

## To Acknowledge Himself

Spencer sat slouched on his old armchair, staring gloomily into his glass of sparkling apple cider. Some news program ran muted on the TV a few feet from him, but he didn't even see it. He could hear his neighbors walking rather aggressively above him and the soft creak of his chair as he rocked it absentmindedly with his good foot. His usually orderly apartment was cluttered and musty. He reasoned that it was perfectly understandable considering the level of difficulty cleaning had when coupled with a full leg cast and crutches. And that was without even considering the pain.

He had refused all of the medication that was urgently recommended by his doctor; both his doctors, actually. The man who had somewhat reconstructed his knee was horrified at his adamant denial of all pain medication considering the nerve damage and excruciatingly painful and slow recovery of such a critical joint. He had managed to get consent to prescribe antibiotics. Spencer had reasonably considered the necessity of them and the incredibly low risk of such medication and had reluctantly agreed. The doctor then told him to make an appointment with him for a new prescription when the pain inevitably became too much. The Voice in Spencer wanted to spit in his face at the implication.

He had become aware of what he now internally referred to as the 'Voice', after a particularly trying appointment with his FBI appointed psychologist the previous week. Considering the circumstances of his injury, it was no surprise he was mandated to see one. Being shot, after which you shot another person was considered highly traumatizing. Throw in the gruesome case in Canada they had just concluded, and the higher ups seemed to be expecting him to lose it any day now. Whatever 'it' was. He had never fully understood the expression.

At the end of their session, his psychologist informed him that this would be their last. He then proceeded to tell Spencer his findings. In a dry monotone, he explained that it was his conclusion that Spencer was psychologically cleared for active duty, but that he did have some observations to make. It was almost amusing, and definitely ironic, to hear him speak about being concerned when his tone carried such routine. He said that Spencer's thoughts were both negative and very self-deprecating. He was concerned for his emotional well-being and so wanted to provide a prescription for antidepressants. Not likely.

After a brief debate in which the doctor's voice actually hinted at frustration, thought that was more likely his ego at his refusal of treatment than true worry, Spencer told him outright that the only treatment he would accept would be of the herbal variety. Muttering under his breath and thoroughly incensed, he scribbled a few recommended remedies on his script and ushered Spencer out of his life.

Sometimes he wondered about his somewhat irrational fear of addictions. True, he had needed to fight tooth and nail to recover from his addiction to dilaudid, but that in no way rationalized expecting to become dependent on simple tylenol. It was the only argument that his medical doctor had managed to win. His pain treatment consisted of 600 mg of Tylenol every four hours. Spencer halved the dose and reduced the frequency to every six hours, just in case. The genius in him knew his fear was completely ludicrous, but that didn't prevent it from paralyzing him. The Voice reminded him regularly that, once an addict, always an addict.

The 'Voice' was what he had come to recognize as his most base thoughts and feelings. Without conscience or reason. The kind of thoughts that spring to one's mind unbidden and are typically disregarded just as quickly. But they were there. And when you could hear them, they could feel overpowering. And couldn't help but admit that they must represent some very small part of himself.

He unconsciously began monitoring his thoughts after the psychologist had mentioned 'negative self-talk', as he called it, and Spencer had discovered the Voice.

Spencer hated the Voice.

It had had a lot to say in the past week. He imagined this had something to do with all the free time he had suddenly found himself facing. After Hotch had learnt that he had faked his doctor's approval for fieldwork, he had been left behind to be Garcia's, as she called it, bitch. Now he faced another evening alone that began at a scheduled 5-o'clock of only himself and the Voice.

Spencer blinked, realizing his glass was almost empty despite the fact that he couldn't remember drinking any of it. This was why he didn't drink alcohol. He reached awkwardly to the coffee table for the freshly opened bottle, almost tipping it over with his strained fingertips before grasping the neck and pulling it towards himself. He refilled his glass and set the bottle down beside his chair for easy access. He took a slow sip of the wonderfully sweet beverage before using his free hand to painfully adjust his casted leg, face not betraying anything out of pure habit.

He leaned back and settled in again, taking another long drink. He had found the carefully boxed bottle in the mail after work. Slid in between the packaging was a sweet Get Well card signed by all the staff at his mother's institution, and a lengthy letter from herself. She must have lectured the director about what he liked, because even the brand choice was perfect. He allowed a small, troubled smile as he thought about it. It was the only sign of sympathy or support to be found in his home. No balloons, no cards, no baskets or gifts. Just the letter from his mother, the bottle of cider, and the card signed by a number of people as good as strangers on the fridge.

The Voice bitterly compared his situation to Hotch's.

He remembered the day like it was yesterday. Laying on the grass clutching his knee in excruciating pain, as his team members ran to him in concern. He managed to gasp out that they needed to contact Emily, something had happened to Hotch. Immediately he felt himself be shifted to the bottom of the metaphorical list. After absentmindedly being sure he made it into an ambulance, he saw them scatter to their SUVs, and he knew he'd have to wait until they could see him in the hospital to hear what had happened to his friend and boss. The Voice snarled that apparently a shot in the knee while tackling the bullet's intended target wasn't worth serious worry or an escort to the hospital.

The only thing he could remember from the ambulance was the loud voices, machines and sirens all around him, the pain, and the terror. He had always heard that the knee was one of the most painful places to be shot, and now he knew that to be true. They tried to medicate him for the pain and almost declared him incompetent to make his own decisions when he vehemently refused it. Even now he could feel the wonder and horror of the floating, numbing feeling. The release from all pain and

concern. He craved it and struggled against it. Somehow he knew that once he experienced that feeling again, he would drown. Everything he had accomplished had been gone. Faced with his obviously impending hysteria, the medics agreed with his demand, but informed him that they were sedating him no matter what he thought of it. Before he could form an opinion or argument on the matter, blackness mercifully overcame him.

When he woke up, his doctor informed him that the surgery had lasted three hours. They had reconstructed his knee to the best of their abilities, and that the rest depended on him. There was disapproval in his voice as he told Spencer, after noticing the fine sheen of sweat on his forehead, that studies have shown that severe pain extends the healing process. Irritated by the pain and by being constantly pressured to give in to the medication, Spencer took it upon himself to inform the doctor of the exact statistics concerning all documented studies on the subject. He watched, satisfied with wide-eyed innocence and the doctor merely shook his head and left the room.

It was another 7 hours before he received a visitor other than medical personnel. He had been anxious for the past three hours, worried that whatever happened was more serious than he had assumed. He jerked his head up when a soft knock finally sounded on the door to his recovery room to see an exhausted and worried looking Penelope Garcia. She had stayed for twenty minutes, telling him all about Hotch's situation. She offered some distracted comfort before leaving to continue working with the team to find Foyet. That was the only visit he received.

He struggled against the emotions in himself that only the Voice was willing to acknowledge. Family, abandonment, apparently they went hand in hand. He supposed he shouldn't be surprised that this was not exclusive to biological families. After all, Gideon had already shown him that. There was no one beside him as he struggled through three pain filled and exasperating days in the hospital. No one stood up for him every time the doctors weakened his resolve and indulge in the relief that would be the end of him. When the time came for him to leave the hospital, he told himself he had taken a taxi home because he didn't to pull the team away from the manhunt, but the Voice spoke of resentment.

Was he worth so much less than Hotch? After he was poisoned with anthrax, Morgan had helped him through his recovery. This time, since the briefly spoken words laying bleeding on the lawn, the man didn't even make an effort to speak to him until he returned to desk duty. As soon as someone else was in trouble at the same time, he no longer registered as a priority. Everyone except Hotch who, as his supervisor, knew, was surprised the day Spencer swung into the bullpen on his crutches. The voice supposed they had just forgotten about him. There was a brief flurry of attention as he got settled into his desk, but it was gone as quickly as it had come, and it was back to life as usual. He wondered if they avoided bringing up what had happened to him because they felt guilty and thought it would be too awkward, or if they just supposed the time for undue concern was over. He couldn't decide which was more likely.

The Voice was full of resentment and bitterness, and Spencer hated it. He hated how it felt towards the members of his team that he loved so dearly. The betrayal it felt towards all of them. Maybe they were all just used to him being held hostage and being injured and thought he must be by now as well. Even the Voice couldn't resent Hotch for not holding his hand through this, and he was actually the one who had appeared to

show the most concern towards his condition. And yet, his supervisor was still on its list of betrayers.

He resented the man for being the means of his makeshift family abandoning him in his time of need. For being so much more important than him in the minds of those he loved and trusted. After the years he had let down his guard among them, and after the Tobias and anthrax episodes, he had allowed himself to expect to be needed and wanted. Valuable. That was now torn down in his mind. Hotch was worth homemade cookies that had taken time and care to make, and he was worth a lollypop from a tin that had been sitting on her desk for the last five months at least.

He had always felt somewhat out of place in the team. All brains and no brawn. It was atypical to find such an individual working as a field agent, even as a profiler. And he could feel the way they coddled him. He never led the way after an unsub, though anyone else would be able to get away with going on the field before cleared, he was left at home. Clearly, even slightly off his game he was considered a liability. It was thoughts like these that had him desperately doing everything he could think of to contribute and be useful.

He knew the only thing he had going for him was his genetics; a high IQ and eidetic memory. It was painful to know that the only things that seemed to give him worth were the ones that he had no control over. It didn't matter that he had supported both himself and his schizophrenic mother since he was ten. It didn't matter that he had pulled himself up and brushed off after every beating in high school, college, and even FBI academy to stubbornly continue on. He was singled out for his mind. If he wasn't so gifted intellectually he never would have been invited to the BAU, been mentored by Gideon, been welcomed to join the FBI, been fought over by professors. He expected he wouldn't have even been able to survive childhood. None of the most cherished and significant events in his life would have happened if not for his intelligence.

Naturally, this led to the conclusion that what he had to offer to the team was knowledge. Because of this he endeavored to offer that every chance that arose, to desperately try to earn inclusion. He offered facts and statistics for everything that was mentioned, only to find that probably 90% of the time they were not wanted, or even welcomed. Even he couldn't count the number of times his attempts at contribution in everything from a case to conversation, were interrupted and dismissed. They sent him to recruitment seminars, even with his reluctance, and then when his social awkwardness would show its face, his partner would take over and get the class to laugh it off. To laugh him off. The sound of his last name being said sharply with aggravation to make him stop speaking was imprinted in Spencer's mind. He had even been told to his face after he was interrupted in what he thought was an acceptable casual conversation, that they were sorry they had spoken to him.

He hated this Voice. He hated that it forced him to acknowledge the ugly parts of himself. Hated that the things he heard it say were coming from himself. He dreaded the day that the Voice may become audible. He wondered if that was what brought some schizophrenics to the point of violence. He wondered, horrified, if one day his team would be hunting him.

Exhausted emotionally and physically, Spencer tipped back the last of his drink. His plan to get up and conduct his evening routine was quickly discarded once he considered the effort, and he just burrowed further into his chair and shifted his cast,

wincing. He reached for a couple of carefully restricted tylenol from the small table beside himself and swallowed them back before using his crutch to reach a dull green afghan from his couch and pull it toward himself. As he turned off the TV and nestled into the blanket, he contemplated the following day. The team was arriving back on the jet tonight, meaning he would be facing them all again tomorrow. And so would start the pattern of hiding his physical and psychological pain, and trying in vain to bury the Voice inside him. One lone tear travelled down his cheek as he clicked off the lamp behind him and allowed darkness to fill the room, as it was his heart.