

It was a terrible sight. The hospital bed, the pillow—everything was white. Kellan’s skin looked as if it had been bleached, as if the antiseptic air had been seeping into him. Asleep, it seemed his head hardly made a dent in the pillow.

There was a crease at the corner of his right eye, a stickiness that hinted of moisture. *God.* Graham wanted to rub it away. He kept his hands at his sides; the nurse was beside him. If he had been here—

The eyelids flickered. Opened, and even the eyes were washed out, pale, sticky.

“Graham?”

Quietly, as if he did not believe it. *Christ.* He reached over, put his hand on Kellan’s wrist. His own palm felt hot against the coolness of the skin, the detached coolness of the whole room, the *air* of the place.

“Need your talent at the stove, old man. The chowder’s getting old.”

Kellan’s lips quirked into a smile, slight, but the eyes warmed, much. A quick blink, a narrowing of the eyes; one side of the lips quivered, once.

“Hey.” He squeezed his wrist, hard. “I’m here. I’m here, all right? I’m not going anywhere. You’re going to get better.”

Kellan closed his eyes, tight. His jaw clenched. He took a deep breath through his nose, finally, opened his eyes again, and they were dry, under control. “I—”

He sat down on the stool, leaned forward, clasped his hands on the bed. The nurse was still there; she had just moved back, blessedly discreet. “The place is lonely without you,” he said, honestly. He made his voice strong, something solid.

“Graham.” As if he still didn’t believe it.

He should have been here sooner, he should have—

But Kellan looked at him, and went calmer. “I—was in the explosion. The accident. I don’t remember much.”

“It’s all right. You don’t have to.”

He nodded, very slightly, faced the ceiling again, and closed his eyes. His hand moved; Graham put his own on top of it, but Kellan pulled out from under it, closed his fingers around *his* wrist. “You’ll be here,” he said, eyes still closed, and his grip was not as weak as he might have guessed.

“Right here.”

His breathing slowed. Graham looked to the nurse; she nodded. Quiet, so that he could hardly hear her, and had to rely on reading her lips, some: “That’s a lot, for him. Come on.”

He went, but he stayed in the floor lobby.