

A Window In Time

Part I
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Fireman Roy DeSoto withdrew from the tendrils of unconsciousness and became slowly, foggily aware of himself.

Someone was caressing his face, his hair.

He was lying prone on...wait. Draped over something.... No. Someone. For one disoriented second, he feared he'd fallen asleep on his wife, Joanne...

But...no, that didn't seem right.

Didn't feel right.

He didn't remember being home. Even the...sounds were different. Not of home. Or even the station...

Couldn't remember...

Scents...smoky, sweaty – masculine, musky. Industrial. Mildewy...

Where am I?

The pain entered in. His head... God! His head...something was squeezing his head into the size of a golf ball and slicing it into pieces.

He wanted to open his eyes...too much effort...

A hand at the back of his neck. A voice whispering. A kiss on the side of his head.

He shifted slightly. Felt something on his back...his oxygen tank. His oxygen tank?

"Roy?"

Johnny. Johnny? Johnny... "Johnny?" his voice came out like a cracking squeak.

"I'm right here, Roy."

Pause. "What d'you kiss me for?"

The caressing hand dropped onto his shoulder. "What?"

"What d'you you kiss me for?"

Pause. "Hank kissed you before?"

Roy's body sagged.

"What did I kiss you for?"

He nodded against his chest. Nausea gripped his stomach.

"Oh. I was just apologizing. To Joanne and the kids."

"For what?"

"For getting you into this mess." The hand lifted off of him. "You weren't offended, were you?"

Frown. "No. Course not. Just curious." Pause. "For a moment, I thought you were my wife. I almost kissed you back."

Roy felt Johnny's chest move as he chuckled. "Well, you'd-a been a little disappointed, there."

"Oh, I don't know. Never a bad thing to see a friendly face..."

A hand settled on Roy's side. "Roy? Roy..? I need you to stay awake, alright? You listenin' to me? Don't you fall asleep on me, again." No answer. Johnny chuckled mirthlessly, "Yeah, well, I guess you don't really have much choice."

Banging. Loud. Very loud. Metallic banging. Echoing. "Hello?" More banging. "Cap? Marco? Chet?" Pause. A half-hearted bang. "Shit!"

"Johnny?"

"Roy?" A hand against the back of his neck again.

"Where are we?"

"Minute I have a clue, I'll let you know." More banging. "Cap?"

Roy tried to raise his head and felt himself spinning through space. Johnny laid a hand on his side. "Hey, hey, what're you doing?"

DeSoto settled back down. The room was still spinning. Or was it him? "Johnny...what happened?"

"You don't remember?"

"Remember what?"

"We were checking the second floor of the plant for one of the foremen. Coupla explosions went off. I pushed you into an open doorway to get you out of the blast. At least I thought it was a doorway. I followed you in and we took a nice long ride down into...wherever it is we are. You ended up with a concussion."

"I kinda guessed that."

"Problem is, I don't know where the hell the HT is. And no one knows we're down here." Bang. "Cap?" Pause. "It's no use! I've been trying for...I don't know how long. I can't even tell if anyone's even in this part of the complex."

"They'll find us..."

"Oh, I have no doubt they will. Eventually. But you need to get to a hospital. I just wish I knew how long it's been. I mean, I don't even hear the radios. Where the hell is everybody?" Pause. "Roy?" Shake. "Roy? Dammit..."

A very caring hand caressed his forehead, his shoulder, his side. He could hear his partner's heartbeat; feel the light rise and fall of his partner's chest as he breathed. A little labored.

Paramedic Roy DeSoto had worked with and watched his partner, John Gage, for several years, now. Watched his partner help innumerable people with talent and skill. And while their personalities were quite different, he was pleasantly amazed and surprised that they had learned to work in sync so quickly. They simply did what had to be done, working in concert with nary an argument or complaint about who did what. A well-oiled, two-person machine. Oh, he could be abrasive at times, especially when people were hysterical and he needed them to calm down. But the one thing Roy had never noticed before about his partner – had no reason to, really – was how incredibly gentle Johnny could be. He chuckled to himself, thinking of all the nurses at Rampart who'd turned down his advances. They really didn't know what they were missing.

A hand at his temple. "Roy? You awake? I felt you move."

"I'm here, Johnny. What'd I miss?"

"Oh, well, you know, the whole shebang. They found us, did a spectacular helicopter rescue, but, of course, I had to talk Chet through all the medical procedures, and naturally, due to my expertise he did a fantastic job and now we're on our way to Rampart."

"So not much, then."

"What? You didn't like my story?"

"I liked it fine. It's the believing it I'm having a hard time with."

"Well, hmph. I thought it'd be a lot more fun than being stuck in this...tank."

"Johnny?"

"Hm?"

"Why'm I lying on top of you?"

"Move your fingers."

"What? Why?"

"Just do it."

He wiggled the fingers on his left hand. And felt water, icy cold; heard it swishing.

"There's gotta be a good four or five inches in this...silo. By the time I got to you, you'd been face down in it for several minutes. Figured you'd taken water in already and I certainly wasn't about to lay you down in it. You wouldn't want to develop pneumonia of top of that concussion, now would you?"

"Oh, so it's ok if you do?" Roy's nose tickled. He gingerly raised his left hand and wiped his nose with the back of his hand. His nose was running. Oh no...

"I don't have a concussion. 'Sides, you're the one with the kids."

"Suddenly, I like this situation a lot less than before."

"You're tellin' me." Pause. "Roy...I don't know how long we've been here or how much longer it's gonna be." Pause. "Roy? Roy, now stay with me...Roy? Dammit!" Banging. "Cap? Marco?"

The foundation Roy was lying on seemed to be shaking. No. Not shaking. Shivering.

Alarmed, Roy fought for consciousness. "Johnny?"

"...Yeah, Roy?"

"You're shivering."

"S-Sorry. Can't h-help it."

"It wasn't a complaint." Roy patted Johnny's shoulder and struggled desperately to open his eyes. He worked his left hand to his eyes, with some difficulty, and rubbed. Finally, he blinked his eyes open and squinted, peering around him.

A large, metallic, empty, circular space filled his vision. Their masks, helmets and an oxygen tank, lying in the water nearby, were their only companions. Determined to get his partner out of the water, Roy gathered all his strength and started to lift himself up. His right arm was draped over Johnny's left shoulder and as he moved, Johnny cried out.

Roy stopped. "Johnny, what is it?"

"Roy, what're you doin'?"

"Trying to get up."

"Roy, don't, just—"

"Just what?"

"Just...stay still."

"Johnny, we need to find a—"

"Look, I know what we need. But I don't want you moving around. I think you may have a skull fracture!"

"I know. At this point, I'll take the risk. We need to get you out of this water."

"Then you, of all people, should know that someone with a skull fracture shouldn't be moving around!"

"And you, of all people, should know what'll happen if you stay in this water much longer."

"Don't be an idiot, Roy!"

"C'mon, Johnny, it's time we got outta here. And we can't do that with me lying on top of you."

"Dammit, Roy—!" Johnny scolded through gritted teeth.

Amidst Johnny's continued protests, the older firefighter ignored his head's insistence that a steel vise was squeezing his brains out while he careened madly through space, and awkwardly rose up and tumbled off of his partner, plunking into the water.

"Roy!" Johnny called out, reaching a hand out to grab him.

The disturbed water crashed in waves against the prone paramedic and the walls of their enclosure. Gage turned and raised his head, putting up an arm to ward off the water coming at his face.

Grimacing, Roy looked up and around him. The holding tank was nearly 25 ft. high with two rows of rungs running the height of the walls leading to openings at the top of the rungs.

Roy tried to raise himself out of the muck, nearly falling backward from the SCBA tank. But as he got up to his knees the pain was too much. Sinking into himself, he held his head, moaning with every breath.

"Roy?"

He blinked, fighting to breathe deeply to keep the nausea at bay. Barely succeeding, he looked over at his partner and gestured towards the rungs, "Johnny, you think you can..." and his heart sank as he

noticed Johnny's prone form for the first time. Not wishing to slosh the water too much, Roy slowly sidled over to the younger paramedic and laid a hand on Johnny's forehead, water trickling into his hair. His other hand remained poised in the air, uncertain of where to land. "Ah , Johnny..."

Rivulets of dried blood oozed from a deep gash on the left side of Gage's head, covering half his face, looking like ineptly applied war paint.

"You hurt anywhere else?"

"My left shoulder is dislocated. And my right ankle is either broken or sprained.

Shocked hazel eyes met the unwavering gaze of browns. Shock morphed into irritation. "Why didn't you say something?"

"What was there to say? You were in and out of consciousness, anyway," he needed, a smile tugging at the corners of his mouth. "Besides...I was worried enough for both of us."

Roy looked his partner up and down and sighed heavily. "John Roderick Gage, how the hell d'you manage...?" As DeSoto shook his head in disbelief, the nausea intensified and jammed a knife into his head. "God...!" he gasped. His hand plunged into the water to brace himself as he doubled over, a hand over his face. He could feel his senses fading as he panted from the searing pain. "Johnny..." Roy's hand was slipping and he started to fall forward.

In a flash, Johnny grabbed his fainting partner with one hand and guided him onto his body and away from the water, holding him protectively. He let out a frustrated yell, banging the walls again. "MARCO! CAP? CHET? SOMEBODY! ANYBODY! WE NEED HELP DOWN HERE!"

(silence for what seemed like hours)

Shaking. "Roy?" Pause. Banging. "Yeah! We're down here!"

Sloshing. A lot of sloshing. Voices. Echoing. Water lapping over his feet, his legs. God, he felt sick...

"DeSoto? Roy? We're gonna turn you over, alright?" A different voice. Familiar. But not Johnny.

Roy felt hands on him and then slowly, carefully, they were turning him over onto his back; Johnny's hand remaining protectively on him. But the movement made the world turn one way while his head went another. He clenched his eyes shut to stop the dizziness. Felt movement close to his face.

"Harry, positive on rhinorrhea. Negative on the otorrhea."

"Got it."

An oxygen mask was placed on him. Felt a hand on his chest, a BP cuff on his arm, a stethoscope diaphragm over his heart. Light in his eyes, searing his brain. That did it. His stomach lurched and he struggled to fight the intense nausea threatening to turn him inside out. He started shaking.

They relayed the vitals up top. Roy could feel a pressure weighing his body down.

"BP's dropping, Mitch."

"We gotta go. Now."

A needle prick on his arm. Splashing noises. Hands on him again. Lifting him. A metal cage surrounded him. His whole body was rising up. Leaving his stomach behind. He couldn't fight it anymore. He groaned, whipped off the oxygen mask and raised his head.

"Stop! Bag!"

The cage stopped moving. Strong hands lifted one side of the stoke so that he tilted over to one side. Roy's body convulsed as the nausea won out, a strong hand holding his head.

"Roy?" Johnny's worried cry.

His body convulsed several times and he coughed after each episode, setting off a thousand blacksmiths in his head.

"Is he supposed to be doing that?" A familiar voice...Chet!

"It could be shock or a reaction to the skull fracture." Pause. "DeSoto...you alright?"

Roy peered through slitted eyes at Squad 29's Jeff Mitchell, a strapping young dark-haired paramedic with serious eyes and the kindest smile. Frowning against the excruciating pain, Roy could only whimper pathetically. Looking past his counterpart, Roy spotted his partner, still lying in the water. Chet was kneeling behind him, cradling his head on his thighs. Mitchell's partner, Harrison Yoder, was next to him with the BP cuff.

Marco suddenly appeared at his side. "Man, am I glad to see you," Marco flashed that bright smile as he helped to right the stoke and double-check the lifelines.

"Marco..." was all the senior paramedic could eke out, grateful beyond measure at seeing his station-mates.

Mitchell patted Roy's arm. "It'll just be a coupla minutes, and then you'll be back on solid ground, ok? Just relax. Take'r up!"

Roy closed his eyes as he felt himself ascending out of his temporary prison.

The faces that greeted Roy topside were sights akin to a pilgrim seeing the holy land. The paramedics from 110, Mike Stoker and Captain Stanley grabbed and set the stoke onto the ground.

"Thank god!" Cap grabbed Roy's face and kissed him on the forehead, his smile beaming from ear to ear, belying his tear-filled eyes and flushed appearance. "Dear God, Roy, we thought we lost you. Both of you."

"Cap...Mike..." Roy whispered.

"Don't try to talk," Captain Stanley ordered. "The boys from 110 are here, they'll take care of you, get you to the hospital, ok?"

Roy blinked acknowledgement.

"They're bringing Gage up, now. I'll see you at the hospital, Roy," Captain Stanley squeezed DeSoto's arm and went to help bring his partner up.

Stoker stayed with him, holding the IV as the 110 team double-checked his vitals and stabilized him for transport.

"What happened?" Roy asked.

"Well, we saw the explosions. Tried to get you guys on the HT, but got no signal. We came looking for you, but didn't see or hear anything. We were certain you guys were dead. We didn't think anyone could've survived." Stoker looked at the ground and sighed. "Cap was a mess, Roy. I've never seen him like that. After we searched, he realized that there was no sign of you guys at all. Nothing. No bodies, no pieces of clothing, masks, tanks, nothing. He figured maybe you'd found shelter, somehow. So we came back and started checking all the nooks and crannies. Marco heard Johnny banging and...the rest is history."

Roy gave Mike a thumb's up and settled back into the stokes, allowing the crew from 110 to take care of him.

"Fellas, next time, be a little more considerate, ok? I've never seen Cap so shaken," Marco patted his fellow firefighters on the leg, gave a reassuring smile and glanced over at their stalwart leader.

As Roy was being loaded into the ambulance, he followed Marco's gaze. He spotted Captain Stanley near 51's Engine. Cap settled back against it and took off his helmet. He put a weary hand to his face and bent over, bracing himself with a hand on his knee, the helmet dangling from a finger. After some moments, Cap straightened up, his hand slowly sliding down his face, then through his hair. As he walked along the side of the Engine, he wiped his eyes with the back of his hand.

"Alright, Gage, you're up," one of the ambulance attendants came into Roy's view and he and Marco hoisted Johnny up into the ambulance besides him.

"Hey, Marco," Roy called before Mitchelli hopped in and the doors closed.

"Yeah?"

"Thanks."

Marco flashed a smile and nodded, shut the doors and patted them. Roy felt the ambulance lurch forward and soon, the scene was retreating in his vision. He glanced at his partner beside him. Johnny was looking back at him, worriedly.

"How you feeling?"

"Like someone's been using my head for chisel practice."

"I'll bet."

"Johnny?"

"Yeah?"

"Thanks."

"You bet, partner."

And then the darkness took him again.

THE END

Author's Note: Like many fans, I grew up watching Emergency! during its original run and Emergency One! syndication. Unfortunately, neither the firefighting nor EMS bug bit me (this will be obvious to those who are in those valiant professions!). Nonetheless, I loved watching our Station 51 heroes every week :-)

This is my first Emergency! fic and decided to make this part of my organic Window in Time series. These are unrelated stories, but are just windows in time/place of a specific incident, exploring the particular relationship of the characters involved and are not meant to be fully involved plots. Of course, save for the characters of Jeff Mitchelli and Harrison Yoder, I do not own any of the Emergency! characters. I also haven't read very much E! fic, so a plethora of apologies if this story happens to mirror any previous fics; entirely coincidental and unintentional!