love for your partner." Hank looked down at his notes. "Jensen Ackles, do you consent to take Dmitri Collins—"

"Misha," they both corrected him.

Hank looked back and forth between them.

"I go by Misha," Misha said.

"Okay. Jensen Ackles, do you consent to take Misha Collins as your husband?"

"I do."

The officiant nodded to Misha and he awkwardly put Jensen's ring on his finger while still trying to hold the bouquet.

"This ring—which I hope is a proxy—represents your commitment to each other and will serve as a reminder for your faith and love for your partner.

Dmitri—Misha Collins, do you consent to take Jensen Ackles as your husband?"

"I do."

"Um. Do you two have anything personal you'd like to add?"

Jensen shrugged his lips and was about to say no, but then Misha spoke.

"Jensen, the circumstances surrounding our meeting and how we fell in love will always be tinged with a lot of, quite frankly, bad memories and emotions. But I want you to know that my love for you is completely pure and untainted by the forces that conspired against us." He gave him a wry smile and put a hand to his chest, the plastic flowers drooping pitifully.

“Please know that I have no regrets about being the thief who stole your heart.”

Jensen had to bite his lip to stave off the sudden urge to burst into tears like a giant sap. Hank and Octavia had exchanged looks after Misha’s declaration, thinking his words to just be cheesy, cliché drivel. They didn’t know that Misha was saying that he would never wish away the worst horrors of his life if it meant that he couldn’t be with Jensen. He was also taking the power away from Russ, and making the word theirs and a representation of their love.

Jensen nodded at Misha. He understood exactly what he was doing. He squeezed Misha’s hand.

“Misha, I’m proud and honored that you think me worthy of being your husband.” He gave him a little wink. “And you’ll always be my angel.”

Hank and Octavia exchanged looks again, but Misha’s smile grew wider and his eyes got a little shiny.

“You know, I think I’d be okay with that one sticking.”

Jensen smiled in reaction to Misha’s smile. He had a feeling he always would.

“Well then,” Hank said, “by the power vested in me by the state of Maryland, I declare you to be married. You may consummate the marriage with a kiss.”

“I hope we’ll be able to do a lot more than that to consummate it,” Misha murmured.

“Oh, I—I didn’t—I meant—” Hank spluttered embarrassedly.

Octavia snorted in amusement.

Jensen leaned close and whispered, “Don’t worry; we will.”

Then he tilted his head and kissed his husband. They kept it closed mouth, aware of their audience, but let it linger for a good four or five seconds.

They pulled back and grinned at each other. Hank finished signing the license and handed it to Octavia.

“Congratulations,” she said. “I’ll go make a copy of this for you, but you are now officially married. Because a woman got it done for you.”

“Thank you, Octavia,” they intoned playfully.

She gave them a look and a final, “Mm-hmm,” but she winked at them as she left. Hank followed her out whispering, “We really need to come up with something to replace ‘you may kiss the bride.’”

Then they were left alone in the room. Misha tossed the disgraceful bouquet over his shoulder and then wrapped his arms around Jensen’s neck. Jensen’s arms fit naturally around Misha’s waist.

“Husband,” Jensen said, giving the word a test run. “This is my husband, Misha.”

“This is my honey bear, Jensen.”

“Don’t even start,” Jensen warned.

Misha laughed.

“Unless you want to try to find a new nickname. It’s not so hard. Then I can have baby back.”

“Hmm.”

“Can I? Use baby again?”

“We’ll see.”



## **Glossary**

### Chapter Notes

Please let me know if there are any terms in the fic that you think should be added to this section.

**ADIC** – Assistant Director in Charge; oversees entire field office, only found in extra large field offices: DC, LA, New York, Miami, and Chicago

—and yes, it's not said letter by letter, it's said the way it's spelled **ASAC** – Assistant Special Agent in Charge; oversees a group of squads—

and yes, it's not said letter by letter, it's said the way it's spelled **Bu** - Short for Bureau

**Charlie Papa/Lima-2** – The military alphabet is used to make letters easily identifiable over phone and radio communications. A= alpha, B=beta, C=Charlie, etc. In this case Jensen is using Charlie Papa to indicate he is calling from the CP, the Command Post. L(ima)-2 is the designation for one of the Lookout points they have established at the port.

**COB** - Close of Business; typically in the government, this means around 5:00pm-ish

**CR-2** – Divisions are given two letter designations, Criminal = CR, Counterterrorism = CT, Cyber = CY, Counterintelligence = CI, Intelligence

= ID The number is merely a counter and not specific to any particular country or threat or investigation

**DIQG** - Domestic Investigations and Operations Guide; the rules by which the FBI must conduct their investigations

**EAP** – Employee Assistance Program **IA** – Intelligence Analyst

**NAC** – New Agent Class

**NAT** – New Agent Trainee

**Pen Register** – an electronic device that records all numbers called from a particular telephone line

**PFT** – Physical Fitness Test

**PNG** – Persona Non Grata; the political term used for kicking someone with

diplomatic immunity out of the country

**QC** - Quality Control

**SA** – Special Agent

**SAC** – Special Agent in Charge; oversees the field office or resident agency of assignment except in extra large field offices: DC, LA, New York, Miami, and Chicago in which case they oversee one division **SOS** – Staff Operations Specialist; mainly functions as an analyst **SSA** – Supervisory Special Agent; in charge of a squad of agents and analysts

**Trap and Trace** – an electronic device that records all numbers made to a particular telephone line

**UC** - undercover

**WFO** – Washington Field Office; not to be confused with HQ

(headquarters) which is also located in DC

Please [drop by the archive and comment](#) to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!

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| Rating:          | <a href="#">Explicit</a>                                                                                                           |
| Archive Warning: | <a href="#">No Archive Warnings Apply</a>                                                                                          |
| Category:        | <a href="#">M/M</a>                                                                                                                |
| Fandom:          | <a href="#">Supernatural RPF</a>                                                                                                   |
| Relationship:    | <a href="#">Jensen Ackles/Misha Collins</a>                                                                                        |
| Additional Tags: | <a href="#">Alternate Universe - Law Enforcement</a> , <a href="#">Mentions of past violent acts</a> , <a href="#">team switch</a> |
| Series:          | Part 4 of <a href="#">The SPN RPFiles</a>                                                                                          |
| Stats:           | Published: 2016-05-27 Words: 5178                                                                                                  |

## Timestamp: Action takes place between White Collar and The Creole Mistake

by [emwebb17](#)

### Summary

Jensen and Misha go on their honeymoon.

### Notes

See the end of the work for [notes](#).

**Friday, January 23, 2015**

The dark, heavy beat of the music vibrated through Jensen's body in perfect time with the slow, deliberate movements of Misha's hips. A fire burned in a stone hearth, large and hot, barely three feet from where they were making love on the fur blanket they'd laid down on the floor. Sweat rolled down Misha's spine and a fine sheen covered his whole body making him glisten in the orange glow of firelight. Jensen's hands had a little trouble keeping their grip on Misha's hips because of it, but he looked beautiful as he rode him—barely moving in more than hard, swiveling figure eights as he rocked with the music. His hands had started on Jensen's chest and nipples, but were now tangled in his own hair as he grinded down onto Jensen, making them both feel how every inch of Jensen's thick cock fit perfectly snug inside Misha's body. Misha bit his lip and pulled on his hair and gasped softly as the rhythmic line of the song began to throb around them a little faster—and Misha along with it.

The lyrics were repetitive, but the song built and built with the added suggestion of a ticking clock that made Jensen feel like there was a countdown to something. From the way Misha slightly increased his movements and pulled harder on his hair, desroying his bottom lip with his teeth—Jensen suspected he felt it too.

Posted originally on the [Archive of Our Own](http://archiveofourown.org/) at  
<http://download.archiveofourown.org/works/6984400>.

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increased his movements and pulled harder on his hair, destroying his bottom

lip with his teeth—

Jensen suspected he felt it too.

“Jensen, baby...gonna make me come...”

“I’m not even doing anything, angel. This is all you. Think you can spread your legs just a little bit more? Open up for me, Mish. Just a little more.”

Misha let out a desperate, whining sound, but his knees slid on the fur, opening his hips just a little wider, and he sank down completely. It was physically impossible for Jensen to be any deeper

inside his body and Misha lost it. He stopped moving and let out a sobbing groan as he came

untouched, spurting warm come all over himself and Jensen. Jensen kept his grip on Misha’s

body and watched in awe as his husband seemed to be completely lost in his own pleasure. He

kind of almost missed his own orgasm, but when Misha started murmuring how much he loved

feeling Jensen fill him up, Jensen became aware that he was coming. He closed his eyes and

couldn’t hold back his own pleasure-filled sobbing noise as he claimed his husband.

And God would he never get tired of using that word.

The song ended and changed to an old 90’s soft rock love ballad. Misha removed his hands from

his hair and ran them down his sweaty and come-covered chest. Then he looked at his hands and

laughed.

“Sex is so gross,” he chuckled.

Jensen replied, “More embarrassing than gross. We’re both crying like a couple of—”

“Finish that sentence...I dare you,” Misha said, holding his filthy hands over Jensen’s face.

“Saps,” Jensen said. “I was gonna say saps. Nothing derogatory.”

“Mm-hmm.”

Misha looked around them and saw nothing handy, so he leaned forward and wiped his hands on

the furry blanket on either side of Jensen.

“Oh! Misha!”

“What? We bought it for like seven bucks at Wal-Mart. Expressly for the purpose of getting it filthy while we had sex on it. Were you planning on taking it home?”

“Well...I guess not.”

Misha glanced over at the fire that was almost making the room too hot.

“You’re right. It’s better we waited until winter to come here. If we’d come in October a fire would have been unbearable.”

Jensen placed a possessive hand on Misha’s thigh and the other he put behind his head. He turned his head to look out the window. Outside was a gorgeous winter landscape of mountains and

forest gleaming white with fresh snowfall. Their cabin was snug and comfortable and they’d

already discussed how they felt accomplished as human beings for thwarting nature—and then

promptly spent two hours discussing how they were likely going to wind up dead and buried in an avalanche, their bodies remaining undiscovered until spring, for tempting the Universe with their hubris.

“It is pretty out there,” Jensen said. “Fall would have been colorful, but I kind of like the purity of the snow.”

“Mm, not touching that with a ten foot pole. But, I know what you mean. I don’t suppose that means you want to actually go outside and look at it at some point before we have to go back

home.”

Jensen smiled and shifted his hips. Misha moaned brokenly at the feel of Jensen’s cock inside him even though it was soft.

“I can see it just fine through the window,” Jensen said.

“Hm. But we have to go somewhere we can buy a souvenir at least. One for ourselves, and I

promised I’d get one for Gil and Jared. Though you ought to pick out Jared’s.”

“They have souvenirs at the airport.”

Misha tsked at him in mild disgust, and then reached out with a hand and tilted his chin a little more to the right. He ran his fingers over the smooth, exposed skin of Jensen’s neck. The bite mark Russ had left on him was gone. Misha had diligently made sure that Jensen used an anti-scar cream on the healing wound four times a day for six solid weeks. Jensen couldn’t see where it had been and he couldn’t feel anything when he ran his own hand over it. The fact that Misha could unerringly put his hand exactly where it used to be was all in his head.

“See anything?” Jensen asked, just to be conversational.

“No.”

“I told you it was gone.”

“I wish he could still get the death penalty,” Misha muttered.

“He can. Six out of eight families from Lubbock were able to identify the treasures he took from the Lady Killer kills. And remember how the Lubbock PD postulated that Russ might be

responsible for some of the missing persons cases involving men during that time? A family

member of one of those missing persons recognized a class ring from Russ' collection. That's

seven people who are demanding Russ be brought to Texas for trial. And I guarantee you, in

Texas, they will kill him.”

Misha frowned. “Good. I hate to be happy about ending a life...but there's no redeeming him.

And he'll only continue to try to manipulate and torture people from prison. And now that he's pissed at you because you're still with me, he's not going to help you or anyone else find his other disciples.”

Misha was still frowning, his eyes focused on Jensen neck. Jensen rubbed his leg to get his

attention and chuckled.

“Tell me again the look on his face when you told him we were getting married.”

“Murder, mostly, to be quite frank. But it was this perfect combination of despair and realizing that you'd been playing him all along. And then it was

mostly anger and murder and him leaping across the table to snap my neck.”

Jensen shuddered and grabbed one of Misha’s wrists to ground himself. He didn’t know why

he’d broken the “Russ has no place in our relationship” rule. He’d been trying to make Misha feel better, but now he just felt terrified all over again. One stupid, improperly trained guard had nearly cost Jensen all of his happiness. He knew Misha was it for him. As much as he had

lectured Jared on the “there’s no such thing as ‘the one,’” Jensen knew that he could only be

happy as long as he had Misha. No amount of family or friends or new lovers would ever save

him from the loneliness and misery of losing Misha. And he hated that he thought about losing Misha at all, but one man had nearly taken him from him twice.

Misha leaned forward to soothe him with soft kisses scattered across his face. The movement

caused Jensen to slip completely from his body, and Jensen pouted unhappily.

“It’s okay, baby,” Misha said with faux-concern. “You can put it back in later.”

“Wanna put it back in now,” he whined.

“You’re not even hard,” Misha laughed.

“Gimme a sec.”

“Later.” Misha got to his feet and carefully stepped over Jensen’s prone body as he made his way to the kitchen. He sucked in a sharp breath and hopped across the cold floor until he reached the rug in front of the sink. “Okay. The floors are a little too cold. Perhaps we should have found a compromise



between October and frickin' January."

"November and December were booked. Holidays. Plus you know my mom wanted us there for

Christmas so that she could make up for last year."

"There was nothing to make up for," Misha said as he filled a glass of water at the sink.

"What? Can you turn the music down?" Jensen asked, barely able to hear Misha over the

scratchy strains of Tom Waits. He didn't know what so many people, including Misha, liked

about him.

Misha turned the music completely off and Jensen took that to mean that he was serious about

actually leaving the cabin this time. They had been mostly naked and sticky for five solid days.

They were flying home tomorrow, so if they didn't go out today they would be buying their

souvenirs at the airport.

"I said that there was nothing to make up for. Though I did appreciate the family dinner more this year. And it was very sweet of your mother to buy us matching stockings."

Jensen sat up, rolling his eyes. "Yeah, just what we needed in an apartment without a mantle."

"I think she wanted us to stay there Christmas Eve night."

"Oh, I know what she wanted, but waking up at 6:00am to the sounds of

shrieking kids was not

what I wanted.”

“What if they were our kids?”

“Well, that would be a different story, now wouldn’t it?”

Jensen had been in the middle of stretching out his tired muscles (he’d done most of the work in their first session that morning) when he heard Misha start coughing violently. He turned around in concern and saw Misha trying to clear the water he’d swallowed down the wrong pipe. Jensen

walked over to him and patted his back gently while Misha put down his glass and cleared his

throat a few times.

“You okay?” Jensen asked, partly amused, but mostly concerned.

“Y-yeah.” He coughed. “Fine. Geez. That startled me.”

“What, the water?”

“No, your response.”

Jensen tried to think back to what they were talking about. “I don’t...”

“I thought you would roll your eyes or make a face at the notion of us... having kids.”

“Oh. I guess...I was thinking of it in the abstract.”

“Oh. R-right. Of course.”

Misha turned and began washing his glass.

“Misha...do you want kids?”

Misha stayed focused on his glass. “Not always, but...I guess I just thought that...with us...and, I’m kind of too old anyway...that it would be nothing but something to joke about.”

Jensen turned and leaned against the counter and watched Misha thoroughly clean a glass that had only had water in it.

“Misha...do you want children? With me?”

Misha inhaled slowly and put the glass in the dish rack. Then he turned off the water. He

managed to glance over at Jensen once, and then looked down at the sink.

“Well. Um. Okay, yes, I would like that, but I don’t think it’s really feasible, so it’s not

something we have to discuss.”

“Why not? Don’t you want to know what I want?”

“Yes, of course. Although, maybe it’s a conversation we should have when we’re not standing

around butt naked in the kitchen of a cabin we don’t own on a snowy mountaintop.”

“I suppose that’s a good point. I’m going to go take a shower, if you’re insisting on going out today.”

“I am.”

“Join me?”

“Do you really need to ask? Go get it started; I just want to check my email really quick.”

“Okay.”

Jensen pushed off the counter with his hips and then leaned in to kiss Misha's cheek.

"I want kids too," he said, and then walked toward the back of the cabin. He glanced back as he turned the corner and saw Misha gripping the edge of the sink and grinning a bit like a maniac.

Jensen smiled and hoped the goober wouldn't forget to join him in the shower.

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Misha held up a Christmas tree ornament that looked like a moose snowman. It was on sale for a deep post-Christmas discount, so he thought that even if Jensen's mother hated it, it would be

okay because he wouldn't be out too much money.

"What about this?" he asked Jensen, holding up the ornament. "I know she had a snowmen-ornaments-only theme for her tree, but this is a snowman. It's just shaped like a moose. Because we're in Yellowstone."

Jensen tilted his head. "Um...I don't know. It just looks like a bulbous white moose."

"Well, snowmen look like bulbous white men."

"How much is it?"

"Mm...after the discount...three dollars."

"Eh, get it. Worst case she hangs it on the back of the tree for a couple of years until she begins to

'forget' to bring it out."

"Okay. Maybe it'll get one year on the front of the tree because she still feels bad about the first Christmas."

“I thought there was nothing to forgive,” Jensen said, taking the snow moose so that Misha could continue to browse.

“There’s not. But that doesn’t mean she doesn’t still feel guilty about it.”

“Hnn. Are you hungry yet?” Jensen complained.

“Almost. Have you found something for Jared?”

Jensen made another whining noise and then meandered off into the snack food section of the gift shop. Misha found himself looking at the decorative rocks with colorful quartz crystals in them.

His sister would have liked these. It had been over a year since she had died, and he hadn’t even been back to visit her grave. But he was never going to go back to Elton. For any reason. His home was in DC now. Or wherever Jensen went. Home wasn’t a place—it was a person. Or

people. Jensen probably couldn’t live without his family, even if they were a lot to deal with.

This past Christmas had been somewhat pleasant, but he was remembering the first family dinner

they’d had after getting married. Jensen had asked if they could all get together and his mother had decided she wanted to throw a dinner party. She’d gone all out with decorations and

delicious food and it had all been ruined when their “happy” announcement had made her cry.

Well, not cry—bawl. Her feelings had been hurt terribly that she hadn’t been invited to the

wedding. Jensen tried to explain that no one had been there, but that hadn’t made her feel better.

Jensen’s older brothers had chastised him like they were ten years older rather than only a couple of years. His younger brother, Hollis—Misha’s only

real ally in the family—had tried to make

peace, but then Jensen's father had said that it was better the whole thing had been a quiet affair.

That had set Jensen off. He'd yelled at his father for being ashamed and disgusted by him and that if that was the case then he should forbid him and Misha from entering his home.

Things had spiraled out of control from there. Jensen's mother had run from the room sobbing

and a couple of his sisters-in-law followed her. His sister had yelled at Jensen because she knew that their mother would now start demanding she get married and would take total control over the wedding since it would be her "last chance." Everyone had had any opinion and a shouting

match had commenced. Through the shouting Misha had eaten his duck because it had been

really good and he wasn't about to waste it because a bunch of crazy people didn't know how to

communicate with each other.

Finally Jensen's father had managed to calm Jensen down by expansively telling him how much he respected and admired him and how proud he was of him and that all he'd meant was that he

knew that if his mother had known she would have wanted to plan a lavish wedding and he was

trying to convince her that a no frills wedding was a good thing. Jensen's brothers and in-laws had finally managed to stop fighting amongst themselves and Hollis' wife had convinced Jensen's mother to return to the table. Everly had still been annoyed with Jensen though—she'd been

certain she'd wind up in a big ugly frou-frou princess wedding dress just so her mother wouldn't cry.

Once everyone had returned to the same room, there had been a slight lull in the shouting and

arguing and crying and Misha had leapt up and wrapped an arm around Mrs. Ackles' shoulders.

He'd apologized to her for Jensen's terrible explanation and that he should have jumped in sooner to clarify things. Jensen had looked confused and slightly suspicious. Then Misha had told her, and everyone, that they had had to do a quick justice of the peace marriage because of the ninety day deadline the Bureau had put on them so that Misha would qualify for the assignment to

WFO. That had calmed Jensen's mother down a bit, but his father had made some sort of noise

like "that explains it" and Jensen's therapist brother had rolled his eyes and muttered bureaucracy wasn't a reason to get married and they had all been poised on the precipice of a fight that Misha wasn't sure they would have been able to come back from.

So, Misha had pretended like he hadn't heard Jensen's father's and brother's dick comments and

that he didn't know that Jensen's sister and Hollis were about to get into fights with their siblings and he'd announced happily, "We were hoping to have the big wedding later." Jensen had gone

completely still, and then turned slowly, like he was in a horror movie, to look at Misha. Misha had sent him a look that let him know if he contradicted him that he would be going on their

honeymoon alone. Misha had gone on to explain how they'd done nothing to celebrate the

wedding because they didn't want to have to rush planning it in ninety days. That was for legal purposes for the Bureau, but as far as he and Jensen were

concerned, they were still just engaged and had all the time they needed to plan a wedding and a reception.

That had shut most everyone up and Mrs. Ackles' eyes now had tears of happiness and she had

kissed Misha's cheek no less than five times. Hollis had looked between Misha's and Jensen's

faces, and he was probably the only one who caught onto the load of bull Misha had fed his

mother and the crushing anxiety attack Jensen was suffering. And he had burst out laughing.

Only Misha and Jensen had known why he was laughing (and Jensen hadn't been happy about

it), but it was so joyful and infectious that it managed to lighten the whole mood. The dinner had been sort of saved, and the only thing sacrificed was Jensen's and Misha's sanity. They'd given the planning of their wedding completely over to Mrs. Ackles with the knowledge that she had a

blank check because Misha's inheritance could cover most anything. Apparently Misha was

going to be a June groom.

Misha shook himself out of the memory. The next week with Jensen had been a little tense as he hadn't known whether he was angry at Misha or grateful for the interference. The first time his mother showed up and excitedly showed them swatches to pick out wedding colors (because

nothing can be done until I know what colors you want to use!), Misha had been petrified that

Jensen was going to figure out that he was mostly angry. But after she had left, Jensen had been calm and amusedly resigned. He was happy that his mother was so happy. Plus, he was kind of

thrilled about the idea of getting married at his parents' country club where all of his father's douche bag friends were sure to know about it even if they refused the invitation. The tension had dissipated and Misha had done his best to run interference between Jensen and his mother. He

himself still didn't know most of the details of the wedding, but from what he did know he knew it would be wisest to keep Jensen in the dark for as long as possible.

Misha picked up a small quartz piece that also showed a few layers of the earth's crust. He

decided to buy it and sit it on his desk at work to remind him of Natalia. He was on his way to the large huckleberry products display when screaming suddenly broke out. Someone yelled, "He

has a gun!" Misha's instinct was to reach for his weapon, but he'd chosen not to bring one on the trip at all even though Jensen (and all his instructors) told him that an FBI agent was always armed

—on duty, off duty, at home, and on vacation. He still ran toward the commotion while everyone else ran away from it.

He rounded the large stack of stuffed animals and saw a couple of people and a clerk crouching

behind the counter. Two of them were on the phone with 911. They were peeking out at a large

man crouching on top of a scrawny man. The scrawny man's arms were being held behind his

back and the large man had a gun pressed to the back of his prisoner's head. The most shocking thing about the whole scene was that the man with the gun was Jensen.

"Jensen?" Misha asked carefully.

“He’s one of Russ’,” Jensen forced out between gritted teeth. He wouldn’t take his eyes off the guy he had pinned down.

Misha glanced at the people behind the register. “It’s okay. We’re FBI.” He did at least have enough sense to keep his creds on him and flashed them. The people relaxed a little bit, but stayed hidden behind the counter.

“Jensen...why do you think he’s one of Russ’ disciples?”

“Probably not a disciple; just one of his tools.”

“Okay. Why?”

“He said, ‘I’ve stolen enough of your time.’”

“No, I didn’t!” the man squawked.

“Shut up!” Jensen yelled and the man flinched as best he could while being held immobile.

“Jensen, baby, is it possible you misheard him?”

“No.”

That was good enough for Misha. “I’m going to go out front and wait for the police. We don’t

want them to come in here and start shooting people.”

The police arrived minutes later—which was actually a really good response time—and Misha

greeted them with his creds out and arms in the air. After a quick explanation they came in,

without weapons drawn thankfully. Jensen was right where he had let him and he reluctantly let the police take over arresting the man. It was a long, confusing, and awkward conversation as the police tried to understand that the guy hadn’t stolen anything or threatened anyone, he’d just

apologized to a man for asking his opinion on which necklace he should buy for his girlfriend.

The suspect began getting ornery and demanding a lawyer. Eventually the cop in charge did

manage to decide that they should move everything down to the police precinct.

When the story got explained there, the police chief pitched a fit. He demanded that the guy be released immediately, but they'd already started the booking process and they had to wait for the inquiries to go through on him before they could clear him and discharge him. Misha and Jensen were given a rather condescending lecture from the police chief—probably because he

having power over the FBI—and then he told them that he'd be calling their supervisors and

slammed the door of the interview room where he left them alone together.

Jensen sat back in his chair, scowling fiercely at the beat up and scratched surface on the table.

Misha sat beside him, not sure what to make of what had happened in the gift shop. He reached

out and put a hand on top of Jensen's clenched fist.

"Can you tell me one more time what happened?" Misha asked. "I'm sorry, with everyone yelling

and interrupting, I didn't quite get it all."

"You think I'm paranoid?" Jensen asked tiredly.

"I don't know yet. What happened?"

"I was looking at some snack things for Jared, and then this guy asks me to

look at some

necklaces. He said he couldn't decide which one his girlfriend would like best. I mean, like hell if I would know if he didn't, but I was polite. Picked one out. But he waffled over it like he wasn't sure and kept talking about one versus the other. Finally I just said I couldn't help him.

And he apologized. And I thought that was the end of it, so I started to turn away, but then he said 'I've stolen enough of your time.' That's what the woman in the garage said. That's what Darcy said. He's one of Russ'. I know it."

Misha patted his stiff hand again. "Okay."

Ten minutes later the police chief and two officers entered the room with a laptop. They set it down in front of Jensen and clicked play on the video. It was the footage from a surveillance

camera in the store. Jensen and the man were clearly visible and even their dialogue was audible over the drone of the rest of the busy store. Everything progressed much as Jensen had said, but when Jensen turned away from him the man's last sentence had been, "Sorry to have bothered

you."

Misha glanced nervously at Jensen. He looked completely shocked. He really had believed that

he'd heard "I've stolen enough of your time." He sat back in his chair in stunned silence. Misha glanced up at the smirking police chief and barely restrained himself from kicking the man's balls up into his sinuses. He knew the man might even go to the local press with the story, just to try to humiliate the FBI. The police chief started gearing up for a big, patronizing speech when a young officer burst into the room.

"Damnit, White!" the police chief growled. "Comport yourself like a professional. We're in a

meeting here. We'll talk later."

"But, sir—we got a hit on the man's prints. There's a warrant out for his arrest in Georgia."

"For what, parking tickets?" the man scoffed.

"No, sir. Three counts of murder. He killed his girlfriend and her two children and then set them on fire."

No one in the room said anything for several long moments. Then the police chief said, "We

haven't released him, have we?"

"No, he's still in custody."

Everyone kind of exhaled in relief.

"Okay. Well, let's call down to Georgia and let them know we got him. As for you two," he

looked at Jensen and Misha, "while this is completely unrelated to whatever mental breakdown

you had in that store, I'm sure as hell not going to accuse an FBI agent of any wrongdoing by

catching a murderer. You guys head on out of here. And, uh, enjoy the rest of your vacation."

The chief left the room and his officers followed behind. Misha and Jensen stayed seated. Jensen didn't look relieved or happy at all. Misha scooted his chair closer and put a hand on his thigh.

"Are you okay?"

"No. Because...I still think he's one of Russ'. I mean, I know I misheard what he said, but this guy turns out to be a murderer in another state? I just

happened to randomly flip out on a

murderer? I feel like I know that I'm being crazy. I heard that he didn't say it, but..."

Misha leaned against his side and combed his fingers through his hair. "Shh, it's okay."

Something else must have triggered your subconscious. Maybe you saw his face on the news, or

there was something about the way he talked about his girlfriend...your brain made you hear that

phrase so that you would have a reason to react to him. It's okay. Everything is okay."

"And what if next time I pull a gun on someone innocent?"

"Then we'll deal with it."

Jensen turned his head and looked at him. "What, you're not going to reassure me that that won't happen?"

"I can't possibly know that. I don't think it will. Honestly, I think you went after that man because some part of you knew he was guilty of something. I don't think you 'randomly' flipped out on some guy and got lucky."

Jensen grumbled, but didn't make an attempt to lodge a formal protest. Misha nuzzled his cheek with his nose and Jensen grumbled louder, but he didn't pull away in the slightest.

"Come on. We've got that cabin for one more night and we haven't even tried the hot tub."

"It's below freezing outside," Jensen muttered.

"That's kind of the point, babe."

“What about shopping? I think I broke that snow moose.”

“It’s okay. They have souvenirs at the airport.”

Jensen seemed reluctant to be let out of the situation without being punished for something, but Misha knew Jensen’s weakness.

“Husband, I want you to take me back to our honeymoon cabin and—hm. I was going to say

‘ravish me,’ but that might be a little too trashy romance novel even for you and me.”

“Drill you into the mattress is probably too crass.”

“Kind of what I want though.”

“What about the hot tub?”

“Oh. Ew. We are not having sex in a rental cabin’s hot tub.”

“Can we get some more of that huckleberry ice cream on the way back?”

“Of course. As long as I get to lick it off your—”

The door opened and one of the officers who had brought them in started.

“Oh, sorry, I thought you two had left.”

“We were just doing that now,” Jensen said, standing up and taking Misha by the hand.

He led them out of the station and to their rental car that Misha had had to drive behind the police car that had carried Jensen. They’d let him sit up front, but it had still been a little insulting.

“Hey,” Jensen said, nudging Misha’s shoulder.

“What?”

“Say it again.”

“Say wha—oh. Husband.”

Jensen grinned goofily and held the car door open for Misha. He slid into his seat with a silly smile of his own. He supposed it was his weakness too.

End Notes

I'm sorry; I don't have an estimate release date for *The Creole Mistake*, but it is coming.

Please [drop by the archive and comment](#) to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!

Document Outline

- [Timestamp: Action takes place between White Collar and The Creole Mistake](#)