I Can Do This

by osointricate

Summary

Alright. So it took pirates and way too many years for Steve and Danny to get their crap together and actually be together. But they are. Things are good. Danny's family is coming to the island for a visit, he's got a clean bill of health, he's going back to work for the first time after being kidnapped, Jack's adoption is less than a week away... Life is good, but it's about to start up again. Five days. Five days until Jack's adoption and everything that can go wrong will go wrong. But they've got this, right?

Right?

(Of course they do, you already know how this one ends.)

This is the story of the rough week that was Jack's adoption and a look into his new parent's past relationships.

Notes

HEY SO REMEMBER THIS STORY so yeah hi I'm still writing. Is anyone still reading?? Guess we're gonna find out! (I have been writing this thing for going on year three now so like. *pats self on back*)
Anyway, as for any further warnings: there is a minor character death, but it's case-related. The man is a gay man, but it is not why he was killed. His sexuality had zero to do with his murder. I decided I needed to establish that upfront during my re-read. Biphobia, 90s flavor homophobia, DADT, and internalized homophobia are all PAST interactions that Steve and Danny face in flashbacks. I kinda feel like the world in which Steve and Danny CURRENTLY live, there is no room for that crap and neither would allow it to continue where they could see it. BUT, that doesn't mean it hasn't been part of their journey or they are completely healed from it either. None of it is abusive beyond name calling or institutional injustice though, if you were worried. I hope I wrote this particular thing right. This is mostly an excuse to put down my headcanons for Steve and Danny's past relationships and their relationship with their sexualities. I did a lot of research (I bought BOOKS) and... I just hope I did it right.

There's less Grace and Nahele and more focus on Steve and Danny. I did not mean for this to be a beast it just wanted to be a beast. Do I think it's as good as YCDT? No. But it's here.

(Also, at one point, it's like "You get plot relevancy! And you get plot relevancy! EVERYONE GETS PLOT RELEVANCY!" and that's because the NEXT FIC like... helps with that?? I'm sorry I have not finished writing it yet.)

As always, feel free to suggest tags this needs.

Enjoy!

See the end of the work for more notes.
Chapter 1

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Steve – March 2016

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“So, Commander, Detective,” the lawyer started, head turning towards them as she greeted them. She was a small white woman by the name ‘Kain,’ and Danny sure liked her better than any lawyer he’d ever met barring Ellie; he said that often. And Steve knew he had met his fair number. “As you know, Jack’s petition of adoption has been posted for well over two months, are you sure you want to second-parent adopt?”

Steve blinked and glanced over at Danny, “Is that a problem?”

“No,” Kain said, “his biological mother’s consent goes a long way, but it will look suspicious, adding a second parent mid-way through the process, especially with no legal connection between the two of you.”

“We’ve been work partners for well over six years,” Steve said.

Kain made a face, “While that is impressive, that’s not really the connection a judge looks for in potential co-parents.”

“What would it take?” Danny asked. “Would it be better for Steve to adopt alone, and then I adopt after time’s past?”

She nodded. “You could do that, but there are other ways. Other things you could do that would show this isn’t a whim decision.”

Danny glanced over at Steve and sat up straighter, Steve blinked in confusion at his body language. “Marriage?”

Steve’s heart lurched. That was the first time that word had been brought up, and everything between them was still so new. Marriage was so big, marriage meant rings and vows and commitment and while that was in the future, Steve didn’t think that meant right now, quick, hurry.

“That would be the ideal option,” Kain said.

Steve gulped.

Danny reached out to hold his hand, pulling his attention away from the lawyer. “I’m not ready for marriage.”

“Oh, thank god,” Steve said, relieved. Then he caught himself, “Not! Not that it’s off the table… for... eventually…”

“Right! No, just… not…”

“Right now.”

“Yeah.”
Steve sighed a breath of relief, happy they were on the same page. Finally, after six years, a nuclear bomb, a couple girlfriends, a few small invasions of foreign countries... they were finally on the same page. Steve felt sparks hit random parts of himself; his shoulder, his neck, his ribs, his thighs, his cheek. He knew the moment he allowed himself to feel romantic love for Danny he’d be drowning in it. By the smile and soft eyes Danny was wearing, it seemed to be mutual.

They were finally on the same page.

Danny shook himself, knocking Steve out of it. He turned to the lawyer and licked his lips. “Are there other options?” Danny asked.

“Well,” Kain said after half a beat, face curious, probably from watching their ridiculous faces. “There is a domestic partnership.”

“What’s the difference between that and marriage?” Steve asked.

“Not much, actually,” she told him. “Marriage makes things easier with military spousal benefits, but not impossible. A partnership still entitles you to benefits and helps in the event something happens to one of you. In my opinion, a partnership is more of a legal relationship, while a marriage is an emotional one. Though a partnership doesn’t hold as much weight to lots of people in the world.”

“But it would hold the same weight in court?” Danny asked.

Kain nodded, “I believe so, especially with your history of knowing each other for so long. You don’t have to be married to second-parent adopt, but it’s just... adding you to the petition so long after Steve filed... that could look suspicious.”

“Right,” Steve said. If he hadn’t been such an ass about it all they wouldn’t be having this problem.

Danny squeezed his hand, pulling his attention back to him and the dropped their voices again in a semblance of privacy.

“Hey,” he said gently, rubbing his thumb along Steve’s. “Legal, not emotional,” Danny said. “Security, but not...”

“Marriage,” Steve finished.

“Right... I could do that,” Danny told him. Then he raised his eyebrows at Steve in question, his blue, blue eyes certain and steady and oh so patient, waiting on Steve.

“I could do that,” Steve said, nodding, warmth flooding through him. They smiled at each other for a moment before Steve turned back to the lawyer. “What do we have to do?”

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**Steve, present day**

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Fresh out of the shower, ready for the day, Steve found his boyfriend at the stove making eggs. It was a common enough thing in the morning. It had become a routine they fit into nicely since they had fallen in together. Only now, instead of Danny’s medical leave wardrobe – a wardrobe that consisted mostly of sweat shorts and t-shirts – he was standing wearing his work attire.

Oh, how Steve didn’t realize he missed Danny’s ass in his work pants until he had those pants back.
He had every right to look now that they were together.

Smiling, and Danny grinning as he entered the kitchen, Steve snaked his arms around Danny’s waist.

“Glad to see you can move this morning,” Danny teased him about the night before. “Glad I didn’t do something permanent.”

“Shut up,” Steve said against his cheek, kissing it quickly. Danny turned his head and met him for a kiss… two kisses… a third that made him turn around in Steve’s arms… and a fourth that made him abandon the eggs on the stove.

Steve grinned against his mouth.

“You sure you want to go back to work?”

“Hmm,” Danny said. “Let’s see… we have two car payments, a mortgage, medical bills, law fees, and four children.” He mused for a moment, thinking it over. “Yup, I think I have to go back to work.”

“Mmm, well,” Steve nuzzled his nose into Danny’s neck, “if you insist.”

Jack took the time to kick in his high chair, distracting both of them. He had fluffy crackers on the tray in front of him. He was still too small to successfully feed himself finger foods, but every now and then he’d get one in his mouth and the task was enough of a challenge for him that it gave Danny time to make breakfast for the rest of the house.

“Can you believe our adoption hearing is on Thursday?” Steve asked, arms still around Danny.

“Four days,” Danny said, grinning at Jack.

Steve studied his happy look for a moment. “Second thoughts?”

Danny didn’t look away from Jack. “Nope.” Then he turned to Steve, “You?”

“No way,” Steve whispered. They grinned and leaned in for another kiss.

“We’ve got a lot to do this week,” Danny said. “Let’s hope we don’t catch a long case.”

“Mmm, knock on wood.”

Steve’s life had been good to him for the last several weeks. He mused on the good things, Danny’s mouth being one of them, while Danny’s fingers ran through the back of his hair. They just got back from their ‘getaway vacation,’ stronger than ever. They received notice that their domestic partnership had been processed only yesterday and they celebrated by losing some sleep.

Everything with Danny just felt like they were pouring concrete around them. Danny’s family was coming to visit – the first time they’d be around them now that they were together and Steve felt the pressure. It was a good kind of pressure. Grace and Nahele were taking the slow walk towards summer vacations, and their hike up to the petroglyphs this last weekend was good for all of them. It wasn’t just a trip for Grace and Nahele, but it was a test for Danny. Steve wanted to make sure that Danny’s knee could make a trek up the steep hills before going back to work. He rested a few times, but nothing more than to be expected otherwise. Danny really was ready to go back to work, no matter how the worry settled in Steve’s stomach. They hadn’t really worked out how they were going to be together and be partners yet; Steve was looking forward to the challenge.
Life was good.

And breakfast was starting to burn.

“The eggs are burning, Danny,” Steve said, squeezing Danny’s asscheek and kissing him one last time. “I’ll get the plates to the table.”

Danny turned back to the eggs, and Steve went about setting the table, and eventually the hustle and bustle of the morning stirred up around them. Reminders about a baseball game that evening, and reminders about cleaning rooms for relatives visiting at the end of the week, and some last minute flash card practice, and scrambling around to get everyone in the car – it was busy even if Charlie had spent the night at Stan’s. That, plus Danny going back to work threw their easy routine off, just a little, and Steve was waving goodbye to Jack through the windowed door of his daycare room just as he got a phone call that they had caught a case.

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Danny – 1991 – Age 15

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Danny knew the boy scouts looked good on college applications, and then later in life when he wanted to try to be a policeman, but what started out as an activity to eat some time after school and to look good on paper turned into actual enjoyment. Danny enjoyed the camaraderie. Some of the guys on the baseball team thought it was a little childish, his insistence to stay a scout, even after several of his friends dropped the activity. He enjoyed being outside, and he enjoyed campfires, and he enjoyed the few trips to the archery range they took, and he’d be lying if he said he didn’t enjoy the uniforms.

Billy Selway stuck it out with him, more for getting to spend time with Danny than anything, and one of the few things his grandparents gladly paid for. Billy was practically a Williams, as much time as he spent at Danny’s house. His parents were gone, and he had no siblings, and it was just him and his grandparents. They were old school Catholics and thought Scouting was a respectable activity. Along with baseball an American Tradition, after all. The Williams were a good family, lots of kids, religious father; young Danny was the perfect friend for a boy like Billy to have.

It was a good thing they got along as well as they did.

But man, Billy looked good in his Eagle uniform. They were in the small Scout shop in Newark, getting all the needed necessities for their new up and coming rank. A new shirt for Danny, a new neckerchief, some socks that were required of them. Danny’s mom told them to spring for some official camping gear too. There was a set of twin boys who were buying their cub scout uniform and were loudly examining all the badges. Danny remembered those days and smiled at them. They were about his little sister Abigail’s age.

Billy, however, posing and showing off, made Danny’s mouth turn dry. He looked away quickly, down to the belts – he’d have to get a new one of these after Abigail decided to “update” his with some sparkle paint.

Distracting himself with the buckle he tried not to focus on the fact he just thought his best friend was “hot.” Maybe he just had a thing for uniforms? He turned his eyes back to Billy as he did a over dramatic twirl and Danny couldn’t help but drop his eyes to his ass. He looked away quickly again.

“Hey, come on!” Billy called out to him. “Tell me I look spiffy!”
“‘Spiffy?’” Danny repeated, eyeing him.

“Yeah,” he said with a drawl. “Admit I’m the cat’s pajamas.”

“You’re a dork,” Danny laughed.

“Danny, sweetie,” his mom called from somewhere over near the merit badge sashes. “Let’s get you a new one of these too! Your other one is getting a bit snug!”

“God, I love your mom,” Billy said, leaning on a rack of tan button ups.

“Yeah, I like her,” Danny said with a smile.

That was when the shop’s front door bell jingled and Danny couldn’t help but look up.

Another boy, about his age, walked in, followed by what Danny assumed was his father.

He had dark hair, combed back in a style Danny instantly wanted to try out for himself. He wore a jean jacket Danny instantly coveted. He was tall and built like a soccer player. Everything about the boy screamed ‘I’m so much cooler than this place,’ but didn’t give off the feeling that he thought that about himself. His dark eyes scanned the room, taking in his surroundings, and then found Danny.

Danny’s eyes widened at the sudden connection. They stared at each other for what felt like was too long, but was probably only a few seconds.

He was the most delicious looking thing Danny had ever seen.

Danny looked away quickly at the thought, eyes glancing towards Billy, and then found his mother – still inspecting sashes – across the room and then back to the boy. A grin grew on the boy’s face. It hit Danny – he knew what Danny was thinking.

He looked back down to the belt buckles.

The idea that he could like boys had been a constant thought lately. He was very confused on the subject. Girls were pretty with their hair and their hips and their legs and how good they always smelled. But boys… boys were pretty for a whole different set of reasons. Their waists, their butts, ...how they carried themselves. Danny found he was drawn to taller boys, with dark hair and cocky grins. But he was also drawn to athletic girls with dark hair who didn’t back down from a conversation. He was very confused.

He looked back up to the boy through the side of his eye and caught the tail end of one of those cocky grins. The boy’s father pulled on his shoulder and the connection was dropped. Danny watched as they made their way up to the front counter, where a bored Eagle scout was working on some volunteer hours.

“What was that?” Billy asked, crowding into Danny’s space. “Do you know him?”

“What?” Danny asked, knocking himself around the head. “No.” He said it a little too quickly.

Billy studied him for a second, a small look of curiosity crossed his face and Danny’s stomach flipped. If anyone knew that Danny was having thoughts about boys, it was going to be his best friend.

His face turned from curiosity to nonchalance in a heartbeat and he shrugged. “It just seemed like you knew him from somewhere.”
“I’ve never seen him before,” Danny insisted.

“Then let’s go introduce ourselves.”

“What?” Danny asked, suddenly embarrassed. “No!”

“Why not? He’s a Scout! We have that in common!” He turned to walk towards the counter.

“Billy!” Danny reached for and failed to grab Billy’s arm.

“Come on!”

Danny stood for a second, stewing in the embarrassment before he realized hanging back would make him look dumb, and he didn’t want to look dumb in front of this boy.

‘Oh god, I do like boys,’ Danny groaned to himself. He glanced over to his mom, who had a sash hanging over her arm and had moved on to a bookshelf full of guides and how to books. She hadn’t noticed the awkward soup her son was making. Danny really didn’t want to deal with the whole gay panic thing, and yet, here he was, being forced to because Billy was a friendly guy by nature.

‘Oh my god, I like this boy.’ Danny bit his lip. This was a first and it was so fast. Sure, Billy was good looking, but he was Billy. Billy was like a brother to him. But this boy this beautiful Italian boy – was handsome and Danny had never had a crush so fast before. What was happening?

Suddenly his throat was dry and he had trouble swallowing. His feet moved without his permission, and there he was a few feet behind Billy, hating himself.

“...there are a few troops in Newark, but none in your city at your age group,” The Scout behind the counter said. So he was here looking for a troop.

“Troop 230 is the best,” Billy spoke. “We’ve been around since before World War 2.” The boy and his father turned to look at Billy. Danny’s stomach flipped at the short glance the boy shot Danny’s way.

“I take it you boys are 230?” His father asked.

“Yes, sir!” Billy said. Then, after a second or two had passed – Danny’s eyes on the boy the whole time – Billy knocked into Danny’s arm.

“Yes, sir,” Danny answered with a nod.

“Where are you from?”

“Philly,” the boy answered. “But we just moved to Morristown.”

“Ah, the suburbs!” Billy said, like hadn’t spent his entire life a train ride away from New York City. Then he held out a hand, “Billy Selway.”

The boy smiled a sweet, pleased smile and took Billy’s hand. “Ricky. Ricky Bonnaduci.”

There was another few seconds of awkwardness before Billy rolled his eyes and said, “This weirdo is Danny Williams.”

Ricky grinned and held out his hand. Danny took it a little too fast and there were instant sparks.

“Nice to meet ya, Danny.”
“You too,” Danny said quietly.

Billy had that curious look on his face again.

“So,” Ricky’s father said. “Is Troop 230 out of Newark?”

That’s how Ricky Bonnaduci came into Danny’s life. That’s how Danny started to care about what his hair looked like. That’s how Danny finally admitted he liked looking at boys.

That’s how Danny’s life got turned inside out.

A few months later, Ricky had become a good friend, and the two of them did what could only be described in retrospect as “teenage flirting” and they both knew it. Danny liked a boy, and he was lucky that the first boy he liked seemed to like him back.

Like how they’d sit next to each other at meetings, and schedule their volunteer hours together. Little things that made Danny’s stomach flip. Biting of lips and cocky grins and belly laughs. And the guy loved food. He was always bringing all sorts of food to meetings. Sweets and meats and was always happy to share, but always making sure to get Danny’s opinion before all others.

“Ya know,” Billy started, in one of the vans heading towards a camping trip weekend. “I’m starting to feel a little bit like the third wheel around here.”

Danny was quickly worried. He knew what was going on, he knew Ricky knew what was going on, but how obvious were they being? Would Billy approve? Or would Billy think less of him? Danny’s family were all Catholics, he knew the mindset Billy’s grandparents would have. He didn’t think Billy would drop him, but there was that morsel of doubt that his best friend would think he’s disgusting.

“I’m sorry, Bill,” Ricky said, turning around. “How about you bunk with us in our tent this weekend?”

Billy’s mouth dropped as he digested that suggestion. He turned to look over at Danny, and then back to Ricky.

“Alright, sure,” he said, sounding a little unsure.

Ricky met Danny’s eye and they gave each other a look of relief. Ricky knew that if anyone was going to find out first, it was going to be Billy. Of course Ricky had to smuggle a whole rack of ribs in his bag. And Billy was more than happy to partake in the late night snack. Danny was sure that Ricky was trying to smooth feathers with Billy. A choice that made Danny a little weak in the knees.

“This is contraband,” Billy said, impressed.

Ricky grinned, “The Boy Scouts motto is ‘always be prepared,’ right?”

Danny laughed. And Ricky’s eyes turned from happy to something Danny didn’t quite understand at sixteen years old. But it was enough to make things click. This was going to happen.

Oh, how stupid he was back then.

He decided he and Billy needed some alone time and chose him as his partner in the fishing boat. The whole troop was spread out over the small pond in half a dozen row boats, but everyone was spread out enough that any conversations could be private.
They sat in silence for a little bit, enjoying the cool weather.

Billy broke the silence. “You know you’re my best friend, right?”

Danny turned, “I know.”

“Am I yours?”

“Of course, you idiot.”

“So you know you can tell me anything, right?”

Danny’s stomach dropped again. Billy knew. Or, at least, he suspected.

“Yeah, I know.”

“Okay.” Then. “I’d follow you into hell, man.”

Danny chuckled. “I hope we don’t have to go there.”

“Still,” Billy said, absently reeling in his line. “Say the word.”

Danny smiled, observing his friend; his brother. He fiddled with his own reel for a second. “You know that goes both ways, right?”

Billy narrowed his eyes at him. Danny liked to think that look was Billy knowing Danny was bi before Danny did, and deciding whether or not to make a joke. Billy only smiled and then something tugged at his line and the moment was over.

Later that night, Ricky was giving him all sorts of signs with his eyes and Billy was watching them with a happy curiosity. Danny was feeling good; a good boy nudging him and laughing with him and flirting with him, and a best friend that all but declared he’d support him. Maybe this gay thing wouldn’t be so bad.

That’s when the whole troop split up – something about navigating with the stars and earning a merit badge – when Billy grabbed his flashlight with a smile.

“Why don’t you two go off on your own?”

“What?” Ricky asked.

Billy shrugged. Then he winked at Danny. “See ya’ in hell.”


But Billy only mock saluted him, and was off into the dark, leaving Danny alone with a boy he’d been flirting with for months.

“I like him,” Ricky said, crossing his arms.

Danny snorted at him and started walking in the opposite direction. “Let’s go get this merit badge.”

“I don’t really care about getting a merit badge tonight,” Ricky said, voice suddenly lower, and Danny turned on a dime. There was no mistaking his tone, and then the look on his face.

“Jesus,” Danny sighed, overwhelmed.
Ricky made a face and then clicked his tongue. “Not thinkin’ about him either.”

That’s how they found a dark bit of forest, and Danny had his first kiss with a boy, and then his second, and definitely the first time he had someone else’s tongue in his mouth, and definitely the first time someone kissed his neck. Looking back, it wasn’t that great of a kiss, but man sixteen year old Danny didn’t care.

Of course the troop leader seemed to come out of nowhere, flashlight on them, catching them in an embrace, with Billy not far behind him.

“I think the pond is over this way, Mr. White!” But his distraction was too late. He saw the scene in front of them and looked as upset and scared as Danny felt. He was trying to keep the troop leader away from them, but had failed in his endeavor. Danny would always been thankful that he tried.

There’d be one, single goodbye phone call Ricky would sneak in late one night, but the trip home – the trip where every single boy knew what had just happened, and the troop leader furious… that was the last time he’d see Ricky.

If he had been three percent braver, he’d have held his hand.

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Danny – Present Day

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Steve was out the door with Jack and then on the way to a crime scene; Danny was soon after him with the teens to high school, and then he was on the way to the airport. His parents were due in town and Danny was to greet them and get them to their hotel.

Forty years of marriage wasn’t something to turn your nose up at, and here were Eddie and Clara Williams, taking a week to celebrate those forty years. Eddie kept up his promise of traveling more, and Clara was more than happy that the promise included long stays in Hawaii where the majority of her grandbabies were. They were staying the week, and then Danny’s sisters and a couple aunts would follow for another week.

By complete accident (or kismet) Jack’s adoption fell in the middle of their visit. Danny’s whole family would be present to welcome the newest member of the Williams clan. The Williams-McGarrett house would host two parties in a single weekend and Danny was already feeling the pressure, even if the only thing he had to worry about was the house.

Luckily, Max stepped up for the adoption party, excited that his friends were adopting. He said it was ‘his honor and privilege to host such an occasion.’ Danny knew it had to do with his own adoption. He had been nicer to Danny ever since he found out their intentions towards Jack. From the sounds of things, he had roped Jerry and Kamekona into the planning and Danny had no idea what the party would look like with those three in charge.

Kono and his sisters stepped up for the second party. Danny and his sisters wanted to throw their parents an anniversary party, even if it was a small occasion attended to by mostly Danny’s friends and their family. Kono, on desk duty due to her pregnancy, was going stir crazy. Danny offered up the option to help and she took it to like a fish on a hook. Stella and Abigail had both mentioned Kono’s enthusiasm the last couple phone calls.

They still had some light hurricane Fiona damage – mostly in the trees – and the backyard needed all
sorts of work done, but Steve was sure they had time.

They had four days and Danny was already picking his parents up from the airport.

“Danny, baby!” His mom was smiling and holding out her hands for a hug and Danny went with a wide smile of his own.

“Hey, Ma!” Danny greeted her with a deep hug.

“Hello, son,” Eddie greeted.

Danny greeted him back with a hug. “Hey, pa.”

“Where are my grandchildren?” Eddie asked.

“At school,” Danny shook his head with a grin. His dad always insisted on seeing his babies. “They are already taking Thursday and Friday off, they don’t need to miss much more school.”

“But we never see them!” Clara pouted. “And Charlie barely knows us.”

“I know!” Danny mocked her tone. “But I’m trying to be a responsible dad.”

They all laughed.

“Besides,” Danny said reaching for their suitcase rack with wide eyes; his mother always did pack heavy. “Aren’t these first few days supposed to be just for you two, celebrate a little, enjoy yourselves?”

Clara shrugged. “Grandbabies aren’t enjoyable?”

Danny rolled his eyes, pulling the suitcases to his car. “You know what I mean.”

“Yeah,” Eddie said, pulling Clara towards him by the waist. Clara went with a flirty smile and Danny resisted the urge to cringe. No wonder Nahele and Grace found excuses to slink off to their rooms when he and Steve got cuddly on the couch. “I am certainly looking forward to that hotel room.”

“Okay,” Danny interrupted. “Enough of that. I’ve got to get you guys to your hotel. We caught a case this morning, and we have three days to solve it. Don’t want to have to make Jack’s adoption a fly-by.”

“Oh, a case?” Clara asked, grabbing her own suitcase. “Do you know what’s going on?”

Danny shook his head. “Team’s at the crime scene now. I’m hoping to meet them there.”
Chapter 2

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Steve -- 1995 -- Age 19

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“Come on guys, it’s pouring!” Steve yelled at the cab overflowing with academy guys. He was the last one there, the cab was already full, and there was no way he was getting in with them. “What am I supposed to do?”


Henry Boren was an ass. He was a fellow freshman at the Academy. He had started in high school with him two years ago. His father was some congressman and he walked around like he owned the place. Steve hated him right away. Steve didn’t want to be at that school back then – it’d be awhile before he was warmed up to the idea of the Navy and he didn’t need a bully to make it worse. But neither did the other kids.

So, Steve, being a natural big brother, decided he was going to take the brunt of Henry Boren’s shit.

When Henry had found out that Joe – a frequent guest instructor and all around war hero to little dedicated sailors everywhere – was a little less like student/teacher and little more like nephew/uncle… oh things just got worse after that.

Making sure Steve was left behind seemed his deliberate doing.

“I don’t have any more money!” Steve yelled as the cab took off. “I bought you all beer! Don’t leave me!” He took off running after the cab, but stopped after a few steps as his boots were soaked by a puddle.

Steve McGarrett was nineteen, broke, and stranded in New York City. He’d just seen Aunt Deb and Mary off on their own spring vacation and he had to be back at the academy by Friday. There was no way he was going to make it by walking. He pulled at the change in his pocket; he had maybe two dollars in change. There was one thing he did not want to do, like, the very last thing he wanted to do, the very last, not after this last summer; he was going to have to call his father.

One thing was for sure, he was never buying anyone beer ever again.

“Hey,” Steve walked up to a man under an umbrella. His camis they all wore to make them appear older and able to buy alcohol with less of a chance of being carded were already soaked through.

“Do you know where a payphone is?”

The man vaguely pointed up the street a ways and kept on walking. Steve practically ran until he saw them, in an alley, not covered at all. He was going to get so soaked; he’d be surprised if he didn’t end up with a cold.

Biting the bullet, he deposited his last few quarters and dialed the familiar numbers. It rang once, twice. It should be around noon, and unless his father had switched shifts, he wouldn’t start his shift for another three hours.

John picked up on the third ring, “Hello?”
“Dad!” Nerves shot up Steve’s spine. “Dad, it’s me.”

“Steve?” he paused. “Aren’t you in New York City?”

“Yeah, spring Break.”

“Are you okay?”

“I’m stranded. I need you to send me some money.”

“…”

“Dad?”

“What was it you said?” John said slowly. “‘You don’t need me anymore? You never needed me?’”

“Dad,” Steve pleaded.

“You’re a grown up,” John said. “Figure it out. Academy doesn’t want someone that can’t figure out a simple problem.” The line went dead after that.

Steve’s heart hurt at the sound.

“Fine!” He hung up the phone. “Fine!” He yelled again. He picked up the receiver and banged it down again several times. “Fine, fine, fine!”

He stepped back, shaking, and not from the cold of the rain.

Thunder rolled through the alley of the tall buildings as Steve tried to steady himself. “Okay. Okay. I can do this. Come on, Steve.”

Slowly, he found his footing. He needed cash. Enough for a ticket and maybe a meal. He couldn’t get by on a belly full of beer and bar nuts from the night before. Or– What he needed was a recruitment office. Own up to his predicament. Call Joe. Joe would help where his father wouldn’t. He could always count on Joe.

He pulled out the already soaked phone book and began searching the yellow pages for a recruitment office, and – unfamiliar with the city’s layout – it took him longer to find than he cared to admit.

It was a run of the mill Navy recruitment office, with some kind of higher ranked individual sitting behind a tired desk in the back; Steve had worked a desk in a similar office closer to Aunt Deb’s place in Queens one summer. That internship looked good to the Navy. A young clerk – an ensign – sat in a similar desk to the one he used to sit at and she lifted her head as he entered, camis soaking wet, just as another thunderclap echoed down the street.

“Sailor,” she greeted, standing up.

“Not quite,” he answered, with a salute, dropping his duffle. She grinned and returned the salute anyway. “Academy.”

“Can I see some I.D.?”

Steve pulled at his chest velcro, pulled out his soaked to the core wallet, and thanked whatever deity that all his cards were plastic or laminated. He pulled out his academy I.D. card. She inspected it briefly before handing it back to him.
“Alright, Midshipman, how can we help you?”

“I need to use your phone.”

The recruiter was on the phone, but not saying anything, presumably on hold. He eyed Steve with interest.

The clerk handed him the receiver of her own phone. He sat down with a curt and respectful nod of his head and went about dialing another, less familiar number. It rang once, twice, and then–

“Joe White.”

“Uncle Joe! Hey, it’s Steve.”

“‘Uncle?’”

“Because I’m calling you as your favorite honorary nephew, not as your student.”

Joe chuckled for a second before, “What’s going on, son?”

“Well, I’m in a bit of a jam. I’m stuck in New York City, with no way back to the Academy. I have to be back by 1600 Friday.”

“Oh, well that’s a simple enough of a problem. Let’s get you home, son.”

And like that it was fixed. Would that have been so hard for his father to do? Really? Just a few words of encouragement? Even just a suggestion to call Joe would have been better than what John had given him. He didn’t need his father, after all.

After plans were made (a train to D.C., meeting Joe, and a car ride back to Annapolis, simple solution, really, his father was a jerk. Maybe he had just caught him on a bad day, during a bad case? Maybe there was a reason he didn’t have time for Steve.

He didn’t seem to have much time for anything to do with Steve, so he doubted his mind’s own suggestion.)

He hung up the phone with lighter shoulders and a sigh.

“Sounds like things went your way,” the ensign said with a grin. “I’m glad.”

“Yeah, thanks,” Steve said with a smile. Then he looked over his shoulder at the downpour outside. He had a few hours before he had to pick up his train ticket. Maybe the storm would pass before then. “Mind if I stick around and try to dry off?”

“As long as you don’t drip on my paperwork,” she said with a grin then she glanced at his feet. “Or my carpet.”

“Yes, ma’am,” he said, pushing out of the chair and off the carpet below him, a small puddle already under him.

“Though I don’t know why you bother. It’s supposed to rain on the whole east coast for a week.”

“Good to know.”

He moved to one of the waiting area chairs, plastic and on tile floor, sat his duffle under his feet, and
let out another sigh.

Would it have really been so hard to help him? Was it really that much of a hardship to help out his child? He was starting to see where Mary’s anger was coming from. Mom died, and he sent them away “for their own good” and Steve spent so long trying to believe it. Mary had been young enough, he supposed. Young enough to realize this wasn’t right. Steve had just been old enough for it all to hurt way too much.

Another sigh, and a decision to focus on better things, Steve looked for reading material on the side table next to him. Run of the mill recruitment brochures – things he already knew. The Navy was his future, even if he hadn’t admitted it out loud yet. Why wouldn’t it be his future? Then he came across one brochure that caught his attention.

“What you need to know about Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell.”

Steve’s eyes shot up first to the recruiter, who was still busy on hold on the phone, and then to the ensign who was busy with her own paperwork. He hated the rush that went to his ears at the very thought. One tough topic to another; his mind was betraying him today; he wasn’t gay.

He eyed the ensign again. She was pretty. Maybe in her mid-twenties. Reddish-brown hair done up in a simple french braid that so many women in service preferred. She was attractive, and Steve took comfort in that.

He wasn’t gay.

Which is why he picked up the brochure. It’s not like you could raise your hand and ask about this sort of thing in class. Not without raising suspicion.

“A recruiter cannot ask about your sexuality, and you are under no obligation to reveal your sexuality,” it read.

‘Good,’ Steve thought, glancing back up at the woman again. ‘Because I’m totally not gay.’

“What does ‘Don’t Tell’ mean?” he read further. “Soldiers should not disclose or discuss their sexual orientation or conduct. If a soldier admits to being homosexual, the commander will begin the process to determine if credible information exists which would warrant separation.

“What is credible information?

“One: A statement made by a reliable person that she or he observed or heard a soldier engage in a homosexual act, state that he or she was homosexual or bisexual,—”

The word made his eyes stop reading for a second. His eyes flitted back up to the ensign, still just as pretty. Then his eyes flitted towards a cardboard cutout of a sailor, done up in his dress blues, and looking too much like Freddie Hart for his own good. Cold ran through him and he swallowed hard.

He mentally shook his head and kept reading. Maybe this did pertain to him... No. No, McGarrett. Stop it. You aren’t gay.

—or state that he or she attempted to marry a person of the same sex. Two: A statement made by a reliable person that he or she had observed or discovered a soldier saying or putting in a writing statement acknowledging a homosexual act or the intent to engage in a homosexual act.”

So someone could just say they saw him kissing another man and his future was gone. Then where would he go? He couldn’t go home, he wasn’t welcomed there. He thought of that asshole Henry –
so desperate to take Steve down. One wrong move and Henry would be at the Dean’s office at soonest free time. He’d have to be careful.

Then his mind went directly to laundry duty. He and Freddie had laundry duty twice a week. Folding sheets was fun when you did it with someone that sometimes made out with you afterwards. Someone could have easily have walked in and saw them and then where would they be? Out on their asses, in the rain, with no prospects and no futures; the shame of their families.

His stomach sank; it had to stop.

“Almost 200 discharged already this year across all branches of the military,” came a voice. Steve looked up; it was the recruiter, standing over him, tall and in intimidating dress blues. He was a Captain and probably around his father’s age. “An epidemic, truly,” he said with disgust.

Steve stood immediately and saluted him.


“Yes, sir.”

“Good man, that White,” he said. “Served with him on the Johnson a decade back now. You called him ‘Uncle.’ I wasn’t aware Joe had a nephew.”

“Oh, uh,” Steve said smartly. “My father served with him in Vietnam. They’ve always been close. He even introduced my parents.”

“Ah, a military family, I see. Good, good. So you got stranded?”

“A bunch of us came into the city for spring break, sir. I got left behind.”

“Tsk,” he berated. “What disloyalty from your classmates. Calling White, I bet they get their asses chewed out.”

...Steve hadn’t thought about that. That was the last thing that needed to happen. He wasn’t a tattle.

“Oh, don’t worry, boy,” he told him, clapping him on the shoulder. Steve crumpled the brochure in his hand on reflex. “No man gets left behind is an important lesson to learn. One, I think, Joe White believes in above most things.”

Steve politely grinned.

“So, any of your classmates undesirables?”

“Sir?”

The recruiter motioned towards the crumpled brochure in Steve’s hand. “That why you’re reading up on it?”

“No sir, just looking for something to read.”

“Well, better to weed ‘em out early in the academy before it’s an embarrassment in the Navy, don’t you think?”

“Sir?”
“The homosexuals.”

“Oh,” Steve said. He didn’t quite know how to respond.

“Didn’t you say your train was at 4:00?” the ensign spoke up, interrupting them from across the room. Steve’s head shot to her. She must have sensed his discomfort. His train wasn’t until 6:00. She was giving him an out. She glanced down to his hand, the one in a fist around a Navy pamphlet, then back up to him with purpose.

It hit him: she knew about him. Which meant that Steve now knew about her. They shared a sudden, deeper understanding of each other. A sudden respect and camaraderie Steve didn’t expect to find on a day left stranded by his classmates. A secret.

It would be decades before he realized that this was the first moment he accepted this part of himself, even if only for a passing moment.

“You better get going before you miss your second ride out of town.”

“Yes, ma’am. Thank you ma’am.” He turned to the recruiter. “She’s right, sir. I should be going.”

“Good luck getting home, Midshipman.”

“Thank you, sir.”

Steve turned to leave, but not before turning, and giving the ensign one, last, grateful nod. She gave a similar one back. A friend in unfamiliar waters.

No man left behind.

As he left the office, stuffing the brochure into his pocket, he thought, ‘maybe this wouldn’t be so hard.’

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Steve – present day

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The victim was face down on the floor, and the hotel room a mess. The mattress thrown, a couple dents in the walls, a glass table in the corner shattered, the television looked like it had been picked up and bashed down on someone. Whatever happened, the victim put up a fight. He had a deep gash on his upper arm and it looked like his leg had been broken. There was a pool of blood under him, suggesting he was stabbed somewhere in the stomach.

Kono was pale.

“You okay?” Steve asked her.

“Morning sickness,” she lied. Or, maybe she wasn’t lying.

“Be sure to step out if it’s coming,” Chin teased. “Don’t want you contaminating the crime scene.”

“So supportive,” Kono said with a sarcastic look on her face.

“Aren’t you supposed to be on desk duty?” Lou asked her.
“I can come to crime scenes. The action is already over. I’m perfectly safe.”

“Sure,” Lou said, giving her a grin.

“So do we know who our guy is?” Steve asked, nodding towards the man on the floor.

“We can’t touch him until Max gets here,” Chin said. “CSI is still photographing the place.”

“Right,” Steve said as Eric smiled at him and went back to his camera. They were always ahead of CSI, it seemed. It had been a while for Steve, though. He had four kids he had to shuffle around and he didn’t know how Lou and Danny did it. But he beat CSI today, maybe he and Danny were getting better at this.

Splitting up the kid’s drop off certainly helped. Steve in charge of the babies, Danny in charge of the teens… it worked out well this morning. Maybe both of them working would actually be beneficial to–

Steve mentally shook himself. He was in the middle of crime scene, for goodness sake.

That’s when Max walked in, looking frazzled. Frazzled for Max was unusual. They all noticed it.

“You okay, Max?” Kono asked first.

“I just had an unpleasant conversation with a cupcake baker.”

“We’re having cupcakes at the party?”

“As you know,” he stood up straight and faced Steve, “I am not sharing any details of the planning with either you or Detective Williams.”

“So are the cupcakes going to turn out like you showed me?” Kono asked, conspiratorial. She grinned, like she was getting away with teasing Steve. Steve grinned and let her have this one.

“They will now, and if not, there is nothing more I can do,” Max sighed as he knelted down. “Let’s see who we have here.” He went about opening his kit. “Mr. Russo, was he properly photographed?”

“Like always, Doc, vic gets pics first.” He snapped a friendly one of Max kneeling over the body only to be met with a blank face from Max. Eric brushed it off and turned to the television and focused on his job.

With procedure properly checked, Max went about turning the body over. Another CSI stood ready with a camera to document and Chin stepped out of his way.

Steve’s stomach dropped at seeing the victim’s face. He was bruised, had a cut along his forehead, and had blood running down half his face, but it was him for sure; Steve remembered his face clearly.

“Let’s see,” Max held out the the quick AFIS scanner; sometimes they got lucky and the victim was already in the system. But Steve knew they didn’t need it. He could already I.D. him.

“No need, Max,” he said sadly.

“You know who this guy is?” Lou asked.

Steve nodded. “Jake Wu. He’s a SEAL.”
It was in that moment that Danny showed up, several of the officers at the door welcoming him back. He walked up, taking in the scene around him, and then, with a bit of confidence, “What, no welcome backs?”

“Our victim is a Navy SEAL,” Chin said gently.

Steve felt Danny’s eyes on him in an instant, but Steve couldn’t stop looking at Wu. They never worked together again, after that first mission. Commander Hood saw to that, saw that they wouldn’t mesh well together, and that was probably for the best. But Wu was a hurt that Steve never quite dealt with. It was always something he ignored and tried to move on from.

Here fate was, forcing him to deal with it.

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Danny – 1995 -- Age 19

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“‘The bathroom is down the hall.’”

“El bano esta en…. el... hall.”

“‘Pasillo,’ Danny.” Sally rolled her eyes and smiled at him. Danny’s heart flipped a little bit. Like it had all semester. This was new. Or, well, not new so much as the decision to act on it was new.

“Did you not do the flashcards at all during spring break?”

They were at one of the public tables at the school library, somewhere near the back exit, alone, books and highlighters and empty dinner containers surrounding them. The east coast storm that had ruined the tail end of spring break let out a steady downpour of rain against the single window at the back door exit.

Sally Greene was his study partner; freckled skin, long, brown hair, and bright red-rimmed glasses sitting in front of wide, brown eyes was a combination that made Danny’s tongue thick in his mouth. It was alright though, he could blame the language.

She was the prettiest thing he’d ever seen.

“Besides, it’s, ‘El baño está al fondo del pasillo.’”

The way that rolled off her lips was distracting; he wasn’t absorbing much of anything. He really should call Matty and apologize to him for all those jokes about being gaga over girls. Here Danny was, sitting two feet away from one he couldn’t get his mind off of. He grinned.

“This is why you and your beautiful brain should just do all the work and I just sit back and look cute.”

She chuckled so deep her tongue stuck out the corner of her mouth.

“Oh, now I know why you keep me around,” she joked.

He liked making that thing with the corner of her mouth happen. They’d been friends all semester, and – besides his sisters – she’s the first girl that ever really gave him the time of day. He chased cheerleaders in high school, maybe even took one or two of them to a dance, but once the scandal about him and Ricky Bonaducci broke, he couldn’t get any of them to give him a real chance. His
date to prom was a pity date. By the time his senior year rolled around, he contented himself single
and very, very gay.

But Sally Greene was gorgeous. Her hair had a curl to it, the kind that was wide and soft like it was
done with a curling iron and she sat in a chair like she had years of ballet lessons under her belt.

Sally Greene was smart. She had straight A’s, was a year older than Danny, and she had been
教学 him how to study. How he got through high school without studying, he’ll never be able to
explain. College hit and it was like, crap… how do I do this? Sally Greene was an angel with paper
clips and post it notes and sympathy piling up at her edges.

Sally Greene was also funny. He hadn’t laughed so hard with anyone that wasn’t his sister. Which
was what he thought this relationship was, at first. Missing his sister; she was looking to be his new
best friend. He had plenty of friends, a whole gaggle of them.

They went into the city almost every weekend, snuck into clubs, and danced under bright lights. But
none of them were close. Maybe he and Brian could get there if they could ever get over sleeping
with each other that one time.

But Brian had nothing on what he and Sally were becoming.

He’d seen her in her pajamas. She was comfortable enough with him that she let him in her dorm
before class while she was rushing around getting ready; she was always sleeping too late. Trusted
him enough to know he’d stop by and wake her up. He knew it wasn’t like missing his sister when
she slushed out of her sleep pants in a hurry and the quick glance he got of her upper thigh made him
wide eyed and turning around towards the door quick.

(“Oh, come on, Danny. It’s just underwear!” she had said. His libido apparently didn’t think so.)

So he was pretty sure he was attracted to her. He was pretty sure he liked her. Butterflies and
everything. He’d noticed pretty girls before, but had never really had a desire to do much about it
since he was a sophomore in high school.

Only problem, he was gay. Right? Gay. Men. He liked men. ‘Very, very gay,’ remember?

So why did his eyes keep wandering down her neckline? Why couldn’t he get those thighs out of
his mind?

“I was a little busy during spring break, thank you.”

“Oh, yeah, sure. New York City gay clubs keep you busy and I’m sure all the hunks eat you right
up.”

“I thought you didn’t judge!”

“I don’t!” She held up her hands.

“It wasn’t just gay clubs,” Danny told her. “I was lining up a job for the summer down in Atlantic
City.”

“Oh, bartending?”

“I’m nineteen. No, I got a aunt who’s a manager at a hotel. Well, more like my mom’s friend that I
call my aunt. She’s getting me a gig in a casino restaurant.”
“Ah, nepotism.” She nodded and reached for Danny’s pile of flashcards, pulling out a fresh card and writing ‘pasillo’ on one side. Danny grinned at her help.

“It’s not nepotism, it’s a character recommendation! I don’t exactly have a work history outside of babysitting, mowin’ lawns, or shovlin’ snow.”

“So you’re going to be a waiter?”

“You don’t think I’d be a good waiter?”

“No, you’d be a great waiter, but how is that going to help you be a cop?”

He grinned again. She was so supportive.

“Remembering who’s who is an important skill. Remembering lists, keeping an eye out for things, and,” he did a little dance jiggle, “body language.”

She fought a giggle. “…Right.”

“What?”

“You’re cute,” she answered. Danny’s heart soared. Then she rolled her eyes and handed him the flashcard. “Write the translation, nerd.”

“First I’m cute, now I’m a nerd,” Danny said taking it from her, writing ‘hall’ dutifully on the back. “Which is it? I’m getting whiplash.”

She leaned forward on her arms with a grin. “You can’t be both?”

Was… was this flirting? “Nah.” Danny grinned back. He shuffled the card into his ever growing pile. “Gotta be one or the other, can’t be both.” He took a beat to feel an unidentifiable emotion about that statement.

She bit her lip. “Why not?”

It was his turn to lean forward on his arms and into her space around the corner of the table. Neither of them moved. “It’s just the way it is.”

“Both,” she said softly.

“We’ll see about that.”

The space between them got smaller and smaller. Danny was close enough to see a glare in her glasses when her eyes went wide and she sat back in her chair slowly.

“You’re gay.”

Danny, wisely and maturely, said, “I thought so.”

Her face fell. “I don’t want to be an experiment.”

“You’re not an experiment!” Danny said, throwing his arm out in between them.

She gave him another face.

“Okay, so maybe I’ve never really kissed a girl before, but maybe I’ll like it!”
“Oh, so you mean:” and she sat back forward again, “experiment.”

“Is one little kiss so bad?” he asked. Put this to bed, kiss a girl; feel nothing. It would help. He’s gay, he’s gay, he’s gay. “Help a friend put his mind to ease?”

“So you’re attracted to me?” she asked, eyebrows peaking up above her glasses.

“I don’t know,” he answered. “I think so.”

“‘You think so,’” she parroted, sighing. “Danny…”

“I know, I know. But there’s something here, and you know it!” She bit her lip and her eyes flashed down to his mouth. He wasn’t wrong. “Just. Please?”

She stared at him for a moment before rolling her eyes again, “Fine. A kiss. But that’s all the experimenting I’ll participate in.” She waved her finger at him.

“Agreed,” Danny said, nodding, serious.

They leaned over the corner of their table again, another sigh from Sally, and then they gently kissed one another. That simple kiss did things to Danny. That simple kiss deepened and Sally pulled back – just a fraction – and pushed forward and kissed him again. It was clear she was a bit unpracticed, but that didn’t stop the rush towards Danny’s ears. He reached forward, putting a hand under her jaw, pulling her closer.

She pulled back at that. Taking a moment, running her tongue along her bottom lip, she collected herself. Danny left the hand on her jaw.

“And?” she asked.

“I’m more confused than ever,” Danny confessed. “I really liked that.”

“I did too,” she said, a bit breathless, rushing forward to meet him in another kiss. They sat there, at that table under the single window in the back of the library, kissing each other like they didn’t have a midterm to cram for. Soon enough, Sally opened her mouth and Danny was obviously teaching her how to use her tongue in a kiss. He found it endearing. She was teaching him how to study; he could teach her how to kiss. He didn’t mind, he liked her.

“Okay,” she said pulling back. “Maybe I’m willing to experiment in other ways.”

Danny laughed, her face in his hands, excited to be doing this with a friend. He leaned forward and kissed her again when–

“Williams!”

They quickly pulled away from each other. It was Brian, six foot four, tan, built, with judgement and betrayal written on his face.

“Brian!” Danny greeted.

“What’s up?” Brian asked with a frown.

“Whatcha doin’?” Brian asked with a frown.

Danny felt it in the pit of his stomach – a place he’d identify as cop-gut later in life – his life was about to one-eighty again. Last time it was because someone caught him kissing a boy for the first time ever... only this time he was caught kissing a woman.
Whenever the victim was a sailor, or even military, Steve got stone faced and proud. Driven in ways he wasn't in other cases. Everyone understood why and fell in line quicker than normal, with less teasing. The team stepped up to try to exceed his expectations.

He wore that stony face all throughout the crime scene, and out into the hall where a few patrol officers were standing guard, and for the long, tense wait at the elevator. The others stayed behind, Kono with Steve’s keys, while he and Steve went ahead of them to make a next-of-kin phone call. Usually finding who to call took a little bit of cop work, but Steve had a name ready.

Not only was this Jake Wu personal for Steve because he was a SEAL; he had some kind of personal history.

Danny wondered if he’d share with the class, or make them all work for it.

Much to Danny’s surprise, as soon as they were alone in the elevator, he turned towards Danny and dropped his head to his shoulder. Danny took only a second to be shocked before he reached around Steve’s neck and ran his fingers into the hair on the back of his neck. He didn’t cry, instead he only took deep, long breaths. After two or three, he nosed his way into Danny’s neck and Danny returned the gesture and gave him a ghost of a kiss right below his ear.

“We have to catch this guy Danny,” he said into his neck.

“We will,” Danny said, reassuring.

Steve pulled back. “We have to.”

Danny put a hand on either side of his face. “We will.”

Steve took another breath, bopped his forehead back onto Danny’s shoulder, before pulling away with a sigh; moment over. Danny snaked his hand into Steve’s anyway, happy that Steve gripped his hand back.

“How’d you know him?” Danny asked just as the elevator doors opened. Steve dropped his hand, and Danny took notice. Maybe it was a professional thing. “Did ya’ go on missions together or something?”

“Or something,” Steve said, stepping into the hotel lobby.

Danny followed him, only a step behind. “You going to explain what that means?”

Steve gave half a look over his shoulder, throwing him a face that said ‘maybe, but not right now.’

So they were going to have to work for it, it seemed.

Just then, a hearty, “Danny Williams?” sounded out across the hotel lobby. Danny turned widely towards his name, and Steve looked up for the source. “It is you!”

Across the way stood a man in swim trunks, a towel slung over his shoulder and sunscreen in hand. Obviously a tourist. He was tall, early forties, with a small hint of a gut, but there was no denying
Danny was looking at his own blast from the past.

Nick Newton.

“Don’t say you don’t remember me,” Nick said with an easy grin, walking their way.

“Nick, wow, hi…” Danny said shortly, mouth gaping. He really didn’t need this right now, with everything with his family coming to the island, now with the dead SEAL fourteen floors up and an emotionally compromised partner and boyfriend…

The last thing he needed was Nick Newton.

“What are you doing in Hawaii?” Nick asked.

Oh, this was going to hurt.

“I… live here.”

It’s was Nick’s turn for his mouth to fall open. “Oh really, Mr. “I don’t see myself living anywhere but New Jersey?””

Danny scratched the back of his neck. Then he remembered Steve was standing not two feet away, arms crossed, looking at Danny with a friendly curiosity. Probably going to use Danny’s obvious awkwardness to distract himself from the mess upstairs.

“Uh, Steve, this is Nick Newton… From college…”

“Oh, college?” Steve’s eyebrows went up with interest. He held out a hand. “I want stories.”

“Nick, this is my – partner Steve.”

He didn’t know why he didn’t introduce Steve as his boyfriend. He saw Steve’s half glance at the lack of title. They had already had the “we’re going to introduce each other as our boyfriend, okay?” conversation weeks ago. Danny shuffled on his feet.

Nick reached forward for Steve’s hand, “Partner? Like…”

“Cop,” Danny said a bit too quickly and Steve noticed. This was some leftover instinct, it had to be. What was wrong with him? “We’re cops. We’ve got a crime scene upstairs.”

“You became a cop after all.” Nick frowned. Then he smiled at Steve, they were about the same height, “Nice to meet you.”

“You too,” Steve replied, grinning. How did he convey that this was not a place Danny wanted to be or a conversation he wanted to be having. ‘Let’s go Steve, let’s go,’ his face said.

“You seem surprised Danny’s a cop,” Steve observed, ignoring Danny’s face, or just plain not picking up what Danny was laying down.

Nick shrugged. “Not surprised, really.”

“You knew I joined the academy,” Danny said.

“Yeah, but academy and detective are two different things.”

“How did you know I was a detective?”
Nick paused, looking Danny up and down, “It doesn’t take a detective to know those clothes don’t exactly scream off the clock.”

Danny did a little chuckle.

“Right?” Steve asked, friendly. “He used to wear a tie.”

Nick smiled back at him easy. “He looks good in a tie.” Steve gave a tiny frown, but you’d have to know him to know it.

“Right.” Danny said, trying to not think about the implications of that statement. “What are you doing in Hawaii?” Danny asked. If they were going with small talk here might as well be polite. Nick asked him, after all.

Nick paused, looked down at himself, and then back up to Danny with confusion. “Family vacation.”

“Family?”

“Yeah, kids and everything.”

“You’ve got kids!” Danny said, with a bit of a smile. Nick always wanted kids; Danny found himself happy for him.

“Yeah,” Nick smiled.

“So do I,” Danny told him, proud and rocking up on his toes. “Four.”

“Four?” Nick laughed. “Now that’s a little much.” Danny frowned, opening his mouth to defend his children when– “I have three.”

He and Danny laughed at the same time. He had a gut, hair a little thin around the hairline, wrinkles surrounding his eyes, but he had the same thousand watt smile. Some things never change.

“Technically four.” Nick threw out a hand towards them; he always did talk with his hands. Danny never knew if he picked it up from him, or if Nick picked it up from Danny, or if they only exacerbated it in each other. “If you count Gino.”

They laughed again.

“Well, in that case, I have five,” Danny said.

“Five?” Steve asked, eyebrows meeting.

“Eric,” was all Danny said back. Steve made a face like he understood.

“Gino said he ran into Eric a few years back,” Nick said, happy. “Said he was going to school for… something in science.”

“Yeah,” Danny said, proud. “Criminal forensics. He’s a CSI now.”

“Like on TV?” Nick looked impressed.

Danny smiled, a little proud. “Like on TV.”

There was a slight lull in the conversation, Danny studied Nick’s face, while it was obvious Nick
was studying his own. Nick wasn’t the only one with thinning hair and wrinkles around his eyes. Danny found comfort in their mutual aging, and that Danny had stayed fit where Nick looked like he sat in an office chair a little too much.

“Well,” Danny said, pointing towards the exit. “We should get going, murder to solve.”

“Right,” Nick said, “It was nice…”

“How long are you guys in town?” Steve asked, cutting him off. He looked eager to be friendly and threw Danny a confused look. He was probably wondering why Danny wasn’t being friendlier.

“Steve,” Danny berated.

Steve shrugged and threw him another confused face. Danny tried to tell him ‘no, let’s go, not this guy, please not this guy,’ but their telepathy wasn’t working today for some reason. Steve was off his game.

“We got here yesterday,” Nick answered. “Here until Sunday.”

“Why don’t we get together, then?” Steve asked before Danny could interrupt. “I still want stories. Besides, a couple of locals showing you and your wife around town adds to a vacation, right?”

Danny made a face. Steve said ‘wife.’ Oh god.

“Steve,” Danny said again, trying to sound more like a warning.


“Sorry,” Steve said, shaking his head. There was a short moment of realization that flitted over Steve’s face. He did a double take between them before sheepishly saying, “Offer still stands.”

Nick looked to Danny who had wide eyes, telepathy between the two of them shaky, but still there, even after all these years. ‘Are you okay with this?’

But the telepathy was rusty, and Danny couldn’t tell if there was a little bit of, ’sure, let’s catch up,’ in there too.

“We could bring the kids?” Steve offered. “How old are yours?”

Nick’s mouth dropped open, pulling his eyes off Danny to answer. Did he want to catch up, or was he feeling as awkward as Danny?

“Ten, fourteen, and nineteen.”

“Perfect!” Steve said. “What do you say?”

“Steve…” Danny started.

“Sounds like fun,” Nick said, cutting him off. Catching up it is. “I’m sure the kids will enjoy some vacation friends.”


Steve pulled out his phone, “Give me your number, we’ll set it up!” Nick reached for the phone with hesitation, his eyes on Danny.
The two of them shared a short moment before Danny shrugged, giving in. Nick grabbed the phone and made quick work of dialing his phone number.

“There ya go!” Nick pointed over his shoulder. “The family will wonder where I am.”

“Right,” Danny said, following his thumb towards the outdoor pool.

“We'll text,” Steve said, holding out a hand.

“It was nice to meet you,” Nick said respectfully, shaking Steve’s hand.

“You too.”

Danny gave an awkward smile and a nod towards Nick. He wasn’t about to hug him, and shaking his hand felt too… impolite. Nick took a deep breath and gave an awkward smile back.

And like that he turned towards the pool and left.

Danny face fell from polite to angry in half a second. Steve’s went from satisfied to concerned just as fast. Danny, at least, gave Steve the courtesy of waiting until they got to the car to let him have it.

“Why did you do that?”

Steve took a second, starting the car. “What do you mean?”

“Why did you get his number? Now we have to go out with them,” he practically whined.

“With an old college buddy? What's the problem with that?” Steve asked.

“Nick was not a buddy. Nick was my college boyfriend, Steven.”

Steve’s face fell. “Oh.” Then he backed out of the parking space.

“'Oh,' he says,” Danny scoffed, sitting straight in his seat, crossing his arms.

“Is this going to be a thing, now?” Steve asked.

“Yes!” Danny answered. Steve puffed out his cheeks in an aborted sigh.

“Wait, the college boyfriend?” he asked as he pulled into traffic.

Danny sighed. “Yup.”

“The college boyfriend.”

“You already said that.”

“It’s just that you’ve really only got the one.”

“Yes, I'm aware.”

“Why didn’t you say that?”

“I was a little bit in shock at seeing him again, that's all,” Danny said, waving his hands.

“You could have said something.”
“Oh, so now this is my fault?”

“Wait,” Steve paused. “It’s my fault?”

Danny growled and rolled his eyes. He threw up a hand, wanting to change the subject.

“How do you know Jake Wu?”

Steve sputtered for a moment and then rolled his eyes spectacularly. “Whoa, whoa, whoa, we were talking about your college boyfriend.”

“Yes, and I’m mad at you about that, and I wanted to change the subject. So. How did you know Jake Wu?”

“I don’t—” Steve bit his lip.

“Steve.”

“He was a SEAL. That’s how I knew him.”

“The way you were in the elevator tells me you knew him better than that,” Danny said, gently this time. Oh, boy, was he mad at him for Nick, but he also knew Steve was hurting. He saw pain and regret the moment he walked the crime scene. Relationships took balance and compromise, right? Right? One thing at a time.

Steve only chewed on his lip.

“So? Did you go on missions together? Were you drinking buddies? Did he save you on some mission and now you need to pay him back? Is he your long lost half brother you’ve never mentioned? What?”

“Where are you getting that last one?”

“I don’t know. I just got off a month and a half of daytime television.”

Steve chuckled a little, but Danny’s rejoice in the smile was short lived; he chewing on that lip again, dark corners around his eyes again.

“It’s complicated.”
Chapter 3

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Steve – 1998 -- Age 22

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All the advice he received after graduation was the same: find someone who had the job you wanted and befriend them. Ask them questions, learn the social expectations and the ropes of climbing the career you wanted. Four years learning the in and outs of the Navy in the academy only got you so far.

Jake Wu was Freddie’s friend first. Freddie knew he wanted to be a SEAL since he was a little baby freshman folding laundry. Steve had ended things with Freddie just after that spring break he was stranded, but that didn’t stop the two of them from gravitating towards each other in an on-again-off-again mess of a relationship. They had several stolen moments and a couple weekends where they both pulled away from each other, angry and ashamed and swearing up and down it wouldn’t happen again and desperate to remain friends. Steve’s heart broke every time.

Freddie seemed determined to make this particular off-again status stick, and was throwing them into friendly group settings as much as possible and it was actually starting to work. That’s how Steve met Jake.

If they really wanted to be SEALs, then they had to quit whatever they were doing. Despite the tension between them, Steve knew he’d be following Freddie, hell or high water, so it only made sense to befriend SEALs too.

Jake Wu was gorgeous and his grin reminded Steve of his high school crush. Freddie introduced them and they hit it off like they had been old friends. Jake had spent a few of his younger years in Hawaii, his father stationed at Pearl, and they were talking old haunts and missed connections and a few too many beers in, Jake had Steve pinned against his door in his military base house in Norfolk and was doing something incredible with his tongue.

The next morning was sweet and easy and waking up with Jake was nothing like waking up with Freddie and how refreshing was that? No angry kisses, no dark looks. Just sips of orange juice between hot, wanted kisses made Steve think of Jake everytime he drank orange juice for years afterward.

And then:

“You know this was just a one off, right?”

“Why?” Jake asked.

“You know why.”

“We don’t have to tell anyone.”

“It’s not that simple. Someone could just say they saw us and like that it’s over. You worked so hard to become a SEAL, I might be heading in the same direction.” Steve shrugged, picking up his cami overcoat. “It’s just too hard.”
“That’s too bad,” Jake said sadly. “I sure like you.”

Steve didn’t have much to say in response to that so instead he slept with him again. And again. And a couple more times after that. Not all on the same day. Spread out over months and months and between deployments and in that time he and Freddie were strictly friends and then he met Catherine and she was pretty and attractive and reminded him that he liked women just as much as he liked men.

There was one deployment where he assisted a SEAL team and pulled Jake out of the water fresh from doing Steve-couldn’t-know and they had a nice makeout session in Jake’s officer’s quarters and he couldn’t look Freddie in the eye afterward and two weeks later he slept with Catherine for the first time and it was incredible and he was so confused about what he wanted.

So he signed up for the SEALs, and Catherine approved, and Jake approved, and Freddie approved, and Freddie’s father approved, and like that Steve was on his way to becoming a SEAL.

‘Your mother would be proud,’ Joe had told him. Steve believed him and took it as yet another sign he was doing the right thing. At least his career seemed set in stone. At least he had that. Even if things with Catherine were stalled, and things with Jake were easy, and things with Freddie were an addiction he couldn’t say no to. He had the Navy, and it became a cornerstone for him.

Catherine didn’t want anything, and that was fine; Steve wanted Freddie. But he didn’t dare tell that to Jake. Freddie’s secret wasn’t Steve’s secret to tell.

“I’m in love with someone else,” Steve had told Jake. “That’s really the problem, here. They don’t want to be with me.”

“Maybe I can convince you in the meantime?” Jake said with bedroom eyes.

The real problem though, was Freddie didn’t want Steve. Or, at least, he kept saying that, pulling Steve along on a hook.

The evening that Jake met Catherine, Steve watched as he put two and two together and came to the wrong conclusion and the hurt, dejected look in his eyes was enough for Steve to leave Catherine wanting more at her front door that night. His love life was a complicated mess of will-we, won’t-we and we-can’ts and we-shouldn’ts and this-is-just-for-funs and at least Steve had the SEALs and an exciting professional life to look forward to.

He had a short deployment while they vetted him. A short deployment cut short by a summoning that meant almost losing his career.

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**Steve – present day**

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“It’s complicated,” he had said.

“Did you ever work with him?” Danny asked.

“Once,” Steve answered curtly. His grip on the steering wheel tightened briefly.

“Just once?”
“We didn’t really get along. Higher ups figured that out real quick.”

He wanted to tell Danny, he wanted to tell Danny everything, but now was not the time. Jake was just killed. He had to focus on that, not on… not on everything else. He owed him that much.

“What do you mean? I thought there was a brotherhood bond no matter what.”

“What does it matter?”

“You’re the lead investigator in his murder investigation. I think it matters!”

“It’s nothing.”

“It’s something.”

Steve sighed through his nose and made a show of checking his mirrors – something he did when he was trying to think of what to say next. He needed a topic change.

“I’m sorry about setting us up on a date with your ex-boyfriend,” Steve said, instead of an explanation.

“Don’t change the subject,” Danny scolded him. “I couldn’t get you to say what I wanted you to say if you weren’t avoiding the subject.”

“To be fair,” Steve went on, “all you’ve ever said about the guy was ‘last big relationship before Rachel.’”

“He was.”

“Why don’t I know more about him? You two were very awkward.”

“Noticed that, did ya’?” Danny asked.

“Yep.”

“And you still invited him out?”

“I said I was sorry!”

“Stop changing the subject!”

“So do you want to go with atmosphere or authentic, because we could take them to Kamekona’s for all I care—”

“Steve!”

“What?”

“What happened between you and Jake Wu?”

Steve was quiet again. Checking his mirrors, merging a lane, pulling up to a red light, and they sat in silence.

“It was nothing,” he bit his lip. Oh, how he wanted to tell Danny everything. How Jake could’ve been something but couldn’t be anything and how unfair that was and how paranoid even a glance at each other made him feel and how he hated Freddie for stringing him along and how guilty he felt
for that hatred. But it was too much right now. Maybe, after they caught Jake’s killer, after Danny’s family had gone home, he’d talk to him. He could picture it; alone, late at night, laying in Danny’s arms, where it was safe and easy and–

“Steve,” Danny started, reaching over to rest a hand on Steve’s knee. “It’s me. Who else are you going to tell?”

He had a point.

“Let’s just get this call to his sister over with.”

“Do you have beef with her too?”

“I only met her the once. She was young then. Just out of college. I mean, I was too.”

“Would she remember you?”

Steve bit his lip as the light turned green. He took off as soon as he could. “I don’t know.”

Danny didn’t get anything else out of him during that particular car ride.

~

“I never wanted to get this call,” Stephanie Wright said over the phone. “Didn’t expect it to come while my brother was on leave.” Then. “Wait, Steve McGarrett? Navy SEAL Steve McGarrett?”

Steve grimaced. “Yes ma’am. I didn’t know if you’d remember me.”

Lieutenant Stephanie Wright was probably their age living somewhere in Florida. She and her husband were both in the Navy reserves and her older brother was their victim. After the initial call, and the awkwardness between her and his partner, Danny requested calling on Skype so they could ask her a few questions face to face. Body language and facial expressions went a long way, as far as Danny was concerned. Steve obliged, but wasn’t looking forward to it.

She had a couple boys she had sent outside. Danny could see them kicking a soccer ball outside through a glass door. She was sniffing and had a tissue in her hand as she settled what had to be a laptop in front of her.

“What would you boys like to know? Why isn’t NCIS working his case?”

“Lieutenant Wright—” Steve started.

“Stephanie,” she corrected.

“Stephanie, Five-0 takes Naval related cases when NCIS is overloaded. They also throw us any SEAL related cases because they know a SEAL leads our task force, but we caught Jake’s case before we knew who he was.”

“And you’re that SEAL in charge?”

“Yes ma’am.” Steve switched feet. “My whole team has all its attention on your brother’s case.”

“Well, at least it’s not just you.”

The malice in her words hurt, but Steve didn’t blame her. Stephanie knew the truth about her brother, long ago. She knew the truth about Steve, too. She had walked in on them, dropped a bag
of groceries, and grinned like the cat caught the cream. She never said anything, and Steve was thankful for that.

She must have heard the whole story from Jake at some point, for such a dark tone.

“For the record, Commander, it wasn’t me.” She looked sincere at that. “And it wasn’t him, either.”

“I know that, ma’am.”

“You didn’t have to take it out on him.”

“I know that too, ma’am.”

They sat in silence for a moment, measuring each other up. Thank god for Danny.

“Do you know why your brother was in Honolulu?” Danny asked.

“No,” she shook her head. “But he goes all over the country doing side work.”

“‘Side work?’” Danny asked her.

Steve spoke up, explaining to Danny. “Sometimes SEALs take side jobs when they are on leave. Ours is a very distinct skillset.” He turned back to Stephanie. “Do you know what kind of work?”

She shook her head again. “Sorry. He does a lot of security gigs, though. For celebrities and whatnot?”

Steve nodded. He’d done a few freelance jobs like that once upon a time.

“Do you know anyone else that would know why he’d be in Hawaii?” Danny asked her.

“Oh,” she looked stricken, like she just realized she didn’t just have to deal with her brother’s death, but she had to tell other people about it now too. Her face tore for a millisecond. “His boyfriend.”

Danny’s eyebrows shot up and his eyes went directly to Steve. So that particular piece of information was public knowledge. Steve wasn’t aware he had come out.

“Name?” Steve asked.

“Eliot Brown.”

“Was Jake out to the Navy?” Danny asked gently.

Stephanie sighed, “No. He was planning on it though. They were waiting on something in Eliot’s family, and then they were going to announce everything. They were getting married.”

Steve’s heart fell.

“Is there anyone that would be upset with him… coming out? Someone that knew?”

“Other than you?”

Steve said nothing, and took the blow for what it was. He could feel Danny’s eyes on him.

“Sorry.” Stephanie said. “He never… I think I was more upset about everything back then… He saw that you were out. It… inspired him. He wanted to be able to post on facebook like you do. And a gay Navy SEAL tends to make the gossip rounds, ya know?”
“I don’t think I’m friends with him on facebook,” Steve told her.

“Doesn’t mean he didn’t look you up. He was hung up on you for a long time.”

Danny’s eyes were boring into him now, and he was having a hard time ignoring them, trying to give Stephanie his full attention.

They hung up with Stephanie after a few more questions, but Danny had a few more for Steve. Bless him, he eased him into it.

“Side jobs?” Danny asked. “Do you do side jobs?”

“I used to.”

“What kind of side jobs?”

“The kind that can fund our getaway vacation.”

“The one with the fake I.D.s?”

Steve darted his eyes around the empty bullpen and Danny rolled his eyes. “Yes,” Steve told him with a nod. “I can’t exactly pay for all that with a military salary, ya know.”

“Do I want to know?”

“Probably, and I’ll probably tell you one day.”

Time to rip the bandaid and Steve felt it coming. “You knew Jake Wu was gay.”

Steve took a moment. “Yes.”

“How did you know?”

Steve motioned for Danny to move into his office and they sat across the desk from each other. Danny settled in for a story. “We slept together a dozen times a couple dozen years ago.”

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**Danny – 1995 -- Age 19**

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The Felicity Casino and Hotel wasn’t one of the fancy new buildings in downtown Atlantic City, in fact, it was only seven stories high, and one of the oldest buildings on the block. Inside was done up to attempt to be the roaring twenties, and — while there were a few slot machines near the restrooms – the Casino prided itself on its classic card games. Poker and blackjack specifically.

The Felicity also housed a restaurant named “The Rooftop” on the top floor. Seven stories tended to be impressive from an outdoor bar and The Felicity had a terrific view.

Danny’s first summer working The Rooftop was not as a waiter. He realized that as soon as he showed up for his first day. The Rooftop had a standard and he had zero training. Instead, that first summer was spent bussing tables and cleaning the water displays among other things while he was trained to be wait staff.
Sally Greene dumped him on July 5th. He remembers the date because he’s pretty sure she stuck it out with him just long enough to get into The Rooftop for fireworks the evening before.

“I don’t think I’m comfortable with your history, Danny,” she had told him. “I’m always going to be second guessing you around every man!”

“I like you!” he tried to explain. “I like men, but apparently I like women too! And I like you!”

“I don’t know if I can deal with that,” she told him sadly, rubbing her thumb along his wrist.

July sucked after that. When he started dating Sally, his entire friend group had dumped him. They, and he can still quote them, “felt betrayed and disgusted” that Danny would “give up his homosexuality like that and go back in the closet.” He had tried to explain he wasn’t giving anything up, that maybe he just got things confused and this was who he is, but they didn’t hear it.

Danny’s summer social life after that consisted of the little village that made up the staff of The Felicity. The bartenders snuck him drinks when it was the end of his night and the kitchen sent him home with food more nights than not. The maids were gossips and Danny clued into that right away. Security found out he had dreams of being a cop and invited him to watch the screens with them every now and then. Everyone saw little, teenage Danny and seemed to adore him.

Sometimes management (his Aunt trying to avoid showing favoritism) threw him to the downstairs tables, walking the casino floor, cleaning up beer bottles and cocktail glasses after casino guests. Sometimes they threw him to the hotel and he carried luggage for tourists. He went where he was told and he learned a lot.

The concierge desk was a favorite place for his breaks. He learned a lot about New Jersey, fell in love with it a little bit. Once, he was caught up by a guest when he was alone behind the desk. He winged it and set them up with Mets tickets. They liked him so much his name was on their comment card and Danny felt important after that. The card dealers made fun of the little pep in his step all night. It helped that the concierge was an out and proud bisexual that taught Danny definitions and made him feel comfortable in his skin and maybe he could do this sexuality thing.

Of course, the dealers were a fun bunch. They all looked at him like he was a kid – and looking back he was so much a kid – and they all treated him a bit like a little brother. They teased him, relentlessly, but they taught him a lot too. Like how to survive light hazing and how to smoke a cigarette and how to read people’s bluffs. And other important things.

Like how to play poker. The dealers found out that the manager’s baby-faced nephew didn’t know how to play a simple game of poker and that first time he sat in a backroom with them they took him to town. His whole first week’s paycheck lost in the pot while they laughed with glee. His Aunt snacked him over the back of his head and told him to get his shit together.

By the end of that summer he was an aficionado. The dealers made sure he left them with some skills, after all.

Danny worked for The Felicity every summer, and on the weekends through his sophomore and junior years of college.

Sophomore year of college, between his friend group dumping him for not being gay and his girlfriend dumping him for not being straight, would have been a lonely, empty year without the good people at The Felicity. Sure, he dated a few people (mostly girls, because they were new and exciting and unfairly easy to pick up, but none of them stuck.) He wouldn’t have gotten through Spanish 102 without one of the assistant managers finding out he was struggling and then doing
nothing but speaking to him in her native Spanish constantly.

Nick Newton became a bartender for The Felicity the May of his sophomore year. He was twenty four and looked good in the white button up and black tie uniform behind that bar. Danny was a kid with a crush, and the whole casino knew it.

The whole casino, including Nick Newton.

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Danny – present day

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Danny listened as Steve told him what had to be the reader’s digest version of his relationship with Jake. He got the feeling there were feelings involved and that meant Danny had to be patient. Steve was getting better, he had to admit. But it still felt like Steve wasn’t telling him the whole story.

Maybe it was just because they were at work.

“You sure you want to work this case?” Danny asked him.

“I owe it to him.”

“So you were friends with benefits. Why the falling out? What happened?” Danny asked.

Steve opened his mouth to answer just when Chin knocked on the door of his office and let himself in.

“Hey, so we got a hit on the security camera footage. Could be our guy.”

They were up in a heartbeat.

They spent the morning, and the better part of the afternoon chasing down a security camera lead, and then trying to track down Eliot Brown. Eliot, too, was a sailor. A Captain on an aircraft carrier currently at sea. It would take some time. And it was bereavement call, and neither Steve nor Danny wanted to spring that on the man while he was on the bridge. They had a quick message back from him “I’ll call at 1500 your time” and that was that.

Kono and Jerry were waist deep in Jake’s financials and Chin and Lou were coordinating some canvassing at the hotel so that left Danny watching Steve’s stony face for any cracks.

“Anything, guys?” Steve asked.

“‘Side jobs,’” Kono said with a judgmental eyebrow, “why can’t Five-0 do side jobs. I could make some serious money.”

“You want to go to the private sector?” Steve asked her with a grin. Danny knew the answer to that. There was no way.

Kono made a face and shook her head.

“He’s been working hard this deployment,” Jerry said. “I’ve already cleared several four and five figure deposits as security gigs and one from the CIA, which I think is interesting.”

Steve shrugged. “More common than you think.”
“So the CIA was your side job of choice!” Danny said with a grin. It was an unwritten rule on cases like this that Danny’s job was to keep Steve as human as possible. The whole team knew it, and Danny was good at that job. “Should have known.”

Steve made his ‘I’m a badass and I know it’ face that was one part pride and one part smug superiority that made Danny roll his eyes before Steve crossed his arms. “Nothing that sticks out?”

Jerry shook his head. “I also went six months back on Lieutenant Wright’s accounts, and I’m about to start Captain Brown’s. No funny business.”

Danny whistled, impressed. “You’ve already cleared two people’s financial’s?”

Jerry shrugged. “You guys hired me for a reason.”

Steve shrugged again. “Man has a point.”

“He’s had several phone calls to two different numbers,” Kono spoke up, “both burners, so that doesn’t get us anywhere. Whoever he was talking to didn’t want authorities to know who they were.”

Steve’s nostrils flared; he was frustrated. Their leads weren’t very helpful, and the image they captured on the camera was of a guy walking the other way, with sunglasses on to boot, so facial recognition wouldn’t help. Danny was hoping their meeting with Eric at the lab in a few hours, or the one at the morgue with Max before that would yield something, or else Steve would go mad with no results.

That was when the table’s phone line rang. Captain Eliot Brown was on the line, a whole two hours early.

Jerry brought his image up on the main screen. Captain Eliot Brown was a black man, mid forties, with a kind face – not at all the kind of face Danny was expecting out of a Navy Captain.

“Five-0!” He greeted. “What can I do for you? The message said you needed to speak with me.”

Everyone took a breath together, and Danny wanted nothing more in that moment than to reach out and hold Steve’s hand, but he was standing in a relaxed soldier’s stance, hands behind his back. They all had their eyes on him. He glanced at Danny briefly.

“Yes, sir,” Steve replied. “Lieutenant Commander Steve McGarrett, this is my team. Are you alone, Captain?”

The Captain sat up, and his eyes flitted somewhere behind the camera. “I’m in my quarters alone,” he replied. “Usually Five-0 calls the Navy, it’s about needing information for something time sensitive. When my CO found out you all were calling, he gave me time to call you back.”

“Thank you for that,” Steve said, nodding in way that reminded Danny that Steve wears a uniform from time to time.

“Steve McGarrett,” he said, intrigued look on his face. “Where do I know that name?”

“I am a SEAL,” Steve offered.

A look of realization crossed across his face and his voice dropped. “Why are you calling me, Commander?”
Danny watched as Steve visibly swallowed. “I have some bad news for you. Jake Wu was found murdered this morning in Honolulu.”

Danny watched as the Captain blinked once, twice, and then his mouth fell open.

“You knew to call me, how?” he asked, a little breathless.

“His sister, Stephanie,” Steve replied.

The Captain nodded, before leaning forward staring off into the room, hand covering his mouth. “Can I have a moment?” he asked.

“Of course,” Steve answered.

The camera panned the room to show the stiff made bed behind him, obviously pushing his laptop away from his face.

Kono and Jerry let out a breath and looked down at their hands resting on the table, but Danny only had eyes for Steve. Steve had sent him an overwhelmed and distraught look. No one liked making this call, but it was going to be tougher on Steve. Danny couldn’t imagine what the Captain was feeling, if he got the same news about his own SEAL. He couldn’t face it. He wanted to hold Steve’s hand so badly.

Except it was Steve that reached out for him and Danny took it, greedy. They shared a small, soft, comforting few seconds. This case was different for lots of reasons, but of course their first case as a couple together had to involve a gay couple and a SEAL, of course it did, this is their life.

The camera panned back to the Captain who sniffed a few times and wiped at his eye, righting himself. Steve dropped Danny’s hand, and Danny hoped it was out of professionalism.

“What happened? Do we know who did it?”

“We have leads,” Steve spoke. “We were wondering if you knew why he was in Honolulu.”

“Oh,” the Captain started, “yeah. He had a job, but I’m stateside for a few weeks on Saturday. We were going to spend some time in Hawaii while my ships there. We rented a place – uh… I don’t have the… he did it all.”

“We didn’t find that in his financials,” Jerry spoke up.

“It would probably be on my card,” the Captain said. “Better miles program.”

Danny let out a breath of a laugh. The things couples do. “How long were you two together?”

His face fell. “We were.” He took a second before letting out a controlled breath. “Six years. We met in the field, actually. His Team rescued me and two other guys in one of the ‘Stans.” He grinned and looked like he was remembering the moment.

“Do you know what his job here was about?” Steve asked gently.

The Captain shook his head, “I never know until the job’s over. It’s usually security gigs though. When it’s the CIA, it’s usually overseas, so…” He trailed off, looking somewhere off camera.

“What about people he works with, who he gets the jobs from?” Danny asked.

“Word of mouth. Usually alone and usually freelance. People he’s worked with before either use
him again or give his name as reference. He’s worked with celebrities and politicians and athletes. He worked the Oscars once. I honestly don’t know.”

“Alright,” Steve said.

Danny felt his phone vibrate in his pocket and he pulled it out to eye who was calling. It could be Lou or Chin. Instead it read “Kain – Lawyer” and his eyebrows met in confusion. This was either about Rachel or about Jack. Either way, Danny figured he wouldn’t like this conversation. He took the lull in the Captain’s speech to excuse himself and make his way to his office. Steve looked towards him in confusion. Danny shrugged, and showed him who was calling. His confusion only grew.

“Detective Williams,” he answered as he reached his door.

“Detective! Hi, it’s Lindsey Kain, do you have a moment?” she asked.

“Yeah, a moment, what’s going on? Is everything okay?”

“No,” Kain said immediately. “It appears Miss Smith has pulled her support of adoption.”

“What?” Danny’s stomach dropped.

“The notice was on my desk this morning. She changed her mind, which is her right to do.”

“What do we do now?”

“We can go ahead with the hearing, but without the birth mother’s consent…”

“Adoption isn’t likely.”

“Yeah.”

“Any hint about what changed?”

“No,” she answered. “But with your permission, I’m going to request a meeting with Miss Smith this afternoon, see what happened.”

“Do we need to be there?”

“No, it’s just a meeting with her face to face.”

Danny bit his lip, and looked out into the bullpen to Steve, still talking with the Captain. How great would it be not to know about this. Danny was already dreading telling him. They had so much going on in their lives right now, of course this was going to happen. “Set it up.”
“Prisoners who have recently had children are already at risk of depression, but Jack’s mother is suffering a pretty bad bout of it, apparently. Her doctor is recommending a visit from Jack, to give her something to look forward to.”

Leia was in their kitchen, getting Danny’s paperwork to be the boys’ other foster parent finalized, Jack was asleep in his crib, and Steve was packing for his reserves week. He’d be leaving in thirty six hours, and now he had to squeeze a visit to Halawa.

“Oh, baby, look at you! You’re so big!” she said, sitting down. She reached out, but then paused. “Am I allowed…”

“I think that’s allowed,” Steve said, lifting Jack over the table. She took him greedily, wide smile on her face, and her eyes only on her son. Jack wiggled for a moment before settling, unused to someone else holding him. Steve made a note to invite the others around more, so Jack could get used to more people. “If not, I’m sure we can break this rule.”

She smiled up at him for only a moment before all of her focus was on Jack. She smiled wide at Jack’s curious face. “You’re already holding your head up!” she praised with a smile. She pulled him close then, carefully hugging him.

Steve was trying really hard not to just take Jack and run. This was his job as a foster parent. To, not only give Jack a home, but foster a relationship with his mother. He was hit with how much he had become attached to Jack these last few months.
“How long has he been doing that?” she asked, happily, eyes still on her son.

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“How long has he been doing that?” she asked, happy...
He loved Jack, he knew that. But this was his mother, and Steve was only his caregiver. His foster-father, not actual father. This woman obviously loved her son, it was written all over her face. He also knew that she’d be behind bars until Jack was at least a teenager.

(Steve had sat down with Leia, back when he learned that Jack was in the back room of her office with no place to go, and asked if he could help with him. She told him she needed to find him a long-term placement. Steve offered his home until she did, and she never did find someone else. Two weeks into it all, Steve was content with a long-term placement, and learned that “long-term” meant well over a decade while Jillian was in prison.

Watching Danny make ridiculous faces at the boy made his heart warm and he would do good with a decade of those faces, and a kid would be so lucky as to have Danny love him…

Leia signed the paperwork and that was that.)

But Jillian was his mother. He could never take that away, and Steve wouldn’t want to take that away from Jack.

“So what do you do,” Jillian asked, “You know, when you’re not off playing soldier.”

Steve grinned. Danny used that exact phrase too. “I’m a cop. So is Danny, for the record.”

He watched as her face did something he couldn’t quite read. Somewhere between shock and relief.

“Cops,” she sighed, looking down to Jack. “That’s good.”

“Good?” Steve asked.

She glanced up at him, and then back down to Jack. She made a face, like she wasn’t sure if she wanted to share. “Jack’s father…” she started. “He’s not a good man.”

“Who is he?”

She shook her head. “He doesn’t know about Jack.” She grinned up at Steve, “Let’s keep it that way, yeah?”

“What about when the time comes and Jack asks?” Steve asked.

She was quiet for a moment, rocking his carrier. “I don’t know. A bridge to burn when we get there?”

Steve grinned at her tone. She was such a kid herself and yet he knew a bit of her background, read her file. The things she’d been through by the time she was ten made Nahele’s childhood look idyllic.

“Am I part of that ‘we’?”

“Leia told me you signed on for long-term care,” Jillian shrugged. “I have no choice but to trust you. I can’t request him in a new home just because I don’t like him being with other people.”

“I want to be a good home for him.”

“I’ve been in lots of foster homes, Mr. Navy. Many of them said the same exact thing that just came out of your mouth.” She sat back from Jack for the first time and crossed her arms. “Plenty of people
say things they don’t really mean.”

“I don’t–”

“If something happened to me,” she offered. “Would you still keep him?”

He was shocked to find he was worried. “You’re not planning on doing anythin–”

“I’m not planning on offing myself in the night, Mr. Navy.” She rolled her eyes. “Didn’t ya hear? They put me on drugs for that.” Steve didn’t know what to say to that, and she laughed at his awkwardness. She leaned forward with a grin. “So, Mr. Navy. You and this partner foster father of yours, you together?”

“Uh, no.”

“Why not?”

“Uh…”

~~~

December – 2015

~~~

Steve missed out on Jack’s second visit, Danny taking him instead. He got a report that read much like Steve’s visit. An interview. Invasive questions. A sad kind of acceptance of her current situation. Nothing but loving attention for Jack. And a nickname. Steve was “Mr. Navy” and it seemed Danny earned the title of “Detective Man.”

The third visit was in early December, and Steve had just picked up Aunt Deb’s remains on his way to the prison. It was such an awful chore, but Mary was making a quick trip home to explain why she had to go back so soon, and they were in the middle of a case and they just…

They had plans to climb a mountain when Mary got back, but until then. “Pick up the urn” was just another errand. Steve hated that.

He was feeling guilty about that when an alarm sounded and in walked two dozen prisoners in orange jumpsuits, smiling to visiting family. He saw Jillian eyeing him through the glass window, impatiently waiting in the single file line. She looked better, Steve didn’t realize how bad she was last time he saw her. Her hair was cleaner and combed. There was color to her face. She looked a hundred times better.

Her focus was on Jack immediately. He even pulled out a thermos of hot water he had prepared. He’d been working with Jack for two weeks for something special for Jillian. He’d moved back his feeding time by a few hours so she’d get to feed him.

When she heard that she all but cried. It took her as long as it took the formula to warm up in the portable bottle warmer to regain herself. She awkwardly settled Jack in her arms, and he took the bottle greedily.

Steve pulled out his phone. Jillian looked confused.
“He’ll want pictures someday,” Steve shrugged.

“Of his mom in prison?”

“Of his mother wanting to do everything she can for him.”

Something Steve couldn’t quite identify crossed over her face, something sad. He thought a few pictures with his mother while he was an infant would be good for Jack as he got older, but maybe he was wrong. Steve watched as Jillian shook herself and posed, ready for a photo.

Steve took a few, and made a mental note to start a photo album for Jack. They planned to keep him for the long term, but there just was no knowing what would happen, and they didn’t have any control over that. A photo album was something that could travel with him.

They sat quietly as Jack finished off his bottle and cooed, content, in Jillian’s arms. She looked on in adoration and Steve had to fight himself.

This was his job. This is how he could be there for Jack. This is what he was supposed to do. Not just for Jack, but for this woman, who was very much still a child in so many ways. This was his job. He could do this job. Be there for them like this, create a home for Jack and keep him connected to his mother. If anyone knew the importance of knowing where you came from, it was Steve.

Suddenly Jillian let out a single sob, knocking Steve out of his own mind. He watched as she ran a devoted hand over his growing head of hair. Then she looked up at Steve.

“I know you said you started fostering for your oldest foster son?” She started, “Why’d you take in Jack?”

He blinked a few times, thinking back to Leia’s office, filling out paperwork for Nahele, and hearing a baby’s cry from the back room.

~

“Sorry,” Leia had said. “Newborn placement didn’t work out. It’s so hard to find someone for someone that little when adoption isn’t on the table.”

“Little?”

She nodded. “The Whittaker’s retired, and I tried a placement with little Jack, but it fell through. They brought him back after two days.” She shook her head sadly, pulling out yet another stack of papers for Steve to take home with him. Insurance information, Nahele’s medical history, the schedule of required appointments – he’d have to have a general check up in the next six months. Steve was trying to pay attention, but the cries from the back room kept distracting him.

“The Whittaker’s Jack? The one that was with Nahele?” Steve’s mind went to a little bundle, wrapped up in Danny’s arms. Danny held him, and rocked him, and fed him, and Steve bounced him for a little bit before he fell asleep on his shoulder.

That little guy? Who wouldn’t want that little guy?

“I could take him,” Steve offered, maybe a little too quickly. “Nahele and I already know each other, I could house him until you find someone. You know, for now.”

Something filtered over Leia’s face, and Steve didn’t know her well enough then to read what it was, but in retrospect it was disbelief. Not in that Steve couldn’t take care of an infant, but in that it would
be temporary. He couldn’t read her, but she read him like he was the morning weather report.

“I’ll start up the paperwork, but you’ll need a crib, and a few other items before he can stay with you.”

Steve shrugged, “Nahele and I are going shopping this afternoon anyway! It’s perfect! Meant to be,” Steve said.

“I’m sure it is,” Leia said with a grin.

~

“He was alone,” Steve told Jillian. “No kid should feel unwanted, not like that.”

“And you?” she asked, pulling Jack close. “Do you know what that feels like?”

Steve stared at her for a moment, then down at the table, considering his words. Her question was a big one, one that therapists and Danny have been asking him for years and never quite gotten an answer. So much of his life was a confusing set of contradicting facts and stories and he never quite figured out if he was wanted or not. His parents’ actions – leaving, and sending him away – were for his safety, so could he really blame them? Knowing those things now didn’t change the hurt he felt when he was young.

A short, curt nod was all he gave her.

Her face broke and she pulled Jack close, holding him to her shoulder. “Then I have to ask you a question, and you can take your time to answer,” she said around fighting tears. She hugged Jack tighter. “Would you consider adopting him?”

The question floored him. It was what he wanted, even if he hadn’t admitted it to himself. Of course he wanted to adopt that little boy. But how would it make Nahele feel? How would it change things with him and Danny? His whole life would be different with a son that was there to stay, whom no one could take away from him.

“Wh– Why–”

Jillian sniffed. “You’re military. Best foster family I ever had, that foster father was a sailor. You’re a cop, so if Jack’s father ever…” she trailed. “You took him in because you didn’t want him to be alone. I don’t want him to be alone, either.”

“Jillian…” Steve said, leaning forward onto the table. “I don’t–”

“Would you just think about it? Let me know? I need to know he’ll be okay.”

Steve nodded, already knowing the answer he wanted to say.

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Steve – Present day

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“What do you mean?” Steve asked as Danny gave him the news about Jack.

Danny shrugged. “She’s got the right to pull her support.”
“But she wanted us to adopt him.”

Danny sighed and slumped down into one of the chairs in Steve’s office looking as disappointed as Steve felt. Well, that wasn’t quite right. Steve really didn’t have a name for what he was feeling. Like a rug was pulled from under him, or a wave threw him from his board, or the rough pull of breath when you run in the cold. Was there a name for this feeling?

Shock. This was shock.

He took a deep breath and counted to four, let it out and counted to four again. He repeated that pattern for half a dozen breaths.

“What do we do?”

Danny shrugged again. “Kain said she was going to talk to her.”

“Should we talk to her?”

“I don’t know, maybe. I’d say let Kain try first. It might just be a misunderstanding of the legal language for all we know.”

Steve nodded. “Right. Let the lawyer go first.”

They sat as a couple disappointed lumps for a few moments before Steve’s phone pinged. He pulled it out of his pocket to see that it was his reminder app. “You’ve got PT.”

Danny threw his head back, “Ugh, I’m done with PT.”

“You’d make me go,” Steve argued. “You better go now, don’t want to be late.”

“Ugh,” Danny complained again.

Steve sighed, thankful for the distraction. This, he could handle. He stood up and moved around his desk to start pulling on Danny’s arm. It was true Danny was back to one hundred percent, and if not he was close to it, but doctor’s orders were doctor’s orders, he still had a few more sessions. “Up and at ‘em.”

Danny rolled his head forward and grinned. Steve knew that grin. Before, it was ‘I’m going to tease you’ grin. Now it was firmly ‘I’m teasing you but I want something out of it.’

“What do I get if I go?”

Steve returned the grin and leaned forward just a bit, “A functional knee.”

Danny’s face fell, but Steve had something ready for him.

“One of these days I’m going to get you on all fours.”

Danny’s jaw dropped, just enough to let Steve know he was imagining that scenario, and he sat up. “Okay, I’m going.”

“That-a-boy,” Steve praised, grasping him by the shoulder and patting his back.
It hit him that the action was… it was something he would have done before.

Something safe and neutral and platonic and a big giant excuse to touch Danny. What a strange realization.

So he smacked his ass.

Danny scoffed, but then rolled his head back to look up at him with a sad grin. The shock from just a few moments ago came back, only this time it came with a side of sadness. They shared a few moments of silence, Steve thinking about Jack, when Danny reached up and cupped his neck, just below his ear. “Things will work out,” Danny said. “We don’t even know why, yet.”

“I know,” Steve replied.

~

A few dead ends in the case later, Steve popped his neck in frustration. Jerry was following a few large payments, Chin and Lou had gotten back from canvassing with little to go on, Kono wasn’t having any luck with the cell phone company, and Steve’s contact at the CIA was giving him the runaround (as expected.) It was starting to get to Steve. They had to solve this, and he had nothing to chase.

He had snapped at Jerry – something out of character for him – and Chin had pulled him aside and suggested he take an hour or so.

“He was a friend,” Chin had said. “We all understand. Just until Max is ready for you. We got this, in the meantime.”

He nodded, agreeing. If it was any of them, he’d suggest the same thing to them. Not that any of them would take him up on his suggestion, but he had snapped at Jerry.

That’s how Steve ended up half a mile into the ocean away from his beach. A quick, light surf to clear his head. Except he found himself alone. No one surfed this part of the island, and most day boaters and fishermen were further out than he was. He was alone and found himself overwhelmed with the events of the day.

He allowed himself a moment of weakness. No one was around to see; he could allow himself this. Why? Why hadn’t he said anything to Jake? Why did it have to be Honolulu he died in? Why did he have to catch his case? Why did everyone he loved in his past die violent deaths? What was wrong with him? Why didn’t Jill want him parenting Jack anymore? Why was he not good enough? He’ll never be good enough. He’s never been good enough.

This wasn’t working. This was just making his anxiety worse. He wiped at his face with the back of his hand and sniffed, intent on catching at least one wave. And it was a pitiful excuse for one. His beach wasn’t great for surfing, but if you were patient enough, you’d catch a good wave. But not today, because that was just how this day was going.

When he got back to shore and checked his phone, he saw that he had a text from Nick Newton:

**California Number:**

*Hey this is Nick from this morning. We’re trying to plan our week out a bit and was wondering if you still wanted to get together if we could tomorrow? Let us know, thanks!*
“Oh, hell,” Steve groaned. He had forgotten.

He looked up at his yard, still a mess and torn up from the hurricane, life too busy to do much about it the last few weeks. The week ahead looked action packed too. Kono would kill him if they didn’t get it cleaned up before Eddie and Clara’s party; she had planned so much.

Steve chose to ignore Nick for the time being, shook off his disappointing surf, and decided to get to work. This, he could actually do something about.

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Danny – December 2015

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“I’m going to try to adopt Jack,” Steve announced one December night, in the kitchen, elbows deep in soap suds. “After talking to his mother… she wants me to. I know I’m not supposed to make any big decisions after a loss like Deb’s but for as long as the process would take–”

“I think it’s a good idea,” Danny interrupted, finishing drying a plate.

Steve looked at him with hopeful eyes, “You do?”

He nodded; he didn’t say anything else as he watched Steve’s face fall into relief, and then glee.

Steve turned back to the sink, working on another dish. “I’m going go to the lawyers after the new year.”

“Sounds good, babe,” Danny said, waiting on the next dish to dry.

He was excited for Steve, he really, truly was. It was just…

They had been going down the same path for a long while now. A path towards something good, something together. He bit his lip at the sight of Steve happy about his decision. One, Danny figured, had been on his mind for awhile. A huge life decision that was life changing and forever and Danny thought about the baby asleep upstairs. Thought about how he’d raise his arms up whenever he was happy, and he’d curl over in on himself when he smiled, how he didn’t quite know how to give kisses so they were just kind of open mouth, wet circles, and his heart ached.

He thought about how Steve was going to get to be there. For all the late night tantrums, and the kindergarten plays, and scraped knees, and first time on a surfboard. Danny knew that he’d be there for those things too. Even if they never fell in together, he’d be Uncle Danny, and Steve could just deal with it. He loved those boys.

But he wanted it.

There was a moment, just before Deb had passed, when Steve was still overwhelmed by his new room, and they were awkwardly padding around the same room together, wondering if…

Steve had rolled over and snaked his arms around Danny’s waist and nuzzled his face into his back. Danny ached at the memory. How his hand clung to Steve’s wrist, how he laid awake for an hour, just so he could memorize that embrace. How Steve’s breathing didn’t even out for almost as long either. They laid there and Danny’s heart raced and he was certain that they were finally ready for…

But here they were, almost a month later, standing in the kitchen late at night, still standing on the
Something new. Steve was always going to be his friend, always going to be his family, and yet.

He wanted it.

He sighed. All this want and uncertainty was going to give him a heart attack. They were going to have to talk about this, if they were really going to do this or not. A conversation was going to happen at some point, it had to. Or maybe Danny would just give in and grab his stupid face and kiss him because he couldn’t take it anymore.

Because Danny really wanted that life. A life with Steve and being a father of four kids like his father before him and bedtime stories and chasing down bad guys during the day and lazy rainy Sundays and obnoxious cheering at cheer tournaments and family fishing trips and Jack asleep on his chest. He wanted it so badly; so badly he shook with it.

Steve was grinning, too lost in his own moment to notice that Danny had let the dishes stack up, waiting to be dried. He shook himself back into the moment and he sniffed. He wanted it.

He just wasn’t quite ready to fight for it. Not yet.

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Present day – Danny ~~~

Kain:

Jill’s withdrawal seems final. I have a meeting, but I’ll call this evening to talk about it.

Normal visiting hours were on the weekend, and Danny knew he was pushing the limit on flashing his Five-0 badge at the warden for a personal matter like this. Immunity and means only worked if they didn’t abuse their power.

Steve:

Nick texted. Tomorrow okay? Sorry again honey.

‘Honey.’ He was trying hard to get out of the dog house. Or stay out of it. Danny hated that it was working. Pet names were new and he stared at the ‘honey’ for a little longer than he admitted as the guard walked him to the visitor’s room.

Thing was, this case was already hard on Steve with the victim being a SEAL and someone he used to know on top of that. He wasn’t telling him everything either, not yet. There was more in Steve’s past with Jake Wu, Danny had been a detective long enough to know that much. Usually, in cases that were hard on Steve like this, Danny was the rock. Kept Steve going forward and focused. But Danny was on his first case back from major injury, and was dealing his own fair share of history being stirred up and the ground underneath him was muddy, at best. It was awful. There was only so much Danny was willing to put up with, and anger at his partner was low on the list.

They were both distracted, neither one of them giving anywhere near one hundred percent, not at work and no where near one hundred percent with each other. Steve didn’t even know he was here.

Danny:

If we have to
Then almost immediately:

**Steve:**

*I love you.*

Danny grinned. So maybe Steve was trying for one hundred percent and Danny was the one dragging his feet.

**Danny:**

*I love you too babe*

Their day was hard, but three simple words made it a little bit easier.

The call from the lawyer only made everything worse though. Chin, Lou, and Kono were carrying this case and Abby was due in town so they’d have her help soon; but Kono wasn’t even supposed to be in the field. He had half a mind to storm into Steve’s office and demand they sit this case out. They had too much on their plate and Steve was too close to the victim as it was. Depending on how this conversation went, he still might.

Steve didn’t even know he was here. When the lawyer had called with the news, she had said not to do anything, said that she’d take care of it.

Lawyers don’t like it when people talk to each other though, so Danny chose to ignore her.

So there Danny sat, on his side of the table, tapping his fingers against the table in front of him, waiting for a nineteen year old girl to come out and decide his future.

Jillian Smith wasn’t that much older than Nahele. That blew his mind every time he thought about it, or visited her. He had a few times, during their visits. Twice a month, like clockwork, Jillian had visitation rights to her son Jack. It started back in November and had continued easily until Steve had agreed to adopt Jack. And even then, they kept bringing him to see her.

She had a fourteen year sentence ahead of her, and Jack was obviously loved, and turns out that nineteen year old was a decent mother, wanting to give her child some stability. Until she had called the lawyer and rescinded her promise to sign over her rights. Something had happened, something had changed, and Danny wanted to figure out why.

Jillian paused when she saw him. For a moment he was sure she was going to turn around and go back. Then she pushed her long blonde hair behind her ears and sat down with a sigh.

“Danny,” she greeted. “I already talked to your lawyer.”

“Jillian,” Danny responded. “Can you tell me why?”

“Why what?”

“Why’d you change your mind? I thought you liked us.”

She broke eye contact with him, looking down. “He’s my son.”

“We’re not going to take that away from you. Or you from him.”

She still couldn’t make eye contact.
“Jillian, you were so sure. What changed?”

She bit her lip, and then her posture changed. She sat up straighter. “I don’t have anyone else. I’ll be alone.”

“No,” Danny shook his head. “We won’t let that happen.”

“I’m an orphan. I’m a kid that aged out of the foster program! I’m an ocean away from anyone that I even knew from before!” She had moved closer to the glass, pointing down at the table with each point she was making. “I’m looking at fourteen more years of this place! I gotta have something to keep me going.”

“We could put it in writing,” Danny pleaded. He was pleading.

If they lost their chance at adopting Jack…

She sat back in her chair.

“It wouldn’t be a closed adoption.”

“And in fourteen years?”

“I’m not going to say it’ll be an easy transition,” Danny started. “But knowing where your son is? With people that are willing to work out schedules and visits and who knows what else Jack will be comfortable with? Think about him going through that foster care system you aged out of. You say no now, not ever, and there’s no way Steve and I can be certain Jack stays with us.”

“Now you’re using Jack against me,” she scoffed.

“Now you’re using Jack against me,” Danny said, arm flailing. “That includes knowing his mother. I’m not using him. I want to give him stability. I think you do too. I want to give him freedoms he may not have in another foster home. I want him to know where he came from, and I want his mother to have a better chance at succeeding when she’s out of this place.”

He thought of Nahele, walking around with the weight of his father’s own jail time pulling him down. The less of that in Jack’s future, the better.

“But you’re cops.”

Danny sighed, “That was a plus to you a few months ago. Something about a violent birth father?”

She rolled her eyes, but looked like she was about to cry. “What cop is going to be okay with a felon hanging out with their kid?”

Danny blinked once, twice, and then laughed. “That’s what you’re worried about? We have ex-felons over for dinner all the time.”

“That’s supposed to make me feel better?”

“They are all reformed guys, and that kind of community will be good for you, too, when we get there.”

She rolled her eyes. Then she picked at her shirt quietly for a moment. Danny let her have it. There had to be something besides the loneliness.

“Is this about his birth father?”
She looked up quickly at that. “No.” Then she looked panicked. “No one’s come forward, have they?”

Danny shook his head.

Relief poured over her face. “Let’s keep it that way.”

He filed that bit of information away for later, another conversation to have with her down the road. If only they could get over this road bump today. “Then what is this, Jillian?”

“Jill.”

“What?”

“I named him Jack because my name is Jill,” she answered sadly.

“‘Jack and Jill,’” Danny put it together.

“Do you have any idea how awful it is to be forgotten by the world?” She went back to picking at the hem of her shirt. “I’ve been forgotten about since I was born. I was left in a grocery store parking lot, and when asked, my mother said ‘oops.’” She laughed sadly. “I was two. She died of an overdose three days later. She was my age now.”

Danny didn’t say anything, he knew most of this from Jill’s file. Foster kids had hard lives and rough beginnings and more often than not left the system with scars they couldn’t afford to have treated. He knew that from all his years as a cop, but never saw it so clearly as he did whenever he was with Nahele, and now, here, sitting in front of him. He could only imagine the life Jill had.

“I wouldn’t leave Jack in a parking lot,” she said, seriously.

“That’s not what you’d be doing,” Danny told her. “You’d be making sure he’s safe.”

“I don’t even know where you live. What if it’s a dump?”

Danny smiled. “We live on the beach on the southern shore of the island, about an hour’s walk from diamond head. Steve goes running there in the morning sometimes.”

“On the beach,” she said with a chuckle. “In Hawaii. You guys really are loaded.”

“Not really,” Danny answered honestly. “I’m a cop, he’s military. They aren’t the best paying jobs. Steve inherited his house from his father. It’s where Steve was a kid, he grew up in that house.”

“That must be nice.”

“It is,” Danny tried to assure her. “We both want that for Jack. I think you do too.”

She only picked at her hem and Danny let out a sigh.

“We’ll put it in writing, we’ll keep up visitations, please, Jill.”

“Do you love him?” she asked.

“Yes.”

“How do you know?”
Danny paused; he knew his next words had to be the truth. They had to be sincere. He was asking this woman to give him her son. He owed her everything. She deserved honesty and respect and Danny wanted to give it to her.

“Because I’m just as terrified to lose him as you are right now.”
Chapter 5

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Steve – 2010

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He had googled and he had shopped and he had prepped and he had a plan but standing in the living room with a bucket and gloves, ready to scrub away the horrific aftermath of his father’s death? He didn’t know where to start.

Trophies – for sharpshooting and car shows – were splattered. Various frames and walls coated in a layer of his father’s blood. A pool on the ground. Some footprints where someone actually walked through it. The rug would have to be thrown out. The table and chairs – Steve couldn’t sit at them, he’d have to replace them. But not the desk. He couldn’t get rid of that desk. He stared and stared and felt numb.

This was his fault.

That’s when someone pushed him on the shoulder and he jumped, dropping the bucket (it splashed all over the ground and his feet) and threw up his hands, still elbow deep in a pair of rubber gloves, ready to fight.

“What, whoa, whoa, whoa,” Danny said, hands up, backing away.

“Danny, Jesus,” Steve said, calming down. “Ever hear of knocking?”

“I did knock. You didn’t answer.”

“So you just let yourself in?”

“After the last few days? Yeah.”

Steve sighed, he supposed he was right. They still hadn’t found Hesse’s body – there was always the chance he was still stalking Steve.

“What are you doing here?” Steve asked, pulling the rubber gloves off his hands.

“The paperwork I have to sign for the task force. I had a few questions.”

“You couldn’t have called?” Steve asked, a bit short. He made his way to the kitchen, the clean kitchen; nothing bad happened in there.

“I did. You didn’t–”

“I didn’t answer,” Steve said, cutting him off, nodding, and leaning against the counter.

He watched as Danny eyed the crime scene, linger over some photographs on the wall, before making his way into the kitchen. “Ya’ got any beer?”

Steve, still kind of out of it, mentally shook himself. He pushed up off the counter and reached for the fridge. “I got a couple longboards left.”
“Longboards,” Danny scoffed. “Is this your favorite beer?”

Steve shrugged, pulling a couple out of the fridge. “It’s locally made, and easy to request from pretty much any liquor store. It always made me think of home.” He twisted a cap off one of them and offered it to Danny.

Danny took it, an odd look on his face that Steve didn’t know him well enough to read yet, and took a small swig.

“So, what are your questions?” He asked as he opened his own bottle.

“Can we define ‘immunity and means?’ Because I’m getting real caught up on that one.”

Steve rolled his eyes, and over the next hour or so, they argued and debated security versus privacy (“I’m just saying, the warrant system is there for a very good reason!” “What if it was Grace, huh? What if the time it took to take a warrant was the difference between life and death?” “Don’t you dare put my daughter into a hypothetical, McGarrett.” “So you agree.” “I say I see the merit, not that I agree.”) went over the various insurance plans they could pick from (“I need full coverage, with you as my partner.” “I’m not that bad.” “You drove a car! Onto a ship! While they were shooting at us!”) and had an evening of generally getting a feel for one another over the island in Steve’s kitchen. The sun was going down when Steve’s stomach growled so loud it interrupted the conversation.

“Wow, you went into special ops with that subwoofer in your stomach?” Danny asked with a grin.

“Oh, haha,” Steve made a face as he stood up straight. “I haven’t eaten today.”

“At all? All day?”

Steve shrugged. It’s not like he starved himself, but sometimes other things had a bigger priority. Like meetings with the governor about a new job and meetings with lawyers about his father’s estate and phone calls with a distant sister and and and

His stomach growled again.

“Alright,” Danny said, waving his hand. Steve was going to have to get used to the wild hand movements as soon as possible. “Let’s go get some food.”

“Nah,” Steve said. “I’ve got to clean. I’ll figure out something later.”

“Then I’ll go get us food,” Danny said, already pushed away from the center island.

“Oh, no, no, no,” Steve said instantly. “You’ll bring back some chain restaurant fast food!”

“And what’s wrong with chain restaurants?”

“…I don’t even know where to begin.”

“They are successful businesses, as showcased by their many, many franchises.” Danny was already walking out the kitchen.

“Oh my god,” Steve followed him. “Fast food is so bad for you!”

“If it’s food, it sustains you. Therefore, not bad!” Danny argued, turning around, hands waving.

Steve was already piling up half a dozen reasons why he tries to avoid fast food when a flash of red
caught the corner of his eye. He stopped, hit with a huge wave of guilt and grief, arguments lost on
his tongue in an instant. His father was dead. Freddie was dead. He just quit the navy. What was he
doing? How was he going to handle any of this? This is stupid. This is so stupid.

“Hey,” Danny knocked him out of it. He turned quickly, forgetting what they were talking about.
“How about you go get us something? Show me what real island food is, right?”

“Right.”

He was in such a daze that he didn’t realize that Danny had stayed behind until he was on the
highway on the way to Rainbow’s. How rude of him, Danny was going to let him have it when he
 got back.

But he came back to, not a completely cleaned house, but the pool of blood in the middle of the floor
was washed up. The rug Steve was sure was ruined was rolled up against the window. The chairs
pulled out and lined up against the wall, opening up the room to clean as much as possible. There
was a mop, red and wet, sitting against the desk. The splatter on the wall was gone, too. His father’s
old trophies and photographs were lined up around the table, already wiped clean.

Danny worked fast.

He came out of the kitchen, drying his hands in a dish towel and a smile on his face.

“What’d you get us?”

“Danny…” Steve started, mouth agape at the scene before him.

Danny only shrugged and waved off in towards the other room. Like what he did wasn’t a major
chore, or one that Steve was having trouble facing.

“What’d you get us?” he asked again.

He was giving Steve an out. Steve knew they’d work well together, the last couple days proved that.
But this… this was above and beyond what a work friend would do. Danny had to get on his hands
and knees and… Steve swallowed something in his throat and took the out and shook his head as
clear as he could get it. Danny was just a good man. How did Steve luck out?

“Loco Moco,” Steve answered, holding up the takeout bag.

“Loco what-now?” Danny asked, curling his body away in suspicion. “I was thinking like fried
shrimp and rice and you bring me… what… is it like… the-the-the guts of a… turtle or something?”

Steve grinned. “A turtle?”

“I hear people turn them into soup.”

“They do. And it’s good, you should try it. But no. This, my friend, is Loco Moco. Let’s eat
outside.”

“You’re not going to get me to eat octopus, I swear to God.”

“Octopus is a delicacy!”

“You know what’s a true American delicacy? A Big Mac.”

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Danny – present day

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Danny got off the phone with Chin a half hour after his less than fruitful visit with Jill. The girl wasn’t letting anything loose, and Danny had a bad feeling in his gut. Jerry was running down a few financial leads, trying to figure out what their victim was doing in Hawaii. Chin and Lou had gone to check out the condo that Jake Wu had rented.

They had found a briefly lived in condo, but nothing suspicious. Eric was going through the left laptop and cell phone already and right now it was a waiting game.

Chin had said Steve had gone home to do some chores while they waited. Which meant he was frustrated with the lack of leads. He probably had the furniture moved and was polishing the wood floors. Steve was not good with stagnation, with the kind of cop work that took Jerries and Maxes and Erics. The small details that break cases were not his strong suit. Work drove him crazy when he didn’t have someone to chase, or someone to question, or someone to shoot.

Work drove him double crazy when it was personal.

Danny knew what he’d do before. He’d bring over a six pack and they’d have a heart to heart or they’d watch a game or Steve would drag him out surfing. Now? Would it be any different because they were together now?

Steve was piling up yard waste from Hurricane Fiona into the back of his truck when Danny pulled into the driveway.

“Hey,” Steve greeted. “News on Wu?”

“No,” Danny sighed, leaning against the camaro. “We got Max in twenty though.”

“Gotcha,” Steve said, wiping his hands on his shirt. “I’ll go change.”

Danny followed him into the house, and into the bedroom. The house was so quiet during the day, he was used to it over the last month and a half, but it always felt weird when the kids weren’t home. Daisy, Charlie, and Jack wouldn’t be here for another hour or so. Seven months ago this absence was the norm, how wonderful and strange.

“You doing okay?”

“Yeah,” Steve said, starting a shower – presumably for one of his quick navy showers.

Danny sat down on the bed, and talked to him through the open bathroom door. “I hope Max has something for us.”

“If not, Eric is going through his laptop now.” Then he bit his lip, choosing to bite the bullet. “I went and saw Jill.”

Danny heard the shower curtain swing open and Steve was at the door, naked and dripping wet.

“What?”

“I know.”

“I thought we said we’d let the lawyer talk to her.”
“I know.”

Steve’s voice raised, “Then why the hell—”

“Because!” Danny stood up, raising his voice. “We’re trying to add her son to our family! Which means she’s going to be in this family!” He was pointing sternly. “The last thing we need is a lawyer to be able to talk to family! I lived years talking to Rachel through lawyers, and it’s looking like that kinda life with her again lately and excuse me if I wanted to avoid that! With another child!”

Danny wiped his face after that. Steve looked on quietly, shower still running in the background.

He sighed, sitting back down, trying to control himself. “I know what it is to talk to family through lawyers, and trust me we don’t want to live that way.”

Steve’s jaw adjusted, like he was controlling anger, before turning back into the bathroom. Danny heard the shower turn off. Steve walked back into the room, towel around his waist, to sit down next to Danny on the bed.

“What’d she say?”

“That she has to think about it,” Danny said softly.

Steve sat forward. “I don’t understand. This whole thing was her idea.”

“She’s scared, Steve,” Danny said. He turned to him. “She’s scared and she’s alone and she’s been alone her whole life.”

“It’s not like we’d keep them from each other,” Steve said, eyebrows meeting. “I thought that was clear? I mean, you don’t want to keep them—”

“No!” Danny said. “I’m cool with Jack knowing her. I just think…”

Steve turned to him, eyes guarded.

“I’m sorry I went without telling you,” Danny said suddenly, shocking himself a little bit. “I just. I wanted– I wanted to fix it, to try. Everything was going so good. Now… There’s so much going on I just… Six hours ago I was making eggs and everything was beautiful.”

Steve leaned forward and rested his forehead against Danny’s temple. “It’s just life, Danny.” He kissed his cheek and ran a hand along his back. “We don’t have to do it alone anymore.”

Danny smiled.

This sweetness from Steve was both the newest and most familiar thing about Steve. He’d always been a giant softy, but now he got to be a softy in love and Danny was the focus of that love and oh man, oh man, how could Catherine turn this down? How could anyone? How could anyone feel the warmth and butterflies coming off this man and not get addicted?

He turned his face towards Steve, close enough that they rubbed noses for a moment, before leaning in for a gentle kiss.

Steve pulled back with a face, “Not that we weren’t doing it alone before! Just—”

“I know what you mean,” Danny said, smiling happily. Then his face fell, remembering what they were talking about. “But Jill does have to go it alone. That’s her hesitation.”
Steve’s face fell at his words and he took a deep breath and nodded. “He’s not going anywhere for a long while, if we have anything to say about it.”

“We don’t know that,” Danny started. “He could be–”

“He could be’ a thousand things, but we’re not going to let him get taken from this house without a fight, right?”

“We’re going to fight Jill? I don’t want to fight her. I don’t think we should.”

Steve shook his head. “No.” He took another deep breath. “I think we need to call the lawyer, let her know we’ll only go ahead with the adoption with Jill’s permission.”

“Are you sure?”

Steve shrugged. “I want him.” He closed his eyes. “I want him so bad. But not if it’s going to hurt him when he’s Nahele’s age and Jill starts asking to see him, or he starts asking about her.”

Danny leaned forward and kissed Steve’s shoulder, right at the top of his tattoo.

“I don’t want to hurt him,” Steve repeated himself. “This is our job. Right? As parents? To hurt them as little as possible?”

Danny kissed his shoulder again. He was right, and he nodded his affirmation. “As long as he’s not going anywhere.” He snaked his arms around Steve. “I’ve fallen in love with this kid, babe.”

Steve hugged him back. “I have too.”

“Alright, we’ll call the lawyer on the way over to Max,” Danny said.

He started pulling away, but Steve pulled him in again. They held each other for a moment, sad and quiet.

Then...

“You smell, babe.”

“You interrupted my shower.”

“We’ve got to be at Max’s in ten, let’s go,” Danny made a ‘hurry it up’ motion with his hand with a grin.

“Oh,” Steve groaned, leaning in for another kiss. “If only we had more time.”

“Mmm,” Danny mused against his mouth. “We have all the time in the world… As long as you want to get a reputation. Do you really want to start being late for work things now that we’re a couple?”

Steve sat back. “You’re right.” Then he grinned and kissed Danny quick, before he was up and back in the bathroom just as fast.

“I’m always right!” Danny called after him.

“I should have never said that!”

“Too late!”
“Do you ladies have a problem?” the Commander asked them roughly against the rain. They were in some unnamed jungle in some unnamed country and it wasn’t Steve’s first rodeo, but he was still very green in the field.

Steve, covered in a delicate balance of face paint and mud, immediately said, “No sir.” Jake Wu took longer to respond.

They were soaking wet from the downpour, meant to walk another four clicks before they were even within a scope’s eyeshot of their target, and he and Wu were rubbing each other this side of the wrong way. It was noticeable, and Steve hated it. This wasn’t a professional way to act, but he couldn’t stop himself.

Wu had slipped going up a hill, an innocuous thing really, everyone slips, but he slid right into Steve. The honorable, brotherly thing to do would be to steady his fellow team-guy and push him on up. Steve’s instinct reaction was to shove Wu off of him.

He hadn’t forgiven him, and wasn’t planning on it anytime soon.

Commander Hood noticed the tension weeks ago, back when this mission was still based in Coronado and was nothing but a pile of maps and manila dossiers. Steve and Wu walked around each other like bruises; purple and prominent but harmless unless poked. Everyone was a bit wary about them going into the field together.

Hood stepped up into Wu’s face, “Senior Chief?” he asked.

Wu took a deep breath, obviously ignoring Steve, and gruffed out, “No sir.”

“I don’t care what this is between you; we are in play right now!” It was a whisper, but he might as well have been yelling. “It’s not worth screwing up a mission over. Get over yourselves and we all get to go home.”

“Yes sir,” Steve responded dutifully.

Wu said nothing.

Hood stepped into Wu’s personal space again.

“Yes sir,” he said, defeated.

The team continued their trek through unconquered jungle and Steve wiped at his nose, taking a second. Wu was standing with him.

“He’s right,” Wu whispered.

“Yeah, whatever,” Steve whispered back, not looking him in the eye, adjusting the gun in his arms,
and moving forward with the team.

“Steve!” Wu reached for him.


He watched as Wu swallowed hard and looked hurt. Steve fought the urge to feel bad for his malice towards the man.

“Lieutenant,” he said again, the grip on Steve’s arm tighter. He looked like he wanted to say something. Now was not the place, nor the time, to have the little heart to heart they had been dancing around for years. This was their first mission together, and the first time they had been forced into close quarters since… “It wasn’t me.”

“Let’s focus on the mission,” Steve told him, ignoring the same, old defense. He’d heard it before. “You heard the Commander.”

‘Now was not the place, nor the time,’ he told himself. They had a target to reach, hostages to free. People were counting on them to be everything their reputation said they were. Not a couple of jerks poking each other’s bruises.

Wu dropped his hand off of Steve’s arm with a sigh. “Right.”

They’d have their heart to heart when they got home.

Except they never did.

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Steve – present day

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“What do you mean, the adoption is off?” Max asked, affronted. He seemed hurt and upset and Steve viciously thought ‘he’s got nothing on how I feel.’ “Why did you change your minds?”

Steve and Danny shared a look, “Look, we know you’ve spent a lot of time on the party…”

“Oh, it’s not that,” Max said with a minute shake of his head. “You will have to deal with the four dozen cupcakes, but it’s not that.”

Steve saw Danny’s eyes widen at the mention of four dozen cupcakes. Steve didn’t realize Max had invited that many people. He made a mental note to get more ice before he realized the party was likely not to happen.

“Why have you changed your mind?”

Steve shuffled on his feet. It was still a fresh decision, and Jake Wu laid under a sheet only a room away. He really wanted to be on another topic, but he did figure their friend deserved a response, it was just that it was so complicated.

Danny shrugged. “His birth mother isn’t cool with it. We aren’t cool with it if she’s not.” How simple. He studied Danny after his summary, impressed.

“Wouldn’t you feel better about your adoption knowing your mother was cool with it?” Danny continued.
Max looked taken aback. “Well, yes. I suppose knowing my mother gave me up made accepting my parents easier. But Jack’s situation and my situation are not the same. My mother abandoned me.”

“Exactly.” Danny held out a hand. “Jill hasn’t. And we’re not going to steal a baby from a young woman just because we think we’d be better parents. That’s not how it should work.”

Max nodded, accepting it. Steve swallowed, thank god for Danny. The good thing about Max is he could remove emotions from the conversation and focus on the logic, on the facts. Steve liked that about him. Reminded him of being in the field sometimes; turning off emotion like that was what made you good in special ops, after all.

“So, what do you got for us, Max?” Steve asked, wanting to change the subject. Focus on the case, on the facts. Remove the emotion.

Of course emotion was all he felt when Max removed the sheet from his face. The gash along Jake’s temple and down to his cheek was thick and angry looking, and he had bruises all along his neck and shoulders, but Max was respectful. That’s all Steve could see of the man.

“The time of death was sometime last night around midnight. COD was due to blood loss because of a stab wound to the stomach, but I believe our victim was knocked unconscious before that happened.”

“So he was asleep,” Steve said, comforted.

“I believe so,” Max agreed. “Although he did put up a fight that would have caused some serious pain. He had a broken leg, and several bruises on his torso that would suggest swollen and damaged organs. His final fight was a rough one.”

“He didn’t go down without a fight,” Danny said, more for Steve than observation. Steve sent him a small, but grateful, smile.

“Yes,” Max agreed.

“What else did you find?” Steve asked.

“There was some dirt and residue under his fingernails, presumably from his attacker. I’m running DNA now, but it hasn’t gotten any hits as of yet. And the crime lab has some dirt from his shoes that looks unique.”

“Unique?” Danny asked. “Like, we can pinpoint where he’s been?”

Max nodded. “The dirt looked like refined concrete, which, if I’m correct, tells me he’s been near a concrete plant, and there are only two of those on the island, or at least a construction site where concrete would be used. With luck, Eric should be able to confirm more.”

“Good work, Max,” Steve said, happy for a lead. They could definitely look into these concrete plants, at the very least. “Anything else?”

“Yes,” he pulled himself aside to his computer. “He had a higher level of salt on his skin than a man would have in his situation. The levels are familiar and I had seen them before. He had been swimming in the ocean sometime since his last shower, and hadn’t showered yet. I tested his clothes before sending them to the crime lab. His pants showed signs of saturation, but his shirt and boots did not, suggesting…”

“...he went swimming in a hurry.”
“Yes,” Max said. “But the concrete plants are both inland. Nowhere near the water.”

“Thanks Max,” Steve said, staring down at Jake’s face. He stared for a moment, sad they never got the clear the air between them. “Do you guys—” he looked up at Danny. “Can I have a minute?”

Danny blinked. Max nodded. “Of course.”

“Yeah,” Danny visibly gathered himself. “yeah, babe.” He reached forward, running a comforting hand along Steve’s arm. When he got to his hand, Steve surprised himself by reaching out and giving him a solitary squeeze. Danny gave of himself and Steve gobbled it up; a moment to steady himself.

Max and Danny left the room; Max shut the curtains, and Danny smiled sadly at him, closing the door behind them.

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Danny – 1992 -- Age 16

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“Here comes the cocksucker and his slut sister!” some jerk, whose name Danny would forget before he turned thirty, yelled through the hallways of his high school.

A few kids in the hall laughed as Danny and Stella made their way through the front doors. They paused at the loud jeer, knowing it was about them. Not all, but most eyes were on them. News about Danny’s incident at a boy scout retreat the weekend before had apparently hit the school’s population. Jenna McKay, who he was sure was a few flirtatious winks away from a date with, looked at him with a bit of disappointment behind her eyes. A couple guys from the baseball team were laughing with the jerk. A couple girls from Stella’s year were snickering.

‘I can do this,’ Danny told himself, letting out a puff of a sigh.

“She’s so fat!” he heard them say to one another, despite Stella not showing at all.

“Oh my god,” Matty said, embarrassed, threw up his hood and pushed past them and into the crowd.

“He’s a lot of help,” Stella said, as the gawking moment had passed and most of the crowd had moved on with their lives. Danny and Stella moved on with theirs too and made their way to Stella’s locker. “Would you be by my side if you weren’t gay, Danny?”

Danny rolled his eyes. “It’s not like I wanted the world to find out this way.” People who would have never given him the time of day were suddenly staring at him, open and wide eyed. Like he was some kind of zoo animal on display. He pulled at his shirt absentmindedly and tried to stand up taller. “I mean, I haven’t even known that I’m gay for that long.”

“Are you sure you’re gay?” she asked as she turned around to face him and turn the corner at the same time.

Danny paused, eyes on Jenna down the hall. She was smiling and laughing with one of her friends, long brown hair falling softly onto a baby pink cheer shirt tucked into some high waisted jeans. He didn’t realize he was staring until she looked up at him, same disappointed look in her eye. He hopped in his step to catch up with Stella.
“I don’t know,” he answered honestly. Then he turned and let out another puff of breath as he leaned against the lockers next to Stella’s.

She was working on her lock. “Well, I hope kissing Ricky was worth all this.”

He thought back to Friday night, with Ricky’s hand up his shirt and Ricky’s bottom lip dragging across his cheek and the bark of the tree against his back...

“Yeah, it was pretty good,” he mused.

Stella laughed.

“I haven’t sucked any cocks, though,” he said, crossing his arms, almost in a pout. He was sure that wouldn’t be the last name he’d be called, but it still got to him. It was just a kiss. He was being vilified for a single kiss. Or, well, a single interrupted session of kisses.

“I have,” Stella said conspiratorially, “haven’t you heard?”

“Yeah, that must be why they are calling you a slut,” Danny shot back, acting just as dumb.

“Maybe I’m the cocksucker,” Stella pointed at herself. Then she pointed to Danny, “and you’re the slut?”

They both met eyes and started laughing. Danny watched as his sister finally got her locker open and started switching out her books. Sometimes you had to laugh or the weight of all the crap on your shoulders would pull you down. He had tried to be on his sister’s side since the news of her pregnancy broke (her boyfriend Hank, of course, blabbed and bragged and jumpstarted the scandal,) but after this weekend… and the morning walk down the hall, he realized he could have been doing better.

Some kid Danny didn’t even knew walked by, saying to his friend, “those are the Williams, stay away from them. He’s gay,” said in a whisper, “and she’s pregnant,” said at a normal volume. “Who knows what’s in the water at their house.”

Danny pushed away from the lockers with a start, ready to go after them, but they noticed and scurried away. Danny would have followed if Stella hadn’t put a hand on his shoulder and held him in place.

“Don’t. It’s nothing I haven’t heard before.”

“You’ve heard that before?”

She shrugged. “In so many words.”

“How have you put up with it?” he asked. He could have totally have been a better brother to her if this was the kind of treatment she had been getting. He knew that she had looks and names but didn’t… he didn’t know what it felt like. He could have been better.

“Welcome to the party, pal,” she said with sad grin.

“God,” Danny scoffed. “I’m sorry.”

That was when Hank came strolling up, all pompous and haughty.

“Stella-bella,” he greeted, throwing an arm around her shoulders and going for overkill for a kiss on her cheek. Danny hated that nickname. What he hated worse was how uncomfortable Stella looked
under the attention. She had made it clear she wasn’t certain if she was going to raise the baby, but that didn’t stop Hank from trying to convince her that they should get married and settle down and start a family…

...at fifteen. And Hank didn’t understand her hesitation. The sleaze.

Stella smiled faintly, “Hey babe.”

“Hell-o Hank,” Danny said, leaning back against the locker again, unamused.

“So,” Hank had a stupid grin on his stupid face, “Stella-bella, why wouldn’t you tell me your brother was battin’ for the other team?”

Danny rolled his eyes. He wondered how many euphemisms he’d hear today.

“I didn’t know,” Stella answered honestly. “Even if I did know, I wouldn’t have told you.”

“Why?” Hank reached forward and lightly smacked Danny’s shoulder. “You ashamed of your packer brother?”

“’Packer?’” Stella asked, eyebrows furrowed.

Danny had to agree. No way he’d ever be a Green Bay fan.

Hank seemed to sense their confusion. “You know,” and his stupid grin deepened and Danny wanted to sock him. “’Shit-packer?’”

Danny stared at him in confusion for just a little longer. What was that supposed to mean— ...oh. From the look on Stella’s face, she understood just about the same time that Danny did and turned and slapped Hank.

Several people stopped and stared at the scene, but Hank covered his cheek and turned to Stella with betrayal in his eyes. Danny stared on slack-jawed.

“If you want to make you and I work,” Stella said, more grown up than Danny had ever seen her. “Then you need to stop that shit. Right now.”

Oh yeah, he could have been doing so much better.

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Danny – present day

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Eric was an excited puppy whenever he knew he had something he knew would break the case, or help them nail their bad guy, or would give them a starting point. Steve said it was Eric trying to prove something to Danny, but the kid had cleaned up his act. He was good at his job, his boss Charlie Fong had said so, and his co-workers all seemed to like him. Not to mention he was a good roommate to Mary and loved hanging out with his younger cousins. He didn’t need to prove anything to Danny, he was doing just fine.

Steve only smiled and shook his head.

(Danny had to admit it made him feel important, but he didn’t want to put that much pressure on Eric’s shoulders.)
They had gotten Chin and Lou on the concrete plants, and Kono and Jerry were still looking for whoever Jake was working for in Honolulu. Steve and Danny were closest to the crime lab, so that meant a trip to see Eric.

Eric, happy and bouncing on the balls of his feet. “So it is concrete,” he greeted them. “Finely ground, but no way to tell which plant it came from.” He licked his lips.

“That’s not helpful,” Steve said.

“That’s not why you’re here,” Eric said with a grin. “It has to do with his clothes. Max said he thought he was in the water and he was.”

“We knew that.”

“I can tell you where at in the water he was.”

Danny blinked at that, impressed. “How?”

Eric grinned. “There’s a unique fungi growing on the west side of Sand Island because of the wastewater treatment center. The water’s clear, but it grows because the water in that particular bay is partially brackish because of the runoff.” He pulled them to a screen that Danny would never be able to decipher with a chart and lines and some kind of bar graph. “He was in the water somewhere near here,” he clicked open a map that was already circled.

“This is great,” Danny said, grasping Eric’s shoulders. Eric smiled wide. “This narrows his whereabouts down.”

“I can do one even better.”

“ Impress us,” Steve said with a grin. Danny rolled his eyes.

“You guys took your time getting over here, so I starting looking up construction sites on Sand Island. There are three who are doing extensive concrete work.” He handed them over a piece of paper. “Their addresses.”

Danny reached forward and pulled Eric’s head down for a kiss, “Good work!”

“Uncle D!” He pulled back, looking pleased but embarrassed. “I’m at work!”

“Yeah yeah,” he waved him off. The he looked up at Steve. “We should call Chin and Lou back from the north shore. Sand Island is a big place, even with a narrowed list of places.”

“Yes,” Steve agreed. “Hopefully we can find some kind of surveillance on Jake, see if he was with anyone.”

That’s when Eric’s phone rang. He excused himself and Steve and Danny nodded, moving to leave.

“Hey, ma’!” Eric said.

Danny turned on his heels. It was Stella. He wanted to say hello to Stella. He reached out to Steve, “Hey hold up.” Then to Eric, “Tell her hi. Say I’m here. Say hi for me.”

Eric held up a finger, holding him off, and Danny made a face about it. She was his sister way before she was his mom. Ungrateful. Then Eric’s face went serious.

“What do you mean you’re here?”
“‘Here?’” Danny repeated. “Like Hawaii, here? Honolulu, here?”

Eric nodded at him, then, with a thick accent, “I thought you weren’t coming until the end of the week?” He paused. “A little warning would have been nice. Like knowing you were on a plane?” Another pause. “Ma’ you never know.”

“Tell her I say hi,” Danny said again.

Eric rolled his eyes, “Uncle D says hi.” Pause. “No.” Pause. “If you wanted to talk to him, why didn’t you just call him?” Pause. “I work too, ma’!”

Danny laughed, looking over to Steve. Steve looked amused, but he wasn’t smiling his usual amused smile when one of their accents got thick. Danny gave him a sympathetic face. He was somber ever since he was alone with Jake’s body. He was obviously having a hard time. Danny wanted to reach out and touch him, so he did.

Steve let him, but he made no move to touch him back. He really was hurting.

“I can’t just leave work to pick you up, call a cab!”

“We can pick her up,” Steve offered. Danny turned wildly to look at him with shock. He was sure Steve would want to follow these leads as soon as possible. At Danny’s action he shrugged. “It’s on the way, and we’ll have to wait for Chin and Lou to get down here, and that’s about an hour. We can do it.”

“Are you sure?”

Steve hesitated, and his face turned soft. He was thankful for Danny’s worry. Danny smiled. Steve nodded. “Yeah, we can pick her up, drop her off at your house. No big deal.”

“Really?” Eric asked.

Steve nodded again. Eric looked to Danny. Steve was technically one of Eric’s bosses, but he was still looking to Danny for direction. Maybe Steve’s observation that Eric was still trying to win Danny’s approval had merit.


~

Stella had found a cheaper red eye flight three days earlier than she was supposed to fly out. She came with news that his brother-in-law Jake was going to use her seat instead and make the trip after all. That meant his whole family was going to be on the islands. His sisters, his sister’s kids, his parents, and his own family. A mess of Williamses that Steve was giddy about. Danny was playing the grouch, but he was excited too.

Something about Danny being captured by pirates, starting a relationship with a man, and announcing the adoption of a child made them all want to visit for some reason. It was going to be a mess of family all wanting to see Danny and they really needed to solve Jake’s case before that happened.

Danny wanted to be there for Steve, he also wanted to visit various sites with his family. This was the first time he’d see them since he and Steve started things together. He wanted to impress them…

“Danny!” came a shout from a tall brunette woman, she was Matty’s twin after all, her arm raised to
get their attention from the car. Unlike their mother, Stella packed sensibly with a single suitcase and a carry on bag. She bounced happily in a sundress that was probably out of season in New Jersey.

He waited for Steve to pull up in front of her, then Danny jumped out, happy to see her.

“So you came early!” Danny greeted her with a hug.

She shrugged. “I do have a son that has a place here. Surely I can crash on his couch.”

“You mean my couch. That’s all my furniture.”

She waved him off, “Whatever.” She turned to Steve who had gotten out of the car and had joined them in the waiting zone. “Steve!”

“Hello, Stella.” They exchanged a friendly hug.

“I could have taken a cab, thank you guys!” she said with a thankful grin. “I hope I’m not keeping you from anything.”

“Oh, we were on our way to follow a lead, but we’ve got some time to drop you off at Eric’s,” Danny said.

“Sweet!” she said. “So what’s your case this week? Pirates? Kidnapping? Ooh! Organized crime?”

Danny shook his head while Steve chuckled and put her suitcase in the trunk. “I talk to you too much. You have too big of an imagination.”

“You know you’re my favorite action show not on TV, right?” she teased, hip bumping him. He leaned into it with a smile.

“Yeah, yeah,” he said.

They got in the car, heading towards Eric’s when Stella said, “I’m here early for another reason.”

“Oh?”

“Uh-huh,” she nodded, eyes out the window taking in the sights. “Kono seemed stressed out getting everything together for the anniversary party. I felt bad. You know. Considering they are our parents.” She turned to them, sitting forward between them. “Apparently she pulled Eric into it all too and his house is the staging area.”

“Staging area? I thought this was going to be a simple wine and shrimp kinda party?”

“Did you not get the message?” Steve asked.

“What?”

“Kono says we all have to wear black and white now.”

“What?”

Steve shrugged, “I don’t know why. But we have to dress nice.”

Stella nodded. “I have to go shopping while I’m here, but I’m waiting on Abigail. Have a sister’s day in downtown Waikiki on Friday.”
“But why?”

Steve shrugged. “Do you really want to question a pregnant Kono?”

Kono’s moods had been unpredictable at work too, according to Steve. She’d frustrate easily, and walk off to cool off more than normal. Once, they had a case that involved a child, and she teared up right there at the computer in the bullpen. Her first case after knowing she had a kid coming, it was going to be hard. Danny remembered his first after he found out about Grace – and every case with children since.

Kono’s pregnancy was throwing her out of whack, and it was best not to rock her boat too much.

“Kono’s been a big help,” Stella said from the back seat. “It’s going to be a whole lot nicer than we originally planned.”

“Doesn’t she have something planned you all don’t know about?” Steve asked.

“What do you know, that we don’t know?” Danny asked, interrogating him.

Stella leaned forward again. “Yeah. What don’t we know?”

Steve shrugged at the sudden onslaught, focusing on the road. “Just that she needed access to our house before everyone else.”

“And you didn’t tell me?”

“I’m under strict orders.”

“Ah-hah!” Danny threw a finger at him. “I knew you knew something.”

Steve pulled an imaginary zipper across his lips and smiled.

“Ugh,” Stella groaned, sitting back.

They sat in silence for a moment or two before Danny was turning back towards her. “Guess who else is in Hawaii?”

“I don’t know. Elvis? Is he back from the dead?”

Danny nodded. “Saw him this morning.”

She pulled a face. “How’d he look?”

“The same,” he said. “Only older.” He turned in his seat a little. “He has a gut, kinda like dad’s.”

“Ooh, a dadbod, nice.”

Danny widened his eyes and shot his eyes to Steve pointedly and then back to Stella, who – bless
her – got it and nodded. Oh, how he missed his sister.

Stella had visited once before, and Steve had gone with him to Jersey over Christmas;

Danny knew Steve was jealous of Danny’s relationships with his sisters. Danny knew Steve wanted that with Mary. Danny tried to encourage it wherever he could. Like agreeing to let Mary rent out his house – a constant relationship outside of their sibling relationship that meant they kept seeing each other. He had made a promise to a dying woman, after all.

Steve quickly turned as far as he could without taking the eye off the road. “Scale of one to ten how serious were they?”

What whiplash. Danny wanted to pinch his ear and remind him he could ask these questions of Danny any time he wished it, the jerk.

“You sure you wanna know?” Stella asked, looking between Steve and Danny.

Steve nodded instantly. Danny shook his head. Stella’s mouth hung open with indecision.

She answered anyway. “Somewhere between ‘first comes love’ and ‘then comes marriage.’”

“Marriage?” Steve asked, giving Danny a scandalous look.

“It didn’t get that far, and we couldn’t any– That’s beside the point.”

“What is the point?”

“Why are you asking?”

“Because you married Rachel pretty quick after meeting her.”

“We were pregnant! It’s what ya do.”

Steve pointed towards Stella over his shoulder with his thumb., “Everything you’ve told me about your sister’s life with her son’s father tells me you don’t really believe that.” Then he found her eyes in the rearview mirror. “Hi Stella.”

“Hi Steve!” She smiled, not bothered.

Danny, however, was. He wanted to take a bet on Stella’s popcorn cravings right about now by the look on her face. “What’s my sister’s life got to do with it?”

“I’m just saying, that maybe,” and this is when his hands started flying around over the middle console, “you were ready for that kind of relationship with Nick and jumped into it with Rachel because you wanted to chase that feeling.”

Danny turned in his seat, glanced at Stella, then stared back at Steve.

“What?”

“Who are you and what have you done with Steve?”

Steve rolled his eyes. “I can be emotionally mature.”

“Right,” Danny said, believing him. He had his moments, sure. But this was Danny’s past. Two could play that game. “Why didn’t you tell me about Jake?”
“What?”

He turned and crossed his arms. “If you’re so emotionally mature, then where in our -this time we’re talking about the men we’ve been with– talk about past relationships was Jake?”

“I told you about Jake.”

“Uh-uh.”

“Yes I did.”

“No!”

“I told you I hooked up with a couple guys.”

“‘Hook up’ implies once or twice.” He held up one finger. “Once is a one night stand.” He held up another finger. “Twice is a booty call.” He held up another finger. “Three times is a relationship, my friend!”

Steve made a face.

“Don’t make that face!”

“Man,” Stella sighed from the back seat. “I should have sex more.”

Danny shook his head and side-eyed her.

“What?”

“Did you mean to say that out loud? You know you do that sometimes.”

“No, I meant to,” she looked nonplussed. She shrugged. Then her face fell. “Don’t tell dad.”

Danny rolled his eyes. It’s not like they were teenagers anymore.

“Look,” she pulled herself forward between the seats again. “It sounds like you two just had the reader’s digest version of the ‘who I had sex with’ talk.” She shrugged and smacked Danny on the shoulder. “Details get filled in as the relationship progresses.”

Danny studied her, waiting on that second head to grow. Any second now. “Who are you and what have you done with Stella?”

“What?” she tried looking innocent. “I can be emotionally mature too.”

Steve laughed.

“Oh my god,” Danny said, throwing his hands up and turning forward in his seat. There were two of them.

They sat in silence for a moment, everyone digesting what just happened. Danny snuck a look at Steve, who only reached over and gripped Danny’s knee. They were good.

They were always good. Danny smiled, content in knowing they were still them. Being in a relationship didn’t change them too much. They still argued in the car, the topics just had the potential to be serious. Reaching forward and gripping Steve’s hand in his, running a thumb along the back of Steve’s knuckles, he had to admit even that was the same. They’d always argued about
serious topics. They were still them.

Oh, Danny shook himself, it was ridiculous how much he was in love with this man.

“Oh!” Steve said eyes back on the rearview mirror. “Do you want to come to Nahele’s baseball game tonight?”

“Heck yeah!”
Chapter 7

Steve – 2002 -- Age 26

He had survived hell week. Three fourths of his training class had dropped, but he survived. So had Freddie. They were in town, celebrating their insanity by numbing the aches with booze. Apparently word got out on base that the baby SEALs were tired and loopy and all the grown up SEALs came out to see the new recruits and share war stories.

Things were going great until that. The beer was cold. The alcohol was soothing the ache in his shoulder. The company was rowdy and fun. The feeling among his new brothers felt good and sure and a little like family. The looks Freddie was sending him were little embers in his stomach. Then Jake Wu walked in with a mess of other SEALs and it reminded Steve of his near-miss. He nearly missed out on the chance of a lifetime. Brotherhood, purpose, family. He nearly lost this.

He was still convinced it was Jake’s fault.

Steve’s mood turned on a dime, and the other boys noticed and tried to cheer him up. He acted like some of it worked and chose to ignore Jake and the evening turned easy and fun again.

Freddie’s eyes flashed again.

“We can’t,” Steve said, leaning in while they lined up for a drunk game of darts. It was a first, Steve turning him down. It would be an occasion that marked a change in their relationship, but that was for later. Freddie turned him down plenty of times, but never had Steve said no.

“Who says?” Freddie said, friendly and enticing.

“I say,” Steve said, finally.

He played a round or two of darts to keep up his mask, truly enjoyed his double bullseye and round of shots in celebration of his double bullseye, but he had to get out of that dive bar, outside into the fresh air and the night sky and the hundreds of stars.

Sometimes a memory is so powerful in the moment, that you sometimes had echos of the future when you recalled it again. Steve would remember this moment of recall as clear as day the rest of his life. Something about the combination of the smell of a truck backfire and that night sky made Steve twelve years old on a boat with his dad. It was so late that it was just easier to spend the night on the boat and drive home in the morning. Steve spent the night next to his snoring father and a backup can of gasoline unable to sleep and never seeing so many stars. Off in the distance, on the other side of the horizon, he could see the glow of Honolulu. But those stars… Steve learned about insignificance under that sky.

He came out of the memory missing his father in a way he had never missed him. Hell week was an achievement measured by the whole navy. Hell, even those that chose to ring out were given respect based on how long they lasted. Looking back into the bar, he was sure he could go back in there and find joy and confidence and brotherhood. He was certain of it. But it wasn’t what he was craving.
He really wanted someone to be proud of him.

There were the few moments with Joe… Joe showed up for all his ceremonies, patted him on the back before his deployments… But he was his training officer. It’s not like he could share a beer with the man while he was in the middle of training. That wasn’t done.

There was Deb, who would shower him with excitement and joy. Who knew what country Mary was in right now. Mary probably wouldn’t be too impressed, but Deb would. Maybe he should call Deb.

Eyeing the payphone at the end of the building, Steve kicked at the edge of the porch for a moment. Reynolds, another in his class, was using it to call his wife.

There was Catherine, who would be impressed and would agree to celebrate the next time they saw each other. She was warm and easy and could be something, could turn into something. If they could get their timing right with their deployments… she could be a safe harbor in which to dock himself. But she still wasn’t…

There was Mr. Hart. Who talked football and fishing and the American dream. Who said grace before they ate and gave Steve a turkey leg. Who pulled him aside and made it clear he was thankful for Steve’s presence in his son’s life. Who shared a glass of whiskey with him and toasted to a successful endeavor with his thick Irish accent. “To your success, son.” Not to Freddie’s; to Steve’s. But he wasn’t Mr. Hart’s son.

Steve kicked the post of the overhanging roof with a grunt. Reynolds gave him a glance, so Steve looked back up at that sky and fell into that memory again. The one on the boat and his dad with the sky that went on forever.

He knew what he wanted. It was a phone call away. He had just had the worst week of his life. Starvation, dehydration, his pinky was still wrapped up for frostbite, sleep deprivation, not to mention the physical torture he put his own body through. They didn’t even get bathroom breaks, and were expected to deal with it, so they just relieved themselves when they needed to go.

That payphone was a beacon in Steve’s mind. A hurdle he had to face. Hell week wasn’t quite over, it seemed. Not yet.

“What’s that light, dad?” Steve asked, pointing towards the glow past the horizon.

His dad leaned down to his height, arm around his shoulders. “That’s home, son.”

He heard Reynolds say his goodbyes and hang up the phone. “It’s all yours, man,” he called out, assuming Steve was waiting on the line.

Steve nodded up towards him, smiling easy. Reynolds smacked him on the arm – the same one where the shoulder was hurting him – as he passed him on his way back into the bar. Then he stared down that payphone. One last hurdle, come on man, dialing a phone is a thousand times easier than the week he just survived.

‘I can do this,’ He thought to himself.

He walked up to the phone, picked up the receiver, and – for as rarely as he called his father – dialed a familiar number. He was filled to the brim with nerves and anticipation, not knowing how this would go, wanting so much from a man that had given him so little.

Ring…
He shuffled his weight on his feet.

Ring…

He took a calming breath.

Ring…

He let that breath out.

Ring… click. “This is John McGarrett’s machine. Leave a name and number and I’ll get back at you.” ….BEE-

Steve hung up before the beep could finish, racing it. And because of another memory of standing at a payphone and his father not being there for him, he picked it up and slammed it down again, and again, and again. He was never going to get what he needed from that man. He wiped at his eye before it could betray him, and sniffed.

“Steve?” someone asked. Steve looked up quickly to find it was Jake Wu, a concerned look on his face, arms stretched forward like he wanted to comfort him.

Taking a few steps back he shook his head. “No, I don’t want to deal with this right now.”

“Steve? What’s happened?”

“Leave me alone.”

“No, you look miserable, you should be celebrating!”

“Right,” and Steve was just drunk enough to let it slur inside him. “Like you wanted me here.”

Jake’s eyebrows met, “What are you talking about? I’m proud you made it!” He moved a few steps and reached out for Steve’s arms.

Steve jerked out of his grip, “Don’t touch me.”

“Steve,” Jake looked pained. “What’d I do?”

“Like you don’t know.”

“I…”

Steve leaned in, quiet like, “I was investigated for being gay, Jake.”

Jake’s eyes went wide and he looked around them quickly.

“Yeah,” be paranoid, see how it feels, it’s awful, isn’t it? “I just want to know how you implicated me without implicating yourself.”

Jake took a step back, like he had been punched, and that should have been enough for Steve to give him the benefit of the doubt, but Steve was drunk, and missing his dad, and his career was going places… but his life was in shambles.

No. None of that sailor. Turn it off, McGarrett. Turn it off. Focus. What’s the objective? Focus. Come on sailor. Turn it off.
“Get away from me,” he practically hissed with uncharacteristic malice, before walking into the bar and turned it off and celebrated the one good thing in his life with his new family.

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Steve – present day

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The sky was clear today, and the sun was warm, and there was a nice breeze in the air. Looking out over the horizon it was clear for miles. Steve liked these small moments, where he found a second or two to take in the expanse of the ocean, of being surrounded by it. It was that same insignificance that gently knocked him steady. A quick reset button. Not just to turn off his emotions, but to turn them on again.

Danny had the same effect on him. Except Danny didn’t make him feel small, Danny made him feel big.

Speaking of… “This was the last place on Eric’s list,” he said, walking up to Steve at the edge of the pier.

Steve nodded. “Let’s gather surveillance video,” he pointed up at light pole with a camera on it. “Start going through it, maybe we’ll get lucky.”

“Yeah.”

~

It was boring and steady police work after that. Steve fought hard to stay patient, some cases were nothing but paperwork and long hours watching surveillance videos. But he was itching for anything to chase. He had Kono tearing into the concrete plants and construction sites, and Jerry watching surveillance video and hopefully whoever had hired Jake would put a payment into his accounts. He had Lou controlling canvassing around the hotel again, and put Chin on organizing HPD to be on the lookout for their suspect – using a bad photograph.

He had delegated what he could and sat at his desk, going cross eyed with his finger on the fast forward button. Pushing back from his desk he let out a frustrated sigh and rubbed his eyes with the heels of his palms.

There was no way he was going to let Jake down. Not for this. He owed him. He couldn’t make it right between them anymore, but he could solve his murder. Maybe knock the guy who did it around a little.

Knock knock

He looked up to his door to see Danny waving at him. He waved him in.

“I’ve been thinking we need some kind of code.”

“‘Code?’”

“Yeah,” Danny pushed his hands into his pockets. “So we know if we’re talking to our partner or our boyfriend.”

Steve smiled.
“Ya know. To– to help out with being professional, and all.”

“Right.” Steve leaned forward on his elbows. “What’d’cha have in mind?”

Danny smirked. “Pet names.”

“Not going to work.”

“Why not?”

“We call each other babe too much already.”

“Then different pet names. Special pet names. Ones that are like. ‘Hey warning this is your boyfriend speaking’ kinda names.”

Steve shot one eyebrow up at him.

Danny let out a laugh of a sigh, “Can we just give it a shot?”

“Alright,” Steve said, sitting back and crossing his arms. “Do I call you ‘honey?’”

Danny made a face, “Nah. I claim honey.”

“You can’t claim a word.”

“I just did.” He sniffed. “Anyway, honey, you look stressed and it’s almost time for Nahele’s game anyway.”

Steve blinked and looked down at his watch, it was nearing five already. They’d have just enough time to go pick up the kids and make it to the fields. Personal case or not, he wasn’t going to miss his kid’s game. Finding out that his own father prioritized Steve’s own games inspired him. Short of something that was time sensitive, he wasn’t going to miss being there for Nahele.

“Okay, darling, let’s head out,” Steve pushed up out of his chair.

“I veto that.”

“What? ‘Darling?’ You can’t veto a word, either.”

“Rachel used to call me that, honey.”

Steve pulled a face. “Ugh, okay fine.”

He made a quick note of the timestamp of where he was in the surveillance video and closed his laptop. A year ago he’d be pulling an all-nighter to watch the rest of it. Today, he was leaving in the middle of it. Everyone said fatherhood would change him, but he took a second, looking at his closed laptop, to realize that they were right.

Nahele’s games had become some cheap entertainment for their little ‘ohana. The whole Team usually showed up, along with varied extended family. It took them two cars to get to the ball fields with Stella in tow, but they made it just in time for Nahele to warm up. Nahele was anxious the whole ride there, worried they were going to be late.

Steve knew he was worried about Kaili’s open-ended invitation to come to one of his games. The man had never shown, and Steve doubted he ever would, but this was his job. To encourage a relationship with Nahele’s birth-father. As much as he didn’t like it, it was his job.
He just hated to see his boy with his hopes up every time, just to see them shot down in the eleventh hour. Seeing the resolve on his face, trying to act like it doesn’t hurt him, made Steve hate Kaili.

“Go, go, go,” Steve said to Nahele as they found a parking space. “Don’t wait, we’ll get to the field.”

“Okay,” Nahele said with a grin. “See ya’,” he called over his shoulder as he ran.

He had his back door open, pulling Jack’s carrier out of it’s harness when Grace startled him by popping around the back of his car.

“Hey!” She grinned. She had on her cheer top.

“Hey,” Steve smiled. “Any other cheer girls here tonight?”

“No, not tonight. I can barely get them to come for the weekend games.”

“At least you’ve got school spirit!”

She grinned. Then her face turned serious. “What’s this about not adopting Jack?”

Danny came around the truck holding Charlie as she drilled him. Steve’s mouth dropped at her accusing tone, and looked up to Danny with a ‘you told her without me?’ face. He had held off on telling Nahele because he figured he and Danny would tell them both at once.

“I’m sorry!” Danny said, letting Charlie down. “She was talking about the party and I just…”

Steve rolled his eyes and continued to focus on Jack. “We need a bigger car,” he said to Danny, avoiding Grace’s question.

“Hey! Don’t change the subject!” She waved a finger at him.

Steve shrugged, looking towards Danny. He had explained it so simply to Max earlier. Maybe he could do it again.

“Grace, I told you already.” She turned to look at him. “We’re not going to do it if his mother is uncomfortable with it.”

“She’s in prison, she doesn’t get a say!”

“Hey,” Steve started, carrier over his arm, closing the door. Then he waved his own finger, “Prisoners still have human rights. They are people who still deserve some respect.”

Grace did a dramatic roll of her eyes where she threw her head back and looked up to the sky. “Yeah, yeah.” She stood up straight again. “I’m just saying, why don’t you fight her?”

“That’s not how this is going to work,” he told her.

“He’s right, Monkey,” Danny said, moving to throw an arm around her. “Every kid is different with different needs.”

“If you say ‘I’ll understand when I have kids’ I’m going to roll my eyes again.”

“You did a spectacular job of eye rolling already,” Stella said, resting her arms on Steve’s tailgate. She turned to look at Danny. “Did you or I ever do that? Eric did. I bet it’s genetic.”
“You’re supposed to be on my team,” Grace glared at her aunt. Steve grinned and turned to go towards the field.

“We’re on field two tonight,” Steve said over his shoulder, ignoring it all.

Grace hurried up faster, and leaned down to Jack with a grabby hand and a smile as she walked behind him. “I was looking forward to another baby brother.”

“He’s still your brother,” Danny said.

“Yeah, foster brother,” she emphasized ‘foster.’ Steve was walking ahead of them all, so he couldn’t read their faces.

“Don’t let Nahele hear you say that in that tone,” Danny warned.

“Nahele is one of my best friends, that’s different.”

“How is it different?”

“It just is? I just… you guys were going to adopt him. Now you’re not. Can’t I be upset?”

“Sure,” Steve shrugged. “I am.” He turned his head to look at her. “Doesn’t mean it won’t happen at some point in the future, it’s just not going to happen now.”

She looked up at him with a face that grew in sadness, then she shifted her gaze down to Jack. “That’s awful. What if we don’t get to keep him?” She turned to look at Danny. “There’s no guarantee.”

“Nope,” Danny said with a shake of the head. “Enjoy it while we got it, Monkey.”

She sighed, pouted a bit, and Steve’s heart went out for her. He understood completely. He’d be devastated if he lost his—this child. He couldn’t think about Jack like he was his anymore. It had been something he was allowing himself only these past few weeks. Maybe they shouldn’t have been so excited about it with the rest of the kids.

Charlie, who had been uncharastically quiet the whole time, finally spoke up. “It’s not fair.”

“No, it’s not,” Grace said.

Steve had to agree with both of them.

Danny spoke up, “Hey, why don’t the two of you go get a drink from the stand before the game starts.” Steve watched as Danny pulled a few bills out of his wallet.

“Can I have a candy bar?”

“‘A candy bar?’” Danny repeated, with a scandalous tone. “Sure,” he said easily. He looked up at Grace and winked. “We are having dinner after this.”

“So two king size hershey bars, got it,” she said, taking the money.

“Grace,” Danny warned. Steve grinned, and Grace shared a ‘he’s so easy’ face with Steve.

“Come on, Charlie,” Grace said, holding a hand out to her brother and off in the other direction they
They weren’t the first ones to the stands, as Chin and Kono – in Kukui King’s red shirts, really, he and Danny needed to be better about supportive clothing – and Lou and his daughter Sam were already there.

“Hey everyone,” Steve greeted as he sat Jack down so he’d be out of the sun.

Danny stepped back and smiled, “Lou, you haven’t met my sister! This is Stella,” he threw his thumb towards his sister. “Stel, this is Lou.”

“Hi!” she greeted with a wave.

“Hello,” he smiled back smoothly. “Let me ask you, has Danny always been this way?”

“What way is that?” Danny asked, defensive. Steve smiled, knowing Lou was teasing.

Stella grinned. “Actually not really. It’s old age.”

“You’re only a year younger than me,” Danny warned.

“Maybe, but I look like I’m in my early thirties,” she threw her hair over her shoulder and sat down with grace. “You, however, tsk,” she pointed at him, moving her finger up and down, “...it’s starting to show.”

Danny looked offended, and towards Steve, who dropped his grin immediately to frown and reassure him with a shake of the head and a wink.

“At least I have a boyfriend,” Danny threw at her.

“Hey, now,” she spoke back up. “That’s a low blow.”

“Low blow, you blow,” Danny shot back.

Then, like a shift in the breeze, they stared at each other for a moment before giggling together, obviously sharing an inside joke.

“I haven’t heard that one in a long time,” Stella sighed. Danny mused along with her, sitting down between her and Jack’s carrier. “...your... wedding shower.”

Danny immediately held up a hand. “We don’t talk about that day anymore.”

“Oh come on, it was hilarious. Besides, we only not talk about it because Rachel would get so upset. Are we really still defending Rachel?”

Danny rolled his eyes, glancing over towards Steve, and then towards Grace and Charlie still in line. Steve was interested in his answer too. “When we’re around her children? Yeah.”

“Mmm, mmm, gotcha,” Stella said, leaning forward to rest her elbows on her knees, eyes on the field. “I now expect an apology.”

“What did I do?”

“Every snide comment about Hank, everytime you got onto me for defending him, I want an apology.”
“That’s different.”

“How?”

“Do you really want to get into this? Now?”

Stella shrugged at him. “Why not?”

“We are at my son’s baseball game! Surrounded by a bunch of strangers!” Danny’s arms were flailing and Steve couldn’t help his amusement but it all.

“Oh, so now you’re worried about appearances,” Stella rolled her eyes, her own arms flying.

“What’s that supposed to mean?”

“Low blow, you blow,” Stella shot back at him, and whatever it meant it had Danny cracking up again.

“Oh, fine. I’m sorry.”

“For?”

“Being opinionated,” Danny said, a bit short.

“That’s a sweet apology, a much needed one, but not the one I asked for.” She crossed her arms.

They continued on, but Steve was distracted by a pulling a fussy Jack out of his carrier.

Steve reached down to the pocket on the side and pulled out his hat. Jack had been fussy about wearing a hat lately, and Steve wondered how long it would take before he was picking it up off the ground.

That’s when Lou leaned down to talk to Steve over his shoulder. “You know, watching them, suddenly several things about you and Danny’s relationship suddenly make sense.”

Chin and Kono chuckled from beside Lou.

“What’s that supposed to mean?” Danny turned to look at their friends.

They only chuckled harder.

Steve couldn’t help his grin, he knew what they were laughing about: he and Danny’s little arguments. Clara had commented on it once before, that he and Danny traded quips like all her kids did. Apparently Danny and Stella were the worst about it among Clara’s children, but Steve “gave Stella some competition.”

He adjusted Jack in front of him, as Jack looked up at him with wide, curious eyes.

Suddenly Steve’s mood fell, looking at the baby. Just hours ago he was going to be Jack’s father. Now? The only connection they had was flimsy and temporary. Steve brought him close, holding his head to his shoulder in a soft hug. Jack let himself be held for a moment, before pushing against Steve’s chest with a grunt.

He felt Danny’s hand on his arm and he turned to find a concerned look on his face.

Steve tried brushing it off, but he felt the whole group’s mood had already shifted. Everyone knew
the setback.

Thank god for Abby.

She had walked up, still dressed from work like Steve and Danny were, smiling a nervous smile.

“Abby!” Chin said happily. “You came!”

She shrugged, “I was invited.” She turned to Steve and Danny, “I hope that’s alright?”

“Of course it is!” Steve said with a grin. “But didn’t you just get off a plane?”

Abby shrugged. “Sure, but some fresh air and a baseball game? Just what the doctor ordered.”

Chin shuffled a bit, and there was a moment where everyone on the upper bleacher shuffled down to make room. “Come sit!”

Steve and Danny shared a look. Chin had disclosed the nature of their relationship to Steve months ago, but it was so good to see a smile on his friend’s face. He deserved something good, even if Abby’s job was on the mainland, and their relationship hadn’t shifted into serious territory just yet. Five-0 would always accept her help as a consultant, but Steve had no position to offer her at the moment. That was one thing he had to clear with the governor now.

She pushed herself up and settled down next to Chin with a matching smile. “So we’re rooting for the… what team?”


“Gotcha.”

Grace and Charlie had found their way to their spot in the bleachers. Charlie had a fun dip candy that was basically just eating sugar off a sugar stick – which would be lots of fun later – and Grace had two water bottles in her hand.

“I got grape!” Charlie said, showing off his candy.

“Nice,” Stella responded. Charlie was still a little uneasy around her. Sweet, like always, but he’d only met his aunt twice now. “I used to love those things when I was your age.”

“They didn’t have anything gummie,” Grace said sadly, straddling the bottom bleacher.

She handed Danny the change. “I’m keeping the fifty cents.”

“Oh, you are?” Danny asked with fake rage.

Grace shrugged. “I promised it to Charlie if he was good the whole game and dinner.”

Danny stared at her blankly for a moment before turning away, proud. “Approved.”

“I haven’t met you yet, Charlie.” Abby said, leaning forward. “Your dads talk about you a lot.”

Charlie smiled his shy smile and took another lick of sugar. Steve wondered if the sugar high would ruin his chances for two quarters. Then it hit him that Abby used the plural ‘dads.’ She was talking about him. His eyes shot up to Danny, who was already a few steps ahead of him, looking all gooey and sweet.
That’s when the players hit the field and started warming up distracting them all. Steve didn’t miss the sad look on Grace’s face as she stared at Jack sitting on Steve’s lap. Or the hand Danny reached out and squeezed her shoulder with.

They made it through three innings when Steve was holding Jack between his legs, letting him stand up on the floorboard of the stands with Steve’s support. He was happily banging on the bar seat in front of him. Nahele was up to bat, so Steve sat him down between his feet long enough to clap out some support. Jack sat happily as Nahele swung once, twice, a third time, and struck out.

“That’s okay, that’s okay,” Danny called out, and they all gave faces and looks of support as Nahele passed by on his way to the dugout. Then he paused and pointed at Jack.

Jack, who had pulled up and was standing holding on to the bottom bleacher, all by himself, without support.

Steve held his hands up in excitement. There was a moment where everyone held their breath as the baby wiggled around, experiencing this new sensation. Grace had pulled out her phone and was reaching around Steve’s leg to get a better angle. He looked up at Grace with a baby smile and then promptly fell back onto his bottom, Steve protecting his head from smacking into the seat behind him just in time.

They couldn’t help it, everyone watching let out a cheer of excitement and joy. The milestone, even as little as it was, was celebrated loud enough to confuse the rest of the crowd. There were a few other parents nearby that had watched and understood, but the confusion of the outburst was enough to distract the other team enough they missed a foul ball.

Later, Clara would watch the video on Grace’s phone and get upset they weren’t invited to Nahele’s game, but that was later, and this was now. Nahele was clapping from behind the field, and his whole family was excited, and Steve was smiling but…

…but it had just a twinge of sour around the edges.

Of course he picked up Jack and praised him, and of course they were distracted from the game for the rest of the inning trying to get him to do it again with only one successful try.

But he did have to excuse himself to the restroom where he let himself have a few moments where he wasn’t strong, and he wasn’t okay with not fighting for him. He pushed at his eyes and took a few calming breaths. He didn’t want to waste too much of his time with his boys fighting tears in the bathroom.

Even if they weren’t his.

~

Kaili didn’t show. Nahele had kept an eye out the whole game and disappointment sat on his shoulders just enough that you could tell something was wrong. It didn’t help that they didn’t win their game. Like always, they went out to eat after the game. Nothing fancy, just Kamekona’s, but it was easier than making the kids wait even longer after they got home. Kamekona had greeted them with a smile, and asked if they won and brought them all their regular orders.

Of course Nahele’s mood dramatically shifted when Grace brought up her disappointment about the adoption again.

“What do you mean you’re not adopting him?” he asked, instantly interested, if not upset. “Why not?”
Danny explained again that it was about Jill, and not about Jack, and he was placated a small amount.

“So you’re just going to let him stay in the system?” he asked. “You aren’t going to fight?”

Steve narrowed his eyes at Nahele, studying him. He was campaigning for Jack hard, but did he feel the same way about himself?

Danny sighed. “We are. Just in a different way. We aren’t giving up.”

“It sounds like you’re giving up,” he said, stabbing his rice with his fork.

“It’s more complicated than that, Nahele,” Steve said gently. “It’s not just Jack we have to win over, ya’ know. It’s a judge and lawyers and social workers, and on top of all that, Jack’s mother. Fighting doesn’t always mean… yelling at each other from opposite sides. Sometimes it means compromise and making friends.”

Nahele took a moment to take that in. Steve glanced around the table, first to Grace who looked thoughtful herself – to Charlie – who was crashing hard from his sugar high and not really paying attention – to Danny, who looked at him with a soft, proud smile. Steve felt warm fuzzies crawl up his back under the gaze and gave him a soft smile back.

“What if–” Nahele started and then stopped. He eyed Jack, content with sitting on the table in his carrier. “–Jack’s mother– what if she doesn’t want to be friends?”

Steve and Danny shared a sad look. That was a very real possibility, and one they hadn’t really talked about. The current game plan seemed to be ‘take some more time to let Jill trust them,’ but Nahele was right. How long were they going to follow this course of action?

Danny took in a deep breath. “If that’s a bridge we have to cross, okay. But we’re not crossing it today.”

It was Steve’s turn to smile sweetly at him. He’d been explaining things so well all day.

They all sat and ate their meals in relative silence after that. Everyone had a few bites before the subject changed and they were all talking again.

~

Steve was brushing his teeth when Danny hit the bed with a groan. He looked out the door to see him face down in a pillow. Steve knew how he felt. He finished up and grinned as he crawled into bed, threw his legs over Danny’s so he was sitting on his thighs, and reached out to gently massage Danny’s back – just because he could.

“Oh,” Danny said, turning his head so he could breathe. He reached behind himself and vaguely motioned towards his back. “The middle bit.”

Steve chuckled and went to work with a light massage, working around a sore spot where he knew Danny held a lot of tension. Steve carried his stress in his neck and shoulder; Danny carried his just below his shoulder blades. Every so often Danny would let out a soft groan, so Steve would focus on that area, and then move on.

Eventually Steve’s hands stilled, and he leaned over to place a kiss at the base of Danny’s neck, and then a few inches higher, then against his jaw, his hairline, just below his ear. He nuzzled in his neck, taking a deep breath, before rolling off him to his side of the bed.
Danny was smiling when he got face to face with him. “Thank you,” he said. “That was nice.”

Steve responded by scooting closer and rubbing his nose against Danny’s. Danny’s smile grew as he turned his body to face Steve’s, and their mouths found each other. It was an intimacy Steve had never had the pleasure of experiencing before. Not with Catherine, not with Freddie, not with Jake.

At the thought of Jake, Steve pulled back with a short sigh, resting his forehead against Danny’s. They had had a day. So many things had happened, so much to talk about, so much planning to do, so many people to tell, a case with hail mary leads… Steve wanted to talk, he always wanted to talk to Danny, but they had so many topics to choose from.

“I could have loved him,” Steve confessed, surprising himself.

“Who?” Danny asked, running a hand up Steve’s arm.

“Jake,” he whispered. He had never told anyone and here he was spilling it all to Danny.

“What happened?” Danny asked, not pulling away, only pulling Steve closer. Steve sighed into the embrace.

He felt the pricks of tears in the corner of his eyes and fought them; oh what a day he had had. “I… accused him of something he didn’t do. I was so mad at him, I wouldn’t even let him defend himself, I didn’t want to hear it. I never got to make it right, and it’s all on me.”

“Shh,” Danny soothed. His hand between them found Steve’s chin. “What was so bad that you pushed him away so hard?”

Steve bit his lip, hesitant, but who else was he going to tell?

“Telling the Navy I was gay.”

Danny took a breath in that was too slow to be a gasp, but fast enough to be shocked. “How’d you get out of that one?”

“The guy that did it was jealous and…” Steve took a deep breath and let it out slowly. “Joe apparently tracked him down and put the fear of God in him and he took it back.

The case was dropped. It was just before I went to Buds.”

“How come you never told me before?”

Steve shrugged and darted his eyes down. “I just… It’s just… one of those things you don’t talk about.”

“Is that why you are worried about telling Joe about us?” Danny sighed.

“What? I’m not–”

Danny pulled back and gave him a look of disbelief.

Steve rolled his eyes in submission. “Okay fine. How’d you figure that one out?”

Danny sighed. “You used to call him every couple weeks just to check up on him. You haven’t called him since Christmas.”

“I’m not ashamed,” Steve said, closing his eyes.
He felt Danny squeeze his arm and move forward to touch foreheads again. “I know.”

“It’s just…” He didn’t have the words. He didn’t think the conversation would go this way.

“…he’s like a father to you, honey. I get it. Coming out is hard, especially to a parent.”

“I can’t believe you stole my pet name.”

“You can’t steal a pet name.”

“Apparently you can veto one.”

Danny smiled wide. “You have veto power too, honey.”

“I like it,” he whispered, running his hand over Danny’s waist, pulling him closer. “Pumpkin.”

“Veto.”

Steve laughed.

Danny took a moment and actually moved closer and they enjoyed the embrace for a few moments.

“It’s not like he’s my father,” Steve said quietly.

“No, but he’s the closest you’ve got.”

“I don’t know if he’d understand. And it’s not like we’re being secretive, and it’s not like he can’t call me, which he hasn’t. I just…”

“Worry?” Danny guessed.

Steve shrugged.

“Coming out is hard.”

“I didn’t realize how often you’ve got to do it,” Steve mused. “I mean, after awhile I just kinda became numb at every instance where I had to cover up. I’m glad I don’t have to do that anymore.”

Danny kissed him, pulling him out of it. “I never hid, but I did worry about being outed.”

“Why’d it take you so long to tell me?”

“I was worried how you’d take it.”

Steve pulled his head back. “Really?”

“Oh, yeah. A career military guy with a cop job. I didn’t know what your reaction would be, and I needed you as a friend more than I needed to be out. The same reason you’re worried about Joe’s reaction.”

“You thought I was straight.”

Danny shrugged.

“Back when I met you I needed a friend too. I didn’t know how badly I needed a friend.”

“Well, you still got me,” Danny said softly. “You’ve always got me. I bet things with Joe will turn
You think?"

"Joe cares about you. He’s like a father to you, but you’re like a son to him. I hope he surprises you."

Steve took a few deep breaths and let that settle. "Speaking of," he started, desperate for a subject change. He knew Danny wouldn’t let him drop it, but he hoped he’d let him drop it for tonight. "Nahele. When we were talking about the adoption… did he seem…"

"Like he was talking about himself?" "Yeah," Steve said.

"Yeah, I kinda picked up on that."

"I’d adopt him if I could."

Danny rubbed his nose against his. "So would I."

"It’s not the same," Steve said sadly. "His father has a case."

Danny nodded.

"He wants a relationship with Kaili."

Danny nodded again.

"Kaili could do more, but the prison to civilian transition is hard one."

Danny nodded one more time.

"It’s our job to foster that relationship, right?"

"Yeah."

"We’re only temporary. That’s what we signed up for." Danny was running a hand up and down Steve’s arm. "Just a way station. Not their parents. Just watching them for other parents. Raising them, and feeding them, and clothing them, and supporting them, and loving them. Then they go, or they get taken away, or something happens and we’re declared unfit and they are gone."

Steve couldn’t help it. His whole spiel it was building up in him. His breath hitched, and Danny’s embraced tightened. Danny sniffed himself, and Steve lost it.

"I just want my boys," he admitted as he finally let a single tear fall over his nose. He wiped it away quickly. It was just a single sob, only a quick release, but overdue.

"I know, I know," Danny said, gripping his arm, running a hand over the back of his head, trying to soothe him. "Shh."

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Danny – 1993 -- Age 16

~~~
Matty was off somewhere with Hank, doing God knows what Hank was getting him into. The two of them were the bestest of friends, even before Hank and Stella dated. It was super annoying that Hank tended to spend more time with Matty than with the future mother of his child.

…who was going to be here soon.

Their parents had taken a day with Abigail, something about a play Abigail’s girl scouts were putting on, but Stella was so pregnant she couldn’t go, and Danny decided to stay with her… just in case.

And thank God he did.

She was still a month early, so Clara and Eddie weren’t too worried about leaving them alone, but Danny was the one that got her in a car, and Danny was the one that checked her into the hospital, and Danny was the one scrubbing up to be in the room with her. He didn’t want her to be alone. There were no cell phones back then, everyone gone and out of the house. It was all up to Danny.


“I bet,” he sympathized. He wanted his mother now too. “But you’ve got me! I’m going to be here. I’m not going to leave you.”

Then another contraction hit Stella and Danny made a note to switch to the other hand. This was his catching hand she was squeezing.

“This is so stupid, why did I have sex?” Stella asked as she breathed through her contraction.

“I don’t know,” Danny said. “It probably seemed like a good idea at the time.”

“It was awful,” Stella whined. “Everything was over in, like, a minute.”

The nurse looked up at that, eyebrows raised, and then she smirked. Danny knew why and he smirked with her, thinking about Hank being… less than stellar.

“Where’s the needle? I want drugs,” she told the nurse.

“We’re waiting on the doctor for that.”

“Then where’s the damn doctor?”

Danny chuckled.

Turns out the doctor was busy doing something doctorly (using his lunch break to take a nap, though they wouldn’t learn about that until later) and waited too long and by the time he got to Stella, she was too far along for an epidural.

“You’re going to start pushing within the hour, young lady,” he told her.

“Oh, God,” Stella moaned.

Their parents still hadn’t come home or they would have found Danny’s note.

“You’re going to be fine,” Danny said.

“How about you push a watermelon out of your dick,” she spat at him. Danny sat back. This was just the pain talking. This wasn’t really Stella, or how she felt. She was in pain. “Danny, I’m scared.”
“I know,” he said, trying to soothe her. “I know, but you’re going to have a baby soon!”

“I don’t know how to do this,” she said, almost crying. “I don’t know how to be a mom.”

‘I can do this,’ he told himself. ‘I can talk her through this.’

“Remember the night that he first started kicking?” Danny asked. “Remember how you came to my room, all excited?”

Stella nodded.

“You decided to be a mom that night, didn’t you? That was when you decided to keep him.”

Stella’s face broke and she started crying. She nodded again.

“Think about that feeling,” Danny told her. “I was excited, but you were ecstatic.”

Her breath hitched, but she seemed calmer.

“You’re going to be a good mom. And you’re not going to be alone. You’re gonna have so many people help you. Mom, dad… me. You’re not going to do this alone.”

“Don’t leave me, okay?”

“I promise. I’ve always had your back, right? I’ll have your back through this.”

And he did. Literally. At one point Stella demanded he get behind her and steady her. She held his hands and screamed and Danny had never heard someone in so much pain before but she did it.

At the first cry, both Stella and Danny gasped. They brought him up, showing him off, goopy and covered in mess. Stella laughed.

“Here’s your baby!” the doctor said. “A little boy! He looks good so far!”

Stella reached out for him, and Danny stood up from behind her, letting her rest back with her son in her arms. She looked so happy, and so scared, and so relieved.

“Uncle Danny,” one of the nurses said. Whoa. ‘Uncle.’ “Would you like to cut the cord?”

He looked to Stella, who had tears running down her face. She nodded.

Danny laughed, just because the moment was so surreal.

~

Later, just a little bit later, after the hustle bustle of getting him cleaned and measured and wrapped up had ended and nurses and doctors left the room to give them a moment, Stella threw her head back with a sigh.

“You did it!” Danny said. “And you said you couldn’t.”

“I was so worried I wouldn’t love him,” she confessed.

“And now that you’ve met him?” Danny asked, leaning over to get a better view of his face.

“I don’t have the words,” she said.
They took him away for a couple tests, and a couple nurses helped Stella get cleaned up when their mother rushed in, a crazed look in her eyes.

“Oh my gosh,” she exclaimed, upset. “I missed it!”

“It’s okay, mama,” Stella said. “I had Danny.”

“That’s good,” his mother said, hand on Danny’s face as she walked past him, but her attention was on Stella. She walked over, and put her hands on her face. “How are you doing?”

Stella put on a decent show and nodded. And then she immediately broke into sobs.

“Oh,” their mother said, reaching down to hold her. “Oh, it’s okay.” Then she stood up. “Where is he?”

“They took him for a test,” Stella said. “Said they’d bring him right back.”

Clara nodded. “They do that.”

“They are going to move her up into the maternity ward while he’s gone,” Danny told her.

“Will they know where to find me?” Stella asked.

Clara and one of the nurses laughed.

“We can keep track of you,” the nurse told her.

Danny sniffed, having been softly letting tears flow the whole time. What a day. What a wonderful, crazy, terrifying day.

He was an uncle. How freakin’ cool was that?

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Danny – present day

~~~

Stella was staring dreamily out the diner window while Danny sent a few work texts. Steve had sent him to breakfast with Stella, as he didn’t get to see his family as much as the others did. Danny was happy to take the morning with his sister, but the team had found a lead and the group text was blowing up. He was willing to drop his sister off and join them, but Steve ordered him to stay put.

He loved his sister, but this case was important to Steve. He hated the excess nervous energy.

“It’s so beautiful here,” Stella said, still admiring the window.

“You mean the busy street and the traffic at the stop light?”

She rolled her eyes. “You’ve lived here too long. No, everything’s so green,” she said, excited. “I always forget and then I come back and it feels like nature is constantly trying to take the island back. It’s incredible.”

“Yeah, so was the six inch centipede on the wall in my son’s room this morning,” Danny groaned.
“Nature’s fantastic.”

She shook her head. “Still so cynical.” Then she took a sip of her coffee with the same judgmental eyes.

“Cynicism is part of what makes me, me.”

“No,” she said, sitting down her mug. “Cynicism moved in with you when you left Rachel.”

“Rachel left me.”

“Right, right. It’s not like you were miserable and depressed before that and weren’t actually relieved when she brought it up.”

Danny gave her a single look, which she responded with the usual ‘yeah, I get it, we don’t talk about that,’ look.

“Besides, cynicism moved in when Grace died. When Billy died.” He bit his lip. It wasn’t something they had spent much time talking about... “When Matty died.”

The grip on her cup tightened, but it was only noticeable if you were paying attention. Danny avoided her eye line and listened as she took in a deep, steadying breath and let it out just as slow. She went radio silent with Danny for a month after he came home with the news about their brother. She didn’t say a word to him in the two weeks he spent in New Jersey, helping his parents get everything in order, talking to the Feds on their behalf, making sure his mother could get through a day without him.

“For the record,” she started, “I don’t blame you.”

He said nothing.

“I know you. I was there when Billy died. I was there when Grace died. Matty’s death is not your fault.”

But she didn’t know. His eyes were just beginning to get blurry and he wiped at one, pushing the urge away. She was Matty’s twin. They were both tall, brown eyed, brunettes. Both looked more Italian than he and Abigail ever did, and both were loving and supportive siblings.

“You don’t know.”

“I do.”

“You don’t.”

“It is not your faul-”

“I had him!” Danny said, finally meeting her eye. “He came here for a visit.”

“You had no way of knowing he was going to run.”

“I did know.”

“What?”

“Down to the private airport and time of departure, I knew.” Danny sat back, and licked his lips nervously. He’d been sitting on this for years. No one but Steve knew. Now, here he was, telling his
sister on a whim. What if she learned and left him?

“Why… why didn’t you…”

“Tell the authorities?” He chewed his tongue for a second as Stella nodded. “I wanted to bring him in myself. Vouch for him, go through the process with him, ya’ know? I didn’t want him to be alone.”

“So what happened?”

“He told– He sa– He.” Danny huffed. “He gave me an ultimatum. Shoot him or let him go.” Danny looked at her, feeling vulnerable, and then just lost it, right there in the middle of the busy diner. He controlled his tears, but his face tore in half for a single blink-and-you-miss-it moment. He gathered himself up as quickly as he could, but it involved a lot of calming breaths.

By the time he felt right enough, he looked up to see Stella wiping her own eyes.

“Do mom and dad know?” she asked.

Danny shook his head. “Only Steve knows. I think Chin has an idea of what happened, but…” He shook his head again. “No, they don’t know.”

She nodded slowly, looking down into her coffee. Her silence lasted long enough for their food to come. They both sat back from the table to make room for their food, and both said solemn ‘thank you’s’ to the waitress.

Alone once again, Stella reached across the table for Danny’s hand. When he didn’t reach back, she gave him a stern look. He gave in and reached across the table too. “Matty’s death is not your fault.”

“Stel… I–”

“Matty’s death is not your fault.”

How many times had Steve told him the same thing? How many nights sleep had he lost thinking about that runway? How it twisted and rotted inside of him until it came out in the form of a bullet that killed Marco Reyes? He left them on the mainland, he was a shit brother that couldn’t keep a marriage together and left his brother and sisters alone, a man who couldn’t be trusted to–

“I do not blame you, Danny,” she said, gripping his hand. He gripped it back, just as tight.

His breath hitched in his throat. Forgiveness he didn’t know he needed, or forgotten that he needed. “I’m so sorry.”

“Hey,” she said. “You’ve nothing to be sorry for. He was a grown man who made a bunch of bad decisions and decided to run away instead of dealing with it.”

“He’d be in prison… not in a coffin… if I had just…”

“You don’t know what would have happened. He stole a dangerous man’s money. If he couldn’t have gotten to Matty then he’d have gone after someone else. You, me, ma… Grace.” She had a very good point. Reyes’ threat to go after Grace echoed in the back of his mind. “You can’t control things like that. You can’t predict it. No one can.”

He rested his elbow on the table and rubbed at his face with his hand.

“You’re a good brother. I miss you like hell, but you’re a good man.”
“If you knew the things that I had done, Stel…”

She cocked her head and smirked. “I didn’t know this diner was giving out free therapy.”

Danny looked around the place with a sad smile. “The McGarretts sure seem to think so.”

“What?”

Danny shook his head. “Steve and his sisters.”

“...he has more than one?”

“Well, that’s a bit complicated.”

“Ooh,” Stella sat forward over her breakfast, “drama, tell me more.”

Danny had sudden deja vu.

“I miss Matty, Stel,” Danny confessed.

“Yeah,” Stella sat back with a sad smile. “But you were telling me about Steve’s secret sister.”

Danny smiled and rolled his eyes. Gossips, the pair of them. “She’s not really a secret. She’ll be at the adoption–”

And like that Danny remembered the adoption hearing wasn’t happening. There’d be no party. Jack wasn’t going to be his, and his whole demeanor fell.

Stella’s face fell into another sad smile. “You were so close to getting him.”

“Tell me about it,” Danny sighed. Then he picked up his fork and started poking at his eggs.
Chapter 8

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Steve – 2007 -- Age 31

~~~

Cath was winning. If you could have a race on a set of treadmills, Cath was winning. She was breathing heavy and sweat was gathering on her neck and chest and her mouth was wide with a shit eating grin meant just for Steve. Steve was feeling it in his knees, but hell if he was going to give up before someone won fair and square.

“Give it up, McGarrett,” she teased.

“I’ve got a quarter mile to go, how about you?” he panted.

“Less than that,” she bragged with a laugh. “You can give up, ya know. If it’s too hard.”

“No chance, Rollins,” he growled. SEALS don’t give up. That’s kind of their thing. He reached forward and pushed the machine to go faster and pushed through the strain.

The pitiful, misused, hotel gym treadmills weren’t the best machines in the world, but they did the trick. Catherine only had forty eight hours of leave and she always had energy after sex. Steve had flown out to meet her when she called. She was in Miami and he was in California, but one phone call had him meeting her in some basic chain hotel a block or so from the Atlantic.

She had called him. Of all the men in the world, she picked up the phone and called him. The thought was a nice little ember he hugged for the whole flight cross country. He always had a good time with Cath. She liked a challenge and he liked being one and he liked her being one, too. There were times Steve liked to picture them in a house on some base somewhere, half the closet his camis, half the closet hers. Dedicated to their careers, but meeting every now and then… supporting each other, being there, holidays and Taco Tuesday and dress whites and wedding bands… but that wasn’t them. They were fun and easy and not committed. Friends with a whole lot of benefits.

…but she had called him.

She had two days to do anything she wanted and she called him. She was due for a long deployment soon too. And she had called him. Maybe this was her saying “let’s make this real.”

A warm, hopeful little ember full of potential that led to a cheap hotel gym and a race that Steve was losing and a victorious smile on Cath’s face that would get him through a dark moment in Myanmar a few months later. But this was about two days in Miami, not sixteen hours trying to get out of the Yunnan province. This was about Steve’s ability to survey a room full of people and clock all the potential problems in ten seconds and his inability to do the same with a relationship.

This was about Catherine’s uncanny fishing skills, pulling Steve along like he was bait for a bigger fish. In the end he was. Retrospect told him that much. He was the right kind of bait for an exciting, full life he could not give her.

But that was a problem for future Steve, because right now he had two days of fun teasing and friendly gloating ahead of him because he was doubled over and breathing hard and she was laughing and adjusting her ponytail.
“And they say women can’t keep up with SEALs,” she goaded.

He waved a tired finger up at her. “You. You could be a SEAL.”

She lifted her chin. “Damn right, I could.”

He looked down at his watch as his breath finally started to even out. “So… you’ve got about thirty eight hours left. What do you want to do with it?”

She handed him a bottle of water, and then reached for her own. “I would say let’s spend a few hours at the beach, but you hate the beach.”

Steve’s eyebrows met and his face fell into confusion. “Me? I don’t hate the beach.”

“Yes you do.” She took a long gulp. “It reminds you of home.”

...what a private thing for her to know about him. He paused his motions opening his water. “Wrong ocean.”

“Right,” she said, studying him. Then her head cocked to the side. “Do you ever want to go home?”

He shrugged while he sipped his drink. This was a personal, emotional question.

Maybe she was looking for something deeper. “I don’t know,” he answered honestly.

“Why? Want a tropical vacation?”

She grinned again, “I’m in the middle of one.”

“The beach it is!” He pointed towards the gym doors, but got a whiff of himself. He pulled a face. “But first… a shower.”

Her grin turned dirty. “Now that sounds like some good post-workout fun.”

“Sex makes you want to work out,” Steve started, leading her towards the door. “Working out makes you want sex… when do you sleep?”

She nodded thoughtfully. “On airplanes.” Then she turned around, walking backwards, with the same dirty grin on her face. “But airplanes have bathrooms so it depends.”

“Woman, you are killing me,” Steve groaned, and the elevator couldn’t arrive fast enough.

They weren’t touching, but their eyes were locked on each other, and they both couldn’t stop grinning. They were going to have a nice shower ahead of them, and then maybe they’d walk that moonlit beach and Steve would talk about commitment like he wasn’t allergic to the concept. Not like he was going to propose… but maybe a promise to attempt regular communication. That was a start, right?

That’s when a couple men rounded the corner with a shared laugh. Then they looked up to see Steve and Cath standing there. Immediately, one of the man’s faces dropped and he stepped out of the other man’s personal bubble.

“Wu!” Catherine recognized him immediately. She looked pleased to see an old friend. Then her jaw dropped. “Were you on the Eisenhower and I didn’t know it?”

He drug his eyes off Steve only to stall his answer for a few seconds longer before he collected
himself. “She was just dropping me off between missions.”

Steve watched as the man with Wu took in the situation. Realization floated over his features and he crossed his arms, looking uncomfortable. Steve did not feel for him, because his discomfort was nothing compared to the ocean Steve was standing in.


“Mark,” the man corrected.

“Sorry,” Jake turned to him, then back to Cath, “Mark.”

Wu’s eyes flitted up to Steve’s again. Steve felt Cath look up to him, but he gave her no glance.

Then the elevator door dinged open. They stood as a wave of discomfort rocked all of them. They were in a precarious situation. Cath turned towards the elevator, and Steve looked to Jake’s feet and followed her. She pushed the button for their floor and they waited, and waited, all the while Cath was staring at Steve with a face full of judgment. The doors started to shut, and Steve started to feel the relief, but Cath caught them.

She ducked her head out. “No need to be shy. We do know how to share.”

She bit her lip for a moment, expectant, and then stepped back a few steps as Wu and Mark stiffly walked into the elevator. Wu reached forward and pressed the button for the third floor – the floor just below theirs.

Cath let out a breath as the doors shut. Then she waved her thumbs at Wu and Steve. “So how long’s it been since you two saw each other?”

Wu pulled at his ear and glanced at Steve, who felt the glance from the corner of his eye.

He was such a coward.

“Awhile,” Wu answered. “How are you, Steve?”


“Good. I’ve been with Team Four,” Jake said.

“I know,” Steve answered.

Jake was quiet for a moment. “Heard you went DEVGRU,” Jake said.

“I can neither confirm nor deny,” Steve answered automatically, as he was taught.

Cath rolled her eyes. “He thinks that makes him mysterious. He’s a softie.”

“I know,” Jake said, openly staring at him. Steve finally looked up and met his eyes, feeling a strong dose of…something… at the declaration. The elevator dinged again, the doors opened, and Mark stepped out, but Jake didn’t move.

Steve held his ground. Steve knew the truth about what happened. It wasn’t Jake that tried to out him to the Navy, it was an old enemy from the Academy. Joe had told Steve about it. How he had tracked the man down and put the fear of God in him. How Joe said what he did, changed the subject, and never spoke of it again.
The ocean Steve was standing in was one of his own making. He should have trusted his friend. He could say a few things, and with the way Jake was looking at him, he could fall back into things with him. It would be so easy. Apologies and a long talk and a couple beers and everything would be better. Maybe they’d go back up to Jake’s hotel room and-

He glanced to Mark, waiting out in the hall and looking like a one night stand in the making, and then down to Cath.

If he was…

He looked back up to Jake. If he was thinking about fixing things with Jake to… to be with Jake again… He looked back down to Cath. That walk on the beach and that talk about commitment probably wasn’t a good idea.

The doors started to close, but Cath reached out and stopped them again. Then she turned over her shoulder at Jake. “It was good to see you again.”

“Right,” he said, pulling his eyes away from Steve’s again. He stepped towards the hallway.

Courage, out of nowhere, like the ocean pulled away for a moment. “Hey,” Steve called out. Jake paused, turning, a hopeful look on his face. “Cath’s only got a few days, but maybe we could get together Thursday?”

Jake’s mouth floundered for a moment. “I leave Thursday.”

“Before you go,” Steve asked.

“I don’t know.” He shook his head. “We’ll see.”

Steve nodded. Jake stepped into the hall. It took the elevator door closing to cut off the look between them. As the elevator rocked, the awkwardness returned as he felt Cath’s curious stare and knowing grin.

He was sure she knew his secret. At least suspected about his sexuality for years. She had never said anything but that grin was like she had confirmation.

“What?” he asked.

“It’s none of my business,” she said airily as she faced forward.

‘It should be,’ Steve thought, ‘if you wanted this to be real.’ His heart sank and hated that relief poured in around him.

He was such a coward. In so many ways; a coward.

“I want you to wash my hair,” Cath said, random after what just happened. Then she grinned again, side-eyeing him. “…while I’m on my knees.”

He had no idea how to respond to that.

He also had no idea how to respond on Thursday to the hotel clerk who told him that Jake had checked out on Wednesday.

He’d never see Jake again.
Steve – present day

~~~

Danny came back from breakfast just as things were looking up. They finally had a lead. Catherine Miya.

Steve had sat down to finish fast-forwarding through the surveillance video, with little hope they’d find anything, only to find a golden ticket. There Jake was, just to the side of the shot of the camera, running up, taking off his shirt, and diving in. They couldn’t see what he was diving after, or why, but after a few moments, he pulled a woman out of the water.

Jerry stood impatiently by the computer, tapping his finger as facial recognition ran through driver’s licenses. Steve could relate.

“We got somethin’?” Danny asked, walking up to the table.

Steve nodded. “Hopefully.” He pulled up the clip of Jake jumping in the water to show Danny. They watched, again, as Jake toed out of his boots and pulled off his shirt and dived. “Whatever happened, she was far out. He wouldn’t have taken time to take off his shoes if she was close. He wanted speed.”

“Is that a SEAL thing?” Jerry asked.

Steve shrugged. “Water rescue in general.”

Chin came out of his office. “That was Eric,” he started, “Jake’s phone just got a call from a local number.” Steve stepped aside so Chin could run the number. “They followed protocol and let it go to voicemail, but they didn’t leave a message.”

“Maybe it’s his employer?” Danny suggested.

“Hopefully.” Steve was thankful for the sudden onslaught of leads. This morning, coming in to watch more surveillance video sent him into a short bit of frustration. Action was better. Doing something, talking to people face to face instead of face to bank account… this was his strong suit.

“Where’s Kono and Lou?” Danny asked.

“Kono took the morning,” Steve told him. “She’s a little nauseated. Before we found the video, Abby had a hunch about the photo of the guy from the video at the hotel. She and Lou are making a visit to the FBI.”

Danny rewound the video once again, pausing just as Jake had the woman back on the dock. “Are her hands tied?”

Jerry nodded, zooming in to her hands.

“So he stopped a kidnapping?” Danny asked. “Good on him.”

Chin’s number search for the mystery caller pinged. “Catherine Miya,” Chin said, pulling up another screen to search for a photo of the caller.

That’s when Jerry’s facial recognition search pinged as well, pulling up the driver’s license photo of a young Asian woman with long black hair.
“Catherine Miya,” Steve read Jerry’s results, a little excited.

Whoever this woman was, she was calling the man that saved her.

“Let’s go pay her a visit,” Chin said.

~

It was clear from Catherine’s apartment that there had been some kind of struggle. A bookshelf had been knocked, and all its contents askew and falling off its shelves. A chair was knocked over, a clean knife laid in the middle of the kitchen, whatever Catherine was making herself for dinner had been spread out and left, like it had been sitting out for a few days. Whoever tried to take Catherine, she had put up a fight.

“Or maybe it was Jake,” Danny suggested. “Maybe he was hired to protect her.”

“She’s a hula girl at a luau whose parents own a convenience store,” Chin repeated what Jerry had found out about her. “Who would go after her?”

“Obsessed customer?” Danny suggested. “Angry ex?”

“Possibly. But we know she’s alive or she wouldn’t have tried to call Jake.” He pulled out his own phone and dialed Jerry. Jerry answered on the first ring.

“Hey boss,” he answered.

“Jerry, I’m going to call Catherine’s number, I want you to trace it.”

“Gotcha.”

From there, Steve switched over to another line and dialed Catherine’s number. They all waited quietly as it rang once, twice, three times, and eventually went to voicemail. Steve, frustrated, left a message explaining who they were and hung up.

He huffed out his nose and Danny shifted on his feet, hands on his hips, and gave Steve a soft look. It was the same look he’d given him a thousand times; ‘I’m sorry you’re frustrated, we’ll get there, be patient, ya’ dork.’ Steve rolled his shoulder back and let out a sigh.

“Let’s start canvassing,” Steve told them. Danny nodded and Chin pulled out his phone, presumably to request a few uniforms for assistance. They could use the help. “We’re on the third floor. Surely someone saw something.”

~

“She told me not to tell anyone,” her neighbor, a middle aged woman, said, hugging her cat in her doorway. She seemed suspicious of them.

“Ma’am,” Steve started, fighting the frustration. “We’re the police, and we want to make sure she’s safe.”

“I wanted her to go to the police, but she was adamant that she wouldn’t.”

“Do you know why?” Danny asked.

She hesitated just long enough for Steve to snap. “Tell us, or we’ll take you down to our office, where you’ll tell us anyway.”
It was rough and just this side of a threat and Steve knew this woman didn’t deserve it. She was only protecting a friend.

“Steve,” Danny warned. “Sorry about him. This is the biggest lead we’ve had. Ma’am, we just want to help her. Truly.”

“Why wouldn’t she call the police?” Steve questioned, more to Danny than the woman.

“I don’t know,” she answered anyway.

“Maybe whoever took her was a cop,” Danny offered.

“’Took her?’” the woman repeated.

“We want to know she’s safe,” Danny said again.

She rolled her eyes and bit her tongue. “They were adamant…” she said again.

“’They?’” Steve repeated. “She was with someone?”

The neighbor looked frustrated with herself that she let something slip. She turned and dropped the cat behind her and turned back to the them, crossing her arms. “She was with a man. Tall. Asian. She said he was okay. She was shaken, and all messed up like she had gotten wet.”

They came back after being at the dock, then. Steve nodded, hoping she’d keep going.

“Her apartment was a mess and he helped her pack a bag. She asked me to call her parents on Saturday if she wasn’t back by then.”

Steve nodded, but shared a look with Danny. The loyalty this woman had was deep. “Anything else?”

“She was scared.” The neighbor shook her head. “She seemed to trust the man she was with, so I didn’t…”

“The man,” Danny said, pulling out his phone and tapping a few screens. “Was it this man?” He held it out towards her.

She looked for a moment. “Yeah, that was him.”

Danny held it up to Steve. It was Jake.

“What time was this?”

“Tuesday afternoon,” she said. “Around four.”

The timeline with the surveillance video and Jake’s time of death lined up. He’d have about six hours between being at Catherine’s apartment and the fight in his hotel room.

“A uniform officer will be by to get your information,” Danny told her. “Stick around awhile, yeah?”

The woman nodded. Then she made an aborted attempt to say something. Steve noticed when she did it the second time.

“Ma’am?” Steve asked. “Is there anything else? This is a murder investigation.”
“Murder?” Her eyes went wide. “Cathy? Was it Cathy?”

“No ma’am, but we need to find her,” Danny said.

She looked defeated. “If she didn’t want to go to the cops because she was scared of the cops, how do I know you two aren’t what she was scared of? Take me downtown if you need to.”

Steve sighed. She had a point but her hesitance was getting annoying. “The man she was with was the man that was murdered. He was a friend of mine. He and I were Navy SEALs together. We served together, and he was good at his job… and someone killed him. That someone could still be after Catherine. I want to make sure she’s safe, and I gotta find who killed my friend.”

The woman studied his face for a moment. His words were earnest and true, and something finally got through to her. “She went to the Hailiki Motel a couple streets over. She said she was going to lie low until they figured things out.”

“Thank you,” Steve said, already pushing on Danny. “Thank you so much.”

Danny squeezed his elbow and pointed at the woman. “Wait on those uniforms, yeah?” She nodded, but Steve was already taking off towards the exit.

~

Catherine only opened her motel room door when they showed her a picture of Jake.

“You’re the one that left the voicemail.” She let them in her small room. “I didn’t… I didn’t know…” She sat down on the bed and immediately started crying.

“Hey,” Danny stepped forward and put a comforting hand on her shoulder. “We’re here to help.”

“I can’t believe he’s dead. He seemed so strong.” She said, shaking her head. “He said that he’d protect me… that he had to talk to his friends. Said they knew people that could help.”

Steve pulled a chair from the small table and sat across from her. “We saw that your hands were tied in the water.”

She nodded, and rubbed her wrists absently. She still had the marks where the ties bruised her skin.

“Tell us what happened.”

She sniffed. “They showed up at my work the night before. I work at the Polynesian Cultural Center. I dance in the luau. They said they had a few questions for me, but the show was about to start. They left after that.”

“Who did?” Steve asked.

“The cops. A couple men dressed like detectives. They had badges.”

Steve exchanged a look with Danny.

“What did they ask?”

She shook her head. “I don’t know. Just that they wanted to talk to me someplace private. I went home and they were waiting. I figured whatever it was had to be important, so I let them inside and started making a sandwich as we talked. Then one of them pulled a knife. I… I tried to fight back… but. One of them had a gun.” Her voice broke as she told her story. “They walked me out of the
building with that thing digging into my spine.”

“They weren’t cops,” Danny said.

“How do you know?” she sniffed.

“They wouldn’t have bothered with a knife. They would have both had guns.” Danny had a very good point.

“Then what happened?” Steve asked.

“I was put in a car, and told to stay down. It was dark and they had a gun on me; I had no choice. Then we were at a dock and I was pushed into a storage container with four other girls. But there were others in other containers. I don’t know how many.”

Sirens went off inside Steve’s head.

“A storage container?” Danny asked.

She nodded. “Like one of those big metal shipping containers.”

Steve watched as Danny’s face went pale.

~~~

Danny – March 2016

~~~

It was hot. The metal of the container made the air inside a thick, heavy heat that was making Kono sweat. She was sitting between him and the wall, a protective hand over her stomach. The sweat dripping down the side of her face told him it was hot. But he was cold. The pitiful rag of a blanket was doing nothing to combat the violent shivers racking his body.

“Sleep, Danny,” Kono told him.

He didn’t have much energy to fight her, so he did.

A few hours later he woke up to Kono pushing some water in his mouth. He took a few sips before shaking her off.

“Hey, hey,” he complained. “Save some for yourself.”

“Trust me, you need this.”

It was black after that.

The next time he woke up, Kono was shaking him. He was a little better than before, but not by a whole lot.

There was gunfire, the muted kid, like someone was using a silencer. It was nearby, maybe thirty paces. What they heard louder than that was the guy that hit the wall of the container, supposedly hit. Kono sat up straight after that, and Danny wanted to, but laid back down in pain. It was getting really hard to breathe, and he was sure he was just a few coughs away from a collapsed lung, if he wasn’t there already. She kneeled down, moving to sit him up.
“Do you think you can stand?”

“I’ll do my best. I still got one good leg.”

They heard the other containers being opened, metal screeching on metal. Then he heard it. The best sound in the world.

Steve’s voice.

He was shushing people, telling them where to go, and Danny, fully relying on both the wall and Kono, called out, “Steve!”

“Shh!” Kono told him.

“I know I’m a bit delirious, but it’s Steve!”

“I know, but still shush!”

The locks on their container started to open and Danny knew it was Steve, he could feel it in his bones. He coughed in anticipation and started to feel a bit light headed with hope. Or maybe it was delirium, he was unsure. The moment the door swung open and there was Steve, oh man that was a sight Danny really needed to put to memory because Steve in tactical gear, hair dripping wet, face paint all over his face, carrying a combat weapon was really, truly a sight to behold.

“Steve,” he said happily.

“Danny,” Steve said, sounding ten types of relieved. He rushed into the container, dropping his weapon on its belt, and cupped Danny’s face in his hands. There was another guy with him, who had turned around, keeping an eye out.

Danny needed to take a moment to thank Ricky Bonaducci because Steve was kissing him. He had a busted lip, a swollen eye, a bruised jaw, he really couldn’t breathe all that well, and his knee was already giving out on him, but Steve was kissing him like he never thought he’d see him again. He could relate.

The next bit of memory was kinda fuzzy, there was something about a helicopter and a bazooka and another kiss but he wasn’t sure if any of it was true. By the time he woke up again he was in another helicopter and Steve was telling him everything was okay.

~

It was hot. The metal of the container made the air inside a thick, heavy heat that was making Kono sweat. She was sitting between him and the wall, a protective hand over her stomach. The sweat dripping down the side of her face told him it was hot. But he was cold. The pitiful rag of a blanket was doing nothing to combat the violent shivers racking his body.

“Sleep, Danny,” Kono told him, but she wasn’t okay. She was hurt. Her stomach was bleeding.

Suddenly they were sitting side by side in a couple metal chairs and Kono was shot point blank to the stomach. Her head rolled back.

“Grace!” Danny called out. He fought against his ties. Somehow, they were loose and he stood immediately. He rushed to his partner. “Grace!”

He had her head in his hands, and when he went to push her hair out of her face, checking on her,
wasn’t Kono, it wasn’t his partner Grace… it was his daughter.

Then he woke up with such a deep breath of shock that his still weak lungs hurt. He was coughing and throwing a fit, turning over, pulling at the bruises on his ribs.

Steve had a hand on his shoulder as the coughing fit subsided. He was in his bed…Steve was there with him… there was an awful pain in his knee where he had turned over too fast.

“Hey, hey,” Steve said, trying to soothe him.

Danny laid back flat and fought against tears. It was a nightmare. He turned his head towards Steve and Steve took him in his arms and told him everything was okay.

~

Grace was gripping at her hair, practically growling over her math homework and all Danny could see was her slack jawed face from his nightmare. He moved towards her, slowly at the moment, and highly dependent on crutches.

“If I fail eighth grade will you disown me?” she asked.

“No,” Danny said, leaning down and kissing the top of her head. “Never.”

~~~

Danny – present day

~~~

Catherine’s story was just familiar enough that it had to be connected. It was the same pirate operation that had kidnapped Danny and Kono only a few months before. They had caught half a dozen ships involved in the trafficking ring, but a new joint task force between the NCIS and the FBI had taken the case out of their hands when they found themselves overwhelmed. Danny remembered teasing Steve about leaving them for a new, shinier team. NCIS and the FBI had several players, with various connections to a dozen organizations all over the Pacific Rim. None of the goons they captured were talking, and none of the ships carried any information about who their bank was.

Looks like they missed a ship.

Steve was busy on the phone with that joint task force, demanding intel and to put their weight back into the case. It was a murder investigation, they should have jurisdiction, immunity and means be damned. Lou and Abby were already at the FBI office, talking to one of Abby’s contacts. Kono had come back to work and she and Chin were busy walking Cathy Miya through the last forty eight hours, checking for any missed information.

Danny quietly excused himself to his office so he could panic in peace.

With every ship the Navy captured, Danny’s anxiety and nightmares lessened. They hadn’t found one in weeks, and Danny assumed everything was over. The bad guys decided their plan was too risky now with the US Military looking for them. They ran back to wherever they came from and cowered. Like most things connected to organized crime, he doubted they’d ever find who was really responsible, but he thought at least the process had stopped. A couple of the men they captured that first night ended up dead in prison in the following weeks. Whoever it was – they were powerful.
The human trafficking and the pirate ships were only a couple pawns in this big game.

But it wasn’t over.

A game Danny had been playing his whole career. It was messy and dangerous and never ending and no wonder Nick Newton couldn’t handle it. No wonder Rachel asked for a divorce.

Eyeing up at Steve through the bullpen, in his own office, in the middle of what looked like a heated phone call, Danny was thankful that Steve was playing this game too. Maybe that was a missing piece in all his relationships? Maybe he just needed someone that knew what it was like? That drive to weed it out and put everything in the light?

And oh man, oh man, did Steve know. Danny had been fighting the fight against organized crime his whole career. Steve had been in the thick of it his whole life. Danny chose the life; Steve had it chosen for him.

God help him, Danny loved him. Maybe they really were meant to be.

That’s when his phone rang. He pulled it out of his pocket to read “Kain” across the screen. The lawyer. Again. Jack. Would this week ever end?

“Detective Williams,” he answered with a sigh.

“Detective, it’s Lindsey Kain. I need to talk to you about the adoption hearing on Thursday.”

“It’s off, isn’t it?”

“Well, I need to know if I’m canceling the court date or not.”

“We aren’t going ahead with it if Jillian isn’t okay with it.”

There was a pause. “So you don’t want to fight her for custody.”

“Why should we? We aren’t going to steal a child.”

“Honorable.” She sounded impressed. Another pause. “Let me talk to her again before I cancel it. Just in case.”

“I doubt you’ll get anything, I talked to her myself. I don’t think she’ll change her mind.”

“Well, if you want to go through with this in the future, you’ll have to convince her somehow.”

“I understand.”

“Do I have permission to talk to her again?”

“It’s worth a shot, I guess. But I doubt it.”

“I’ll call again.”

“Alright.”

They hung up and Danny sighed. He looked up and watched as Steve paced, phone to his ear, back and forth behind his desk. That was his ‘I’m on hold and I hate this’ face. Danny was going to give him ten more minutes before he was going to go in there and try to smooth out his feathers. Steve hated red tape, and he was already short with the witness earlier.
His phone lit up with a text from Grace. They were home from school.

**Danny:**

*Do your homework*

**Grace:**

*I don’t have any*

**Danny:**

*Then mow the yard Steve picked up limbs today*

**Grace:**

*ugh*

**Danny:**

*Its that or laundry*

Then he switched screens and text Daisy, to make sure Grace mowed the lawn. And then one to Nahele, reminding him that he was getting to take Friday off *so do your reading response tonight please.*

**Daisy:**

*sure thing*

**Danny:**

*We might be working late tonight*

**Daisy:**

*I can handle that*

Thank god for Daisy. They’d be drowning if not for Daisy. Though it was a strain to pay her at times, she was worth every penny. It didn’t hurt that she was fond of Eric, either. Or the kids. Jack loved her, and Charlie thought she was fun, and Grace and Nahele listened to her when she needed them to. She was a great fit and Danny was thankful for her each and every day since he and Steve started down this busy path. A path full of packed schedules and heartache over foster children and custody hearings and dating and and and and…

He looked down to his phone, where the lock screen picture of his four kids were smiling up at him. It was from Christmas and it was beautiful. His kids were gorgeous. Nahele was handsome, Grace was perfect, and Charlie was looking healthier and healthier every day. And then he studied Jack’s face for only a second before the screen faded away to black. His heart hurt. He was so scared of losing him.

“*Do you have any idea how awful it is to be forgotten by the world?*” Jillian’s words dashed across his mind. She was so scared of losing him, too.

There was one difference between them, though. Danny had other people. He had Steve, and three
other kids. He had his parents, his sisters, his nephews. He had Chin, Kono, Lou. He had a whole
world of people. Jillian had four walls, a cot, three meals a day, and a visit with her son twice a
month.

Then he remembered her saying something about a foster family of hers. Curious, and following a
hunch, he reached for his computer. Not his work computer, his personal computer. He only ever
brought it home when he had to do bills, preferring to use Steve’s laptop (that had become Nahele’s
laptop) for everyday internet things. His personal laptop, with all the important files and paperwork
and account information and a hundred other things that ran Danny’s life, was much safer in a secure
facility guarded by security twenty-four-seven. Anyone could break into their private home.

The screen loaded, asked for his password, and then popped up his desktop. There, under a file
marked “kids,” was a folder for Jack. It held his shot records, and insurance information, and foster
care paperwork. They had hard copies of all these things at home, but Danny felt safer having this as
a backup elsewhere.

…and he thought Steve was paranoid. Danny was getting to be just as bad.

But there was one folder. A folder marked ‘Jillian Smith.’ It had everything they could find on her.
Steve had wanted to know all he could about her before meeting her, and Danny had to admit he
was curious too. …and so what if they pulled a few strings the average Joe wouldn’t have been able
to pull? It wasn’t anything illegal, it was just a few phone calls. After checking a particular page of
her file, Danny pulled out his phone, about to make another one, but he had a text that got in his
way.

Nahele:

Do I still need to cook dinner? I know its my night but Steve said we had some kind of dinner
tonight?

Oh, shit. He had almost forgotten about Nick Newton.
Chapter 9

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Steve – 1983 -- Age 6

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His memories of the day were fuzzy. He knew Uncle Joe was there, and his dad seemed frazzled, rushing in and out of the hospital room where his mother was giving birth. Mamo showed up and Steve got a pink candy cigar. A nurse congratulated him on becoming a big brother. He had spilled soda all over his flag football jersey and didn’t want to meet his baby sister with a stain on his shirt.

Joe had taken him to the bathroom and cleaned him up as best he could.

“She’s not going to mind,” Joe told him. “She’s too little; she won’t even remember.”

“Dad brought his camera,” Steve thinks he told him. Or maybe that was a later addition to the memory as Steve got older and the pictures of the day always reminded him of that spilled soda.

No matter what, he met Mary while she was mid-yawn. Everyone reacted immediately, amazed at the action. She had light, wispy, blonde hair peeking out from under a hospital cap meant to keep her warm. Someone told him that, and he couldn’t remember who.

“Look at the camera, son!” His father said, camera ready.

Steve turned with a wide, front tooth missing, smile. That photo was in Steve’s room until the day his father sent him away, and even then he packed it away in a photo album he took with him to the Academy. That small album was in a storage unit now, with a bunch of photos of his life before his mom died. Happier times; simpler times. Lost, among boxes of items that Steve dragged from storage unit to storage unit all through his years in service.

He wouldn’t find it until he was forty one, upgrading to a larger storage unit, and making room for Jack’s toddler crib and a few of his toddler toys. They might need those things again someday soon. But that’s for the future.

Right now he was curling up against his mother in her hospital bed, her arm snug around him, eagerly waiting to hold his baby sister for the first time. She was tiny, he was told. Give her head some good support, someone said.

Mary opened her eyes and looked up at Steve with a little look of confusion on her face.

He was overwhelmed.

“Say hi,” his mother encouraged him.

“Hi, Mary,” Steve whispered. “I’m your brother.”

She sneezed and started crying, but Steve softly pet her the little bit of hair she had, and she calmed down.

“She likes you,” his mother said, squeezing him into her side. “I like her, too.”
“I don’t give a shit!” Mary practically screamed at him. “You’re signing your life away!”

“Maybe I’m going to have an amazing life in the Navy, Mary! Interesting, and important, and, and, and, international!”

“Great alliteration,” Mary threw towards him, sarcastically. “How about ‘insane?,’ or ‘idiotic,’ or ‘life threatening?’”

“That last one didn’t start with an ‘I,’” Steve said, lacking a quick response.

“**I,**” she stressed the word, “don’t care!”

He had made his choice. He was going into the Navy. With his time at the Academy, he’d already be going into service with a rank and title. It was a smart career move, with plenty of friends, and nowhere to go but up. Not to mention their family had a long, proud history of being in the Navy. He was excited for this part of his life to begin. He thought his sister would be, too.

But here they were, having a screaming match with each other in Aunt Deb’s apartment.

“This is what our family does, Mary. It’s what dad did… Uncle Joe!”

“Well, think about grandpa!”

“I am! He’s part of why I want to do this! I am named after him.”

“So you want me to support you so you can drown in a metal can under twenty feet of water? Have your name engraved on some memorial somewhere? Some statistic on the news? I don’t like it! It’s dumb, and you’re dumb if you think it’s not!”

In retrospect, she was scared. She loved him, and she was scared of something happening to him. But he was young and his twenty two years had him convinced he was invincible. And she had just insulted his intelligence, and his choice.

“Well, I don’t like you not going to college!”

“You don’t get a say in that, you’re not dad!”

“Then you don’t get a say in what I do, either!”

“Fine!”

“Fine!”

“Then just leave!” Mary said, swinging her hand toward the door. “Go off to find the next war and die for some senator’s bank account for all I care! Just don’t expect me to cry over a flag covered casket!”

Steve took a deep breath, furious.

“Fine,” he said, voice low and deep. “Have a good life.”

He left the apartment, and only came back long enough to pick up his things. He hugged Deb goodbye, but Mary never came out of her room.
“You’re going to love adopting,” Mary said one Saturday morning in January.

He had started the paperwork with the lawyers. He was well on his way to being Jack’s dad. It was Saturday morning, and Ellie and Mary were talking about his feelings for Danny, and his stupidity of turning him down. So he had to distract them. It’s not like adopting Jack was a secret, or anything, but he was going to save it a little while longer. Make sure it was actually happening.

But the distraction did the trick.

“I’m glad he won’t grow up in foster care,” Ellie added, taking a sip of her coffee.

“Seriously,” Mary said. “It’s so gratifying. Like, Joan was all alone in the world and I was almost just as alone and then she came along and we had each other! Now it’s us against the world.”

“That’s sweet,” Ellie said, approving. Ellie was liking Mary more and more every time they spent time together, and the feeling seemed to be mutual. Steve was glad to see it. He knew things could be awkward.

Steve took a deep breath. “I hope it’s the right thing to do.”

“It will be,” Mary said, certain.

“I just want to give him stability, ya’ know? Certainty.”

Mary studied him for a moment, and Steve fought the urge to squirm. She did have more experience than him in adopting a child. She’d been through the process, both legal and emotional. He wondered what she was thinking, if she thought he could do this. What if she didn’t think he could do this? What if she thought he was irrational, and insane, and dumb?

“Are you going to stay in the Navy?”

“What?” He was thrown by her switch in topics.

“Can you adopt as a single man who could be deployed at any time?” She asked, clarifying.

“It’s not like he wouldn’t have people to be with if that happened.”

“Yeah,” Ellie said. “But you’re talking about Danny. And you and Danny aren’t seeing eye to eye right now.”

“You know how you could fix that?” Mary asked. Steve groaned. “Tell him you love him.”

Steve huffed out a breath of air and sat forward towards Ellie, desperate for a change in topic. “So what’s new in your life, Ellie?”

~

“What do you think?”

“It’s a dump.”

Mary’s face fell.

They were standing in a small office space that was squeezed between a laundromat and a Thai
delivery joint. Everything smelled faintly somewhere between soap and spices. The walls were stone blocks and they were grimy, the window that separated what had to be the waiting room away from what was probably an office was broken. Its twin on the other side of the hallway was grimy and had some kind of brown grease on it. He hoped it wasn’t blood. Mary had to push to get the front door open to show him the place. He hadn’t even seen the rest of the place.

“It’s great!” Mary said, trying to convince him. “It’s three offices, a storage room, a bathroom, and a waiting room. That’s all the space we need. That’s more than enough space!”

Steve looked around the room. “I think that’s a dead rat in the corner.”

“Well, of course we’re going to clean it up! Put on a fresh coat of paint, take out that broken glass, put up a curtain. Get the front door fixed. Change the locks, of course. Get a new sign on the door. Get in some chairs and tables.”

“…how many clients are you expecting to have, Mary?”

She bit her lip. “I’ve already got one.”

“You got took your licensing exam yesterday. You don’t even have paperwork yet.”

“No, that’s true. But Ellie said they freelance work all the time. That’s respectable, and will totally pull in more clients!”

“You think you’re going to have enough clients that you’ll need a waiting room?” It wasn’t large. Probably big enough to hold a secretary desk and half a dozen chairs, but it was a lot bigger than Steve was anticipating. “How about something smaller, but the same price! You could probably find something a bit nicer.”

“Steve…” she groaned. “Come on. This is only a starter office, anyway. And trust me, I’ve looked.” She sat, a bit disappointed, for a moment before saying, “Come on, see the rest of the place.”

She led him down the single hallway of the building.

“We’ll make up this room to be a good spot for Joan after school,” she said, pointing into the first room – the one with the broken window. Steve was concerned his niece would be spending time here. “With a couch and a TV and a table for homework.” She pointed into the office across the hall from that. “This is Eli’s office. He claimed the one closest to the door, the freak.”

Steve knew why that was. That was so he’d have quicker access to any danger that walked through their doors. Steve’s own office was positioned so he could see everyone and not have his back to the room for similar reasons. Everything he learned about Eli made him more and more suspicious. He didn’t know if he liked the guy yet, and here his sister was, building a life with the guy. Not that they were together, but. He’d be a figure in Joan’s life for sure. And he was thinking about tactical scenarios to combat danger.

Steve huffed.

She pointed at another door, “That’s where we’ll put up case boards and stuff, I think it’s supposed to be a board room, but… and the bathroom and storage room is back there.” She waved at the door at the end of the hall. “And this:” she turned, excited, in front of the last door, “will be my office.”

It was the same size as what Eli would be in, but it also had a window into what would be Joan’s space.
“It’s dark,” Steve said.

Her face fell again. Then she rolled her eyes. “That’s what white light bulbs are for. Eli was talking about changing all the light fixtures anyway. Bring them up to code.”

“They aren’t up to code?”

“Relax, that’ll be covered in the contract. We won’t be paying for anything that didn’t pass inspection. Chill.”

Steve took a deep breath, giving the whole place another once over. He was trying to be supportive, but this place was not the place—

“I know you’re worried,” Mary interrupted his thought process. “But this is going to work.”

“It’s just…” Steve started. “You’re planning for a full work load right away. I don’t want you to get your expectations up…”

“I thought you were going to be supportive.”

“…for immediate success,” Steve finished. “Do I think you can do this? Of course I do. But this kinda career will take time. You came from a big, established firm in New York City, where their name had history and resources and contacts.”

“Eli and I have resources and contacts.”

“Yeah, but the firm had seven decades of it. You’ve got five years. And most of those contacts are east coast.”

“What kind of cases do you think we’ll be taking, Steve?” Mary asked, crossing her arms. “We aren’t doing open murder investigations, or hunting down international terrorists. We’ll be following husbands here on what they told their wives was a work trip. I’ve already got interviews set up with a dozen law firms to serve divorce papers. Ellie wants to hire us from time to time to do evidence piling. We might even take a few tax cut opportunities and investigate closed cases for inmates claiming they were wrongly accused, Ellie said she’d set us up with a few of those, she’s got a few on the docket already. I’ve been setting all these interviews up. I’m not just going to put my number in the want ads and hope for the best! Sure, maybe, once in a blue moon, we’ll get a case that turns just this side of dangerous, so it’s a good thing I know a guy in the Governor’s Task Force.”

Steve had to admit: he was impressed. She really was chasing down opportunities and securing sources of steady work.

“That firm’s name, and my history there, the fact I learned the trade there? That opens lots of doors. You know what else opens lots of doors? My name. Thanks to you, and thanks to Dad, lots of people here know the McGarrett name. I just want to be one of the reasons why people know it.”

“You will be,” Steve said instantly.

“I can do this, Steve.”

“I know you can.”

She let out a sigh, her shoulders falling with relief. “Thank you.”

“So, a paint job, huh?” He said, giving the place another once over, this time feeling more
confidence in Mary.

“Yeah,” Mary said. “I know a couple guys that are trying to get a remodeling business off the ground.” She hip bumped him. “Contacts. I’ve already called Stan. They are ready to work.”

Stan and Adam. Steve chuckled.

“There’s just one thing,” she said, picking at her nails.

“Mary,” Steve said, with a bit of a groan. If he was going to have to co-sign a loan for this place…

“The landlord would like a letter of recommendation.”

Oh. Well. That, he could do. That, he was happy to do.

He threw an arm around his little sister’s shoulders. “We’ll see,” he teased.

“Steve!” She pushed against him, and they laughed.

“You going to hire a secretary?” Steve asked, ignoring her question a little while longer.

“Maybe,” Mary shrugged. “It’s on the business plan, but there’s a lot that needs to happen before we get there.”

He was kind of proud of her plans, her goals. From that angry kid to this confident adult. It was impressive and Steve was so thankful they’d found their way back to each other.

“I’ll write you that letter,” Steve said. “On one condition.”

Mary rolled her eyes, but pulled out from under his arm to stare up at him, waiting.

“Don’t hesitate to call me if a case gets too dangerous, or too close to home.”

Mary’s smile was small and slow, but she was smiling all the same. “Deal.”

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Steve – present day

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Danny had excused himself to his office the moment it was clear they were dealing with the same pirate operation that took him out for the count the last month. He was still going to physical therapy over what they did to him, and while he was physically getting better, he woke up from a bad dream just this weekend. Something about small spaces and being in the water while bullets were flying all around him and Kono had gotten hurt…

Steve hoped this was his chance to get some kind of closure, but the moment the found out, Danny closed himself off instead. The whole experience had gotten to him more than he was letting on. Steve eyed him through his office windows, wondering what he could do.

“Thank you, Governor,” Steve said, back in the moment, and into his phone. He hung up with a satisfied sigh. Finally. He was getting somewhere.

He’d spent the last hour on the phone trying to get updated details about the case. He’d handed it over back in March when everything happened. Too much was going on; Kono’s pregnancy,
Danny’s injuries, Steve dealing with getting Nahele back. It was just easier to sign everything off to NCIS. He never thought trying to get back on the case would be so difficult, or that he’d face so many roadblocks. Usually his job was easier than this.

But these people took out Jake. These people almost took out Kono. They almost took out Danny. This was an operation that Steve was now one hundred percent behind taking down. As far up the organized crime ladder as they could get and all the way down to the very last grunt. They kept stealing women from his island. They threatened his family and people he loved. This had Five-0’s full attention again. They should have never let it go in the first place.

That’s when Kono knocked on his door. He waved at her to come in.

“Hey boss,” she greeted. She looked a little hesitant.

“You feeling better?” Steve asked, eyes fluttering down to her stomach.

She covered her stomach with a protective hand and smiled. “Oh, yeah. Morning sickness. It’s hitting at random times.”

Steve nodded. “Just let me know if you need to rest, okay?” He pointed at her stomach. “That’s my niece or nephew.”

She smiled wide. “I’m fine, boss. And thank you.”

“What’s going on?”

She bit her lip. “I have a hunch.”

“A hunch?”

“Well, more than a hunch.”

“Okay…”

“The number that keeps calling Jake.”

“The burner phone.”

“I got the company to tell me which chain store they sold Jake’s phone’s serial number to.”

Steve sat back, impressed. “I didn’t know we could do that.”

“Neither did I, but I thought I’d try. Anyway, the chain only has three stores on the island, so I thought I’d take a shot. There was only one purchase where someone bought more than one phone, and they bought three. One of them was Jake’s number.”

“Did we call the other two numbers?”

“Yeah. Look, I called Mary.”

“Mary?” Steve took a second. That was random. “My sister, Mary?”

“Yeah. I think she can help us.”
“We’re hiring help now?” Steve asked.

“No… but she is on her way up here. She just text me that she was parking.”

“Who was on the other end of that number, Kono?” Steve asked, wondering why Kono thought Mary could help. Maybe it was another PI on the island. Or maybe Kono just wanted some company while she was stuck doing pure research.

Kono only bit her lip again. “It’s a hunch.”

“What’s going on?” Steve asked, a little bit of something flaring up in his gut. No. Way.

Just then, he saw as Mary was stepping through into the bullpen in a summer dress with her hair in a set of buns behind her ears. Steve eyed Kono, and then back to Mary. He was up out of his seat and out of his office in a heartbeat. He saw that the bullpen computers were pulled up with sensitive case information about Jake and he moved to clear the screens.

“No, wait,” Kono said, stopping his hand, eyes on Mary. “It’s a hunch.”

“Hey guys!” Mary greeted with a smile. “Kono said I might be able to help with a case? Didn’t think you’d call me, I figured I’d be the one butting into one of yo–” that’s when Mary noticed the computer screens. Her face fell into curiosity, and then into confusion. “Why is Jake Wu on your computer screen?”

That little flare of something in Steve’s gut flip flopped. Mary was involved in this.

He turned to Kono, and with a low tone said, “It was her on the phone.”

Kono nodded, but she looked stricken, like she was expecting Steve to lose it. He didn’t blame her, he kind of was. He immediately looked to Danny. He needed some support out here, and now.

Danny was on the phone, but noticed right away. He nodded, looking like he wanted to get off the phone quickly.

“What?” Mary asked.

“I pretended to be a wrong number,” Kono clarified.

“Wait, you were the one looking for Tiffany?” Mary asked Kono. Then, “Wait. How’d you get that number?”

“It fell off a truck,” Steve said sarcastically.

Mary gave him a face. “Why is Jake Wu on your screens?”

About that time Danny had gotten out of the office. “Call me back at this number when you’ve got it,” he said. “Thanks.” Then he hung up, all his focus on Steve. Chin and Lou, too, had noticed and was moving to join them.

“How do you know Jake Wu?” Steve asked, crossing his arms.

“He’s a friend.” Then her face fell. She was putting two and two together. Danny made a face, and had a moment of hesitation in his step as he made his way to their circle. “I’ve been trying to call him, but I assumed he was with his boyfriend… They were in town for a vacation.”

“Not yet,” Steve said.
“Is he dead?” Mary asked, worried, face torn.

“Why do a couple of friends need burner phones, Mary?” Steve asked.

“They are company phones, so we can keep track of minutes spent on work. Just a cheap option, for now.”

“Why would Jake need a company phone?” Danny asked, eyes on Steve.

Mary turned around to look at Danny. “Is he dead?”

“He was killed sometime the night before last.”

“Killed?” Mary repeated, hand going to cover her mouth. Her eyes were on his service photo on the screen, and she took a step back in disbelief. Danny moved to support her just as Steve reached out.

“Why did he need a company phone, Mary?” Steve asked again, voice tense.

“He was going to come work at McGarrett and McGreggor,” she said quickly. “He had another year with the Navy, and then he was going to come work with us. Retire. Do stakeouts now and then. With any other firm, they’d require him to only work with them. We were cool with him taking other security gigs on the side. He and Eli do them together all the time. …did them.”

“How did you meet?” Steve asked.

“He was a freelancer at Stone-Highdecker in New York. Usually worked security for clients. Followed some leads every now and then, when they showed up. We became friends after he said he knew you.”

Steve said nothing. Jake was that close. Jake was friends with his sister. He was that close and he never…

“He was sad that you and I weren’t close, and said that he hadn’t seen you in years, but would like to. I said I’d set it up if you ever came to New York and he was in town at the same time. You guys never were.”

Of course they weren’t. Because Steve never got over himself and visited Mary. Because he didn’t put work into their relationship.

“I liked hearing stories about you. You, in the Navy, I don’t know that version of you. I never will. I just got stories. And then he… he was a friend. He and Eli got close. Oh, Eli…” She quickly dug in her purse. “Eli needs to be here. He needs to know.”

“Hey, hey,” Steve said, reaching out to hold her arms. He was trying to be comforting. “That can wait. I’m sorry you found out this way.”

She let out a ragged breath, like she was gearing up and ready to cry. “I take it you don’t know who killed him?”

Steve shook his head. “What was he working on, Mary?”

Mary paused. Her eyes went distant, even though she was looking right at Steve.

Then her face fell even more stricken, her shoulders drooped, and she looked down. “Oh… this is my fault.”
“No,” Steve said.

“No,” Danny agreed. “Someone killed him. That someone wasn’t you. This is on his murderer, not you.”

Steve nodded his agreement.

“Yes it is. He was… I have a case… and it was kinda connected to…” she shook her head. “It was a long shot. More like a feeling, I didn’t have anything to prove it.”

“What case, Mary?”

She moved out of Steve’s arms, and sat her purse down on the table. “Last Friday night, I had a phone call from a set of parents who were frantic. Their daughter – Molly Huan – was missing. She’s nineteen, lives at home, and never stays out overnight.

She’d been missing since the night before, and because she’s an adult, the police couldn’t help. They told them that she probably met a guy.” Mary huffed in frustration. “I followed her footsteps, found her car in a sports bar parking lot. I hadn’t given up, but… she’s been gone a week now. She’s got an open investigation with the police, and I didn’t know…”

Chin moved to the computer, and and started typing.

“The thing is, she’s young, dark haired, fair skinned, Asian woman. That fits the description of the women that those human traffickers were taking. It was just enough of a stretch that I…”

Photos and case files from Molly’s missing person file popped up on the screens. Mary was right, she was a ringer for those other girls. Including Cathy Miya. Whoever the human traffickers were selling these girls to, they had a type.

“I sent Jake out to check out a warehouse I had flagged a month ago. That was it.”

“A month ago?” Steve repeated. “Molly’s only been missing a week.”

Mary was wide eyed, like she had been caught in a lie. “Don’t be mad.”

“Mad?”

Mary’s head fell back. “I couldn’t just do nothing.”

“Mary…”

“The night Danny went missing, the night I had those kids – who were terrified, by the way – I couldn’t do nothing. I couldn’t sleep. I got on my computer and…”

“Mary…”

“You had him back, like, a day later!” She said, motioning to Danny. “It’s not like anything I found was in any way helpful!” She ran a hand over her forehead, pushing up her bangs. “And then I felt weird giving my information to the military, I wasn’t licensed at that point, it was pointless!”

Steve shared a look with Danny. He thought back to feeling helpless in his quarters on that ship when Danny was taken. Like he couldn’t do anything and he was worthless. He would have probably pulled up google if he had the option, too. He couldn’t blame her in this.

“What did you find?”
“Well… it’s not like I dropped it.”

Steve rolled his eyes. “Mary! NCIS has been working this case ever since!”

“Yeah? Well, why did they miss this warehouse if it’s what got Jake killed?”

“Why are you looking into this kind of thing? I thought you were going to tell me if you ever had a case start looking dangerous!”

“It’s not like I was walking into a room full of bad guys, Steve!” Her voice was raised, and they were in it for a fight. She was defensive and he was angry and oh boy. “I was on my computer! Making phone calls!”

“Some bad guys monitor that kind of stuff, Mary,” Steve shot back.

“I’m well aware, thank you, that’s why I bought burner phones. That’s why I was going to hire a Navy SEAL!” She got up in his face. “I hear they are pretty good at that kind of stuff!” She smacked him on the chest with the back of her hand, then she motioned to herself, “So I wouldn’t have to. I know I’m not cut out for a room full of bad guys. That’s why Eli and I wanted to work with him! My brains, Eli’s experience, Jake’s brawn!”

“Why didn’t you tell me any of this?”

“Because I didn’t know Jake was going to say yes until he called me a week ago to talk about it!” She took a steadying breath. “He was a recent addition to the plan. One that Eli and I thought was a long shot!”

Steve huffed through his nose, “You were still looking into a case that’s not yours.”

“’Not mine,’” Mary huffed with a chuckle. She motioned towards Danny. “Dad’s case wasn’t yours.”

Steve sputtered, looking towards Danny. Danny had ‘she has a point’ all over his face, and Steve gave him a face back.

“What does Dad’s case have anything to do with this?”

Mary paused, suddenly quiet. She looked around the room at the faces that had gathered around them, and Steve took the moment to assess his team’s reactions. Kono still looked worried, Chin was purposely not looking at them – busy with the computer, and Lou and Abby had made their way out of the back offices – probably when the yelling started. Then he looked at Danny. Who only had eyes for him. He was worried, and Steve took a deep, four second breath at the sight of the worry lines between his eyebrows.

He let out his four second breath, and then Mary grabbed his wrist and pulled him towards his office.

“Mary…”

“This is family business, okay?” Mary said. “Let’s talk in private, first.”

He looked to Danny to follow them. Danny followed dutifully. This was family business, after all. Danny shut the door behind them as gently as he could, and Mary didn’t give him a second look about being there.

“You get to follow all these leads that answer questions you and I both have. You get to ask
questions about our past, about Dad’s past, about Mom’s past… and you get to find answers. And I am thankful for those answers. But I still have questions of my own.”

Steve sighed and moved to lean back against his desk. “What’s that have to do with this?”

“Dad was killed because of the Yakuza. Because mom made deals once upon a time with the Yakuza.”

Steve shrugged. That was true enough. “So?”

“This is a lead on mom.”

“How?” Danny asked. “Organized crime is deep and vast and there are internal power struggles and who’s in charge depends on where you are and whose coup was successful this week.”

“I know,” Mary told him. “I just want to know what Mom did. What’s keeping her—” she paused. She shook her head, unable to finish her sentence.

Steve rolled his eyes. “Mary, I have been down that road. Mom’s out there because she wants to be, not because she has to be.”

Mary’s shoulders fell again. “She’s still our mom.”

“I agree,” Steve nodded. “But chasing a thread to look for a blanket is not the way to go.”

“How else does this kind of thing happen? Danny said it, it’s deep and vast. It’s also private. Most of what they do is taking advantage of things that are legal. Why not chase the one thing we know about that isn’t?”

“That’s not your job.”

“How come you’re the only one that gets to look for blankets? These blankets aren’t just random, Steve. Some of them are family heirlooms. Our family’s heirlooms. Not just yours. Mine too.”

Steve sighed. They had inherited a grand canyon of lies surrounding their parents, hadn’t they?

“I’m not going into rooms filled with bad guys. I’m following paper trails. That’s all I’ve done. It’s free time work that Jake was asking about and wanted to help.”

Steve pushed his head to the side in an attempt to relieve some pressure in his shoulder. This was very stressful. He wanted his sister a thousand miles away from danger, and here she was seeking it out.

She crossed her arms, “I sent him out there. So let me help solve his murder.”

“Mary…” he groaned.

“I think she should,” Danny said. “Jerry could use some help shuffling through paper trails. And it was her man.”

Steve’s mouth dropped as he looked at Danny, betrayed. Danny met it without any remorse.

“We’ve worked with PIs before,” Danny said.

Steve watched as Mary mouthed ‘thank you’ to Danny, and Danny nodded support.
“Okay,” Steve acquiesced, finally. He wanted to protest, but she had Danny on her side. He pointed at her, “Research only.”

She held up her hands, “Cross my heart!”

“Okay. Tell us what you know.”

“I have to call Eli, first.”

Right. Maybe he could help too.

“You can use my office,” Danny told her, motioning across the room.

“Thank you,” Mary said, reaching out and squeezing Danny’s arm. “Truly.”

He grinned, and pat her shoulder, and then she was gone, already pulling out her phone.

“Thanks for the back up,” Steve said angrily after the door shut.

“Hey, she’s got a right to look into her family. Just like you did.”

“She’s just going to stir up trouble.”

“Then I’d rather keep her close than push her away.”

Danny moved into Steve’s space, and rested a hand on his neck, near his shoulder, and started a small massage. He knew Steve was stressed. He knew where Steve carried his stress. Steve reached out and snaked his hand around Danny’s side. They leaned into each other; Steve soaked it up.

“Besides, if she stirs up trouble, then that just gives us a chance to clean house. And I’ve seen the McGarretts’ track records. We’ll do good to have another one of you on our side.”

Steve rolled his eyes.

“Honey,” Danny said, clear and certain. Steve remembered their code. This was his boyfriend talking. “She deserves the chance to prove herself. I think she already has.”

“I’m just worried…”

“I know she’s your baby sister but… You don’t think I worried the first time Abigail walked into a burning building? That was my baby sister walking straight into danger. But look at her, she’s a fantastic firefighter. How can I be anything less than proud of that?”

Steve finally looked him in the eye. He hated this, but Danny was making excellent points. Why was he so good at explaining things lately?

‘I should keep him around,’ he thought to himself with a grin. He squeezed Danny’s side.

“You’re right,” he admitted. “Just… distract me for the next five minutes. Anything.”

“Mmm,” Danny mused for a second. “In light of everything I think we should cancel our dinner with Nick and his family.”

“Oh,” Steve lit up, reminded. “Oh hell no.”

“What?”
“We’re doing that. Unless something Mary says has to happen right away, we’re doing that. That’s a worthy distraction.”

Danny rolled his head back, and for a moment Steve was distracted by his adam’s apple and the way he groaned. “Please, no.”

“Yes,” Steve said. “Sugar-plum.”

Danny rolled his head back up and gave him a stink eye. “Veto, and you know it.”

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**Danny – 1996 -- Age 20**

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Nick Newton was incredibly good looking and he noticed the way Danny looked at him right away, the jerk. He winked and teased and flirted and Danny found himself swept away in him. He was absolutely intoxicating. Stella compared it to her romance novels but she didn’t know the half of it. He had a thousand watt smile that lit up his whole face; it was a smile that could walk Danny into bed without much persuasion.

It was about two or three months of steady sex and kissing and flirting and not sneaking around and being foolish and frustrating to the staff. It was a hot, wet summer and Danny loved every minute of it. Longest, most serious relationship that Danny had ever had.

Until he realized they always went to Danny’s apartment. Until Danny realized he didn’t spend the night sometimes when it was obvious he should. Until Danny realized he’d skip out on dinner. Until Danny realized the two of them had never had a conversation about intentions and labels.

The fight that came out of that lasted a week. Danny came out of the explosive argument behind The Felicity one August night swearing that Nick was keeping something from him. Something big.

Danny’s mind went directly to there being someone else, and that was fine, just let a guy know, ya’ know? They hadn’t talked about what they were, if they were anything at all.

By Friday he had Stella in his car, staking out Nick’s apartment.

“You’re crazy,” Stella said, snacking on some popcorn. “I can’t believe I got a sitter on a Friday night for a stakeout.”

“Shush, you,” Danny said. “How many times have I sat in a car so you could tail Hank, huh?”

“Yeah, but Hank’s no good.”

“Glad to see you’re on that train right now.”

“Shush, he’s still Eric’s father.”

“Barely.”

Stella gave him a face. “Nick’s a good guy.”

“You’ve met him twice.”

“And he was nice both times.” She held the popcorn to him. He took a handful while he rolled his
“He’s hiding something from me, Stel, I know he is.”

“You’re paranoid.”

“What if he’s married?”

“What?”

“What if I’m just the guy on the side, ya’ know?”

“You aren’t.”

“But what if I am?”

“You aren’t. Besides, he’s not married, he’s gay.”

It stung a little, the way she shrugged it off like it was nothing. “What if he’s married to a woman?”

“What, like he’s in the closet? You say he’s so open with you at The Felicity.”

“Yeah, that’s work. But he could be like me, ya’ know?”

“What?”

“Bisexual!” Danny said. It was a new phrase he was using with his family. They hadn’t quite gotten it down. ‘Gay’ was simple, easy. ‘Bi’ was a little more complicated, for some reason. It wasn’t complicated to Danny at all.

Just then Nick’s car pulled into the spot below his apartment. He got out, turning to the back door to let a small child, probably four or five, jump out after him.

“He’s got a kid!” Stella observed.

“But he’s so young,” Danny said.

“I have a kid,” she said back, defensive.

“That’s not–” He eyed his sister and chose to change the subject, not wanting to get into it. “So that proves there’s a woman.”

“Not necessarily one he’s with,” Stella said, trying to calm him down.

“I’m going to confront him,” Danny said, courage soaring. He was already halfway out the door.

“Wait, no!” Stella said, reaching for him, spilling her popcorn everywhere. “Danny! No!”

It wasn’t a large parking lot, and they only parked across the street, so Danny had to jaywalk.

“Hi!” Danny greeted once he was within a decent distance. He stuffed his hands in his pockets.

“Were you following me?” Nick asked.
Danny shrugged. “No.” He threw a hand over his shoulder towards Stella. “Just waited for you to get home.”

Nick waved, eyes on the car behind Danny. Stella was probably waving too. The little boy looked up at Nick, and pulled on his pant leg. He looked down at him and sighed. “This isn’t how I expected this to go.”

“Expected what to go?” Danny asked, hands still in his pockets, trying to act relaxed.

“Danny, this Gino. Gino, this is my friend Danny.”

“’lo Danny,” Gino said softly.

“Danny, this is my baby brother, Gino.”

“Brother,” Danny said, cautious.

Nick nodded.

Danny took a moment to let that sink in. Nick bit his lip, waiting on Danny’s response. Gino was a cute kid, about Eric’s age. He kneeled down to Gino’s level and held out his hand to shake, “It’s nice to meet you.”

Gino took it with a grin, shaking his hand wildly.

“I have Gino half the week while my sister has him the other half, and every other Friday,” Nick explained. “We share him. When our mom…” he trailed off. Danny knew enough that Nick’s mother had some substance abuse issues. He accepted that for what it was.

Gino smiled wide at that, like he was proud of the fact he had two homes.

Danny shook his head, confused. “Why wouldn’t you tell me?”

Nick shrugged. “Things with us are going great, Danny. A kid… it’s serious. I didn’t know if you—”

“Wanted serious?” Danny finished for him.

Nick let that settle between them, then he grabbed Gino’s hand, “Why don’t you come inside? We can talk more.”

“Yeah, sure,” Danny said to him. Nick smiled and turned to walk up to his apartment. Then he turned over his shoulder to wave at Stella. Stella shook her head, but started to move over to the driver’s seat.

They made their way in, Nick dropping his keys off in a bowl by the door and Gino running to the living room.

“Mr. Danny, my show’s on in a few minutes, do you want to watch with me?”

“Your show?” Danny asked. “What do you watch?”

“Fresh Prince of Bel-Air!” he said excitedly.

Nick grinned. “He loves the re-runs.”
A kid, huh? Danny could do a kid. Suddenly Nick wasn’t just a hot bartender.

Suddenly he was fatherly and responsible and Danny found himself liking the guy a little more. A lot more. This was something he didn’t know he was attracted to; responsibility. He eyed Gino, settling into the couch and reaching for the remote control. He eyed Nick, who was watching his baby brother with a grin.

‘I can do this,’ Danny decided. ‘I can totally do this.’

“You know, Gino,” Danny started, walking toward the couch. “My nephew Eric is about your age and he loves Fresh Prince.” Then he eyed Nick. “Maybe we can get the two of you together and you can watch it together.”

Nick grinned slowly, understanding what Danny was getting at. He bit his lip, but it didn’t last long before it turned into that thousand watt smile.

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Danny – present day

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Mary was telling the truth. All she had was paperwork. Several folders worth of shipping manifests and docking contracts. She had combed through them all, highlighting things that caught her eye or looked like a pattern. She had several folders about the case itself, including information on all the girls they knew had been taken by this operation.

When asked about how she obtained that information all she gave back was, “I know a guy.” And Steve shot back, “Does that guy drive a truck?”

She had pages upon pages of Chinese documents, and when asked what she was going to do with those, she responded about knowing someone that could read Chinese, and Eli smugly and quietly waved at the group from over her shoulder. Steve sniffed. Danny knew Steve didn’t like him much. It was more to do with his role in Mary’s life looking a little too much like big brother for Steve’s liking rather than what kind of man he was. Danny thought he was fine. Joan thought he was amazing. And that, too, bugged the hell out of Steve. He should be Joan’s favorite uncle. It was cute.

Mary had done some impressive intel gathering in a very short time. Being a PI meant she could bend the law from time to time, had to be creative in how she got information, what she was looking for. PIs were trained to look where cops don’t, and it was clear Mary knew where to look.

Danny knew that Mary being this capable wasn’t a new development, but it was one that she had been hiding from Steve. She didn’t want the judgment, or his encouragement to drop the career. Her debut with Ellie’s foster-father was fantastic, but Steve still wasn’t convinced. And with the news that she was looking into their family history? He really wasn’t happy. But, with a memory of Deb following him around, Danny decided he was going to be on Mary’s side. Sometimes Steve’s controlling nature got in the way of things; an unstoppable force. But Danny was an immovable object. Most of the time. Okay, sometimes he was yelling as loud as he could while he was trailing along in Steve’s draft. But he did his best.

The paperwork was amazing, but NCIS was still giving Steve the run around. The Governor was having a hard time going up against a four star Admiral, it seemed. In the meantime, they could stakeout the warehouses Mary had found connections to.
Chin and Abby were going to take the first leg. NCIS was going to take the second. Steve and Danny would wake up early and take the third.

With a plan in place, and Jerry and Kono settling in with Mary and Eli over all the paperwork, Danny was looking for excuses to stay.

“Are you sure you don’t need more help?” he asked.

“There are four of us, dude,” Eli said.

“I know, but five heads are better than one,” Danny said.

“He’s avoiding a dinner with his ex,” Kono snitched. “Don’t let him stay.”

“I could have you fired,” Danny complained, without heat.

Kono laughed, “I’d like to see you try.”

Danny rolled his eyes.

“Go, brah,” Kono said, waving her hand at him. “Paperwork and research are my life for the next four months. You get to go have dinners on the beach with pretty men and cute kids.”

“Aww,” Steve said, coming out of his office. “You think I’m pretty.”

“Would you fire me if Danny asked you to?” She turned, asking him.

Steve paused, eyes back and forth between Danny and Kono. “No.”

Kono gave Danny a face, scrunching up her nose and shaking her head. She didn’t stick out her tongue, but it would have been the perfect opportunity.

“Thanks for the back up.”

“If you’re really serious about getting Kono fired, something is wrong, and I’d rather fix that, thank you,” Steve shrugged. “Let’s go pick up the kids and face the music already.”

“I don’t want to goooooo,” Danny whined, exaggerating the last word.

“Too baaaaaad,” Steve mocked, exaggerating the last word in the same cadence.

Kono, Jerry, Eli, and Mary all chuckled, but looked away towards their work.

Danny was facing the music.

Once they were downstairs, outside, and in the car, Steve’s teasing fell. He reached for Danny’s hand and squeezed. Danny squeezed back. “I know this dinner is my fault,” Steve started. “I’m sorry. But we’re going to get through this.”

“Maybe next time you should ask me first.”

“How was I supposed to– what was I supposed to– what was I going to do, blink in morse code?” He turned on the car, and backed out.

“Morse code? That is such an outdated system of communication. How about using words next time.”
“It is not outdated. It is a perfectly acceptable form of communication that has come in handy multiple times in my life. And you could have said something while we were talking to him.”

“If it’s so handy, why don’t they teach it in schools, huh? It’s not even offered as an elective! And I couldn’t have said anything, not with him standing right there!”

“I’ll have you know, I did learn morse code in school. Had a whole class over it. Tests and everything.”

“Well, sure, if you go to army school.”

“Danny--” he took a deep breath and Danny knew it was coming. An old topic that always set Steve off. It was a distraction, and Steve was happily complying. Danny fell in love with him a little bit more. “You know good and well that I am in the Navy!”

“How much of a difference is there, really?”

“Danny!”

~

They had access to three cars, and not a single one of them could hold all six of them at once. Anytime they went anywhere as a group it was always in two cars. And because Danny’s car was the one they used for work, the babies’ car seats usually had a permanent home in the backseat of Steve’s truck. Which meant Danny was alone on the way to dinner with his ex. Alone, with two very curious teenagers.

“So this guy is an old friend?” Grace asked from the back seat. “Was he a cop with you in Jersey?”

Danny let out a huff of a chuckle. “Nope. I knew him before I was a cop.”

“So, what, college?” Nahele asked.

“I met him while I was in college, but we didn’t go to college together.”

“Why not?”

“Well, he was a… uh um. He was a few years older than me. And um. Didn’t have that much money.”

“So how’d you meet him?” Grace asked.

“We worked together.”

“Cool,” Nahele said. “And his kids?”

Danny shrugged. “Never met ‘em. I don’t even know their names.”

“So, we’re going… because… why?”

Danny rolled his head around, stretching his neck. “I need some back up.”

“For an old friend?” Nahele asked, judgmental.

Danny scratched his forehead, and turned on his blinker. “Yeah.”
“He was more than a friend, wasn’t he?” Grace asked, eyeing him through the rearview mirror with a smirk on her face. She was too smart, too quick, and Danny was worried that her aspirations to be a cop were shining through. She liked people, she liked solving puzzles, and my god was she good at reading the room.

“…yeah,” Danny admitted. He wasn’t going to lie to his children.

Nahele immediately turned, face lit up. “How does Steve feel about this?”

“He’s the one that set it all up.”

“No,” Grace said, she was such a gossip, unbelieving. “Why?”

“He didn’t know, at the time. And Nick was being nice by saying yes, because he’s a nice guy.”

“So why’d he dump you?”


“You wouldn’t be nervous if you had dumped him,” Grace observed, unnervingly all knowing.

They pulled up to a red light, and Danny dropped his head in frustration. He’d take a stupid lecture about the meticulous differences between the branches of the military with Steve over being interrogated by teenagers.

~

Nick and his husband were waiting on them as they unloaded their horde of children. Their three kids were playing with the ply-board face cut-out Kamekona had set up for the tourists to take pictures with. The board had the likeness of Kamekona without a face, a woman clad in Hula dress without a face, and together they were holding up a giant shrimp without a face. Nick was ordering them around, camera out and ready. The middle child – a boy – looked less than thrilled he was declared to be the shrimp, or maybe that the stereotypical dad-taking-vacation-photos moment was happening, Danny couldn’t tell.

It’s not like Danny hadn’t forced his own children into sticking their faces through that tourist catch himself.

The man Danny assumed was Nick’s husband, a shorter, balding man, with dark sunglasses, was standing over his shoulder, eyes on Nick’s camera, also giving instructions.

Danny turned back to the parking lot. Steve was busy pulling Jack out of the backseat, Charlie waiting dutifully at his side, holding the small bag they held some of Jack’s essentials in when they went places. They had never went out and got a real diaper bag, instead using an old military backpack of Steve’s.

Rocking on his feet, Danny fought the anxiety. This was going to go so badly.

“Are they here?” Grace asked, scanning the crowd.

Danny pointed. “They are over by the sign.”

“Tourists,” Nahele tsked, like he himself didn’t smile wide, pretending to be Kamekona in a picture on Danny’s phone.

Danny laughed anyway. “Let’s get the big table, yeah?”
They made their way to claim a table, and Danny watched as Nick’s family finished with their picture. The youngest, a brown skinned girl stood on her tiptoes to get a good look at how it turned out, while the middle child, a redhead with freckles Danny could see from even this distance away, looked bored. The oldest, another boy and a spitting image of Nick’s husband, was busy taking photos of his own on his phone.

That’s when Nick looked up, scanning the crowd. Danny gulped.

“Dad,” Grace pushed when he took a second too long.

Danny sighed and raised his hand, trying to get his attention. Nick had his own moment of hesitation when he saw him. Oh, this wasn’t going to be fun. Nick motioned to his family, and together they made their way towards them.

“Hi,” Nick greeted.

“Hi,” Danny said back.

“Your partner not joining us?” Nick asked.

Danny turned quickly towards Steve, who was already walking up, carrying Jack in his carrier being led by Charlie.

Charlie was running and made it to them first.

“Daddy, it’s heavy!” Charlie complained, holding up the backpack.

“Well, set it down!” Danny told him and Charlie dropped it with a plop.

“Well, ain’t he a photocopy,” Nick’s husband observed.

Danny looked up at the comment with a bit of a proud smile. Then, “I could say the same thing about you and this young man.”

Nick’s husband smiled. Then he held out a hand, “Mike.”

Danny reached up and took it, “Danny.”

The young man was busy messing with his phone, but didn’t look up to say, “It’s really weird that me and dad’s ex-boyfriend have the same name.” It was a dry comment he let settle among the group for a moment before he slyly and pointedly looked towards Nick. He was the first to sit down.

“Danny!” Nick said, stern, like his son had just said something wrong.

Nick looked quickly between Danny, and then Steve, worried and embarrassed, and back to his son, who was shrugging. The moment was awkward and strange. But whatever seemed to bother Nick seemed to pass and he was calm again. Nick’s son was named after him. Huh.

“It’s weird.”

Nick rolled his eyes. “You had that name long before I ever met you.”

So not named after him, good.

Young Danny shrugged his shoulders, “Still.”
“Well,” Grace said suddenly. “I am going to like you.” She held out a hand towards young Danny. “My name’s Grace.”

“Hi, you’re pretty,” he took it with a bit of a grin. Danny watched intently. Nick had said his oldest was nineteen. Then young Danny’s face turned curious. “How old are you?”

“I’ll be fourteen in a few weeks.”

“Oh, okay.” His face fell and he pulled away, turned off. “That’s cool.”

“Uh,” Danny said, shaking off seeing that obvious aborted flirting with his daughter. He turned towards Steve, who was still awkwardly standing up. “This is Steve.” He turned back around, and wiped at his nose.

‘Just say boyfriend, Daniel,’ he thought to himself. ‘It’s not hard. Just say it. Just say it, oh my God!’

Mike smiled and held out his hand again. “Nice to meet you.”

Steve took it with a grin. “Likewise.” Then he nodded down to Nick, offering his hand.

“Nick.”

“Steve,” Nick greeted. They all took a moment to sit down before Nick started pointing out his two other kids. “This is Dylan and Nina.” Nina smiled and waved, her ponytail swinging behind her head.

“My best friend’s named Dylan,” Nahele said. “We play baseball together.”


“Dylan,” Nick and Mike chided at the same time. Dylan only slouched and crossed his arms.

“Sorry,” Nick said, embarrassed. “We’re dealing with some vacation blues.”

“I get it,” Danny said. “Well, that’s Nahele, this guy’s Charlie,” he paused to help Charlie up and onto the bench. “Miss Flirt here is Grace.”

“‘Flirt?’” Grace repeated, outraged. She glanced up at young Danny before looking away with a scoff. Danny ignored her.

“What kind of name is Nahele?”

“Dylan!” Nick and Mike said again, this time sterner.

“Native Hawaiian,” Nahele answered.

“Cool,” Nina said with a grin. “I’m Native American too!”

“Yeah?” Nahele asked, interested.

She nodded.

“Very cool,” Nahele approved. He reached forward with a fist, and Nina reached forward with her own, and they fist bumped each other with a grin. Nahele made his hand explode and Nina laughed.
and followed suit.

Danny watched as Nick, Mike, and young Danny watched on with approval. Danny found himself proud of his foster son; what a good kid he is.

Then Jack let out a loud grunt, distracting them all.

“Oh, last but not least, this little guy is Jack,” Danny reached forward and squeezed his toes. Jack pulled his foot away quick, with a grin.

Steve turned his carrier around so he could start getting him out. Jack lifted himself in prep for Danny to reach in and take him while Steve dropped the carrier off on the ground at their feet. Jack lifted his hands and stretched, happy to be out of his carrier. Grace reached forward over Charlie’s head to tickle his stomach, and he pulled away from her with another grin.

“Oh, he’s adorable,” Mike said, cooing. He tried giving Jack a little wave.

“Yes, we like him.”

“We were going to adopt him on Thursday,” Charlie said sadly. “But his mom said no.”

Danny looked between Nick and Mike’s shocked faces, and then turned towards Charlie, cupped the back his head with a little sad, supportive grin. “We’re not giving up, Hammerhead.”

“You’re not?” Nahele asked, looking earnest.

Danny looked up at him and took a moment. Did Nahele want… did he want them to… “No. Of course not.”

“Hmm,” Nahele said, approving.

Just then Steve’s phone rang. Danny looked towards him, desperate for anything to keep actual conversation with Nick from happening. Introductions were over, now they had to talk about actual things. Steve looked down at his phone with a groan.

“NCIS, I gotta take this,” Steve said. Danny shook his head minutely. Steve grimaced.

“Sorry, boo boo.”

“Veto!” Danny complained as Steve grinned and stood up to step away.

“Boo boo?” Nahele asked, nose turned up. “Veto?” Grace asked at the same time, just as confused.

Danny rolled his eyes. “He thinks he’s being funny.”

“I’m being hilarious!” Steve said, a few paces away, voice raised. “Sorry, Admiral…” Danny rolled his eyes again.

That’s when the waiter – a young woman Danny knew and recognized as Gilly, who they helped get a job here – popped up at their table. She was in her twenties and a real laid back personality, matching Nahele’s pretty well. Nahele mentioned her in several of his work stories.

“Shoots!” She greeted Nahele with a pat on the back. “What are you doing here?

Boss is gonna put you to work. We’re getting busy.”
“Uh-uh,” Nahele shook his head. “I took the week off. Boss can deal.”

“Boss won’t like that.”

“Boss can answer to me,” Danny told her over all their heads.

“Aww, Danny,” Gilly said with a grin, resting her weight on Nahele’s shoulder. “Wanna go up to bat for me so I can take off next Saturday?”

“Will you give me a free meal?” Danny teased.

“Uh,” Gilly said, impressed. “If you can get me out of a shift, your plate is on the house tonight.”

“Where is the big man?” Danny said instantly.

“He doesn’t work Wednesdays,” Nahele informed him.

Danny shot a look up at Gilly, “You got my hopes up for nothin’?”

Gilly shrugged and then winked. “Good to know when customers are loyal.”

Danny laughed.

“So you work here, Nahele?” Nick asked.

Nahele nodded. “Very part time.”

“Are you in high school?” Young Danny asked.

Nahele nodded. “Freshman.”

“See!” Young Danny exploded, hands thrown up in the air. “If he can work as a freshman, I can work as a college kid!”

“You’re double majoring,” Nick said, like it explained things. “And taking summer courses.”

“So? I want to graduate early.”

“So,” Mike put a deeper inflection on the word, “you’re not going to have a job on top of that. Not while we can afford it.”

Young Danny sat back with a huff, slouched, and crossed his arms like his brother.

“Great,” Nick said. Then he looked up to Danny with a face full of apology. “Two grumpy sons.”

Danny grinned a friendly smile. He understood. Sometimes kids just did their own thing, regardless of what you wanted.

Steve sat down next to him with a sigh.

“So?”

“We lost a stakeout shift.”

“You mean we don’t have to get up early?” Danny asked, arms up in anticipation.

“Yeah, NCIS took our shift.”
“Yes,” Danny brought his elbow to his side in celebration. Then he turned down to coo at Jack. “Hear that buddy? We don’t have to lose any sleep!”

Steve rolled his eyes. “This isn’t a good thing. This should be our case!”

“I know,” Danny leaned over and bumped Steve in what he hoped was a comforting way. “As long as they get put away, that’s all that matters, right?”

“So, Nahele,” Mike spoke up, letting Steve and Danny’s conversation remain between them. “Since you work here, what would you suggest?”

“Oh, just about anything,” Gilly said, pulling out her pad.

“I didn’t think a food truck had wait staff?” Nick asked.

“Not for breakfast or lunch,” Gilly said, clicking her pen. “But we do for dinner. Do you know what you want?”

“You can’t go wrong with the fried shrimp,” Nahele said. “And I know it says we serve breakfast all day, but don’t order any breakfast food. Ever.”

Danny and Steve laughed.

“Lunch and dinner plates?” Steve started. He held up a hand with his finger and thumb making a circle. “A plus. Breakfast? Yeah… avoid it.”

Mike and Nick laughed. Nick sat back, “Well, gotta try the famed fried shrimp. I looked up this place after you gave us the details. They’ve won awards for it.” That was more for young Danny than for anyone else at the table. “You gotta go with the specialties when you travel, right?”

“Oh, yeah,” Steve said.

Mike nodded, and turned up to Gilly, “Five fried shrimp plates, please.”


“Impressive,” Steve said. “You’re getting better.”

“I think I’m pretty good at this job,” Gilly said with a grin to herself. “Thanks for the recommendation, by the way.”

“You’re doing great,” Danny praised. “In more ways than one!”

She smiled a soft smile.

A few months ago, Gilly had just gotten out of a penny at Halawa. She was in prison just because she was running with the wrong people, and a case had led them to her struggling to go straight because of the same people she was running with. But she had no choice; she had no one else. She helped them with their case, and promised to testify, and in return they introduced her to Kamekona and Flippa and a whole new crowd of people. She had been thriving ever since.

That was Steve’s doing. Gilly went around the table, taking drink orders; but Danny had eyes on Steve. Steve and his desire to see the best in everyone, and give them chances no one else will.
Nahele laughed at a joke Gilly said, and Danny turned to watch. He was loving that kid more and more every day. And that was also thanks to Steve. He smiled.

He turned back, glancing at Nick – a double take – Nick was staring at him, studying him. They studied each other while life went on around them. They had both found themselves going down parallel paths, surrounded by a blended family, despite declaring they wanted different things all those years ago. It was a surreal moment…

…broke up by Danny’s phone ringing. It buzzed in his back pocket, pulling him out of the moment. He made a movement, quickly handing Jack off to Steve before digging it out.

Kain his screen read.

Great. She did say she was going to call again.

“Sorry.” He answered it, “Detective Williams.”

“Hi Detective.”

“Miss Kain,” Danny said for Steve’s benefit. He immediately looked intrigued. “What can I do for you?”

“She didn’t change her mind.”

“I told you she wouldn’t. She made up her mind.”

“Well, I’ll be taking you guys off the docket tomorrow sometime after four. Please let me know if you change your mind.”

“We’re not going to.”

“Well, a girl can have hope a cute baby finds a home, that’s all.”

For a lawyer, Lindsey Kain wasn’t so bad. He was glad Steve had found her. Where had she been this whole time? “Thank you, Miss Kain.”

“Please, Detective, Lindsey.”

“Then call me Danny.”

A pause. “Alright, Danny. We’ll meet in a few weeks about Charlie and Grace’s case?”

He turned to glance over at Grace and Charlie. “Gotta clear the date with Stan, but yeah, see you then.”

“Good. See you.”

Danny hung up, and turned to Nick. “Sorry, lawyer.”

“Did she go and talk to Jill again?” Steve asked, turning towards Danny. Danny felt Nahele, Grace, and Charlie all sit up and listen for the answer.

“No luck,” Danny said.

Four sets of shoulders fell, and Danny knew how they felt. They took a moment to be sad about things until Jack grunted again. It had become clear that Jack could sense everyone’s moods, and
didn’t like it when people were upset. He had found lately that he could make a grunt or make a sound that was halfway to a laugh and everyone would look up and smile and give him attention, the little ham.

“Oh, he’s so cute,” Mike cooed again. He turned to Nick. “Can we have another one?”

Nick rolled his eyes and turned to his husband. “Only if you can grow a baby in your stomach.”

“I can’t do that,” Mike said sadly.

Nick tisked. “Then sorry, baby, nope.”

Mike made a face that was comically over dramatic.

“I wouldn’t mind a little sister,” Nina said, quietly. Mike leaned forward around Nick and smiled at her.

“Oh my god!” Grace exclaimed. “Me too! I’m surrounded by brothers! All my cousins are boys! The closest thing I have to a little sister is Steve’s niece, Joan.” Grace pointed over to Steve.

“You’re not getting a little sister,” Danny said, monotone.

Grace harumped and pouted. She leaned forward toward Nina. “They will never understand.”

Nina nodded wisely in solidarity.

Danny and Steve shared another look, and then Danny turned to Nick, who was still studying Danny. Danny let himself squirm a little under the scrutiny.

“So, you two must be pretty close if his niece is close with your daughter, and your kids are so comfortable around him.”

“Yup,” Steve said, eyeing Danny. Danny squirmed again. Why was this so hard?

“And he’s cool with you... ya’ know,” Nick trailed. He turned to Steve, “You seemed cool when Danny kinda... ya know. Outed your friend.”

Danny bit his lip and another awkward silence fell over the table.

“I didn’t just out you, did I?” Nick asked again.

“Oh my god,” Grace exclaimed again. Then she lightly smacked Danny on the arm. “Danno!”

Danny grimaced under the awkwardness. Steve’s unreadable gaze (he knew what that look was. That was a ‘why is this such a problem?’ look.) and Grace’s judgment, and oh, that moment of realization on Nahele’s face when he put it together.

“What?” Charlie asked, innocent.

“Stop being weird!” Grace ordered him.

Danny turned to Steve with his mouth a gape.

“Girl’s gotta point,” Steve said, voice low and accusing. Danny knew what he was accusing him of. His eyes said it all: ‘are there feelings here? Are you not proud of us? Are you embarrassed by me? What’s wrong with you?’ Danny chose to ignore that can of worms and turned to face Nick.
‘Pull off this band-aid, Daniel,’ he told himself.

“Like a band-aid, Danno,” Steve said, in the same tone he uses to get Charlie to brush his teeth. It was scary how their minds lined up sometimes.

“Steve isn’t just my work partner, he’s my boyfriend,” Danny said quickly. There. That wasn’t so hard.

The look on Nick’s face was worth it, though. It was shock and embarrassment, and his eyes flitted back and forth between Steve and Danny. “Oh!” He said. “I thought—” he started. “Okay. Okay.” He put his hands flat on the table in front of him. “After our greeting the other day I thought—”

“Oh, I can see how you came to that conclusion,” Steve told him with a grin, and then a dark look towards Danny, bouncing Jack.

Danny only pulled his lips in between his teeth and crossed his arms.

Saved by the Gilly, their food was ready. She had to take three trips, but the first trip was drinks. They waited in silence as she quickly made her way around the table, balancing the tray on her hands. The silence was awkward, and several of the children looked confused as to why.

Grace was rolling her eyes and shaking her head.

“And you get on to me about this kind of thing,” Steve said, fond.

Danny rolled his eyes again. “We’ll see how well you do next time Catherine comes around.”

Steve’s face fell. “That… You… That was… You have a point.” Steve let him win this one.

“Thank you.”

Then Steve’s phone rang again. He groaned, passing Jack back over to Danny. He glanced down at his phone and paused. “It’s the Governor.”

“What?” Mike asked, impressed.

“He’s calling after six o’clock. I gotta…”

“Go,” Danny told him.

Mike and Nick looked impressed, and in the meantime Gilly came with half the table’s food.

“The Governor?” Nick asked as she left for the rest of the food.

Jack started to get fussy. The fish sticks weren’t ready yet and he saw that other people were getting food. Danny started bouncing him.

“Yeah, we… work for him. Uh… his Special Crime Task Force? Five-0.”

“Yeah, I’ve read a few things about you guys,” Nick said. He rolled his eyes at himself.

“I might have done some light googling yesterday.”

Danny chuckled. “That’s not fair. I haven’t had time to google you.”

“They catch murderers and tear-o-ists,” Charlie told him, sounding a bit proud.
“Terrorist,” Danny corrected him.

“Do you even know what a terrorist is?” Grace asked him.

“Someone that wants to hurt lots of people at once,” he answered.

Grace looked impressed, and Danny knew how she felt. “Pretty good, buddy,” she praised.

Charlie looked smug.

Danny glanced over to Steve, who had the phone to his ear and wiping at his face. This was more bad news.

Then Danny’s phone vibrated on the table next to his shrimp plate. It lit up Rachel and Danny groaned, but went to answer it.

“Sorry again,” he told the table. “Yes, dear?” he answered sarcastically, and watched as Grace rolled her eyes again. She was getting really good at that and he narrowed his eyes at her in response. She only grinned. He was losing his touch.

“Tell Stan that I am entitled to every other Wednesday, just like him!” Rachel practically screamed instead of saying hello.

“What?”

“He said that he has Charlie tomorrow. I have the children tomorrow.”

“Rachel, this is the first week of the month. Those are Stan’s nights. Besides, you had both kids all week last week!”

“That’s different. You were out of town on vacation with your… your boyfriend.” She said ‘boyfriend’ with a little malice.

“Look, Rachel,” Danny said, done. “Work it out with Stan, and then one of you call me to tell me who’s picking Charlie up tomorrow.”

“Remind her I got practice until four-thirty,” Grace said, pouring dressing on her salad.

“Grace wants me to remind you-”

“Yes, yes, four thirty, I’m not stupid.”

“Yeah, well, you messed up a pick up spectacularly a few months ago, excuse me if I’m worried about it.”

“That’s over, Daniel.”

“Then work it out with Stan! I’m not going to play middle man!”

“Ugh,” she hung up on him.

Danny took a long deep breath, sat his phone down slowly, and let the breath out. “I’m very sorry for that.”

“Is Mom in a mood?”
“Oh yeah,” Danny answered, adjusting Jack in his arms again.

“That’s going to be fun tomorrow,” Grace said. Then she lifted up her fork and spun it around in show of sarcastic celebration.

Gilly made it with the last of the food. “Anything else?”

“This is great, Gil,” Nahele said after everyone shook their heads. She squeezed his shoulder and then was off to take care of another table.

There was a moment where everyone focused on their food for a moment or two. Danny starting tearing up a fish stick and separating some rice for Jack. Charlie dove for the ketchup and Grace had to stop him from overflowing his plate with it.

“Boy, this is fun,” Dylan said, sour, and his dads both looked exacerbated about it. Nick shot Danny another look of apology.

Steve came back and sat down, immediately lowering his head to his hands. Danny had his hands full with Jack or he’d have put a comforting hand on his back. Steve sat like that for a moment or two, taking deep breaths.

“You okay?” Danny asked, low, and just to him.

Steve sat up quickly, and with a wide smile. “Yup! I’m great. Food’s here. Good. Let’s eat!”

“So,” Mike started, trying to change the subject. “How long have you two been together?”

Grace and Nahele both started laughing and Danny and Steve both gave them a long, dirty look. They only laughed harder.

“It’s kind of a long story.”

“They met at gunpoint,” Grace informed them. “Then Steve got Dad shot, so Dad punched Steve across the jaw.”

“He didn’t get shot!” Steve complained.

“A bullet! Disrupted! My skin! I was bleeding! I got shot!” Danny argued. Steve was never going to win this argument. Danny would never back down, the asshole.

Then Steve’s phone rang again.

Steve sat back with a huff, “What now?” He looked at the caller. “Ooh…” he growled and answered the phone. “Timmins, unless this is you telling me you’re going to share information, I don’t want to hear it! … Oh, yeah, sure, run back to the Admiral like a little baby … there is a big difference– … I work for the Governor, the Admiral is your Uncle!”

Danny made a shocked face, mouth falling open, and indulging in a silent laugh. They’d worked with Timmins a few times, and Danny had never been impressed with the man, but here he was fighting a jurisdiction debate using an Uncle. Oh god, how sad.

“…my men are already on the scene, there is no need and will just cause unnecessary attention to … you already what? … you didn’t even give me time to warn my guys? … thanks. Thanks a lot.” Steve hung up with force, and then immediately dialed another number.

“What’s going on?” Danny asked. He eyed Mike and Nick, but to be honest, the two men looked
more intrigued than affronted.

Steve held up a hand as he waiting for whoever he was calling to answer. “Chin, hey, NCIS is sending guys to relieve you now. …I didn’t plan this, you guys should have been there until ten but you’re going to have people there. …yeah I don’t know, try not to make too big of a scene. …no hold your ground, we were on the schedule for this, this is our case, we have jurisdiction. …yeah man, let me know how it goes. …I don’t know, maybe.”

Danny rolled his eyes and send another quiet apology towards Nick, who shook him off immediately.

Steve hung up again with a huff. “I swear, this is the biggest hissy fit over jurisdiction I have ever dealt with.”

“I don’t understand why they just won’t work with us, we work with other agencies all the time.”

“It’s Timmins, he’s an ambitious little suck up who hates the fact that I out rank him. He always has. He’s being a problem because he knows it’s making this a problem for me.”

“Want me to beat him up?” Danny asked, trying to flirt a little.

“Now we’re talkin’,” Steve said with a chuckle. He sighed and reached for his fork. “Two months. Officially.”

“What?” Nick asked.

“Answering your question, Mike. About two months.”

“…were you going to adopt Jack together after two months of dating?” Nick asked, concerned.

They paused. Well when you put it like that…

“I know how it sounds,” Danny started. He fumbled with Jack’s food for a hot minute, but it was enough of a fumble that Nahele clapped his hands and held them out for him, offering to take over feeding him. Danny was grateful and handed him over. Grace reached for Jack’s food and suddenly Danny’s hands were free.

“We’ve been crazy for each other for years,” Steve told him.

Danny smiled, turning towards him, “You’ve been ’crazy’ for me?”

Steve looked at him, wide eyed. Then he looked away, thinking about it. Did he want to go down this path?

“Yeah,” Steve answered. Then he smiled his flirting smile. “Deny it.”

Danny stretched his neck. He stayed quiet.

“Mmm-hmm,” Steve mused, taking a victory bite of his burrito.

Grace threw up her hands, “They admit it!”

“Grace,” Danny and Steve groaned at the same time.

Mike and Nick chuckled.
“What? I’ve known you guys were in love since like, the fifth grade.”

Danny did some quick math. “That was three years ago.”

“Yeah, I was a little slow to pick up on it, but once I did, it was hard to miss.”

“What gave us away?” Steve asked, around half a mouth full of food.

Grace grinned. “Halloween. We watched The Notebook. Catherine was right there, and you two were the ones that were cuddling.” She turned to young Danny. “Catherine was Steve’s girlfriend for like, a decade.”

Steve rolled his eyes, but Danny was laughing. He started laughing so hard he had to lean forward and put a hand over his mouth. “We were so stupid!” Steve shook his head, but he was starting to laugh.

“‘Cuddling?’” Nahele asked for clarification.

Grace nodded. “Steve had his arm around Danno, and Danno was curled up next to him, and they were sharing a popcorn bowl and we were watching a romantic movie. It was very sweet.”

“You were a bumble bee,” Steve said, chuckling.

“That was a great costume!” Grace said, pointing her fork at him.

Danny had finally calmed down a little bit enough to finally take a bite when his phone vibrated again. Everyone sat back with a chuckle. Except Danny. This was getting ridiculous. “Oh for the love of God!”

He answered, a bit rough, without looking who was calling, “Hello?”

“Danny?” It was Daisy. Danny’s mood dropped instantly.

“Hey, Daisy, can I call you back?”

“Sure, but Eric and I are about to go into a movie in about an hour,” she said.

“Can this wait until tomorrow?”

“Sure. Call me in the morning?”

“Sure thing. Your class starts at nine, right?”

“Yes, sir!”

“Talk to you then.”

“Bye.”

He hung up with a sigh. “Does anyone else want to call right now?” he asked his phone.

He stared at it for a moment, daring it to ring. This was getting embarrassing, and not at all how he thought this dinner would go. Would this week ever end? He sat back, and everyone sat back with him, like everyone was watching the phone waiting for it to ring, too.

“Alright, then,” Danny said, preparing another bite. What were some of his prepared questions?
Small talk topics. Come on Daniel. “So how’d you two meet?”

“At a pride parade, actually,” Mike said with a grin. “I had brought Danny with me for the first time, and it was really my first time being so open about being out and… Danny had to go to the bathroom, so we found this cafe. But then we got separated from my group and… there he was. And he was so good with Danny and I kinda fell fast and hard. He had such a great smile. Still does.”

Oh, Danny was aware of Nick’s smile.

Nick smiled and leaned over to rest his head on Mike’s shoulder in a sweet show of PDA. Danny’s licked his lips. Steve wasn’t there yet. He glanced at Steve out of the side of his eye about the same time Steve was glancing over at him, probably thinking the same thing. They’d get there.

“You were wearing a rainbow wig,” young Danny said, remembering with a smile. Then he looked thoughtful for a moment. “You told me you had a friend named Danny.”

Nick looked over at him, biting his lip. “Is it really weird?”

Young Danny grimaced a bit, scrunching up his nose. “How long after breaking up with him did you start dating dad?”

Nick bit his lip again.

“Dad…” young Danny groaned.

“A few months.”

Young Danny looked away from his father and nodded, looking let down.

“Hey, he told me everything right away, Danny,” Mike said, leaning behind Nick to look at him. “I knew everything.”

Young Danny shrugged, and focused on his food again. Nick looked upset and hurt, shared a look with Mike, and then took a sad bite of his rice.

“Don’t worry Dan,” Grace spoke up. “That’s got nothing on Danno’s history.” She reached over and patted Danny on the shoulder.

“What’s that supposed to mean?” Danny asked.

Grace gave him a face and then held up a hand to start counting things off. “Well, a secret gay history, a surprise pregnancy, a shotgun wedding, a miserable divorce, an affair with an awful ex-wife after losing your one and only brother, a burning love you ignored for years by dating a woman a decade younger than you to distract yourself before finally giving in and kissing your true love on New Year’s Eve in the middle of Times Square,” she ended the summary of Danny’s life a little dreamy, and up into the air. Then she came back to Earth and shrugged. “It’s like a soap opera.”

Steve snorted, and then avoided Danny’s gaze by taking another bite.

“Thanks, Grace,” he motioned to the table, “for sharing all that. Everything. In front of everyone.”

“Well, you weren’t going to do it.”

Steve snorted again, this time choking a bit on his burrito. Danny didn’t pat his back as he coughed a little. He didn’t deserve it.
Then something hit him, “How did you know I went to see mom after Matty left?”

Grace looked down to Charlie and then back up to Danny. “Because I have eyes and know how to use a calendar.” Steve snorted a third time.

“Steven!” Danny said, unable to hold his betrayal in any longer.

He glanced up at Nick and Mike. They were chuckling again. At least they were talking this honestly embarrassing scene with dignity and manners.

His family was obviously lacking in both.

“What’s an affair?” Charlie asked the table.

“Oh my God,” Danny said, throwing his head back. Then he felt Steve’s hand on his back, rubbing a comforting circle, right below his ribs.

Then his phone rang.

“Oh my God!” The table groaned. “No!” He clicked the ignore button before reading who it was. “You can go to voicemail.”

The table laughed.

Then Steve’s phone rang.

“Oh! My! God!” Danny exclaimed.

Steve looked sheepish. “It’s Chin, it’s about the case,” he held it out, letting it ring, and asking Danny’s permission, like he’d ignore it if Danny asked him to. He’d ignore this case, Mary’s mess, his old flame’s death... How thoughtful; how sad that that moment could be defined as thoughtful.

“Take it,” Danny sighed.


Danny zeroed in on the conversation.

“…okay. …call the Governor and update him, will you? You were there.” He stared at Danny, lowering the phone and mouthing ‘I’m sorry.’ “…we’ll be right there. …No, you did the right thing. …have Abby take the survivor to our holding, NCIS be damned. … give us twenty.” He hung up. “I’m sorry, Danny.” He turned to the table. “I’m sorry guys.”

Danny already had his phone up, looking to call Daisy back. She wasn’t going to get to see that movie after all. “Take the Camaro,” Danny said, phone already to his ear. “I’ll wait here until Daisy gets here and then meet you, wherever it is we’re going.”

Steve stood, but eyed Nick, “you sure you don’t want to stay?”

“There was a gun fight, wasn’t there?”

“Yeah.”

“We’ve got a goon to interrogate?”

“Yeah.”
“Then I’m coming.” Daisy answered the phone. “Hey, Daisy, sorry, just a sec.” He looked up at Steve with a smile. “What are you waiting for? Go.”

He cupped Danny’s face, “I’m sorry, sweetheart.”

“It’s alright.”

Steve then turned to the kids, ruffling, Charlie’s hair, then kissing the tops of Grace and Nahele’s heads, leaning down to steal a kiss from Jack that was rewarded with a sweet grin. Then he looked up at Nick and his family, “I’m sorry guys.”

“No,” Nick said. “Bad guys to catch. I get it.”

“You do?” Danny asked.

Nick paused. “Yeah.”

“Alright, I’ll text you the place,” Steve told Danny, backing away towards the car. He turned, took a few steps.

Danny was ready to talk to Daisy and ask her to stay the night, when Steve paused, and turned around.

“I didn’t hear a veto.”

Danny paused, digesting that. Then he smiled and said nothing.

“Sweetheart,” Steve repeated, a growing smile on his face. “Okay. Sweetheart.”

Danny rolled his eyes and then focused on his call with Daisy.

“So,” Grace started, focusing once again on young Danny. “This was fun.”

“Grace,” Nahele rolled his eyes, berating her.

After the phone call was over, and Daisy was on her way over to pick up the kids, Danny didn’t feel much like eating, but decided to focus a little of his attention on making sure Charlie ate.

“Does that happen often?” Nick asked.

“What, a break in a case? Usually every case,” Danny said, taking a sip of his drink.

“No, life disrupted like that,” Nick said.

“Nick,” Mike started. “Don’t.”

“What?” Danny asked.

“Nothing, I guess,” Nick said, a bit sour, glancing at Mike.

“No, what?”

“I’m reminded why we didn’t work out.”

“Because I became a cop.”
“No, because you put being a cop before everything else.”

“Hey,” Grace said, immediately.

“Grace,” Danny held a hand out. Then he turned to Nick. “That was a long time ago. I was a kid, chasing praise and… and, and, a good start to a career!”

“And not thinking at all about family.”

“…I was twenty two years old. Who was thinking about family? I remember several nights of being alone because someone had to study for their LSATs. I supported your dreams, but when it came to mine, that just got in the way of your plans.”

“I had Gino, Danny! I had to think like that! I had to make serious plans!”

“Yeah, but you didn’t want me anywhere near your plans.”

“Are you kidding me? I was planning a life around you in it!”

“Maybe, but you didn’t ask me what I wanted my part in that life to look like.”

“I wanted you safe.”

“You wanted me locked away in a room teaching high school economics and wearing tweed the rest of my life.”

“You would have been terrific at that job!”

“But I wanted to be a cop! And guess what, I’m good at that!”

“At what cost?”

He had so much more to say, suddenly everything he had wanted to say back then, every defense of himself and his actions, all the justifications he had come up with over the years, it all came rushing forward and Danny wanted nothing more than to let him have it.

But then he saw young Danny, looking up at his dad with a disappointment and confusion, and he looked over at Grace and Nahele, who were wearing similar, if not a lesser version of that same look, and it all paused in his mouth.

“Dinner with our families was a bad idea,” Danny said.

“Yeah,” Nick said, agreeing. It seemed he seemed to realize the fight that was gearing up was not needed.

Seemed like there was some unresolved issues here. Issues that wouldn’t get solved. Danny had a witness to interrogate. Nick had a family vacation to salvage.

“We should get going,” Nick said, pushing back from the table. He stood up, and all his kids looked up in a bit of shock at the declaration. Mike, however, seemed concerned, eyes lingering on Danny.

Nick pulled out his wallet, Danny waved a hand, “Don’t worry about that.”

“No,” Nick said, dropping a few twenties on the table. “Wouldn’t want you to think I didn’t think about you in planning this evening.” He started leaving.
It was a little sting, but Danny took it.

“Come on, kids,” Mike said, pulling at Dylan, Nina and young Danny already up. “Say goodbye.”

“Bye, I guess,” young Danny waved.

“Whatever,” Dylan said, walking off.

“Bye Nahele, bye Grace,” Nina said. Nahele held out another fist for her and they fist bumped again, smiling with each other. Grace waved a sad little wave at everyone leaving.

“I’m so sorry, Danny,” Mike said, looking awkward in his exit.

“I’m sorry too,” Danny said.

“He’s…” Mike trailed. “…he was so nervous about this. I encouraged him to… It was nice to put a face to the stories.”

“It was good meeting you too. Glad to know he’s got someone.”

They nodded at each other and then he was gone.

Jack munched on a fish stick, confused as to why people left, but unconcerned.

Grace sniffed and sat back from her plate. “You sure know how to pick ‘em, Danno.”

“Don’t start. We need to talk about over sharing.”

Later, after Daisy had sat down at their table and Danny felt like it was time to go, he got in the truck and checked the voicemail from the call he ignored.

“Hi, this is Helen Goddard from Virginia Social Services calling for a Detective Williams about a former foster child named Jillian Smith? This is my last call of the day but you can call me back starting seven am east coast time. Thank you. Bye.”

He checked the time, put the truck into reverse, and cursed himself. The one phone call he was looking forward to and he ignored it. Of course he did.
Chapter 10

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Steve -- 2002 -- Age 26

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The plane ride was excruciating. He wasn’t the only military personnel that had hitched a ride, but he was certain he was the only one flying stateside to be told his career was over before it even began.

Several personnel had fallen asleep leaning on each other, and others were easily listening to music, but Steve enjoyed the white noise of the engines. It soothed his nerves, but even with the steady buzz there was no way he was sleeping. Not with what he was facing when he landed.

He was being investigated for homosexuality.

The JAG lawyer he had talked to told him they couldn’t really do anything, not unless there was concrete proof, but apparently someone had come forward as a witness. It was his worst fear realized. He didn’t tell anyone, not even Freddie – who notably wasn’t under investigation – and he left as soon as he got the summons, straight from the warship.

Freddie wasn’t being called in, so this was about his time with Jake, he just knew it. Jake’s sister had squealed, despite her assurance she wouldn’t. That had to be it. There wasn’t anything else, he and Freddie had been so careful. Freddie was even more paranoid than Steve was, his paranoia presented as denial, even when they were together. Steve was sure it had rubbed off on him over the years. A sad reality of don’t ask don’t tell.

There was no way to reach out to Jake, even if he wanted to. If this was about Jake, any official communication would look suspicious. If it wasn’t, then there was no reason to contact him while he was in field. No need for that kind of distraction. Steve was only friends with benefits with him, after all.

That was a lie. Steve knew Jake had feelings for him. In another world… he’d probably have feelings for him, too. Steve didn’t want anything to get in the way of his career right now. Not even a relationship.

That was a lie, too. He’d throw everything away if Freddie asked him to. That was probably why he wasn’t letting himself feel anything for Jake. His flame for Freddie was too high, too powerful, and now it was going to ruin him.

Steve felt so lonely. On the Enterprise, there were a couple people he kind of got a sense about, and by the states of their easy friendships, (not that it was hard for Steve to make friends) he was sure they had suspicions about him too, but nothing was concrete. It was all under the table jokes and a few shared looks whenever a gay joke would present itself among the men. Nothing that any of them could take to the higher ups, and nothing that could get him kicked out of the military. The JAG lawyer told him to tell no one, and he listened to her, but “vetting for the SEALs” could only explain away so much. Freddie was another SEAL candidate on ship and he wasn’t being sent stateside for a special hearing.

Suddenly those friends that he had a sense about were sitting further away from him.
They knew what it was and didn’t want to get caught in his splash. He was alone in this.

So he put on his dress uniform and prepared for the worst, sitting on a bench outside a courtroom. He had no idea how he was going to explain this one to his father if it went sideways. Even if it had its best outcome, that they’d investigate and find nothing, this would still follow his career the rest of his life.

Running a surf shop wasn’t such a bad back up plan, was it? The last time he wanted to be something besides a sailor, he wanted to sit on the beach all day, renting out surfboards and playing the guitar. Looking down at his fingertips he knew picking up the instrument again would be a pain, but so was this whole ordeal. That surf stand was just a child’s dream. His whole career up in smoke because of some unnamed witness.

He had found purpose in the Navy. He didn’t want to lose that.

Would he even go back to Hawaii, back to a father that didn’t want him before? His father had said the Academy was for his own good, Joe had said that his mother would have approved; he just didn’t know his father’s reaction to this. He couldn’t even begin to gauge it. Deb would take him in, he knew that. Maybe New York could be his home.

Didn’t Deb talk about moving out to California a few times? Maybe he could convince her to move with him, open up a surf shop there. California had great waves. There was one time he and Freddie went camping on the beach near Coronado and– they were so careful. No one saw them. He was sure of it.

This was on Jake. Steve thought back to every interaction with the man. Maybe they got too loud and a neighbor heard? Maybe that one time Jake chased Steve’s mouth out the door with his own and they had that nice, long kiss in the hallway? Maybe it was Stephanie? Surely she wouldn’t out her brother too? No, they were too close, she wouldn’t have… Maybe they had a falling out like he and Mary had? There were so many variables and so many unknowns it was driving him crazy.

All he knew was “a statement by a reliable witness.” That could be anyone.

Just as he was about to drive himself out of his own mind with the what-ifs, his JAG lawyer walked straight towards him.

He stood. “Lieutenant Sims,” he greeted with a salute. She saluted him back with a nod, her short bobbed hair bouncing with it. “I thought you couldn’t go in there with me?”

“I can’t,” she told him, sadly. “But that’s not why I’m here. Your case has been dropped.”

“Dropped?”

She nodded. “The case fell apart. The witness rescinded his statement.”

“Why?”

She held her hands out, not knowing. “This happens sometimes. It’s not worth the inquiry if they don’t have any proof. The law keeps them from asking you right out, but nothing protects you about asking you about evidence. When that evidence goes away, so do their questions.”

“So is this going to be on my record?” he asked, hopeful.

She shook her head. “No. There’s nothing to put on a record. You were lucky.” Then she leaned forward, quieter. “This time.” Then she stood up straight again, with a friendly smile. “Good luck
with BUD/S, sailor. You’re supposed to go to Norfolk from here for orders.”

He nodded, “Yes ma’am,” and saluted her again. She saluted back and left with a soft wink.

He probably sat in that courtroom hallway for too long, but he was so sick with relief he didn’t know what to do with himself.

~

Joe met him in a bar in Norfolk a few days later. He ordered some kind of fruity drink while Steve stuck with a beer. The last few days were full of a quiet relief and preparations for SEALs training. Thanksgiving was around the corner, and Steve had already promised Freddie and his family that he’d spend it with them, but he wouldn’t get on a plane just yet. Not before the customary lunch with Joe. They did it every year.

Granted that lunch was at a bar this year, and their lunch consisted of alcohol, but no matter. They did the usual “your father says hello” and “Mary’s doing fine” and then went right into stories about Steve’s deployment and old war stories that Joe would remember randomly. Sometimes it felt like a father and son sharing a few beers, and then Joe would throw in a story about John and it would lose it’s magic.

Didn’t matter. Steve liked Joe. Sure, their relationship started out rocky, but the more and more Steve seemed to realize he had a knack for the Navy, the more he looked up to the man. When Joe had learned that Steve was thinking about the SEALs, (back when Freddie first mentioned an interest) Joe had patted him on the back and all but declared it a done deal. Steve knew Joe’s net of strings was a wide and vast web and that his recommendation was practically an approved stamp.

“Glad to see that whole mess with the investigative council went away,” Joe said, sitting his drink down with purpose during an easy lull in conversation.

“You knew?” Steve said, focus on Joe immediately, heart caught in his throat. Oh, God. Did the room get smaller?

Joe nodded, but didn’t turn to look at him. “I did what I could, and I’m glad it worked.”

“You… you… what did you do?”

“The ‘witness,’” he said, raising his fingers to make air finger quotes. “I tracked him down. We had a talk.”

’He.’ So it wasn’t Jake’s sister. Steve was still confused on who it would be. Who would say such a thing…

“He was jealous that you’d been accepted into training,” Joe said, still not looking at him. “Some personal grudge he had about you and Freddie... That’s not a good enough reason, in my book.”

Did Joe think… Did Joe know…

…was Jake so jealous of Freddie that he’d out him?

“You can’t–” Joe said, but stopped. “You gotta–” he tried again. He finally looked over and looked Steve in the eye. “If SEALs are you future,” he raised a hand, pointing down the bar, “…you can’t let things get in the way of that. Not even old grudges.

Personal…” he trailed, looking for his words. “Personal shit just gets in the way. Muddies the water.
This job requires friends, and lots of them, and lots of different types of friends. Even people you may not like. You can make mistakes in the field and be fine, as long you don’t do them again. Piss off the wrong guy and everything goes away.”

Steve took in the advice, looking down to the bar, and started picking at the napkin under his beer bottle. “I’m sorry.”

“Don’t be sorry, son,” Joe said, turning in his seat a little bit.

“Who was it?” Steve asked, worried. “Was another SEAL?”

Joe hesitated, rolling his head back and taking a deep breath. That was pretty much a yes if Steve had ever saw it. “That doesn’t matter now. What matters is you show up, you do the work, you prove you belong. No matter what anyone says or thinks about you.”

Did Joe know that Steve was… that Steve wasn’t…

Joe clapped a hand on his shoulder. “No one is going to remember this by the time you complete your first mission. Trust me. All this ugly business” (Steve gulped at what that could mean) ”will be swept under a rug. You’re going to make the Navy proud.”

‘I guess it doesn’t matter what he knows,’ Steve thought to himself. Even though nothing was said about… about Steve’s sexuality. Oh, how he wanted to confide in someone, anyone; maybe Joe was that someone?

He watched as Joe took another swig of his beer.

“Thank you,” Steve said, grateful. “You didn’t have to—”

Joe shrugged. “I’d be doing this country a mis-service if I didn’t.”

Steve had to look down again at the onslaught of feelings that statement made him feel, unable to let Joe see it. He took a moment, and then took a long swig of beer. He couldn’t come out to Joe, not now. Maybe not ever. Not after what he did. Not after saying these things to him.

“Do you think they sell turkey sandwiches here?” Joe asked and – like that – they never talked about any of it again.

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Steve – present day

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Chin and Abby got into a shootout with some hostiles the moment the NCIS agents got out of their car to confront them. One of the NCIS guys took a sudden bullet in the shoulder, and like that it was four against four. At least Chin and Abby had the advantage of cover, letting them see where the shots had come from. Apparently Abby went around somehow and took out a few from behind.

She’s come a long way since her first shootout a few months ago. Steve didn’t know if that was a good thing or not. He’d have to ask Chin, or even Abby what they thought about it. Abby was an incredible asset to the team, and was willing to fly out and help them often. They were lucky to find her. But if this kind of job was too much, or too dangerous, Steve would understand her taking a few steps back.
Steve put a conversation with Abby on his mental to do list.

There was one guy, a black man, with the sides of his head shaved in an intricate pattern and tattoos down his neck. He spoke with a South African accent, and that threw everyone for a loop. The case had no connections to South Africa until now.

Well, unless you count Mary’s gut. Which Steve had to admit was impressing him more and more every time he saw her work. She had flagged several ships who stopped in several different countries, which circumnavigated the world three times in all the research Mary had done – one of which was confirmed to be latest of the ships the Navy captured. She had called it a month ago, following a completely different lead, and seeing a pattern of needles in a pile of needles. Several of those countries didn’t have any import or export declared, only a refueling; Mary had a hunch and highlighted it for later.

Danny was right. How could Steve not be proud?

That, plus this man’s accent, allowed the party of four researchers upstairs to focus their attention on the handful of ships.

Right now, though, right now Steve had his arms crossed, standing over the man they had captured, trying to get any information out of him. So far, he wasn’t talking much. “We got into the warehouse,” Steve told him. “We know what’s in there.”

Danny was leaning against the wall next to the door, hands in his pockets, backing Steve up. “How many girls were you holding?”

The man said nothing.

“There were twenty beds, Danny, we got to assume at least twenty.”

Danny whistled. “That’s impressive.”

Steve felt the switch. Danny playing good cop. Time to put on a show. “‘Impressive?’ Try disgusting.”

“No, no,” Danny said, gesturing towards the man. “The organizing that it takes to kidnap twenty different women from one single city is impressive, you have to admit.”

“That does take some brains,” Steve said. He turned back to the man, measuring him up. “I doubt this guy was any help.”

The man looked up with just his eyes; that got him. So maybe this guy was a little higher up on the food chain than his other buddies.

“I’ve seen American movies. I want a lawyer,” the man said, speaking for the first time.

“Now, see,” Danny said, “a sign of intelligence.”

“Yeah, we’ll work on that, but getting an international lawyer, this time of night, might be tricky,” Steve said, sucking in air through his teeth.

“Better get comfortable,” Danny said.

The man rattled his handcuffs, pulling at them. “What?”

“Oh, you’ll be staying here until that lawyer shows up,” Steve told him. “Policy.”
Then Danny made a face, leaning forward and pushing off from the wall. “Or, you could start talking, tell us what you know, and we can get you down to regular holding, where you’ll have a cot and toilet and probably some breakfast in the morning. And be out of those cuffs.”

The man said nothing, only leaning back and stretching out his legs, putting on a show of getting comfortable.

“Okay,” Danny tsked.

Steve huffed. “Twenty counts of kidnapping, that’s what… it’s twenty years at worst for one person, right?”

“Five, at least, but this was with malicious intent. It’ll be more than that.”

Steve turned back to the man, “let’s compromise at ten years, then. That’s still two hundred year sentence. At least.”

“They were only beds,” the man said, smug. “No proof of kidnapping.”

“Oh, but we’ve got a witness that might be just the ticket to this whole thing, so I wouldn’t be so sure.” Steve said, just as smug. “Bringing them in now, see if they recognize you.”

He looked a little worried.

“If anything happened, and if what you say is true,” he said slowly. “And you have a witness, someone special might be looking for that witness. She might have been a special order.”

“Special order,” Steve repeated. “Like, someone wanted her specifically?”

The man shrugged. “If you’re right.”

Steve and Danny shared a look. Cathy Miya might be in bigger danger than they thought.

“Yeah, maybe we’re wrong,” Danny said, tsking. “But if we’re right, it’s looking bad for you, man. Two hundred years in an American prison. And you’re not American. Trust me, from experience, you don’t want to be a foreigner in a prison. Any prison.”

The man studied Danny as he spoke, thinking it over.

“Help us out now, we’ll talk to the ADA, try to get you to serve time in South Africa. Or wherever else it is you call home.”

“I want that in writing.”

“No,” Steve said, raising his frustration act. “I’ve got twenty potential Americans that have been kidnapped. No deals. You talk. The end. I bet I could think of a few ways to get you to talk.”

“Steven,” Danny said, still with his acting voice, hand on his chest in an act to try to calm him down.

Steve put on a show of turning away, frustrated. He stretched his neck and huffed loudly, and paced a few steps.

“You have my word I will talk to the ADA. We’re friends. She’s sympathetic to immigrants and foreign nationals, being one herself. And I don’t lie.”

“All cops lie. I’ll wait.”
“So, he’s smart,” Steve huffed after they closed the door to interrogation.

“Can’t win ‘em all,” Danny said, sighing.

Steve rolled his eyes. “You don’t like winning.”

“Hey,” Danny shrugged. “We got some of our laws for reasons. Good reasons. Not every cop has the same intentions that we do.”

“Who’s side are you on?” Steve asked. Danny’s ever present campaign to make sure their team followed as much of the law as he could get them to was annoying sometimes.

Danny gave him a face. “Did you forget who they kidnapped?”

Steve licked his lip. Of course. That was a line that Steve should have remembered. “Sorry, sweetheart.”

Danny took the apology with a soft smile. “I believe what I believe, doesn’t mean I’m not going to try when lives are on the line.”

“Twenty girls,” Steve sighed. “At least. That’s bigger than the operation that took you and Kono.”

“That we know of,” Danny said. “Kono and I may have interrupted the moving process.”

“Sounds like they are holding them in containers on land now, less chance of being spotted.”

Danny shook his head. “Cathy said they brought her out to a boat and pushed her overboard when Jake yelled out.”

“You heard him,” Steve said, motioning to the door. “She was ‘special order.’ She was targeted for a reason. They were probably treating her a little better than the others because of that.”

“Ugh,” Danny said with a growl. “I hate these guys.”

“So do I.”

~

Cathy Miya recognized the man in holding, and that was enough for them to hold him. He’d get his lawyer, but he wasn’t going anywhere. That soothed Steve’s nerves a little. She was, however, shocked to find out they targeted her specifically.

“Who…” she started, sitting in shock on Steve’s office couch. “But I’m no one.”

“That’s kind of who these guys target, sometimes,” Kono said gently, on the couch next to her.

She shook her head. “I… please… I don’t want…”

Steve reached out and squeezed her shoulder. “You’re safe. I’m going to make sure you stay that way.”

“Will you be willing to testify against him?”

“Can you find out who wanted me?”
“That’s the thing,” Danny said, leaning forward from his chair. “Can you think of anyone? It would be someone with the kind of connections to get these guys to do this. Money, power.”

She shook her head. “No… I…”

“It was probably a short meeting,” Kono said. “Maybe a customer got too close? Or made you uncomfortable with some staring? He’d have been dressed nicely, or tipped a lot.”

Cathy sat back, pushing some hair behind her ear. “There was this one customer. He paid extra to buy out a whole section of the luau. Paid extra to have us dancers serve them in our dresses. We don’t do that at the cultural center. We roast a pig, and read some history, do a little education, and then the tourists eat from a buffet. Then we do a show after; that’s what I do – I greet tourists and perform in the shows. Sometimes I work the photo line. But I don’t work the dining hall.

“This customer made us serve them. Away from the tourists. He’d have bought out the whole place if he could have, but it was such short notice. There were men who spoke so many different languages… I think he was… He touched me; it’s not uncommon for some customer to get handsy every now and then. Policy is we point them out, and everyone avoids them. But he was such an important customer… I- I- I let it slide and just tried to ignore him, but he…” she nodded and looked towards Kono, looking frightened and scared. “…he kept staring at me.”

Kono reached forward and took her arm, trying to soothe her.

“How long ago was this?” Danny asked, softly.

“Um…” she thought back. “It was just before my birthday, so… February. Before the thirteenth. I remember because I had said something and he tried to get me to sit with them for a drink to celebrate.”

She closed her eyes and looked like she was going to be sick. “He said I was too distracting to be eighteen.”

Steve saw red. “Do you know his name?”

Cathy shook her head, obviously about to cry. “No. The manager that worked that night, she’d have record of that kind of thing.”


“We’ll give you some space,” he motioned up to the bullpen, where Cathy’s parents were waiting eagerly for Catherine’s interview to be over, and invited them in. They were at attention immediately, Chin and Abby nodding an okay. They had been by her side throughout her protective custody, all their attention on their one and only daughter. They almost lost her. Steve felt for them as much as he was angry for Cathy. “Give you some time with your parents. You can use my office for as long as you need.”

“Thank you,” Cathy said, wiping at her face.

Danny reached forward, but didn’t touch her. “Let us know if you think of anything else. No detail is too small, okay?”

She nodded. “Okay.” Then her parents were in the office, and she stood, running straight for her father’s arms. Danny, Kono, and Steve all made their way out of the room, letting them have some time.
“Take your time,” Steve told them.

Her father nodded at him. “Thank you.”

Steve nodded.

They were in the bullpen and Steve ran a hand through his hair, trying to cool down.

“Honey?” Danny asked softly, hand on his arm. He must look really bad. He reached out and gripped Danny’s bicep for support.

“She’s barely nineteen,” he said, low and letting out a breath. “That’s Grace in five years.”

“Don’t remind me,” Danny groaned.

Kono curled her arms around herself. “Is it bad that I hope that this baby is going to be a boy?” She was sad, and quiet, and staring off into space.

“No,” Abby said, hand on her shoulder. “You know how scary it is to be a woman.”

Kono let out a sigh and shook herself.

Steve thought about Grace. How she was growing in confidence every day.

Confidence and beauty and personality, stronger and bigger and more noticeable every day. Steve was hit with a wave of worry. Dating, boys, someone breaking her heart that he was prepared to walk Danny though – but who was going to walk him through it?

How? With cases like these haunting him?

“Oh, Danny said. “Is it too late to sign Grace up for those kickboxing classes?”

Steve chuckled.

“What?” Danny asked.

“That’s a great idea.”

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Danny – 1998 -- Age 22

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Danny had been working at The Felicity for four years. Nick had switched to another bar years ago. In that time it had changed hands and was under new management twice. The first time was fine, a young couple – Fran and Bob Little – that had come into some money unexpectedly, but had underestimated how much it took to run a casino. They gave it a good shot, but money ran out quick, and they knew nothing about casinos besides how to lose money in them. The second time was the fall of Danny’s senior year of college. The Little’s were in debt and looking to get out of it quick. So they sold Danny’s beloved Felicity to a man named Vinny Merlino.

Vinny Merlino was exactly the kind of man that his name suggested he was. A forty something, hairy, Italian man who spoke with a thick Jersey accent. Danny wasn’t entirely sure he hadn’t changed his name for the direct purpose of sounding like an old timey mob enforcer. He was tall, and his shoulders were wide – like he played football and he always seemed to be smoking.
Vinny ruined The Rooftop, turned it – and the whole top floor – from a four star restaurant into a dirty club. Danny went from waiter to unofficial bouncer. It was not a move he was particularly happy with, but Vinny offered him a couple hundred under the table every time Danny stood at the door, so Danny took the job. He had tuition and rent to pay, after all.

When Vinny found out Danny’s mother was Italian, he decided he was going to take a special liking to him. ‘Take him under his wing,’ as it were. Danny saw what was going on a mile away. This man was no good, his business was no good, and declared his time at The Felicity over at the end of the semester, and encouraged his Aunt to back out too.

She refused and paid a little bit of the price. After an event around Labor Day that Danny still didn’t know the details of, she gave her two weeks and was managing a hotel in Jersey City by Halloween. Whatever it was, it left his Aunt timid and that made Danny angry.

So, when two Detectives showed up, a Kenrick and a Casey, casing the joint and asking employees questions, Danny started to pay closer attention.

Vinny had a cousin he called Skinny. Skinny and a couple others were always in the back office counting money. Danny was told it was their payouts from the casino floor, but Danny wasn’t sure. Louis was the man that covered the counter that changed guest’s money into chips; he was the one that took care of the counting of that money. He had the whole time Danny had worked there.

So Danny asked Louis if things had changed.

“No,” Louis said. “It’s still the same. I count it, I store it, I put it in the books. It’s one of my responsibilities.”

“And Vinny trusts you? He doesn’t re-count it?”

Louis shrugged. “I don’t know.”

“How much cash goes through here a night?” Danny asked.

“Oh, on a good night, around ten thousand. We have had a couple twenty and thirty thousand nights, but not since Vinny’s taken over. We’re averaging somewhere around three thousand.”

That was when Danny noticed all of his dealer friends had either quit or had been let go. Not a single one of the people that taught him how to play poker were working the floor. Everyone was dark haired, dark eyed. Asking around, Danny found out that several of them were Vinny’s nephews. Apparently he had about two dozen of those.

The security guards had been replaced too. All big, burly men who probably looked away while major drug deals went down upstairs and men were bringing young, young girls back to their rooms.

Sure, drinking, a quick hit in the bathroom, a pill here or there… Danny couldn’t stop any of it, and it happened in every club – no matter the management – but it only got worse and worse. After he witnessed a man hand over what Danny assumed was a brick of blow to another man and reported it to Vinny, Vinny blew him off. Danny was done. He felt sick about taking those under the table deals. Didn’t take anymore of them.

Christmas wouldn’t come soon enough. He’d have enough money by then to make it to the summer without work. He requested to work the concierge desk instead of the club and Vinny liked him enough that he saw no harm in it.

Danny knew what this was; they were turning The Felicity into the center of something bigger than a
few drug deals. This was a whole family. Dealers taking chips from the top of the pile, or rigging the
cards, cheating the guests. Let them be too high to notice. Danny figured it was only a matter of time
before Louis was replaced and he was right.

There were people coming in and out, people that didn’t stop at the tables or go up to the clubs.
People that went back into the back rooms and left with dark plastic bags full of something and left.
Some looked tough, others looked desperate.

They were organized. They were using a legal front. They were an old, large Italian family. And
Danny had watched one too many mob movies.

That’s when he started to notice that Kenrick and Casey were semi-regulars. Probably had
suspicions, but no proof, and were hanging out at the downstairs bar, looking for some during their
time off.

That’s when they noticed Danny reading a training manual for the Newark Police Department.

“Why ya’ readin’ that, kid?” Kenrick asked, leaning over the desk, pulling out a brochure for
helicopter tours.

“Studying,” Danny answered. “I can’t sign up for the Academy until May, but, there’s no harm in
reading, right?”

“You’re gonna be a cop?” Casey asked, sitting in the chair across from him, crossing his legs and
getting comfortable.

“I’m gonna try,” Danny answered. “I’d like to be a detective some day.”

They looked impressed.

“And your uncle is okay with that?” Kenrick asked.

“Do you know one of my uncles?” Danny asked, racking his brain. Sure, firemen and police
worked together from time to time, and he did have an uncle that was a firefighter in Atlantic City, so
maybe, sure, they made a connection to one of them.

“Vinny,” Casey filled in.

“Yeah, Vinny.”

“Vinny’s not my uncle.”

“Oh,” Casey said, sharing a conspiratorial look with his partner. “Really?”

Kenrick put the brochure back into its slot and moved to sit in the chair next to Casey.

“I thought everyone that worked the first floor was related to the Merlino’s.”

Danny shrugged. “There’s a few of us from before left. Me, Maria, a couple girls at check in. A
couple of the cocktail waitresses. Vinny likes the girls serving down here and up in the club, so I
don’t know how many are left.”

“How long you worked here?”

“Goin’ on four years.”
“So you know how this place works, then,” Casey asked, leaning forward.

“Not lately.”

“Yeah, but you got eyes,” Casey said. “And from this desk, you got eyes on the whole first floor.”

“What of it?” Danny asked.

“You want a good recommendation going into the Academy?” Kenrick asked, voice a bit lower.

“What?”

“We should talk about your future,” Casey said, handing over his card. “Not here. Somewhere else. If you’re up to it.”

“Up to what?”

“Come on, kid,” Kenrick said. “You’re smart. You gotta be seein’ what’s goin’ on around here.”

Danny was. He knew what they were asking for. They wanted him to squeal. He just didn’t know if he could do it. He didn’t know how powerful the Merlino’s were.

Vinny took that moment to walk up. Danny saw him coming and moved some folders around so his training manual was covered.

He smiled wide and knock his knuckles on the desk, looming over them all, trying to be charming and intimidating all at once. “You boys looking to buy some show tickets?”

“Nah, Vinny,” Kenrick said, leaning back from him, giving him a once over. “I’m thinkin’ of takin’ my girl on a helicopter ride. Danny here,” he said, eyeing Danny’s nameplate on his shirt, “was telling me about a good place.”

“Yeah,” Danny said, pulling the same brochure Kenrick had just put up. “These guys do this long leg thing where they fly you up into Manhattan, around the buildings? I’ve always heard good things.”

“Yeah, Jimmy,” Casey said. “That sounds like somethin’ Sarah would really go crazy over.”

“Yeah, maybe for Christmas, so she can see all the lights.”

Danny nodded.

“Are you going to use my boy’s services today?”

Kenrick pocketed the brochure. “Not today.”

“Are you going to play any cards, or go dancing, by any chance?”

Casey scoffed. “We’re partaking in your plethora of options at your lovely bar.”

“How about I get you fine Detectives a round, on the house.”

“Well, Vinny, how nice of ya’,” Casey grinned, standing up and pulling down on his blazer.

“Yeah, we can all sit around, enjoy a cool drink, and,” Vinny dropped his voice an octave, “then you
two can get goin’,” Vinny said, voice dropping an octave lower.

Kenrick held up two hands in surrender. “What do you got that’s top shelf?”

Casey turned to Danny, raising his eyebrows. “Think about it, kid.”

“Think about what, Danny?” Vinny asked him.

Danny was caught, for just half a second. Casey was eyeing him, studying him, probably sizing him up if he could lie convincingly.

“Detective Casey, here, was asking about my Aunt. Wanted me to give her his number,” Danny said, waving around his card.

“Ah, you don’t want her,” Vinny said, clapping Casey on the back. “She doesn’t like to party, if you know what I mean.”

Danny felt his jaw tighten. How dare he. Carol was his mother’s best friend. She had cried to his mother, made his mother worried. Now he was… what? Insulting her?

Casey laughed, “Can you blame a guy for tryin’?”

“I guess not. So what’ll it be, boys? Bourbon, or scotch?”

~

Kenrick and Casey met him in a sports pub for lunch a few days later. Danny had his homework spread out in front of him, munching on a sandwich, trying to get some studying in while catching up on his sports. The pub was up the street from his and Nick’s apartment, and was a refuge for Danny whenever Nick started getting stressed about his own homework. They learned quick they studied better when they were in separate places – and Danny worked better with some background sound.

The two detectives sat down across from him just as Danny took another bite. He still had Casey’s card in his wallet; he hadn’t called them yet. They had tracked him down.

“Heya, kid,” Casey greeted. Then he leaned forward, glancing over Danny’s textbook. “Math, huh?”

“Economics,” Danny said, swallowing. “My last class for my minor.”

“Minor in economics,” Kenrick said. “That’ll come in handy when you’re a detective.

Everything is following paperwork nowadays.”

“Yeah,” Casey said with a sniff. “Especially if you’re trackin’ organized crime.”

Danny placed a post it under the paragraph he was on and closed his book, crossing his arms. “Is that what you guys do? Follow around wise guys?”

“Sometimes,” Kenrick said, crossing his arms. “Is that what you want to do?”

“I don’t know,” Danny said. “Maybe.”

“Well, we give you a taste of it, see if it’s what you want to do,” Kenrick said.

“You want me to spy on a mobster,” Danny said. “That’s a one way ticket to witness protection.”
He reached forward for his drink.

“The Merlino’s aren’t that bad,” Casey said. “But with that hotel, they could get there.”

“How’d you know?”

“Merlino was a small time enforcer for the Cartelli family about a decade back. Doubt you know it, you’d have been a kid.” Kenrick said. “We caught the Cartelli’s on a loan shark operation and the whole thing fell apart. Those we didn’t get something on hit the wind and most of them got out of the game. Merlino did a few years behind bars though, but he got out a few years ago and was a model parolee.”

“What makes you think he’s doing something illegal?”

“I know him,” Kenrick said. “I put him away. He was always smart for an enforcer. When I heard he bought a hotel? I looked into it. He had some kind of inheritance and went to work. You gotta know that place is sketchy now. We’ve got a string of DUIs and overdoses we can trace back to his club. But that’s all we got.”

“We have the suspicion he’s a shark; the activity we’ve logged in the casino and local businesses tells us that much, but what we’ve got isn’t enough.”

Danny thought back to the guys counting money, to the strangers that walked in straight to the back room and out with black plastic bags.

“With a hotel, there’s no tellin’ what else he’s doin’,;” Kenrick said. “Cleanin’ money, drug deals, hookers. We’ve had three cases fall apart because our suspects had an alibi because of The Felicity.”

Danny sighed.

“One of them was a murder case,” Kenrick continued. Danny looked up at that. That was serious.

“Who died?”

Casey shook his head. “Doesn’t matter. It’ll go unsolved for as long as Vinny confirms an alibi.”

“Who did you think did it?”

“Man named Peter Marks.”

“I know him,” Danny said, thinking about the man. “He’s a new dealer.”

He was a quiet man who took liberal smoke breaks and had eyes for Danny after he learned about Danny’s relationship with Nick. Dirty, dark looks that Danny wondered if he’d ever get used to. Hateful looks that made Danny cling to his pride and stand up straighter. They didn’t mesh at all.

“You think he killed someone?” Danny asked.

Kenrick and Casey nodded. “It wasn’t our case,” Kenrick turned to Casey, “but it is now that we know he works at The Felicity.” He turned back to Danny. “When did he start?”

Danny shrugged. “’Bout a week ago.”

They exchanged a look that Danny couldn’t read.

“We can’t sit in that lobby twenty four seven,” Kenrick said. “But we need eyes inside.”
“It would look good on any academy application, and then later when you go after your shield.”

Danny bit his lip. “I got a family. Siblings, a nephew, not to mention my boyfriend’s family.”

Both detectives pulled faces at the casual drop that Danny wasn’t straight, but neither of them commented on it.

“Just think about it. This is a chance to take out a new player in the mob world before he’s an actual player. Right now, he’s… a pawn. But he’s makin’ name for himself. Establishing a large crew who will owe him for floatin’ money, or lookin’ the other way with drugs, and providing alibis. We gotta take him out and you can be part of that.”

“Why do you want to be a cop, kid?”

Danny shrugged. “I’ve always wanted to be one. My whole family… they’re firefighters. They don’t like that I don’t want to be one.”

Kenrick tisked. “Maybe this is a way to show ‘em you’re serious?”

“We need to get this taken care of before someone really gets hurt. There’s already murder suspicion on the place. It’s gotta stop.”

Danny thought to his aunt, crying and hysterical on the couch with his mother. The phone calls his mother made the weeks following – how she was so worried about him working there, how relieved she was when Danny announced his departure.

“I’m done working there at the end of the semester.”

“That’s what, two months? We can get something by then, if not your observations will still help.”

“Why don’t you get some rookie to go undercover. The place is always looking for cocktail girls.”

“You’re a rookie,” Casey said. “Or, you will be. It’s good experience if being a cop is really what you want to do.”

“Think about it, kid. You could be part of somethin’. That means somethin’ to people.”

~

“Absolutely not!” Nick said.

“Oh, come on. I’d just be taking notes,” Danny said.

“If your boss is who these detectives think he is? No way! You could be in some serious danger!”

Danny rolled his eyes. “This is the kinda thing I want to do!”

“You want to be stupid?” Nick asked, raising his voice.

“Hey!” Danny shot back. “Can we not?” He motioned towards the living room, where Eric and Gino were watching television and playing with a couple transformer toys. “In front of the boys?”

Nick sighed, nodding his agreement. Eyes on the boys, he chewed on his bottom lip. “I don’t like it.”
“I think I want to do it!”

“Please, Danny…” he was sarcastic. “You want to be a hero.”

“Maybe so!” Danny said, hands waving. “What’s wrong with that?”

Nick motioned towards the living room, “I think you’ve already got admirers. Just keep your head down until Christmas, yeah? Don’t do something stupid. I got to make a grocery run.”

Danny sighed. “We’re not done talking about this.”

“Whatever,” Nick said, throwing on a coat. Then he turned to the living room. “Hey boys, special requests for dinner?”

Eric and Gino turned around on the couch to look at him. “Pizza!” they said at the same time. Danny rolled his eyes; he saw that coming.

“I was thinking more like requests for vegetables,” Nick shot back.

Both boys stuck out their tongues and turned around, ignoring him.

“Broccoli it is!” Nick called after them. He rolled his eyes and smirked at Danny, “I’ll be back.”

“Alright,” Danny said, pointing at him. “We aren’t done talking!”

~

It was a Thursday when Danny called Detective Casey and agreed to take notes for them. Mr. Garbo, the owner of the shop down the street – the one that Danny stopped in on his way into work to pick up a drink everyday – is what made him change his mind. He and Mr. Garbo were friendly. Mr. Garbo was a kind old man whose daughters were always doing their homework behind the counter. The oldest daughter sometimes worked the front desk, and it was clear the girl thought Danny was cute. She was much too young for Danny, but Danny figured it was just a small high school fascination. Mr. Garbo seemed to like that Danny never encouraged it.

He was an hour into his shift when Mr. Garbo made his way into the lobby. It wasn’t unusual to see the guy in the casino, blowing off some steam with a few hands of poker, and he always had a friendly smile for Danny. But not that Thursday. That Thursday he walked in, carrying a small blue money pouch and a look of determination. He didn’t head for the poker tables, or the bar, or even stopped by to say hello to Danny. Instead he walked straight to the back rooms.

He was back there for half an hour, and when he came out it was without his money bag, and he was walking holding his stomach, with a cut on his nose, and a sore eye. It was clear he had wiped some blood from his face.

“Mr. Garbo!” Danny called, leaving his station. “Mr. Garbo! What happened?”

“Don’t worry about it, Danny,” he said, with a little strain.

“Who did this?” Danny asked, angry.

“Don’t worry about it,” Mr. Garbo said again. “Better that you don’t know.”

“Mr. Garbo…”

He put a hand on Danny’s shoulder and forced himself to smile before returning his arm to his
stomach and let himself out. Danny watched him leave, and then turned to look towards the back room. There stood Vinny and Skinny, eyeing Danny.

“Get back to your desk, boy!” Skinny called out to him.

Danny held up a hand in acknowledgment, but he knew what just happened.

~

Danny took notes for three weeks. He and Nick were barely talking. It was getting to him, so he turned his focus into taking detailed notes. He’d study at the concierge desk during lulls, and in the back of his criminal law notebook he kept a detailed log of everything from shift change to visitor descriptions. Every other day, Casey and Kenrick would meet him at the sports pub and pick up his notes.

“I don’t even know if this is going to help.”

“Trust us, kid. This helps.”

Vinny was starting to suspect him. Maybe it was just that Danny’s time with them was coming to an end, but Danny’s paranoia was growing. He felt all Vinny’s nephew’s eye him regularly. Skinny would bug him at his desk. He was forced into a couple bouncer shifts against his will. He couldn’t take as detailed notes standing around watching people get drunk and dance, but he was an ‘anonymous tip’ on several drug deals and date rape attempts that led to a couple arrests in the club. Danny’s paranoia spiked after that.

Everything came to head a few days before Christmas. Kenrick and Casey were sitting at the bar, nursing some drinks and surveying the room. They had a new suspicion on the new chip exchange guy. A man with priors, they told Danny. Something about aggravated assault and a mistrial on a rape charge. When Danny told him that the guy liked to take home girls from the club after his shifts, they both sighed and put him on the list to watch.

Danny had finished with his final exams, and this was to be his last week at The Felicity. He was minding his own business, sitting and reading for pleasure and in-between customers when Vinny asked him back into the back room.

“We gotta talk about your future here, son,” Vinny had said.

A quick look to Kenrick and Casey; they were already watching them.

“I’ve got three more days left,” Danny said. “Not much of a future in seventy two hours.”

“Oh,” Vinny said, hand squeezing his shoulder so bad it hurt. “We’ll see about that.”

Another glance to the detectives at the bar as Vinny pulled him away from his desk told Danny they were both concerned, drinks down, ready to jump up.

The back rooms were a series of offices and the break room. Vinny’s office wasn’t particularly decorated any which way, but the lighting was harsh and a single chair sat across from his desk. Peter Marks was already there, dealer vest off and leaning against the wall, smoking a cigarette. Danny was pushed down into the single chair. At their arrival, Marks took one last, long drag before leaning over Danny to put out his cigarette butt. He was trying – and succeeding – at being intimidating. Danny knew he was suspected of murdering someone.

“Heya, Pete,” Danny greeted.
“Danny,” Marks said.

“So, Danny boy!” Vinny started, sitting down. “I hear you want to be a cop!”

Danny looked up, wide eyed. “Yup,” he answered. No point in lying.

“I want to offer you a job,” Vinny said.

“A job?”


“They know I want to be a cop, too, sir. Just trying to be helpful, I guess.”

“We want you to distract them,” Marks said, cutting to the chase.

“Distract them?” Danny asked. “What?”

“Yeah,” Vinny said. “Just for a few hours tomorrow. Ask them to lunch so you can ask them a bunch of questions. A bet a newcomer like you would like some advice, right? You say they want to be helpful.”

“Lunch.”

“A few hours. Tomorrow.”

“Why?”

“Now why are you asking questions?” Vinny asked. “You do this, there’s a couple grand in it for you.”

“You’ll pay me to go to lunch with a couple guys?” Danny asked. “To get the cops out of here?”

“You got it,” Vinny said. Then he shook his head from side to side.

“We’re holding some merchandise for a friend,” Marks said. “Merchandise that’ll be noticed if we move it, ya’ get us?”

Danny decided to play a little innocent; maybe he could get a little more out of them.

“Like what? Old mattresses or something?”

“Or something,” Marks said.

“Come on, Danny boy,” Vinny said. “You’re smart. You do us a solid now, we won’t forget you. Throw you a few shifts up at the club every now and then. Some free overnights in the hotel. You were trying to get your parents a weekend awhile back. How about I throw that in, too? That’d be a nice Christmas present for them, wouldn’t it?”

Danny bit his lip. They were talking about his family.

“In fact, I already called them. They are looking forward to their stay over New Years. I set them up in the Honeymoon Suite.”

“So you’ll do it?”

Danny shrugged. “I can always eat lunch.”

“Good,” Marks said.

Vinny smiled, and pulled out a cigarette. “Good, good! Glad to see you get it. Let your time with us go out with a nice bonus, eh?”

“Yeah, that sounds good,” Danny said moving to stand up.

“It’ll be nice knowing a cop,” Vinny said. “Always good to have powerful friends in your pocket, ya know?”

Danny paused.

“I’d hate for something to happen to your parents,” Vinny said. “Eddie and Clara, right?”

Danny sat back down. “Yes, sir.”

“And your brother, Matty? Graduated before you? That had to be hard. He’s on wall street now, right? Some kind of accountant?”

Danny nodded. “He’s trying.”

“Well, tell him he’s got a job here if he wants it.”

“That’s nice of you,” Danny said.

“You know you don’t have to quit, right?” Vinny said. “We like you around here. You can work shifts whenever you want.”

“Thanks.”

“That sister of yours,” Marks said crossing his arms. “Stella, right?”

Danny gulped. He nodded.

“She sure is pretty. She’d make a good waitress, if she ever wanted a job, too.”

“Right,” Danny said. “She’s got a pretty good job. She’s a bank teller.”

“Oh,” Vinny said. “That’s good to know. What bank?”

“It’s up in Newark.”

“Still, good to know,” Marks said.

Danny didn’t like what was happening. They knew his family, and he couldn’t help but take it as a subtle threat. Matty and Stella’s jobs were of interest to them. Like they were thinking about recruiting. Danny was getting out at just the right time, but he had to stop them from spreading into his own family.

~
“Sounds like a drug haul,” Kenrick said that night at Danny’s apartment.

“I think they were trying to threaten my family,” Danny said. “They knew what my brother does for work. I hadn’t talked about him at The Felicity since they bought the place.”

Kenrick and Casey nodded. “Recruitment. The right people in the right places. They like you, they want you. More people you care about gets involved, the more likely you’ll do what they want.”

Danny’s stomach curled. “Peter Marks said my sister was pretty. She’s never been to the hotel. He’s had eyes on her.”

Kenrick and Casey nodded again. They turned to each other. “Let’s get some uniforms on their workplaces for awhile.” Kenrick turned back to Danny. “You don’t need to be anywhere near The Felicity tomorrow. The less they think you’re involved, the better.”

“What if Marks is outside my apartment right now, sees you leave?” Danny asked.

“Good instincts,” Casey said. “Hold on to them.”

“Can I use your phone?” Kenrick asked. Danny nodded and motioned towards the land line. “I’ll have a black and white come do a sweep of the area with Marks in mind. Just in case. We can always threaten loitering.”

“…is that why loitering charges are even a thing?” Danny asked.

“Sure,” Casey said. Then he nodded his head. “Some cops abuse that, but yeah. A reason to get someone dangerous out of a situation, or off a person, or… but yeah, don’t abuse it when you walk a beat, yeah?”

Danny nodded.

“And, after all this, it’d be a good idea to get out of Atlantic City,” Casey said as Kenrick called it in. “Go back to Newark.”

“I don’t know if my boyfriend’ll like that,” Danny groaned. If he still had a boyfriend.

Casey didn’t say anything.

~

They caught Vinny, Skinny, and Marks moving a whole moving truck full of cocaine bricks. Enough to put everyone involved in prison. The detectives fibbed and said they got a tip from some low ranked dealer that wasn’t even involved with the Merlino family just to get the suspicion off of Danny.

With Marks’ fingerprints finally in the system, they caught him on a different murder charge than the one he was suspected of. He had killed a girl up in Manhattan one evening after he picked her up from a bar. Danny read about it in the paper, and found pride in the justice of it. He apparently confessed to the other murder after a deal was presented. Two counts of murder, both at half time behind bars. It was a chance he’d be out by his seventies instead of dying in prison. He’d still go away for a long time.

“Oh, I know that guy,” Stella had said over his shoulder when the news broke. “I gave him my number a few weeks back. He never called, thank goodness.”
“Yeah, Stel, thank goodness.” His sister could have been his third victim.

Vinny also confessed, squealing on several of his nephews – and a shocking reveal that his brother was running a prostitution ring with underage girls. Danny was sure that the hotel was used as a place for the Johns to do their business, but they had no proof of that. Vinny’s deal got him a low security prison somewhere in the Midwest. No big deal.

“These kinds of guys have to do a stint,” Kenrick said. “Point of pride.”

“It’s also like going back to school for a lot of them. Learn new trades, how to be smarter next time,” Casey had said.

Danny’s application for the May academy class was accepted within a week of applying. Kenrick and Casey introduced him around to a bunch of their friends, and took him out drinking. Danny started networking, started showing his shit, impressing officers, and even had a sit down with the New Jersey police commissioner. His contribution couldn’t be public knowledge, for his safety, but wouldn’t be forgotten as he moved forward with his career.

Nick left him a few days into the New Year. Danny sulked in his attic bedroom in his parent’s house for months as he finished his degree and started at the academy. He didn’t date, he didn’t try to date. Things with Nick ended badly; they didn’t say much of a goodbye. It was a mutual understanding.

When Danny learned that Nick and Gino had moved out to California that spring, Nick chasing a scholarship to Stanford of all places, Danny was happy for him. He knew Stanford was his dream school. A dream he had sacrificed for Danny. Danny didn’t want to leave New Jersey – or at least the East Coast – and Nick gladly accepted it. Learning he moved across the country without so much as a word to Danny? Danny didn’t know how to feel about that. They were over, but that didn’t mean it didn’t hurt. He just up and moved. No chance at reconciliation.

And worst of all... no goodbye.

He had to be a cop now. He had a degree in criminal justice, a great recommendation from a couple of senior detectives, and some experience with organized crime on his record. This was what he wanted.

It would take years to realize that it was something he was supposed to do. That Nick wasn’t his future.

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Danny – present day

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Yushin Shioma.

Danny was shaking with anxiety.

Yushin-fucking-Shioma.

It was late, but the Cultural Center on the east coast of the island’s show lasted well into the dark. Fire dancers were spinning along to a beat, there were spotlights, and dancers doing a Haka. It was quite the production, and Danny thought he would have appreciated a luau – and what it meant – a little better if his first one looked like this, instead of sad, plastic skirts, a man singing “Over the Rainbow” off key, and a scratchy boombox.
The manager had pulled them into their offices. It was behind the audience, next to the box that controlled the music and the lights. There was a glass box just outside, and Danny had been watching the fire dancers as the manager dug through a couple files.

“Ah, here it is,” she said, pulling out a stack of paper. She held onto it for a second. “We have tables and seats reserved all the time for big groups. But his requests were… over the top. But he paid double, and we aren’t just a luau, we’re a museum.”

“We understand, ma’am.”

“And we get pitiful funding,” she continued.

“We understand,” Steve said again. “The paperwork?”

She handed it over and Danny leaned over Steve’s shoulder to read the name at the bottom.

“Holy shit,” Steve said.

~

They had what they needed. A golden ticket to the Yakuza in Hawaii. When Gabriel killed Goro Shioma – they head of the Yakuza in Hawaii – at the boxing match back in December, everything they knew about the Yakuza died with him. Who knew who would take over in his place. His brother, his son, a couple others – they were all suspects, but no one anywhere had any leads. There were some ideas, a couple leads, but he died a private citizen, his family chose not to press charges on Gabriel, and they had no right to invade his world. Just like the Yakuza would have wanted.

No one knew why Gabriel had went after so many heads at once, maybe just to cause enough chaos to get someone off his back, or to get someone’s attention, or maybe just because he was a little crazy, who knows. They’d never know until they found him.

But.

Yushin was schmoozing people, buying out tables at expensive luaus, people who looked important and rich and spoke many languages. He caught interest in a young dancer and wanted her for himself. Yushin was in a better place in the world than he was six months ago. Seemed his brother’s murder was doing wonders for his career.

Danny shook.

They had to be smart about this.

“I know what time it is, Governor, but this is time sensitive.”

The whole team was crowded around the computer, Mary, Eli, and Jerry included. Everyone was waiting, on baited breath, for the Governor to give them the go-ahead. If the warehouse was Yushin’s, and he got wind they had taken it – and taken a man – he’d be making moves they couldn’t predict. They had to be smart, but they had to act fast.

“Even if we can’t connect him… sir, I talked to Ellie Clayton just now. She’s on her way over to make sure this is airtight. Even if we can’t connect him to the human trafficking, we have enough for a warrant into his whole life. This is a chance to get some real intel on the Yakuza and make some real headway into the new management structure.”

Kono leaned back, hands on her head. Lou was rubbing his temple. Mary was biting her nails.
Everyone was on edge and it seemed Danny wasn’t alone with his anxiety.

“Yes sir. If Ellie gives us the clear, we have your permission?” Steve asked, for the benefit of the room. Everyone waited. Then Steve made a fist in celebration. The spell broke, and everyone shared excited glances and smiles. “Yes sir, of course sir, thank you sir.” He hung up, and immediately threw an arm around Danny and pulled him close in a half hug, wiping at his face.

Danny hoped leading to taking out a chunk of the Yakuza would help soothe Steve’s ache over Jake.

“Alright. Let’s get started. Everything we know about Yushin Shioma, let’s go.”

Jerry was fast on the computer, pulling up file after file. They may have not known how Yushin was involved, but his brother was an oyabun; he had to be involved.

“Okay,” Jerry started. “Two ex-wives, not currently married, no kids. He’s sixty-five, and has had suspicion on him for a long time, but nothing on him seems to stick.”

“Typical,” Kono said. Then, after a bit of hesitation. “There’s something else.”

Everyone turned to look at her.

“The Shiomas are Adam’s cousins. Goro was his father’s first cousin.”

“Would he know anything?” Steve asked. “Will he help us?”

“He’s already on his way here.”


“Yeah, okay,” Jerry said, having trouble pulling his eyes off Kono for a second. Then he pulled up two pictures. “Niece – Michelle Shioma – Goro’s daughter. She’s a single mom, works in 401Ks, no criminal record in sight.” He pulled up what had to be old surveillance photos. She had two daughters, identical, one in each hand and both wearing bright pink tutus, while they waited to cross the street. “Reports say she only really showed up to family events when it was expected. She and Goro weren’t close.”

“She’s a soccer mom,” Eli observed.

“Yeah, she’s probably not involved in the family, at least not enough to be in charge of anyone,” Steve agreed, crossing his arms and speed reading some of the reports Jerry had brought up. His eyes caught a file. “Her brother, however…”

Jerry took his cue and pulled up another file. Abby gasped. Everyone turned to her.

“Who is that?” Abby asked, breathless.

“Christopher Shioma,” Jerry answered. “Goro’s son.”

“You know him,” Chin said, getting close. “Who is he?”

She turned to Chin. “He’s the one that killed Julie.”

“Who’s Julie?” Steve asked.

“My old partner,” she had shocked, sad eyes trained on the screen. “I’ll never forget his face.”
The room swayed. Danny eyed Steve, who was practically shaking with anticipation. They’d get to take down a branch of the Yakuza, take out some human traffickers, get some revenge for Kono and Danny, and put away a cop killer. Not exactly a bad legacy for Jake Wu to die for.

“We were working a murder investigation. A young journalist was on to something. We followed her footsteps, her notes, and then a couple guys we found that were stalking her… they said… we followed that lead too. We were on the docks… they got the jump on us. They tied us up. He killed Julie. I couldn’t do… all I could do was watch.”

Chin was focused on her, clear that he’d heard the story before. Her story was short, lacking details, but it got the most important things across. She looked racked and distraught. Danny could relate.

Danny was having flashbacks to when he lost his own partner. Following leads, someone getting the jump on them, tying them up, taking Grace out while Danny was helpless to intervene.

“I understand,” Danny told her.

Steve looked towards him, and a moment of realization flashed over his face. Danny squeezed his hand when he felt Steve’s fingers graze the back of his hand.

Abby, however, studied him. He, too, was looking at her with a new light. “You do?” she asked.

“All too well,” he answered.

“I’m sorry,” she whispered.

Later, after everything was over, she and Danny would find a couple seats next to a bar while everyone else was off, deeper into the bar, surrounding a table and nursing their own beers. Together, they’d sit and examine each other’s scars. He’d tell her his own story, and she’d express comfort in knowing he knew how she felt, how she really felt, and they’d both walk away a little lighter than before. All this time Abby had just been a colleague – his friend’s girlfriend – but later, after that talk at that bar, she’d be a friend for life.

But right now she was looking at a picture of a man that had to of haunted her dreams.

“We’ll get him,” Danny promised her, squeezing Steve’s hand. “We’ll get him.”

That was when Abby’s phone rang. It was late into the evening, but her FBI contact finally got back in touch with her.

“What’s up, Rex?” she asked into the phone, like she didn’t just get the lead of her career. Jerry was busy pulling up files on Christopher and Michelle while everyone crowded around the table to read them over as quickly as they could. A lot was happening at once, and soon Steve would have to step back and decide the direction they went, but for now he was just as excited about what was happening as the rest of them.

“Are you sure?” Abby asked. “How much percentage is the match?” Everyone turned to look at her. She nodded, “Thanks Rex. Can you send that over to us? Use my email. Thanks, Rex.”

She hung up the phone and reached forward, taking over the table, and pulling up her own email address.

“What do you got?” Steve asked.

Abby sighed. “I know who killed Jake Wu.” Then she stopped and stared at Chin for a moment
too long.

“Abby?” Steve asked, knocking her out of it.

“You know that software you guys are having trouble getting? The FBI’s database on criminal body measurements?”

“It’s not the software,” Chin said. “We have that… it’s the database we’re having trouble getting access to. Feds putting up a fight about it.”

“Right,” Abby said. Her email chimed and she clicked on the video link. “I’ve got a friend that has access to that database and I had him run the security footage of the murderer leaving Jake’s hotel room against it.”

“And?” Steve asked, practically buzzing. Danny reached over and squeezed his side, pinching his shirt, but Steve didn’t react.

Abby spared Chin another sympathetic and worried look before running the program’s results for them. “Gabriel Waincroft.”

Ellie and Adam walked in together. They listened as Adam told them a little of what his extended family was like.

“Christopher is violent. Always has been. He and Michael were close,” he told Kono. That explained a lot about his character. “But he’s got a temper. He’s more muscle than brain. If anyone of them are in charge, it’s Yushin.”

“The failed attempts on your life,” Steve started. “Would Yushin be the type?”

Adam took a moment. But then he nodded. “He always thought I was weak. He didn’t like it when I was buying my way out. Trying to go straight. If he had enough power, and the right people in place… he’d punish me just for leaving. No one leaves the Yakuza without scars. Or missing limbs.” He turned to Kono and she ran a comforting arm up his back.

The ghost of Steve’s hand in his, and the way Chin was standing so close to Abby there was a lot of that going around.

“But I wouldn’t cut out Michelle,” Adam said, after allowing himself a moment with his wife. “She’s ruthless. I don’t remember ever dealing with her, not for work, but she’s got a mean streak, and likes to play the long game.”

“Her daughters,” Abby asked. “Who’s their father?”

Adam shook his head. “No one knows. No one except Michelle,” he made a face.

“And Goro. It was a scandal at the time, but Goro knew, and that was enough for him. Which is another reason I wouldn’t mark off Michelle. She might be a connection to a big player too, but has had to hide it for her safety.”

“Good to know,” Steve said.

“Speaking of safety,” Ellie spoke up. “I spoke to the DA. If Catherine Miya is willing to testify, she and her parents can go into witness protection.”
“That’s good,” Steve said.

“But I had an idea, and it might be a bit of a Hail Mary, but my boss liked the sound of it.”

“What?”

“We offer the man downstairs a deal. He testifies over whoever his boss is and we offer him protection as well.”

“You mean my taxes will be paying for that man to have a fresh start?” Danny complained.

“Depending on who his boss is depends on the level of security, but… yeah.” Ellie looked at Danny with a bit of apology. “But if it’s a chance to take out this organization and all of this human trafficking, at least for awhile – I think we should take the chance. And besides, if he testifies, we might not even need Catherine. That would spare her the trouble of starting a new life.”

“And if he doesn’t know anything that leads us to anyone? To Yushin?” Danny asked.

“Then we get him to testify who wanted Catherine, and get him on conspiracy to kidnap and give him protective custody on the mainland.”

“I don’t know, this deal sounds pretty good,” Lou said, leaning forward onto the table.

Ellie turned to Abby. “Your testimony alone will be enough to put Christopher away.

And he might know a lot about what’s going on, but Adam says he’s not the brains. Gabriel’s a wild card, and there’s so much connected to his name that another murder will just add more to his sentencing… he can’t be in charge either… not if he’s getting his hands dirty. My money is on Yushin.”

Abby bit her lip. “It would be nice to go after a big fish, after all this time.”

~

The man downstairs took the deal. Danny made a face when he learned his name, too, was Daniel. Too many Daniels lately. Depending on his information, he was guaranteed protective custody.

At least he wasn’t going to be ‘Daniel’ for long. The US Marshals would give him a new name.

Yushin Shioma was in charge of everything, it seemed. Everything. From the human and arms trafficking down on the pirate ships to some international business with heads of other groups. Columbia, South Africa, China… Yushin was apparently the new guy for any ‘international business’ and Hawaii was host to these meetings.

Right under their noses. Boy, were they brazen.

But, of course, because this was personal for Kono and Danny because of the kidnapping, and personal for Abby because of her old partner, and personal for Steve because of Jake Wu… it was only a matter of time before it was personal for Chin, too. He was shaking at the reveal Gabriel was in Honolulu, but Daniel gave them more than even they were expecting.

When the news came out, Lou whistled. “Man, I hope my past stays where it is. This is just a flood.”
Yushin was head of everything, but Christopher was head of the ships. And it seemed the both had an attack dog.

Trafficker Daniel said it best: “I’m just a mercenary, I have no loyalty to anyone but myself. But my boss? The one all the ships answered to? I don’t understand why they trusted him. He’s worked for half a dozen organizations since I first heard his name.

The man plays with loyalty like a yo-yo.”

“This man got a name?” Steve asked, crossing his arms.


~

Things happened fast after that. Chin was on a warpath, Abby was ready to explode, Steve was eager to end this, but Lou and Danny were just along for the ride.

They rushed to Yushin’s compound, warrant ready, everything as legal as they could get it, but Christopher was at the gate when they pulled up. He seemed to recognize Abby, and the moment he did, he ran.

That was it for him. The chase was on.

But it was enough of a threat for Yushin’s men to open fire. Which meant they returned fire. Chin and Steve both got out of the fray and ran after Christopher. They had a dozen black and whites behind them, so the whole ordeal was over as soon as it started, but it was still a firefight. The Camaro had three bullet holes in its hood and the windshield would have to be replaced. But things were settling down, and the ten or so men that were stationed as Yushin’s security outside surrendered. Unless they had an open warrant out for them, they’d all get away with a defense of doing what they were hired to do. Danny had seen it happen before.

Abby led the charge into the house.

“Five-0!” she announced to the house as she slammed the door open. It was large, and they started their walk through the house.

They didn’t have to go far. The entrance way was framed by two staircases leading to the second floor, surrounding an opening that lead to a sitting room. There, in the middle of his couch and facing the door, was where Yushin was waiting, patiently, drinking a glass of dark booze. His legs were crossed, and he looked calm and collected.

“Why is Five-0 barging into my home?” he asked calmly, lowering his glass. “I’ve done nothing wrong.”

“We have a warrant,” Lou said, mocking him a little, holding up the paper. “We’ve got evidence that says otherwise.”

Yushin scoffed. “I sincerely doubt that.”

“Yeah, yeah,” Danny said.

“You’re under arrest for conspiracy to commit kidnapping, conspiracy, and organized crime. And who knows what else we can stick on your head.” She went about cuffing his hands and reading him his rights. Several uniform cops were already going through the rest of the house, room by room.
Abby roughly made him stand up, and led him out of the house herself.

“This is ridiculous,” he said tersely. “I want my lawyer!”

“Yeah, yeah, you’ll get that lawyer,” Danny said. “We’ve got one too!”

“You’ll find nothing on me and my family!”

Abby shoved him around. “What about murder?”

“You did not list that among my crimes.”

“I wasn’t talking about you,” Abby said with a grin. “I was talking about Christopher.”

Yushin’s face dropped. “I want my lawyer.”

“Yeah, yeah,” Abby said, continuing to lead him out of the house.

That’s when gunfire was heard, off in the distance. They all turned to the sound. Another round. A third. Two more, too close together to be from the same gun.

Abby turned back to them, Danny turned to face her.

“Steve,” he said quickly. “Chin,” Abby said at the same time.

Danny and Lou were off. Abby was busy handing Yushin off to a couple uniforms and was about twenty paces behind them. They ran out the back door, hoping to get there faster. Shots were still ringing as Danny realized they were near a cliff, and a gate was lit up by lights, the gate swinging open.

“Steve, you idiot,” Danny said, rushing forward. He skidded through the gate, only to find himself on a landing, not five feet wide, of nothing but grass, and the top of a staircase.

Not to mention Steve, alone on the ground, bleeding out of his head.

“Steve!” Danny called out and rushed to his side.

“Danny! I’m fine!” He said. “My leg’s cut, I’m fine. I’m not shot.”

He was on his knees inspecting Steve’s leg, and then up at his head. He was bleeding badly.

“I’m okay, sweetheart,” Steve said, gripped Danny’s hand.

Lou was kneeling next to them, breathing hard, Abby was soon through the gate behind him.

“Where’s Chin?”

Just then a couple more shots rang out, and Abby had her answer. She didn’t bother waiting on Steve, and rushed towards the stairs.

“Go, Danny,” Steve said, pointing after her.

“Honey—” Danny started, hands on his leg.

“Go!” Steve said again, this time with more force. “Gabriel was with him!”

Danny’s stomach did a backflip. If Gabriel was there, there was no telling what Chin would do. The two that were on revenge trips were the ones closest, and they were alone.
“Go!” Steve said, again this time earnest. “I’ll be fine.”

Danny grabbed his face and kissed his forehead but then he was off.
Chapter 11

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Steve – 2006 -- Age 30

~~~

It was cold here in [redacted.] Cold was a poor descriptor. The temperature was as if you decided to put [redacted] on Pluto. It was miserable and breathing was hard and it was all they could do to hide and wait for rescue. They were eating snow, rescue only minutes away, but they were all dehydrated. Eating snow was a surefire way to get hypothermia, but Jacobs had already passed out once, and there was no way they could make a fire. It would give away their location.

So they were shivering together, waiting on evac, depending on body heat, stamina, and stubbornness. They were SEALs, a little frostbite wasn’t going to slow them down.

A bullet to the chest might, though. Henry Boren had been hit, in the sweet spot between his tac vest and his arm, in the meaty part of his armpit. From what they could tell, the bullet hadn’t hit anything major, but they didn’t want to risk moving him too much. He was flat on his back and they were crowded around him.

“McGarrett,” Boren coughed out. “Hey, you saved me.”

Steve reached out and squeezed his good shoulder. “Of course, man.”

Henry’s eyes rolled back but he opened them again straight away. He was fighting a lot of pain. “I’ve been an ass to you my whole life.”

“What are you talking about?”

“School, man. That time I left you in New York. All that. …” he started coughing.

~~~

1992

~~~

Steve had been dropped off at the Academy the summer before his junior year. Only the true nuts signed up for the summer programs. The ones that wanted the career… ‘or their parents wanted the career for them’ Steve thought.

Either way, Steve hated being there. The structure, the bedsheets, the standing up straight, the meticulous drills and physical training. He was a beach bum, who liked sitting on the beach playing guitar and watching the sunset. Sunsets in Virginia seemed dull after a childhood in Hawaii. He started his career at the Academy dragging his feet. He decided he was going to be as much a pill as he possibly could. He would take his time at anything physical. He’d make his bed, sure, but as soon as the master chief (and what a joke that title was – he was only a senior student!) cleared their room, he was sprawled back on it, resting his feet on the metal footboard. He snuck food and other contraband like candy and magazines and comic books on their rare days off in town. They wouldn’t let him bring his guitar! Any act of rebellion he could get away with was worth the cost of getting yelled at.
Then fall semester started and that’s when Henry Boren became a giant thorn in Steve’s thigh. He hated that Steve had spent the summer there, hated that Steve seemed to get away with everything, hated that Steve was just enough of a little shit that he had figured out ways around rules that all the other boys liked him. His father was a congressman. His family had six houses. He’d been all over the world by the time he was ten. He spoke three languages. Everyone should like him! Not Steve. But Steve tried not to let it bother him. He was just a bully. He could take it.

Enter scene, Josh McFadden. Josh was the smallest kid in the class, scrawny, red headed, freckled, and wore thick rimmed glasses. He was bully bait if Steve ever saw it, but Josh knew a lot about The Flash and The Hulk and enough about comic books that he could fill in the boys on issues they were missing. That, and the pressure about brotherhood and unity from their instructors, was enough for most of the boys to accept him. He was a cool kid. He grew up to be a congressman, himself, Steve knew. He wished he could have voted for him.

But Henry Boren, and a couple other boys that were easily manipulated by money and status, decided he was a good target. One day, after physical training (with Josh trailing behind miserably, but getting better) while Josh and Steve were still finishing their pushups, Henry walked over and stepped on Josh’s back, smushing him into the grass.

He and a few other boys laughed and walked away. Josh sat up slowly to find that his glasses had broken.

Steve was outraged. “Hey Henry, you ass, what was that for?”

“What are you going to do about it, McGarrett? You’re just as weak as him!” The boys laughed again and they all walked away.

Steve turned to Josh, “are you okay?”

“This is my second ruined pair this month,” Josh said sadly. “My dad is going to be mad.”

Steve put a hand on his shoulder and told him it probably wouldn’t be so bad and that they only had a rep of push ups to go.

That was when Steve decided that if Henry was going to bully anyone, he was going to bully Steve. And that meant going after what Henry prized the most: praise.

Suddenly Steve became the model student. Stood up straighter, zoomed through PT, shot up in the ranks to best marksman, had the best grades and cleanest space. It bugged the hell out of Henry. But when Henry found out Steve’s connection to Joe? Oh, man. “Nepotism” this and “nepotism” that, like his father wasn’t a congressman pulling strings.

Though, it had a side effect. After awhile, standing up for the other boys got to Steve. He liked doing it. Liked being a shield. Suddenly some of the things the school was shoving down his throat started sound good, righteous, honorable; like something he’d be interested in pursuing.

Once they reached college, and it was clear they were both going after the same career, things only got worse. Everything was a competition, with Steve as the clear winner to anyone watching. And boy, did Freddie Hart watch. That was the one indiscretion Steve allowed himself. A handsome Irish boy with a mischievous grin and a kiss that drove Steve wild. He was distracted from Henry after that. High school bullying was no longer cool to any of the men. This was college, we’re supposed to have each other’s backs, grow up.

Henry would eventually grow up. He was in the next SEAL class after Steve. He signed up for
DEVGRU a few months after Steve did. They worked together often, and Henry had learned his lesson about no man left behind. He grew up and Steve was glad to see it. They may have never been close friends, but they had gotten over their childhood rivalry.

Mostly.

~

2006

~

“…you didn’t have to save me.”

“Of course I did, Boren, shut up,” Steve told him.

“After what I did…” Henry said.

“We were kids,” Steve said. “Trying to prove ourselves. We’re cool, Henry.”

“No,” Henry adjusted himself with a groan.

“Stop moving lieutenant,” Jacobs said. Jacobs had the most medical training and they all deferred to him. Henry listened.

“The hearing shit…”

What?

“What?”

Henry’s eyes flitted around the circle, then back to Steve. “Before you went into training?”

His almost hearing about homosexual activity.

“That was you?” Steve asked, shocked. This whole time he was blaming Jake.

Henry nodded. “I’m sorry. I had just been denied training for that class. I had heard that you had gotten in. I was jealous. You and Hart both, you both got in and I didn’t. I had been one step behind you my whole life and I was frustrated.”

“That was you?” Steve repeated again.

“I was young and angry. I did something I shouldn’t have. It could have… You wouldn’t have…” If you weren’t here, I’d be dead. And not just today. How many missions have we been on that you’ve had my back, the whole time? Like I was never awful to you?” Steve was livid. Heat rose in his body so fast he could barely feel the cold anymore.

“How dare you,” he said before he could stop himself.

Henry squeezed his eyes together. “I deserve that. I deserve worse.”

It’s not like he could turn him in. It’s not like he could tell anyone why he wouldn’t want to work with him again. This was a hurt Steve would have to carry all by himself.

…and he had blamed Jake. Jake got all his hate, and for what? A teenage rivalry?
Steve’s open mouth closed with anger, eyes boring into Henry. Then he looked away. The rest of his team—men he was responsible for. They were all watching, curious, unable to leave the safety of their makeshift tent and body warmth. Now was not the place. Now was not the time.

That’s when the helicopter showed up, blowing snow all over the place, landing twenty paces away.

“We’ve got to move before she’s spotted,” Steve ordered. “Let’s get him up.”

Everyone got home, no casualties. Steve requested leave to digest that new information and he buried himself in a Catherine-shaped distraction, and spent a lot of time thinking about what he’d tell Jake if he ever saw him again.

~~~

**Steve – present day**

~~~

Steve was trying not to watch the EMT do some quick examinations of the cut on his thigh. He knew when it happened he was going to need stitches.

“Can’t you just do it?” Steve asked the guy.

“Well, sure,” the man answered, “but you’ve also got a bump on your head and I’ve dealt with you before. Not doing it means you’ll actually go to the hospital.”

“Who are you, my boyfriend?” Steve asked, trying to lighten the mood.

The EMT, who was a handsome man if Steve had to judge, only smirked. “I like my men a little less insane.”

“But you do like men,” Steve smirked back, trying to throw a little bit of flirt into it—then he caught himself and frowned. What was he doing? He frowned. Maybe that head injury did need checking out.

“Most days,” the EMT responded. “Sometimes my spouse wakes up female so.”

...what? First, there was Mary’s asexuality that sent him on an evening of google searches, and now… what? Steve definitely had a lot to learn.

The EMT seemed to sense his confusion and winked, “Don’t worry about it.”

Steve sighed, looked away, and began digesting that. It didn’t last for long when the man began cutting at his pants around the cut.

“Do you have to cut my pants?”

“They are already ruined,” the EMT argued with a shrug. Steve rolled his eyes and looked away only to see Danny, about thirty yards away, looking instantly relieved, like he had just gotten eyes on Steve. Steve felt like the look on Danny’s face. Lou had called for a bus as soon as Danny left his side, and they had a stretcher out there, pulling him away from the gunfire down at the bottom of the stairs in less than two minutes.

Danny took a moment to take a deep breath before he made a beeline straight for Steve, sitting on the back of the ambulance.
“Heya, cupcake,” Steve greeted as he got closer.

“Vetoing that,” Danny said back instantly, “you found your pet name,” he pointed at him, “come here,” and then he grabbed the sides of Steve’s face and kissed him. It was a little too hard and desperate, but Steve understood. But they were surrounded by patrol cops and the rest of the back up that had met them at the docks. On the other side of the ambulance there were already news crews gathered – someone somewhere knew something and tipped them off. They had to be professional, but Steve figured they were allowed a short kiss of reassurance.

Danny pulled back, hands still on his face, and turned to the EMT, “How is he?” “I’m fine,” Steve said, rolling his eyes.

Steve got a finger pointed at him, “I’m not talking to you, I’m talking to the medical professional?” Danny turned back to the EMT.

The EMT smiled. “He’s got a bump on the head I’d like to get checked out, and he’s going to need stitches on his leg.”

“Tattle,” Steve teased him. He was a familiar face, but Steve didn’t know his name.

“That doesn’t sound like fine, Steven.”

Steve rolled his eyes again, “Relative.” Then he turned to the EMT and pointed to Danny, “This is my boyfriend.”

The EMT looked up from Steve’s leg to smile at Danny, “I kinda figured, with that kiss and all.”

Danny only shook his head with a soft smile. Then he took a moment to run his fingertips across Steve’s hair, near where the cut came down over his forehead. Of course, he’d have to find the bump; Steve grimaced slightly unable to fight the pain.

“Jesus,” Danny said, his soft attention turning to worry. “Feel that egg. Do you have a headache?”

“I’m fine,” Steve said, shaking him off. Danny wouldn’t go.

“You said you could use some tylenol for your head only three minutes ago,” the EMT squealed. “I took that to mean you had a headache.”

“I’ve had worse.”

The EMT gave him a dirty look and Steve couldn’t help but widen his eyes and look away. This guy was serious, and totally the kind of person Steve could be friends with.

“I’m Steve, by the way. This is Danny.”

“I know,” the guy said. Then there was a beat. “You guys are Five-0. I’m a first responder. I know who you guys are. Besides, you already introduced yourself.”

“Oops.”

Danny gave Steve a weird look, but then pointed at the EMT for a moment, “Chris, right?”

Steve looked up at Danny, in awe. Of course the guy would know him. Steve smiled. Okay, he was feeling a little light headed.

“Yup,” Chris smiled.
He turned to Steve, “He was first on scene when you were kidnapped by Wo Fat.”

Steve’s stomach dropped, and then he turned back to Chris. “So you know I’ve had worse.”

Chris shrugged again, sitting back. “Just means I’m more aware of your medical history than the average first responder.” He turned to Danny with a grin. “I’m not stitching him up so he’ll have to see a doctor. But it didn’t cut deep enough for a major artery. No major blood loss. I’m more worried about that bump on his head.”

“I knew I liked you,” Danny praised.

Chris smiled, and then the radio on his shoulder came to life, someone calling for help with some kind of code and directions that led Steve to understand it was another EMT calling for help.

“But, he is stable, and you’re here now, and apparently my partner has a gunshot victim waiting on me.” He pointed at Danny, “I take it that’s your handiwork?” Danny shrugged. He grabbed a bag and jumped out of the back of the ambulance.

“I’ll get him to the hospital, don’t worry,” Danny said.

“Good,” Chris said, taking off.

“Thanks, man,” Steve called after him. He waved back at them over his shoulder but he was moving fast with the stretcher Steve was just on. He turned to focus on Danny, handsome Danny, his Danny. He smiled. “Did we catch them? Did we get Gabriel?”

Danny frowned. “Christopher got away on a boat. We’ve got the coast guard out, but who knows.”

“How’s Abby?”

“Left her staring at the sea at the end of the dock.”

“I’ve gotta talk to her,” Steve said. “Make sure we’re not too much for her.”

“Mmm,” Danny said, running his fingers over his hairline again. “Are you sure you’re okay?”

“I’m fine,” Steve lied. He did have the starts of a headache. He hit the brick fence hard when Christopher threw a roundhouse kick at him. He had gotten back up quick, but he was thrown from the impact enough that he didn’t see his knife. Chin had gotten his gun out by then, having lost his hands on Gabriel. And then…

“Gabriel!” Steve remembered. He had killed Jake. “Tell me we didn’t lose both of them.”

“No, we got Gabriel. One of us got a bullet in his leg and he fell off the dock.

Christopher left without him.”

“No loyalty between thieves, huh?”

“More like no loyalty between crime families.”

Steve smiled, and then caught eye of Chin, wet, walking along with Gabriel on the stretcher. He was stone faced and as he got closer, Steve noticed that he had handcuffed himself to the man. Steve didn’t blame him, he’d do the same if he was Chin. Standing up, putting his weight on his good leg, Steve groaned, a bit dizzy.
“Whoa, whoa,” Danny said. “Sit down.”

“They need the ambulance, Danny,” Steve said.

“So do you,” Danny told him. “Sit down.”

Steve sat, too dizzy.

The ambulance ride to Queen’s was tense, between the four of them, and Chris who had wrapped up Gabriel’s leg, and started focusing on Steve. They didn’t make it two miles before Chris was reaching for a sick bag, and Steve held on to himself just long enough for Chris to ready it for him.

He hated throwing up. He hated concussions. Danny was going to be so mad at him.

But Danny was running a hand over his hairline again, that felt nice. Soothing.

He turned to the man he loved. “In sickness and in health?” he asked.

Danny looked shocked for a moment, and then smiled slowly. “Yeah, babe, but you better not be proposing to me over a bag of vomit.”

Chin, as serious as this moment was for him, chuckled. Gabriel rolled his eyes and laid back on the stretcher, defeated.

“Nah,” Steve said. “I know better.”

“Good. Besides,” Danny said, smirking. “It’s only been two months.”

“Oh my God,” Gabriel groaned, ruining the moment.

“Shut up,” Chin told him.

“Yeah, we got evidence of another count of murder on you,” Steve said. “Caught on hotel security footage and everything.”

“So what if I did,” Gabriel confessed. “Was he a friend of yours?”

They hit a bump and Gabriel groaned in pain. Steve smiled with a little retribution. “He was.”

“Good,” Gabriel said.

“I’m going to make sure you go away for a long time,” Steve told him.

“I’ve heard that before.”

“Shut up,” Chin said again.

Steve smiled. He was going to go ahead and count this as a win, concussion and all.

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Danny – 1984 -- Age 8

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Danny was eight years old. He had just found out that sometimes they had to cut a mommy open to get a baby out, and that’s what they were doing to his mom. He was sitting in a waiting room with
Stella, and Matty, and a whole mess of Aunts and Uncles, but his dad had gone with his mom, and Danny didn’t even get to say good luck.

He might have been trying not to cry.

Matty didn’t understand. Stella was sitting quiet, so maybe she knew, but Matty didn’t understand. He was busy with some stupid hospital playroom toy.

It felt like hours, but when everyone else tells the story, it happened fast. Fifteen minutes, tops. ‘Your mom was in danger, they had to go fast!’ He does remember his dad running, so maybe they were right. But it still felt like hours.

But his dad came out, pulled a mask off his face to reveal a grin, and announced, “It’s a girl!”

The Williams clan all stood with excitement at the good news.

“And Clara?” Danny’s grandmother asked.

His father’s face fell soft, “She’s doing fine.” She turned to his kids, kneeled, and gathered them in front of him. “They gave mommy some medicine so she’ll sleep while they fix her up, but she’s okay, okay?” Danny watched as his dad wiped at his face. “So you won’t get to see her for awhile, okay?”

All three children nodded. He hugged them tight, and for a long time. Then he pulled back with a smile, “You have a baby sister! And she’s beautiful.”

“When can we see her?” Stella asked.

“Well,” he sniffed again. “She’s got to be inside a special box to keep her warm for awhile. She kinda got a little caught up on the straw in mommy’s stomach that feeds her?” He asked, seeing if they remembered being sat down and shown pictures about what was happening inside their mom’s belly.

Danny did. “Billy cord.”

His dad smiled. “Close. Umbilical cord,” he pronounced. “She got caught up on it and so now they are just making sure she’s breathing right. But they say she’s doing good already.”

“Can we see the special box?” Matty asked.

His father frowned, “Not yet. Probably not until morning.” He turned to his own parents, “That’s why grandma and grandpa are going to take you back home so you can get some sleep. You can come back tomorrow and meet her, okay?”

All three kids nodded.

His father wiped at his face again, and then turned to his mom, saying something Danny can’t remember. But he had a baby sister. He eyed Stella. Sometimes Stella stole his gameboy, but she was pretty cool. Maybe he wouldn’t mind another sister.

~

Abigail was a sweet baby. Only cried when she was wet, and happy as could be the moment you changed her. She smiled early, according to his mom, and walked early, too. She was doted on by
three, loving, excited older siblings, and never had a lack of entertainment. Even through her toddler years she’d sit and watch Matty and Danny put on silly puppet shows trying to get her to laugh.

Eric, however. Eric was a pill. He cried all hours of the night. ‘Colic,’ his mother called it. ‘This will pass, Stella.’

There was one night he would. Not. Stop. Crying. That Stella was at her wits end. She had left Eric with their mom and made her way into Danny’s attic bedroom and sat down against his wardrobe, staring forward into space.

“That’s a bad hiding spot,” he told her.

“I’m not hiding,” she said, instantly.

“Do you regret it?” Danny asked.

“Regret what?”

“Keeping him?”

Stella turned to him quick, “No.” She looked back into space again and widened her eyes, “I just wish he’d stop crying!”

“Mom says it’s a phase.”

“Maybe I’m just a bad mom. Maybe I am too young.”

“No,” Danny said, getting out of bed to sit next to her. “No. Well. You are young, but you’re not a bad mom.”

“How do you know?”

“I was there in the delivery room, remember?” Danny asked. “You had just gone through all that pain and your only thought was for him.”

Stella leaned her head back against Danny’s wardrobe. “I’m still bleeding.”

“What?” Danny asked, concerned.

“Yeah,” Stella said.

“Should you be?”

Stella shrugged. “Mom said she bled for two months after me and Matt.”

“Holy shit,” Danny said. “Girls are scary.”

Stella laughed, “what?”

“You can bleed for two months and not die. That’s… that’s hardcore.”

She pulled her head back up. “Yeah, I guess it kinda is.”

“The baby crying downstairs seems easy compared to that.”

Stella laughed again.
“Come on, you’ll be okay.”

She rested her head on Danny’s shoulder. “You’re a good brother.”

Danny smiled. “I try.”

~

“Come to daddy!” Danny said, reaching for Grace. “You can do it, one little step, and then one more!”

Matty had hold of her hands, helping her take the first few steps, but then he slowly let go of one, then the other, and suddenly she was standing on her own! Sure, she’d been doing that for weeks now, but it never failed to amaze Danny.

“Come on, monkey!” Danny said, clapping. “Come here!”

She took a hesitant first step.

“That’s it!”

Then she took another.

“Ah!” Matty exclaimed quietly.

Grace took a third step, but she was losing it! Her hands went up, and Danny rushed forward to catch her.

“Oh!” Danny said, pulling her back up, smiling wide. “You did it! Yay!” He pulled at her hand to high five his hand and patted it for her. He let go and she patted it again.

Danny and Matty laughed.

“Let’s try again,” Matty said.

Danny turned, positioned her so she’d walk to Matty, and said, “Walk to Uncle Matty!”

Danny held on long enough for the first step, but she wasn’t so sure this time, and turned back to Danny, falling forward into his lap.

“She only wants to walk to you,” Matty said without a pout. “Here, let me take her, let’s try again.”

She took another three steps and they celebrated again.

About then, Rachel walked through the front door, grocery bags in hand.

“Rach!” Matty called out. “Come look, come look!”

“Oh, did she walk?” She said instantly, setting her bags down, all focus on the living room.

“Wanna show mommy?” Danny handed her back to Matty.

Matty set her up, and she was off. Five steps this time, closer to Danny before she fell face first.

“Oh, my baby!” Rachel said, pulling Grace out of Danny’s arms and squeezing her in a hug. “Oh, you’re growing up too fast.”
“Actually, according to the book, she’s right on time,” Danny said. He turned to Matty. “Stella owes me money.”

“You were betting on when our child would take her first steps?”

Danny looked up, caught. “Uh.”

~

Jack was asleep on his chest; he had just kicked in his sleep, right on Danny’s bruised rib, and Danny woke with a little yelp. It was his first night home from being in the hospital after being taken. All his kids had made their way into their room, and into their bed, and all of them were sleeping. They had had a rough week and they deserved this puppy pile they had found themselves in.

He gave each of his kids a once over, thankful he got to come home to this.

Grace, his baby, curled up on his left, head on his chest next to Jack’s face. She had fallen asleep making faces at him. Then he turned to Charlie, who had fallen asleep with his head on Steve’s arm. His mouth was wide open, and if Danny listened hard, he was lightly snoring. He smiled and wondered if he had inherited his sleep face from Danny. Rachel didn’t look like that when she slept.

Then, in an attempt to look over at Nahele, caught Steve’s eye. He had woken up.

“You okay?” he asked in a whisper.

Danny rested his head back, “Yeah. I’m good.”

He felt a scratch on the top of his head and realized it was the hand from the arm Charlie was asleep on. “I love you.”

“I love you,” Danny whispered. “I love them!”

“Yeah,” Steve said, turning away, looking down at Nahele. Steve’s grin sent butterflies through Danny’s heart. He couldn’t see Nahele from where he was laying, but Steve’s face said everything he was feeling. “I love them too.”

“That’s good. I come with two.”

“I come with two, too,” Steve shot back.

They shared a smile, and a silent giggle. Like they’d have it any other way.

~~~

Danny – present day

~~~

With Steve staying the night in the hospital for what was obviously a concussion, Danny almost forgot about his phone call.

He had called Daisy, and then talked to kids, and let them know what happened. Daisy was going to get them all up early so they could visit Steve in the morning. But Steve was rolled into his own room sometime around one am. He was protesting, like expected, but he had thrown up and they were waiting on some test results. He could chill.
Danny had just sat back, settling in for the night, and plugging his phone into charge by Steve’s bed.

2:30

Being well versed in time zone math because of his displacement, he knew it was 7:30 in Virginia. Perfect.

He sat back with a grin, phone to his ear.

“Who you calling now?”

He held up a finger to shush him. “If you’re quiet, I’ll let you listen.” Steve zipped his mouth.

It rang once, twice, before a tired woman answered. “Helen Goddard.”

“Hi, this is Detective Williams, from yesterday?”

“Yes, hi. I pulled Jillian Smith’s file. We are having internet issues today, so I can’t forward it to you, but I can read some information if you tell me what I’m looking for.”

“Do you mind if I put you on speaker with my partner?”

“Of course.”

Danny tapped the phone, finding the right buttons, and then sat forward with the phone between them.

“Steve McGarrett, ma’am.”

“Hello.”

“Before we start, Ms Goddard,” Danny said. “We’re not calling over a professional matter.”

“Oh?”

Danny eyed up at Steve. “We’re hoping for information on Jillian so we can help her and her son.”

“Oh. Alright. …what would you like to know?”

“There was a foster family Jillian was placed with I want to try to get into contact with. The father would have been a sailor in the Navy?”

Steve looked up at that, confused. Danny hadn’t told him any of this, or that he was even trying to find information. Too much had happened since dinner only a few hours ago.

“Well, I can reach out to them, but I can’t give you their information, for obvious reasons.”

“That’s fine, we understand.”

“Hold on,” Helen said. “Apparently it’s not just internet, it’s the whole system. Changing screens are taking forev- Here we go. Oh, poor girl.”

“What?” Danny asked.

“She was in sixteen houses and aged out. I always hate to see something like that.” “Yeah, she was dealt a bad hand,” Steve muttered, picking at his blanket.
"You're telling me. Taken out of house for abuse,'” she read. "Taken out of house for sexual assault against the minor.' "Taken out of house for violent nature’ – which is fifty/fifty just rebellion against an abusive foster family. This poor girl. You said you want to help her? Is she safe now?"

“…well. Yes. But she is in prison.”

“…”

“Ms Goddard?”

“Sorry. I work hard and to hear that… I hate when…” Danny felt for the woman. This was her job, and hearing about letting a child falling through the cracks, it had to be hard. “So I’m looking for a Navy foster father?”

“Yes ma’am. That’s all I know.”

“Well, there’s only one. Hold on, let their page load. So what’s your relationship with this girl, Detective? Did you put her in prison?”

“No,” Danny answered. “Steve and I, we’re fostering her son. She seems lonely, and I thought reaching out to a couple of people that were kind to her once upon a time…” Steve looked impressed.

“Yeah, that might be helpful,” Helen said. “Here we go. George and Helen – hey good name – Wells. Richmond, Virginia. Father, Navy JAG officer. Mother, mechanic! Hey, cool. Oh, she worked on planes, even cooler.”

Danny laughed. He liked this woman. So often whenever he called service workers, they were dull and monotone. Maybe the idea she was actually helping a girl that got bad treatment… maybe it was doing some good for her too.

“Okay, okay,” she sounded like she was probably skimming their page. “No complaints... passed all inspections... had a total of eight kids over four years of fostering, that’s a good ratio. That typically shows they weren’t in it for the money. Oh!

They had a petition of adoption on their record! They were trying to adopt one of their foster kids, hold on. It’s on the next page. They seem like a good couple, glad she had some time with them, at least.”

“Yeah, they sound nice,” Steve said. He turned to Danny, “I hope we sound that nice.”

Danny smiled at him.

“Yeah, their activity seemed to stop after the petit- oh. Oh. Oh, poor girl.”

“What?”

“They died.”

Danny knew the answer before he asked the question. “And the child they were trying to adopt?”

“Jillian.”

Steve and Danny shared a pained look. No wonder she was terrified of being alone and forgotten.

“There was a car wreck. They had two foster children in the back seat. Jillian was the only one to
walk away from the crash. Oh, poor girl. She didn’t stand a chance.”

“No,” Danny frowned. “No she didn’t.”

“I don’t know how any of this will be helpful,” Helen said, sounding sad. They heard some typing on her end.

“How long ago was this?”

“2013,” Helen said. “She was sixteen. And that’s rare, too. An older child getting adopted. She probably thought there was no chance for a family, and then they came along and offered her a family, and then they were gone.”

Steve groaned, and threw his head back into his pillow. “Oh, Nahele,” he groaned. Then he reached up and touched the bump on his head. Danny watched as a small look, he didn’t quite understand pass over Steve’s face. He wasn’t used to not being able to read him.

“This is so tragic I’m going to need another coffee.”

Danny laughed. “Coffee sounds nice right about now.”

“You’re in Hawaii, right? What time is it there? Like, ten?”

“Two am,” Danny said.


“Wait,” Steve sat up. “Did you look us up?”

“This isn’t in a professional matter. You said you were fostering. I’m curious by nature.”

“Virgina Social Services can pull up Hawaii’s records?” Steve asked. “Without internet?”

“…maybe we do have the internet and I was just suspicious about why you called.”

Danny chuckled again. He didn’t blame her. But he did feel like he was about to get a surprise inspection by the social worker. “Well, how do we compare with the Wells family?”

“Currently fostering two children, ages infant and sixteen, that’s a big gap. It says there are two more open beds in your house, so you already had two children, I’m assuming? Or just one extra room.”

“Right the first time,” Danny said. “Fourteen and five.”

“Oh, that gaps not so bad then, you’ve got a ladder goin’ on in your house. You must have fun.”

“We do okay,” Steve said with a grin.

“Oldest foster son has had a bit of the same story as Jillian, poor boy. I see his father is petitioning for visitation, how’s that going?”

“One day at a time,” Danny sighed.

“Mmm,” she mused. “A recommendation from the Governor, look at you two. Oh, a petition of adoption! I see why you’re calling now.”
“Yeah…” Danny said, grimacing. “Does this look like we’re overstepping?”

“Oh, you’d be surprised how many prospective parents look into their child’s history. You’re not the first, you won’t be the last. I can read files, so help where I can. I think your record is shaping up to be a good home. Keep it up, boys. Don’t let your older boy fall through like Jillian, okay?”

“We’ll do what we can,” Danny said.

“And then we’ll do more,” Steve corrected with a serious look.

“Good. Anything else I can tell you?”

“No,” Danny said. “Feel free to reach out to us if you need anything, Ms Goddard.”

“Thank you for that, Detective. Sometimes we do get runaways with dreams of the beach and little resources to go after them.”

Steve and Danny both laughed.

“You’ve got our number now,” Steve said with a smile. “Our social worker’s a good one, too.”

“Yeah, I see through that butter, but it is appreciated, and don’t think I’m not going to call her and let her know what you’re up to.”

“…and that’s not going to look bad?”

“Nah,” Helen said. “Like I said, it happens a lot. I’m sure I’m not the only social worker that reads files every now and then, if you catch my drift. I tend to like parents that call and try, for the record.”

“Gotcha,” Danny said. “Well thank you.”

“Sorry it was bad news.”

“What can you do?”

They said their goodbyes, and sighed. They sat in silence for a few moments, Danny reaching forward for Steve’s hand. Then he rolled his eyes and pulled his chair closer so he could lean his arms and head on the bed. Steve pulled out of his hand, and started running his fingers through the back of his hair.

“I can’t be so reckless anymore,” Steve said, randomly, out of the blue.

Danny rolled his head, so his ear was on the mattress, but he could look up at Steve.

“What?” Danny had to admit he’d been wanting to hear that out of his mouth for years. Of course, it took a concussion to get it out of him.

“Nahele deserves it. Jack deserves it.”

Danny narrowed his eyes. “Your head still hurting?”

Steve rolled his eyes and smiled, “it’s not the concussion talking. I’m serious.”

Danny sat up and put his hands on Steve’s good thigh. “Well, it’s about time you listened to me.”
Steve grinned. “I’m not going to live it down, am I?”

Danny shook his head. Steve closed his eyes slowly, like he was already regretting Danny’s gloating, but he was still smiling.

“How about Jill’s foster parents, that’s what made you realize you’ve got kids depending on you, didn’t it?”

Steve nodded. “When you came back from being taken all hurt and close to… close to being too late, I lost it. You were everything, and I didn’t want to be alone.” He flicked Danny’s ear with his thumb and squeezed him by the chin. “I almost lost you. Lost this.”

Danny closed his eyes. “That’s how I feel every time you run ahead about to do something stupid.”

“I’m sorry.”

“Excuse me, what?”

“I’m not saying it again.”

“So he can admit when he’s wrong!”

Steve flicked his ear again, this time out of exasperation instead of something tender. Danny squirmed against it, smiling. Then he stood up and kissed him, because he could. Steve let out an audible sigh, and maybe a happy groan. Then Danny pulled back suddenly. “You threw up a couple hours ago.”

Steve let out a snort.

“It’s not funny.”

“Kiss me again,” Steve said.

“Gross,” Danny complained.

“You’ve already kissed me. Damage has been done. It’s too late.”

Danny rolled his eyes, but didn’t take much more convincing than that. He leaned down and kissed him again, though not as deep.

Then Danny smiled, “Move over.”

“I don’t think we’ll fit.”

“We fit when it was me, and that was with me hooked up to more machines than you. We’ll fit. Stop complaining.”

“I want to talk to Jill again, before Lindsey takes us off the docket,” Steve said the next morning, well after the kids had visited. They were already in school, and Steve was ready to go home and take a shower. Danny had his after-care paper work and was waiting for Steve to put on the new pants that Daisy had brought him.

“What?”
“Just. I want to talk to her. Try one more time.”

“Steve, we’ve bugged her so many times.”

“Yeah, but now we know more about her, more than ever before. I can relate to losing a parent at sixteen. Even if she still says no, I want to talk to her.”

“She’s nineteen, Steven,” Danny said. He knew this path. Steve walked down this path all the time. Jillian was broken and needed family. Steve was a softie.

“So?”

“She’s in prison.”

“So? She’s not worth a conversation?”

“We can’t adopt her,” he said. Steve paused, looking like a cross between confusion and shock at being caught.

“I know,” Steve said. “But you said it the other day. If Jack becomes our family, so does she. She’s got to know that. She’s got to hear it.”

“Okay, baby,” Steve said, at his wits end, laying flat on his bed, the heels of his hands digging into his eyes. “It’s time for you to fall asleep.”

He turned his head to look at a red-faced, crying, one month old Jack screaming in his crib. He had medicine for his infected ears, but it hadn’t quite kicked in yet. They were on day two of being miserable. “You’ll feel better, I promise.”

He only responded by screaming louder.

“Okay,” Steve said, rocking himself forward and off the bed. “Okay…” he tried a soothing tone as he stood and made his way over to pick Jack up. “Let’s try something new, huh?”

About that time, Grace showed up at his bedroom door, rubbing at the sleep in her eyes. “Is he okay? Can I help?”

Steve felt horrible instantly. It wasn’t just him and Jack on night two of this. Danny was at work, sitting in a car on a stakeout, and Steve felt very much alone. Except he had two teenagers in the house that had school in the morning.

Nahele would never complain, and neither would Grace, really, but she was too much like her father; she was a worrier. She’d stand in his doorway in her pajamas in the middle of the night and ask if she could do anything to make it easier for everyone.

“Do you want me to run him a bath?”

“No, Grace,” Steve said, holding a whimpering Jack close to his chest, “go back to sleep.”

“Are you sure? A bath usually helped Charlie.”

“I have an idea,” he told her. “We’ll try a bath if it doesn’t work, okay? Just go back to sleep.”

“Okay,” she said with a sigh. “You can wake me up if you need the help, okay? Mum would sometimes. With Charlie.”

Steve’s heart sank. Charlie had been sick way too often, and with Jack’s ear infection, Charlie couldn’t be anywhere near him so soon after his transplant. The next weekend was supposed to be Danny’s weekend, but Danny decided against it, letting Rachel keep him instead. Jack whimpered against his chest again and Steve bounced him. This ear infection was hurting everyone.

He stared at Grace for a moment, worried just how fast she had grown these last few years. She stood, looking much wiser than her thirteen years should be. Losing her uncle, her father’s time in Columbia – and how he came back so beaten – her little brother getting so, life-threateningly sick… He wondered if she felt a bit forgotten.

“Are you okay, Grace?” he asked, still bouncing Jack.
“Yeah,” she said softly. “Just worried.”

“Just go back to sleep, worry about going to a new school, yeah?”

She grinned. She was happy to be going to public school, Steve knew that much. Grace had told him it was like she was contributing; it made her feel like she was actually doing something. Maybe not ‘forgotten’ then, so much as ‘helpless.’ Wanting to assist everyone, but not really knowing how.

“Goodnight, Steve,” she said as he made his way towards the door. She petted Jack’s head and made a sad face. “Feel better, you,” she told him, and then gently kissed his hand. Jack momentarily stopped crying, watching her. She wiped one of his crocodile tears off his cheek and kissed his hand again. Steve smiled at her actions, warmth streaming through him.

He made his way downstairs, after making sure Grace had gone back to her own room, and then outside down the beach, all while making comforting cooing sounds, humming a tune he couldn’t place, he was tired. He found himself on the beach, his toes just at the edge of the water, and he turned so Jack was laying his head on his chest, crying a bit, but interested in what Steve was doing.

Steve held Jack tight, breathing as steady as he could, and let the steady beat of the ocean lull Jack out. His whimpering quieted, but he hadn’t quite fallen asleep when Steve decided to sit down, exhausted. Steve dug his toes into the sand as Jack fidgeted at the movement, digging his ear into Steve’s chest with a whine.

“I’m sorry, baby,” Steve whispered, running a hand down his back gently. At least he wasn’t screaming anymore. “I know you don’t feel good.”

Jack moaned only a little bit longer before he finally nodded off, combination of the medicine, the ocean, and Steve’s heartbeat comforting him.

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“Ohau Daily”

**Obituaries**

--Debra “Deb” McGarrett – Age 83 – passed away Sunday night, succumbing to a three year fight with cancer.

*Deb was born on Oahu in 1933. Her father, Steven McGarrett was a Naval officer stationed at Pearl Harbor just after the end of World War 1 and went down with the Arizona during the attack on Pearl Harbor. Deb volunteered after the horrific event, even at the age of 8, delivering water and meals to recovering sailors in the hospital.*

*It was in a recovery ward that she fell in love with singing. In a story well known by her family, Deb was singing Christmas Carols to cheer up the sailors the Christmas following December 7th when she got the biggest applause of the night and saw smiles on several faces she had never seen smile. Not only did she realize she could sing, but she realized what she could do with it.*

*She left home at 16 and worked as a nightclub singer in the 40s and 50s, singing in legendary night clubs like The Trocadero Ceros, and the Coconut Grove, among others in L.A.. When her mother died in 1959, she moved back to Hawaii and took in her younger brother John McGarrett. She raised him until he was eighteen and he enlisted in the Navy. Inspired by her father’s sacrifice and her brother’s service, Deb then joined the USO at 32 and traveled and entertained servicemen until the end of the Vietnam War in 1975.*
At age 42, she decided to start over in New York City, where she worked as a vocal coach for Broadway singers until 2000 when she finally retired. In 1992, at age 59, she took in her niece and nephew, Mary and Steve McGarrett, turning down a chance at a record deal to, yet again, take care of her family. Her brother John died in 2010. She is survived by her niece Mary, her nephew Steve, her grand-niece Joan, and a big and loving Ohana who will miss her dearly.

Deb’s Memorial service will be on November 30th, 7:00 PM at the Flamingo Lounge, like she would’ve wanted.

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Steve – November 30th

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‘Would you consider adopting him?’ Jillian’s voice was in his head. ‘Would you just think about it? Let me know? I need to know he’ll be okay.’

They were on the way to Aunt Deb’s wake. Daisy agreed to take Jack for the afternoon, allowing Steve to focus on the wake, and on Mary, but all he could think about was Jill’s question.

‘Would you consider adopting him?’

He wouldn’t have to consider it, not really. He had fallen in love with that baby, hard and fast, in such a short amount of time. Steve never bothered with love at first sight. Love was built on companionship and shared history, not first glance. But his mind was on the first time he saw Jack, bundled up tight in Danny’s arms. Danny had looked so in awe at the baby, bouncing him with a smile on his face – the smile he reserved for his children.

But…

You weren’t supposed to make big decisions after a loss. Danny had gently reminded him of that yesterday, when he reached out for comfort, first with a hug, and then nosing into Danny’s neck, and maybe crossing a line that would have led to a kiss that he would have regretted.

“Don’t do this because you’re sad, Steve,” Danny had said. “I’m here, but don’t do this because you’re feeling vulnerable.”

Then he pulled him in for another hug and he was right. If they had kissed… if Steve had kissed him and pulled him close and got him underneath him… it would have just been because he wanted to forget he just lost his Aunt. Then every time they… it would be tainted. That wasn’t anyone’s fault.

You weren’t supposed to make any major decisions after a loss, and a change in relationship was one of those things.

Mary blew her nose, pulling him out of his head.

Danny was driving. It was one of those rare time when Steve needed it. They were a parade of cars making their way to the lounge bar. She had already been cremated, secure in Mary’s arms, and they had plans to walk her remains up a mountain, but she still deserved a wake.

“You doing okay, babe?” Danny asked. “You look a little out of it.”

Steve shrugged. “How am I supposed to look?”
“I don’t know,” Danny said. He reached over and squeezed Steve’s forearm in support.

Steve reached out, covering Danny’s hand with his own, stealing more comfort. Danny squeezed him again, giving even more, and then put his hands on the wheel to take a left turn.

There were tons of people. All of Five-0 had shown up, most likely more for Steve than for Deb, but he was appreciative all the same. There were a few friends of Deb’s whose faces Steve recognized from his summer breaks spent in Deb’s apartment in New York. They were… Broadway guys? Or maybe part of her singing crowd? Steve was unsure, and made a note to find out.

There were other performers from the USO, who got up and performed an old number they all used to sing together, in honor. They were down two members of their group, but several of them had flown out from the mainland when they heard the news. Mary knew a few of them by name, and Steve was jealous of her time with their Aunt.

Aunt Deb was obviously loved, and lived a full life full of adventure and lively characters. Steve felt like a stranger compared to Mary. He blamed his father for that, before regretting it immediately. Steve could have been a better nephew, he kicked himself with the thought. But it was great to hear stories, and learn about her amazing life.

Then there was a couple of old Sailors, both wearing world war two caps with Pearl Harbor Survivor embroidered on the sides. Steve and Mary were both shocked, and agreed they’d greet them together.

Steve greeted them with a nod and holding out his hand, “Sirs. It’s an honor. I didn’t think… Aunt Deb was a child when Pearl Harbor happened.”

One of them nodded, shaking his hand. The other switched his cane to his other side, and reached forward and shook his hand too. “When I read her obituary last week, I knew I had to come.”

“Me too,” said the other. “When I read that she was the little girl that sang for us in the hospital ward… I had to come pay my respects.”

“We know that story,” Mary said, wiping at her eyes. “The applause made her want to be a singer.”

Nicky Demarco, Deb’s friend and the Flamingo’s main lounge singer, took that moment to walk up, hands in his pockets, simply listening to the story. “I’ve heard that story from her, too. She was one of the greats.”

“She was magnificent, even for a child,” the man agreed. “I hadn’t said a word since the attack. They called it shell shock back then, but I know now I was suffering from major survivor’s guilt. But that little girl served me lunch every day. And then she sang, it was so enchanting… it echoed all through the halls.”

The other man nodded. “Yeah. I remember men getting up out of their beds, or rolling their wheelchairs, trying to find the source of the singing.”

Steve shared a look with Mary; they hadn’t heard this story from the audience’s point of view. This was amazing.

“Men that hadn’t gotten out of bed in weeks were up. And we watched her sing. Every other act that night were singing happy, upbeat Christmas carols, trying to cheer us up, but that little girl sang “Stormy Weather,” do you know it? That old song by Ethel Waters? I looked it up yesterday. The lyrics still get me.”
The other man grinned and leaned in to Mary. “After the war, I went out and bought that record, it was so good.”

“I never knew the song she sang that day…” Mary said. “Wow. Thank you.”

Both men smiled. The one of them made a face. “I listened to it yesterday, but she changed some of the words, right? I remember because I hadn’t seen my family yet, and the song got to me.”

“Yeah,” the man said, snapping his fingers. “Whenever the song sings about her fella, she changed it to say ‘daddy,’ didn’t she?”

Steve nodded. “My grandfather,” Steve paused, suddenly wishing he had worn his dress blues. Hearing this story, it felt appropriate, somehow. “I’m named after him. He’s in the Arizona.”

“Oh, no wonder she sang it so well,” he said.

“We’ve got Etta James’ version of that song on the juke-box,” Nicky said, pointing to the corner. “I can go cue it up, if you all would like?”

“Yeah,” Mary said, wiping at her face again. “Yeah, let’s hear it.”

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A few songs on the juke-box later, the slow beat of “Stormy Weather” filled up the room. Mary was a mess after the first chorus, but even Steve couldn’t get through the song without letting a few tears fall. The song was a deep blues song about missing a lost lover. Full of grief and loss and melancholy. The idea of Deb, as a small eight year old, getting up and singing that sad song, loud, from deep inside her… Steve wished he’d seen her perform more.

When it was over, Mary shook herself, wiping her face clean, and blowing her nose. “Well, I think it’s time to say something, don’t you think?”

“I guess,” Steve said. He wasn’t quite sure what to say.

“Let’s go,” she said, holding out her hand. Steve took it with a grin.

She led them to the stage, where she tapped on the microphone. Everyone quieted down and turned at attention.

“Hello, everyone,” Mary said softly. “Thank you for coming. Everyone. It means a lot to me that you’re all here. It’s been so nice hearing stories from all of you. Aunt Deb would have liked to have seen each and every one of you.” She sniffed, and wiped at her cheek. Steve wondered if she’d be able to get through this and put a hand on her back. “Steve and I only have each other for family now, but looking around, we aren’t lacking friends.

“Aunt Deb, she,” she sniffed again. “…she pretty much adopted me. Took us in when our father couldn’t have us around anymore. She gave up so much to take us in, the sacrifices she took to raise me still blow my mind sometimes. When I adopted my daughter, Joan,” she smiled and gave Joan a small wave, “I knew that I could adopt because of how she took me in, no questions asked. She didn’t have to be, but she chose to be my mother. It inspired me, still inspires me, to love my daughter every day.”

‘Would you consider adopting him?’

Steve stared at Mary and thought of Jack. Of Deb. Adoption seemed to be a family tradition. He
could adopt Jack, he could. Deb gave up a career because Mary needed her. Family didn’t wait for when things were convenient, or waited for grief to subside. Family happened when it needed to happen, sometimes unexpected and out of nowhere. He could adopt Jack.

‘I’m going to adopt Jack,’ he thought to himself for the first time. ‘He’s going to be my son. I can do this.’

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Danny – present day

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“You guys are getting to be regulars,” the guard said as they signed in. Every other Saturday was visiting hours where visitors could hug and prisoners could hold their children, but anyone could sign in at any time to talk though a plexiglass window.

“Do I gotta flash my badge again?” Danny asked.

The guard smirked. “Nah, I know you. You know the drill.”

Danny and Steve both checked in their guns and made their way down the hall where five other prisoners were already talking to their own visitors. One set seemed to be ready to make out with the glass between them, and Danny let a moment of judgment pass. And then, ya know what, power to ‘em.

They waited for a few minutes, dutifully ignoring the couple on the other side of the room and trying not to listen to the conversations that were happening. There was a couple speaking in mandarin and Steve’s eyes widened, and then he hid his face away from them and tried not to laugh.

“What?” Danny asked, intrigued.

Steve shook his head. “Don’t worry about it.”

Danny scrunched up his face and leaned in quick, hands reaching out to poke Steve in the stomach. Steve giggled and pushed him away. Then Danny watched as Steve’s smile lingered, and marveled at how much he always liked it when Steve smiled.

“What are you going to tell her that we haven’t already said?” Danny squeezed Steve’s knee, asking the question on his mind since they left the hospital.

Steve took a deep breath, “I just want to talk to her. No expectations.”

“Alright,” Danny said. “Be nice.”

Steve smiled again, “I’m always nice.”

“You threatened to torture a man last night,” Danny shot back.

Steve’s jaw did that thing where it slid to the side. That was Steve hating that Danny was right. Danny pushed at his lip with his tongue and smiled.

“Whatever,” Steve said.

Danny laughed.
And then they both sat up straight as another prisoner was walked through the doors. She saw who it was and paused, her lips a thin line. Maybe they were one visit too many.

She chewed on her cheek before the guard nudged her forward. She sat down across from them with a guarded look on her face. Steve picked up the receiver, and it was a long ten seconds of them having a staring contest before Jill picked up hers on her end.

“Hello, Mr. Navy,” Danny read Jill’s lips.

Steve switched the phone ears and leaned over so Danny could listen in too. “Hi, Jill.”

She looked down at her hand resting in front of her. “I don’t know why you’re here.”

“We…” Steve started. “We did some digging, and it might have been a little invasive, but we had to know.”

She looked up, worried. “It’s not Jack’s father, is it?”

“One of these days, you’re telling us that story,” Danny warned her. She rolled her eyes, but nodded.

“Someday,” she answered. “What was invasive?”

“We read your foster program file,” Steve said. “We were looking for that foster family you talked about? See if they wanted to visit you? Give you some comfort, but…”

She closed her eyes and looked away.

“We had to know.”

“What? How sad my life has been?”

“Yeah,” Steve answered. “We’re sorry you went through all that.”

She scoffed. “A couple of rich cops that live on the beach. Feeling sorry for me. Imagine that. What would you know?”

“My mom died when I was sixteen. Car wreck.”

Jill’s face turned from sarcastic to sincere. “Oh.”

“After that, my dad, he couldn’t– he separated me and my sister. Sent me to military school, which, at the time, I had no aspirations for.” Steve chuckled. “If you knew what kind of kid I was…” He chewed on his lip for a moment. “I know my life doesn’t look anything like yours, but I can relate a little.”

She looked away.

“I know what it feels like when it seems like no one wants you.”

Danny was amazed. He looked up at Steve over the receiver in awe. He was opening up, for the sake of Jack. Oh, he’d be a good dad, he just knew it. Between how he’s always been with Grace, how he accepted Charlie without question, how he turned his life inside out for Nahele… he’s already a good dad. Danny smiled slowly. He leaned over and bumped shoulders with Steve, in an attempt at comfort and support. Steve reached out across his lap with his empty hand to grasp Danny’s arm.
“But people want you now,” Jill said, voice cracking a little.

Steve nodded.

“That’s the difference between you and me.”

Steve adjusted in his seat. “I don’t think so.”

“Who do I have?”

“Me.”

She rolled her eyes. “You just want Jack.”

“No,” Steve said. “Well, yes, but. I didn’t come here for Jack. I came here for you.”

Danny moved to hold his hand, he was so proud. Of course he would, this is what Steve does. He adopts people. He’s there for people, even when they don’t think they deserve it, even if they don’t realize they needed it. Danny followed his lead and turned his focus to Jill. Her grip on the phone was tight, and her eyes were wide and – for the first time since Danny had known her – innocent. He was hit with just how young she was all over again.

“It’s true that Jack is why I know you and know your story. I might not be able to do anything about where you are, but I can help make it easier. You’re not alone in this. I’m not going to let you be.”

“Why?”

“Because I know what it’s like to be alone. No one should feel that way.”

She wiped at her face and sniffed.

“I don’t know if it’s the Navy telling me ‘no man left behind,’ or my history with loneliness, or some combination of the two, but I know you now.”

She looked up at him, head tilted downward.

“I’ll go to bat for you when it matters, and I’ll make sure you’re treated right in here as best I can, I’ll be there when you get out of this place, and I’ll make sure you and Jack know each other, for as long as I have him. No strings attached. Just because you need it. It’s what our family does.”

Danny nodded. “He was there for me,” he told her. “And countless others. I’ve seen him do it over and over again. He decides something like this, and I know our family just got bigger.”

Jill had to sit the phone down to wipe at both of her eyes with the heels of her hands. They waited for her to gather herself, squeezing each other’s hands.

Slowly, she picked it back up. “Can I ask you a question?”

“Of course.”

She sat for a moment, maybe bracing herself or finding her words – Danny didn’t know but they waited. “Define family. Both of you.”

They sat back, eyeing each other before both looking away, thinking about their answer. Danny had no idea what Steve was going to say, but Danny leaned forward-
“Family is a choice,” Steve said first. “You gotta choose who you call family, and you gotta choose to have them in your life, and it’s work, but it’s worth it.”

“Yeah,” Danny said. That summed up what he was going to say. “When I was sixteen I had a friend die. It was like I lost a brother. I have been divorced, and lied to, and…” He took a deep breath and sighed. “I always think about what that friend said to me a few weeks before he died. It didn’t matter that we didn’t share blood.” Danny sniffed, thinking about it. “We bleed together. That makes us kin.”

Steve was staring at him with a small smile on his face. Danny ignored him and begged his eyes to stop watering.

“You can adopt him,” she whispered. She nodded. “You can. I’ll sign whatever.”

“What?” Steve sat up. “This visit wasn’t about that–”

“I know,” she said. “And thank you. Jack isn’t your blood. Jack is a choice.” Then her face went serious with intent. “I still want it in writing that my visitations will keep happening. I want to know him.”

“We want him to know you,” Steve said. “Trust me, that car wreck my mom died in?

She actually faked her death. She didn’t just leave us, she blew us up on the way out.”

“Holy shit,” Jill said. “Why did she fake her death?”

Steve took a deep breath. “That might be a story for another day, but I’ll tell you someday. It’s just really long.”

“I’m looking forward to it.”

“Point is, I came to realize my parents weren’t what I remembered them to be. I always wonder if I’d be better off, better balanced, less messed up… if they had just been honest with me from the beginning.”

“Probably,” Danny interjected. “But you’re not messed up.”

“Have you met me? I almost dived off a cliff last night in pursuit of a murderer. That’s not exactly normal behavior.”

“At least you admit it,” Danny said. “Did you have to admit it in front of the woman who’s opinion of us will decide if we get to adopt Jack or not?”

Steve chuckled.

“I actually like him a little better,” Jill confessed. She looked up at Steve with a smile. What exactly was Danny in for if Steve’s brand of crazy was a selling point? “You’re honest.”

Steve nodded, jaw strong.

“That, he is,” Danny said, approvingly, and with what was probably a goofy look on his face. He finally picked a good one.

“Is it too late for tomorrow?” Jill asked. “How long will it take to get another court date?”

“What time is it?” Danny asked, pulling at Steve’s wrist to try to read his watch upside down.
“It’s three, we’ve got an hour to call Lindsey,” Steve said.

“Well, go!” Jill said. “The sooner Jack’s somewhere safe, and for good, the better.” “Thank you,” Steve said to her, quietly. Danny nodded.

“Go!” Jill said. Danny was already up, they had to check in their phones at the front desk.

But Steve stalled, halfway standing up, phone still to his ear. Jill said something Danny didn’t catch, but Steve nodded and she grinned.

“You got it. Thank you, Jill.”

She nodded, said something else, and then hung up the phone. Danny shared a look with her. This girl – this woman – was trusting them with the only good thing that happened to her in her long life of misery. The gravity of that choice hit Danny and he had never felt so worthy of something in his life.

‘Thank you,’ Danny mouthed.

She pushed against her stomach, probably digesting that choice as well. Her face broke, and she was about to cry. She nodded. The guard came over and nudged her shoulder again. She looked up at her and stood to leave. Steve had noticed Danny, and together they watched as she was walked away and out of the room.

They stood for a moment, letting themselves feel the weight she placed on their shoulders. Danny glanced up at his boyfriend, amazed. How does he do that? How does he just pick up people and carry them around like they didn’t weigh a thing? He had to have a superpower, or something, because Danny couldn’t do that. He was getting better at it, learning by watching Steve, but man… Steve had a gift.

“I can’t believe we came here so you could adopt her.”

“You said we couldn’t,” Steve shrugged. “I was right. You were wrong. I just didn’t want to fight you about it.”

“Well,” Danny said knocking his knuckles on Steve’s stomach. “When you’re right, you’re right.”

Steve grinned.
Steve – 1991 -- Age 15

For the life of him, Steve couldn’t remember his name. Jason? Jimmy? Jules? It started with J, but he wasn’t sure. He can’t remember the boy’s name, but he’ll never forget the rock of the bus as they went down the highway, or the silver moonlight that floated in through the open windows, or the cool air that rushed in and through his hair as they made their way home from an away game. He’ll never forget the bus parent yelling at them to quiet down, or the deep bass of some rap song they all claimed to know the words to, or how none of them listened even though Steve did as he was told and sat back and tried to enjoy the steady beat. He doesn’t remember what was playing because the blood in his ears was too loud. Johnny or James or Jacob… he was a wide receiver. Steve threw hundreds of throws to him during practice, he should be able to remember his name… he was sitting next to him, their knees knocking every time the bus rocked. Both of them tired and in that post sweat shiver from the wind blowing through the bus. Jude? Jamie? Had a walkman in his lap and headphones on his ears, head nodding along like he hadn’t just shook Steve’s entire world.

He can’t remember his name, but he’d never forget his hand on his. How that sudden, intense understanding hit Steve, or the fear that understanding caused. Kept causing for the next several decades of his life. He’d never forget the moment when he realized that boy probably didn’t mean to do that… or the long few seconds where he didn’t move his hand. Or how after that, Steve didn’t move away from him, how he ran his fingers between Steve’s finger, Steve’s hand caught under the boy’s.

Or the breath caught in Steve’s throat.

But he remembered how Jeremy? Jason? It had to be Jason… wait- Jordan? Gently tugged at Steve’s thumb and suddenly they were palm to palm, fingers laced, faces forward, out of breath. Steve glanced around. No one in the dark bus was the wiser. No one saw, no one said a thing, no one was looking their way, and Steve felt like their hands were a beacon.

He’d held hands before. Hell, he’d gotten to first base with Chelsea Ochoa several times, but never, ever, not once with a boy.

The rock of the bus, the silver moonlight, the wind in Steve’s hair, and the weight of a boy’s hand on his…

Steve never forgot that.

2002 -- Age 26

They were soaked to the bone and exhausted. Freddie had almost made the worst decision of his life, but Steve had tackled him out of it.
They were doing this SEAL thing. Steve had given up hope of anything more than stolen nights and half conversations with him for this. For this chance. If he couldn’t have a life of loving him, then Steve was going to have a life of fighting with him. (Maybe, maybe, that’s where Steve started to confuse confrontation with affection, but he wouldn’t be ready to face that thought for a decade or two.) Freddie was not going to ring out and ruin it all. No way.

Joe showed up. Saw through them. Saw pity. Sent them on their way.

Steve yelled at Freddie. Something about his dad, something about how proud he was, and he knew Freddie knew Steve was saying all those things and thinking about his own father.

But they were soaked to the bone, and Freddie hadn’t said another word on their bear crawl back to the bunks. Steve thought maybe he had overstepped, or pushed too hard, or… something.

They paused at the door, Freddie acting like he wanted to say something. Steve reached out for his hand. Freddie jumped away like he had been shocked and said nothing.

Steve would never forget the look of disgust on Freddie’s face.

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2010 -- Age 34

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Danny was covered in rubble. There was an explosion, and he didn’t know how stable the building was, but Danny was covered in rubble and that was his priority. He could see his hand rise out of the bricks and mortar.

“Danny?”

“Steve!” he called out. “Steve!”

“Danny! Danny!”

Danny reached out and Steve did the only thing he could in that situation. He reached out, too, and grasped his hand. He was alive. That’s what mattered.

Danny groaned.

“Hey, I got you, buddy. I’m right here. I got you.”

Steve started lifting heavy bits of concrete, thankful he’d gone up a weight level in his lift workout. He got Danny out from under the rubble. Danny, who had claustrophobia, and anxiety, and was caught in a small space under a collapsed building. He walked Danny through the situation quickly, all while holding his hand. Danny was listing off baseball lineups like a loon and Steve chuckled. Their grips were tight and desperate.

He was relying on his training to keep him calm; seeing his partner like this wasn’t good for his mental state. He always lost control when it was Danny in trouble – but there was no one else, and he was alive. He had things to do. Things to focus on.

He had to be strong.

“I gotta get this thing off your leg, okay?” He had found a bar, had half an idea, hoped basic physics
were on his side today, and hoped for the best. He returned to Danny with an optimistic grin.

“Where’ve you been? I had to move on to the ’92 line up. That… that was a tough year.”

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1992 -- Age 16

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Steve crossed his arms while he watched the weather report in the mess hall. It wasn’t a hurricane anymore, but it was a strong enough storm that the Navy had moved it’s ships out to sea to get out of its way, but there was a problem. The storm had shifted. The whole fleet was now in its path. A small maintenance boat had already sunk, and several men had died.

All the boys were crowded around the television, watching the news, waiting on any kind of update about the situation. They were talking about flooding, and water rescues, and where to go if you needed to evacuate, but every boy in that hall was waiting.

One of the older boys got word what ship it was that sank. Another one of the boys gasped and asked again, for clarification.

“The Sandpiper,” the older boy said again. “Captain just confirmed it.”

“…my brother’s on The Sandpiper…” the other boy said, quietly, in shock. Everyone gathered around him, giving him support.

“Maybe he was one of the ones that got out?” someone asked. “They said the were looking for survivors.”

“Don’t be stupid,” Henry Boren said. “They got smacked in the side by a destroyer. They’re all gone for.”

“Shut up,” said Steve. He was sixteen, and a sophomore, but the older boys all looked at him and nodded.

The boy who lost his brother found him a few days later, just before he was to take leave for his brother’s funeral, just as Steve was walking away from PT.

“Steve, right?” he asked, taking off his cap and stuffed it under his arm in the fashion the college men do. He was a senior named Vincent. Steve knew because he was chasing a few names up the marksmen’s leaderboard, and Vincent’s was one of them.

“Uh, yeah,” Steve said. “I’m sorry. About your brother.”

Vincent shrugged, looking down. “I wanted to thank you.”

“For what?”

“Speaking up the other day.”

It was Steve’s turn to shrug. “Henry’s an ass to everyone.”

“Well, you didn’t have to, but ya’ did. It meant something to me, in the moment.” Steve watched as his eyes watered. Then he held out a hand.
Steve took it firmly, shaking it. “I don’t think I did anything special, but. I’m glad.”

Vincent gave him a sad grin and reached for his hat, only to have it fall and hit the dirt. They both kneeled for it instantly, and while crouched, looked up at each other in amusement. Then Vincent’s eyes darted to Steve’s mouth, and Steve felt a pinprick of… something. Something that made him think about silver moonlight. Vincent’s eyes went wide and the moment was over.

Steve was still gathering himself as Vincent said his goodbyes, reaching for Steve’s hand again.

They stood there, shaking hands, realizing that the moment wasn’t over, and was instead lingering. They were shaking hands too long. Vincent’s thumb kinda… ran over the back of Steve’s thumb. Innocuous, but not after the moment they just had. Steve’s eyes went wide, and in a moment of bravery, returned the action.

Vincent’s grip tightened. Steve’s understanding hit him, just like before on that bus after that football game. Understanding and excitement and dread and fear and self-hatred. It was a mess of emotions he had no hope of unraveling at sixteen. The onslaught, the implication that he— that they— that he…

Someone called out for Steve, and he turned, dropping Vincent’s hand. Vincent took the break in eyeline to put on his hat.

“It was good to know you, Steve,” he said.

“You’ll be back for spring semester, right?”

He shook his head. “After everything… I think I’m gonna stay close to home for awhile.”

“Right,” Steve said. Then Vincent turned to leave with a sad grin and a nod.

Wind blew through Steve’s hair, and for a moment he swore he was rocking. He wouldn’t hold another boy’s hand, and have it mean something like that… not for a very long time. Not with Freddie, not with Jake, not with anyone.

And then he met Danny.

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November – 2014

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Danny held his hand on the way to the hospital after his ordeal with Wo Fat. He wasn’t himself, he wasn’t in control of himself, but Danny’s hand? Danny’s hand was the first thing that brought him back to the world. A rock he could steady himself on.

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New Year’s Eve – 2016

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Grace was buzzing. The train was rocking gently as they made their way back to Eddie’s car. They had parked in Queens and took trains to Times Square, and now they were doing the trip in reverse, ready to go home.
Nahele was dead tired, and Grace was too, even if her adrenaline was lasting a little longer than his. Steve had made sure they got the only two open seats he could find. They were safer there, with Steve and Danny holding onto the pole in front of them, surrounding them.

Danny had kissed him. Danny was looking up at him with a playful grin. Danny had kissed him. They had kissed. This was happening. This was the moment.

He slid his hand down the pole so his pinky could slide over the back of Danny’s hand, and Steve watched and felt as Danny’s smile grew and he pushed above Steve’s pinky, slotting into place.

Grace smacked Nahele repeatedly, knocking Nahele out of a comfortable doze. She was excited, and she and Danny shared some sweet smiles, and Danny rolled his eyes. But he didn’t move his fingers and they played with Steve’s.

Later, Danny would reach out and steal Steve’s hand from the wheel. The kids had fallen asleep almost as soon as they were on the road. Steve let his hand go, pliant and happy, thinking they’d get to let their fingers play with each other on the way home.

But Danny lifted it towards his face and kissed knuckle. Then the next knuckle. Then the next.

Steve was breathless.

The silver of the moonlight never looked so beautiful as it did silhouetting around Danny’s face.

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Steve – present day

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So it happened. The judge said it and everything. Jack was theirs. Steve took photos, and then Kono took photos, and Stella took photos, and Danny’s mom cried.

He was a dad.

Danny was taking it a bit better than he was. Steve was a ball of excitement and nerves. Danny seemed calm and sure and the moment Jack started screaming for his nap, a few hours overdue, he smiled, clapped in Jack’s direction, and said, “Come on, Danno time.”

They’d been laying down for an hour and the party was going on without them. This was Jack’s day! Steve felt a little bit about how the person of honor wasn’t present, but naptime was naptime and Jack lived for naptime.

“Still sleeping, huh?” Mary asked, walking up with a cupcake in hand.

“Yeah, he sleeps about an hour every afternoon, like clockwork. Daisy says he sleeps the whole time in the car when she’s gone picking up Charlie at daycare and then sleeps in his carrier another half hour before he’s up and a happy baby again. That’s pretty much Danny’s and my observation too, but today we disrupted his schedule.”

“Well, I’m really proud of you,” she told him. “I don’t know if I’ve said that yet.”

Steve smiled. He was proud, too. But hearing it from family… from his sister? The woman who questioned his every choice and judged his every move and had opinions about every little thing in his life? That was something. A puzzle piece clicked. One he didn’t know was missing. How cool.
“And it’s cool. About his name, I mean.”

“What about his name? His birth mother gave him his name.”

Mary looked up at him like he had lost it. “Oh come on, you haven’t realized?

“What?”

“I have a daughter named Joan, and you have a son named Jack.”

Steve drew a blank. “Yes. And?”

“Some people called daddy ‘Jack.’” It was like ice water ran down his back. “We both have a kid with a version of daddy’s name. I think it’s cool.”

...

“Steve?”

“Yeah,” he turned to her quickly. “No, I didn’t realize…”

She smiled coyly at him. “Only you would have a father named ‘John,’ adopt a boy named ‘Jack,’ and not make the connection.”

He chuckled, deep and low. “I don’t know if you’ve noticed, but us McGarretts aren’t exactly the most well-adjusted people in the world.”

“Oh, trust me. I know,” she said, taking a bit of cupcake icing with her finger and licking it. “Daddy was the same way, I think. Never knowing our grandfather… needing to live up to this huge, important thing, and not knowing what he thought, or who he was.”

She had grown so much. Did he miss it? How did he miss it? Sure, she was halfway around the world, but she sent him a weekly Joan update full of stories and pictures… maybe motherhood had changed her. Maybe this new career had. Maybe it was mom coming back from the dead or dad dying or a hundred other things that had made Steve grow up too.

“We’ve got to stop that tradition, you know,” she said, swallowing some cupcake.

He pulled her into a hug just so she wouldn’t see his eyes watering. “You’re right.”

“And we’ll help each other do that, right?”

“Oh, you’d get me even if you didn’t want me.”

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A few people stayed until it got dark. Kono and Adam had taken a moment to be alone in the kitchen, cleaning plates they didn’t have to clean. Chin and Abby and a few others were sitting on the lanai and laughing. The Governor had made a quick stop, long enough to say hello and bounce a cute, grinning baby, and to say congratulations. Danny’s family was impressed, and Denning made sure to talk to Eddie, though Steve was unsure about what he said. Hopefully good things.

Speaking of Danny’s family, Stella and Abigail bowed out just as it got dark, claiming they needed sister time. Which Danny informed him meant they were going to go get drunk at some club. Abigail’s husband – also named Jake – trailed along like a good little designated driver, rolling his eyes at the women’s excitement, but leaving with grin all his own.
Eric and Daisy were in charge of Zach and Tyler. Abigail’s young twin sons, both around six and both with bright blond hair that matched their mother’s, Danny’s, and Charlie’s. They were wild and crazy smart and Charlie was having trouble keeping up. Joan, however, had them wrapped around her finger by the end of the night.

“Fetch me a Capri-sun,” she’d order. They’d fight for the right to be the one to hand it to her, like they were knights and she was their queen. Steve supposed they could be playing knights, though no swords had ever come out.

Charlie had pouted. His cousins – two boys he barely knew – had stolen the attention of his friend. Steve was busy changing a diaper, but watched out of the living room window as Danny knelt down to see what was wrong.

“They made him the wizard,” Danny told him later. “They wanted him to play along too, but he thought they made him the ‘wizzer.’ He didn’t want to have to pee in front of everyone.”

Steve was lost in laughter for a good few minutes. “Well, at least he has manners.”

But slowly and surely everyone left in good spirits. Chin and Abby disappeared without saying goodbye, which – good for them. Danny’s parents left after extra hugs and kisses for their newest grandchild, pinching Danny’s cheek and saying they’d talk more on Saturday and at their party on Sunday. So many of Danny and Steve’s friends had shown up – people they never would have expected. Other officials in other organizations they’d worked with, lots of uniformed cops stopped in and out between shifts. Steve saw that Stan had offered to walk Ellie to her car, and lifted an eyebrow at that. That was going to be fun, now wasn’t it? He sure hoped Ellie knew what she was getting into. Daisy had to break up a game of soccer to go home (Eric verses three five and six year old Williams boys, but not before Danny was sure to get several minutes of video.)

In the end, they didn’t have enough cupcakes. Max, instead, left them with three boxes full of quickly store bought chocolate chip cookies. Danny stacked them up in the kitchen, saving them for Sunday. Grace and Nahele were going around the backyard, picking up trash and breaking down card tables. They’d pull them back out for Sunday, so they just stacked them on the lanai and called it good.

Charlie had passed out curled up on the couch. Steve smiled, sitting on the coffee table to push the hair out of his face. Only a few months ago, this kid was just in his peripherals. Grace’s little brother. Important, sure, but not loved. Not like this. He leaned forward to kiss his head, gently so as not to wake him up. He sat back, and pushed up on his knees to stand and grimaced as the stitches on his leg pulled a little.

Then he was caught. Danny had been watching him from the kitchen doorway. He had a soft smile on his face and a dish towel in his hands. He turned back into the kitchen, throwing the towel behind him, and then made his way towards Steve.

Steve opened his arms as Danny moved into his space. Danny snaked his hands around Steve’s middle and Steve felt and heard a kiss, just below his collar bone, right at Danny’s height. He smiled and closed his eyes, memorizing the moment. Danny pushed at him, just enough that he turned so they could both look at Charlie, arms around each other. Steve rested his head on Danny’s and they just enjoyed the moment.

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Grace was in the shower – she had gotten in the water and waded around with a bunch of other people at one point in the party – and was singing. Some top forty song about moonlight, if Steve
was hearing her correctly. He grinned as he carried Charlie in his arms. Danny still had a lift limitation as per his physical therapist. (Danny would surprise him, a week from now, after an awards ceremony, with a weekend of PT-cleared *vigorous activity*, but for now Steve was happy to lug around a sleepy five year old.) Danny padded around behind him.

Nahele’s door was open, just enough that Steve could glance in to see that he was sitting at the computer. He’d stop by after they got Charlie into pajamas and into his covers.

Jack – his son! His baby! His! – was sleeping soundly in his crib, laying on his back legs and arms spread wide and looking like a starfish. His fingers were open, and relaxed. Mrs. Whittaker told him that babies only let their hands relax when they felt comfortable and safe. Steve watched as Danny peered down over the railing.

Holy shit, Danny adopted a kid with him.

Danny – Mr. “I’d-die-for-my-kids” – trusted him, loved him enough to adopt a child with him. Steve had seen the lengths Danny went to for his kids. He threatened, shot Stan, punched, bled, killed, went under the knife… all for his children. He ran the tips of his fingers down the side of Jack’s face and shook his head. Then he looked up to Steve with a contented smile.

Holy shit.

Steve took a deep breath, rubbing Charlie’s back, deciding to focus on getting the child into his pull ups.

“Ung,” Charlie groaned, pushing his face into Steve’s shoulder.

“Pull up time, buddy,” Danny said.

“No,” he groaned. “’ma big boy.”

Danny chuckled and rubbed his back too. “Do you wanna try to go without one tonight?”

Charlie nodded against Steve’s shoulder.

“Okay. A good, big brother try, huh?”

Charlie smiled and nodded again. So they helped him out of his play clothes, and let him skip brushing his teeth, just this once. He was so out of it.

“’Ve got lotsa fam-ly,” Charlie told them, rubbing his eye.

“Yeah, a brand new little brother,” Steve said, pulling his covers back so he could climb in.

“Yeah,” Charlie said, “but more than b’fore.”

“Before what, buddy?” Danny asked, kneeling – Steve was happy to see physical therapy was doing its job.

“I don know,” Charlie answered. “Jus b’fore.” He rolled over and snuggled into his pillow. “B’fore Danno.” And then he was out.

It was Danny’s turn to lean forward and kiss his forehead. He sat there, staring at him for a moment longer. Steve watched. It was his favorite view; watching Danny love his kids.

Then he pushed back. “Night, buddy,” he said softly.
They stood, but Steve wasn’t done. We walked over to Jack’s crib and rested his elbows on the railing, and rested his temples in his hands. He was a dad. He was a whole other person that Steve was responsible for. A little person. How crazy.

“Has it hit you, yet?” Danny asked, leaning around his shoulder.

“Has what hit me?”

Danny didn’t answer, only moved to kiss his bicep. “Let’s go to bed.”

“Mmm,” Steve responded. “I’ll be few more minutes.”

Danny smiled and looked down to Jack. “Then I’ll wait.”

They watched their son (their son) sleep, losing track of how long. Danny’s hands were running up and down his back, and Steve had let his hands fall into the crib, and rested his head on Danny’s.

Their son.

Together. Holy shit.

By the time the could pull themselves away, Steve was dragging his feet leaving the boy’s room. Danny had a hand in his, pulling him along.

“We’ve got all day tomorrow, Steve,” Danny told him. They did, they had a whole day planned with Danny’s family. A water park, an aquarium, maybe a guided tour through the valley if the weather stood up, something about a dinner on a boat. Eddie had put it all together in an attempt to impress his wife.

Danny said it was working.

Steve pulled Danny back from leading the way and into his arms. “Kiss me,” he begged. Danny complied.

“Come to bed,” Danny said, humming into his mouth.

“In a minute,” Steve said, stealing another kiss.

“You’re supposed to have maximum sleep, honey,” Danny said, stern. “Gotta take care of that head.”

Steve rolled his eyes. “I went to bed early last night, slept late this morning, and took a nap before court. I’m feeling good.”

Another kiss, this one a bit wet, with a little bit of heat behind it. But Danny pulled away. “You gotta take care of yourself now.”

Steve blinked. There it was again. Half a thought he didn’t quite understand… but Danny had a point. He was a father now.

“I’m going to check on Nahele, first,” Steve said. “Go get the sheets warm for me, huh?” Danny smiled.

They turned the slight corner to find Grace had finished her shower, lights off, and Nahele’s door closed. Steve stared at it, a little sad. He had wanted to check on him, see how he was doing after today. After watching Steve adopt another child. His light was still on, though. So he walked over,
ready to knock, when the light switched off. Steve’s whole mood fell.

Nahele was his, too. Maybe not in law, but in heart. He rested his hand on Nahele’s door, longing to barge in anyway but… respect his space. That’s what all the literature told them about older foster children, right? Their emotions, their space, their boundaries… they had a right to them, and deserved them a little more consideration than the average child.

He pulled away sadly, and made his way downstairs.

He scratched at his head, grimaced when he hit the bump on his head. Can’t be jumping into knife fights anymore. Not if he could help it. Not so near a cliff. No jumping over fences without knowing what was on the other side. He had to be better.

Then he paused, mid-step.

His life had a bit of worth it hadn’t before. Meaning. He breathed deep through his nose. Sure, he had friends and ‘Ohana and Mary. Sure, he had an impressive service record, full of rescues and taking murderers off the street and arms dealers out of the global equation. All that had value. All that was important.

But a whole life was depending on him. Depending on him for everything… for food, shelter, help with homework, and kisses on skinned knees, and learning how to shave, how to throw a football. All the things dads were expected to do.

…and all the things they weren’t. Like teach him that it’s okay to cry, okay to feel, okay to love. Something Steve had to learn on his own. He wiped at his eyes. Things like talking about their emotions, and being open, and all those things Steve wasn’t very good at. He had to lead by example; he had to get over his own shit.

Holy shit, this was going to be hard.

He walked into their bedroom still wiping at his eyes. Danny was in the bathroom, brushing his teeth when he noticed him. He stopped, spit, and wiped at his mouth; his attention was needed elsewhere.

“Did it hit?” Danny asked.

Steve nodded, unable to speak.

Danny moved forward, threw his arms around Steve’s neck, and pulled him in.

Steve rested his face on Danny’s shoulder and sobbed a few times before standing back up and righting himself.

“I didn’t realize…” he said. “How much of myself I’ve got to deal with to raise him.”

Danny smiled and nodded. “Yeaaaah. I always ask myself if I’m letting myself get in the way. If I’m putting my needs and wants first. You gotta put your mask on first, but trust me, you will lose that instinct. I’m constantly thinking about finding that balance.”

“This is kind of why…” Steve started. “I didn’t realize how deep… but this is kinda why I was so scared to be with you after New Years.”

Danny nodded. “I know.”
“How did you know?”

“Because you’ve been a dad for awhile now,” Danny told him. “The moment you decided to let Nahele into your life, you started to change. I saw it, even then. Trust me, I have a thing for hot dads,” he winked.

Steve smirked. “That’s why we finally got over ourselves? Because I became a dad?”

Danny acted like he was mulling it over, rolling his head side to side. “Maybe.”

Steve pulled him close by the hips. “So, you’re turned on by sleep deprivation and spit up stains?”

“Oh, yeah,” Danny played along. “It really gets me going.”

Steve snorted and started laughing. Danny joined him and leaned into the embrace, pulling his arms down around his neck so his hands rested on the sides of Steve’s face.

“Now, and I’m going to be honest with you. You hurt him on purpose, I’ll kill you,” he said, serious as Steve had ever seen him. “And I expect the same treatment.”

That was a loaded statement. The weight of it settled on his shoulders. He finally understood when Danny said that Steve ‘paled in comparison’ to his kids. Steve had heard him say it several times, to Kono, to Grace, even to him.

He understood.

He nodded. “Yeah. Yeah, okay.”

Danny looked convinced. “Good. I think that’s one of the reasons Rachel and I fight as hard as we do.”

Steve grinned. “I’ll fight you.”

Danny grinned too. “I’ve been doing it for eight years already, bring it.”

Steve took the challenge and leaned down and kissed him, just because he could.

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Danny – 1998 -- Age 20

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When Eric was six, Danny had a fist fight with his nineteen year old father. How hard was it to show up on Halloween and take your kid trick or treating? Instead, Hank showed up three hours late, smelling like alcohol, no telling where he’d been. Danny put his foot down on the front porch of his parent’s house, not asking permission from his father or from Stella, and refused to let him inside.

“He’s my kid, Dan!” He hated when Hank called him that. “Not yours.”

It was supposed to be a cut at how close he and Stella were, and how much Danny took care of the boy, and he knew it, but he didn’t care. He loved his nephew and Hank needed to go home and sleep it off.

“You’ve got a funny way of showing it,” Danny told him.
"Just let me see him."

"You had your shot, three hours ago. And from the smell of it a couple 40s ago."

"Shut up, I’m not drunk."

"You drove here, I should call the police."

"Do it and Stella will never talk to you again."

"Let’s do it!" Danny said crossing his arms. "See who she cares about more?"

So Hank punched him. Danny pulled back from that punch with a sour jaw and the smirk on Hank’s face made him see red. The ensuing fight was loud enough that the adults inside heard and made their way outside. Danny knocked over one of the tall light posts in the flower bed, and it hit the front walk with a crash, shattering it’s bulb. Hank went down screaming slurs at Danny, and if Danny had seen red before, the color he was seeing was so crimson it might as well be blood.

It took both his father and Nick to drag Danny off of Hank. His father drove Hank to the clinic where he got six stitches on his face and Eddie convinced Hank not to press charges.

Stella didn’t talk to him until Thanksgiving, but Danny felt like it was worth it. Of course that was until Hank left for three years. Between the fight with Danny, and whatever it was Eddie had said to the man, Hank thought leaving was the best option. No one realized for awhile, either. Stella was angry, and Eric was upset, and Hank was missing, but everyone just thought he was making himself scarce to avoid Danny. They didn’t realize until he didn’t show up for Thanksgiving and Stella called his home, only to be told he was living in Vegas.

He regretted his actions then. He wanted Hank to be a better father, not an absent one. He was young and reckless. He had no way of predicting what would happen.

Looking back, too, that was the beginning of the end with Nick. Something about Danny’s protectiveness was read as violence, and Nick did have a point. Danny carried an anger there wasn’t much an excuse for. Nick and his sister had a history with violence. It only made sense Nick would come away from that incident worried. In almost two years of dating, it was a side to Danny he had never seen.

Of course Danny wouldn’t know what Nick was feeling for awhile yet. He was kind of distracted with things that weren’t Nick, like Stella and Eric, like Matty graduating early, like an early chance at a career grab with the police academy. Not to mention he began taking the man for granted, that he’d always be there, someone to go home to, to escape with. Looking back...

...Danny should have known it wouldn’t be that simple.

~~~

Danny sat back from watching the game as he heard the locks on the front door open. He looked up the to clock; it was almost two am. He turned and watched as Nick opened the door and pulled his key out of the lock.

"It’s two am," Danny greeted. Then he grinned, "You seein’ someone?"

Nick paused, heavy bookbag hanging off his shoulder. "Oh, haha."

Danny smiled that his joke came across and sat forward. "This is the third night the week you’ve
been out ‘til late.”

“Yeah,” he said, dropping off his bag. “Did Gino get to sleep?”

Danny motioned towards the hallway, “Gino’s fine. We had spaghetti. He misses you.”

“It’s only three more weeks,” Nick said, flopping down on the couch. “Thank you for watching him tonight. Becca had to work last minute.”

He reached out for Danny’s hand, and Danny took it with a grin. “Studying for your LSATs takes dedication. And a village. You’re going to be an incredible lawyer. Blow ‘em all out the water. I am happy to babysit so that can happen.”

Nick smiled, and leaned over to be face to face with Danny, “Thank you. You’re so supportive.”

Danny smiled, and pushed forward to steal a kiss. One Nick returned happily, and before they knew it, one kiss turned into Nick on Danny’s lap. He needed to blow off some steam, and Danny was happy to help with that too.

“But not supportive enough for California?” Nick asked.

“Here we go,” Danny sighed, pulling away. “I can’t leave my family.”

“They’d just be a plane ride away…”

“I don’t see myself living anywhere but New Jersey, Nick. Really.”

“Not even with me?”

Danny opened his mouth… but he didn’t know how to respond. How could he respond when he knew it would just cause a fight.

“Uncle Danny?” came a groggy call from the hallway, thankfully interrupting them. Then Gino saw that Nick was home and lit up. “Nick!”

“Hey buddy,” Nick greeted. “What’s going on?”

“That lights comin’ through the windo’ again,” he groaned.

Nick sat back, throwing his head back, “Shit! The curtains! I knew I forgot something today.”

“You said a swear word.”

Nick lifted his head, “Oops. I did.”

Danny laughed and shook his head. How often did he get on to Danny about his mouth? The hypocrite. He watched as Nick rubbed at his eyes and looked exhausted. Time to act.

“Come on bud,” Danny said, standing up. “I’m going to show you how to put a blanket on a wall.”

“Why would a wall need a blanket?”

“Oh, you’ll see.”

~ ~ ~
“Those detectives came by the Felicity again,” Danny said stirring dinner, on a rare night Nick chose to study at their apartment. “They asked again.”

“Well,” Nick said, not looking up from his books, “you know how I feel about it.”

“And how are you going to feel in five years when I go after my detective’s shield?”

Nick didn’t move his focus, “You know how I feel about that, too.”

“It’s going to happen, Nick.”

He finally looked away from his books. “And what about that job Becca was talking about?”

“I don’t want be a teacher, power to your sister’s career – we should totally support teachers better – but that’s not a career I want,” Danny groaned, absently stirring, free hand waving wildly as he talked. “I’ve wanted to be a cop since I was Gino’s age!”

“But you love economics!”

“I minored in economics just so I could keep up whenever Stella and Matty talked about finances and the stock market.” He didn’t understand how they ever found it interesting enough to make it small talk, but once he started studying, and understanding, things made more sense, and he was actually able to contribute to the conversation from time to time. “Besides, most of detective work now-a-days is following paper trails. My minor will help me understand those things once I get there.”

Nick huffed and rolled his eyes, but said nothing, focusing back on his books.

“I’ve been thinking I want to focus on organized crime,” Danny said, mostly to get the thought out into the world.

“Oh, for the love of—” Nick said, throwing his pencil down into his book. “You’re only interested in organized crime because of what’s happening at The Felicity.”

“So?”

“So!” Nick mocked. He stood up and moved to stand on the other side of the kitchen, facing Danny. “You shouldn’t base your career on a couple of cops that gave you the time of day.”

“That’s not what I’m doing!”

“Then give me another reason you want to be cop, other than it’s what you’ve always wanted to do!”

“I want to help people!”

“Then volunteer.”

“I want to put away bad guys!”

“Then be a lawyer.”

“Oh, yeah, great. No thank you.”

“What’s that supposed to mean?”
“Nothing.”

“No, that tone says a lot.”

“Then I guess I don’t need to say anything else.”

“Danny…”

“Lawyers sit in high rises and charge hundreds of dollars an hour to do a job that’s too complicated for the average citizen to manage. And they want it that way. I want to help people, Nick, because it’s the right thing to do, not because I’ll make bank.”

“That’s low. Cops are just as awful! Bending the law to fit narratives that fit into a nice story that makes them a knight in shining armor.”

“…I want to actually be a member of my community.”

“Then be a teacher!”

Danny shook his head, trying to clear away some anger.

“Don’t judge me for going after a career with money. You know my history! You know how hard it was for me and Becca! We have worked hard to make sure Gino didn’t live in a van like we did. So, sorry, if I don’t want my children worrying about money!”

“I don’t want them to either! But I also don’t want them scared of what goes bump in the night!”

“You’re not Batman, Danny. You’re kind, and you’re sweet, and you love your family, you’re honest, and good, and you’re so good! You’re not the right kind of person to be a cop!”

“Oh, right, because a cop has to be mean and angry and mad at everyone and out for themselves at all times, that’s great, let’s put more of those types on the street. Maybe I want to be a cop to fight the stereotype!”

“Why? What in your past makes you want to do that?”

“Why does it have to come from some trauma or important moment? Why can’t it just be answering a call to duty!”

“Oh, now you sound like a soldier.”

“…and if I enlisted?” Danny said. “That’s an option I’ve considered for awhile.”

“Where did that come from?”

Danny shrugged, defensive. “I don’t know. I’d rather be a cop. I just know I want to serve. I want to be the guy that people turn to when they are in trouble! Someone people can trust and count on!”

Nick stared at him, suddenly quiet. Danny watched as he took a deep breath, closed his eyes, and sighed. Like he was gearing up for something, like he was holding something back until just this moment, gathering up the courage to say something. Danny braced himself.

“Please don’t be a cop.”

Danny’s heart fell. That’s what he was waiting on. For months now, years, probably.
“I already said yes to the detectives. They said they’d recommend me and put in a good word for me if it all goes well.”

“You said yes,” Nick said, unbelieving.

“Yes.”

“Without talking to me.”

“I’ve been talking to you about this since they came to me a week ago.” Danny dropped an octave, and lowered his voice, and slowed his cadence. He was mad, and he was done. “I’m sorry if you’ve been too busy studying to notice you’re not the only one chasing a dream.”

Nick stared at him for a moment, two moments, before he blinked and turned back to his books. He started closing them, and packing his bag.

“What are you doing?”

“I can’t be here.”

“Where are you going?”

“The library.”

“What about dinner?”

“I’ll pick something up on the way there.”

Danny sputtered, sitting in a pool of anger, watching Nick pack his books and walk out the door without a word.

They were together for a few more weeks, barely made it past the new year, and long enough for Danny to get his foot in the door with the NJPD and for Nick to pass his LSATs, but the sound the door made when it slammed behind him signaled the end of them.

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Danny – present day

~~~

“Come on, Danno!” Steve called out from the living room. “Cab’s here!”

Danny was busy putting the finishing touches on his hair. Steve had surprised him with reservations to a fancy place downtown. It was a nice place Danny had been to once with Gabby back in the day, but hadn’t been back since. He remembered it being a bit expensive for a single cop’s budget – a single cop who was having trouble keeping a roof over his head at the time. Steve wanted to celebrate – just the two of them. They’d had several botched attempts at dates so Danny wasn’t going to complain. In fact, he couldn’t complain, not to anyone besides Steve.

Their week long getaway ended up being a lot of work that left Danny tired and sore at the end of every day. He owed him a date, and it was nice to see that he was still trying to make it something special.

“I’m coming!” Danny called back, switching off the light.
“You guys look fancy,” Nahele said, apple in hand and standing in the kitchen doorway.

“Yeah?” Steve asked, throwing out his arms. A button up and a blazer and he was good to go. Danny felt like it was getting too warm for a jacket and had opted out. But looking how good Steve looked… he was debating going back into their room and changing.

“Yeah,” Nahele said, taking a bite of his apple.

Then Steve turned to Danny, eyes scanning up and down. Then he narrowed his eyes. “Oh, no. I know that look,” Steve said, pointing at him. “You look gorgeous, you don’t need to change.”

“This place is super fancy, Steve.”

He reached out and grabbed Danny’s arm and pulled him towards the door. “And you’ll blow them all away.”

Danny smiled at the ridiculous compliment. “Sap.”

Steve smiled, reaching for the doorknob, but not before pulling Danny close to kiss the side of his face. Danny turned his head and snuck a quick kiss Steve was more than happy to give.

“So why a fancy place?” Danny asked once they were in the back of the cab and on the road. “And why so last minute?”

Steve shrugged. “We’re dads. Like. Together. We should do something special.”

Danny grinned. He already had something planned for the next weekend. They had a medal ceremony for taking out the pirate operation, but Danny had plans. The Whitakers were lined up to watch Jack and Nahele, Rachel was more than happy to take Grace and Charlie for the weekend. Danny had a whole weekend with Steve, alone, off work, just the two of them and a box of condoms. He grinned, studying Steve’s profile. He didn’t even know.

“So a fancy restaurant?”

“What’s wrong with fancy?”

“It’s not really… you.”

Steve made a face. Then he made another, more outraged face. “You’ve never dated me before.”

“No,” Danny agreed. “But I watched you date Catherine. Besides that one time with the suit and picking her up and everything… yeah… this isn’t really you.”

Steve rolled his eyes. “I can’t do something nice?”
“Of course you can,” Danny said, reaching out for Steve’s ear, rubbing his earlobe between his fingers and resting his arm on Steve’s shoulder. Steve grinned. “But you don’t have to, you know that, right?”

Steve turned to him and smiled again. “I know.”

~

But, of course, Steve had an ulterior motive. As soon as Steve said “McGarrett for four” he knew what this was. This was an ambush. This was his control issues rearing its ugly head and coming out to bite Danny in the ass.

“The rest of your party is already here,” the hostess said with a smile.

Danny hated him in that moment. Okay, hated was a strong word; annoyed with him, then. Thoughts about canceling their weekend alone was at the front of his mind, just as punishment. Following the hostess around a corner, he saw them. Danny knew exactly what this was. Mike raised his hand, waving at Steve. Steve, the asshole, waved back, and turned to wait on Danny. Danny had paused in the middle of the restaurant, wondering if he could make a break for it. Nick was wearing a face that made Danny figure he was in the same boat. A secret ambush.

Steve gave him a ‘come on, you’ll be fine’ face and reached out to put his hand on Danny’s back, leading him to the table. The hostess smiled and wished them a nice evening.

“I didn’t know this was going to happen,” Nick said immediately, giving his husband a dirty look.

“Neither did I,” Danny said with a bit of a growl towards Steve.

Steve, feigning innocence with his wide eyes, pulled out his chair for him. Jerk.

Danny sat down with a huff. “Because dinner the other day went so well,” Danny said sarcastically.

“You guys obviously have things you need to say to each other,” Mike said. “So I called Steve, told him what he missed, and we set this up. You guys deserve to leave things on a good note. Finally.”

Danny watched as Nick sighed.

“But in this nice of a place, Mick?”

Mike shrugged. “This was on your list of places we just had to eat at this week. I thought that might soothe your feathers.” Then he turned to Steve and pointed at his own head. “Can I ask… what happened?”

“Oh,” Steve started and waved his hand near the cut on his forehead. “Just chasing a bad guy.”

“He jumped off a cliff.”

“There was a ledge!”

“You didn’t know that.”

“I was concussed!”

“All the more reason not to jump over a fence next to a cliff.”

Steve rolled his eyes and made a big show about opening his menu. Danny rolled his eyes back. He
was still a little miffed with him for setting this whole thing up, and he wasn’t about to let him win the jumping over a cliff argument.

“So, you two had an eventful day,” Mike said.

“A couple eventful days,” Danny said. “The adoption actually went through. We’ve got a baby!”

“Congratulations,” Nick said. “We know how hard adopting can be. How long have you been trying?”

“Since the New Year,” Steve answered. “But we’ve had his birth mother’s approval, so things went a little faster than normal.”

“Lucky you,” Nick said. “It took three years to get Nina.”

“Oof,” Steve sympathized. “I’d have waited a decade if I had to. Longer, even.”

Nick and Mike both smiled, and Danny reached out to squeeze Steve’s hand, but he dropped it just as quick. He still wasn’t used to casual PDA in crowded places full of people he didn’t know. Danny sighed.

“So,” Nick started, leaning forward on the table and linking his fingers in front of him, “what are we supposed to do? Air our grievances?”

“Yell at each other some more?” Danny offered.

“How about you try to find some closure,” Mike said firmly.

“What closure, babe? We didn’t work out, the end.”

“We were young,” Danny said softly.

“That’s your excuse?”

Danny shrugged. “What’s yours?”

“Excuse me?”

They were then interrupted by the waiter coming up to the table with a wide smile. “Good evening, everyone. I’m Tyler. I’ll be your waiter this evening, how’s everyone doing?”

“Great,” Danny said.

“Wonderful,” Nick said, sarcastically.

“Good, good,” Tyler said, looking between them like he didn’t believe them. “Can I get you all some drinks?”

“I’ll take a martini,” Nick said with a smile, and then a dirty look towards Mike.

“Same,” Mike said after a brief moment.

“The cheapest red wine ya got,” Steve answered, setting his menu down.

Danny shook his head. Cheapskate.

Steve immediately pointed to Danny, “Don’t start.”
Danny chuckled, then turned up to the waiter, “I’ll have wine, too.”

“All right,” Tyler said. “I’ll be right back. You all have any questions about the menu?”

They all shook their heads and then the waiter left them in a severe awkward silence.

Danny turned to Steve, “You still owe me a real date.”

“This is a double date!” Steve said, hand motioning to the table.

“A real date, just the two of us. Not this stupid idea.”

“I don’t think it’s stupid, and what about our week vacation?”

“That was not a vacation! That was a work trip!”

Steve pulled a face and shook his head. “That was not a work trip.”

“We worked every single day!”

“Work trip implies it had something to do with our job. It did not. Therefore, vacation.”

“I have never been so tired from a vacation, ever. I want a real date.”

“What about a few weeks ago at the Wailina?”

Danny huffed. “That was interrupted by gunmen and you doing kung-fu. Not a date.”

It was Steve turn to huff.

“You two have never been on a date?” Mike asked.

“Nope,” Danny said, matter of factly.

“And you adopted a child together?” Nick asked, eyebrows raised.

Danny stared at him for a minute, digesting that. “Okay, I know how it sounds. But we’ve known each other for years.” He had said this before, but it was worth stressing.

“We’ve been on plenty of dates.”

“Just not since we’ve been together,” Danny said, throwing his head back and throwing his hands up. Then he turned back to his menu. “I’m getting steak. You’re paying for it.”

“We have a shared bank account, Danny.”

Danny stalled. That was true. “Whatever.”

Nick and Mike were watching their back and forth with wide eyes. Danny studiously ignored them; he knew Steve was biting his cheek to keep the argument from continuing. Thank god the waiter chose this moment to come back with their drinks. They went through the process of ordering food and handing over their menus.

Danny tapped his fingers against the stem of his wine glass for a moment and noticed Nick watching him. That was always a tick of Danny’s that drove Nick crazy. They shared a look for a moment
“So, doc,” Nick started, turning to Mike. “What do we do now?”

“You’re a doctor?” Steve asked, almost impressed.

“No,” Mike said with a chuckle. “I have a PhD, but not that kind of doctor.”

“You’re a counselor,” Nick said.

“Yeah,” Mike said. “For high schoolers.”

“So, what advice would you give your patients in this situation?” Nick asked.

“First off, they aren’t patients. Second, none of my students would be in this situation because none of them are men in their forties that refuse to deal with their problems.” He said the last few words with emphasis towards Nick, who just rolled his eyes. “This whole vacation took a sour turn the moment you said you saw him again. I know for a fact you are haunted by how things ended with him. I’m sure he is, too.”

Nick sighed.

“You’re avoiding it,” Steve said to Danny. “You only avoid things when it hurts you.” “I do not,” Danny argued.

Steve held up a hand and started counting on his fingers. “Ignoring Rachel’s phone calls and letting them go to voicemail. Not talking to me about being kidnapped. How after Matty died, you never talked. Every time something serious happens, like everything with Matty or Charlie, you get quiet and you don’t talk about it. You only get quiet when you’re upset. Every time I’ve tried to bring this up,” he motioned towards Nick, “you get mad and change the subject. You obviously need to deal with this.”

He had a point.

“Who are you, and what have you done with Steve?”

Steve smiled softly. “I can be emotionally mature sometimes.”

Danny chuckled, remembering earlier in the week. Oh, how the man knew him. Oh, how the man drove him crazy.

“Okay,” Danny said, sitting forward. “Here we go: you didn’t want me to be a cop. I wanted to be a cop. Neither of us were willing to compromise on that.”

“You didn’t want to go to California with me,” Nick said, unbelieving. “That’s why.”

“What?” Danny asked.

“You knew I had my heart set on Stanford.”

“You knew I couldn’t leave my family!”

“And yet you’re here in Hawaii! How much further away can you get?”

“Not fair. You don’t know why I’m here.”
“Then why?” Nick asked. “We were planning a future, and you could have been a cop anywhere if you really wanted to fight me on that. So what could have motivated you to leave your family if not a future with someone?”

“My daughter,” Danny answered honestly. “Her mother… she had custody. She was remarried, moved here… I had no choice.”

Nick paused, taking that in. “And your daughter’s mother. How does she feel about you being a cop?”

“There it is again!” Danny said, raising his voice. He caught himself and came back to a normal volume. “You didn’t want me to be a cop! Just admit that’s why you left.”

“It is a dangerous job. You were just talking about jumping off cliffs!”

“Sure,” Danny said. “My job has gotten a lot more dangerous since moving here, but the things I’ve done… The things I’ve been able to do because of my job… I can’t… There’s no way…” He sighed, looking for words. “I wouldn’t change anything.”

Steve reached over and rubbed the back of his fingers against Danny’s thigh, but Danny was too worked up to keep going.

“Oh, yeah, what could be so grand and important that it was worth throwing away a safe life?”

“You don’t get it. You’ll never get it,” Danny told him. “That’s why it didn’t work with my ex-wife, and that’s why it would have never worked with us.”

“But he gets it,” Nick said, motioning towards Steve. It wasn’t a question.

“Yes,” Danny answered. “And he likes that about me.”

Nick looked down and away. “This was stupid.” He turned to Mike. “Why did you make me do this?”

Mike sputtered for a minute but then cut him off.

“Danny, I’m glad you have someone, and that you have gorgeous children, and a lustrous career, but I can’t do this. This is stupid.”

“We weren’t meant to last, that’s all,” Danny said, shaking his head. “You’ve had a good life, right?”

Nick nodded.

“Got everything you wanted?”

Nick nodded again.

“Then we’re good.”

“Danny…” Steve started.

“Steve.” It was halfway to a warning. That’s when he caught eye of the waiter and flagged him down. The waiter came over with a smile.

“How can I help you?”
Danny pointed at him and Steve. “Can we get our meals to go? These two gentlemen have a vacation to get back to.”

“Danny…” Steve said again. Danny waved him off.

“We should be the ones to leave,” Nick said.

“No, no,” Danny said shaking his head. “You’re guests on this island. You should enjoy it.”

“Is there something I could do to convince you to stay?” the waiter asked.

“No, no,” Danny said, standing up. Steve shuffled to stand up himself. “Nothing wrong with you, or the place. It’s us. We shouldn’t be here. We’ll be over in the bar. We’ll need the ticket too.” He turned to Nick and Mike, “Your dinner’s on me.”

The waiter nodded. “Alright.”

Mike and Nick then also shuffled to stand quickly.

“I still think—” Mike started.

“Not now, Mike,” Nick cut him off. Then he stepped around the table to be face to face with Danny. “We weren’t meant to be.”

“Nope.”

Nick nodded. “Okay.” Then he moved to hug him, and Danny was more than happy to reciprocate. That’s what he needed. A resolution. “Goodbye, Danny.”

There it was. That’s what was missing.

“Goodbye, Nick,” Danny said.

They pulled back from one another, taking in each other’s faces for just a moment longer before Danny nodded, accepting it.

He pulled away with a sigh and a glance up at Steve. “Come on,” he said, tilting his head toward the bar. “Nice to meet you, Mike. I’m glad he found you.”

“You too, Danny.” Then he held out a hand towards Steve to shake. “We tried.”

Steve took his hand, but glanced towards Danny with a look of understanding on his face. “I think this mission was successful.”

“You think?”

“I hope so. It was nice to meet you both.”

~

They were quiet at the bar, nursing drinks while they waited for their food. Steve reached out and took Danny’s hand once they were in a cab. A soft, plea of an apology… so Danny took it and linked their fingers together and rubbed his thumb over Steve’s.

“I’m sorry…” Steve started, adjusting their food in his lap.
“Not here,” Danny told him.

Danny had their cab drop them off at the park that had the beach that led to their backyard. Steve was confused, but after Danny pulled them to the corner of the park a picnic table away from a bunch of twenty somethings hanging around a fire with a couple guitars – Steve understood.

“I’m sorry,” Steve said again.

Danny shook his head as he opened his food. “Don’t be. You were trying to help.”

“I thought you guys needed…” Steve said. He tore at the wrapper around his fork. “If I had a moment, a chance to talk to Jake… I guess it’s not the same.”

Reaching forward, Danny took Steve’s hand. Steve let him. “No, honey. It’s not. We needed to say goodbye. You needed to say you’re sorry.”

Steve’s face broke for half a second. The corner of his mouth turned down into a small pout, his eyebrows furrowed, and he looked down. “I can’t believe he was friends with Mary this whole time and never…”

Danny ran his thumb over his knuckles again, trying to give him some comfort. “We’ve had a busy couple days,” Danny said. “We haven’t really had time to talk about things.”

“I wanted you to talk to Nick.”

“I don’t want to talk to Nick. I want to talk to you.”

“I love what you do,” Steve said suddenly. “I don’t just like it. I love that you are so dedicated to what you do. It’s part of who you are. I don’t want you to change.”

Danny smiled, secretly relieved. Sure, he thought Steve liked that he wanted to serve, to be helpful, to be that guy… but it’s also nice to hear it.

“I gotta change a little,” Danny said. “My family is here, now. Wherever we go, that’s home.” He pulled away from Steve and opened his own to go fork. “I think that was a problem back then. Nick wasn’t… I didn’t think of Nick like that. He… he was a boyfriend. Not my family. He didn’t deserve that. I didn’t choose him. But I did choose you.”

Steve poked at his shrimp for a moment before, “I love you. I trust you. I’m sorry I put you through that.”

Danny shrugged. “Based on your week and everything with Jake… I get it. Not every relationship looks the same, Steve.”

“I know.” He said it with a certain nod, if a bit sadly.

“We caught who murdered him, babe,” Danny said. “Gabriel confessed to that – who knows why. But we got him.”

“I just wasted so much time,” Steve said, trailing off. “I always waste time. I did it with him, with Freddie, with Catherine, …with you. I almost missed out on you.”

“But you didn’t,” Danny tried to reassure him.

“It’s the story of my life, though. I’m too much like my dad.” He ran his hands through his hair. “I don’t want to be like my dad.”
“You’re not,” Danny said. “You’re doing good.”

Steve sniffed and focused on his food again. They both gave themselves some time to think to themselves as they ate their food. Danny had a lot to process. It wasn’t much of a conversation with Nick, but it was enough that there was something lighter about his memories of him. Of his time with him.

“I think you’re right.”

“About what?”

“I was chasing a feeling with Rachel. I felt bad that I… I wanted to find it and I think I forced it.”

“You got Grace out of it, so it wasn’t a total loss.”

Danny smiled. That was very true. He’d never regret his time with Rachel, not after his children.

“So…” Steve said, swinging his fork around in the air. “Does this count as a date now?”

Danny rolled his eyes.

“What? Good food, decent music,” he pointed over to the fire pit where some gentle songs were being played, “sounds of the ocean, a good view… it’s not a date?”

“’No. No ex’s. New rule.”

Steve smiled, “okay okay. I’m going to keep trying.”

“Good. You better.”
Chapter 14

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Steve – 2006 -- Age 30

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Freddie and Kelly were off again. They had pushed back their wedding date – again for a random
deployment and Kelly had enough of it. Steve knew it wasn’t going to last long, but…

He knew just how to move… just how to angle himself… just where to kiss him…

It was always good. No matter where they were. Steve’s officer’s quarters, Freddie’s base housing,
the bathroom of that one bar in upstate New York, the shed at Freddie’s childhood home, the laundry
room at the Academy, a flimsy tent on the beach like they were now… It didn’t matter. There was
always a tinge of a thrill that Steve could never name. There was the feeling they’d be caught, getting
it on in such public places – like they were daring the world to take the messy matters of it all out of
their hands.

There was the chance they’d be caught and punished and thrown out of the Navy. It was just this
side of uncomfortable.

But things were different now.

The excitement that hiding it caused – the thrill of engaging in something so forbidden it had lost its
burn. In fact, it felt kind of dark, empty, ashy.

Steve was tired.

That was the upside of Catherine and Kelly. Kelly was sweet, but feisty when she wanted to be.
She didn’t let Freddie get away with shit and sometimes she was even a fun drinking buddy.
Catherine was fine with friends with benefits, with using each other to get through something they
didn’t talk to each other about.

Like… there was something only a few months ago, where Catherine showed up on his doorstep,
unannounced, and they had a weekend like she was trying to forget someone. And the few times he
and Freddie would finish their dance and pull away without saying anything and Steve went back to
her, like he was trying to prove that being with women felt better.

But then Freddie would do that thing with his fingers, push him around, pull him apart.

He had pretty much fallen on the label ‘bisexual’ years ago, but hadn’t really admitted it. Not to
Freddie, not to Catherine… not to anyone, least of all himself.

These thoughts – these distracting thoughts about Catherine, about his sexuality, about how wrong it
all felt, and why it felt wrong – they were never present before. Before, Freddie could flash his eyes
at him and all thought of anything else would leave Steve’s mind.

Lately though, just lately, and he couldn’t quite place when it started, (he could, he just didn’t want
to admit that it had to do with Jake and Henry’s admission about his trial and everything he had been
avoiding) but lately he felt more and more like Freddie’s dirty rag. A piece of cloth used to take care
of a mess.
But here he was, playing the part of the rag, because of his messed up feelings because he loved Freddie.

Freddie adjusted them, pulling Steve back up so he was resting forward on his elbows, and there was a moment while Freddie found his rhythm again that Steve was lost in thoughts about feelings and motivations and intentions. Thoughts about Catherine making it clear they weren’t much more to each other than friends and how he could have had something deeper with Jake if he hadn’t messed up and how he and Freddie never talked about it.

He didn’t even realize he was crying until Freddie had stopped and pulled away.

“Hey, bud,” he asked, tentative hand on his back. “What’s going on?”

Steve turned around and sat up quickly, wiping at his face to get rid of the evidence as soon as possible. “Sorry, I’m okay.”

“Did I hurt you?”

What a loaded question.

“No, everything felt good, I just—” Steve sniffed and wiped at his nose again. Something about the emotions of the moment racked him and he lost control of himself, the words escaping him before he could stop them. “What are we doing?”

Freddie’s mouth gaped for a moment, and he pointed towards where they just were, and said, “Having a good time?”

“You know what I mean.”

His eyes turned dark, and Freddie looked away from him.

Steve’s heart lurched, but he still didn’t have control. “Is this just sex? Or is this something else? Are we dating? Are we friends with benefits? Are we in love?”

Freddie was shaking his head, rolling his eyes at Steve’s questions. Until the last one. That last question filled the tent and Freddie’s eyes darted to Steve’s, wide eyed and nervous. “Steve… don’t—”

Steve listened and quieted. He was reigning himself in, but Freddie was pulling away.

“Why do you gotta ask?” Freddie asked. “Why can’t we just… be?”

“I’m confused,” Steve answered honestly. “I don’t know…” he trailed off, unable to find words.

Freddie stared him down and, he was already naked, but he felt more exposed. His breath got caught in his throat. He struggled, his breathing rushing, and getting shallower.

“You can’t even say anything, Steve,” Freddie said, vulnerability all over his face. “You can’t talk about it anymore than I can!”

Steve looked away, trying and failing to get his breathing under control. “We can’t keep this up,” Freddie said. “It’s finally getting to us, isn’t it?”

Steve could only hold his breath and look up at him.

Freddie turned to the pile of clothes they had shed only a few hours ago. He wiped at his own face
and Steve wanted desperately to reach out and... what did he want to do, exactly? Suddenly, between the look on Freddie’s face and his body language as he dug through the clothes for his own... maybe Steve wasn’t the only one feeling like a used rag.

“Hey,” Steve reached out, not knowing for what. But they had fucked up somewhere along the way. Let shame cloud everything. He couldn’t stand it. “Hey.” He grasped Freddie’s arm just as he leaned back to put his legs through his pants.


They stared at each other.

“We can’t keep this up, you’re right,” Steve said. “But you don’t have to leave.”

“What other choice is there, Steve?” He licked his lips and turned to face him. “I want to be a dad someday.”

“You do?” Steve asked. He could picture it. Freddie would be an awesome dad.

Freddie nodded. “I want to hold my baby, and I want to teach them about life, and how to be good. How to be better. Better than me... than this world...” His eyes watered, and he took a moment to push at them. “We can’t have that.”

“Sure, we can.”

Freddie looked away. “We’re SEALs, Steve. No we can’t. Not together.”

Steve’s breath hitched – out of his control again – “Fred-”

“We can’t keep doing this,” Freddie said, reaching out to hold Steve’s face in his hands.

“We can’t. We got to move on from this.”

“I don’t want to lose you.”

“You won’t. We leave this tent, and you’re my brother. I swear to God, Steve. You won’t lose me.”

Steve took in a deep breath. It was painful, but this was a fork in the road they had been ignoring for far too long. It’s why things with Kelly never seemed to work, why Steve couldn’t seem to make it work with anyone. Why Steve was so closed off from anyone he was with. It was a secret too big, too powerful, for them to live with.

They were in love. Steve needed him. They couldn’t be what they wanted to be. He didn’t want to be alone. Freddie wouldn’t let that happen.

“No matter what, you’re my family, Steve McGarrett.”

Steve let out a wet chuckle, and reached up for Freddie’s hand as Freddie wiped away a tear. It felt like a wall had fallen down between the two of them, and here they were, about to build a brand new one.

“Brothers. The moment we leave this tent?” Steve asked.

Freddie nodded.
Steve rushed forward and kissed him. Freddie let out a whimper and kissed him back. “Steve…”

“Then one more night,” Steve said softly. It was almost a beg. “One more night.”

Freddie studied him for a moment, eyes full of longing and heartache. He gave a small nod that turned into a big, decisive one.

“One more night.”

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**Steve -- Present day**

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The next day was Saturday, and it was filled with lots of family events. The whole family played tourists to all the things that Eddie had planned. Charlie was a trooper throughout the day, keeping up lots of energy. He had to admit, Charlie was doing better and better every day. He’d be cleared and declared in remission, Steve was certain. He knew that if Charlie was healthy for another two years he was in the clear, but Danny carried a lot of worry on his shoulders about it. He tried not to let it show not even to Steve – but the way Danny chased him through a typical end-of-the-aquarium-tour gift shop told Steve otherwise. Danny was cherishing every moment with him.

Steve threw an arm around Nahele, deciding to cherish the moment too.

The Williams clan was a loud one. Opinions and hand waving and thick accents. Whenever one of them was off on their own, their accent would lessen, so Steve knew they all exaggerated on purpose. A family tick that even Grace suffered from.

The afternoon hit and they all broke from lunch at the Hard Rock (a destination request from Abigail’s husband) and Eddie had another surprise. All the girls (and Jack) were going to be heading to a luau that was apparently going to demand participation and learning a Hula. All the boys were heading out to sea. They’d all meet up for dinner later.

“Dad,” Danny started. “You rented us a boat?”

“These guys do this kinda thing with tourists all the time. We’re going to catch fish that I’m going to have you cook for our party tomorrow night.”

“I’m pretty sure the girls have food covered…” Danny said.

“Yeah. They do. They are depending on us.”

Talk about pressure. So there they were, a party of six and three kids (Charlie, Zach, and Tyler all threw a large ‘we probably need a nap’ fits about not going on a boat ride until their grandfather gave in and said they could come.)

“Thanks for including Daisy grandpa,” Eric said as they made their way down the dock.

Eddie threw his arm around him. “So. Is it getting serious with this girl?”

Eric rolled his eyes and looked away, a little embarrassed. “Yeah, gramps. I think so.”

“Really?” Danny asked, hand holding Charlie’s tight around the water. “Does she know that?”
Eric smiled back at Danny. “I think, with this weekend, she’s starting to.”

That’s when it hit Steve. This whole weekend was Eric introducing Daisy to his family his grandparents, his aunt, his mother. Steve and Danny had been having such a big week that it hadn’t even registered in his mind; this was a big step for Eric. Steve thought back on the last several days. He’d been smooth and smiling wide and… Danny wasn’t the only one showing off how good Hawaii had been to him.

Steve smiled. He supposed he should start looking at Eric more like a nephew than ever before. Keep things like this in mind.

‘Ve got lotsa fam-ly,’ Charlie had said. ‘More than b’fore.’

This was his family now, too. More than before. This was his father-in-law (or would be, one day,) his brother-in-law, his nephews. He brought up the rear as everyone made their way down to the boat – a commercial tourist attraction, for sure – and turned to wait on Nahele. Nahele was moving slow, but watching everything.

“You okay?” Steve asked.

He looked up, like Steve had knocked him out of deep thought. “Yeah, I’m good.”

Steve held out an arm, open for Nahele to walk into. “You and I got to stick together.”


Steve motioned forward to the bunch arriving at the boat. “We’ll get overrun by Williams-es if we don’t.”

Nahele tsked. “I think we already are.”

Steve laughed and they paused, watching Jake and Danny try to wrangle their small sons into different sized life jackets. He chuckled and shook his head. “Tourists.”

Nahele chuckled too.

Steve held out a fist for Nahele. “Island boys stick together?”

Nahele reached out and completed the fist bump. “Okay, haole.” Then he pushed out from under Steve’s arm as Steve sputtered.

“Kama’aina!” Steve insisted.

Nahele grinned back at him and winked. It was good to see he was starting to feel comfortable enough to tease.

Steve shook his head and made his way down to the boat.

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The trip was successful. Several tuna were caught, lots of photos were taken, a lot of teasing was done (mostly at Eric’s expense, the poor guy) and Steve was even happy to see that Eddie took time to give Nahele some specific attention.

“Maybe this time we won’t get boat jacked,” Danny grumbled.
“Well, now you’ve gone and jinxed it!” Steve said.

And then they had to tell the story of how they got lost at sea to Danny’s unaware brother-in-law (Steve’s, too, he had to remember.) Eric and Nahele had never heard the story either, and all three young boys sat quietly, taking in the tale of their adventure at sea.

(“You were boat jacked, Danny? When?” “Uh… just a little bit.” “This wasn’t the pirates thing?” “No, it was something else.” “We ended up in a dingy being circled by a tiger shark.” “I know you’re new to the whole ‘in-laws’ thing but babe, you’re supposed to try to impress them.” “That’s what I was doing. I got him to safety, sir. We got a bigger boat.” “I! Who saw the boat?” “Very impressive, Steve.” “See, Danno? He’s impressed.” “Whatever.” “Was there really a tiger shark, Danno?” Charlie asked. “Yup, I could feel him through the bottom of the boat,” Danny answered. “Ah!” Charlie gasped.)

They had all assumed that Eddie had made a large party reservation for them at some place downtown, but when they got back to the house to drop off the fish and meet up with the girls, he surprised them all with dinner on a boat.

The boat didn’t go anywhere. The thing was another brochure ready tourist stop up on the North Shore that was a restaurant floating in the marina.

“You know the North Shore is an hour away, right Pa?” Danny asked.

Eddie made a show of checking his watch. “We’ll get there in plenty of time to watch the sunset.”

“So,” Clara said, understanding. “This is why we rented the sixteen person van!” She turned to Danny. “I’ve been wondering all week! We usually take cabs everywhere when we travel.”

“You were really wondering about the giant van we’ve been getting in and out of all day, ma?” Abigail asked.

“Oh, shush, you.”

Danny laughed along with his family. Steve watched as Danny smiled wide and felt his stomach flip flopped. This wasn’t just Danny’s family anymore. This was his family, too.

The thought hit him again and he smiled. He suddenly wished Mary was with them.

He shot her out a text.

**Steve**

*Are you and Joanie still coming tomorrow?*

**Mary**

*If we’re still invited after everything on Wednesday.*

**Steve**

*Of course you are. I’d like for Danny’s family to meet mine.*

“Who are you talkin’ to?” Danny walked up as they were loading the younger boys into their car seats. “Some hot guy you met online?”

Steve rolled his eyes and turned up the flirt. “Oh, sweetheart, you know I only got eyes for you.”
Danny smiled wide. “Seriously.”

“Mary. Making sure she’s coming tomorrow.”

“Why now?”

Steve shrugged, thinking of an answer. He decided to keep up the flirt and grinned. “I think the in-laws should meet, don’t you?”

Danny’s face fell slack, and then he smiled softly, almost to himself. Then his face switched back to playful, “You know my nephew lives with your sister, right?”

Steve rolled his eyes. “You know what I mean.”

“I think you two are ridiculous,” Daisy said, clapping them both on the shoulders. Then she turned to Danny, “Now I totally see where Eric gets it from.”

“Hey,” Eric said. He waved his hands between Steve and Danny. “I am not that sugary.”

“Oh, baby,” Daisy said, moving forward between Steve and Danny to grab Eric’s face, “you’re so sugary you’re a candy factory.”

The whole family laughed again. Poor Eric.

Dinner was a mess of conversation and laughs and at one point Zach had spilled his drink and everyone rushed up to catch the spill before it got on clothes and spread all over the ground. More laughter at Eric’s handfuls of napkins and some light teasing (of both Danny and Eric) about when rings would be exchanged.

It was all good until the food came, and everyone waited until everyone had their plate in front of them. It was a nice little bit of manners. To not start eating until everyone could start – that was a new sensation to Steve. Even Grace knew what to do. He and Nahele shared a look; they were both impressed.

“Alright,” Eddie said, holding up his glass. “I think I’ll leave a big speech for tomorrow night when Clara and my brothers and sisters are here, and all your friends, Danny but. I think something needs to be said.”

Everyone waited, eyes on Danny. Eddie may have been the patriarch of their family, but it was clear who they all looked towards, whose leadership they all valued. Steve understood. In their little portion of this family, Grace was their anchor. She had gotten that from Danny. Danny was his own family’s anchor. At work, Steve was in charge. At home, Steve tended to defer to Danny. About the calendar, about the kids, about the bills, about their relationship. Steve was so bad at the emotional stuff, it took Danny to get him to open up.

He watched as Danny bit his lip, thinking. They all grabbed their own glasses.

“Well,” Danny finally said. “I can only really think of one thing.”

He took a moment, controlling a bit of emotion. Whatever Danny was thinking of, it was something important to him.

“To the one that’s not here. To Matty,” he held up his drink as his voice cracked.
The look on Clara’s face was like a switch. She covered her mouth quickly. Stella let out a small “oh.”

Eddie nodded his approval. “To Matty,” he repeated.

They all accepted the moment for what it was and all raised their glasses in a small bit of remembrance and took a sip. Steve watched as Danny and Stella shared a small, but significant look. How Eddie hugged Clara close. How Abigail and Jake leaned on each other.

In a moment of bravery, Steve put down his drink and reached for Danny’s hand under the table. Danny turned, surprised. Steve gave him a squeeze of comfort and Danny smiled wide.

“He would have bitched about fishing today,” Eddie said as everyone recovered. “Always so seasick on boats.”

The table laughed, Stella wiped at her eyes.

It was a great evening.

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Danny – 1992

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Danny was sixteen. Danny was sixteen and outed and his little sister was pregnant and his whole family was a bit of a walking scandal. Danny was sixteen and completely lost, confused, and terribly angry with no outlet. He had been thrown into a grown up world that shouldn’t have happened to him for several years yet. He was confused about who he was and he had scars on his knuckles from when he heard some not so great things about his sister and he was losing friends left and right.

Except for Billy Selway.

Billy stuck with him, wore a rainbow shirt to school a couple of times when it got really bad, (even if people were only starting to understand what that meant back then.) He stood up for him, loudly and often, and had matching scars on his knuckles in defense of Stella. He had a dreadful crush on her, she was pregnant with another guy’s baby, and he still stood up for her.

(Danny used to imagine that maybe they’d all grow up and Billy and Stella would fall in love and they’d be actual brothers. Matty was his brother, no matter how much Matty wanted not to be at the time, but Billy was closer back then.)

“Hey, lover,” Billy said, letting himself in through the basement door from outside, dropping his bookbag on the floor. He flopped down next to Danny.

“Careful, people will think you and I are gay together.”

Billy gave a look of fake outrage. “We’re not?!?”


See? Dreadful crush. Danny smirked.

Matty, who was sitting at the old table they only ever really used for homework or holidays or his
dad’s poker nights with the guys from the firehouse, groaned. “Oh my god,” he gave a dramatic eye roll – one that took his whole upper body with it – and slammed his book shut. “I’m going to do my homework in the kitchen.”

“At least you’re actually doing your homework,” Danny shot back. “Instead of paying Teddy Upping to do it.”

Matty turned around quickly. “How’d you know that?”

“I have eyes,” Danny said sarcastically. “What, you out of cash?”

“Bitch,” Matty spat out.

“Dickwad,” Danny shot back.

Danny hoped they’d get over this someday, this angry version of his brother. For now he was a problem that Danny really didn’t need, thank you very much.

“What?” Matt said at the bottom of the stairs. “At least I’m the good child in this family.”

Danny felt fire in his belly. “At least I didn’t spend all my allowance on titty mags.”

Matty turned around quick. “Oh, of course not. There’s no titties in your kind’s magazines!”

“My ‘kind’s’?” Danny asked. “You mean gay.”

“I said it,” Matty spat.

Danny flipped him off. Matty returned the gesture and made his way up the stairs.

Danny has a picture. He was ten years old, Matty nine, and they both had on way-too-big fireman helmets, with their dad in full uniform kneeling between them with a wide, proud smile. Danny’s dream of being a police officer had already taken hold at that point, but it remained one of Danny’s favorite pictures from his childhood. It sat proudly on his mother’s fireplace mantle and in the photo album Danny would eventually take with him to Hawaii.

There were no such pictures of him and Matty while they were this age. Unless they were being forced into the same photo by their mother, they never purposely and willingly sat in the same photo together. He got better after high school, grew up, apologized about a few things… but man.

Danny was sixteen and sometimes he wanted to kill his little brother.

“So,” Billy started. “You and Matty are doing better, I see.”

Danny closed the book he was supposed to be reading and rolled his eyes – much in the same fashion as Matty – and leaned his head back against the couch. “Billy, my life is in shambles.”

“Nah,” Billy said. Ever the optimist.

“Besides you, and getting to know my sister better, what good is there in my life?”

“You’re getting to learn who your friends are,” Billy said. “And that your parents love you no matter what. Not all of us get to know that.”

Billy’s parents were gone, being raised by his grandparents. It was something Billy only ever brought up a few times.
If there was one thing Danny never understood it was ‘why the hell do people have such a hard time getting along with their parents?’ because he honestly had the best parents on the block. The whole neighborhood. Probably New Jersey. He was being biased, sure, but come on! They were awesome. Clara and Eddie Williams were the best, in Danny’s humble opinion.

He couldn’t imagine life without them.

Billy knew all too well what that was like.

Then the basement door to the kitchen opened up again and they turned to look.

“Hey boys, Matty said Billy was here,” his mom called out as she walked down a few steps to see them.

“Yes, ma’am!” Billy called back.

“You staying for dinner, Billy?” his mom asked.

“If you don’t mind, Mrs. Williams. That sounds nice.”

“When have we ever minded you, Billy?” his mom asked with a smile and Billy gave her a wide smile back as she turned and went back up the stairs. “Danny no video games until you finish your chapters!”

“Okay, mom!” Danny replied.

“I mean it, Billy keep him honest!”

“Okay, Mrs. Williams!” Billy said with a grin at Danny.

Watching Billy’s smile Danny figured he was living vicariously through Danny. Getting to know what parents are like from watching a couple of the best do their thing.

Many years later, on an island in the middle of the Pacific, he would become well versed on family. What it really meant. He was faced with so little of it and finally learned the words to describe it. Locals called it ‘ohana, and Danny didn’t mind it. There was plenty about this island that Danny found ridiculous, ignored, or flat out rejected, still too stubborn to admit he missed New Jersey less and less each day.

The concept of ‘ohana was not one of those things. How family had nothing to do with DNA. DNA was a good starter point, something to jump off of, something to fall back on, but family had nothing to do with genetics and everything to do with choice. Choice to support, choice to fight for, choice to love. He believed that for most of his life, it was a vital part of who he was, that choice; but Five-0 would just help him find the words to describe it.

Billy was family. Danny was sixteen and his life was falling apart, but he had Billy and that made all the difference. That made him family.

Danny sighed, thinking about the family that had abandoned him and his sister. How family Christmas and the family celebration at his dad’s firehouse were both stiff and tough and left Eddie’s wife and children leaving early. How his mother had stepped up and made things easy as possible when Danny and Stella came home. Eddie was a shield in front of his children’s hardships and Clara became a soft place to land. Danny grew close with his sister during her pregnancy. Not that they weren’t close before, but with Matty being awful, and both of them having this Big Scandalous
He remembered one particular visit to the firehouse where men he had known his whole life looked at him like he was dirt and his father pulled him aside and told him to stand up straight. A solid target was tougher to knock down than a weak one; so Danny puffed up his chest and raised his chin and his five-foot-five self held steady while his dad packed up for the day.

Didn’t mean it didn’t hurt.

Didn’t mean Danny didn’t try to hide himself, either. Make the whole ordeal easier on his parents, on Matty. He kept his head down, didn’t chase any boys (or girls, not that any of them at his school would take him seriously,) kept on top of his studies. He shoveled snow, and mowed the lawn, and did whatever chores asked of him without complaint.

They chose to support him. They chose to love him. They didn’t have to. It was the 90s. No one would blame Eddie or Clara for letting their children suffer on their own.

Billy smacked him. “Your face is doing that thing again.”

“You’re face is—” Danny shot back, unable to come up with a come back.

“Yeah, smooth,” Billy said. “Seriously, you’ve got a great family – Matty not included in that judgment – and you’ll get through this.”

Danny dropped his head back on the couch. “When? My life is over.”

Billy rolled his eyes. “Just you wait… one day you’ll be happy. So happy you won’t know what to do with yourself.”

Danny lolled his head to face Billy. “That sounds like a fever dream.”

“You gotta dream or else what’s the point? One day you’re going to be so happy with where you are in your life. You just gotta keep walking towards it and one day, you’ll turn a corner, and there’ll your life will be, waiting for you, and you’ll know I’m right.”

“You sound like a Hallmark card,” Danny shot back.

Billy grinned. “That’s a compliment. I’m taking that as a compliment.”

“You would,” Danny said with a smile. He really would. Billy was the sort of guy that liked being the source of optimism in the room, and wouldn’t be outdone, either. Oh no, someone had a brighter outlook on life? Better step up his game. He was the perfect ying to Danny’s depressing yang.

That’s when Billy threw his arm around Danny’s shoulder and pulled him towards him in a move that was clear he had learned from wrestling. Danny struggled back, and they fell off the couch with a huff and wrestled for a few minutes. Then, all the fun stopped the moment they rolled over and the coffee table moved just right and one of the legs broke off with a loud ‘snap!’

They paused in their actions, arms around each other’s necks, and stared at each other in shock.

“If you broke my table I’m going to break you!” his mother yelled down through the closed door.

Shock turned terrified.
Danny – present day

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Look at him now; he had the guy, he had the kids, he had his clean bill of health (a few PT sessions notwithstanding) they were all smiles and a large family looked good on Nahele, and it was doing wonders for Grace.

Of course he wanted to show this off.

A few of his own aunts and uncles had flown out all for their own vacations, everyone on different schedules, but everyone here for tonight. A few of the aunts and uncles that shunned him as a kid, that gave him crap when he became a cop, that still didn’t quite understand Danny, or his siblings. They were all saying he had a beautiful house and a bunch of cute kids and that their view off their back beach was fantastic.

“You’ve really made something with your life, haven’t you?”

“I have to say, Daniel, I am impressed.”

“Look at you, all grown up and living on a beach on an island. That’s the dream, innit?”

“Your Jack is the sweetest baby I’ve ever met.”

“Charlie sure has those Williams genes, now doesn’t he? Little toe head.”

All good comments and praise that made Danny smile and feel warm. He didn’t need their approval, he never needed it, but it was nice to hear all the same.

The white table cloths were Kono’s doing, though. Why did they need tablecloths at all? There was a beach twenty yards away? Kono’s planning took them from ‘nice evening outside,’ to ‘fancy cocktail party.’ He had to admit though, it was impressive.

Everyone was dressed up (Kono’s demands) and strings of lights that Grace and Nahele had worked hard on the whole day, and they had bought the (little bit) more expensive wine, and Kamekona promised to prepare food (all the fish they had caught: “We didn’t get boat-jacked, Danny.” “Whatever.” “We didn’t jinx anything, Danny.” “Yeah, yeah.” “I think this deserves some celebration, Danny.” “Not in front of my dad, you animal.” “I was just talking about a couple beers, you perv.” And Danny never saw Jake laugh so hard.) It seemed like everyone had shown up, ready to fill their backyard and drink their beer.

Everyone, it seemed, except Clara and Eddie, but considering they were the guests of honor, and it was their second honeymoon, no one could blame them. The evening was warm, the lights were strung along the whole backyard ready and waiting for the sun to go down, and Jack (his son! His!) was crawling, scuffing up his overalls much to Steve’s chagrin. Danny quite enjoyed his exasperated face every time he caught him.

Danny was having a long string of good days lately, if you didn’t include almost dying at the hands of pirates.

But sisters plus Kono…

“We thought Grace was exaggerating,” Stella told him, throwing her brown hair over her shoulder as he sat down at the table with his sisters. All three of them.
He paused. “What?” Danny asked them all.

“You and Steve,” Abigail clarified.

“What?” Danny asked again, focused on Abigail. Then to no one, prematurely mortified, “What?” Then to Kono, deep and warning, “What?”

All three of them laughed at him.

“I was telling them how much you two were already dating before you were dating.”

“We– We might have– Okay we were kinda dumb, but we weren’t that bad.”

“You were really that bad.”

Danny rolled his eyes and regretted his decision to sit down and enjoy the company of his sisters. He was outnumbered.

“The way Kono talks you’d think the two of you were all but knockin’ boots seven years ago,” Stella said, leaning forward, raising a single inquisitive eyebrow that she totally inherited from their father.

He blanked out in response. When he moved in? Sure, they were idiots for months, maybe a few years. But for seven years?

“Seven years?” He turned it around on Kono, “Come on. That’s stretching it. That’s the whole time I’ve known him.”

“I don’t know brah,” Kono said, sipping her water, “You met and like a month later your daughter’s announcing to the world that you talk about Steve a lot. I believe it was along the lines of ‘he talks a lot about you too.’”

Danny rolled his eyes as his sisters’ faces grew excited, “I would have talked about him anyway, even if he wasn’t a giant pain in my ass!”

“Oh so you’re the bottom,” Kono teased.

“Shut up, Kono!” He said instantly, cheeks heating.

His sisters laughed loudly, drawing everyone’s attention towards them and Danny smacked the table lightly.

“Shut up!”

That only made the laughing louder. How was it that he was the big brother and he was the one getting teased? He may be the shortest of all the Williams children but this was just rude. He suddenly and viscerally missed Matty, missed him…

Danny sighed.

“I do have to say, Danny,” Abigail started, leaning back against the chair, “love looks good on you.” Her light blonde hair floating around in the breeze. She fought it the first few days, but Danny had learned long ago: you either gel it down or accept defeat and embrace wind blown hair. He and Abigail were very much alike when it came to their hair. “You weren’t like this with Rachel.”

He looked up at that. He loved Rachel. There was a part of him that always would simply because
she mothered his children. Once upon a time he was happy with her, once upon a time he felt special just because she wanted to be with him.

“Yeah,” Stella said. “Rachel was great and all back then, but… you’re happier now.” “Lighter,” Abigail offered.

“Yeah,” Stella agreed. “You were a mess after the divorce. I’m really glad you found your way back.” She leaned forward then, laying a hand on Danny’s forearm. “I haven’t seen you this happy since before Billy Selway died. It’s been way too long.”

Suddenly Danny felt like he was back on that east coast beach, swept under the water, caught in that same old riptide that had haunted his nightmares for years. It was like the lungful of water he swallowed came back to suffocate him every time he thought about that day.

He sighed, fighting the guilt and the grief.

“That was a bad day,” he said, picking at the table cloth.

“Who’s Billy?” Kono asked and bless her, she asked it gently.

His chair dipped from behind, knocking him out of his head and back to the conversation, and he felt himself smile. Only Steve ever did that to him while he was sitting. He leaned down so he was even with Danny’s face. “Uncle Billy or cousin Billy?”

He leaned back, resting his head against Steve’s shoulder, and turned to look at his partner, “Neither.”

“Well you’ve got like six uncles and cousins named Bill or Billy,” He shrugged. “I’ll get there eventually.”

He licked his lips and felt his face fall serious, “Billy Selway.”

Recognition floated across Steve’s face. “Ah,” he said, and he left it at that.

Danny pulled his head back up and found himself studying the tablecloth in thought.

That cold, numb feeling came back; the memory of the sharp, sudden fear when Billy’s head didn’t come up out of the water, knowing exactly what happened – being the first person to know what happened, how he screamed his throat raw that day, how rough the blanket the emergency crew threw around his shoulders was. His eyes wandered towards the ocean with anger. Oh, how anxious he got every time Steve took the kids out swimming.

Then Steve gripped his neck, scratching lightly, and he was pulled out of it. He had a lungful of air and it was all thanks to Steve’s hand on his neck and his thumb massaging into the back of his head. He closed his eyes as he sighed and reached up to grab Steve’s hand with his own, thankful.

“Did you ever tell Rachel about Billy?” Stella asked.

Danny studied her for a moment, already knowing where she was going with it. He had never told Rachel, anyone outside his immediate family actually, and yet he had told Steve. He chewed on his cheek as he shook his head no, knowing full well what that meant.

“But you told Steve?” Stella continued, just like Danny knew she would.

He nodded, and then his eyes flitted up to Kono with intent. She didn’t know who Billy was, or the
details of that horrible day, but by the look on her face he was sure she understood the gist of what happened.

“Years ago,” he told her.

Kono smiled slowly, glint in her eye, and Danny knew he’d never hear the end of it.

“Oh, there he goes again,” Steve said, off to chase Jack around the yard. Danny turned to watch with a smile.
Chapter 15

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Steve – 2012

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They had just been boat jacked, Steve swam with a tiger shark, they found a murder scene, and uncovered a horrible plot, and arrested two murderers. It had been a very long couple days. Danny’s first tuna was a good break in the stress, but Danny’s story earlier in the day, just the two of them alone in that dingy, about Billy Selway stuck with him.

He found himself at Danny’s door, a six pack in his hand, well after dark.

Danny opened the door, barefoot and relaxed in a t-shirt, something Steve didn’t see often back then, with a curious face.

“Hey,” he greeted. “It’s like… ten o’clock.”

Steve took a deep breath, trying to find the words. He wanted to tell Danny about Freddie; desperately needed to tell someone. It was a story he hadn’t shared with anyone since it happened, not Joe, not Catherine, not even Freddie’s wife. But Danny shared a bit of his own trauma with him, and it left Steve raw, like an unfinished sentence.

Danny must have read his face, because his face fell welcoming, and he stepped back, letting him in. “Okay.”

His apartment was small, but a thousand times better than some of the dumps he lived in. Grace had toys littered around, and he had dishes in the sink, and mail scattered on his coffee table. The mess would usually fray at Steve, years of military conditioning tugging at him, but with Danny, in his space and home… it felt warm.

“What’s up?” Danny asked after Steve sat the case down on the counter and handed him a beer.

Steve gulped at his beer until he had it half gone, and Danny’s face was worried and apprehensive. “Okay,” Danny said, worry all over his face.

Steve stared at him for a moment, before downing the rest of it in one go and grabbed a second beer.

“Wow, okay,” he said again. “What is this?”

Steve moved across the room to sit on the couch. He licked his lips. “You’re story…” Steve trailed, then he cleared his throat. “Your story about Billy Selway?”

Danny’s face fell serious. He licked his lips and took a gulp of his own beer. Then he sat down in the chair corner to him with a sigh. “What about it?”

“It, uh,” Steve sighed. “It reminded me… of– of something that happened to me. And I really need to get it off my chest.”

Danny nodded slowly, and a curious look settled on his face. “Okay.”
Steve bit his lip and bounced his knee, not really knowing how to tell this story, how much of it wanted to tell…

“My best friend… my best friend in the whole world… We–”

He was more than a best friend. They called each other ‘brother,’ but there was a period of time that they could have been something… something else. Something spectacular. They faced a choice, the two of them. The Navy or being together, and by choosing the Navy they could still be in each other’s lives. They loved each other. And they had a choice.

To Steve, it didn’t feel like a choice, it felt like a trap.

It had been a sore spot in their friendship but one they pushed aside because they loved each other so much. That didn’t mean Freddie stopped being his best friend. And that didn’t mean he was ready to tell Danny the whole story. Part of it was Freddie’s and he was gone and he couldn’t tell Freddie’s part of the story like that. Wouldn’t. They had missed Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell by one, measly, heart-aching year. That was a pain for another day, and maybe Danny would be there for that day, but it wasn’t today.

He cleared his throat again. This was a lot harder than he imagined it would be. Now that he was doing it, he fully realized how much he needed to get this off his chest. “We were at the academy together, enlisted together, served two tours together,” He took a deep breath and held it. “We went through BUD/s together…”

He licked his lips. He felt so raw, and he was shaking with emotions he was trying to keep down. He let out a steadying, controlled breath.

“My absolute best friend,” he finally looked up at Danny. “My family was crap, but his welcomed me with open arms. His dad…” He looked off into the room at nothing, remembering. “My dad didn’t even come to my graduation,” he said sadly. “His dad shook my hand and told me he was proud of me, and it was the first time…”

He had to stop at that, take another long gulp of his beer. His eyes were watering and he needed a small moment to breathe.

“His name was Freddie Hart and he died,” he sighed, eyes stinging. “We were on an extraction mission,” his voice betrayed him, shaking. He cleared his throat again. “He was bleeding out, and… and he told me to go. That he’d cover me.”

He sniffed and wiped at his eye. “He yelled at me for trying to go back and get him.

There were two dozen men, all with machine guns, and he was yelling at me to go and I watched him die in a rear view mirror.”

A tear escaped and he hated himself and he sat his beer down to wipe at his eyes, digging in with the heels of his hands, trying to stop it. He sniffed again.

“The government is in negotiations to recover his remains, but… he’s still there,” he said. “He died and in less than twenty four hours later my father was killed.”

Danny wiped at his face, digesting it all.

“This is the first time I’ve told anyone,” he told Danny. “Even my field report just said ‘killed in combat fire.’ I can’t face talking to his dad… and…”
He sniffed again, rubbing his eyes.

“How about Billy and I just… I needed you to know that I get it.”

Danny sighed, “I never doubted that.”

Steve sighed and licked his lips. “You were there during all that. What ha– What I–” He didn’t have the words. “You don’t realize just how much you did for me back then.”

He grinned, “You mean the arguing and the yelling about police procedure and generally not getting along?”

Steve chuckled, “I needed a friend. More than I had ever needed a friend, and there you were.”

“Here I am,” he said seriously. They stared at one another, and something settled in Steve, something he couldn’t quite define. It wasn’t gratitude, or thanks, or relief. He looked at Danny and felt… He felt like… like...

Steve took a sip of his beer and dropped his gaze, “Th–” His words fell short again and he sighed.

“Thank you for telling me,” Danny said softly. He reached forward and gripped Steve’s arm. It felt sure and calming. “You know for years after Billy died I had nightmares and insomnia – which came in handy with a newborn nephew in the house – but it hurt me for a long time. Still does sometimes.”


This was a big moment for Steve. They spent that night talking about Danny’s bad cases and Steve’s combat experience and drank all of Steve’s beer, and then they broke out the liquor, and laughed until Steve passed out on Danny’s couch, feeling lighter than he had in years.

Of course the shared hangover they had the next day was terrible and Chin made fun of them and they grinned at each other through their sunglasses and nausea.

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Steve – present day

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Danny should be taking the grass stains on Jack’s overalls more seriously. After his blow out at the courthouse in the beginning of the week, he didn’t have any nice clothes left. He had meant to go out and get something for the anniversary party, but the week was stressful and time just got away from him.

Instead Danny was laughing at him every time he left to go pick up their son (whoa, ‘their son’) up off the grass.

They spent most of the afternoon setting up, pulling out tables and wine glasses and cleaning up (and Grace re-doing her hair on five separate occasions.) Steve had to admit, this was easily the fanciest his backyard had ever looked. There were candles waiting to be lit on every table, even. Nahele mowed and Steve took out the weed eater and they trimmed plants and it was like Hurricane Fiona never even happened to their home. Steve had never cared for the upkeep of his yard so much.
Kono had strict orders for him. He followed them to the letter. Down to “everyone in your immediate family needs to wear something black.”

Except for Jack’s pants. He had black pants for his adoption, but nope. He had to go and get sick and they were ruined. Of course, that wasn’t his fault. His overalls were gray and Kono didn’t seem to mind, so Steve counted it as a win.

Pregnant Kono was a meticulous Kono. Her paperwork had never been so perfect. He knew she was going stir crazy in the office, stuck on research duty. She was used to the field, used to running down leads, used to dropping storage containers on top of men pointing guns at the rest of them. Of course he was going to follow her strict orders about the party, he was a little too scared not too.

“Hey bro,” Mary said, waving fingers in Jack’s face. He giggled. “This place looks fancy.”

“Right?”

“It’s just an anniversary party, right?”

“This is Kono when all of her detective work has to be done on computers and telephones and Danny when he’s on medical leave.”

“Ah,” Mary understood. “I’m really glad I skipped the whole… pregnant… thing.”

Steve chuckled, and he rocked Jack for a moment. “Me too.”

She laughed at that. “I had strict orders to wear something black?”

He nodded, agreeing at the absurdity, “Right?”

Everyone had something black on. Ladies were in dresses, Joan had a cute little black and white sundress with plumerias on it, Max had opted for a white tux, but he had black lapels, Steve even wore his black dress shirt. He had entertained the idea of his dress blues, but Danny had convinced him that he’d be too hot and that it was ridiculous. Maybe for the next fancy event he and Danny threw. Fancy; him in his dress blues, Danny in an obnoxious white tie, standing at an alter...

“It’s a lot,” he said, ignoring that train of thought. That was still a ways off, yet. They had family over for a party, and Danny was smiling with his sisters, and the backyard looked amazing. Danny and Kono did a spectacular job.

“Well, I’m sure Danny’s excited to do something nice for his parents like this,” she mused.

“Mmm,” Steve hummed. “I’m happy to get to do something like this. We won’t get to with our parents.” Jack laid his head down on Steve’s shoulder and he hummed again, smiling, running a hand down Jack’s back.

“I’m really happy for you,” Mary told him. “I was worried about you there for awhile.”

“Worried? About me?”

She rolled her eyes, “You may be a big bad SEAL, but even SEALs can break.”

“I didn’t break,” Steve said instantly. Then he bit back his words, thinking about it with a grimace. “I may have cracked a little.”

“A little?” Mary repeated with a chuckle. “Danny has a story where you hold a guy off a building by his ankles.”
Steve scoffed and rolled his eyes dramatically, “He likes to bring that up too often. It’s not like I was going to drop the guy!”

Mary laughed, “You’re absurd.”

He scoffed again, “I’m good at my job.”

Not to mention the guy had a lead on Victor Hesse. But Mary was right, looking back he’d have been worried about himself, too. He was a little wild with too many emotions that Steve still couldn’t name.

“Right.”

“Danny once hooked a guy to the hood of his car with bungee cords and then drove erratically around downtown in order to get him to talk,” he defended himself, throwing the man he loved under the bus.

Mary stared at him for a beat, looking shocked and unbelieving. “You two really are a match made in heaven.”

Steve grinned slowly. Maybe they were.

Laughter broke out from Danny’s sisters again, knocking Steve out of the memory. Steve sought out Danny; he was smiling and happy and trading laughter with his sisters. Steve couldn’t help this next thought; he was kind of beautiful. Mary was looking at him, eyes narrowed, with a grin on her face.

Steve noticed, “What?”

“Just you and the ridiculously cheesy faces you make when you look at him.”

He let his face fall into a goofy grin.

“You’re ridiculous,” she said, smiling back at him.

Danny’s sisters laughed again, Kono’s mingled in with them, and Steve grinned, eyeing Mary. “That’s the sister table, right there,” He motioned towards them. “You should join them.”

“Yeah?” she asked, excited.

“You’re my sister, aren’t you?”

She puffed up, proud. “I’m going to go,” she said a wide smile. “I’ve got embarrassing stories too.” Then she winked at Steve and was she was off.

Steve smiled at her pride, and Jack snuggled against him. He lowered his head, kissing Jack’s hair, taking in his baby shampoo smell. His life was pretty good, he had to admit. It was an incredible amount of long time coming. He rocked back and forth a little, swaying to the simple music.

His life had been one long roller coaster since he was fifteen. Doris dying, and getting sent away, and the sudden rigidness and hardness of military school when he didn’t want it, his stubbornness and hurt that he felt for his father that kept him in the Navy, Catherine never wanting more from what they were, several tours of combat and rough terrain behind enemy lines. Several bouts of torture, several close calls with death, losing…

Losing Freddie.
Thoughts of Freddie always popped up whenever Billy Selway came up. Danny lost his best friend in front of his eyes, and so did Steve.

Steve smiled at the memory of telling Danny about Freddie. They had been friends, close and ‘best,’ well before that night, they had inside jokes, and they had barrels of trust, they moved together like they had known each other for years… but that feeling?

The one Steve couldn’t name that night? He knew what it was now.

It was devotion.

He felt it tenfold now, staring at him across the yard. Devotion and commitment and a thousand other things that, in the end, came down to “I love him. He’s everything.” Danny must have felt Steve staring because he flicked his eyes towards him, checking on him, then he turned his head, blinked, and his face melted into a smile. Steve returned the gesture and then all the sisters laughed and they rolled their eyes at each other.

His life was good, and it was a long time coming.

“You look ridiculous, man,” Lou said as a way of greeting. “It’s a nice night.” He had a glass of wine in his hand and a grin on his face. He made a face at Jack and Jack turned his face away quickly with a grin, knocking Steve’s jaw a little. “That little guy sure helps, doesn’t he?”

Steve grinned, “You have no idea.”

“Oh,” he said, looking out into the yard, where Logan, Charlie, and Joan were all playing a pick-up game of tag. “I might.” Then let out a chuckle, “We need to get Logan someone closer to his age in our group. Sam, Grace, Nahele, all the same age. Charlie and Joan, same age. Jack and Kono’s baby will be close too. Logan’s the odd-man-out.”

“Don’t say that too close to Grace.”

“Why not?”

“She’ll use it as an argument as to why she needs a little sister.”

“You don’t want to give her a little sister?”

“You don’t think four is enough?” Steve asked.

Lou let out a laugh. “With you? You need an army to be happy.”

Jack sat back, pushing at Steve’s chest with a bit of a happy growl since Steve stopped swaying, and Steve made a face at him, making him smile. “This little guy is a handful all by himself.”

Jack dug into Steve’s chest again before pulling back again with another growl, his hair messed up. Steve reached up and tried to smooth it back down. That was a war Steve would never win.

“With sounds like that he’ll be talking soon,” Lou praised.

“Watch this. Where’s daddy?” Steve asked. Jack turned his head quickly towards the yard, looking for Danny.

“He’s looking for him! Look at that!”

Danny and his sisters laughed, which helped Jack zero in on Danny. He pointed, turning back to
Steve with a smile.

“Good job!” He held up a hand to high five. Then he pointed to Lou, “Is this Uncle Lou?”

Jack looked unsure and pulled in on himself.

“Can you say ‘Uncle Lou?’” Lou asked.

Jack shook his head ‘no,’ and Lou threw his head back with a loud laugh.

“That’s okay, you’ll get there.” Then he nudged Steve, “I’ll just have to come around more.”

“Well, considering that…” Steve motioned off towards Nahele and Sam, standing by themselves with shy smiles over a couple root beers, “...is probably happening, you probably will.”

Lou followed Steve’s glance and his face fell with a sigh. “At least I know he’s not a bad kid.”

Steve grinned, “He’s really not. Just needed some help.”

Conversation lulled between them as they watched the party together. Steve was proud of Nahele, proud of how far he’d come, how much he’d overcome. He did not deserve the life he had been dealt, not at all.

Jack distracted him, turning to the yard again suddenly, looking for someone.

“What’s up?”

He turned back around, his hands open in a ‘I don’t know’ gesture. He’d been doing that the last few weeks.

Steve looked up at Lou with a curious face, and Lou shook his head.

Just a strange thing, maybe wanting to show off his communication skills. He dropped his looking for someone as he started to play with one of the buttons on his shirt. He was probably biased, but he was pretty impressed with his son. His eyes were always wide with curiosity, he was crawling, and he was pulling himself up on his feet whenever he could, and he loved bouncing his head to music, and he loved watching the fish in the tank in his and Charlie’s room.

He knew he was biased, and he was sure every parent was the same way, but Jack had to be ahead of other babies his age. He had to be.

“I know that look,” Lou said.

“What look?” Steve asked, unable to look away from Jack.

“Pride.”

He looked up at his friend at that.

“For what it’s worth,” Lou said, looking away from Steve, awkward coming off him in waves, “I’m kind of proud of you.”

“What?” Steve asked, embarrassed and hopeful all at once.

“I’m proud of you,” Lou said seriously. “You’ve come a long way. With Danny… What you’ve done for these kids, man… It’s impressive.”
Steve chewed on his lip as he digested that bit of information. He could count on one hand the number of times someone had told him they were proud of him, Danny not included. It was rare and it was mortifying, and every time it happened Steve found himself craving more of it, wondering if his father ever…

He sniffed as he looked back down at Jack.

Jack was never going to have to wonder, that was sure. Steve would make sure of it, and even in the event that he failed, Danny sure as hell wouldn’t. Danny would love him, and make sure he was okay, and know his father was proud, even if Steve failed. He saw that now, with how he’s reacted to Rachel, picking up where she dropped things. Picking up and succeeding in ways Steve wasn’t sure he’d be able to do.

“I didn’t mean to make you emotional,” Lou said, his tone teasing.

“Yeah, well, maybe you shouldn’t be so mawkish.”

“Mawkish? What kind of word is that?”

Steve shrugged and grinned, “One of Grace’s vocab words.”

“Ah,” Lou said, understanding. He took a sip of his wine, and then he said, “You’re a good dad. A really good step-dad too.”

Steve let out a huff, trying to brush off the awkward, overly emotional side of himself. He and Lou were close, and Steve had come to trust his friendship and his advice, but sugary things were hard if they weren’t with Danny. They were hard even when it was Danny.

“You are,” Lou said again, like he was certain, and Steve couldn’t look at anything but Jack.

He really was grateful for Lou’s words of encouragement. Didn’t know how much he needed to hear them. This last week, with Danny’s parents and adopting Jack, it had made him want his own parents, as bad as that was. He wanted his mother to show up, even if it were just for the day, wanted to see her reaction to having grandkids. He wanted his father to stand beside him and say all the things Lou was saying to him. But he wouldn’t get those things. He had Lou instead, and Steve had to admit, while it wasn’t the same, it was important. Lou’s opinion was important to him. It helped fill a hole that Steve knew he had.

“Thank you,” he said quietly. Lou grinned. The man was perceptive enough he probably understood just how much it meant; he probably knew just how much Steve needed to hear it too. Lou was a good dad too, you know.

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Danny – 2002 -- Age 26

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For several years Matty unknowingly suffered from having an awful girlfriend named Loren. She was materialistic and casually racist and the kind of person that saw a gay man and thought ‘just the accessory I need!’ Danny saw through her halfway through their first conversation. It took Matty four years, six months, and a sincerely embarrassing wedding shower to come around to the same conclusion.

“I broke up with her,” Matty groaned as he let himself into Danny’s apartment.
The tiny broom closet that Danny lived in while he was a rookie was a speck of space that somehow seemed to hold more than it should have. He and Rachel would be moving into their (newly purchased) house after the wedding, and Danny was in the middle of packing up his things. Rachel had already swept through his place, deeming certain things worthy of their new house (his dining table, his mattress, his coffee maker) and other things unworthy (the couch he had picked out of a dumpster, “half your clothes Danny you don’t need that many, good god I don’t even have this many clothes,” his impressive collection of baseball stadium panoramas.) Everything else was up to Danny whether he kept it or got rid of it.

He was planning to fight Rachel over those panoramas. They were black and white and tasteful and art. But in the meantime, his apartment had brown moving boxes stacked flush against the walls, waiting to be transferred to the suburbs.

“Good,” Danny said, heading straight for the fridge to grab his brother a beer.

“I didn’t think she’d make a speech,” Matty groaned again, accepting the beer. “I didn’t think she’d say those things,” he took a swig. “I didn’t know she felt that way.”

“I’m going to be brutally honest about her for the first time since I met her,” Danny said, sitting across from him. “Are you ready?”

Matty nodded.

“I have never liked that homophobic bitch. The first time she met me she said we had to go shopping so I could tell her what was in style.” Matty made a face. “I was with Nick back then, and he didn’t like her either. We weren’t agreeing on anything at that point, but we agreed on that. That woman is the kinda rotten egg that gold diggers are hatched out of but, before that they latch onto young, ambitious men who might one day be flush with money and eat their life force in order to become stronger.”

Matty was still as Danny ranted, beer halfway from his mouth. As Danny finished and took a breath, Matty swallowed his mouthful of beer.

“Tell me how you really feel?” Matty sadly laughed.

Danny gave him a stink eye. “No one liked her.”

“Rachel did,” Matty said sadly. Then he made a face. “Until this afternoon.”

“You know that Rachel doesn’t care that I’m bi, right?” Danny asked. “It was one of the first things I told her about myself and the only time she’s ever been even a little concerned about it was this afternoon after that woman said things she shouldn’t have said!”

“I know! I know!” Matty groaned again. “I already broke up with her! What more do you want?”

Danny pointed at him, “To find Rachel another bridesmaid.” Danny sat back with a scoff. “‘Rachel must have a fuckin’ nice pussy for Danny to give up dick.’” He quoted Loren from earlier in the day. “What was she thinking? Both grandmas were there! Great Aunt Helen! The stuck up half of our family was just starting to like me again, and Rachel’s family had no idea I wasn’t straight!”

“I’m sorry, man,” Matty said, leaning back on the couch with a sigh. “Why don’t you just drop a groomsman?”

“I was struggling to find a fourth man in the first place!”
“Then you’re good!”

“That’s what I said! But she said something about photographs looking weird.”

“Oh no,” Matty said, sarcastically, hand over his heart. “Not the photographs.”

“Plus we’ve paid for a dress, and for the food, and the flowers. It’s more than just pictures.”

“Doesn’t she have two sisters?”

“She only talks to one of them.”

“Ooh, drama, tell me more,” Matty sat forward. Danny knew he was being serious. Loren pulled out the stereotypical straight guy out of him, but Matty was really a gossip deep down.

Danny rolled his eyes. “I can’t believe I was outed to Rachel’s family by snorin’-Loren.”

“Snorin’-Loren?”

Danny chuckled, rubbing his eyes. “That’s what Nick called her. Because of that one trip the four of us and Stella took to D.C.?”

“Ah, the Fourth of July trip,” Matty said remembering. “Or as Stella called it: ‘Time To Get Stella’s Groove Back’ trip.”

Danny chuckled. That was a good trip. Fireworks and professional baseball and Stella getting so drunk Danny and Matty had to carry her back to the hotel and kissing Nick under the fireworks with national monuments all around them, out in the open, just daring someone to say something.

No one did.

He had come home from that trip renewed with pride and self confidence. A boost that made him finally march down to his local precinct and get the necessary material to study to become a cop.

Here he was, a week out from getting married… to a woman.

“I’m getting married, man,” Danny said, in wonder.

“I know, man,” Matty said back, excited for him. He had always been excited for him.

~

“Do you, Rachel Tate, take Danny to have and to hold, for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health, until death do you part?”

Rachel was staring at the officiant, wide eyed and attentive. But she wasn’t looking at Danny. She blinked, and her eyes went wider – just for a minuscule moment – before she turned her head towards the crowd, even though she never looked at them. And then, finally, up to Danny. The whole time she was holding her breath.

Danny squeezed her hands.

She looked down at them, clasped together, and her mouth dropped open, but she hadn’t taken a breath.

Danny’s whole world was in his throat. What was this reaction? Yeah, it was a shotgun wedding,
but they were already going down this path, right? Maybe a few years early, but still what they wanted. They wanted each other, right?

“I do,” she said, still breathless, staring at their hands. Not at Danny.

He was relieved anyway. She said the words. No take backs. She wanted him.

The officiant turned to Danny. “Danny, do you, Danny Williams, take Rachel—”

She finally looked up at him. Her eyes were wide, like she wasn’t quite sure of what they were doing, and Danny’s eyebrows met in the middle.

“—to have and to hold, for better—”

He saw a flash of the future. What he knew was coming. He was going to be a father. They were in a hospital room, surrounded by family, showing off a cute little bundle. He leaned over the bed and he and Rachel shared a kiss.

“—for worse—”

He was making dinner. Some sauce that required stirring. Rachel had brought her work home with her and was sitting at the table, glasses on while she typed into her laptop. He said something, she looked up angry, and they yelled at each other. Their baby screamed in the background.

“—in sickness and in health—”

He was an old man, a son bringing him a drink, sitting on his porch, watching the rain. He was happy, he was healthy, but he was old, and his time was soon. He could feel it in his bones. The rocking chair next to his was empty.

Rachel was nowhere in sight.

“—until death do you part?”

She wanted this, right? Wanted him? He was enough for her? What if he wasn’t? What if she changed her mind? He gulped, swallowing down the image of sitting in some lawyer’s office, signing papers, leaving separately.

Come on, Daniel, this is your wedding day. Stop it. Stop imagining the worst. Stop doing what you always do and ruin this. Say something, say the words, it’s two words, you’re fine, it’s fine, she wants you, there’s a baby coming. Daniel. DANNY!

“I… do.” His half a hesitation in his words scared him, but Rachel smiled wide.

She smiled. These were just thoughts everyone had in this moment. Everyone had moments of doubt, right up until there were no more doubts, right? She smiled, and he smiled, and she put a ring on his finger, and Matty pretended like he had forgotten hers, and everyone laughed and Rachel smiled.

‘I can do this,’ Danny thought, as he slid the ring into place. ‘I can do this.’

~~~

Danny – present day

~~~
His parents were fashionably late. An hour into the party he got worried and called them, and then called them again, and when they showed up and his dad’s hair was a mess? Oh, Danny felt gross.

His mom, however, looked stunning. She was in an all-white maxi dress that sat on her shoulders with spaghetti straps. Her hair was in her trademark perm curls, but loose around her face. She was smiling wide, and greeting her sisters and brothers-in-law with large laughs and taking in the beautiful backyard.

“You’re late,” Danny said to his father.

“It’s our party,” Eddie answered. “Does it really start until we’re here?”

“Have you looked in a mirror?”

Eddie’s hands shot up to his head. “I need your bathroom.”

Danny chuckled, but that was about the time Stella came up and put two and two together. “Gross, Daddy.”

Eddie only smiled and let himself into the house.

“Ma’,” Danny said, holding his arms out. “You look fantastic.”

“Thank you, I picked out this dress special for today,” she struck a pose.

“It’s a good dress, Mom,” Stella told her. She smiled and started making her way through the party, saying hello and dispensing hugs.

She looked good. Happy. Nothing like a few years ago when she was here, alone, and struggling with her marriage. Danny smiled, renewed in the knowledge that sometimes relationships take work, but that the work would be worth it.

He watched as she finally made her way to Steve – who greeted her with a kiss on the cheek – and she greedily took Jack from him. Jack was all smiles and played shy. It was all a show; his mother had won over his son (his! son!) in just a couple short weekends. Must be a special grandma power.

Danny smiled again.

It would be sunset soon – the days were getting longer now that it was officially spring and Danny eyed Kono, Eric, and Mary all fussing around with something on the side of the house. He went to investigate.

“She should be here any minute,” he heard Kono say as he made his way over.

“Who should?” Danny asked. “Who are we missing?”

The three of them turned, wide eyed.

“Uh,” Eric said smartly. “No one.”

Mary rolled her eyes, “I think we can tell him now.”

“Tell me what?”

“You know that photographer friend of mine? That’s going to take your family pictures next week?” Kono asked.
They had a session planned; with the addition of Jack it was time for some professional pictures of their kids. Danny nodded.

“I might have gotten her to take some photos tonight as like… a present,” Kono said. “Because of what’s happening later.”

“Photos sound great!” Danny said. It was such a lovely party, and his mother looked so beautiful, and it was their fortieth anniversary. Might as well get some proof, right?

“Yeah,” Kono said. “I’ve been giving her so much work lately she said all you’d have to pay for is whatever you want printed.”

“Cool but… what’s later?” Danny asked. “Is this the thing that Steve knew about that me and my sister’s didn’t?”

Mary made a motion to zip her lips and Kono and Eric grinned like they were excited.

“Guys!” Danny complained.

“Oh, come on, Danny,” Kono said. “Go enjoy the party!”

He was pushed back out into the yard and he let them keep their secret, it would only be for a little while longer anyway. He took a few steps, but stopped. Their backyard was full of friends and family all mingling and laughing. Everyone was wearing smiles and black and white everything. Sure, his aunts and uncles were grouping off, and the few of his friends – less than who showed up for Jack’s adoption, but still plenty of friendly faces – were also grouping off, but there was some overlap, and everyone seemed to be having a good time. There were little kids running around in their marathon game of tag. Nahele and Sam had paired off, hanging out near the water. Grace was making her way towards them, poor thing playing the third wheel tonight. Kamekona was standing over their grill and fryer, their smell of their catches from yesterday were filling the air, floating around them in the light breeze. Someone had brought a stereo and it was playing some soft pop music. With the sun going down, the lights Grace and Nahele had hung up in the trees were starting to glow. Kono did a fantastic job, above and beyond, and this looked nothing like what Danny had in mind when he suggested they throw this party in the first place.

Steve’s laugh filled the air and Danny’s eyes found him in an instant. He was talking to a few of Danny’s uncles, probably swapping war stories for some fireman stories, all of them with a beer in their hands. He had a comfortable hand in his pocket, his blazer jacket setting easy on his shoulders. He was fitting in. His uncles were all enthralled with whatever the conversation was about.

His man was impressing his family. Not that Steve ever had trouble at parties. Danny had been nervous about this party since it’s conception, but the week’s events had thrown a wrench in his anxiety. This was his life. He had moved so far away from everything he knew, and he missed his loud, rambunctious family all the time, but he was finally getting to brag to all the people he left behind.

‘Look what I’ve done! Look what I’ve found! Isn’t it great? Isn’t this worthy of praise? Didn’t I do good?’

Danny was hit with a wave of emotion he wasn’t expecting.

His father showed up next to him, knocking him before he could really feel what he was feeling.

“You okay, son?” he asked as he moved to stand next to him.
Danny took a moment, that emotion still racking him a little bit and causing him to take a beat before saying, “Yeah, dad.” He turned back to the party, taking in the scene again. “I’m good.”

His father then went to run his hand along side the hair near his hairline. It was a move that Danny had adopted with his own children and he smiled. “I’m glad.”

Danny continued to smile under the affection.

“You deserve this,” Eddie said.

That emotion was back. His father wasn’t talking about a party… he was talking about the feeling. Danny smiled, fighting an onslaught of watery eyes.

“He’s a good guy, ya’ know.”

Danny looked up to Steve, who was still talking with his uncles. “Yeah, I know. He drives me crazy, though. He jumped off a cliff this week.”

“From what I hear it was just a fence,” Eddie said, leaning on Danny’s shoulder and taking in the scene himself.

“Oh, don’t give him leverage to win this one,” Danny begged. “I’m trying to get him to be more careful.”

“He was talking today about his father used to take him out fishing when he was a kid.”

“Yeah,” Danny said. “He doesn’t talk about his dad much, but he has his moments.”

“He didn’t have to turn out as good a guy as he is,” Eddie said. “After learning everything I know about him… about his parents and his upbringing… and the complaints I’ve heard about from you—” Eddie smiled, pushing on Danny a little so they swayed. “Its amazing he’s a good guy.”

Danny smiled, eyes on Steve. His father had a point. “He’s just that… strong.”

“I don’t think you give yourself enough credit for that.”

Danny turned to look at his father quickly. That emotion came welling back up and he had to bite his lip to keep it from overwhelming him.

“You’ve done good, son,” his father said. “You should be happy.”

Danny’s emotions were running wild, but he said nothing, soaking up his father’s praise. He leaned forward and pinched his nose, trying to regain himself.

When he looked back up, he couldn’t help but find Steve, who was watching him with concern in his eyes. Danny shook his head not to worry, but he had already excused himself from his conversation and was making his way over.

“I’m fine,” Danny said as Steve walked up.

“Uh, huh,” Steve said, concerned.

“Yeah, might have been my fault,” Eddie said. “Tough love.”

Danny laughed. “That is the furthest thing from your parenting style, dad.”
Eddie laughed. “Nah, every kid’s different. They’ll all need a different approach. You’ll see.”

Danny smiled again.

“So,” Steve said, mostly to Eddie. “It’s almost sunset, so as soon as Kono’s photographer friend gets here, we should… uh.” He glanced at Danny. “Do the thing.”

“What is this thing?” Danny asked immediately.

Eddie practically cackled. Steve was laughing along with him.

Jerks.

~

His uncle Bill (one of the three uncle Bill’s he had) was actually not related to his father at all. He was one of the many aunts and uncles that decided to make the trip, all spending a few days enjoying the islands. He was an old friend of Eddie’s, from way back before his parents even knew each other. In fact, he was the reason they met in the first place. He had gotten everyone’s attention and was bragging about how they were all here today because he had set them up on a blind date.

“Clara went to a different high school, but I knew her through church,” he told everyone. “I also knew Eddie desperately needed a date to homecoming, and I was certain they’d get along long enough to get through a couple dances. Boy, was I right.”

The crowd chuckled.

“But I’ve been asked a great honor tonight,” Bill said with a grin. “But I think I’ll let Eddie take over from here for a little bit,” he motioned towards Eddie, who grabbed his wife’s hand and led her to the beach, so he could talk to everyone at once.

“Hi everyone!” He started. “This… this evening is a beautiful night, and I didn’t expect so many people would come, but I’m glad you all did. To Danny’s friends who have come to a random couple’s party, I say hi. I think I’ve met most of you, and it’s about time I put faces to some of your names. But I might… have a surprise for my family. Some of you know what this is.”

Clara looked confused, and Danny was happy to learn that he and his sisters weren’t the only ones out of the loop. Eddie had gone out of his way to keep a surprise in store for everyone.

“Clara,” he turned to her, “We’ve had forty years of ups and downs. We made it, and there for awhile, I didn’t think we would.” Clara smiled sweetly.

Danny turned to his sisters just in time to see Stella wipe away a tear. Their almost-divorce was hard on all of them.

“But tonight is so beautiful, and our family is healthy and here and… forty years ago… we were about to walk down the aisle” he turned to the crowd, “–it’ll be forty years ago on Tuesday–” he turned back to Clara, “–but you and I were so stressed out by our large families and our mother’s plans for our wedding and this huge storm that was coming and you came to me and said ‘let’s go elope.’”

Clara chuckled.

“Do you remember your plan?”
Clara rolled her eyes, and turned towards the ocean. “I said ‘let’s go somewhere warm and get married on the beach.’”

Eddie smiled. He turned back to the crowd, “That didn’t happen. But Clara, would you remarry me tonight? On this beach?”

Danny’s eyes went wide as the whole crowd were holding their excitement. He glanced over to Steve, who only had eyes for him. Danny had worked hard to accept his parent’s relationship wasn’t perfect, and worked hard to make them work for it. Phone calls and visits and turning his house into an Italian restaurant and more phone calls… so many conversations about how hard it was and understanding and…

Steve only had eyes for him. He knew what this would mean to Danny. Oh, how Danny loved him.

Clara grabbed Eddie’s face with a wide smile, “Of course I will.”

The crowd let out little yelps of excitement and everyone laughed.

“Bill!” Eddie called out. “Your cue again!”

Bill walked over, his phone out, and stood between them.

“Girls, girls!” Clara said, motioning towards her daughters. “I need some bridesmaids. Grace, honey, you too.”

Stella and Abigail jumped at the order. Grace smiled wide and Danny nodded towards her. She’d been in weddings before, but never a bridesmaid. She looked so excited and Danny was thankful Kono’s friend was busy taking pictures of the moment.

“Danny! My grandsons! Where are you?” Eddie called out and it was Danny’s turn to jump at the call.

Eric made his way over, holding Zach in Tyler’s hands in each of his own, and Danny moved through the crowd, scooping up Jack and reaching for Charlie as he went. They stood opposite his sisters and smiled, but Eddie wasn’t satisfied.

He was looking into the crowd, “Nahele. You too.”

Nahele looked shocked, and Steve squeezed him on the shoulder a few times, encouraging him. His first few steps were small, and then he made his way over, looking humbled and a shy kind of happy. Danny held an arm open for him, and he stepped into the embrace. Danny smiled at his dad, thankful for this act of… kindness?

Family? Love? Danny pulled Nahele close to his side and Eddie nodded, understanding Danny’s face, and they all turned to Bill, waiting for him to get them going.

“So I’m going to walk you two through this…” and he started reading off a monologue about marriage and renewal of vows.

Danny smiled, biting his lip, watching his parents say loving things and recommittting themselves to each other. He kept shooting looks to his sisters, who were equally as thrilled, and to Steve, who had a calm look of contentment in his body language and soft eyes for whenever Danny looked his way.
“Now, the rings,” Bill said.

“We already have rings, Bill,” Clara told him. “I think we can skip that part.”

“But then,” Eddie started, dropping her hands and digging in his blazer pocket, “what would we do with these?”

Clara lit up and closed her eyes in joy. Danny smiled, and peeked over his father’s shoulder to see two, thin, silver bands sitting side by side in his hand. His sisters were leaning in, inspecting just the same way. They matched their original wedding bands, only thinner, newer, and with a different meaning.

Danny was so proud of his father. He went from a complacent husband to a caring, doting partner. He was an inspiration.

He glanced over to Steve again, and his mouth fell open. He was watching as Steve was watching Clara, and absentmindedly playing with his left ring finger. Danny wondered if he even knew he was doing it.

Suddenly he pictured a different night. Steve in his dress blues, surrounded by the same crowd of friends and family, except it was them standing there, exchanging rings. It felt right, and Danny felt bubbles in his stomach. Sure, they had a little ways to go before they got there, but they were both already thinking about it. It was something they both wanted.

He had his boys in his arms, his daughter smiling wide, and he had never been so optimistic. Watching as his mother slide a ring on his father’s finger, thinking about Steve’s ring finger, seeing that a couple really could get through anything if they wanted to, Danny realized that Billy was right.

He had finally turned that corner.
Chapter 16

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Steve

~~~

There was a time when Steve wanted to try to reconnect with his father. He had just been in combat as a SEAL for the first time, and it was exciting and thrilling and terrifying and everything Steve imagined it to be. But he knew that it was dangerous, and that there were things left unsaid. So he thought he’d try.

John was surprised when Steve showed up at his door, and had pulled him in for a hug, and Steve tried not to let it get to him. They talked about going to war, and what it meant, and the legacy the original Steve McGarrett left for them. They shared a few beers, and a couple steaks, and a lot of silence sitting on the back beach. Steve got called back to duty almost as soon as he arrived, but it was good.

It was twenty four hours of pretend.

They ignored their history, they ignored how John sent Steve away, they ignored how Steve hated calling home, and they pretended they were in a good place and were happy to be together.

Those were the best memories Steve had of his father as an adult – the only memories he had as adult, really. The rest of the time were checking in phone calls and birthday wishes and holiday video calls. His father hated computers, but he had set up the program on his computer at work, just so he could talk to Steve while Steve was in places he couldn’t talk about and doing things Steve couldn’t brag about.

Little things like that, like his aversion to technology – but getting over it long enough to talk to Steve, those were the little things that Steve clung to after he died. Little nuggets of proof that John loved him. Joe and Deb could tell him of John’s love every day, but that twenty four hours meant more to him than any of the stories they had for him.

When he heard the gunshot that killed him, Steve screamed. But he didn’t cry. ~

His funeral came and went, but he didn’t cry.

~

His life grew wild, and he learned more about why his father sent him away. There was comfort in the thought it was to protect him. It was an empty comfort, but comfort all the same. It was the same reason he sent Mary away the second time. He understood where his father was coming from, at least.

But he didn’t cry.

~

He was chasing down a sniper that had it out for the McGarretts. Who wanted revenge on all the police that had wronged him. And they had taken him out, neutralized the situation, Danny yelled at him a little for being reckless, then he saw his father’s ghost.
When he was alone that night, thinking about his vision, and trying to decide if it was real or his mind playing tricks and showing him what he wanted to see… he was close, but he didn’t cry.

~

Then Wo Fat grabbed him. Out of his father’s car, of all things. His truck was getting its oil changed and he had a crime scene to get to so he just took the Marquis. Wo Fat tortured him, shot him up with drugs, confused him about reality, and shattered his whole world for a little while. Made him think all his friends never had anything bad happen to them, that Danny loved Hawaii, that they had caught Victor Hesse fast and quick without problems. Made him think about that twenty four hours on the beach, and gave him another conversation with his dad.

Made him think he still had a chance to make things right.

So when reality came back to him, Danny’s hand on the back of his neck, he lost it for a moment. He never got to make it right. He was always too late, always missing out.

Officer Ochoa’s daughter – his childhood friend – died of breast cancer before he could see her again, his mother left without giving him answers twice, his sister was halfway around the world and they struggled to keep talking to each other, Freddie died a year short of Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell getting repealed, Catherine had left him for a vendetta in the desert, and he had left things so rotten with Jake Wu. Everyone he really cared about, dead or gone, and he was left alone in the wake.

And now…

He held it together long enough to be alone in the ambulance. He wasn’t really alone, there was Danny, and the EMT, but they didn’t count. Steve lost it. He cried over all his lost connections and all his mistakes and he missed his dad.

He really missed his dad.

Danny held his hand tight as the EMT worked and the ambulance made its way to the hospital. It was a lifeline that brought him back to himself. A moment of weakness against a very big, confusing, emotional day. He wasn’t going to let it happen again. If he ever saw his mom again he’d demand answers, he had to make things right with his sister, he had to track Jake down… he had to tell Danny how he felt.

“Danny,” Steve said, almost under his breath.

“I’m here,” Danny said, squeezing his hand between both of his. “I’m right here.”

“I love you, man.”

“I love you too, Steve.”

“No,” Steve said. “You’re my best friend.”

“You’re mine, too.”

“I love you,” he said again.

“The drugs are still in his system, I’m not sure how he’s still awake after everything,” the EMT said. The EMT turned to Steve, “But try to stay awake, okay?”

Steve nodded, suddenly fighting a wave of exhaustion. He closed his eyes. “No, no, Steve,” Danny
said, shaking his hand. “Wake up.”

~

When he woke up again, he was in the hospital room. Danny was on the phone with someone, but he was there. He licked his lips, mouth desperately dry. Danny was still here.

He still had a chance to tell him the truth, how he felt, that he’d never felt so connected to someone his whole life. He couldn’t let something happen, he couldn’t; he wouldn’t.

Then Danny said something that broke the magic spell; “I don’t know, Melissa, I need to be here right now.”

Melissa. Danny’s Melissa. They’d been together about a year at this point. Danny talked about her a lot and was obviously enamored with her. She was pretty and she was strong and she was…

…she was a woman.

Steve’s heart fell. A half a thought rolled over his mind, ‘we’ll never be togeth–’ but he stopped himself. Shook his head.

Danny was his best friend. He loved him – loved him more than pretty much anyone in his life – but he was just his friend. Steve sighed, and Danny noticed.

“I gotta go, he’s waking up, I’ll call you later,” Danny said into his phone and hung up. Then all his attention was on Steve. “Hey, how are you feeling?”

He was his friend, and Steve could live with that. He couldn’t live without that, that was for sure.

“’M thirsty…” he croaked.

Danny reached for a cup on his bedside table and held it so Steve could take a few sips through the straw. “You scared me today, babe.”

“Wasn’t my fault this time,” Steve countered.

“No,” Danny said, running a hand along the bandages where the bullet grazed his head. “No it wasn’t.”

“Thank you,” Steve said, almost a whisper, and not sure what he was thanking him for.

Danny nodded anyway, like he understood more than Steve had said. Maybe he understood. Maybe he knew about Steve’s deeper feelings and chose to love him despite that. Danny was straight, Steve wasn’t… but Danny didn’t care. He was by Steve’s side anyway.

Steve broke down again, thinking about everything – his head clearer than before, better able to process what had happened to him, everything he felt – and finally, he cried.

~~~

Steve – present day

~~~

“So, we’ll see you for fourth of July?” Eddie asked, pulling bags out to the curb. They were at the airport, getting ready to leave.
“At least me, Steve, Jack, and Nahele,” Danny answered. “If we can get the trip cleared with the social worker. I think Rachel wants Grace and Charlie for the fourth.”

“Ugh,” Eddie groaned. Steve had to agree, but he kept quiet. He and Danny had been down that road before. “She’s British! What does she want to celebrate the fourth for?”

Danny shrugged. “We’ll be in the middle of a custody case,” Danny argued. “We have to look understanding and flexible.”

“Well,” Clara said, sighing. “At least we’ll get to see you,” then she smiled down at Jack, “and my newest grandbaby.”

Danny smiled, and Steve watched as Jack grinned and pulled back in on himself again. He did that when he was pleased by the attention and Steve grinned too.

“Clara, go get us in line,” Eddie said, and Clara nodded. “Steve, help me with the bags, yeah?”

“Goodbye, Steve,” she said, reaching out to him and giving him a warm hug before Steve could turn to help Eddie. Steve returned it with a smile and gave her a kiss on the cheek. “Thank you, again, for the lovely party.”

“It’s my pleasure,” Steve said honestly. “It’s good you get to come visit,” he told her.

“It is, isn’t it,” she turned to Eddie, who only rolled his eyes and nodded. Steve was sure that was a common topic between them since their almost-divorce.

“Let us walk you in,” Danny said, bouncing Jack.

“Alright,” Clara said, refocusing on Jack.

Steve smiled, watching them leave for a moment, but then turned to Eddie. They had a few bags – mostly Clara’s – but it wasn’t too much. Eddie had already done most of the work.

“I wanted to talk to you at the party, but I never could seem to get you alone,” Eddie said.

Steve looked up at that, confused. “Well, that wasn’t on purpose.”

“No, no you are a social butterfly, that’s for sure. A good balance for Danny’s homebodied nature.”

Steve smiled. Danny would spend every night in if Steve would let him. Sometimes you just had to get out of the house and do something.

“I just wanted to say…” Eddie started. “I’m glad the two of you found your way.”

Steve paused.

“I was worried about him, there, for awhile.” Eddie’s eyes were on Danny and Clara, who were queueing up.

Steve said nothing, feeling like Eddie wanted to say more.

“You’re a father now,” Eddie said, eyes still on Danny. “You know.”

Steve nodded, “I’m starting to.”

Eddie smiled, and turned back to him. “I know you keep them safe. I’ve never thanked you for
that.”

Steve’s jaw tightened. “I love them, sir. They’re my whole world.”

“I know what that’s like,” Eddie said, patting him on the back and turning to the trunk for the last suitcase. “So maybe don’t wait so long to put a ring on it, huh?”

Steve sputtered, “what?”

Eddie grinned. “I know these things should take time. You should only do it if you’re both ready.”

“How will I know?” Steve asked.

Eddie smiled, soft and wide. “You’ll know.”

Steve grinned to himself, taking the suitcase from him, realizing this was Eddie’s way of giving his approval. Steve was thankful for it.

“Seeing the two of you together… it’s…” He pulled up on one of the suitcase’s handles and paused, finding his words. “Inspiring.”

“I could say the same thing about you and Clara,” Steve replied.

Eddie chuckled, “Oh, we’ve had our rows, believe you me. But the two of you are… a good match.”

Steve smiled again, shutting the trunk. “Thank you, sir.”

Eddie held out his hand and Steve took it with a satisfied grin. Acceptance. From family. What a weird sensation he was experiencing lately.

Then Eddie pulled him in for a hug Steve wasn’t expecting and said in his ear, “You hurt him, I’ll kill you. I don’t care that you’re a ninja. I know how to make a fire look like an accident.”

Steve laughed and pulled back nodding. He understood. He’d set the world on fire for Jack, too. “Yes, sir. Wouldn’t expect anything less, sir.”

They all said their goodbyes, and Danny was all gentle smiles putting Jack back into his baby seat. They had had a long week the week before, but it seemed they were back to their good days.

…well. Steve had one more thing.

“I’ll drop you two off at HQ, I gotta get back to Hickam.”

Danny turned around and settled in the passenger seat, “Do you want company?”

“Nah,” Steve said. “I’ll be fine.”

“Are you sure? Me and Jack can wait in the car.”

Steve mulled it over. It would mean a drive into town and then turning around to drive straight back. Plus, it be nice to have Danny close. “Sure. Okay.”

~

Hickam’s empty hangers were always full of echos. Echos of engines and mechanics and their tools.
But today, this hangar was quiet. There, in the middle, in a place of honor, was a single coffin with a flag draped over it.

Steve paused at the hangar garage door, taking in the scene. Jake was to be flown back to the east coast today. His fiance Eliot had been given bereavement leave (and what a wonder that was in itself, Steve had thought. That the military allowed bereavement leave for gay couples now. How things have changed.) Eliot was flying home with him, see him to his family and to his funeral. Steve felt like it wasn’t his place to be at the funeral, but he still…

…he felt like he should see him off, one last time.

He walked over to the coffin, straightening his dress overcoat as he went, and pulling his cap off his head. He had dressed for the occasion. Jake deserved that respect and honor, even if Steve hadn’t given it to him in life.

‘I can do this,’ he thought to himself.

He knocked on the coffin gently, as close as he’d get to him as he’d ever be again, and sniffed.

“I’m so sorry… for so many things…” he trailed off. There wasn’t much more to say, not that it would have mattered. Jake was gone. It would be something that would follow him. He stood in the silence for a moment, allowing himself to feel his sadness.

“He wanted to reach out to you,” someone said. Steve turned and saw that Eliot, in his own dress blues, was walking up. Steve turned to him and lightly saluted – he was a Captain after all – but Eliot waved him off. “He was talking about it while we were talking about our move to Hawaii.”

“Mary had told me that you were.”

Eliot nodded. “We are both close to our twenty years, but I wanted to stay on. I had a desk job a Pearl lined up.”

“Not anymore?”

He shook his head, staring down at the coffin, eyes deep with sadness. “I can’t be here. I don’t know what I’ll do now.”

Steve thought about what it would mean if he lost Danny, what he would do. But the fear and the loneliness was too powerful and he squashed it back down. “I’m so sorry for your loss.”

He shook his head again and looked up at Steve. “I never really knew what it was the two of you had before everything went sour.” It sounded like a question.

Steve sighed. “Not much, really. I was… He was good friend, and we could have… but…” Steve shook his head. “You know how it was back then.”

Eliot nodded; then he grinned. “Jake was the one that convinced me we didn’t have to be alone in the closet.”

“Yeah,” Steve said.

“We were together in secret, to everyone but his sister, for… years. When we came out it was fantastic. I’d never seen him so free and so… himself.”

Steve bit his lip. “I’m glad he got that. Some of us never did.”
Eliot smiled a sad smile. “Too many.”

Steve nodded.

Then Eliot turned towards the door and smiled another sad smile. “Hi, guys.”

Steve turned to see Mary, in the same nice, black dress she wore at the anniversary party, and Eli, stone faced and in a suit, standing there. They made their way over to them.

“We wanted to say goodbye,” Mary said as she hugged Eliot. Seemed they were all friends. Steve felt like an outsider. “How are you doing?”

Eliot nodded. “I’m okay. Well, as I can be.”

Mary gave him an encouraging smile, and rub on the arm.

“I’m flying back home today,” Eli told him, reaching out for his own hug. “I’ll be at the funeral on Friday.”

“You don’t have to, Arlington is a long way from New York,” Eliot said.

“I’d go farther,” Eli said. Then his eyes darted to the coffin. “He’d do the same.”

Steve remembered that Mary said Jake and Eli did security gigs together, which means they probably went through some rough times together. Partners and friends. Steve chuckled.

“What?” Eli asked, looking a bit offended.

“It’s just a small world,” Steve said. “Of all the investigating firms in all the world…”

Mary smiled, and reached out to squeeze Steve’s arm. “That kind of thing is how you know someone was supposed to be in your life.”

Eliot’s face tore at the statement, but he gathered himself up quickly.

That was when a few men came walking up. “It’s time to load him,” they said respectfully.

“I’ll help,” Eli said.

“My too,” Eliot said.

“I’d like to, too,” Steve added looking for Eliot’s permission. “If you don’t mind.”

Eliot stared him down, but then he nodded his consent.

The three of them, and three of the local airmen, all gathered around the coffin. Mary reached out and knocked on the coffin, much like Steve had, and then they hoisted him up to get him home.

~

Steve, Mary, and Eli stood long enough to watch the plane take off. And Steve and Eli held salutes and his coffin was loaded into the plane. Mary wiped at her eyes a few times, but held her ground. The two of them made plans for pancakes on Saturday and the three of them parted ways.

When Steve got back to the car, Jack was sleeping, and Danny was ready for him.

“I could see his plane take off. I saw Mary and Eli,” Danny said. “If it weren’t for Jack, I’d have
been there."

Steve shook his head. “I didn’t realize they’d show up.”

“You’re not alone in grieving him, babe,” Danny said, reaching out and running his fingertips along his hairline in a move that Steve had come to crave in moments like this.

“I know.”

“I’m not going anywhere,” Danny said. His mantra he said to Steve every now and then. A reminder that he had chosen Steve.

And Steve had chosen him. Steve leaned over the console and pulled him in for a kiss. Reassuring and steadying and filling and substantive. “Let’s go home,” Danny said, pulling away with a hum.

“We’ve got work.”

“I think the boss with be okay with it,” Danny smirked.

Steve rolled his eyes and smiled. “I love you.”

“I love you.”

“Butterball,” Steve said with a grin.

“Oh,” Danny groaned, sitting back into his seat. “This is going to be a thing, now, isn’t it?”

Steve grinned. “I didn’t hear a veto.”

“Veto! Veto! Veto!”

End Notes

Woo. Ok ok ok that's over okay. Ya still with me? I'm not going to give a time table anymore, I no longer trust myself to stay true to one BUT. There are still THREE more fics in this verse coming. Hopefully not all as long as this, but at least one is gonna end up longer. I'm gonna write them no matter what, I'm committed at this point, but it would be nice (*casts line*) if I knew people still wanted more out of this world.

Anyway. THANK YOU GUYS. :)

AND A BIG OLE SHOUTOUT TO PTERAWATERS FOR BETA-ING WOO I LOVE HER GO READ HER STUFF idk how to link it but she's pterawaters here on ao3!!!

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