

Two Different Worlds

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by [katikat](#)

Summary

Mac gets a migraine. Riley and Bozer freak out a little. Jack handles it like a pro. Riley's POV. (Unbeta'd)

Notes

Written at the request of a Tumblr friend. I'm no army person. I'm no doctor. English is my 3rd language. I tried to dig up relevant info, but... well. So, once again, any mistakes? Artistic licence! XP

They haven't slept in 48 hours. Not really, quick naps here and there don't count. 48 hours during which they played a game of tag with a madman across the city, disarming his bombs and deadly traps for the lunatic's sick amusement. Until Jack finally shot the creep.

That was five hours ago. And no, they weren't allowed to go home and finally rest then. No, because suddenly, every agency to ever shorten its name wanted to debrief them, asking the same questions over and over again, making it seem as if what happened was somehow *their* fault. Until Matty put her foot down and told those bureaucrats to kiss her... *well*. And then she sent her people home.

48 hours, that's how long they've been on their feet and now they aren't simply *tired*, they're *drained* - and yet somehow *wired*, too. Just too damn exhausted to sleep. And so they all gather at Mac's to unwind. The place is big enough for all of them to crash comfortably, if need be. And the peace and quiet over there's just heavenly.

They sit all together on Mac's back porch, watching the sun rise over the city, and they sip beer, Mac and Jack and Riley and Bozer.

And that's when it happens.

All of a sudden, Mac gets up, strangely *slowly*, and sets his half-empty beer bottle down - the thing wobbles and almost tips over, which makes Riley raise her eyebrows. Mac's never clumsy, not even dead tired.

She smiles a little and asks him, amusement thick in her voice, "You okay?"

He just grunts and heads for the house. His posture seems wooden, his steps shuffling and he almost trips, walking down the stairs. If Riley didn't know better, she would think Mac's drunk.

She looks at Bozer who looks back at her with his eyebrows lifted just as high. And she expects to find the same expression on Jack's face. But when she turns to him, he's already getting up, too, much quicker than Mac, and he looks... *worried*?

"Mac?" he calls softly after their friend and follows him into the house.

Riley and Bozer look at each other again and she opens her mouth to ask what's going on, when they hear glass shatter inside. Now alarmed, they hurry after the others inside.

They find Mac and Jack in the kitchen, standing in the middle of a small puddle of tap water, among the shards of a broken glass. Mac's leaning with his hands against the counter, head bent low, and Jack... Jack seems to be holding him up. And he's whispering something to him.

"Jack?" Bozer asks, anxious.

"Not now," Jack utters over his shoulder.

Then he turns back to Mac and asks him something, quietly. So quietly in fact, that Riley and Bozer don't catch what he's saying. And when Mac responds, apparently in affirmative, Jack carefully props him up, making him let go of the counter, and slowly but firmly starts leading him down the hallway and towards Mac's bedroom, while Mac leans against him with his eyes almost closed; he's pale as a sheet and his breath is very shallow.

Exchanging confused glances, Riley and Bozer start following them, but then Riley stops at the counter, noticing a familiar orange bottle with a white safety cap still on there. She picks it up and reads the label. Painkillers. Prescription strong.

She sets it down and quickens her steps to follow Bozer who already stopped in the open doorway of Mac's bedroom. When she catches up to him, she sees Mac lying on the bed covers while Jack's drawing the curtains close, turning the room dark.

Then she and Bozer watch as Jack disappears in the adjoining bathroom, only to come out a moment later with a wet washcloth and a strange black case. He sits down on the edge of the bed, lays the washcloth across Mac's forehead and his eyes - Riley startles when she hears Mac almost whimper in pain - and then Jack opens the case and pulls out... a *self-injector*.

Riley hears Bozer draw in a sharp, startled breath as Jack assembles the thing with quick, practiced moves, and unbuttoning Mac's cuff, he pulls up his sleeve. He then proceeds to clean a patch of skin on Mac's upper arm and to press the injector against it. Once he pushes the button on the thing, he waits for a few seconds, letting the drug enter Mac's system.

It seems to take forever for Mac to relax but finally he does. He goes limp and his hands, that he fisted into the bed cover, open. Jack then pulls down Mac's sleeve and pats him on the arm, whispering something. Mac gives him a mumbled response.

When Jack cleans everything away, he notices them staring and pauses. Then he nods at them to go and they obey, still rather rattled by what they just saw.

Ten minutes later, Jack joins them on the porch again. "He's asleep," he tells them as he sits back down in his chair and takes a gulp from the bottle he set down before.

"What was *that*?" Bozer asks, apprehensive.

"*That* was a migraine attack, Boze," Jack explains calmly.

"I didn't know Mac got those," Bozer tells him, sounding a little accusatory. Another thing they forgot to tell him apparently. But then, Riley didn't know either.

"He doesn't get them often," Jack replies, still very calm. "Actually, almost at all these days. He started to get them back in Afghanistan. Did you know that over 30 percent of soldiers returning from Iraq suffered from them? And it only got worse since then."

He looks out across the city. "It comes with the job, man. Day in, day out, you go out there and you get shot at and you risk your life. I got a few headaches myself, believe you me, but it never got so bad that an over-the-counter pill couldn't fix that. Mac, though..."

Jack shakes his head. “Imagine disarming IEDs under heavy fire, day after day after day. For the longest time, he wasn’t affected by it. But then, when the fighting got really bad, we had days like—” He pauses and tilts his head. “Days like yesterday, actually. Days when we didn’t have time to rest or even eat, several in a row. And those finally got to him.

“The first time it happened, I thought the kid was having a stroke or something,” Jack continues, grimacing. “It was—it was actually quite terrifying. But no, it was ‘just’ a migraine. Our COs were sympathetic, sure, but good EOD people were hard to find and so, once Mac got back on his feet, they sent us out again.”

“That’s horrible,” Riley whispers and she means it.

Jack looks at her and shrugs. “That’s army. Over time, he got better at catching the symptoms before it got this bad. When he caught them early enough, the pills did their job just fine. It’s been a really long time since he had an episode this bad. I guess he forgot...”

“Why didn’t you tell me?” Bozer asks, still angry about that. “I’m his best friend, his roommate. I could’ve helped!”

Shrugging again, Jack takes a sip of his beer. “It wasn’t personal, Bozer, really. We just got used to not talking about it. The army still frowns at some things, the fact that war’s *bad* for soldiers, and not just because of bullets and bombs, being one of them.”

Riley glances towards the house. “Will he be okay?”

Jack sighs. “Yeah, give him a few hours of *undisturbed* sleep and he’ll be as good as new. And speaking of sleep” —he gets up— “it’s what we all should be doing. I’m taking the couch, okay? I’m way too buzzed to risk driving home. Besides, someone has to stand guard in case Matty the Hun storms the fortress.” He yawns. “Goodnight. Or morning. Or... *whatever*.”

Riley and Bozer stare after him, unsure of what to think, how to feel about the thing. About how calmly Jack handled it, as if it were normal to get debilitating headaches because you just spent two straight days *disarming bombs*.

“Do you sometimes get the feeling that we live in two completely different worlds, us and them?” Bozer asks quietly, eyes still on the doorway leading inside the house.

Riley drinks the last of her beer and replies, “Every day, Boze. *Every day*.”

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