

Justice

Von abgemeldet

Criminal Minds Fic

Life being what it is, one dreams of revenge.

Paul Gauguin

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It was only when he felt the blood on his knuckles that he felt relief.

After having died to catch his breath for what seemed like an eternity, he found it easiest to breathe just as the life left the mangled body beneath him.

His fists slammed against an already broken skull once, twice more, until he finally felt peace, a brief episode of respite before hell would claim him again in the morning.

It always did ever since that dreadful day. It never failed to pull him under, a little bit further each day. He didn't know how long he would be able to hide it anymore, but right now he didn't care.

Right now it was night and he had avenged their suffering. It wasn't nearly enough to make up for what he had done, he knew that. He belonged in hell. But he couldn't go there without taking those monsters with him.

Slowly he got up and left the alley, leaving the body behind without another glance. His hands were still dripping blood but he didn't bother trying to wipe it off; it was on his hands, now and forever and nothing he did would change that.

Out on the dark street corner, he took a deep breath before hurrying home, knowing well that it was only a brief quiet before the next storm.

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Jennifer Jareau walked into the BAU's main office with hurried steps, a thick folder in her arms.

"Guys, we've got a case.", she alerted the other team members, urging them to follow her into the conference room.

Spencer Reid put aside an older case file he'd been reviewing and got out of his chair. He watched the others following JJ one by one, except for one person.

"Hey, have you seen Hotch yet?", he asked slightly concerned by the repeated absence of their former unit chief. He was officially back at work after the murder of his wife, but he had been missing meetings a lot lately.

Both Morgan and Rossi hesitated for a moment before shrugging.

"He didn't come in this morning.", Rossi said.

Reid's brow furrowed further: "That's not like him. Should we worry? Call him maybe?"

"I don't think you need to.", Morgan declined, patting Reid's shoulder reassuringly for a moment. His voice was light but his eyes had the same barely hidden expression they all got these days when talking about Hotch. Because they knew it but didn't say that it was like Hotch. At least ever since the reaper had set his goal on making his life a living hell.

Now, with Foyet dead, and Hotch refusing to let them treat him any differently than before, it was easy to forget that his emotional wounds would still be far from healed. No one talked about it openly but they were all worried.

"He probably didn't want to leave, Jack.", Morgan concluded: "We should give him some time; we can always brief him later."

Rossi seemed content with that and left the two men to join the rest of the team.

Reid nodded slowly, looking over to the entrance once more as if hoping Hotch would appear out of thin air. Knowing that one of them was in pain and wouldn't accept help was gnawing at him.

"You're probably right.", he agreed distractedly, only looking up when Morgan's grip on his shoulder tightened briefly.

"Hey.", the black agent gave him an empathetic smile, obviously trying to ease his worries: "Don't worry your head off, pretty boy. Hotch knows he can talk to all of us at any time. Let's give him some space."

Reid returned the smile and nodded thankfully, feeling a little more confident that Morgan was right.

They entered the conference room last, and JJ didn't waste any more time discussing the case. She pulled up several images on the screen on the wall, causing all of them to grimace.

"We have five victims so far, they all lived and died around the area of Quantico, none of them more than thirty miles from here.", JJ explained: "They're all Caucasian males around the ages of thirty to forty. They were found in remote areas of the city, mostly around the projects; no one saw anything. We are assuming they crossed paths with the UnSub who attacked and killed them on the spot, leaving three days between each victim. C.O.D is blunt force trauma to the head and upper torso."

"That's a lot of blood.", Prentiss interjected, wrinkling her nose while pointing at the pictures: "What kind of weapon was used?"

"They were all shot once, nothing fatal though. Most of the injuries are caused by repeated blows with bare hands."

Prentiss grimaced at that, clearly appalled by that amount of ruthlessness. "Had to ask.", she murmured to herself.

"So he disables them, so they can't escape, then he beats them to death?", Morgan concluded: "That takes a lot of built up rage and very little inhibition. Could the UnSub be personally motivated, I mean, did he hold a grudge against the men?"

"Already on it, cupcake.", Garcia's voice chirped from the laptop on the table: "I'm cross-referencing the victims to see if there is any connection, or if they might have angered someone in particular. Also, I'm checking if they are connected in any other way, socially as well as geographically. Give me an hour to work my magic."

"Thanks, baby girl.", Morgan smiled before turning his attention back to the others: "Looks, like we don't have to go anywhere this time, the case is coming to us for a change. Alright, JJ, make sure the press stays out of this for now until we whip up a profile. Prentiss and I are gonna go look at the last dump site, Reid and Rossi you take the first; see if that victim might have also been the stressor. Let's hope we really have two more days before the next victim."

They all got up, leaving the office in pairs while JJ got on the phone immediately.

Reid waited patiently for Rossi to get his jacket while Morgan and Prentiss had already left. He pushed the elevator button so they could get going quickly, all the while fighting with a stubborn button on his satchel.

The elevator doors opened with a ping and he simply walked in, still so focused on his hands that he almost collided with someone stepping out of the elevator at that moment. He gasped in surprise, just about to lose his balance when strong hands grabbed his arm and shoulder, steadying him.

When he looked up, Hotch was eyeing him with a look somewhere between stern and concerned.

"You okay?", he asked, letting go when he was sure Reid wouldn't fall. Reid nodded, embarrassed by his clumsiness: "Fine."

Then, on second thought, his head shot up and he took the time to really look at the other agent. There were dark shadows under Hotch's eyes; he looked like he hadn't slept in weeks. "What about you? We were worried..."

"I'm fine.", Hotch cut him off, clearly keen on stopping him before he asked any personal questions: "What did I miss?"

Reid tried to hide his frown, deciding that if Hotch didn't want to talk it would have to

wait. It wasn't his decision after all.

"JJ will brief you, she's in her office. We're staying here so you don't need to hurry. The rest of us are going out to look at the crime scenes. We'll meet you guys later to set up the profile."

Hotch nodded quietly and Reid was glad that at least he wasn't arguing about wanting to come along right away. Maybe he could at least get some quiet if he wouldn't get some sleep.

"I'll see you later then.", Hotch murmured, his eyes already searching the office for JJ. Reid nodded and was about to reply when something red caught his eye. He blinked, squinting his eyes incredulously. It didn't go away.

"Hotch.", he asked, alarm in his voice: "Is that blood on your neck?"