

Alone

Author: CK

Rating: P12

Spoilers: 5x02 "Haunted"

Characters/Pairing: Emily/Hotch

Contents: A little episode addition to the ep named above. I just thought Emily shouldn't have simply left.

Disclaimer: Nothing mine; I'm just borrowing the characters for a bit of personal (shipper) closure...

Author's Note: My first Criminal Minds fic. Well, the first published; the other ones are not yet finished.

Everything was mechanical and lifeless. His movements, his motions, his words; his voice and eyes even. In his head were only four words repeating constantly, four words his mind had summed up Emily Prentiss' little speech with: *You are not alone*.

He heard the message. But something inside him refused to understand it.

You are not alone.

But wasn't he? Not knowing when and if he would see his son again? Not knowing whether they would ever catch a killer that had played them so well, them, who were experts on catching scum like him?

You are not alone.

Maybe in some way she was right. There was always the team. Always the six people who would support him. Help him find then man threatening his family. Help him bring this family back, bring back his son into his arms. And there was this one person who wouldn't leave his side. Yet it wasn't his family, his child, the most important being in his world. How could anyone replace it?

You are not alone.

His last words to her, his words of goodbye, or however one would call it, left his mouth without him really noticing. "You, too." He couldn't even recall what she had said at all, what he was answering to. His mouth and voice were replying - but not his mind.

You are not alone.

He noticed that his colleague opened the door to leave and he felt himself about to move to lock the door behind her; to lock himself away and the outside world out.

But then, another word outran his actions.

Prentiss was almost out of the door when she heard him call her name. Her first name; something he only did occasionally.

"Emily." Weak. Broken. Collecting all the remaining strength - and that wasn't much.

That was how he sounded, she realized, and her heart ached at the thought. Aaron Hotchner was a broken man. Attacked in his own apartment, hurt and humiliated, robbed of his family, his son. He was

losing himself; the once proud man and example for every agent was a mere shadow of himself. Still capable of doing his work maybe, still able to profile and think into the killer's mind, but all that now happened without heart and soul.

Broken.

But not alone.

Emily stepped back and closed the door again, turning to Hotch. He didn't look at her, not really. His head hung, his eyes were lowered, he looked pale and sad and lost. Desperate.

All Emily wanted to do was to give him some comfort; tell him that things were going to be right, to be okay. But she knew it wasn't that easy. Because okay meant a lot more than him finding his passion for his work again.

She stood there and waited for him to go on, say or do something; ask for help or for her to stay and accompany him; ask for someone to talk to or simply have a drink with. Whatever.

Yet none of that happened. Instead, he made a grimace, as though he was in pain - mental, not physical. And then, murmuring something she identified as "Sorry.", he turned away and walked into the adjoining room where he threw his keys onto the table.

The keys landed with a loud clatter and a thud on the table. The gesture was still far too restrained for the frustration he was feeling, although even then it was more than unusual for him who normally was always calm.

He had wanted to ask Emily for... he didn't know for what. And it didn't matter either. He couldn't do this to her. And he hoped she would understand his gesture and leave.

He should have known better.

You are not alone.

"Hotch." Just one word. Just like he had said one - her name - before. Though she moved with her words, circling him, coming to stand next to the table, facing him.

When his gaze raised and his eyes met hers, she was shocked by the emptiness she saw in them. Hollow and cloudy, not clear and determined as she knew them. Him.

She looked at him expectantly, wanting to say something, anything, but fearing that she wouldn't be able to find the right words.

"I'm sorry. You should leave. It's not your task to take care of me and it shouldn't be your burden," he finally told her, again restlessly looking around for a place to go; never to rest and stand still, as though stopping seemed to him like losing his family, his son, for good.

You are not alone.

He barely noticed when she shook her head, only heard her answer like a far, distant echo.

"It is no burden. It's what... friends are for. For taking care of, watching out for each other. You need someone, Hotch. And we won't leave you alone." She looked down briefly, then back at him. "I won't leave you alone."

Without any further thought, she crossed the short distance between them and wrapped her arms around him. At first, he didn't react; he simply more or less hung in her arms.

But then, suddenly, he raised his arms and hugged her back. He held her close to him, squeezed almost too hard; but she didn't care. She knew he needed it. Needed to feel life in his arms, life he was missing so desperately. Not even she would be able to give him what he needed. His little boy, the knowledge that his son was safe and secure. And free. Not living in fear. But at least she could try to help him survive this time.

She wouldn't just leave him. Alone, on his own.

Because he wasn't alone. Would never be. *That* she would take care of.

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