

## Team Spirit

It wasn't supposed to go down like this.

The thought skittered across Emma's mind. She made a grab for it but it was gone before she could seize it. The shock of the moment of clarity, brief as it was, caused her to stumble. If not for the firm arm around her shoulders, she would have ended up face-first on the floor.

She batted at the fog that clouded her mind, searching for the thought, for any thought she could latch on to and that could help her focus.

Ariel Spenser

Emma clutched at the name. It meant something to her. What? Did she know this girl? Ariel was a girl's name, wasn't it?

Conversation, the voices muted by the insistent buzz in her ears, distracted her from further pursuing the name and its connotations.

"She all right?" A concerned male voice.

"She'll be fine." Another male, right beside her. "She needs some air, is all."

Emma tried to move her head, to focus on the owner of the second voice, but her muscles refused to obey. Instead, the slight movement caused the world to spin ever faster in a wild vortex of light and colors. A whimper escaped her and her eyelids fell shut, attempting to protect her brain from the overload of sensations.

"Don't pass out on me now." Again the man at her side. "We're almost there."

Emma wanted to trust the owner of the voice, to yield to his presence and rely on him to lead her. Yet some deep-rooted instinct, perhaps something even coded in her DNA, refused to submit.

*Danger!* her sixth sense yelled. *Danger, danger, Will Robinson!*

The unexpected allusion to a forgotten childhood memory was so out of place, so inane, that it jarred her back to near sobriety.

Her instincts were right; she was in danger. Deep down Emma knew it wasn't the noise and thick smoke in the club that caused her dizziness and nausea. The owner of the voice

wasn't some kind stranger who helped her when she grew sick. She didn't need to read him to know he was a kidnapper, abducting her while nobody noticed.

She reached within herself, and managed to find a last ounce of strength. She struggled against his grip, tried to pull herself free so she could run and cry out for help.

The attempt was as successful as if she'd tried to shift Stormking Mountain--the hand around her biceps remained made of granite. With a sob, Emma sagged, her knees giving in to the despair that washed over her.

The hand held her up and forced her onward until other fingers curled around her shoulders. She was pulled into -- a van? She slumped, no longer strong enough to keep up even the illusion of resistance. Already, the moment of clarity was fading. The fog was closing in and she couldn't recall why she had been struggling.

"Please. Please." What she was pleading for, Emma had no idea.

Something stung the back of her neck, and the plea flew from her mind. Emma's world turned black.

o0o

"Shalimar? Have you seen Emma?"

Brennan glanced down from the elevated dojo. Shalimar hadn't moved from her spot beside the pond, although the candles had long since burned up.

"Shal?"

She shifted a little to look up, slowly focusing on his face. Her eyes were red-rimmed with grief and lack of sleep.

"Emma? No." Her head sank back until her cheek rested on her arm and she resumed her silent vigil next to the water.

He watched her for a moment more. It vexed Brennan to see one of his teammates in such pain. Especially since he couldn't do a damn thing about it.

Saunders' death had hit Shalimar pretty hard, harder than any of them had thought possible. But this, this wasn't normal, was it? This sort of depressed state? Brennan made a mental note to check with Adam. Maybe it was a feral thing. Or maybe a woman thing.

Perhaps he could ask Emma how to fix things. Once he found her.

Which brought him to his original reason for disturbing Shalimar in the first place. Where was Emma?

The Sanctuary was a large place, but not that big. He had looked everywhere he could think of. Emma wasn't in her room. She wasn't in the labs either, and obviously she wasn't with Shalimar.

A sudden thought made him check for the car. The silver Audi was missing. Well, that at least explained why he couldn't find Emma within the Sanctuary walls, Brennan decided.

He located Adam where he had expected him to be: tinkering with something or other in the research lab.

"Did Emma tell you where she went?"

Adam looked up. "No. I didn't know she was gone."

"Yup." Brennan picked up a vial with a bright green fluid and held it against the light. Strands of darker green shifted inside. "Took the car, too."

Adam walked around the table and snatched the vial from Brennan's hand. "Maybe she wanted to get away for a bit."

That would make sense. The atmosphere in the Sanctuary had been a bit oppressive lately, to say the least. Brennan assumed that a telepath would be more affected by people's moods than the general population. And Shalimar's mood was bleaker than the Sahara desert.

"Is Shal going to be all right?"

Adam stopped fiddling with the gadget he was working on and thought for a moment before he answered. "Shalimar is a passionate creature, Brennan. She loves with passion, fights with passion. And she mourns with passion. She'll be fine, just give it some time. Now, was there something you wanted to talk to Emma about?"

Yes, Brennan wanted to say. It wasn't like Emma to disappear without letting anyone know. Something was worrying the edge of his mind, like an itch he couldn't scratch.

"No," he found himself saying instead. "It can wait."

If Emma decided she needed some time alone, he was happy to let her have it. He didn't want to give her a reason to get more upset with them than she already was. He knew she felt they devalued her value to the team. She'd gotten that message across loud and clear when she followed Jesse and him chasing after Donna Morse, one-upping them at every step.

It wasn't true, of course. Emma's input was invaluable in its own way. Her misfortune was, Brennan mused while he wandered back through the quiet Sanctuary hallways, that she possessed a certain innocence, a vulnerability that brought the Galahad in him to the fore.

"Hey, Brennan!" Jesse bounced from a side hallway and smacked his shoulder.

Brennan lashed out, aiming for Jesse's head and connecting only with air.

Jesse laughed. "Want to spar some? Looks like you could use some more practice."

Brennan snorted. He caught Shalimar's prone form beneath the dojo and his expression grew serious once more. "Maybe some other time, eh, Jess."

Jesse followed his gaze. "Yeah. You know what? We should run another scan on the Genomex system. Maybe something comes up. A little bit of action might get Shalimar out of her funk."

Brennan nodded. "Good idea. Lead the way."

He followed Jesse up the stairs to the computer, thoughts of Emma pushed to the back of his mind.

oOo

Gradually, Emma drifted back up from the darkness. With the growing awareness came a dull throb in her skull, a sharper pain in the back of her neck, and a terrible taste in her mouth, like something had crawled under her tongue and died there. It was enough to make her long for the oblivion of sleep. It was chilly, and she wrapped her arms around herself, searching for warmth.

She struggled to grasp the memories that flitted through her head. The club. Loud music, lots of people. She'd gone to meet with a New Mutant, a psionic, like herself. What was the girl's name again? Right, Ariel.

She recalled she'd kept an eye out for Genetic Security agents. If she could read Ariel's plea for help on the open boards, then so could Genomex. While she waited for Ariel to show up, a man --strong face, dark hair, in his thirties-- tried to flirt with her. She'd given him a cursory scan, then dismissed him as another hopeful looking for a pretty girl and taken another sip from her drink. After that, things got fuzzy. Real fuzzy.

Emma forced herself to sit up, biting her lip to keep the groan from getting out. Whatever they served in that club should be forbidden, she thought. She felt worse than when she was sixteen and she and her friend Joanie decided to try out her foster father's Wild Turkey.

Her eyes finally adjusted to the gloom. She'd awoken on a narrow cot, bare mattress, no blanket or sheets. Her room turned out to be some sort of cage, barely seven or eight feet deep and not much wider. Emma's brow bunched. Maybe she'd not been totally wrong in her assessment of the stranger after all: this didn't look like a GSA set-up. So who in hell had taken her? And why?

oOo

"That's weird." Jesse frowned at the screen.

"What is?" Brennan moved closer to look over his friend's shoulder.

"There's been some unregistered traffic going out. See?" He pointed. "But the scanners didn't flag anything on the usual channels we monitor. Maybe Adam did some online research and forgot to log it?" Jesse sounded dubious.

The wheels in Brennan's mind turned while Jesse spoke. Suddenly things clicked. "Emma."

"What?"

"Can you check if Emma accessed the computer today?"

"Emma? She doesn't know how to work the system. Not yet, at least."

"Just do it, all right?"

Jesse shrugged and tapped a few commands onto the keyboard. He sat up when the reply came back. "You're right. Emma exchanged a couple of instant messages with someone

named Ariel Spenser. Here's the original call." He read it over. "Looks like a New Mutant. Why would Emma talk to a New Mutant without telling us?"

Brennan straightened. "My guess? Emma decided she would bring her in all by herself. And you taught her just enough about computers to be dangerous. To herself, mostly."

"You think something's gone wrong?"

Brennan nodded. "Think about it. When's the last time you saw Emma? She's disappeared, car's gone so she probably went to the city. And now we find out she's been secretly corresponding with an unknown New Mutant. You do the math."

Jesse swore beneath his breath. "Let's go talk to Adam."

oOo

"She's not replying." Adam moved away from the com-system and let out a sigh. He turned to look at Brennan and Jesse. The lines in his face grew more prominent with worry. "Do either of you have any idea why Emma would do something so foolish as going off to meet a New Mutant without telling anyone?"

The two men exchanged a sheepish look. "We think she was feeling a bit left out." Jesse was the first to speak.

"She wants to help. She asked to train with us, but we, eh, sort of brushed her off," Brennan confessed.

"I see." Adam rubbed his brow. "Do we know the location where she's meeting this New Mutant?"

"Yes." Brennan was relieved that Adam let their role in Emma's disregard of the rules slide. "It's a club, near Jefferson Square. Pretty popular place."

"Good. You and Jesse take the Helix and see if she's still there. If she's not--"

"We'll find out what people have seen. We know the drill, Adam."

"I know, Jesse. But this is Emma we're talking about."

"We'll find her, Adam. We'll get her back." Brennan wasn't sure whom he needed to convince; Adam, or himself.

Adam gave them a tired smile. "Go."

oOo

It didn't take Emma long to decide that she wasn't going to be able to escape. Brennan might have --the electronic lock didn't look like it was up against a sudden power surge-- and Jesse surely would have phased through the cracks. However, although she might be able to bend men's will to her own, the strong wire walls didn't give an inch. It didn't help that she was still feeling woozy and that her head pounded.

She wanted to smack herself when she remembered the com-link on her finger. It had to be some sort of drug that made her brain so slow on the uptake. With the ring, she could call Adam for help, and he could track its signal. This nightmare would be over soon.

It grated her, though, that she'd be forced to admit her teammates were right: she wasn't made for the physical aspect of Mutant X. She had tried, and failed miserably. In her head, she could hear Brennan explain why she couldn't play with the big boys. "We don't want you to get hurt, Emma." She gritted her teeth at the memory. They meant to protect her but being treated like everyone's kid sister was hurting her too. Only Adam didn't act like she was a defenseless girl. It wasn't much of an improvement; he usually seemed to consider her either like a daughter, or a very promising student who needed tutoring.

A door opened nearby, just as she prepared to call Adam. Light streamed in through the opening, and for the first time she could see further than a few feet beyond the walls of her cage. Curiously, she looked around.

They were holding her in some sort of Quonset building, she decided, judging by the curved metal walls and the small, high windows that showed a night sky. Several empty cages, similar to her own, stood nearby.

"I see you decided to wake up."

The man's voice was familiar, and Emma realized he was the one who escorted her from the club and shoved her into the van.

"Who are you? What do you want with me?"

He smiled, and the grin reminded her of a documentary about sharks she'd seen once. Emma struggled to repress a shiver. Even Eckhart never managed to look so cold.

"I have to thank you for responding to our message," he continued. "It's always a pleasure to find a pretty, female telepath. There are not quite enough of you out there, and demand is high."

Emma frowned. "Ariel isn't real? You set me up. You're not GSA, are you?"

"Looks and brains," he commented with a nod. "You'll fetch a good price. Yes, Miss DeLauro, the Ariel-personality is a decoy. And I'm not with the GSA. I'm... let's say, an independent contractor. In a few hours, you will be transported out of the country and commence your training. You see, my... clientele... feels that the addition of mental stimulation augments physical stimulation. Being with a pretty girl isn't enough for some. But pretty girls that give them pretty pictures, ah, see, that they will enjoy. And pay dearly for."

The frown on her brow deepened and she shook her head to clear it. The creep wasn't saying what she thought he was saying, was he?

"I don't understand."

"In time," he said, "you will. I suppose I could squeeze a quick lesson in so you will understand better what your position is."

Emma decided not to wait and see what the lesson could be. Judging by the look on the jerk's face, it wouldn't be pleasant for her in any way. She collected all the mental energy she could locate and flung it at her captor, calling up images of pain and torment that should have him begging for mercy.

What happened next was totally unexpected.

Instead of the moment of resistance and the successive 'pop' that she always experienced when accessing someone's mind, her power slammed into an unseen wall that was impenetrable. Emma grunted with effort as her power lashed back at her and she struggled to regain control. The fight brought her to her knees.

"Don't try that again. I've been at this a lot longer than you have. I learned to shield myself from your kind. It's why I'm the best at bringing in new subjects. Oh, and before you decide to try your power on one of my people instead, I should tell you that we injected you with a subdermal governor."

Her hand flew to the back of her neck. And sure enough, there it was, the little knob the governors used to receive the signal from their remote controls.



"You do know what that means, don't you? Your power belongs to whoever controls the remote. Currently, that would be me. And when you use it in a way I don't approve off? Zap!" He slammed one fist in the open palm of his other hand.

Emma eyed her captor with disgust. "Bastard," she hissed. She wasn't sure what a subdermal governor could do -- neither Brennan nor Jesse ever talked about their experiences with the things. Which told her more than anything they could have said. She didn't think she wanted to find out why they never spoke on the subject. The simple knowledge that her gift --the one thing she'd always counted on to get her out of a tight spot every time she was in trouble-- no longer belonged to her, was torment enough.

"Tsk, tsk," her captor continued. "Such foul language from such a pretty mouth. I guess you need a little demonstration of who's the boss around here.

She looked up at his face. The sharklike smirk was back in full force. She braced herself.

"Did I tell you that I control you? Not just your power. All of you. You belong to me, Miss DeLauro."

Emma merely stared back, uncomprehending and afraid to further provoke him and find out first-hand about the subdermal governor.

"Let's demonstrate that, shall we? Please, get up."

Not prepared to be obstinate over so simple an order, Emma got to her feet, swaying a little before she got firm control over her legs.

"Strip."

"What?!" She couldn't stop the incredulous laugh from escaping. "You got to be kidding. What are you? Some kind of pervert?"

His gaze didn't waver. He showed no anger at the further name-calling.

Much to Emma's surprised horror, her hands started moving without her telling them so. They drifted up, started undoing the buttons of her top one by one.

No!

Her mind screamed at her hands to stop, urged her to take back control over her traitorous fingers. She failed. One by one the buttons popped from their holes until she

slipped the top down her arms and held it out to him. She could feel her cheeks heat up. Her bra and skirt were all that remained to protect her dignity.

Light sparked from her right hand. The ring! With rising dismay, Emma realized it was active. If anyone at the Sanctuary decided to call her right now, they would destroy her one weapon, the one thing that she had left to use against her abductors.

Quickly, she pushed the thought from her mind for fear that it would trigger the event. The ring was her last hope. If she couldn't reach anyone with it, at least as long as she wore it, it would tell Adam and the others her location. Without it, she'd be truly lost.

oOo

"Adam?"

"Yes, Jesse?"

"We're at the club where Emma was to meet Ariel Spenser. The car's parked around the corner, but we can't find Emma. Nobody has seen her."

"Actually, they have."

Over the com-link, Adam could hear Brennan approach Jesse. At the same time Brennan's own signal came in.

"I talked to the bouncer. He remembers a girl fitting Emma's description. She left the club in the company of a man. He says she seemed unwell, and the guy told him she was his girlfriend. He didn't see where he took her."

Damn, Adam swore to himself. Not Emma. Not kind, gentle Emma. She was strong, and Eckhart could hurt her bad. If he did... The strange thing was, he still hadn't found any entry of Emma's capture in the Genomex computers. She should have been processed into their database by now. Eckhart was a stickler for keeping records.

"Okay, let's get--"

His eye fell on the screen he had set to monitor Emma's com-link. "Jesse, Brennan, wait a second." He opened a third connection. "Emma? Where are you?"

For a moment there was only static. Then her voice came through. High-pitched, strained with fear. "Adam! Help me!"

Adam stood rooted to the Sanctuary floor.

Next there were confused noises: a man's gruff voice cursing, the sound of a slap, Emma screaming.

"Emma! What's happening?"

The link went dead. Silence reigned in the Sanctuary.

For a long minute, Adam remained frozen, too shocked to think. Do something! his mind screamed at him. He cursed beneath his breath and leapt to action. With a few quick keystrokes he locked on to the ring's satellite signal. A little dot started moving on the screen.

"Adam? Please tell me you got a fix?" The pleading note in Brennan's voice rang clear over the link.

"I did," Adam assured him. "Signal's moving, though. No telling if Emma's still got her ring on." It couldn't be Genomex who caught her, Adam thought while he worked. They knew about the rings; it would have been the first thing they took from her upon capture.

"Brennan, I want you to get the car and go to the location where Emma's signal originated. I'll upload the coordinates in a second. Jesse, take the Helix and follow the trace. I'm hooking you up right now."

"Okay." The reply came in stereo, both men speaking at once.

"What do you want me to do?"

Shalimar's voice beside his ear startled Adam. He turned to look at her. Her eyes, though dark with worry, were more alert than he had seen them in days.

"Back up Brennan? Or Jesse?"

Adam hesitated. "Neither."

"Adam, I'm--"

He held up a hand. "I know. It's just that I have no idea where your help is needed most. I don't want you racing around town exhausting yourself chasing ghosts. Stand by. As

soon as I know where we need you, you can go."

Shalimar's eyes flashed yellow but she nodded. "Don't take too long."

oOo

Brennan navigated the Audi expertly through the dark streets of the city. Although Emma had the keys, getting the car started had been easy enough. Getting rid of the mental pictures, which the memory of Emma's scream elicited in his brain, was a lot harder.

His fingers tightened around the wheel. Once he got hold of the sonsabitches that hurt Emma, he'd show them true pain. He wondered if it were possible to skin people using electricity. Sparks flew from the tips of his fingers at the thought, and he forced himself to relax.

He took a left turn, checking the guidance system to see that he was still headed in the right direction. The coordinates that Adam uploaded were somewhere on the waterfront. Probably some kind of abandoned warehouse, Brennan expected. What was it with bad guys and warehouses anyway?

They'd made a mistake, he long ago decided. He and Jesse. When they refused Emma to train with them, they reinforced her notion that they considered her power inferior to theirs. If they hadn't, she might not have gone out on her own to prove them wrong. And even if she had, at least with training she'd have known some defensive techniques. Her mental capabilities were strong, but she needed a little time to access them. Sometimes simple physical prowess was a better defense than any New Mutant power.

He was taking the exit to a deserted industrial area near the harbor when Jesse's call came through.

"I found Emma's ring. I'm in Millennium Park, near the fountain. No sign of Emma."

Adam replied. "That's what I feared. They took it from her and used it to send us on a wild goose chase. Okay, Jesse, Shalimar, you both go to Emma's last known location. We'll take it from there. Brennan, how are you doing?"

"Almost there," he said.

"Wait for Jesse and Shalimar," Adam instructed. "We don't know who we're dealing

with."

Brennan hesitated. "Emma may not have that time." He steered the car into a free parking slot between a dented dumpster and a pile of crates. He was a block away from the location. The street was deserted and dark, the street lamps long since broken. "I'm going in."

He could hear Adam's sigh. "Okay. But be careful. We can't afford to lose you too."

Emma's not lost, Brennan didn't say. Instead, he concentrated on making his way through the dark to where he hoped he would find her.

oOo

At last the pain faded enough for Emma's brain to start functioning again. She lay where she'd fallen, in a boneless puddle on the cold, cement floor of her cage. She prodded the inside of her cheek with her tongue where she'd accidentally bitten herself. Her jaw hurt, too, from the cuff she'd received the same instant the governor went off. She couldn't make up her mind where she hurt the worst, on the outside, or the inside.

One thing she knew for sure. She had to get out of here, and fast. Before they killed her. Or worse, executed their plan to ship her off to one of their bordellos for more pain and torture and other things too awful to contemplate.

She didn't dare try to move yet, though. Her nerve endings were still screaming with agony, her body still attempting to recover the severe punishment he had given her.

Emma collected her wits about her and set her mind to work instead. If that sadist could block her mental abilities she should be able to block his mind control over her conversely. She might not be able to access her gift without his permission --the subdermal governor would see to that-- but at least he would no longer be able to turn her body traitor.

If only she could figure out how he'd done it.

She called up the memory of hitting a blank wall with her power, the wall he constructed. Concentrate, she told herself. Again and again she replayed the sensations in her mind, analyzing, searching, using every focusing technique Adam had taught her.

Just as she thought she discovered the first thread to unraveling the mental knitwork, the door opened. Emma stiffened, fearing he had returned to give her more 'lessons', or to

take her away.

Quick, quiet footsteps approached. Emma remained motionless, her eyes closed. She knew it was futile to pretend she was unconscious; he would know the instant he tried to access her brain. She'd try to block him if he did. She'd go down fighting. She braced herself to throw up the experimental blockade when a familiar voice called her name in an urgent whisper.

"Emma?"

oOo

"Emma? Are you all right?"

In the waxing light of the new day that slashed in through the windows, Brennan could make out a pale form lying prone in the middle of a wire cage. He had encountered a single guard on his way in. The minion was currently recovering from a multi-voltage hit to the chest and probably wondering how it was possible to be struck by lightning on a clear night.

Brennan's heart speeded up. Why wasn't she answering? "Emma?"

Her head rose, and he breathed a sigh of relief.

His relief was short-lived, however, when he caught sight of her face. Emma's left cheek was swollen and streaked with dried blood, which trickled from a gash to her temple. The worst were her eyes, filled with lingering pain.

"Shit, Em!"

She flinched at the harsh words, as if they were directed at her. "Sorry," she mumbled through swollen lips.

Brennan frowned. Why was she apologizing? Then it hit him.

"No. No! I'm the one who should be sorry. For not hearing what you were trying to tell me. But it's all right now, Emma. I got you. I'll get you out of here. The others are on their way, you're safe now."

Inwardly, he was cursing at the men who had taken and hurt his friend. If getting Emma out of here had not been his first priority, he would have gone after anyone he could

find. And he doubted he'd be able to moderate the amount of electricity he unleashed. Anger fueled the power within, until he thought he could generate enough electricity to light up a dozen metropolises simultaneously.

He looked around for something to cover up her nakedness, and noticed the discarded shirt. He reached for it, then helped her put it back on, buttoning up the top himself when her fingers trembled so violently they couldn't get the buttons to fit.

"Let's get you out of here."

Emma shook her head. "Can't. Governor." She raised a weak hand to indicate the knob in her neck.

Brennan swore again, in silence this time. Lightning danced along his fingers, which itched to take the damn thing out. Except he didn't know what damage it might do to Emma if he sabotaged the subdermal governor with a shot. No, he decided, Adam would have to remove it. He needed the remote control, though, to get Emma home safely.

"Well, well. What an unpleasant surprise."

Brennan's head whipped around at the unexpected voice. He rebuked himself. He'd been so focused on Emma that he failed to obey the first rule of engagement: always check your perimeter.

Emma whimpered at the sight of her tormentor.

Brennan leapt to his feet, making sure he kept himself between Emma and the man to shield her, knowing it wouldn't help much in case the s.o.b. used the subdermal governor's control. Still, it was the best he could do.

With a murderous glare, Brennan brought his hands together. Blue fire danced over his hands.

"Emma, come to me." The stranger's voice was commanding, sure of itself, and Brennan hesitated, suspecting he was missing something but clueless as to what.

Emma got up slowly, and started to walk away from Brennan, toward the door of the cage.

"Em?"

Her face twisted as if with inner turmoil. She didn't look at Brennan; her gaze was

focused on the man outside.

"Now, Emma."

"No!" She panted with effort and stopped walking. The man looked surprised.

"You!" He directed his stare at Brennan.

Instantly, Brennan felt cold tentacles wrap themselves around his mind. It was not unlike Emma's gentle excursions into his brain, but much more invasive. He swallowed down nausea at the sudden intrusion.

"Take her out."

Brennan uttered a surprised protest when his body twisted away from the bastard that kidnapped Emma. He watched with alarm how his hand slowly rose, preparing to release the bolt at Emma. Her eyes grew wide. Brennan's muscles quivered as he fought to control them.

All of a sudden, the invisible cord that connected the man with Brennan's mind snapped. The shock was enough for Brennan to lose control of the bolt. It crackled harmlessly across the floor until it exhausted itself.

Emma grunted. Her face was as white as a sheet; tiny beads were popping up on her upper lip and temples. The air around her simmered from the force of her power--the hairs on Brennan's arms rose in response. She was protecting him, but it was costing her. She wouldn't be able to keep it up much longer.

Brennan again generated a fireball. This time, there would be no escape for the kidnapper.

The instant Brennan let go of the power, Emma's shriek echoed through the room. Brennan knew he had made a mistake. The bastard possessed the governor's control, and set it off. Emma collapsed, convulsing in agony.

The bolt hit, and the smell of singed flesh was suddenly strong in the air. Brennan scrunched up his face against the stink. He had never used this much juice on living being before. But damn, did it feel right!

Except, Emma didn't stop screaming. Something was wrong.

Fighting down his panic, Brennan tried to think.



The governor!

Its control must still active and in the 'on'-position.

"Shit!"

Brennan was beside the body before it even stopped twitching. Where was the damn thing? He pried open fingers frozen in a death grip. Empty. He dropped the corpse and looked around, searching, cursing that the shadows were so deep inside the building and that his lightning had destroyed his night vision. Behind him, Emma was a heap of writhing, weeping flesh.

Light sparked on some shiny surface. Brennan dove for it, his hand grasping for the small control. Thank God. He didn't bother to get up; he simply flicked the switch to 'off'. Emma's screams faded to whimpers.

He crawled over to her. "I'm sorry, Em." Tears streamed down her face and his eyes grew moist when he saw her in so much pain. "I'm so sorry." He pulled her into his arms and held her while the muscle spasms gradually faded and she grew still, her breathing labored but steady.

oOo

As soon as Jesse and Shalimar arrived, they took her back to the Sanctuary, where Adam quickly removed the subdermal governor before giving Emma a sleeping aid. Sleep, he said, was the best medicine.

Brennan refused to move from her side. She'd never looked lovelier to him, even with the left side of her face swollen and discolored with bruises.

He was dozing in a chair beside her bed when Emma woke at last. Her blue eyes, still dull with tranquilizer residue, nevertheless contemplated him in silence until he felt their weight and looked up to meet them.

"Thank you."

Brennan shook his head. "Don't. Couldn't have done it without you."

A faint smile formed around her lips. "Yeah. I blocked him." Her voice was full of wonder. "I did it. I blocked him."

Brennan grinned. He didn't dare contemplate how close he had come to releasing deadly lightning at her, his friend and teammate. It didn't bear thinking about. "We're a good team, Emma."

Her eyes fluttered shut again as healing sleep claimed her once more. "Yes. A team."

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