

The Collective

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The Collective

by [Hannah_CTWK](#)

Summary

Malcolm, Gil and JT are brainwashed and imprinted with new identities as part of a sinister mind control experiment to test just how much they will endure for the ones they love. Follow what happens when Malcolm begins to remember, and has to figure out how to convince his husbands to escape, while maintaining his new life.

Whump abounds, but not before a bit of domestic bliss for the boys.

Alternative tag line: The Harrises begin a fresh start in Juno, but dreams of another life disrupt the peace. Will their relationship stand up to the strain?

BTHB Compelling Voice- Chapter 4

BTHB Painful Wound Cleaning- Chapter 7

BTHB Made a Lab Rat- Chapter 8

BTHB Arm in a Sling- Chapter 9

BHTB Chapters to be updated when they post.

Notes

Hi Everyone! The conceit for this story relies on you remembering the new identities that Malcolm, Gil and JT have in this story. To recap:

JT is DB Harris

Gil is Phil Harris

Malcolm is Michael Harris

Chapter 1 is dedicated to Sabbean, my fellow CTWK. Happy Whump Day.

Chapter 2 is dedicated to AShortWalkToDelinquency, for your original OT3

See the end of the work for more [notes](#)

Chapter 1

The sunlight peeks through the slit in the curtain, teasing the promise of a new day that has already begun. DB waits for his synapses to start firing before sitting upright, rubbing his face as he yawns one final time. As he prepares to launch himself off the bed a hand lands on his lower back, sliding around to his abdomen and pulling him back down onto the mattress.

“Stay.” The sleepy voice behind him begs.

“Can’t Michael, you know that. First day and all, wouldn’t want to be late.” Despite his reply, DB makes no attempt to sit back up. The touch of his spouse is something he will never tire of. Glancing at the clock, he figures they can steal a quick few minutes before time becomes a problem.

“Mmmhmm...” Michael mumbles into DB’s chest, perfectly content. The pair stay cuddled together until a third body starts to ruffle the covers on the other side of Michael.

An olive hand stretches out from under the quilt to check the time on his watch, then rolls over to face the two men next to him. His arm reaches over Michael and finds DB’s hand, the three of them bound together for a moment. “If you two make us late for our first day you’ll both be in separate bedrooms tonight.” He warns.

“Such a spoil sport, Phil.” Michael pouts. Despite his protesting, both men heed the warning of their spouse and shuffle to the end of the bed before rolling off it.

The Harris husbands are all set to begin their new jobs at The Collective today, three days after arriving in the Juno community. They had been exceptionally lucky that they had found a company that would pay for their relocation from Brooklyn, and though the décor in their fully furnished house doesn’t quite gel with their own sense of taste, it was suitable enough for the time being.

They were still figuring out the kinks in the morning routine- who needed the bathroom and when (more like how DB and Phil managed to squeeze in around Michael’s hogging of the shower) and how to use the coffee machine. The blend this morning wasn’t as bitter as yesterday, which made breakfast all the more enjoyable.

Michael and Phil were wearing their navy blue Collective polo shirts, while DB was wearing his crisp white button down. The husbands made small talk while they sorted out their breakfast (Michael was only drinking coffee, food didn’t always agree with him since they had moved) and once they were settled Michael admired his spouses while they crunched their way through toast and bacon.

“You’re not going to believe what I dreamt about last night.” Michael starts.

“We never do babe, so save us the guessing and just tell us.” DB suggests, not taking his eyes off the crisp bacon on his plate.

Michael wiggles in his seat slightly, eyes shining with mischief. "I dreamt that we were all police officers. Detectives, actually. We were all standing around this guy who'd been killed, behind that fancy crime scene tape. My coat was nicer than yours, and we were talking about cause of death and everything!"

Phil lifts his eyes from his plate, his expression one of amusement. "You. Me. And DB. All standing around a dead body like it's something we see every day?"

"Yeah, it's crazy right?! It just felt so real though. We even had different names." Michael closes his eyes to retrieve the memory. "My name was Bright, yours was Tarmel, DB, and you—" Michael grabs Phil's hand fondly, "were called Gil."

"Gil? As in what a fish breathes through?" DB jokes.

"Shhh, *and*" Michael continues, "you were definitely in charge Phil."

Phil's grin stretches across his whole face. "There you go, it's nice to hear some things are consistent, whether you're conscious or not."

"Hey look, I'm just telling you what I remember. Don't hold it against me!" Michael glances across at DB, hoping he's not offended by his random dream. He need not have worried. DB's shoulders are bouncing up and down to smother the laugh that is threatening to burst forth from his chest.

"Good to know some things will never change. My watch says we got ten minutes before we need to get in the car, let's move."

"Absolutely, *Detective*." Michael accents the last word in jest and earns a strip of bacon sailing past his head a moment later. The men busy themselves with the tail end of their morning routines before meeting back in the lounge room, ready to head to work. Michael smiles and laughs at the jokes Phil keeps making about cats in the front seat, but his mind is elsewhere. The dream he'd had last night felt different to his usual ones, more vivid. He spoke with such conviction about knowing the killer's need to mutilate the victim laying prone beneath them, it couldn't have been something his mind just made up.

Why did it all feel so familiar?

He had to cast it aside for the moment, and focus on their new jobs. They needed to make a good impression, to prove the investment in their relocation was worth it. By the time Phil pulls the Volkswagen Toureg into the employee parking lot the images of a bloody corpse were as distant a memory as he could make them.

He would prove to The Collective that they were all worthy. They all would.

The squat building was unassuming as they entered the double doors, DB leading the way with a level of clout that Michael and Phil haven't earned just yet. DB was headhunted for the position, and the company offered Michael and Phil positions in their PCA department. The reception desk is expecting them, and with a quick peck on the cheek to his spouses DB is guided towards the security wing of the building. Michael and Phil wait for the PCA

manager to greet them, a diminutive and calm woman called Sheila. Her platinum blonde curls barely move as she walks, and she is effusive in her introduction. There's no conversation as the group walk down to an uncluttered office, Michael would hazard a guess to say it's too clean to be a real workspace.

Sheila takes her seat behind the shiny laminate desk and flicks her wrists with palms upward towards the vacant chairs placed across from her. The two partners share a look before taking their seats simultaneously, both a little nervous. Two cups of coffee stand steaming on the desk, and both men begin to drink politely as they are welcomed to their new workplace. Michael's ass has barely grazed the seat of the chair after picking up his coffee before Sheila is launching into a bright chatter.

"Welcome to the Person Care Attendant division at The Collective! We are honored to have you with us. We pride ourselves in providing the highest level of care to the patients in our facility. Let me just run you through the basics..."

Their manager launches into a well-practiced welcome speech covering the basics of the job including patient to PCA ratios and the types of tasks to be performed, her mouth somehow smiling broadly with each word she utters. As Sheila's bubbly voice continues to drabble on, Michael stops listening at some point and starts observing. The woman's demeanour wants to come across as endearing and disarming, yet her eyes betray her. There's a cold, clinical side to this woman, and while she is most certainly telling the truth about there being patients who need help, Michael can feel that she's hiding something.

"Excuse me Sheila, can I ask what type of patients you have here?" Michael inquires, interrupting a not-so-fascinating point about cleaning supplies.

Sheila appears a little thrown by the question. "Uh, of course! We have a lot of clinical trials here, people with varying backgrounds. You don't need to worry too much about those kinds of details though, do you Michael?" The smile remains, but the warmth behind it has disappeared.

He hears the question, and a part of him feels the need to agree with her, to drop the line of questioning. Another part of him, the one that reminds him of his dream last night, wants to dig deeper. Her body language is rigid and tense, she wants him to stop talking.

Phil is giving him a WTF look, almost going so far as to jerk his thumb across his neck so Michael can't miss the signal. In the end the side that wants to please wins out. He keeps his follow up questions to himself, and shakes his head.

Sheila's genuine smile returns. "Excellent. Let's get those coffees finished and I'll take you two on a tour of the wards!"

As he gulps down the last of the milky brew Michael files the interaction with Sheila away, another little piece to a puzzle that is forming in the back of mind. Why it's forming in the first place he has no idea.

As Sheila points out the trolleys, supply closet and the rooms they will be assigned to for their shifts Michael begins to relax and feel more confident. That coffee must have had magic

juice in it because he's practically bursting with the desire to do a good job, to make his husbands proud.

The tour comes to an end in the breakroom, where Sheila happily directs their attention to the coffee machine.

"And this is one of the staff's favourite perks! Every morning before we start our shift we come together for a drink, and start the day off right. Everyone tells me it's the best coffee they've ever tasted!"

"I'd say it was pretty good. Sounds like a great idea." Phil nods along, looking comfortable in his surroundings.

"Wonderful." Sheila purrs. "Let's get you set up with your trolleys, okay? You two are going to be just fine, I can tell." Sheila bounces past the men towards the door before turning back, adding, "One more thing, gents. Just before you leave each room, I want you to wish each guest a Happy Hannukah. Can you do that for me?"

"Sure," Michael replies, as Phil answers "absolutely" in the same moment.

"Brilliant. I just knew I'd be able to count on you."

Michael is surprised at how quickly he agrees, especially as his mind reminds him that it's impossible to wish someone a happy Hannukah in April. He's not usually this impulsive, maybe it's just nerves. Michael looks to correct his mistake.

"Sorry Sheila, I just realised it's the wrong time of year for Hannukah. Did you mean something else?"

"No honey, I meant what I said. Just do what I ask, and you'll do just fine, okay?" Sheila pats Michael on the upper arm, and again the desire to please surges through him.

"Okay. Fine." Another puzzle piece is collected in his mind. He'll ponder on why he wants to say something blatantly wrong later.

They find their way back to the trolleys and Phil and Michael start their shifts in earnest, cleaning down beds, disinfecting surfaces, assisting with patient moves when necessary. And every room they exit they wish the patient a Happy Hannukah. Just as they were asked.

"How was everyone's first day? DB, you want to go first?" Phil starts the dinner conversation off.

DB spears an asparagus and waves it around as he answers. "The guys seem pretty nice. The tech is next level, they've got stuff I haven't even seen before. Today was more about learning the ropes. I'll dig in to what they hired me for tomorrow."

"You had an entire shift and that's all you have to say? There must have been something memorable."

“Hmm...the coffee is really good. Apparently, the whole team starts the day with one.”

Phil nods and smile creeps on to his face. “yeah, we had some as well. The PCA’s have the same routine, must be a company-wide thing.”

“Must be.” DB glances over at Michael, who can only bring himself to push his own asparagus from one side of the plate to the other. “What’s up with you? You weren’t a fan of the coffee thing?”

Michael raises his head, blurting out a rushed “Mmm? I’m fine.” and it’s abundantly clear he wasn’t listening to the conversation.

DB recognises the signs in his husband and reaches out to place his hand on top of Michael’s trembling one. “Talk to us. What’s going on?”

Michael rearranges his expression into a tight smile, one that doesn’t reach his eyes. “Work was fine, just something that happened that felt a little off. I’m sure it was just a mistake, it’ll be better tomorrow. I don’t want to embarrass you.”

“You could never do that, babe.” DB leans over to kiss Michael, a small moment of reassurance that settles the nausea in Michael’s stomach. This time the small smile that plays on Michael’s lips is genuine, and he feels well enough to attempt to eat the eye fillet waiting for him on the plate.

The spouses enjoy the rest of the meal discussing everything from the Yankee’s latest injury list to weaponry of the romantic era (with some time spent drooling over filigree designs on flintlock pistol), yet all the while Michael can’t entirely squash out the uncertainty gnawing at his stomach. After dinner they relocate to the lounge room sofa and fall into the olive-green cushions with a sigh. It’s DB’s turn to pick the entertainment tonight, and soon the orchestral swell of the Star Wars theme song starts up as The Mandalorian begins to play. DB has prime position in the center of the sofa, Phil to his right and Michael resting against him on his left. Try as he might Michael can’t focus on the names of all the people and places, instead his dream from the night before returns to the front of his mind. After a character takes a swig of some unnatural blue liquid that turns his stomach Michael has had enough.

“I’m gonna turn in for the night. Maybe get some reading done.”

DB and Phil don’t contain their shock particularly well.

“Everything okay? You never go to bed this early.” Phil’s brow furrows in concern.

Michael waves his concern away. “It’s nothing, I promise. You stay and watch the Mandagorian finish.”

“It’s Mandalorian.” DB corrects.

“Exactly. What I just said.” Michael wanders up the stairs to their bedroom and decides a shower might settle his nerves a little. The water pressure in their new shower is excellent, and in minutes Michael is luxuriating in his lime scented body wash, the hot water pounding

the stress from the day away. When the temperature changes from scalding to tepid he shuts the taps off and towels himself dry, sliding on a fresh pair of boxer briefs.

Expecting an empty bed Michael can't help but express his delight at finding his husbands waiting for him in.

"I thought you were watching the space thing?" he asks as he climbs on to the bed and slides between them.

"It's not as much fun without you. Plus, Phil over here wanted to make sure you hadn't passed out in the shower. You realise we have to pay for the water, right?"

DB's sense of humor never fails to make Michael smile, and rewards him with a deep kiss. Not one to play favourites he leans back to impart a kiss on Phil as well, their hands sliding over each other promising what's to come.

"Mmmm...you drive me crazy kid." Phil moans. In that moment a spark ignites in Michael's mind, and a vision of Phil in a turtleneck and a frustrated frown with a police station as a backdrop roars into life.

"You can't catch this killer if you can't walk in a straight line. Go home kid, you're driving me crazy."

Michael pulls away with a gasp, unsure of what to make of the scene that his mind has just created for him. It was this Gil person again, he could feel it in his bones. But why is his brain creating these scenes while he's awake?

"What is it Michael?" Phil's eyes are cloudy with uncertainty, his touch had never made his husband react so negatively before.

"I'm not sure babe. I think I'm just a little tired from today. Should probably just go to sleep."

"Sure thing. Come here. Phil guides Michael back down to the mattress and drapes an arm over the man's chest. DB does the same, and Michael revels in the comfort that his husbands always provide him. Whether he asks for it or not. The breathing from the men either side of him even out within minutes, each one sleeping soundly while being grounded to the earth by him.

Michael gazes at the cornices on the ceiling as his mind sorts through the feelings he's had today. He absent mindedly strokes both of the hands on his chest, the pad of his thumb tracking from index finger to pinkie, glancing their wedding rings along the way. He raises his hand in the moonlight to gaze at his own wedding band, a simple yellow gold band with an indent just off the edge of the ring. He thumbs the band, wiggling it up to his knuckle before letting it fall back down. When it falls, he notices something odd. They've been married for years, and yet there's no depression in his finger where the ring sits. DB and Phil's fingers have the weathered band on their fingers, why doesn't he?

Does this have something to do with the dreams of his husbands as other people? Are Gil and Tarmel completely imaginary? It was his husbands, no doubt, but they were different at the

same time. And it felt like the most natural thing in the world to be called Bright, and be staring at a dead body for minutes at a time. He even felt excited to be there.

Something is not right. He just can't put his finger on what.

Michael spends most of the night staring at the ceiling, unable to shake the thoughts that keep spinning around his head like a carousel. He'll have to settle for a cat nap before they begin another day at The Collective in the morning.

Chapter 2

Chapter Summary

The boys let off some steam, then more memories return to Malcolm.

If sex isn't your thing and you want to skip past to the whump search for the word "quesadilla" and you'll find the boys cooking dinner and the angst begin to ramp up.

I would also like to point out that I started writing this in December, long before The Collective appeared in episode 7 of the series. The appearance of a shady medical place in the show is entirely coincidental.

I hope you enjoy the chapter AShortWalkToDelinquency :hugs:

Chapter Notes

From this point on the boys' new names will only be referred to in dialogue, so you it's easier for you to follow the story.

A quick reminder

Malcolm is Michael

Gil is Phil

JT is DB

Four days later and the Harris husbands were driving home to celebrate a week in Juno and the end of their first week working at The Collective. The three men were relieved the week was over, and that their well squeezed brains would get a re st for a few days.

Even more promising for Malcolm was the absence of any more of those vivid dreams from earlier in the week. Last night's dream had just followed around a green and yellow parakeet through a park, no weird police station, no dead bodies. The weight pressing down on his sternum had eased completely, and the man was in the mood to celebrate.

Malcolm's mind had only been on one thing as they drove home.

Taking off all of his husbands' clothing was top of his to do list. The company mandated blazer JT wears highlights all of his best assets, and Malcolm wants to remind himself of what lay underneath as soon as they got home. Gil had wanted to get the groceries from the car unpacked, so Michael takes advantage of having no immediate task to complete and whisks JT into the living room.

After the mental exhaustion of learning about surveillance systems at the office JT only had the energy for a blow job, which happens to be one of Malcolm's specialities. JT had collapsed onto the olive couch and had barely had time to sink into the cushions before Malcolm was clawing at his belt and pants, desperate to make his husband happy. A few pumps of his half flagging cock was all he needed before Malcolm took the man's length into his mouth and was ready to prove just how good at this he really is.

Even after the stress of the day it isn't take long before JT's hips are thrusting towards Malcolm's face, chasing the sensation around his cock before finally blowing into Malcolm's waiting mouth, who swallows eagerly. JT sags back into the couch, utterly spent while Malcolm tucks him back into his boxers and falls into him, sighing contentedly.

Malcolm places his fingers between JT's right hand, interlocking them together. "I needed that, and I think you did too."

JT hums happily in agreeance. "You're something special, you know that?"

"We both got lucky, didn't we?" Gil calls out from the entrance way, a look of hunger in his eyes that Malcolm recognised all too well. "Mind if I take him upstairs DB?"

JT heaves a loud sigh before answering, "You can do whatever you like. My ass isn't leaving this couch for at least an episode of Real Housewives. You two have fun."

Gil grins and walks over to take Malcolm's hand, yanking him off the couch with such force that he ends up falling into the older man.

"What do you say, sweetheart? Wanna spend some time with Daddy?"

"Hell yes." is all Malcolm replies before pulling Gil into a filthy kiss. Malcolm divests Gil of his shirt before they even make it to the staircase, his nipples hard as the cool air brushes against them. The younger man can't help himself and forces Gil against the wall, kissing into his neck and down his collarbone before whispering wickedly in his ear, "Ruin me, Daddy."

With the grace of a dancer Malcolm leaps up the stairs, laughing as he turns and waits for his husband to catch up. Once Gil reaches the top of the stairs Malcolm spins to take off again, but Gil still has some decent reflexes and manages to catch his wrist before he bounds away.

"Ah ah ah, you're not getting away from me that easily." Gil pulls his hand down to his side, forcing Malcolm to step closer towards him. The younger man's chest heaves in anticipation, his eyes sparkling with lust. That look of his shoots desire to Gil's cock every time, and like clockwork Malcolm can feel Gil filling out underneath his starched dress pants. "You will be the death of me, I swear. Come on."

Malcolm starts ever so slightly at the repetition of the phrase from his dream, before dismissing it quickly. There had been no more dreams, it was just an unfortunate coincidence. A gentle tug on the wrist is all he needs to remember what is important right now. His husband.

The two men shed their remaining clothes with the speed of a couple of college kids before uniting again in a tangle of limbs and roaming hands. Gil positions Malcolm between himself and the bed and lowers him onto the duvet. The soft, cool cotton feels luxurious against Malcolm's skin, and he sighs a little as he shuffles further up into the centre of the bed.

"We need lube, hon." Malcolm reminds him.

"On it." Gil promptly leans over to the bed side table closest to him, retrieving the tube and squirting its contents liberally in a matter of seconds. Gil lines up quickly, but takes a moment to gaze at the gorgeous man beneath him. "God Michael, you're beautiful." The compliment slips out unbidden.

Malcolm's eyes blow wide at the praise, shivers traversing the entire length of his body as he anticipates what his husband is about to do.

"Fill me, Phil. Wanna feel you." Malcolm breathes.

Gil is only too happy to oblige.

"Ohmygod, don't stop." Malcolm moans as Gil pounds him into the mattress with all his might, Gil's cock hitting the sweet spot that sends sparks from his back all the way down to his toes.

After another hard day at The Collective it was nice to just tune everything out, to focus on the feeling of his husband's hands digging into his skin as they move as one. The feeling of Gil's cock chases any and all thoughts away, and Malcolm stares into Gil's eyes with the fire of an inferno that needs to be doused. The man launches up to kiss Gil once again. Their rhythm is well practiced, one partner knowing just how to move to set the other's senses on fire.

"Scream for me, baby." Gil urges, gently reminding Malcolm that in his mind a loud bedroom is a happy bedroom.

Malcolm tilts his head to ceiling and cries out in ecstasy, concentrating only on the heat radiating from his belly as he chases his release with Gil, and Malcolm is so focused on himself that he barely registers the dip in the bed next to him. A thick hand wraps around his cock, and a quick mental count of the hands on his body causes his eyes to fly open in surprise. There, lying next to him is JT, with a huge grin on his face.

"I thought...you were going to watch...ugh...Housewives?" Malcolm pants out, using every last drop of spare brain power to ask JT why he was here.

"Oh I tried babe, but the sounds you make? Mmm-hmm. I just knew I was missing out." JT continues to pump Malcolm's cock as Gil thrusts above him, the partners syncing their movements swiftly until Malcolm's back is arched from the pleasure coursing through his body.

Malcolm's cock spills across his chest, as a final ragged cry is ripped from his throat JT leans over and silences Malcolm with a passionate kiss, the larger man stealing the remaining

breath from Malcolm's lungs.

JT hums in satisfaction as Gil reaches his climax just a few seconds later. The only sound in the room is of the men gulping down huge amounts of oxygen, brains otherwise occupied in a haze of pleasure.

Gil pulls out languidly and rolls to Malcolm's other side, sated yet exhausted.

"We survived a week guys, I'd say that was quite the celebration." JT muses.

"I love you two." Is all Malcolm can think to say.

"Me too." His husbands mumble back, and Malcolm is quite certain that they could stay here, in this room for rest of the night.

A rumble from JT's stomach brings each man out of their own heads and back to reality.

"Did we decide who's cooking dinner?" Malcolm asks.

"Not you." Both men answer in unison, then the booming laughter of JT fills the room.

"I actually want to eat tonight, not have to wave the fire extinguisher around again." JT smirks as he plucks some tissues out of the box and begins to clean Malcolm's taught stomach.

"I could have done that, you know." Malcolm points out, an amused grin lighting his face.

"Sure, but then I wouldn't have had an excuse to feel you up again, would I?" JT reaches up for to steal a quick kiss from both his partners before rolling off the bed.

"I'll cook tonight, those quesadillas have my name written all over them downstairs." JT offers, leaving the other two men to dress without the pressure of time.

Gil and Malcolm return downstairs to the smell of chicken, lime and cilantro simmering on the stove, JT humming to himself as he chops capsicums for a side salad.

"This smells great, I am starving." Gil rubs his hands together with excitement, peering around JT to inspect their dinner's progress personally. He slides his arms around JT's waist searching for an embrace but is rebuffed by the chef du jour.

"Hey! I'm tryin' to focus here. Do you even want dinner tonight?" JT admonishes, but there's no heat behind his words. Gil laughs at the attempt at discipline and kisses JT one last time before he joins Malcolm on the opposite side of the kitchen island.

JT and Gil continue to joke back and forth as dinner continues cooking, and when the quesadillas are ready to bake in the oven, they migrate back to the lounge room to relax. Malcolm doesn't say much, preferring to bask in the happiness of the moment.

"What's going on, Michael? You're awfully quiet over there." Gil questions, hoping to break Malcolm out of his reverie.

“Nothing’s wrong. I’m just enjoying the view.” Malcolm smiles wistfully and reaches out to weave his fingers through Gil’s hand.

JT wraps his hand around the other two and squeezes before adding “You can enjoy my cooking in a second. My Mexican is second to none. And a thousand times better than yours.”

“Mmm, can’t wait.” In truth Malcolm isn’t feeling that hungry tonight, the spices should set his mouth watering but at the moment they’re only sending his stomach into knots. He won’t ever tell JT that though, he loves him too much to let him down like that.

The timer on the oven trills and the trio wander back into the kitchen to plate up. As JT digs out the crockery the joking continues. “You two are lucky to have me, you know. If it were up to Michael over here we’d be eating frozen pizza rolls every night.”

“Could you imagine?” Gil laughs, but the smile dies when he glances over at Malcolm.

At the mention of pizza rolls a white flash blinds the younger man for a moment, replaced by a dull ache at the front of his forehead. He grips the island for support as his skull feels like it’s trying to tear itself away from the pressure, leaving him gasping for breath. Malcolm presses his hands against his skull, as if the action will stop his brain from ripping itself apart.

After a moment that feels both infinite and fast the pressure in his brain eases, replaced by a new vignette. The police station is back, sunlight striped by the thin blinds behind them. Another series of crime scene photos are pinned to a whiteboard and Gil, JT and an unknown yet familiar black woman are standing around conferring about an Instagram mom as a suspect. JT comments to the group.

“All I’m saying is that there are two sides to motherhood. The warm, fuzzy one, and the one where you maim your spouse for eating all the pizza rolls.”

The scene dissolves, quickly replaced by the main bull pen of the station, it’s now evening and it’s just him and JT. The man across from him looks nervous as hell, yet all Malcolm feels is happiness for his co-worker.

“Congratulations by the way.”

JT looks confused. “On what?”

“On eating all the pizza rolls, and knowing way too much about sip-and-sees.”

“Dude.” There’s a hint of warning in JT’s voice, but Malcolm continues anyway, speaking through a wide smile.

“Classic conveyance syndrome. Also known as sympathetic pregnancy. Tally’s pregnant.”

“The...things the size of a peanut and you’re already profiling it.”

Malcolm replies but the words are fuzzy. The moment slips away, dragged back to the depths of his frontal lobe.

Why does his brain continue to create these moments where the detail is so vivid it feels like a past life?

Was it real? Is the man he loves married to someone else? Is there a baby JT running around in the world somewhere? The possible ramifications contained in that second moment shake the man to his very core.

Lost in his mind, Malcolm hasn't registered that Gil and JT have both dropped what they're doing and raced to his sides, each one holding an arm and lending the other to his back, holding him up while he battles to return to the real world. Once he realises he isn't alone their touch grounds him, and soon he's able to slow his breathing down and open his eyes once again.

His cerulean irises find JT first, where all he can think to ask is, "Does the name Tally mean anything to you?"

Malcolm holds his breath for a spark of recognition or deceit in JT's face as he answers, but finds none. "I feel like I've heard the name before, but can't remember where. Are we gonna talk about what just happened? Are you okay?"

Once again Malcolm can't bring himself to tell his spouses the truth, so he musters a smile that's almost convincing and utters, "I'm fine, it's nothing. Let's just eat, okay?"

"Food can wait baby, we need to make sure you're okay. You got us pretty worried." Gil's hand lifts from the small of his back to the back of Malcolm's head, his thumb carding slowly through his hair. The movement is comforting, and Malcolm leans into it, revelling in the intimate gesture.

One minute and a deep breath later Malcolm's smile is genuine, the panic and worry almost completely forgotten. "Come on, let's eat dinner while it's still hot. Chef DB won't let us hear the end of it if we end up eating a cold creation."

"Oh, you got that right." JT hums, and the three men huff together before collecting their plates and enjoy a meal together. The chicken is exquisite.

Chapter 3

Chapter Notes

Hello to all my readers following this story! Apologies for the delay with chapter three, you will be pleased to know that chapter four is ready and will be posted far closer together. I hope you enjoy the latest update where the whump begins!

Despite his husband's pleas Malcolm won't discuss what happened in the kitchen any further. He waits until they are asleep before he opens the door in his mind and kicks around what he can remember from his dreams. After a night of tossing and turning Malcolm gives up and sneaks downstairs to start his yoga routine early. The stretching does wonders for his state of mind, and by the time they are heading to work Malcolm is feeling a thousand percent better than yesterday.

The weekend passes without any more dreams, and before Malcolm knows it, they are back in the staff lounge at The Collective for their morale building coffee of the day.

As he and the other PCAs mill about while they wait for their shifts to start Sheila wanders through the crowd, her bright red smile a reminder of the disposition that The Collective want to see in their staff. Gil and Malcolm keep to themselves, the latter using the time to dispel the last of his worries away. There was something about this room, this activity that always made his doubts fade into the background. With five minutes before they start their shift Sheila interrupts their discussion for a quick catch up.

"Good morning to the Harrises! How are we today?"

"We're fine thanks, ready for another week at work." Gil answers. Malcolm remains silent, figuring Gil's answer speaks for both of them.

Sheila isn't satisfied and turns to address Malcolm directly. "What about you, sweetie?"

The tight smile that doesn't quite reach his eyes returns. "I'm fine. Just...haven't been sleeping well these last few nights."

The ruby smile disappears and Sheila's eyebrows furrow. "Oh, that's terrible to hear. Why don't you come by my office first thing, and I'll see if there isn't something we can do to help. I'll bring the drinks, you bring the company."

Malcolm doesn't really want to accept the invitation, but the desire to please that always seems to be stronger when he's at work convinces him to agree to the proposal. "You got it, Sheila."

“Excellent. I’ll let you finish up before you get your assignments.” Sheila leaves the tea room with a satisfied look on her face, and the spouses are alone once again.

“You gonna be okay, kid?” Gil asks.

Something in his mind tugs at the mention of the word ‘kid’, but it floats away as quickly as it arrived. “Yeah, don’t worry about me. I can handle Sheila.”

“Alright. As long as you’re sure.” The men kiss goodbye and go their separate ways. Malcolm arrives at Sheila’s office promptly, to which he receives more praise from his supervisor.

“You’re so dedicated to the job, Michael, I’ve been really impressed. I hope you don’t mind but I took the liberty of grabbing you a mug of tea.”

“Well, I did just have a coffee, I’m good for now.”

“No my dear, I really must insist. We’re thinking of adding this brand to our tea room supplies, and I need all the opinions I can get.” Sheila’s false toothy grin is back as she pushes the mug towards Malcolm. Another little tug at the back of his brain shoots off, a warning that something isn’t quite right. Not being able to place what it is right now, Malcolm diplomatically accepts the mug and takes the smallest of sips.

“Wonderful. What do you think?”

Malcolm opts for honesty. “I think it tastes like dishwater.”

“Oh, are you sure? Others I’ve spoken to have loved it! Maybe try another sip?”

The tug is back, yet he can’t escape the scrutiny of his supervisor. Malcolm raises the mug to his lips again for another sip, and it still tastes revolting.

He does feel more relaxed though.

“I don’t think this is for me, Sheila. I’ll just stick to coffee.” Malcolm returns the mug to desk and waits for Sheila’s next question. It’s a strange one.

“To each their own, I guess. Now Michael, I just need to write myself a note, would you be a dear and give me a moment? Admire my wall art while I do?”

The supervisor twists to her right towards a legal pad and begins to scribble swiftly on the paper. Malcolm is curious as to what could be so urgent that it needs to interrupt their meeting, but Sheila has asked him to focus on the art in her office while she writes, and Malcolm *must* follow her instructions. The man shifts his gaze to the three inspirational posters to his right, and after fifteen seconds his review is complete. Sheila hasn’t told him it’s okay to look away though, so his eyes return to the first poster.

After two minutes Malcolm has the cat’s tortoiseshell pattern memorised and is confident he could sketch every crevice on the rock that the ant is pushing uphill, and yet he continues to wait for Sheila’s okay to look away.

A gnawing feeling blooms in the back of his skull, whispering that he should be able to look away if he wants to. He *can't* look away though, that's not what he's been told to do. To take his mind off the uncomfortable truth he begins to count the number of leaves on the tree in the third frame. He reaches seventy three when Sheila eventually speaks again.

"Thank you so much Michael, you've done so well. The perfect Collective employee. Eyes back with me now."

Malcolm returns his gaze back to his supervisor, and when he glances at the paper on the desk is surprised to find little more than two lines written there. There were nowhere near enough words on the page to justify how long he was asked to stare at those posters.

Why would she ask him to do that?

Before he can ponder that question for much longer Sheila rises from her chair and buttons her green blazer together.

"I hope you're ready to give it your all in our clinic today, Malcolm. We have patients counting on you. Can I count on you to give one hundred percent today?"

"Absolutely" Malcolm replies without hesitation. His stomach flips as he wonders why he replied with barely a moments thought. He's usually more careful than this.

If there's uncertainty in his expression Sheila doesn't notice. "Fabulous. You can head off for your room assignments now, but I'd like you drop back in just before the end of your shift if you don't mind."

"Of course, Sheila."

"Oh, and meet me in the break room please."

"Understood." Malcolm has lost ten minutes of his shift already and will lose about the same at the end of the day, he really needs to motor to be able to get through his work allocation on time.

The day passes in a blur of sheet changing, disinfecting, card playing and water dispensing. Malcolm loves the social part of the job the most, he makes a game out of trying to guess what jobs people have based on what he can observe about them. Just before lunch he guesses a woman's occupation correctly (veterinarian) and is beaming when he reunites with Gil and JT to share a lunch of leftover quesadillas.

The rest of the day flies by, but Malcolm whizzes through his work, buoyed by his correct guess in the morning. He arrives before Sheila in the break room and takes the opportunity to sink into the soft couch cushions while he's on his own for a moment.

Sheila's heels clacking against the floor announce her arrival before she enters the room, giving Malcolm enough time to adopt a more formal sitting position.

"Michael, you're on time! I do love punctuality. How was work today?"

“It was fine, thanks. I guessed someone’s job based on their choice of language and the contents of their handbag today.”

There’s a flash of something in Sheila’s eyes that Malcolm can’t quite place that unnerves him.

“You figured it out just by the words that they use?” she asks, her face curious and almost sinister.

Malcolm feels the need to get on the defensive. “It’s just a game I play to make the day a little more interesting. The patients don’t seem to mind it.”

“They don’t, do they? Hmm...” Sheila studies Malcolm for a moment, before the fake smile returns. “I’m happy to hear that you’re having fun with us, Malcolm. I was hoping to get your help with one more thing today.”

“Anything, Sheila, what is it you need me to do?”

“I need your help over here with the hot water boiler.” Sheila clops over to the break room bench, where a rectangular hot water boiler is affixed to the wall which is mounted above the sink’s draining board.

“What’s the problem?” Malcolm asks.

“The water doesn’t seem to be flowing. Can I get you to take a look?” The woman’s voice is practically dripping in honey.

“I’m no plumber but sure, I can have a crack.” Malcolm places his hand on the unit and can feel the warmth underneath his fingertips. He presses down on the dispensing plug and a stream of scalding water and steam billows out from the spout. “It seems okay to me.”

“Oh, look at that! You are certainly handy, aren’t you? One more thing sweetie. I need you to test the water with your hand.”

Malcolm’s jaw drops at the request.

“You want me to what? You just saw that, right? There was steam. Steam means hot.”

“It might look that way from here, but I really need you to test it with your hand. You don’t want to disappoint The Collective now.” Sheila’s smile is ruthless, the message clear. *Do what you’re told.*

At the mention of his employer the urge to follow instructions returns in full force. Before his hands know what they’re doing they are raising themselves to the unit once again, one underneath the spout, the other on the plug.

“Oh, and Malcolm? Keep it quiet. Don’t want anyone getting worried now, do we?”

With a forced smile, and the back of his brain screaming at him to stop he presses down with his thumb.

The second the water hits his hand the pain is instantaneous. The water hits on the top of his hand just below the wrist and cascades down both sides of his hand, two red hot rivers searing burn tracks into his skin. The pain is immense, yet Malcolm keeps his mouth closed and holds the scream in that so desperately wants to break free.

Seconds feel like minutes, it takes far too long for Sheila to call out. “That’s enough, Michael. Well done.”

The second he is released Malcolm turns to the cold tap within his reach and turns it on full blast, desperately hoping to cool the ravaged skin on his hand.

Sheila peers over his shoulder and tuts audibly. “That looks nasty, let’s get that bandaged up, shall we?”

The walk to her office is a blur, as is the balming and bandaging of his hand. The pain is the only thing that registers in his mind, as well as the dawning horror that he has done this to himself. It was as though Sheila had him strung up like a puppet, and he was powerless to stop her pulling the strings.

The thought keeps Malcolm mute, and barely aware of the comforting words Sheila whispers in his ear. Three clicks in front of his eyes snap the injured man out of his stupor, where he discovers Sheila ready to issue one final order for the day.

“You can go home now, Michael, you’ve made The Collective very proud today. I need you to keep this last little assignment of the day to yourself. No telling your husbands what happened, okay?”

“But...they’re going to ask why my hand is bandaged. I have to tell them something.” Malcolm doesn’t want to lie to his spouses.

“You can tell them whatever you like. Just not the truth. This stays between us.”

“I...you can’t ask me...” The words won’t come. She doesn’t realise what he’s asking him to do.

“Oh sweetie, I’m not asking. I’m telling. You won’t tell them because The Collective needs you not to.”

Two sides of Malcolm’s brain war with each other, the side desperate to submit dominating the moral imperative to be honest with his partners. He huffs out a sigh and closes his eyes, too tired to fight with himself any longer.

“I need to hear you say it.” Sheila’s order is as sharp as a blade glinting under a spotlight. As Malcolm utters the words she wants to hear a part of his soul leaves with them.

“I won’t tell them.” He whispers.

“*Wonderful.* We’ll see you again in the morning, Mr Harris.”

Chapter 4

Chapter Summary

Malcolm has to return home and try and hide his injury from his husbands. It doesn't go well.

More memories start to resurface and the Collective keeps extra tabs on Malcolm.

Chapter Notes

A quick reminder for those reading along at home

Malcolm is Michael Harris

JT is DB Harris

Gil is Phil Harris

Dread weighs down on Malcolm's chest as he arrives late to the family car. The white bandage juts out an inch from the cuff of his black jacket, hiding it from view.

The cover won't last when they arrive home.

Gil and JT exchange small talk about their work days while Malcolm remains silent, turning over the days events in his head.

Why did Sheila want him to hurt himself? His mind supplies the simple answer: Because he was told to. But *why* did he agree to do it? He doesn't have the excuse a teenager might have, with his cognitive decision making skills impaired due to hormones. His mind supplies another answer: *Because you want to please The Collective.*

The answers sit uneasy in his mind, deep down a part of his mind knows his justification is wrong. Nobody should ever end up hurt because someone asks them to do it. And yet, in that moment, all he could think of was pleasing his employer.

It's wrong.

"How was your day Michael? Anything interesting happen after lunch?" Gil asks.

Malcolm doesn't respond.

Gil and JT continue their light conversation for the remainder of the drive, but they share a glance across the front seats.

They know something is wrong with Malcolm. His body language is nervous and closed, and the thousand yard stare from early last week is back. They also know they won't get answers to any of their questions while he's trapped in a car.

When they arrive home Malcolm exits the car on autopilot and heads straight to the bedroom to find the longest sleeved sweater he owns. The blistered skin underneath the bandage feels stretched and puffy in addition to the fire raging on the surface. He raids the bathroom for paracetamol and can't find any burn cream in the cupboards.

He won't make it through the night without any.

While Malcolm panics about how to dress his burned hand he misses the soft footsteps of his spouses. They catch him in the act of staring at his injured hand.

"Michael, baby, what happened?" Gil asks, horrified at the thickness of the bandage.

The truth dances on the tip of his tongue, before Malcolm's brain reins it back in. He can't tell them.

"Oh this? Uh, my hand got in the way of a steam exhaust in the laundry. It's fine, really."

"This is not fine, Michael. I can tell you're in pain. Why didn't you tell us sooner?"

"I was embarrassed." At least he could tell the truth about that.

"You don't ever need to hide something like this from us. What do you need?" JT asks.

"I need ointment for my hand. And you two."

"Well we already got the second part locked in, let's get the first one sorted out too. I've got a first aid kit downstairs in the kitchen, there should be some ointment in there." JT kisses Malcolm gently and dashes out into the hallway.

Gil lifts Malcolm's hand gently to inspect it further. The lines on Malcolm's face give away his discomfort as any motion shoots lancing pain up his arm. Gil eyes the sweater and the perspiration beginning to bead on Malcolm's forehead, and his eyebrows shoot up inquisitively.

"Is the sweater really necessary right now?"

"It was when I was trying to hide this from you." Malcolm admits.

"I think we can both agree it's not needed anymore."

"Yeah, I guess." Truth be told the burn on his hand was feeding heat throughout his body like a furnace, and he wanted nothing more than to hurl the wool weave out the window. Malcolm

takes it slow on account of his hand, and shortly thereafter the pair relocate to the couch downstairs, with the younger man opting to remain topless until JT returns with the ointment.

“You reported this to The Collective, right? They should know if staff are working in an unsafe environment.”

“Of course, that’s why I was late. I was...talking...with Sheila.”

“Good. I’ll follow up myself in the morning. It hurts to know I wasn’t there for you today.”

“You couldn’t have known it was going to happen, Phil. It’s not your fault.” The fault was his own. How is he going to go to work tomorrow knowing that he can’t disobey an order? To watch his body might betray him again?

The anxiety is almost too much. Luckily for him JT returns from his mission with the first aid kit in hand, and the trio carefully redress the angry wound.

“You know I bought the kit because of your amazing cooking skills. It seemed like they might come in handy one day.” JT deadpans.

“Sorry, not sorry to disappoint you this time DB.” Malcolm dozes on the couch for the rest of the evening, fitful as he imagines horrible things Sheila will ask him to do. The sense of dread grows with every passing minute, and at two in the morning he makes the decision to call in sick.

His heart is tinged with sadness at the sight of his husbands leaving for work without him, nervousness about what they might be asked to do when he’s not there, and relief for having avoided a day where Sheila could ambush him with another dangerous request. One that costs him more than the movement in his hand.

Malcolm hasn’t had the place to himself since they moved in, so he makes the most of blaring the most annoying albums Gil and JT think he owns over the stereo system and remakes the bed with his favourite duvet cover. He follows it up with a jog around the block as his usual yoga routine would be too much strain on his hands, and returns home dripping in sweat and ready for a shower. While it takes a little longer to get undressed his eye catches on the scar on the left side of his ribcage. The pink line is only a few inches wide, the colouring suggesting it was only months as opposed to years old.

As his fingertips brush the bumpy skin he casts his mind back to how he ended up with the scar.

He draws a complete blank.

Malcolm closes his eyes to concentrate, to pin down where the injury came from. A stabbing sensation pulls at the site, but nothing concrete forms around it. He can remember the feeling of whatever impaled him, but not how it happened.

How is that possible? How can he forget something so significant?

He stares into the mirror at his own reflection, daring it to reveal the hidden memory. All Michael does is grin before his mouth moves, but the words aren't in his own voice.

"You stabbed me and left me for dead. I survived. Will you?"

The phantom dagger thrusts itself into his body again, sending stabbing pains deep within his chest. The person who held the dagger remains a mystery, the words echoing in his ears enigmatic.

Malcolm collapses onto the bed and loses all sense of time. The gravelly voice replays in his head on a loop, but no matter how hard he tries any further clues prove elusive. His sense of what is reality feels tenuous, the flashes of Bright, JT and Gil dance across his vision and threaten to overwhelm him. The world of these people is devoid of color against a gritty city background, nothing like the life he has now.

What does it mean that these images continue to return to him? If these lives were real, does that mean he stabbed someone once upon a time?

If it *is* real, Michael Harris isn't sure he wants to be this Bright person. He loves his spouses, and won't risk anything to lose them. He's already seen DB married to someone else as JT, Phil's wedding finger suggests he's probably married to someone different as well.

Before Malcolm can reflect on this quandry any further a knock at the door draws him downstairs. Throwing on the nearest clean shirt he can find he scopes out the front door from the bedroom above. To his surprise Sheila is the person standing on the front stoop. The mere presence of his supervisor sends his heart rate sky rocketing. What could she possibly want with him?

The trek down the stairs is slow and deliberate, Malcolm uses every second to slow his heart rate and render his expression neutral by the time he opens the door.

"Good afternoon, Sheila."

"Michael, darling, how are you? When you didn't show up for work today I was worried."

"Well it's because I was injured in the workplace yesterday, Sheila. I can't use my hand." Malcolm raises his bandaged hand for effect.

"Of course, of course. Take all the time you need. I just thought I'd drop in to see how you were feeling, and to deliver your daily coffee to cheer you up."

"That's very thoughtful of you Sheila, thank you. But I think I'll pass on hot liquids for the time being."

"Nonsense Michael, I insist! I know it's the highlight of the day for all our workers, and I just know it will help. I've even put it in this marvellous thermos, so it's lovely and warm." Sheila shakes the red metallic cylinder in her hand.

A warning rings in the back of his mind at Sheila's insistence to drink the coffee. Every time Malcolm interacts with her at work it's always trying to get him to drink something. Unsure

what the warning means Malcolm accepts the mug graciously and pretends to sip the thermos, his tongue blocking any of the creamy liquid from entering his mouth. Hoping to sell the fake move he hums a little in satisfaction. Sheila's face lights up in approval.

"See? You're feeling better already. You just finish that cup, rest up and we'll be ready and waiting for you tomorrow."

"Absolutely. See you tomorrow."

"And what are you going to do right now sweetie?"

Remembering his conversation from yesterday he promptly supplies "Finish my coffee, come into work tomorrow."

"Perfect. See you in the staff room in the morning!"

Sheila returns to her car while Michael closes the door and stares at the thermos. Truth be told his stomach couldn't handle much of anything at the moment, and after the torture that was being forced to obey Sheila yesterday he's not inclined to follow her instructions today. Before he loses his nerve Malcolm wanders over to the kitchen and tips the coffee down the sink, gleefully watching the beverage slide down the drain. A small feeling of triumph washes over Malcolm at this tiny act of rebellion.

The satisfaction dissipates when his mind flashes to somewhere else, the image of a brown bearded man in a red sweater pouring tea into a cup. The man was quite a bit taller than him, as if he was watching this as a child. The task is innocuous in nature, and yet all he feels is terrified. He looks up to find a police officer beside him, and he needs to warn the man he's in danger.

"What is it, Malcolm?"

The man is a younger version of Phil, his normal salt and pepper goatee jet black along with his uniform with a name badge stamped with ARROYO. He must be twenty years younger than what he is today. He finds the strength to say the words he never thought he would need to utter.

"You should take out your gun. My father is going to kill you."

The thermos clatters in the sink as Malcolm drops the steel mug out of shock. He was warning Phil/Gil about his father intending to hurt him.

Not hurt. *Kill.*

The room begins to spin shortly before an inky blackness overwhelms his vision and the floor rises up to meet him.

Chapter 5

Chapter Summary

More memories return for Malcolm, and he starts to look out for his spouses.

Chapter Notes

Welcome to the halfway point in this tale! Apologies for the delay on this chapter, I hope the length makes up for it. The next few updates will be much closer as they are already completed.

Thanks again for your continued love for the boy's story, it means the world to me. If you're enjoying the ride let me know in the comments!!

A reminder for the dialogue:

Malcolm is Michael Harris

JT is DB Harris

Gil is Phil Harris

The tiles feel cool under his cheek when Malcolm regains consciousness. A dull ache encompasses his head as a large part of his true identity fights its way to the surface, the persona of Michael Harris fighting to stay in control. The tug of war in his head shoots daggers through his mind, and the idea that two different versions of himself could exist is too much to try and stay conscious.

Bed is the best option right now, so Malcolm crawls his way back upstairs and buries himself in the bedcovers. The faint scent of his husbands on the sheets is a sore needed comfort, and soon he is drifting off to sleep.

The sound of the door slamming downstairs raises Malcolm from his slumber, the memory of NYPD profiler Malcolm Bright faded into the background once again. Eager to see his spouses Malcolm rolls out of bed minding his bandaged hand and pads downstairs to find JT and Gil sprawled on the couch enjoying a cold beer.

“Hey there, Michael. How are you feeling, babe?” Gil leans forward as he asks the question.

“I’m fine, was just having a sleep upstairs. Hand is bandaged and good to go.”

“Are you sure? ‘Cause you look like hell.” JT argues.

“I promise, I’m fine, really. Tell me all about your days.”

JT eyes Malcolm suspiciously before casually dropping that he supervised the delivery and inventory of some new surveillance equipment. Gil was excited for him and peppered their security man with question after question, providing Malcolm with the opportunity to sit back and observe. Although JT makes out like Gil was making too big a deal out of it, Malcolm picks up the shy smile that was pride playing at the corner of his mouth.

The boys knock up a quick stir fry for dinner, then when they settled down to eat Malcolm figured now was his best chance to find out what he needs.

“Hey DB, did you get a company phone issued when you started, in case you need to be on call?”

DB’s eyebrows creased with confusion. “No, they have a night shift covering anything at the clinic. They’re very much about self sufficiency at The Collective.”

“Right, sure. It’s just that I realised I haven’t seen a cell phone since we got here, and I thought that was odd.”

Gil chips in with his two cents. “I haven’t really missed it. I mean, the only two people in the world I wanna talk to are in this room.” The older man smiles at his spouses, confident that they will agree with him.

Malcolm can’t help but push the point. “I mean, I get that, but doesn’t it seem weird that none of us has a phone at all?”

DB shakes his head briefly. “The guys in my team have said that reception here is difficult. I think Phil is right on this one.”

Malcolm humphs to himself, then remembers the other thread he wants to pull on.

“Do you remember our wedding day?”

Both men break out into warm smiles of remembrance. “Sure/Of course,” they answer.

“It was August 3rd at City Hall, early morning before the city started to smell.” JT starts.

“Just the three of us, the way it should be.” Gil adds.

“We managed to convince Phil not to wear a turtleneck with his blazer for once.”

“Very funny DB.” Gil deadpans. He nods back at the broad man. “You looked dashing in blue.”

Gil’s finger points in Malcolm’s direction. “And you looked handsome in grey.”

“It made for quite the picture.” Malcolm agrees. “Can you remember where we celebrated after?”

JT snorts at the question. “How could you forget Amber’s?! It was the best steak of my life.”

At the mention of the steak house images flash in the man’s mind of clean furniture, red and orange curtains framing large windows and a steak that resembled a golf club placed in front of JT.

Gil chuckles at the admission. “Yeah, I remember what you ordered. That thing looked like a golf club!”

“But it tasted way better than one.” JT chortles, and the two men begin reminiscing about the potatoes on the side.

Although the men look lovingly at each other, the memories for Malcolm are tinged with sadness. He could have matched their statements almost verbatim. The memories were planted by someone.

Michael, DB and Phil Harris were programmed personalities.

The question is, what does Malcolm do with that information now? He’s hardly in a position to admit the truth tonight. There’s no way they would believe that their life is a lie. He has no proof besides his own true memories, not all of which have returned to him yet.

The questions bounce around in Malcolm’s head like a lottery ball machine, eventually the barrage of questions is enough to make his headache return with a vengeance.

“I’m gonna head to bed. I’ll see you in the morning.” Malcolm rises from the couch to head upstairs.

“Michael, wait.” Gil calls.

“What is it?”

“We get a goodnight kiss or what?”

Malcolm stiffens for a moment. Now he remembers that he isn’t actually married to his colleagues, can he still be intimate with them? He ponders the question for a moment before walking over to kiss the two men. While their names might not be real, the affection he feels for the two of them is. This home life will have to end one day, but that day is not today. After kissing Gil goodnight Malcolm leans in to press their foreheads together.

“Love you.” he mumbles.

“Love you too.” Gil answers with such sincerity it hurts. Tears spring into Malcolm’s eyes, and he turns away before Gil can see them.

After an hour of tossing and turning while formulating a plan for tomorrow which mainly involves finding a phone at work Malcolm manages to drift off to sleep. His slumber is fitful as dormant memories resurface, desperate to be remembered. Flashes of his father in prison jumpsuits, being bullied at school, getting fired from the FBI, each one more traumatising

than the last. The macabre tableau reaches a crescendo with the memory of being crushed and taunted in a turnstile by a serial killer, and reliving the moment the bearded John Watkins stabbed him with a knife.

With his heart racing Malcolm runs down the corridor of memories until he reaches the end, a white door contrasting to all the black windows on either side. Psychology pushes him towards the white door, with the idea of being able to shut out all these memories the only thing he can focus on. As he reaches the door and swings it open, he looks over his shoulder one last time to check nobody is following him before he slams the door and collapses against it, panting heavily. When he opens his eyes Malcolm wasn't sure what he thought he would see, but a dank basement didn't even rank in the top ten.

The basement feels familiar, with a study to his right and a storage room to his left. The study is filled with medical books, presumably his father's. The storage room has normal basement stuff in it, including a large steamer trunk. There's a sound coming from the trunk, drawing Malcolm towards it. As he kneels down and unlocks the trunk the noise sounds distinctly human, and he pauses for a moment before opening the lid. As it creaks open to reveal the cramped figure of a woman dressed only in underwear a scream rents from his body that carries him from unconsciousness and into his bedroom. Malcolm bolts upright in the middle of the bed, panting as the adrenaline courses through his system and his mind catches up to his surroundings.

After a few disorientating seconds Malcolm realises where he is and becomes aware of pressure on his forearms. He looks down to find Gil's hands on one forearm, and JT's on the other. Both men are staring at him with concern and horror.

"What just happened?" Malcolm asks.

"You were dreaming...woke both of us up. You wouldn't stop hitting us so we held you down. We've been trying to wake you for a while." JT answers, his voice trembling.

"You couldn't hear us. What happened?" Gil wonders, raising a hand to cup Malcolm's face.

Malcolm can't bear to tell them the truth right now. Not while his heart is racing at a hundred miles an hour. "It was just a bad dream. I'm fine now that I'm here with you."

"There's bad dreams, then there's whatever that just was. You clocked me in the neck." JT points out.

"I'm sorry. I'll go sleep in the guest room for the rest of the night." Malcolm shakes off the hands on his wrists and kicks his feet out of the covers before either man can change his mind. He walks straight past the bedroom and heads downstairs to make himself a coffee. There's no way he's risking any more nightmares tonight. One thing is for sure.

Michael Harris ceased to exist in those dreams.

Vestiges of the husband loving PCA still remain, and there are gaps in his memory but there is a weight on his shoulders that wasn't there before he went to bed.

Malcolm Bright. Criminal Profiler. Son of a serial killer. And definitely not married to Gil and JT.

The weight of unanswered questions weighs heavy on his head. He doesn't know where he is. Doesn't remember when he became Michael Harris, or how they arrived in the town. The memories he does remember are clamouring for attention. Sights, sounds, feelings of a life full of pain and heartache. Too much to bear after regaining them all in the space of a few hours.

Who are these people that replaced their memories with new ones? What is the aim of The Collective? And why did they force Malcolm to hurt himself? *How* did they convince him to hurt himself?

Being awake at 3am and having nowhere else to go Malcolm decides to put this spare time to good use. He retrieves a notepad and pen and jots down everything he can remember from the last week. It isn't until he sees his notes all written down that Malcolm comes up with a theory.

They're being drugged by The Collective.

The insistence of the morning coffee, and Sheila's visit to their house today can't have been a coincidence. There must be a dose of something in the drinks, manipulating their minds to be open to directions. The reason he remembered things yesterday was because he missed a dose.

As the sun peaks over the horizon Malcolm glances over his notes and squares his shoulders, prepared to enter The Collective as a mole.

Today he has two objectives; find out more about the compulsory morning drink, and find a phone to contact Dani.

JT and Gil tread carefully around Malcolm in the morning, aware of the change in his posture and the frown that lightly furrows his brow. When they reach the car park and say their goodbyes at the car Malcolm reaches for JT's blazer lapels and pulls him close for a moment.

"Can you do me a favour?"

"Anything Michael, what is it?" JT's hands find Malcolm's back and holds him close.

Malcolm's heart tugs a little at the use of his false name, but forces a smile on his face and hopes the sadness doesn't show. "Can you watch out for us today? And let me know if you find a phone."

"I always watch out for you two. I'll see what I can do for the phone, we just use walkie talkies and earpieces most of the time." JT stares into Malcolm's eyes. "Is this about last night?"

“Maybe, I’m probably just over-reacting. You should go. Don’t want you to be late for your morning team building thing.” Malcolm plants a quick peck on the cheek before patting his chest as a sign to leave.

As Malcolm and Gil head towards their own morning meeting Malcolm realises he should have asked JT not to drink the coffee. Now he has no way to contact him with alerting The Collective at the same time. He doesn’t have access to JT’s part of the building. While he’s missed the chance to warn JT, he can still help Gil.

“Phil, can you do me a favour today? I don’t feel like drinking the coffee, but don’t want to be the only one not having any. Would you mind skipping it this morning?”

Gil is surprised at the request. “But you love your morning coffee, everyone does.”

“I uh, had some at home this morning, and don’t want any more.”

“Alright, I’ll say no. But only because you’re the one asking.”

Breathing a sigh of relief, the pair head into the staff room and begin to mingle with the other PCAs. Sheila arrives for her morning rounds as well, and Malcolm becomes hyper focused on avoiding her artificial smile and piercing gaze, while appearing to be partaking in the morning tradition. He is successful in avoiding both, and breathes a sigh of relief until Gil walks over with an almost empty mug and a wide smile.

“Michael! Have you tried this chai? It’s delicious!”

Malcolm’s stomach plummets to the floor. “I thought we were giving the morning routine a break today?” he asks weakly.

“You asked for me not to drink the coffee. Sheila was kind enough to offer me a chai instead.”

“Did she? How thoughtful of her.”

“She asked me to bring one over for you, too.”

Malcolm scans the room and spies Sheila’s watchful eyes on their interaction. Having no choice he accepts the drink with a smile.

“Thanks Phil.”

The profiler’s mind races as he runs through the options in his head. If Sheila is watching him dumping the drink down the sink isn’t an option, so he takes the less desirable option. Down the drink in one go at the last second and then run to the bathroom.

It’s not exactly ideal, but needs must.

With one minute to go Malcolm sculls the lukewarm drink in one hit, barely tasting the spicy flavours in the drink as it goes down. His stomach feels sloshy after the rapid intake of so much fluid, but he maintains a neutral gaze until Sheila smiles with satisfaction and leaves

the room. As soon as the supervisor is out of eye line Malcolm bolts for the bathroom, not wanting to give the drug any chance of working in his system.

The stalls are empty as the sound of retching fills the echoing space. When his stomach is free of spiked chai Malcolm takes a moment to check in with his feelings.

Anxiety? Check. Paranoia? Check. Exhaustion? Check.

Remembering how he normally feels after their team building exercise Malcolm is confident the drug hasn't made its way into his system this morning.

He still has the chance to find out more about this shadowy organisation and what they do, as well as finding a phone.

It was time to get his snoop on.

Malcolm had six rooms on his list to clean before lunch, and in each one he pretended to be the model Collective employee, remembering his training as Michael Harris. He was a little bit slower with his recovering hand, but made fast work of the duties. While he chattered away with the patients Malcolm kept a keen eye on the lookout for a phone and clues to what The Collective was doing. Aside from a glance at the patient's charts which only revealed pain medication doses Malcolm was unable to uncover any clues.

At lunch time Sheila breezes into the staff room and calls attention to herself with a series of sharp claps.

"Attention everyone! I have some wonderful news! We are pleased to announce that two positions have become available in our Pathways to Management program, and the worthy recipients are in this very room. Where are Phil and Michael Harris?"

Malcolm drops the sandwich he's eating out of shock.

Ten heads swivel in their direction, equal parts jealous and pleased.

Sheila beams a thousand watt smile in their direction. "There you are. I'll need both of you to stop by my office this afternoon to discuss particulars. Phil, I'll see you straight after lunch, Michael straight after that. Alright?"

"Of course." Gil replies immediately.

"Yes, I'll be there." Malcolm blurts out, forgetting he is supposed to be drugged.

The slight delay doesn't seem to bother Sheila as she exits the room, leaving an awkward silence in her wake.

Gil leans into Malcolm and mumbles so as not to be overheard, "Did you know we were entered into any program?"

"No, did you mention something to her?" Malcolm whispers back.

Gil shakes his head and the couple drop the conversation, aware of the extra attention they're garnering right now. Malcolm wishes Gil good luck and returns to his phone search. It's an hour later when Sheila recalls him from laundry duty to escort him to their meeting. The supervisor's blonde hair barely moves as they wander down the corridor.

"I wanted to thank you for keeping our little session in the staff room private the other day. I checked with DB and Phil to see how you were feeling, and they both passed on their concerns about the vent in the laundry area. Quite the clever tale, Michael! Ah, here we are."

Sheila has stopped them in the hallway at a room he's not entered before; the first aid room. A feeling of unease settles in his stomach as the woman pushes the door open to reveal a tray of medical devices as well as blood drawing equipment. Malcolm checks himself and reminds himself that he should appear eager to please, so he waits until Sheila directs him into the chairs lined up against the wall and lowers himself into the padded chair, their legs almost touching in the cramped space.

Sheila leans in closely, as if sharing a secret. "Congratulations for being selected for our program! The Collective has been very impressed with your dedication to the job, and know you're the right person to take the next step. How do you feel?"

Having an hour to test out possible replies to obvious questions the answer flies out of Malcolm's mouth. "Like I'm ready to serve The Collective in any way that I can."

"Wonderful! Now, an important part of our Management program is a medical assessment. We're here to take some bloods to make sure you're in tip-top shape. I need you to hold out your arm for me so we can get started."

Malcolm looks down at his arms for a moment before deciding to go with the left arm. An alarm rings in his mind, if they're taking blood now they'll know he's no longer on the mysterious drug that makes everyone agree to everything. He's officially on borrowed time. But he can't refuse, so he plays along for now. He exposes the crook of his left elbow and waits for the phlebotomist to start, the laugh from Sheila throws him off balance.

"Oh my dear, that's so sweet. The Pathway to Management program is extremely rigorous and requires commitment. There are a lot of tests we need to run, so we're going to put insert a port instead."

"A what?"

"A port, silly. Right here." Sheila taps just above his collarbone. "The Collective demands it. Are you refusing?" Sheila's eyes narrow a touch, and Malcolm knows he needs to be careful.

"I would never refuse anything from The Collective." Malcolm answers.

"As it should be. Karolyn, are you ready?" Sheila glances up to the nurse in the room with them, who nods in the affirmative.

"Hop up here Mr Harris, and we'll get you on your way in no time."

The profiler's face betrays no emotion as he plants himself onto the chair and waits for the nurse to poke him like a pin cushion. It takes all his FBI training not to tense up as the needle draws closer to his skin, then feeling the narrow needle bore into his skin before settling in a vein.

His mind travels to Gil to keep himself calm, remembering the feel of his goatee on his skin and the musky smell of his embrace. As the nurse draws the vials of blood required Malcolm drifts away on a day dream, wishing his newly found domestic life could continue forever.

"That's it, Mr Harris, you're all done!"

Malcolm glances down and notices the port is still inserted into his body. "Uh, are you going to take this out now?"

A high pitched staccato laugh fills the air. "No silly, why would we do that? That's going to stay in for the next few days, until we've taken what we need from you."

"Oh, okay. Whatever The Collective needs."

"Karolyn here will tape it up, and we expect you to keep it clean until we are ready for it to come out."

"Mmmhmm."

"And Michael, you know what I'm going to ask you to do next, right?"

"Not tell my husbands."

Sheila beams. "Exactly. We really are so lucky to have you. Now go and finish your shift."

"Yes Ma'am." Malcolm exits the room smoothly and makes sure he's out of sight before collapsing against the corridor wall. There was no way he could have known what Sheila wanted to do when he walked in there, and now there was a foreign object installed in his body. He can almost feel the metal scraping around in his vein, and it's another impediment he'll have to avoid dislodging for the rest of his shift.

The impending blood test results give him a day at best to convince JT and Gil they need to leave, and it's clear that there are no phones around to steal, nor computers to email from.

Malcolm is out of options. He'll have to confront his spouses tonight.

Chapter 6

Chapter Summary

Malcolm finally confronts Gil and JT. It doesn't go well.

Self inflicted whump in this chapter, if you're squeamish about blood you've been warned.

“Phil, DB, can we talk?”

Malcolm waited until after the dinner plates were cleared before he felt brave enough to bring up the subject of their mysterious new life.

“Sure babe, what is it? You’ve not been yourself these last few days.” JT motions for Malcolm to lift his hand onto the table, clasping it in his broad and strong grip when he obliges.

Malcolm draws in a deep breath and gazes at his husbands one last time before he shatters their world forever.

“We’ve been brainwashed. We’re not husbands.”

The only sound in the room is the gentle hum from the fridge, JT and Gil stare at Malcolm with their mouths agape.

Gil breaks the silence first. “I’m ah...gonna need a little more information than that, Michael. What do mean, brainwashed?”

“My name’s not Michael. It’s Malcolm. Malcolm Bright. I’m a profiler with the NYPD.”

“A profiler. What the hell does that even mean?”

“I catch murderers. And so do you. Phil, your name is Gil Arroyo, you lead Major Crimes. DB, your name is JT Tarmel, and you’re a detective on the team.” Malcolm knows how crazy this sounds, and can tell by their faces that they don’t believe a word.

“Look I know it’s crazy, but a part of you has to know that there’s something wrong about this place. I think they’re drugging us with the coffee.”

Gil chuckles at the mention of their workplace. “Is that why you told me not to drink it this morning. Oh, Michael. That is the craziest thing I think I’ve ever heard.”

“Is it, though? Think about it. They insist we drink something at work, and then you find yourself agreeing to everything they ask you to do. How do you think *this* happened?” Malcolm holds up his hand as evidence.

“You told us that was from the laundry room.”

“Because Sheila told me to lie to you. I haven’t had a drink in days, and that’s when I started remembering things.”

“And what are these ‘things’ you’ve been remembering?” Gil asks.

“Those dreams I had last week about the crime scenes? They were real. I remember how I got the scar on my chest. I was stabbed by a serial killer. My father is a serial killer, and you arrested him.”

“That’s impossible. There’s no way that person exists in real life. They’d be broken beyond belief.”

“Oh, I can assure you I exist. The dreams weren’t just dreams, they were memories. Something must have happened to us on a case.”

“And none of us can remember it? Come on, man. Listen to yourself.” JT pleads with Malcolm, who is growing ever frustrated.

“And you can’t tell me that there aren’t gaps in your memory right now? I remember our wedding day word for word what you said last night. Down to the last detail. It’s too coincidental for it to be real. The memory has to be a plant.”

“No.” Gil replies. “I refuse to believe that our life is a lie. That what I feel for you isn’t real.” The older man crosses his arms defensively, and Malcolm’s heart warms at the sight of him defending their love.

“I’m not saying your feelings aren’t real, Gil. I’m saying that our calling in life is more than what the Collective wants. At JT, I don’t think you should stay here when you have...” Malcolm stops short, unsure about continuing.

“When I have what?” JT asks slowly, the man’s piercing gaze burning through to Malcolm’s very core. He can’t hide the truth.

“When you have a baby on the way. You have a wife called Tally, and she’s pregnant. I don’t know how far along now, but I remember you were nervous as hell.”

“A baby? Me?” JT’s face clouds over, as if trying to retrieve the lost memories lurking in his mind.

“I would never trick you about something like this. We need to get back to New York, back to our families. I want to leave now, before The Collective can find out that I know the truth.”

Malcolm’s gaze flits between both men, hoping to find a sign of either one willing to leave tonight. His shoulders sag, crestfallen at what their bodies are telling him.

“You don’t believe me.”

“Can you blame us? You come in, spouting this crazy theory that you got stabbed by a serial killer and expect us to believe you with no proof?” Gil stands up and walks over to Malcolm, crouches down next to his chair and raises a hand to his face, stroking gently. “You’ve had a big couple of days, how about we get you to bed.”

“I don’t want to go to bed right now, I want you to believe me!” Malcolm jumps to his feet, shouting out of frustration. “You can’t tell me that it’s normal to ask people to burn themselves. To lie to their husbands. Do you know what they asked me to lie about today?” Malcolm pulls his shirt off with one hand to reveal the gauze square on his collarbone. He peels back the tape to reveal the port nestled above his clavicle. “They did this to me today. Told me it was for blood tests for the Management program. Did they do this to you, Gil?”

Malcolm and JT round on Gil, whose face is affixed with a shocked expression. “What? No.”

“Why not, Gil? You both got accepted into the same program, right?” JT notes. “Why wouldn’t they put you through the same testing protocols?”

“Yeah Gil, why wouldn’t they? What did they make you promise to lie about?”

Gil suddenly can’t look Malcolm in the eye. “I...can’t tell you.”

“Yes Gil, you can.”

“Phil. My name is Phil.” Gil shoots back.

Malcolm realises that Gil is too far under the effects of the mind control drug to accept what his husband is telling him. He balls his fist together in frustration before he has one last try to get through to the man he loves.

“Gil, I know this seems crazy but we need to leave now. They took my blood today, they’ll know I’m not under their control by tomorrow. We’re in danger. Please. Believe me.”

The older man doesn’t answer so Malcolm turns his attention to JT. If the score is two against one it’s over. The profiler can see the hesitation plain as day on the man’s face. Malcolm’s face crumbles when the realisation that he hasn’t convinced anyone hits him.

“Hey Michael, it’s okay man. It’s just a lot to try and process. I think Phil is right, you need to get some rest.”

“Thank you, DB. Let’s get you upstairs.”

Michael. Phil. DB. They won’t even use their real names. He’s no closer to escaping from whatever this place is. Gil and JT walk beside him to the stairs and he mechanically follows, exhausted from the lack of sleep and the feeling of isolation. The spouses guide him to the bed and help Malcolm change into his pajamas, kissing him gently on the forehead before turning the lights off.

Although their intention was to let him rest Malcolm's mind is racing. He may not be chained to a basement floor but he feels equally as trapped by the love for Gil and JT. There is no way he can leave them in the clutches of The Collective.

Frustration at the shadowy organisation that has managed to erase their existence and hold sway over his spouses pulses through his body, and lying still is the last thing he wants to be doing. Needing to do something to get back at the Collective, Malcolm kicks off the covers and stalks into the bathroom, planting his feet firmly in front of the mirror.

His reflection is furious and tense, and his eyes settle on the port. A physical reminder of the reach of an insidious organisation he is fighting on his own.

No longer.

Malcolm's finger's pinch either side of the plastic connector and drags the needle out of his vein. The metal scrapes along the edge of his blood vessel when the angle changes, but he can't stop until the intrusion is out of his body for good. The second the pointed edge slides out a crimson stream follows behind it, welling in the hollow of his neck then sliding down his chest before he can get a hand on the injection site to stem the flow.

Malcolm drops the device in the sink and clasps a hand to his collarbone while reaching for a towel, feeling no small amount of satisfaction over regaining a tiny piece of control in his life.

"What did you do?!" JT's frame fills the doorway, taking in the spray of blood on the vanity and the trail down Malcolm's chest.

"I needed it out. I couldn't leave it in there, I couldn't..." Malcolm trails off as his reasons turn into cries, his body racked with sobs. JT enters the room and wraps his arms around Malcolm, who falls into the man's embrace.

"It's all right, man. I love you, you know that? I just don't want you hurt. We'll get through whatever this is."

"We're not safe here. I wish I could convince you." Malcolm sighs loudly.

"How about we ask around at work tomorrow, see if we can't get some answers."

"No! No, we can't do that. You don't know what they'll do if they suspect we're not under their control anymore. Please don't say anything."

There's a deep rumble in JT's chest which Malcolm takes assumes is him agreeing to his plan. "How about we look for more clues tomorrow, huh? See if we can't figure out how much of this crazy is sticking with us for a while."

"Most of it is, I'm afraid." Malcolm pauses for a beat. "I don't want to lose this." He admits quietly.

"Hey. You won't lose us. We made a promise, right? Until the end."

Malcolm smiles at the memory, even though it's as authentic as a three dollar bill. "Until the end."

JT helps Malcolm staunch the bleeding and re-tape the wound on his chest before they climb into bed together. Malcolm buries his head into JT's chest, revelling in the warmth that he will lose in a few days when they finally escape wherever they are.

Gil joins them half an hour later, making a deliberate point to avoid touching either partner. The tension from their earlier conversation hasn't dissipated, and Malcolm won't be able to sleep until he knows that things are okay between them. Malcolm rolls over to Gil's side and slides an arm over his back and rests his on his chest.

"Please don't pull away from me Gi-Phil. I just want us to be safe."

"You can't expect me to believe all that stuff you said. You told me I've known you since you were a kid. I can't imagine forgetting something like that. I can't wrap my head around what it means if you're telling the truth."

"Whatever happens, we'll figure it out together, okay? Tonight, just let me hold you."

A silence stretches out in the bedroom, and Malcolm can tell from JT's breathing that he's waiting for Gil's reply too. A sigh breaks the quiet, and Gil responds with "I could never say no to you Michael. Goodnight, love you both."

"G'night, Phil." JT murmurs softly, sleep slowly catching up to him.

Malcolm holds onto Gil until they both drift off.

A dreamless sleep welcomes Malcolm for the first time in days, until an unfamiliar voice filters through the darkness.

"Forget Malcolm Bright. You are Michael Harris."

His chest feels tight, restricted. An attempt to lift his hands are thwarted by chains around his wrists. Images flash on a screen of Malcolm, Gil and JT in suits smiling in front of a municipal building.

"Devoted to your husbands. You want to please The Collective."

Malcolm shouts at the disembodied voice. "I won't forget! Let me out!"

"You will forget. They always do."

The room lightens to his right as a door opens and a person enters. He feels a scrape on his arm followed by the sensation of floating in a pool. The same phrases wash over him on a loop, for what feels like days. Becoming his existence. The images eventually cease and a familiar voice, sweeter than honey coos in his ear.

"Who are you?"

“Michael Harris.” He replies mechanically.

“And who do you want to please?”

“The Collective.”

“And who are you devoted to?”

“My husbands.”

“Wonderful.”

Malcolm bolts upright with a yell and scrambles off the bed, yanking the duvet cover with him in a rush. Frantic legs propel him into the hallway and towards the bathroom. He slams the door behind him and collapses against the door, head in his hands as aftershocks of the dream tremble through his body.

“Michael! Malcolm!” JT yells as he bangs on the door, his tone urgent.

“Yeah! Yeah. I’m here. I’m fine. Just...give me a minute.” Malcolm lowers himself onto the floor, allowing the cool tiles to transport him away from the dreamscape he just escaped out of.

“Babe, we’re really worried. Can you come out now?” Gil asks.

Malcolm drags himself to his feet and takes a deep breath before opening the door. He’s not sure what awaits him on the other side, so when the door flies open he doesn’t make a move.

To his relief Gil and JT rush toward him to wrap him in their arms. The trio hold each other silently, waiting for Malcolm to feel safe enough to pull away.

“You okay there, hon?” JT murmurs, his eyes searching Malcolm’s for any signs of distress.

“Just a bad dream. I remembered...”

“Remembered what?”

Malcolm waits a beat before telling them the truth. “What they did to us.” Malcolm sighs.

Nobody says anything, as none of them really know what to say. How do you comfort someone who believes something you don’t?

None of them had the answer, so they leave the tension in the bathroom and settle into their bed once again, broad black hands holding the three of them together. They stay that way until morning.

Chapter 7

“This is a terrible idea. And that’s saying something coming from me.” Malcolm can’t believe what he’s hearing.

“You need to see it from our side, Michael. We can only remember our lives together, what’s the harm in looking for more clues?” JT posits.

“Because I tried that yesterday and ended up with a port in my chest.”

“Well they’re unlikely to try that again today, are they?”

“My blood results will come back any minute, they’ll know something’s wrong. I can’t go in there.”

“You have to come though. You’ve seen more of the place than we have, you can help us. Please, hon.”

JT gazes balefully at Malcolm and his resolve disappears. Gil and JT are set on returning today and Malcolm won’t let them walk into The Collective when they are likely to be controlled. “Fine. But we need to be late to miss the morning coffee. I’m not throwing up two mornings in a row.”

“Fair enough. You okay with this, Phil?”

“Doesn’t really matter what I think, you’re going ahead with whatever brainless plan you two are concocting.” Gil huffs. He’s the one struggling the most with Malcolm’s theory that they’ve been brainwashed.

“Are you going to say something to Sheila?”

“Of course not, you’ll get into trouble. I won’t say anything to Sheila, but I won’t help you either.”

“That’s okay Gil, we can make do with that.” Malcolm assures him. The tension in his shoulders drop as Gil admits that he won’t turn them in the second they reach the building.

The trio continue their morning ritual at a slower pace and hold onto each other a little longer when they part for the day. Malcolm and Gil separate to perform their morning jobs, Malcolm needs to resupply his cart first. He’s busy searching for new gloves in a converted office space when the tell-tale clip clop of shoes behind him alerts him to a visitor.

“Michael sweetheart, we missed you in our motivation session this morning.” Sheila smiles disingenuously.

“Slept through our alarm, would you believe?” Malcolm answers weakly.

“No. No I don’t.” Sheila wanders slowly towards Malcolm, closing the distance between them. “I think you were trying to avoid partaking in our little morning ritual. Why would that be?”

“No Sheila, that’s not it at all. I promise.”

“I think I need a second opinion. Wait here while I go and find your much smarter husband. I know he will tell me the truth.”

Malcolm doesn’t know how much Sheila has managed to find out, so he errs on the side of caution. “Sure thing.”

The woman eyes Malcolm off for a moment before making a beeline for the patient rooms. With no chairs to speak of in the room Malcolm perches on the disused desk, running through various responses for when Sheila returns. The profiler can only hope that Gil keeps his word from this morning.

Malcolm begins to pace across the room as it becomes increasingly obvious that Sheila is taking a lot longer than it should have to fetch Gil for their conversation. Just as Malcolm decides to leave the room and check things out for himself Sheila breezes back into the room with Gil in tow.

“Thank you for waiting Michael, we just had to take a little detour. Phil here was *parched*.”

Malcolm casts his eyes down to Gil’s hand and the mug clasped warmly in his hand. Gil smiles warmly in Sheila’s direction before apologising silently to Malcolm.

“No problem Sheila. Did you ask Phil about our alarm?” Malcolm glances at Gil, hoping he gets his drift.

“Oh we already did that sweetie. It seems you’ve had quite the morning with sleeping through your alarm *and* the flat tire.”

Malcolm’s face freezes as his stomach drops. “Oh, did I forget to mention that too? Silly me.”

“Oh Malcolm, I think we can do away with the pretences, don’t you?” Sheila’s hand cups Gil’s cheek affectionately as he stands placidly, drinking his coffee.

Malcolm doesn’t react to Sheila’s use of his real name, but inside his heart is racing. If she’s giving up the charade of Michael Harris then she knows he’s no longer under their control. They’re all in danger. The profiler’s first thought is to get Gil away from her as quickly as possible.

“Phil, you wanna join me?” Malcolm extends a hand towards his husband.

Gil glances to Sheila for approval which she grants with an amused nod. Gil takes Malcolm’s hand with his free one and smiles in a way that shatters Malcolm’s heart into a thousand pieces.

Their love is real. Malcolm is sure of it.

Malcolm knock's Gil's hand holding the coffee and watches the ceramic tumble out of his hand and onto the floor, stopping any chance of Gil ingesting more of the dangerous drug.

"Malcolm, was that really necessary?" Sheila admonishes.

"Yes, it was. I don't want you poisoning his mind anymore."

"Poisoning is a very harsh word, don't you think? I like to think of it as a little encouragement."

"What are you saying, Sheila? Is Michael right? Is this all fake?" Gil looks uncertainly between Malcolm and Sheila as they talk.

Sheila laughs off the accusation. "Nonsense my dear Phil. This is where you belong! Your husband though, hasn't quite made the cut."

"Then let me leave. What I don't understand is why you're doing this in the first place. Why bring all of us here? Why isn't Dani here?"

"I don't know who you're referring to dear. As to why we brought you here, I must admit we have been watching you for quite some time. The three of you visited our offices in relation to a patient and our executives were fascinated by your team dynamic. There was so much affection, though clearly buried. We just helped it surface, is all."

"So you abducted us to play house for a few weeks?"

"Ah, no, not entirely. We wanted to test how far we can stretch that love. And I must say, you've all performed admirably. You did everything that was asked of you. Until your burn. You were different after that incident."

"I was already remembering my real life." Malcolm shot back. "Your drug isn't as powerful as you think it is."

"Hmm....that is concerning. None of our other subjects have managed to shake the effects of their programming off so quickly."

"What can I say, I like to defy expectations." Malcolm replies sourly.

"Phil, be a doll and keep Michael here for me, I need to make a call." Gil's grip on Malcolm's hand becomes vice-like instantly as Sheila steps out of the room and shuts the door behind her.

Malcolm places his bandaged hand on Gil's arm and offers a reassuring smile. "You don't need to hold on so tight, darling. I won't leave you." The older man scrutinises Malcolm for a moment before relaxing his grip.

Glancing around the room and finding nothing to help his situation Malcolm leans into Gil and recalls a favourite memory of his.

"I'm sorry for breaking your mug, I know how much you love your coffee. You always used to walk around the precinct with a fresh brew, and use it as a prop to control yourself when I said something crazy."

"I can see myself doing that, you sure do push my buttons sometimes, kid."

"I wonder if that mug is still there, it was a baseball one I think. The Mets, maybe?"

Gil scoffs. "Oh you are dreaming if you think I own a Mets mug. Yankees all the way baby."

Malcolm lifts his head to look Gil in the eyes, to see a flash of the man he knew. There's a cloudiness to his eyes, as if he's trying to recall something long forgotten. The younger man takes a chance and kisses Gil one more time before whispering, "I'll always be your city boy, Gil. I love you."

Gil gasps beside him, then his face scrunches up in pain.

"Gil. Gil. You okay?"

"My head. Oh god, what is this?"

"Thanks for waiting boys!" Sheila glides into the room, unfazed at the scene of Gil grabbing his head with his hands. "I've had a discussion with management, and we've decided on a course of action. Malcolm, you were a wonderful participant in this trial, however I'm afraid your time with The Collective is almost at an end."

"And what is that supposed to mean?" Malcolm queries as he rubs Gil's back while he resurfaces from his episode.

"It means that we have been able to observe some fascinating effects of our drug on your heavily medicated body, but ultimately drug trials are about results. If our report documents evidence of diminished mind control our clients will look elsewhere."

Malcolm scoffs audibly, unable to believe what he is hearing. "What your report says is not my problem. You abducted cops because you thought you had the right to. Erased our identities. Inserted a port and drained my blood! We are human beings, not lab rats! I want to take my friends and leave. *Now.*"

"Now now, Mr Bright. I said that *your* time with us was coming to an end. Phil here is still performing optimally."

"I'm standing right here. And I'm leaving with my husband." Gil plants his feet firmly on the ground, staring down the woman they called supervisor. She dismisses Gil's show of protection with the wave of his hand.

"You'll go where I tell you, and you'll do what I tell you to. Right now I need your help, for the trial."

"Stop talking, we are leaving." Malcolm reaches out to Gil and starts to drag him out of the room.

"Phil, stop." Sheila orders. Gil's feet stick to the floor like glue, he won't walk any further. Malcolm attempts to start Gil walking again, but his feet won't budge. Gil is terrified. Keen to press his advantage, Sheila continues. "I'm afraid we have an outlier in our trial Phil. As researchers we have to deal with outliers all the time. They're easy to deal with, all we do is erase them."

Malcolm's eyes grow as wide as he realises what she is intimating. Gil is still frozen in place, and it dawns on Malcolm that he will have to leave Gil with The Collective so he can track down JT. He should leave now. But a part of him can't leave Gil like this. Afraid and heartbroken.

"Gil. You can do this. Run with me." Malcolm reassures his boss, holding on to his hand in the hopes that their connection will counteract the mind control.

"Phil isn't going anywhere Mr Bright. He'll do exactly as I say." The doc watches on with amusement.

"No. I won't believe it."

"You don't have to believe it. Let me show you. *Subjugar*."

As the woman utters a word that Malcolm has never heard before Gil's fist connects with his temple, dropping him straight on to the shiny linoleum floor. The world is turned on its axis as the man fights to keep his eyelids open, the ground feeling as fluid as an 80's waterbed beneath his chest. Malcolm moans as he attempts to raise his head, to find the face of his husband. No-his boss.

Gil kneels down next to him, a gentle hand on his back as he whispers in horror, "Malcolm, I'm so sorry. I didn't mean to, I mean I don't know-"

Malcolm may not be able to find his feet right now, but his heart flutters as he registers that Gil used his real name a second ago. It's the extra push he needs to pull his knees up under his chest and try to get himself upright. He manages to flop somewhat sluggishly up onto his knees and find himself staring straight into Gil's eyes, shining with grief and shame.

Malcolm manages a relieved smile before he clasps Gil's hand in his own. "Let's go find JT."

"Okay." Gil agrees, and slides his hands under Malcolm's elbows to help him stand.

"*Acertar*." Sheila calls out.

Gil inhales a sharp breath, and the hands supporting Malcolm morph into a death grip in an instant.

"What is it? Talk to me." Malcolm implores, searching for Gil's eyes once again. When he does, he can see a war raging behind them.

"You gotta leave, kid. I can't stop it." The death grip on his arms abates as Gil's hands curl into fists. His arms tremble with exertion as he fights whatever the magic words are compelling him to do.

“You see Malcolm, Gil’s meeting with me yesterday was a little extra programming in preparation for this moment. It’s why he can’t fight what I’m telling him to do. But it’s so pretty to watch him try.” Sheila is positively joyous while she watches Gil struggle with himself.

Malcolm has no choice but to leave him as Gil battles with his own free will, chest heaving as if he's ten miles into a marathon.

Without the strength of Gil next to him Malcolm’s limbs feel like jelly as he finds his feet. He sways and staggers as the prize of the open doorway draws ever closer. He ends up falling against the door to take a breath, gather his strength only to have his feet taken out from under him. He collapses on to his back and is horrified to discover Gil towering above him, bending down to straddle him across his abdomen.

"Gil. Please. Stop." Malcolm begs as Gil's fist is pulled back behind him, ready to deliver a knockout punch.

It halts there but for a moment, long enough for Gil to cry out through tear filled eyes, "I love you, kid." Before his fist crashes into Malcolm’s skull again, and the world is no more.

Chapter 8

Chapter Summary

The whumpy climax is finally here....

Chapter Notes

So the cancellation news was obviously a gut punch, but I plan on sticking around in this world long after the last show airs. I have stories still waiting to be written, and hope you'll stick around to read them xx

To Malcolm's surprise, he regains consciousness to a ceiling in motion. His left eye won't open all the way, but he can prise it open enough to track the rows of fluorescent lights as he is dragged beneath them.

The hands underneath his armpits are strong, holding him firmly as he is carried towards a warmer light source. He can also hear the leaves rustling on the trees outside.

The window.

Adrenaline floods Malcolm's system as he remembers whose hands are holding him, and what he has been asked to do. Fear causes him to plant his feet on the floor, alerting Gil to his return to consciousness. Malcolm's journey to the window is halted as Gil drops Malcolm on to the floor in surprise.

"Gil." Malcolm rolls over and searches for his eyes, determined to make the most of the opportunity. "You love me. You don't want to kill me. I need you to fight this." The agony written over Gil's face breaks Malcolm's heart, before sewing back together in an instant by the knowledge that his words ring true.

Malcolm knows he can bring Gil back from the brink of this drug. He uses that confidence to help the older man through this. Gil holds his head in his hands, crouching down to Malcolm's level.

It's clear the man is in pain.

"Kid, it hurts. My head is screaming."

“I know, but you can push through this. We need to get home.” Malcolm reaches out to place a hand on Gil’s thigh, the motion giving Gil something else to focus on. After a few deep breaths his not-quite-real husband lifts his head with a newfound determination.

“Home.” Gil places a hand over Malcolm’s and for the first time the profiler allows himself to believe that they can make it out of this together. His face breaks open into a wide smile, which is wiped off a second later by a blow to the back of the head. As the world swims around him once again Sheila places himself between Malcolm and Gil, syringe in hand.

“As lovely as that was to watch you still have a job to do, Phil. It appears that you will need further encouragement.” Sheila pushes against Gil’s knee and knocks him onto his ass, and while Gil attempts to regain his own balance the Collective staffer looms over him and injects the content of the syringe into Gil’s neck. The man kicks feebly as the drug floods his system, his lungs gasping for air and his voice groaning from the pain.

Sheila smirks as Gil writhes beneath him. “I’ve heard this more potent dose is a bitch to live through, but needs must. Your full cooperation is required, Phil. The Collective demands it.”

Malcolm rolls onto his hands and knees, preparing to rush the short statured woman. Another quick kick to his side is enough to disrupt Malcolm’s balance again, and he tumbles onto the floor in an inelegant heap.

Sheila stoops down to Gil and bores holes into his eyes as she issues a final command.

“Kill him. Kill Malcolm.”

Gil squeezes his eyes shut and lets loose a guttural scream before falling silent. The pain on the man’s face is erased by a mask of intense focus.

“Well, shit.” Malcolm mutters as he rights himself onto all fours once again. He manages to stagger to his feet as Gil finds his own, and Malcolm presses his advantage to rush his partner into the window, momentarily winding the man and buying him a few precious seconds to pull himself together.

“Gil, it’s me. Don’t listen to her. You can fight this.” Malcolm’s words wash over Gil, the urge to carry out his directive is too strong. Gil rolls his shoulders before charging Malcolm with a vengeance, wrapping him in a bear hug and pummeling Malcolm’s back. Pain radiates from rib after rib, making it harder to breathe. Unable to push Gil off his body with his trapped arms Malcolm aims for the only part of the body he can reach with his legs- Gil’s groin.

Malcolm’s knee connects with the soft tissue between Gil’s legs and the older man goes down like a sack of potatoes. Taking a moment to slowly draw breaths with a dull ache, Malcolm tries once again to get through to Gil as he pants on the floor.

“You’re one of the strongest people I know, Gil. We need to finish what we started and shut The Collective down. I need you to remember. Remember me. Malcolm.”

The look of loathing in Gil's eyes just about breaks Malcolm's heart. He's not getting through to him at all. As Malcolm races through the options of what to do Gil takes advantage of his lapse in concentration and rushes Malcolm again, this time aiming for his face. He connects two consecutive right hooks, causing stars to erupt in front of Malcolm's vision.

A desperate arm grab saves Malcolm's face from a third. As the two men struggle Malcolm can feel the vibrations in Gil's arm as he fights to strike his target. Malcolm searches Gil's eyes for a sign of hesitation and finds none, and he realises that he needs to stop Gil.

Malcolm swings the hand grasping Gil's arm down towards the ground, holding it at a forty five degree angle to the ground. He holds it there for a second as his brain frantically attempts to come up with another idea that won't hurt as much as this one. The intensified grunting from Gil as he strains against the awkward hold tells him there is no other choice.

"I love you, I'm so sorry." Malcolm sobs as he drives his foot into Gil's forearm.

The tell-tale snap is unmistakable.

Gil roars out of frustration and pain, and Malcolm releases Gil's arm which is now bent at an unnatural angle. The gravity of what he's just done hits him like a freight train, and the meagre contents of his stomach threaten to reveal themselves on the office floor.

Malcolm searches for a sign of the man he knows in Gil's eyes, and finds none.

They can't escape like this. Malcolm can't get through to the man he loves.

He needs to regroup. JT will be able to help, but he needs to move now before The Collective can close the net around them. The profiler staggers with the coordination of a toddler to the doorway and dares to look back one last time.

Malcolm sobs again as he calls out to Gil who is huddled on the floor, gingerly holding his broken arm. "We'll come back for you."

Malcolm turns away as Sheila claps her hands together, sounding delighted.

"Amazing. What a show you two put on for us! It's not quite over yet." She squats down to Gil and sneers at the injured man. "He never loved you. Even now he's turning his back on you. End this now."

Gil's chest heaves as the command plays over and over again in his head, pain replaced once more by determination. As Malcolm pushes off against the door frame, consumed by guilt he doesn't hear the quickening footsteps of Gil behind him. The older man crashes into his back and sends them both sprawling on to the floor, Malcolm's head bouncing off the linoleum as they go down. The fireworks return to the vision in is one good eye and the floor feels as solid as jelly beneath his body.

While he waits for his equilibrium return Malcolm's legs are forced closed and something thin yet solid is slipped around his ankles, tying them together. Before Malcolm can attempt

to shuck the rope off his legs the world slides past him, and when he lifts his head, he finds Gil dragging him back into the room with a makeshift lasso made from an extension cord.

Malcolm throws his arms out when he reaches the door jam, fingertips scrabbling for purchase on the glossy metal. His desperate attempts prove futile as his fingers only graze the potential anchor, and he draws closer and closer to where this whole saga started, the window.

“GIL. STOP.” Malcolm shouts, hoping volume will break through the compelling drugs. Gil doesn’t flinch.

Sheila saunters over towards the doorway to give Gil as much room as he can. “Marvellous. The level of determination is astounding. Let’s see whether he can finish this one handed, Malcolm.”

Gil drops the lasso for a moment as he manoeuvres himself to be level with Malcolm’s shoulders, rotating his body so that his head is facing the wall.

He’s back at square one. No legs this time though.

The older man positions himself against the plastered wall and attempts to heft Malcolm’s body onto the windowsill. Gil’s arm under his own prevents Malcolm’s hands getting anywhere near the cord around his ankles. Malcolm is almost without hope, until an out of action hand thwarts Gil’s first attempt and the profiler crashes back on to the floor.

Undeterred, Gil immediately resumes his task with the same intensity as before.

“Listen to me...this is wrong...” Malcolm pleads over Gil’s exertions. It’s no use. He may as well be speaking in Latin. With the pain in his swollen eye reaching a peak it becomes easier to close his eyes than trying to focus.

As Gil finally makes some ground there’s a dull thud that sounds from doorway followed by a shout.

“Hey! Drop him!” The booming voice of JT sounds like the clarion call of an angel.

Footsteps thump closer as JT attempts to get through to Gil. “You need to shake this off, it’s Bright man.”

Suddenly a second pair of hands grasps his chest, loosening Gil’s grip enough for Malcolm to slip under it and roll away to safety. The two men above him fight briefly before Malcolm hears a promise spoken in between the grunting.

“You’ll...thank...me...later.” JT promises, and seconds later there is a sound Malcolm can’t quite place followed by the collapse of a body next to him.

He risks a squint through his good eye and is greeted by Gil’s unconscious form. Malcolm gathers all the oxygen in the room and expels it in one huge sigh.

“He will thank me later, right? Yeah, he will.” JT reasons with himself. Once he has reconciled his actions JT kneels down and looks Malcolm square in the eye. “Sorry it took so long to get here, I couldn’t believe what I was seeing. You okay, babe?”

A part of Malcolm dully realises that JT has used his normal name *and* still called him babe after that, but now is not the time to unpack this. “I’m fine. You remember who I am?”

“I remember a lotta things. Getting your skinny ass out of trouble more times than I can count for one.”

Malcolm sighs in relief. He is no longer alone.

“They dosed Gil with something, told him to kill me. We should get out of here before Sheila’s friends show up.” Malcolm pushes himself up onto his elbows, preparing to go another round.

“Hang on there, Rocky. I got it sorted for now. I can hide her for a while, it’s not like she’s in a position to argue with her eyes shut.”

Malcolm glances over to Sheila to find her face down on the floor. The thud he heard must have been JT hitting her over the head with something.

“What about your buddies in the security office?” Malcolm wonders. The world begins to spin a little at the change in altitude.

JT gets to work on the lasso around Malcolm’s legs. “I sent them on a trespassing investigation before I came here. We should have enough time to get out of here. Do you have a plan?”

“Car. Drive.” Malcolm grits out as he tests out his protesting muscles, staggering to an upright position.

“We can do that. You grab Gil’s left side, I’ll grab his right.” JT reaches for Gil and notices for the first time his awkwardly angled wrist. “What happened here?”

Malcolm grins in reply. “Something Gil should thank me later for.”

The two men manage to prop Gil up between them and miraculously make it out of the building undetected. JT straps Gil into the back seat of the Toureg as Malcolm sinks into the passenger seat. As JT pulls away from the building and into the open streets of TOWN the profiler feels the tension he’s been carrying for days melt away.

After they reach the city limits JT feels it’s safe enough to speak again. “Where to now?”

“Towards New York. Maybe a gas station first. We need to make a call.”

Chapter 9

Chapter Notes

A huge thank you to Sabbean who helped kick start this chapter off when I had some serious writers block. She started the ball rolling on this finale, and I hope you enjoy it.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Malcolm is Michael Harris

JT is DB Harris

Gil is Phil Harris

Miraculously, they reach the parking area without someone interrupting them. Malcolm guesses no one has anticipated their grand escape. They thought they could handle it, that Gil would just push him out of the window and their sadistic experiment could continue.

That didn't happen, because JT came for him. JT saved them. There are four of standard issued collective cars parked in the garage, and two other ones on the side.

JT looks at him, and grunts under Gil's weight. "Which one?"

Malcolm considers their options. The collective cars are most certainly all chipped and tracked. It won't be smart to use any of them. One car is brand new, and he's sure it has a 'find my car' option so it's ruled out as well. This leaves the one car, a 2010 Ford Fusion. This one will do.

Underneath the fear of getting caught and the urgency of the situation, Malcolm feels a sick feeling of satisfaction as they break the glass and steal the car. JT helps Gil's unconscious body in the back seat and takes to the driver's seat to wire the car. Malcolm fastens Gil's seatbelt and tries to keep his broken arm safe.

They both work silently and in harmony, like they always have. Whether it was in the real world or the fake one, there was always a sense of kinship between them. It warms Malcolm's heart. They might have gotten off on the wrong foot when they first met, but now things have changed. Now they're a team.

As the car roars to life Malcolm hurries into the passenger seat and soon they find themselves crossing the gate and leaving.

Malcolm sucks in a harsh breath as they do. He still can't believe they actually did this. Next to him, JT's tense face relaxes a bit, and into the setting sun they go. The car rolls on in silence. The engine's whirring and the sound of wheels on asphalt is the only sounds that fill the car.

Malcolm checks behind them for what might be the twentieth time since they started their journey 15 minutes ago. There is nothing. Just like all the other times. It doesn't mean he can relax, though.

JT's hand rests on his and he takes his eyes off the road for a second to look at Malcolm. JT offers him a tight smile. "Don't worry, Bright. We made it. No one's following us."

JT's hand grounds him, give him the support he's been accustomed to in their time as husbands. He can't help the smile that spreads across his face, or the warmth that creep up through him. Malcolm nods slowly. He can't quite believe that they're safe yet, but with JT and Gil by his side, he feels like it'll be ok.

On the thought of Gil, Malcolm looks back at the unconscious man. He feels a new wave of guilt engulfs him as he sees Gil's sleeping face wincing in pain. Malcolm raises a hand to his temples and rubs at them. Gil might have hurt him too, but he was drugged. Malcolm hurt him while fully in his right mind. He can never forgive himself for doing it, even if it was in self defence.

"I can see your gears turning," JT says. "We might not be married but it feels like I know you well enough to know what you're thinking about. It's not your fault. You were trying to save yourself."

"Doesn't make it feel any better," Malcolm mutters. "He's in pain because of me."

"He's alive and out because of you," JT corrects.

Malcolm doesn't say anything, just stares at his hands.

JT sighs and continues. "Listen, man. Ezr—umm, Gil would understand why you did it. They would have probably killed us after they were done with their little experiment. You saved us, Bright." When Malcolm says nothing, he repeats, sparing him another side eye glance. "You hear me?"

"Yeah. Yeah," Malcolm says, and leans his head back into the seat.

JT's hand tenses on the steering wheel. "With the cash we have, we can get a burner and make a phone call to ... Uh"

"Dani." Malcolm finishes for him. "Dani Powell. And yes, she would be worried sick about us. We should also be able to get some supplies to patch Gil's arm up."

"Mhmmm," JT hums in approval, and the car goes silent again. The atmosphere in the car feels becomes instantly lighter with a plan vocalised and fears laid to rest.

About fifteen minutes passes before Malcolm's eye that isn't swollen begins to shut. The gentle hum from the engine helps lull the man towards sleep. Before he can finish his descent into unconsciousness a groan from JT in the driver's seat startles him awake.

"What is it, JT?"

"My head, all these memories, it feels like my brain is about to bust open."

"You wanna pull over?"

"Yeah, I think I need to, unless you wanna take the wheel."

"I have half an eye to see through, we're pulling over." As the car crests over a hill JT mumbles gratification to a deity and rides the momentum down the hill. Malcolm focuses his good eye out the window and can just make out the bright neon sign of a gas station. Someone is looking out for them today.

They park up a distance from the blinding illumination of the gas station and JT heads in to buy the supplies they need. As JT shops, Malcolm gets out to stretch his limbs. He gazes back at Gil sleeping in the backseat who's been moaning a bit the last five minutes, Malcolm guesses he'll be up soon. He worries how Gil will feel when he sees Malcolm. Would he remember what happened? Would he hate him for what he did?

He doesn't have much time to wonder because JT re-joins him a few moments later. Without waiting to inspect the fruits of his labor Malcolm jumps in with his most immediate concern. "Gil's starting to wake up, I think we need to wrap his arm so he doesn't hurt himself. Until we can get him looked at."

"You're lucky I've had experience with field trauma, then." JT hands Malcolm a plastic bag with the medical supplies while opening a box to activate the burner. While JT uses his perfect eyesight to good use Malcolm fumbles through the bandages and iodine and a picnic blanket searching for a sling kit.

"What's the blanket for? It's pitch black outside."

"We need a sling, and this is a gas station not a pharmacy. I got the only thing in the store big enough to make a sling. You wanna walk in there and take a look yourself?"

"No, No, it's fine. I trust you. Help me with this then."

In the shadows of the gas station Malcolm throws the door open to join Gil in the back seat while JT makes quick work of fashioning a sling out of the tartan material. Malcolm turns the interior light on to maximise the light they can work with, and while he waits the profiler can't help but reach out to Gil and let him know he's not alone. Unsure of what will hurt Gil Malcolm lifts a hand to his face and rubs his thumb across his cheek. The older man winces in pain and shifts impatiently, rising further from unconsciousness.

"We're running out of time, JT. You ready?"

"Yeah, let's do this. I'll push him forward, you hold his arm to his chest, okay?"

“Got it.”

They work smoothly together, Malcolm whispering sweet nothings in Gil’s ear as he whimpers with every bump to his injured arm. JT wraps the makeshift sling with a remembered efficiency and within a minute Gil is resting on the seat, his face losing the tension straining it when their hands release him back into the solid cushions. They ease out of the back seat and resituate themselves in the front of the car.

Job done, JT extracts the phone from his pocket and rotates it through his fingers nervously. “Sooo, do I make the call?” He asks reluctantly. When Malcolm shoots him a puzzled look he explains. “I don’t remember everything yet, my badge... other things and ... you know...”

JT trails off and Malcolm realizes how much harder it must be for him. He must be struggling to reconcile how he feels and the things he half remembers. A pregnant wife he forgot who’s waiting for him at home. He can’t imagine how it feels. The man has followed him with a half scrambled and confused mind and still has total trust in him. Malcolm doesn’t want to let JT down now.

“We can do it together,” Malcolm encourages and JT nods in affirmation.

Malcolm silently dials the number and places the call. The line ringing is so loud in the silence of the night it’s actually scarier that it is. On the third ring, the line connects.

“Detective Powell,” a tired and dearly familiar voice greets them through the phone.

“Dani!” Malcolm says and it comes out as a choked sob.

“Oh my God! Bright!? Hey, Bright is that you?” Dani says frantically. “Where are you? Are you safe? Are JT and Gil with you? Are you hurt? What happened?” She’s firing question after question and the way she’s grappling for answers makes Malcolm realize with a sinking feeling that they’ve been gone for quite some time.

He swallows the lump in his throat and chokes out a reply through a smile. “It’s me. JT and Gil are with me, we’re okay.”

“Where are you guys?”

“We...don’t know yet. We’re still figuring that out.”

“What *can* you tell me?”

“We were programmed by The Collective, a group we interviewed as part of the Roderiguez investigation. We’ve been living together for the last two weeks. JT and I are only just starting to regain our memories.” The line goes silent, and Malcolm can hear Dani turning over what he just said through the phone.

JT leans in to assist. “He’s telling you the truth, Dani. We don’t remember how we got here, but DB Harris had a great job in security the last ten days.”

“DB Harris?”

“That’s the name I went by, and I didn’t pick it. We’re gonna try and find a hospital, if we send you the details can you call ahead and let them know we’re coming?”

“Sure, but why do you need a hospital?”

“We got out of The Collective, but Gil and Malcolm didn’t get out unscathed.”

“Oh my god what happened?”

A loud groan from the backseat prevents JT and Malcolm from replying. Gil’s eyelids are fluttering open, and there’s no way he gets through the next few minutes without their help.

“We gotta go Dani, just hang tight and I’ll call you back in a few.”

“No wait, you didn’t!-“ JT doesn’t wait for the rest of the question before ending the call.

Malcolm reaches through the centre of the car to place a hand on Gil’s knee, his voice low and calm. “Gil, are you with us?”

Gil’s eyes shift between unfocused and squinted against the pain rippling through his body, it’s another minute before he can take in his surroundings and the nervous faces of his faux husbands in the front seats.

“Bright? DB? No. That’s not right. What happened?” Gil groans as he tests his limbs, gasping in surprise when he attempts to move his immobilised arm.

JT and Malcolm share a worried glance between them. Both are concerned that Gil called JT by his implanted name, not his real one. He may not have been able to fully shake off the effects of the drug yet.

Time would tell.

JT decided the best thing to do was tell Gil the truth. “You were injected with something that forced you to hurt Malcolm. We had to stop you.”

Gil squares his gaze on Malcolm and takes in his bloodied and swollen face before his jaw falls open in abject horror. “*I did that to you?!*”

Malcolm smiles reassuringly before nodding to Gil’s arm. “To be fair, you didn’t get off scot free either.”

The words glide over Gil unheard as he rakes a hand through his hair, eyes shifting wildly as he takes stock of his aches and pains. It all becomes too much, and his eyes scrunch shut and he holds his head on one side.

“It’s like there’s two of me inside my head, and I can’t tell which one is real.”

Malcolm makes a split-second decision to join Gil in the backseat. The younger man lifts Gil’s chin and waits until the man meets his eyes. “It’s okay if things feel confusing right now. If you feel like Phil or Gil, just know that we are both here for you.”

“And...that you don’t feel murderous towards Malcolm anymore.” JT adds.

“God no, I could never hurt you Michael.”

Malcolm’s heart tugs a little at the use of his old name, but Gil needs to feel safe right now. His fingers slide to the right side of Gil’s head and pulls the man into a soft kiss. The profiler pours all the love he can into the simple touch, a part of him melancholy in the knowledge that this could be their last ever kiss together. Malcolm can feel the older man melt into his touch, a remnant of the life Phil, Michael and DB built together. His heart aches at the prospect of losing this in a matter of hours. When they pull apart Malcolm plasters a small smile on his face, ready to be the encouraging partner Gil needs.

“We’ve called for help at home, but you’re going to need a hospital to look at that arm. I say it’s time to get moving, don’t you?”

“I can’t believe I did that to your face. I’ve never hit anyone like that in my life.” Gil is still staring past them, the memory vivid and raw.

“Well boss, they did have to dose you up like a horse to get you to listen. You didn’t make it easy.” JT replies softly.

Malcolm feels a surge of love for the gruff detective, and before he can think too deeply about it he leans over and kisses his former husband tenderly. “Thank you,” he whispers. JT hovers uncertainly after they break apart, his breath shaky while a moan slips out of his throat. His hands meet Malcolm’s on instinct, and both anchor themselves to each other for a moment.

JT huffs to himself, breaking the spell between the two of them. “How about we find out where the hell we are and find a ticket home?”

Malcolm gazes back at Gil who still looks haunted by his memories. He’s not getting any better the longer they sit here, it’s time to move.

“Yeah, lets go home.”

FOUR WEEKS LATER

The shirt’s collar felt tight against Malcolm’s throat as he walked up the steps to the 16th precinct. It was his first day being called back into the precinct to consult on a case after his abduction by The Collective, and he was feeling nervous.

He didn’t know how much people in the precinct knew about their kidnapping, or what had happened in the aftermath. None of the men had managed to recover memories of being abducted, and without any corroborating testimony or ideas of a location there simply wasn’t enough evidence to attempt an investigation against The Collective. Most of their injuries had been self-inflicted between them, and the port wound just looked like another one of Malcolm’s many bruises from his fight with Gil. They couldn’t prove a thing.

They'd all handled the disappointment in different ways. JT rolled his shoulders and got back to the job at hand, Gil buried himself in cases and Malcolm had attempted to dig into the nefarious company that changed their lives. Without the resources of the NYPD his search had gone nowhere, so as he drew in a fortifying breath he tried to let it go and focus on why he'd been called. To profile.

He had been cleared by the NYPD psychologists two weeks previous, as he had stopped his influence against the mind control drug a few days earlier than JT and Gil. Gil had the worst time out of the three of them, being injected with a stronger dose just before they left had caused significant side effects and required a longer stay in the hospital, and Malcolm had stayed with him as much as he was able to.

Gil remained confused for a week after they escaped, and Malcolm and JT's presence had been calming to him. They would talk together, gently pulling Gil Arroyo out into the sunlight after being hidden by Phil Harris for so long. But the more Gil Arroyo started to return the more awkward things became between them. They hadn't discussed how they had lived their lives in Juno, and when they returned JT needed to return to Tally. Unsure if their feelings were a result of the planted memories the men drifted apart when Gil was discharged, unable to deal with the tension between them any longer.

Malcolm couldn't bring himself to ask how they felt about him for fear of losing them all together. The intimacy he felt for those few weeks was unlike anything he has ever experienced in his life, and the idea that he could lose it forever was simply too much to contemplate.

With each step bringing him closer to finding out his fate Malcolm's pace slows to a complete stop. Panic bubbles in his chest, and he considers turning around and trying again another day.

"You comin' in or what, Bright?" Dani is trailing behind him on the steps, a bagel in one hand and a coffee in the other.

The chance to back out has evaporated. "Uh, yah Dani, just working myself up to come in."

"Aw, you don't need a work up, you practically own the place. Let's go." Dani nudges his shoulder on her way past him, and he has no choice but to follow. The bustle of the bullpen is the same as ever, and yet different. Malcolm can't help but feel as though he is watching a movie through Michael's eyes, the grittiness of the station still surreal when compared with the bright colours of his house in Juno. He can see Gil and JT already at work in the conference room, deep in conversation focusing on the case board, their body language relaxed.

Malcolm knew it wouldn't stay that way the moment he entered the room.

The second he walked in wearing his dark grey suit of armour both men straightened up and stared openly at Malcolm. Gil cleared his throat awkwardly and nobody moved.

"Uh, I think I'm gonna give you guys a minute and finish this at my desk. Call me when you're ready." Dani slinks back to her desk as quietly as possible.

Malcolm turned and closed the door to the room, one hundred percent confident that he didn't want the sound of his imminent rejection heard by anyone else in the precinct. He breathes in deeply to steel himself for the bad news before turning around to face his former lovers.

"Hi."

There were so many other words to say, yet none would form. Neither Gil nor JT can think of what to say either, so they stand in silence for a minute.

"I just want to say, that I don't expect anything to change. You have your lives, I have mine. We can just put it all behind us."

Gil crosses his arms in a defensive gesture. "Is that really what you want?"

Malcolm scrubs his face out of frustration, just wanting it to be over already. "No. Those weeks with you both were some of the happiest of my life. And not just because I couldn't remember my father was a serial killer."

"So why do you want to put it all behind you?" JT asks as he leans against the table. His eyes hint to a feeling of longing, but Malcolm is sure that he's imagining it.

"Because you're better off without me. Michael didn't have the baggage that I do. I don't want to be a burden."

JT pushes off the table with his fingers, his voice soft. "You were never a burden. You might have been a pain in the ass, but you were never a burden."

JT and Gil exchange a glance before the older man asks slowly, "What if we didn't want to put it all behind us?"

Malcolm's heart skips a beat. "What do you mean?"

"I mean, we loved sharing our lives with you. What if we didn't want to go back to the way things were before?"

"But...you remember who I am, right? Malcolm-Loose canon, unstable, fired from the FBI-Bright?"

JT shrugs in dismissal. "Sure, but you can't deny what we had was real."

"But you have Tally, and the baby."

"I do, but that doesn't mean I can't be here for you both. I've talked this out with Tally, she understands. This is your choice though."

Not quite believing what he is hearing Malcolm turns his attention to the Lieutenant. "What about you, Gil?"

Gil's face is lined with sadness as he replies, "I miss what we had. I miss how I felt with you, Malcolm. Now are you done looking for reasons to stop us, or can we get this show on the road?"

"You think I want to stop you?! Gil, I..." Malcolm's face crumples, tears of relief spring into his eyes and he shuffles around the desk to wrap Gil in a hug. Gil's strong arms squeeze him back and they stand still for a moment frozen in time.

What started as a cruel and twisted experiment with Phil and Michael Harris has blossomed into something very real between Gil Arroyo and Malcolm Bright.

"Ahem, is this an exclusive hug, or can I join in too?" JT rumbles over their shoulders.

"Get your ass in here, JT." Gil orders, and the three of them reconnect for the first time since their escape. When they pull away Malcolm lifts his chin and kisses both Gil and JT gently, perfectly content within the moment.

Although the methods that brought them together wasn't something they ever would have agreed to, the change of trajectory in all of their lives is something Malcolm never saw coming. The weight of his partners on either side Malcolm and the musky scent that fills his lungs bring a level of peace to the profiler that he hasn't felt in weeks. His mind is firing at all the possibilities that lie ahead of them, but for now Malcolm will settle for never letting Gil out of his sight again.

JT breaks the scene with a bemused rumble. "Uh, I know it's been a while Bright, but we're gonna need to close the blinds if this goes on any longer, if you know what I mean."

"We get to finish this later, right?" Malcolm looks up at Gil under thick eyelashes, and the older man smirks at his partner.

"Oh it's happening. Your place. Tonight. JT's got the all clear."

Malcolm's feet nearly leave the ground when it's clear that the men already want to cement their relationship, to the point that they made plans to make it happen.

"God yes. Absolutely." Malcolm wraps his arms around JT and Gil one final time before he steps away. Gil clears his throat then nods back to the case board.

"So how about we give you the run down on our latest vic?"

"Sounds great." Malcolm smiles, and within minutes the trio have transformed back into their roles as Major Crime investigators (and consultant). Dani wanders in five minutes later with an update on the lead she is working on, and as his team works the case Malcolm breathes out a silent sigh of relief. He walked into the precinct today like a man walking to the gallows, ready for the floor beneath him to disappear on final time. Instead the men he loves decided that he, Malcolm Bright, is worthy enough to fight for.

Their abduction might just end up precipitating the best thing he has ever known in his messy, complicated life. And there's no way he's letting that go.

Chapter End Notes

And that's all she wrote folks! If you've made it this far I sincerely thank you for supporting this story, it's one I'm immensely proud of.

I will still be writing for the fandom but am still working on some larger fics so updates might be a bit sporadic in the coming weeks. You can find me on twitter attempting to #SaveProdigalSon and hanging on the trash server while we wait for a hopeful S3 announcement.

In the meantime please look after yourselves :hugs:

End Notes

As always if you want to chat and get excited about season 2 and are 18+ you can find me on the [PSon Trash](#) server.

Please [drop by the Archive and comment](#) to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!