

Coping Mechanisms

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Each member of Hank's crew struggles to come to terms with the events of a harrowing rescue attempt. This is the first story in the 'Coping Trilogy'

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Roy peeked in on Chris and remained hovering in the doorway for a moment watching his son. He stepped in to straighten the light-weight blanket which had gotten twisted by restless sleep. Keeping an eye on the six-year-old's face, he turned the chair away from the compact desk, taking extra care not to scrape it across the hard wood floor as he swung a leg over the seat to straddle it backwards. He settled his chin onto stacked fists placed to cushion the top slat of the chair back, and watched the steady, *reassuring* rise and fall of his son's chest. Once again, as it had repeatedly since their last house fire, Roy's mind circled back to revisit that night.

It had been a fairly uneventful shift. He and the guys had spent a few hours relaxing behind the station and watching the stars come out.

It was the kind of evening where a child might snuggle down in bed to sneak her picture book and flashlight under the covers. And since it was way past her bedtime, she drifted off just as the dragon slipped past the castle guard, remaining deep in slumber as the heroes stormed the gate to rescue the princess. He preferred to imagine that she'd been asleep as the battle raged.

Chris, caught in a dream, tossed his head back and forth, a puckered frown formed before he curled on his side. Roy reached to rub his son's back in slow circles until he calmed and flopped over to his stomach.

They'd been called out to a residential two-story structure fire, just after 2 a.m. The stars were still out when the squad pulled up behind the engine. 51 was the first station to arrive. After setting the crew to stretching an attack lead, Cap started his 360 with the HT pressed against an ear. Vince pulled up just minutes behind them and corralled the mother near his patrol car, physically restraining her with one arm across the front of her chest and the other braced between her shoulder blades.

There were signs of heavy involvement of the first floor, but it looked as though the fire hadn't reached the second story yet. Still, it was gaining ground and gathering a momentum that would only become increasingly dangerous for the firemen to confront as each minute passed. If there was any chance for success, they could not wait for the other response teams to arrive.

Roy and Johnny stood back as their linemen cracked the front door open just enough to allow a quick dousing of the entryway. Chet turned to Marco with a thumbs-up signal and received a 'we got this' nod in return, and damn it, at that point they'd both been right. Cap had given firm orders for 'in and out' as quick as possible, and it should have helped that they knew what room she would be in, but it just didn't play out that way.

They had been so close, just a few steps from the little girl's bedroom. They'd just made the stair landing and were hauling up more of the hose, setting up to head down the hall to the left. Working with one eye on the broiling smoke filling the hall, Roy did not see the floor under Chet's right foot give way, nor when he instinctively pulled back to keep from falling all the way through. What he did turn in time to witness was Chet losing his balance, arms wind milling as he hung for a split second over the stairway they had just climbed. Roy grabbed Johnny's left arm to belay him as his partner lunged to try to pull the lineman back. The tips of Johnny's glove covered fingers brushed the front of Chet's turnout before closing on air as their crew mate continued his decent. Roy jerked back from the edge to keep them both from joining their falling friend. They stumbled back away from the stairs and took Marco with them as they landed in a heap against the wall.

Marco was the first to stand, and he turned away to sort out the hose. He was backlit by the orange glow that you notice sometimes even when you can't make out actual flames. The fire had moved to the second story. Roy straightened next and he leaned to lever Johnny to his feet. He supposed decisions had been made, but it wasn't like they'd held a conference or done a quick round of rock/paper/scissors. As they untangled themselves, a shared look, a hand gesture and three nods passed between them. It had really come down to chance as to which paramedic continued with Marco and which got Chet out. The tie breaker was that Johnny was half a step further down the hall than Roy. Their eyes met through face masks as Johnny gave him a nudge towards the stairway before turning to join Marco.

Chet had landed on his air pack with his back against the front door. Roy was relieved to find his crew mate semiconscious, but could not risk the time to get him stabilized on a backboard. He stooped to lift him to his shoulder. Behind and above him, flames were beginning to build. At that point the door opened and Cap and another fireman stepped in to help carry Chet away from the fire, away from the victim and away from Johnny and Marco.

For awhile, Roy's hands had been full treating Chet and getting him packaged for transport. After that, there had not been nearly enough to occupy his mind as they waited for an ambulance while the guys from 116 and 36 went in. It had been as he reached to adjust the blanket to better protect Chet from the light, drizzling rain that he noticed the stars were gone.

Joanne stepped into their son's bedroom a little after ten o'clock. Roy let his wife herd him from his vigil, off to their own bed, where he was asleep before she finished tucking him in.

His kneecaps pressed into the wooden kneeler of a pew set at the back of the church he had attended since his family had moved to Gardena just before his third birthday. With his back hunched, he braced his forehead against the back of the next pew, framed at the temples by his hands clenching the carved wood.

A casual observer might mistake him for a man in prayer. A casual observer would be mistaken. Marco swallowed against the sob that was building in his throat.

It had been hot, so hot that the sweat on his body blistered his skin. The fire was claiming this floor, including the bedroom they now faced. It had taken all Marco had to hold firm, to buy his friend enough time to dive into that room and accomplish the one thing, the only thing that was keeping them both from turning tail and just letting the monster claim a victory.

Crouching, Marco had been aiming the nozzle he held upward to fog the area above their heads to battle the heat building at the ceiling. He now turned the spray ahead of where he judged the paramedic to be, knowing he would search counter-clockwise with a hand to the wall. He was guessing because visibility was pretty close to zero, not only due to smoke but also vapor from the water they'd been adding to the mix. John later admitting that the only way he ever found her was by literally crawling over her just three feet into his search. He had actually been pivoting back in defeat, unable to push further against the barricade of overwhelming heat when he felt something soft give under his right knee. Marco himself had stumbled over a body or two during the course of his career. Sometimes, when things were that intense, when you had to go by feel alone, you'd take what you could get and be grateful for it. Still, you never got used to stepping on someone, you just didn't.

He'd been praying all along, and although he actually did believe in miracles, it wasn't until John blindly bumped into him, cradling the girl that he'd really started to hope.

Marco cringed at the sponginess of the floor beneath them as they retreated on their hands and knees to stay below the smoke and heat roiling over their heads. The situation was about to go even further south than it already had, Marco could feel it. The elements were swirling together...fire, heat, smoke...it was going to flash soon - he could *feel* it. He dropped the hose and reached to support John and his precious burden. They fled.

"Madre de Dios," Marco hissed in frustration. A single tear escaped, but he let it fall rather than acknowledge its existence by brushing at it. It took him no effort to recall the exhilaration he had felt as he urged John forward, actually making headway down the hallway. That feeling of being part of a miracle - that would be with Marco as long as he lived. And as long he lived, he knew he would carry reminders of the truth of that night. He unclenched his fingers to run a hand over the slick, waterproof dressing he still wore to keep his collar from rubbing the back of his neck.

'A' shift would begin in less than 45 minutes and with St. Anthony's being just over seven miles from station 51, he needed to get going.

Marco unbent his frame and stepped into the center aisle. Out of habit, he started to turn to face the altar and the statue of Christ hanging on the cross. Instead, he pivoted away without lifting his eyes from the toes of his shoes. Those eyes burned in rebellion against the control Marco maintained on his features as he strode out to face the grey morning.

John reached a hand to brace it against a wall of the factory. His head hung almost to his waist as he gasped air from the SCBA mask he held firmly with his other hand, trying to clear the lungful of smoke he had just inhaled when his mask had been pushed askew while they ventilated the building. John resisted the journey that his mind threatened, even as he fought to control his coughing. This was *not* a good time to indulge in a moment of déjà vu, not surrounded as he was by caring witnesses. His mind did not seem to give a rat's ass about convenience. John tried to concentrate on the rubbery smell of a well-seated mask until he surrendered with a shudder and returned to...

...the bedroom. It is dark and with gloves on, he is having to fumble to return the mask to his own face after holding it to the girl's for as long as he dared. That first gasp, though diluted by flowing air, makes him cough again. There is the smell of smoke, but what is that underlying odor? His mind skitters away from an elusive notion and he wills it back to the business of getting the child out. Working blind, he resists the urge to remove his gloves, fearing that losing them now would make the retreat he envisions impossible. He continues to struggle with clasps and turnout to get her completely covered even as he begins to crawl in a jerking cadence with his left arm holding her small frame snug against his chest. He is still crawling as many hands lift him, and he knows they have won...

John felt hands grip his shoulders as Mike turned him away from the wall. Roy was there too, so John made eye contact to reassure his partner he was fine to continue. He submitted to his crew mates' fuss and concern until finally, he was once again swinging an ax and enthusiastically tearing holes in walls. John told himself he was okay, even though he knew he would never be rid of the memory of the moment he woke leaning against the squad and finally identified that smell. He just hoped the scent of smoke wouldn't always put him in a tailspin, because that could seriously take some of the fun out of fighting fires.

Later, back at the squad, he took an experimental sniff, to test his reaction out in the open. They all carried the smell of smoke and scorch after every fire. He had once been informed by a girlfriend that he reeked. *Ex-girlfriend*. Cap had once mentioned that his own wife had pulled rank and that no turnouts or bunkers ever crossed a threshold of their house. There was a corner of the garage dedicated to the containment of such offending articles when the need arose to store them away from the fire station.

John ducked his head as this very captain strode by, suddenly very interested in checking the contents of the trauma box. He could see his commander's boots pause for a moment, standing in the puddle next to where he knelt. He breathed a sigh of relief when those boots eventually moved away. He breathed another when he realized that his unruly mind had made no further unauthorized field trips into the past. *Very cool.*

Now all he had to do was to continue to hold the line. He couldn't guess how long it would take before he didn't have to constantly guard against reliving things he would rather not, but he figured eventually it would become second nature and not take so much concentration. John had put a bit of thought into this survival strategy and he preferred it to the alternative of dissecting that nightmare of a rescue repeatedly until his mind got a handle on it. His entire being balked at the notion of moving towards any state of acceptance. He was afraid such a journey would require the sacrifice of some integral piece of himself he was unwilling to live without.

John drew another breath of the humid, mist-filled air hoping to catch a scent of the rain. What he could smell through his soot clogged sinuses was damp fireman. He shrugged to himself as he pushed away from the squad, shoulders hunched against the elements, thinking, *it could be worse.*

Falling. Can't move. Why can't I move? What is coming? What kind of prank is Gage trying to pull this time? I gotta move! What is coming?

Chet woke to the sound of his own ragged breaths. Swinging his legs around to sit perched at the edge of his bed, he grabbed a blanket to ward off the chill... and other things. His bare feet slapped on the cold linoleum as he made his way to his kitchen sink for a drink of water. With a sigh, he moved to the living room, bypassing the TV since the *Star Spangled Banner* had played hours ago. He switched the stereo on, turning the volume down to avoid waking the neighbors in the next apartment. Neil Diamond could take a crack at drowning out his thoughts tonight. Within minutes, Chet realized that Neil was going to drop the ball.

They'd all known how dicey the situation would be going in. That hadn't stopped them from doing their job. The scene had been pretty intense from the moment 51s pulled up. At first, there had been no way of knowing if anyone was still inside or not. A wail of gut wrenching anguish removed all doubt. The mom's screams ran a jagged circuit up and down his spine.

Once they entered the house, Chet paused for a moment to get his bearings. From off to his left, he could isolate the familiar crackling, popping sound of a building being consumed like the kindling it had become. He helped Roy and John lay out the back up hose at the base of the stairs before they all turned and began to climb. For a bit longer, the operation was textbook - up until the moment Chet heard an additional sharp crack of splintering wood as his booted foot broke through the floor. He could remember falling but not landing. He supposed he must have gotten his bell rung but he did remember lying at the foot of the stairs listening to his air regulator as it cycled with each breath. Then he must have checked out again because the next thing he knew, he was lying outside. Roy was leaning over him, calling his name in a voice laced with stress and worry.

Chet heard some shuffling off to his left as they carried Marco and Gage to where Roy had set up, just past where he was lying strapped to a backboard. He was not hurting all that much really, but was still, well, immobile. Mike must have been released from the pump to give Roy a hand, because Chet heard him call to Gage as they helped him slide down the side of the squad until he sat propped up against a tire. Roy was somewhere close-by, telling Marco to lay back and let them do the work. He could only follow what was happening out of the corner of his eyes, so he missed a lot. He wished he had missed it all.

The mom's terror and hysteria sounded more distant than it had earlier, so Chet assumed someone had hustled her away from where the rescuers were working. There was a bit of chaos as three paramedics coordinated their efforts and contacted Rampart. Other firemen reached to remove air packs and smoldering turnout coats. Still, even with all the commotion, Chet caught the low moan that escaped John when he sort of shook himself aware and looked down to see what he still held.

Chet fell asleep stretched out on the couch an hour before dawn with Neil's voice thanking the Lord for the nighttime.

Mike replaced the last sofa cushion. Who the hell had made off with the newspaper? He hadn't been done with the crossword puzzle. He moved through the room to continue his search as he chomped down on the glazed doughnut he held. The engineer's jaws froze mid chew - he'd done it again for the umpteenth time since the original injury. Damn it, he'd bitten the inside of his lip. Again. He glanced around through watering eyes to make sure he was alone before he spit the half chewed food into his palm. The sharp taste of blood mingled with the sweetness that still lingered.

Strange, how his most vivid memory of a night of nothing but vivid memories was the taste of his own blood. Crouching in the rain in front of John, he had deliberately bitten down hard, his canine teeth meeting, to keep from losing it as he helped to gently lift the partially charred body of that girl-almost-still-a-baby from the paramedic's trembling arms.

The clarity of that memory brought a sourness to the back of his throat that almost sent him out the door and on to the latrine, but Mike firmly wrestled his wayward thoughts back to more current events.

Part of his job as engineer was to be a second set of eyes and ears for his captain. He *absolutely* had been paying attention. What he had missed from his vantage point at the engine had been filled in by his crew mates bit by agonizing bit. He had been firm in

his assertion that they each had done exactly what was required, and he was willing to repeat himself as often as it took until someone on this shift was ready to believe him.

He released a sigh when he considered his captain. Mike didn't think Cap worried too much about the men he commanded. Mike figured the man worried just about the right amount - as long as he didn't get an ulcer fretting about all five of them simultaneously. With that in mind, he had consciously forced himself to discuss the house fire when they met for breakfast. It was the least he could do, Mike thought with a private grin. Cap needed to conserve his energy because Chet was returning next week after being off with a wrenched back.

He sighed again as he gave up his search for the missing newspaper. He considered his half eaten doughnut and tossed it into the garbage. He supposed that it was time to admit, to himself as well as to his captain, that although he had been tethered to the engine for much of the drama, he had not gotten off scot-free as evidenced by the way his mind tended to wander at odd moments. He was getting tired of having to work to focus. Man, he missed his ability to concentrate.

Mike decided to complete the aborted trip to the washroom. He really needed to rinse his mouth. He took a circuitous detour past the office, but only sketched the barest wave of greeting when he noted his captain's empty coffee mug. He leaned in to snag it off the desk and waggled it suggestively as he raised it.

A "Sure, thanks Mike." followed him as he partially retraced his steps counterclockwise to the kitchen. Roy and Pete Conrad, Chet's temporary replacement were just finishing up tidying the

kitchen in preparation for Pete to start lunch prep. He slipped between the young lineman and the kitchen table on his way to the counter, reaching to claim a clean mug for himself.

"Sorry, Pete," he said as they brushed elbows. "What's for lunch?"

"Thought I'd do taco salad and cheese quesadillas, with brownies for desert."

He lifted the coffee pot and dumped the dregs in the sink to start a fresh one. He swiveled around and leaned a hip against the counter as he waited. "Dibs on the spoon," Mike said, turning towards Roy to gauge his reaction.

"Be my guest, Mike. I prefer my eggs cooked. You know you can get salmonella poisoning from raw eggs. Remember that teenager last June?"

"No, I do not, your run, not mine. And I say 'you gotta go sometime', and death by chocolate might just head up my list of to-dos in this lifetime."

It was silent for a moment, as the three firemen contemplated that statement.

"Well, anyway, I mean it, Pete. Don't go letting John sweet talk you out of it." Mike turned from filling two mugs. "You two want any?"

"No thanks."

"Nope, I'm good."

Mike started to take a sip, but with a grimace, set his mug on the kitchen table. "Back in a minute, guys," he said as he headed off to deliver the other to his waiting captain.

Hank gazed into the surface of the dark liquid. Maybe if his engineer had used a few tea leaves as garnish the mug would hold more answers. As it was, the brew he lifted to his lips was simply a very decent cup of coffee.

He dropped both palms to his desk and gave it an extra pat. Leaning back into his chair, he decided once again to trust the whispered voice that had been counseling him for the past few days, telling him to wait, to give his men time to come to terms with the events of that night, before demanding they bare their souls. That voice had changed its tune after last shift, and now urged him to take a different tack with the more stubbornly silent members of his crew. He would hold off taking the radical step of insisting they meet with the department psychologist, but they bloody well *were* going to have some mandatory one on one time with their captain today. If he kept listening to little voices in his head, Hank guessed he'd be clearing his calendar for more than a few turns on a couch himself.

It was achingly apparent last shift that there were still some major concerns eating at his crew and he felt no remorse at using any and all tools at his disposal to get to the bottom of their newfound reluctance to communicate. He had finally resorted to *ordering* Michael out to breakfast to corner him and get him talking.

His engineer had eventually come clean over buttermilk pancakes and bacon. He was a sucker for real maple syrup, and direct questioning. Mike had seemed relieved to be able to express his worry over how quiet and withdrawn John had been, not to mention his concern over his friend's disorientation during the salvage operation after the factory fire. They talked about the house fire and its horrendous outcome. This segued into how there were no mathematical equations to trot out at a fire scene that encompassed the a) firemen b) fire and c) victim. Mike and he had launched into a lively discussion complete with napkin illustrations. The best they could come up with was that they would risk a lot to get through b) to reach c) because they were a). Mike maintained that it looked more like a Sunday morning cartoon than any formula he had ever used. Their conversation drifted to Mike's plans for an upcoming camping trip, and Hank's worries over his daughter's first date. They debated what it would take for the Rams to make it to the Super Bowl this season. They left the diner that morning having laid claim to a few moments to mend.

Chet was healing up right on schedule. His captain knew at least one of the crew had checked on him every shift they had off, initially at Rampart and then later at his apartment. Marco had stayed with him the first night after his discharge, and John and Mike had kept him up late at least once watching an old horror movie. Hank himself had been a frequent caller; the wives and Mama Lopez had stocked his fridge. The entire shift had spent Monday night sprawled out across Chet's cramped living room, watching the game. The man had not suffered from lack of attention, but that did not mean he was not suffering.

The apartment-bound lineman had apparently not been included in the 'let's trudge on in silence pact' in effect at the station because he had admitted to his captain early on that he felt guilty that he had lived while a child had not. Hank had listened to him over several visits as he worked his way through the blame and remorse to a point of almost forgiving himself for surviving. He still looked a bit haggard under close inspection, and his captain wondered if he was having trouble sleeping. They would be able to keep a better eye on that situation once Chet returned to work.

Roy was, though not exactly open about his current emotional well-being, the least likely of the men to flee if Hank brought up a touchy subject. In fact, they had been able to discuss the difficulties of dealing with the loss of a victim, especially a child during a quiet moment while they waited for the coffee to brew. Hank shamelessly capitalized on the fact that they had fatherhood and family life in common. Roy seemed well on the way to coming to terms with the fallout from that night, although Hank guessed there would always be residual echoes of sorrow. Better that, Hank believed, than becoming jaded in the face of the tragedies they were exposed to in the course of their chosen profession.

Predictably, his senior paramedic was concerned about his partner's stubborn refusal to admit he was struggling. It was exhausting to witness the single-minded way John was throwing up barriers. Hank sensed something festering beneath the surface of the stoic front the man had hastily slapped over his wounded spirit like a makeshift battle dressing. He had gained time to fly under the radar courtesy of Dr. Bracket's order to take a shift off. After the goings-on at the factory fire, Hank was not going to leave the situation untended any longer. It was always best to take a peek under a bandage occasionally so one could deal with what lay beneath. Prying John's grip away to lift an edge was going to take some finesse, but that process would begin today.

In light of this morning's escapades, he felt the time was ripe to confront both John and Marco head on.

He drew his hands down over his face ending with his head cradled in his palms, and leaned forward to rest his elbows on his desk. This morning it seemed Marco had gone out of his way to earn himself an extra stint at latrine duty. Hank couldn't recall a single instance when he had ever been tempted to assign this member of his crew latrines out of turn. Amongst fireman the man was practically a saint.

Saint Marco was in a tough position, being too stubborn to easily turn for comfort from the very person he was angry with. Still, he had faith in *Marco's* faith. The guy was solid. Surely his God would see through a son's rebellion and recognize the underlying pain. Rumor had it He reached down even when human hands were not raised. Marco's captain was banking on it.

They had been called out in the wee hours before dawn to aid the paramedics with a "man down" response. The rain that had not let up in the past few days pattered against the windshields as they pulled the rigs out onto the all but deserted streets. When they arrived, the man was very much "up" and swinging at curious pedestrians and pretty much anyone who got too close. Police back up had not arrived, so it took the entire engine crew to get him back "down" while the paramedics took a crack at assessing him. Marco was holding the shoulder of the arm John was struggling to wrap a blood pressure cuff around. The squad's flashing strobe lights lent a stop action affect to their movements in the alleyway. The third time that the reluctant patient had connected with his lineman - this time via a hand/tooth interface, Marco let loose with a string of expletives that included a few sacrilegious suggestions in more than one language.

Without turning away from the patient, John leaned in front of Marco, nudging him back to land squarely on his butt with a soft grunt, ending his tirade. Mike was there to steady the lineman and pull him to his feet, tugging him away while announcing he "needed a hand" with something over at the engine. Roy tossed a pair of canvas gloves to Conrad with directions to just hold the patient's head down, never even raising his own.

If Hank had blinked he would have missed this well orchestrated cover up. He thought Roy's blatant attempt to redirect his captain's attention by handing him the vitals to pass on to Rampart a bit over played, but had to admire the overall sentiment. All sentiment aside, Hank had to insist his lineman vent somewhere other than in front of the citizens they served, no matter how much some of them might deserve a good 'venting'. He had briefly considered siccing Mama Lopez on her blaspheming son, but since the sparse crowd either hadn't understood Spanish or had missed Marco's display of spleen entirely, his benevolent boss had been merciful and kept it a fire station matter. At least, if Hank's translations were accurate, lines of communications were starting to be re-established between Marco and the Man Upstairs.

On another note, an hour ago they had returned to the station after having pulled off one hell of a nerve-wracking rescue.

That call had been to assist a man in distress on the rooftop of a six-story apartment building down on Sepulveda Blvd. The crew of 51 had headed up to assess the situation just as Ladder 116 pulled to the curb.

Conrad and Mike were the first to step out on the rain-soaked tar and gravel surface. Hank was startled when these two men dropped the equipment they carried and rushed forward to throw themselves against the waist-high parapet that framed the perimeter of the rooftop. It appeared the man *in* distress had upgraded himself to a man desperate enough to *end* his distress. At some point he must have reconsidered, because when the rescuers arrived he was a man clinging to a brick ledge. Hank started to swear with not nearly the eloquence of his bilingual lineman as he leapt to join the pileup forming at the ledge of the building. All six of them grappled for desperate holds on each other and the dangling victim in a silence punctuated by grunts of effort and terse commands to each other to hang on.

The moment he was reasonably sure the whole tangled *mess* of limbs and bodies wasn't going over, he had Marco retrieve the abandoned ropes and climbing hardware as he spared a rain slicked hand to grab the HT from his turnout pocket and respond to the concerned queries of the commanding officer below. Thank the Lord his men were each already wearing harness belts. Once the rescuers were securely tied in, Hank began to draw normal breaths. It took some exceptional teamwork to get a belt around the victim and lower him to the waiting snorkel basket before strained muscles and cramping hands failed.

What it actually took was John and Roy's willingness to attempt a very tricky rappel, while trusting Marco and their captain to anchor the ropes as Mike and Conrad doggedly supported the victim's weight between them. John had gone over that edge all business and determination. Then, something made Hank look down just as John looked up and he caught the first glimmer of genuine joy he'd seen on that face since the house fire.

Still, Hank had not been so preoccupied with hanging on to various parts of his crew's anatomy and analyzing the finer points of a problematic paramedic's grin that he couldn't spare the odd moment to fantasize on how was he was going to fillet his entire shift alive when he got them safely off that rooftop.

He had spent a fair portion of the past hour doing just that. His men were going to make him daft. His ire at the risks they had taken was matched only by his pride.

He pushed up from his desk and moved to gather the troops for some promised drills.

Today. Come hell or high water, this would be the shift that Marco and John began to examine the current paths they were on. Instinctively, Hank felt they both had reached a point where he might not have to physically restrain them and hold their feet to flame to get them to at least start to open up.

One way or another, hogtied or not, Hank felt confident that healing would happen for each of his men - during shared triumphs and drills, over cups of coffee, and the occasional stack of buttermilk pancakes... and, it seemed, after an extra stint or two in the latrines.