Guardian

by jlstreck

Summary

What happens when Grace's world falls apart while Danny is in New Jersey handling some family business? Will Steve prove to be the guardian the little girl needs? McDanno slash.
Set around early Season 3.
Also posted on fanfiction.net under same title.
Disclaimer: I don’t own any of the characters and make no money doing this. I’m just having fun playing with them.
A/N: This plot bunny took on a life of its own. Hope you enjoy it.

Prologue

“Danno, do you have to go?” Grace clung to her father as he knelt to give her a final hug on the front steps of Stan and Rachel’s home.

“It’ll only be for a few days, Monkey. I should be here to pick you up from school on Friday.” Looking over her shoulder, the detective gave his partner a pleading look. He usually didn’t have to travel without her, but on the rare occasion he did, she usually wasn’t quite so worried about it.

“Gracie.” Steve squatted down next to two of the most important members of his ohana. “Danno will be back soon, but if you need anything while he’s gone you can always call me. I’m just a phone call away if you need me to come.”

The little girl nodded, tears still streaking her face. Finally releasing her father, she wrapped her arms around the SEAL’s neck. “Thanks, D… Uncle Steve.”

The front door opened to reveal a rather tired looking Rachel. “Come on Grace. Your father needs to finish getting ready for his trip.” As the girl trudged into the house, the woman turned to the two men. “Have a safe trip, Danny. Steve, I’ll try not to let her call you too often. I know you’re busy.”

Steve’s eyes darkened a bit at her comment. “Let her call as much as she wants. I’ll make time for Gracie.”

Chapter 1

Staring at the empty office where his partner should be, Steve struggled with an uneasy feeling. It was Wednesday; Danno would be back in two more days.

The SEAL looked down at his phone. Grace had called him Sunday night after they had dropped her off and again both before and right after school on Monday. Maybe the little girl had gotten over her initial upset at Danny leaving for a few days, but Steve couldn’t shake the feeling that the lack of phone calls since Monday wasn’t because she felt better.

He hoped that Rachel hadn’t followed through on her comment about keeping Grace from calling. Picking up the phone, he decided to make a quick call. After several rings, it went to voicemail.

“Rachel, it’s Steve. Hadn’t heard from Gracie since Monday and wanted to see how she’s doing. If you don’t mind, I’d like to pick her up from school and hang out for a bit. I’ll have her home by dinner. Just give me a call and let me know if that’s okay.”

Disconnecting the call, he decided to go see what the cousins were staring at on the big screen. It was a quiet week, so they’d decided to dig into a cold case.

Stepping outside his office, his phone rang. Hopefully it was Rachel giving him the green light. Glancing at the screen he was surprised to see caller ID showing Academy of the Sacred Hearts.
Why was Grace’s school calling him?

“This is Commander McGarrett.” His tone was wary, causing Chin and Kono to look up at him.

“Commander, this is Ms. Jones from Academy of the Sacred Hearts. I’m sorry to bother you, but you are listed as the primary emergency contact for Grace Williams.”

Steve’s mind instantly filled with all the things that could have happened to her at school. “Is Grace okay?” At his question the rest of the team stiffened, their interest in his conversation multiplying.

“Honestly, I’m not sure. Grace was here on Monday and though she was upset about her father traveling appeared to be okay; however, we haven’t seen her since then. Her parents are usually very good about calling us to let us know if she will be absent, but we’ve heard nothing from them. I tried to call Rachel yesterday and received no answer. Today I tried every number we have listed for Grace’s parents and still got nothing.”

A feeling of dread crept over Steve. Something was definitely off about this situation. If Grace were sick, her mother would have called. She’d learned that the best way to cheer the little girl up when she didn’t feel well was to call in Five-0, especially Steve. Rachel wouldn’t just pull Grace out of school without a reason and it wasn’t like her to go off the grid.

“Thank you for calling me. I haven’t spoken to Grace since Monday, but was planning to get her after school today. I’ll head over to her mother’s house now and make sure everything is okay. Call if you hear anything from them and I’ll do the same when I have any information.”

Before the call was finished, the SEAL was headed out the building, the look on his face causing anyone in his path to scatter. Chin and Kono followed in his wake. Whatever had happened, he wasn’t going alone.

Hitting buttons on his phone, Steve wasn’t sure if he hoped Danny would answer or that it would go to voicemail. He had no actual information, but there would be hell to pay later if he didn’t tell his partner something was amiss.

Voicemail picked up and the SEAL spoke. “Danny, call me as soon as you get this.” There was nothing else to say, no other news he could give at this point.

“Steve,” Kono caught up with him as they approached the vehicles. “What’s going on?”

Seeing the concern in her eyes, he shook his head. “I don’t know, but I’m going to Rachel’s to find out.”

Opening the door to her car, as Steve rounded his truck, her reply left no room for argument. “We’ll be right behind you.”

With nothing else left to say, vehicle doors slammed as their engines came to life. Seconds later the Five-0 team was heading on to the street, lights flashing.

What felt like hours later, but was truly only a few moments, Steve pulled his big blue truck up to the gate to Rachel’s house. Pushing the button on the keypad, he waited impatiently for a response that never came. Undaunted, he quickly keyed in the code she’d given him and waited for the gate to open.

Proceeding toward the house, his eyes took in the area. Nothing appeared out of place. No visible windows were broken and the door was still closed, but the seemingly normal appearance didn’t relieve the fear in his stomach.
Stopping in front of the house, he quickly exited the truck and met the cousins at the bottom of the steps. Drawing his sidearm, his eyes met Chin’s and he saw confusion and worry.

“Something is up. Grace has been MIA for 2 days and nobody is answering calls.”

The trio cautiously approached the front door, listening for any clues to what they would find within. Hearing nothing, Steve rang the doorbell. On the off chance every alarm going off on his head was wrong; he didn’t want to scare Rachel to death by knocking in her door.

A muffled sound came from inside before things fell silent again. Someone was home. Banging on this door this time, Steve hollered at the occupants. “Rachel! Stan! Somebody open up!”

“Go away!” A voice that somewhat resembled Stan hollered.

Stepping back from the door, Steve took a second to look at the other two members of his team. Receiving a nod from both, he let loose a powerful kick, sending the door flying open.

Guns drawn, the three quietly approached the sounds coming from the kitchen. Rounding the corner, McGarrett froze in place. “Shit.” The word came out as a whisper. Not ten feet in front of him, Rachel’s lifeless body was crumpled next to the kitchen island. Her head in a pool of blood.

Now on even higher alert, he motioned for the other two to stay with him as they moved forward.

Entering the room, he quickly spotted Stan leaning haphazardly against the counter, a mostly empty bottle of scotch in his hand, one eye swollen shut.

“Stan, where is Grace?” There was nothing he could do for Rachel, but he had to hope that the girl was still okay.

“The little bitch hit me,” he drunkenly gestured to his eye.

“Where is she, Stan.” The SEAL continued his slow approach toward the man. The cousins watched behind him, their boss appeared coiled to strike at the slightest provocation. Given the body on the floor and the danger to the girl they all loved, they wouldn’t stop him.

“She locked herself in the upstairs bath. Haven’t seen her since Monday night, but the door was still locked last I checked.” His voice slurred.

Barely controlled rage rolled off the SEAL as he took a menacing step toward the smaller man.

“If she’s hurt….” His threat was interrupted by Chin’s voice.

“Steve, Grace.” The man’s voice was quiet, but was enough to refocus the deadly man on his primary objective. Find Grace. “Kono’s calling this in and I’ll be happy to deal with him. You have to find Grace.” The Hawaiian was smart enough to know that if she was scared the only one that would be able to convince her she was safe was Steve.

Nodding his head, Steve wheeled around and ran from the room. Taking the stairs three at a time, he rushed toward the bathroom door.

“Grace!” He yelled frantically as he approached the door. Reaching it, he tried the handled and found it still locked. “Gracie, open up. You’re safe now.”

He heard a small shuffling noise followed by a large crash.

Not stopping to wait for any further response, Steve slammed his shoulder into the door, holding the
handle to ensure it didn’t swing widely and hurt Grace.

The sight in front of him fed his rage. The girl that was Danny’s entire world and was like a daughter to him was crumpled on the tile floor her shirt and skirt ripped leaving exposing the brutal bruises across her arms and stomach.

Crossing the space between them in two long strides and dropping to his knees, he carefully pulled her to him as a sob escaped her small body.

“Steve, you came.” She choked out as he held her closer.

“Of course I came. I’ll always come for you.” He reassured the terrified child.

Footsteps behind him caused him to look up. “Steve, Duke and the rest of the gang are here. They sent a bus in case we needed it.” The unspoken question was clear and the small nod from the SEAL provided the answer.

Hearing the other man’s voice, Grace tried to hide cover herself better with her torn shirt. Fear and shock seemed to override her ability to recognize her Uncle Chin.

Sensing her unease, Steven motioned for the other man to leave the room and appreciated his immediate compliance despite the pained look on his face.

Looking around the room, he quickly realized the hand towels wouldn’t work to cover Grace. He started to release her, but his motion halted as her small hand gripped the t-shirt covering his chest tighter.

“It’s okay Gracie. I’m not going anywhere. I just need to take my button up shirt off so you can wear it.” A few seconds later, she released her hold and sat up slightly, still leaning against him as she winced in pain.

Making quick work of pulling the shirt off his shoulders, he swung it around and draped it over the young girl’s back. He was impressed when she managed to push her arms through the appropriate holes and wrap it more snugly around herself.

“Grace, I’m going to pick you up. Kono called an ambulance and I need to get you out there. Just keep your eyes closed and we’ll be out there in no time.”

Nodding her head, she clung to the large man as he lifted her easily. He was relieved when she tucked her head against his chest and closed her eyes. He didn’t want her to have to see the scene in the kitchen. Hopefully she hadn’t already seen it.

Striding out of the room and down the stairs, he met the silent, pained gazes of the other officers. He nodded in silent thanks when he noticed the hastily formed wall of bodies blocking any view of Rachel’s body.

Less than a minute later, Grace was placed on the waiting gurney, still clinging to Steve’s hand.

The paramedics made no move to separate him from the girl and worked quickly around him to secure their young patient. The SEAL did his best to make it easy for them to load her into the ambulance while maintaining contact with her.

Before the doors shut, Kono appeared. “We’ll meet you at the hospital.” Stepping back, she slammed the doors so they could pull away.
Chapter 2

The trip to the ER was quiet. The paramedics worked silently, seeming to understand that their young patient needed to keep her focus on Commander McGarrett. They were both familiar with the head of Five-0 and had treated various members of his team, including him, in the last couple of years. They’d heard the stories about the little Williams girl and her relationship with the task force. Judging by the scene in front of them, those stories had been understated rather than exaggerated as many not close to the team thought.

Keeping his hand wrapped around Grace’s, the SEAL continued to watch her closely. She’d kept her eyes closed since he’d picked her up. He’d nearly panicked for a second when her features started to relax until he realized it was the pain medication injected in the IV.

The silent tears that fell down her face broke his heart. He couldn’t help the feeling that somehow he’d failed her. He should have known something was wrong when she hadn’t called Tuesday. He should have come to check on her sooner.

“Daddy?” The little girl’s voice trembled as her eyes opened. The SEAL was surprised she hadn’t used her normal nickname for her father. He’d never heard her call Danno Daddy.

“I’ll call Danno again as soon as we get you settled at the hospital, Gracie. He’ll be here as soon as he can.” He wished again that his partner hadn’t had to make the trip to New Jersey. He knew Danny would never forgive himself for not being here when his daughter’s world fell apart.

Saying nothing else, the girl’s eyes slipped closed again. “I’ll stay close until he gets here. I promise.” Part of him wanted to confront Stan sooner, but he knew the man would be in custody and not going anywhere. Right now, his priority had to be Grace.

A few minutes later, Steve trotted along beside the gurney through the hall of the ER. Nurses swarmed the gurney as the paramedic gave the overview of her condition. When they came to a stop in one of the rooms, the SEAL helped them transfer her into the bed while quickly assessing the situation. Meeting the eyes of the male doctor that was preparing to walk in the room, he quickly shook his head no and mouthed “female.”

The doctor nodded his understanding and hurried away to find another doctor. A minute later, a female doctor Steve recognized from one of his visits to the ER entered the room.

“Commander McGarrett.” She nodded. “Is Detective Williams on the way?”

“He’s in Jersey, ma’am, but I’m sure he’ll be on his way soon.” He felt Grace stiffen and looked down at her. “He’ll get here as fast as he can, Gracie.” He squeezed her hand reassuringly.

“Commander, I need to examine Grace to determine the extent of her injuries. Perhaps you should step outside for a moment.”

“No!” The little girl’s voice sounded panicked. Clearly being left alone with someone she didn’t know wasn’t the best idea right now.

“Gracie,” Steve tried to think of a solution that would alleviate her fear and preserve her modesty. He knew the doctor would have to check to see if Stan had sexually assaulted her given the circumstances. “Would it be okay if Kono came in and stayed with you while Dr. Scott checks you over? I’ll be right outside the door and can try to call Danno again.”
She stared up at him and considered what he said before nodding slowly. Kono provided a safe alternative as someone she knew and trusted.

Almost as if she’d been summoned, the Hawaiian officer appeared at the door to the room. Seeing her boss’s gesture to enter, she quickly joined them.

“Hey, Gracie.” The petite woman came over to the side of the bed and took the hand that wasn’t still attached to Steve.

“Kono, Dr. Scott needs go through her exam. Would you mind staying here with Gracie while I try Danno again?” His eyes pleaded with her to stay and help keep the little girl calm.

“Of course.” She looked down at the youngest member of their Five-0 ohana. Even wrapped in Steve’s oversized shirt, it was easy to see some of the bruises. She swallowed back the bile threatening to rise in her throat and smiled down at Grace as she started plotting all the ways to make sure Stan got what he deserved.

Leaning over the bed, the SEAL placed a quick kiss on the child’s forehead. “I’ll be back as soon as the doctor is done, okay?”

Receiving her consenting nod, he headed out to the hall. Pulling out his phone, he was a bit surprised he hadn’t received a call back from Danny yet. Hitting the buttons, he waited as it rang. When the phone went to voicemail again, he disconnected instead of leaving a message.

Scrolling through his contacts, Steve decided to try a different route. Finding the number he needed, he hit send and waited as the phone rang. This time, someone picked up on the second ring.

“Williams’s residence. Is this my favorite son calling?” Danny’s mom teased, which meant his partner had to be nearby. The Williams matriarch loved to tease her son that Steve was really her favorite.

Steve fought to stay composed. He wondered if he would still be considered a son, much less the favorite son, when they found out what he’d let happen to her granddaughter.

“It is, Mom. Is Danny there? I’ve tried his cell and he’s not answering.”

“He’s right here.” He heard the sound of her moving around the room to hand off the phone and then heard her voice slightly muffled. “Daniel, where is your cell phone. Steven has been trying to reach you.”

Seconds later, Steve heard the Jersey native’s voice. “Steven, what’s wrong? Something must be wrong or you wouldn’t be calling my parents’ house. Did you blow up the entire island in the less than three days I’ve been gone?”

Normally, the mini rant would have made the SEAL smile, but knowing he was about to send his partner’s world crashing down he sighed.

“You need to come home, now. Danny, Grace needs you here. So do I.” The formidable man ducked into an empty room as his composure finally started to slip.

Hearing the crack in Steve’s voice, his partner paused before responding. It didn’t matter what it was; he was going home. “I’ll catch the next flight out, babe, but what happened?” Running up the stairs to his bedroom, he located his phone on the nightstand and saw missed calls from the school and Steve. This couldn’t be good.
Running back down, he handed his phone and wallet to his mother as he waited for Steve to explain. “Mom, call the airlines. Find the fastest flight to get me home.” Understanding the frantic tone of his voice, she didn’t question his instructions, but simply took the items and headed to the computer to figure out which airline to call.

Heading back to his room, he prodded his partner. “Babe, don’t leave me hanging. Mom is finding a ticket and I’m packing, but I need to know what I’m coming home to.”

Taking a haggard breath, the SEAL finally found his voice again. “I don’t know exactly what happened. I’m at the hospital with Gracie. The doctor is with her now. The school called, she hadn’t been there since Monday and nobody was answering their calls. We went to check it out.” He paused, hating to say the next part. “Danny, Rachel is dead. We found her body in the kitchen with Stan completely drunk. Grace managed to give him a black eye and lock herself in the bathroom. She’s safe now. I promised I’d stay close until you get here.”

“Oh god!” Danny sunk onto the bed. “I should have been there. She shouldn’t have been with them.”

“I’m so sorry, Danny. It’s my fault. I should have checked on her sooner.”

As distraught as he was at the idea that his precious monkey being hurt, he couldn’t let the crazy SEAL take the blame. “Steven, listen to me. It is not your fault. If you hadn’t gone over there, she would still be locked in a bathroom or worse. You got her out. You got her to the hospital and if I know you, you may never leave her unattended again.”

The conversation fell silent for a moment. Neither man had the heart to argue over who was to blame. Before they got any further, Danny’s mom interrupted.

“Daniel, you’re flight leaves in three hours. We need to head the airport.” Steve could hear the fright in her voice. “Let me talk to Steven for a moment while you finish packing.”

“I’ll call you when I get through security, babe. Keep her close and don’t go see Stan until I’m there. I don’t want you to kill him before I get my shot.”

“Okay, but no promise that Chin, Kono, or Duke won’t get to him first.” Steve heard the half-hearted chuckle as the phone was handed off.

“Steven, are you and Gracie okay?” Her motherly tone made him cringe.

“I’m okay and Gracie will be, Mrs. Williams.”

“Don’t you dare Mrs. Williams me, Steven! I don’t know what happened, but from the little bit I heard you’re blaming yourself for something you couldn’t control. We don’t walk away from our family just because something bad happens. Now, you take care of that precious girl and yourself. I need more time to pack than Daniel, but I’m on the first flight out tomorrow morning. I’ll grab a cab from the airport and a hotel room, so don’t worry about me.”

Shaking his head, Steve could see where his partner got his determination. “Mom, somebody will get you from the airport, just text me your arrival info. Hopefully Grace will be out of the hospital before you get here and we’ll all be back at my place. There’s plenty of room for you to stay there and it’ll probably do us all good to have you close.”

“Okay, Steven. I’ll send you the info after we get Daniel to the airport. We love you.”

“Love you too, Mom.”
A/N:

Comments are truly appreciated.
Chapter 3

Waiting outside the door to Grace’s room, Steve was surprised the phone call with his partner had gone so well. As awful as this day had been so far, he wasn’t sure he could have handled Danny being disappointed in him.

He couldn’t help but crack a small smile at the idea that Mrs. Williams would arrive several hours after her son. Grace was going to need all the support she could get to find a new normal for her life. Growing up with only one parent was rough; he knew that.

Never having wanted kids, the SEAL couldn’t help but wonder what being Gracie’s dad would be like. Of course, she had her Danno already. She didn’t need another dad.

Shaking his head in an attempt to cut off that train of thought, Steve’s mind shifted to the scene from this morning. Stan had never been on his list of favorite people, but he couldn’t imagine what drove him to apparently kill his wife and attack his stepdaughter.

“Steve, how is she?” Chin’s voice startled him out of his thoughts.

“Scared and badly bruised, but I don’t know anything else yet. Kono is in with her while Dr. Scott checks her out.” He’d be glad when the doctor came out and he knew just how extensive the damage was.

“Were you able to reach Danny?” The Hawaiian cop inquired.

“He’s headed to the airport. Said he’d call again after he gets through security. Mom said his flight left in 3 hours, so I’d guess he’ll be here tomorrow morning. It’ll probably stop on the west coast for the night. Of course, she’s on the first plane tomorrow, so she’ll probably get here tomorrow night.”

Chin shook his head and grinned. “Shoulda known she’d follow him out here.” He couldn’t help but notice the serious expression on Steve’s face as he stared at the closed door in front of him. He guessed that was where Grace was.

“Do you want the overview of what happened now, or would you prefer to wait until later? I took the liberty of questioning Stan a bit before coming here. Given his rather intoxicated state he wasn’t completely coherent, but I got the gist.”

That got the SEAL’s full attention. “Now.” He needed to know if he was going to figure out how to fix this for Grace.

“Short version, apparently things haven’t been going well at work and he’s been too damned proud to admit it to Rachel. The firm he works for decided to let him go Monday so he came home shortly after Grace got home from school after having a few drinks. When he heard the two of them talking about ideas for a long weekend getaway they hoped to take, he completely lost it.”

Steve looked stunned. “All this because he lost his job?”

“Apparently so. He said he and Rachel started arguing about the trip. I gather he abruptly told them they weren’t going anywhere but initially refused to explain why. During the discussion, he broke out the scotch and continued drinking. Things got heated and Rachel said she and Grace were going to go somewhere else for a while so he could cool down. That’s when it turned physical. He admitted to trying to stop her and getting violent. At this point, he isn’t sure how it happened but she ended up hitting her head on the marble counter of the island. Judging by the damage she didn’t just
slip and fall.”

None of this was making Steve feel better. Unless he’d missed something, this meant Grace was in the room when her mother was killed. Stan should consider himself lucky that he was in police custody already, otherwise an unfortunately accident might have occurred on the way to lockup.

Knowing he couldn’t avoid the last part, Chin pushed on with the story. “When Rachel hit the floor, Grace started screaming. Stan said his head was throbbing and he didn’t want to put up with her, so grabbed a hold of her and tried to shut her up. Of course, our little Gracie didn’t take that well and fought back. Unless he was lying, he didn’t attempt anything with her. When she managed to elbow him in the eye he lost his grip long enough for her to escape. Fortunately, he was too drunk by that point to consider the fact that he could have just busted the door open like you did.”

Steve met his friend’s eyes; the sadness there reflected his own. Their precious little girl would never be the same. She’d seen her mother killed and then had to fight for her own safety with the perp.

The sound of the door opening behind him caused the SEAL to whirl around as Chin stepped forward to stand beside him. They stared the doctor down as she shut the door behind her.

“Commander. Lt. Kelly. I’ve finished the exam. She’s more comfortable now thanks to the painkillers. We’re going to give her fluids and nutrients through the IV to help her body catch up. She did manage to drink some water while hiding in the bathroom, but has had nothing else since Monday at lunch.”

Both men nodded their heads, but Steve was the first to ask questions. “What’s the extent or her injuries?”

The doctor looked relieved, which allowed the pair to relax only the slightest bit.

“She has extensive bruising on her arms, back, and abdomen. There are no signs of sexual trauma and no broken bones. From what I could get out of her, she fought hard when he tried to restrain her after her mother went down. I suspect the bruises may not have been as bad if she’d fought less, but I hate to think what else would have happened. As it is, things could have been far worse. If Detective Williams were here we’d be able to release her this evening.”

“He won’t be back until sometime tomorrow morning. You can release her to me this evening. They’ll end up at my place anyway.” Now that he knew her physical injuries weren’t what he’d feared, he was anxious to get out of the hospital.

“I’m afraid we can’t release a minor to someone other than a parent or guardian without prior written consent.”

Before Steve could get more upset and start an argument he was likely to regret, Chin stepped in. “Why don’t you check her file. I know she’s been here before and I believe Detective Williams had the foresight to include approval for her to be released into Commander McGarrett’s care if ever the need arose.”

Nodding her head, Dr. Scott smiled. She was quite pleased that there was a chance to let her young patient leave. After the trauma she’d been through today, being stuck in a hospital would do her little good.

“I’ll ask the nurse to pull the information for me. If that checks out and she continues to do well we’ll have her out of here by dinnertime. Meanwhile, you two can go in and see her. Try to keep things calm and let her rest as much as possible. Also, Officer Kalakaua took the pictures that will be
needed in court during the exam, so Grace won’t need to be upset further by that process.”

“Thank you, Doc. I’ll stay with her until she’s released.” Shaking both men’s hands, the doctor headed back to the nurses’ station.

As Steve started to push the door open, Chin hesitated. His presence earlier had scared Gracie and he was hesitant to alarm her further. The boss glanced back at him and nodded his head in understanding.

Grace’s eyes met the SEAL’s as soon as he was through the door. Keeping the door open behind him, he offered her a smile.

“Gracie, is it okay if Chin comes in too?”

She nodded her small head. “Of course Uncle Chin can come in.” Much as he suspected, she wasn’t afraid of Chin, but had likely just been so overwhelmed at the house that anyone out of place scared her.

Hearing her response, the Hawaiian followed Steve into the room and watched as he pulled a chair close to the bed and took the young girl’s free hand. Kono still held the other.

“How do you feel?” The SEAL kept his voice quiet.

“Better. Dr. Scott said the stuff she put in the IV would help and that they were going to put more stuff in there to make me feel even better before I go home.” Her voice trembled at the last word and she closed her eyes as the tears formed. “I don’t have a home anymore, do I?”

Her small voice broke the hearts of all three adults.

Without hesitation, Steve squeezed her hand a little tighter. “Gracie, you have a home. You and Danno always have a home with me.” He couldn’t help the image of the three of them building a life together that quickly filled his mind. No matter what he wished for, he would put it aside to make the two of them comfortable in his house. The house that would feel so much more like a home with them in it.

Her eyes flew back open and stared at him. “But Danno doesn’t live there. We just visit a lot when I’m with him.” He heard a hint of wistfulness in her voice.

“I bet if we work together, we can convince Danno that you should both live with me. Dr. Scott seems to think you’ll probably get to come home with me tonight so you’ll already be there when Danno gets home tomorrow.”

Her current fear addressed, everyone could see she was starting to get very tired, an expected, but welcome effect of the drugs. As her eyes started to fall closed again, Steve leaned over and placed a kiss on her head.

“Get some rest, Gracie. I’ll still be here when you wake up.”
Watching their fearless leader at Gracie’s side, Chin and Kono both wished there was more they could do. The nurse had come in and added some other things to Grace’s IV and now they all sat here, helpless. After a moment, Kono realized she could be a bit helpful.

“Boss, why don’t I go round up what she’ll need for a while from the house? Can’t imagine she’s going to want to go back there for a while and she’s going to need you and Danny to stay close.”

His eyes never left the sleep form of the young girl as he replied. “Thanks, Kono. That’d be great. You can take everything over to my place. Just make sure there’s nothing...”

Her voice interrupted him. “I know.” She’d make sure to check for anything that would remind her of Stan and remove it before she put the things in Grace’s room at Steve’s place.

Shortly after she left the room, Chin decided it was time to leave them in peace for a bit. “I’m going to go grab us something to eat. You need anything else while I’m out, brah?”

“No. Food would be good though. Thanks.” Now that the other officer mentioned it, he realized his stomach was telling him it was time for lunch.

Left with only the sleeping girl for company, the SEAL let his mind wonder back to the scene of domestic happiness he’d conjured earlier. The three of them curled up on the couch together, sharing a bowl of popcorn as they watched a cartoon movie in their pajamas.

Before he could get too engrossed in the daydreaming, Grace started to get restless. “No. No. Please don’t!” Her small form started to shiver. “Gracie. Wake up, Gracie. It’s okay, you’re safe.” He tried to rouse her with a gentle shake. “Mom! Let go! Danno! No, but Daddy will come for me!”

Gathering her up in his arms, Steve slid next to her in the bed and held her tight.

“Gracie. Please, wake up. I’ve got you, you’re safe.”

Her eyes remained closed, but her little body seemed to relax back into a more peaceful slumber as a few more words tumbled out. “Daddy... Steve, you came.”

Steve shook his head as he continued to hold her close, he had to be imaging that there was a distinction between Danno and Daddy in her sleep talking. He shouldn’t read into the connecting between his arrival and the mention of daddy.

One of the nurses hurried into the room as second later. “Is she okay? Looked like her heart rate jumped there for a bit.” She looked knowingly at the small girl sleeping in his arms.

Before Steve could explain, she patted his shoulder. “Just be careful with the IV, so it doesn’t pull. I’d feel safer there if I were her too.”

Finishing her check of Grace, the nurse left the room only to reappear a moment later with some extra pillows. With a small smile, she arranged them behind the SEAL so he could sit more comfortably.

“I’ll be back in a bit to check on her again. If you need anything before then just push this button.”

The room fell quiet with only the quiet beeping of the heart rate monitor and Grace’s soft breathing. Closing his eyes, Steve let his head fall back onto the pillows and closed his eyes. He’d be glad
when Danny was back, though he had to admit he’d miss being the one to hold the little girl, but they needed to figure out what to do next.

With Stan’s confession, the way they found the scene, and the pictures of Grace he hoped that the lawyers would manage not to make her testify. She’d been through enough to end up with a case of PTSD already; she didn’t need the additional trauma of the courtroom. As it was, they were going to need to get her in with a professional to help her cope with everything.

Feeling a vibration in his pocket, he was glad he’d turned the volume off on his cell before coming back in the room. Carefully fishing it out, he saw his partner’s name.

“You make it through security already?” Steve spoke quietly.

“Shockingly, yes. It’s amazing how fast Dad can drive when something is wrong. Anyway, how is Grace? I’m guessing asleep since you’re being so quiet.”

Snickering quietly, the SEAL shook his head. “You’d be right.” He hesitated to tell Danny about the nightmares, he didn’t need more to worry about on the plane. “The doctor confirmed that physically she only suffered a bunch of bruising. Nothing is broken and there was no other physical trauma.”

Danny exhaled loudly. He’d been praying for that news ever since the first conversation with Steve. “Thank God!” The phone fell silent for a long second. “So what else do we know? Steven, what the hell happened in that house?”

The SEAL ran through the information Chin had provided. “Danno, how are we going to fix this for her?”

The detective continued pacing back and forth in front of the airline gate. “I don’t know.” The we in the statement hadn’t escaped him. His heart warmed slightly at the idea that his partner would be there for him and Grace no matter what happened next.

“By the way, I promised Gracie that I’d get you to agree to staying at the house now that she’ll be with us… you…. full-time.” He hopped the Jersey native didn’t note the slip and when he didn’t point it out though perhaps he had missed it. “What time does your flight land tomorrow? I’ll make sure Chin or Kono meet you there.”

“Just after 10. Not nearly soon enough.” Steve could hear the frustration in Danny’s voice. Heaven help the people around him if anything delayed the planes.

“Just hang in there. She’ll probably sleep through a big chunk of the time until you’re here.” As he spoke, Grace started to shift and eventually he saw her big eyes staring up at him. “Hey Gracie. Would you like to say hi to Danno? He’s at the airport waiting on the plane to bring him home.”

Nodding silent, she reached up for the phone. Before he could consider moving out of her way, a small hand gripped his shirt and she snuggled back into his chest, the phone held up to her ear.

“Danno?” Her voice sounded so much smaller and frailer than normal to both men.

“I’m here, Monkey. I’m here.” Steve could hear the other man’s voice. It was apparently he was struggling to keep it together. “I promise I’ll be there with you as soon as I can.”

“It’s okay Danno. Da..Uncle Steve is here with me. We’ll both be glad when you get home.” She burrowed closer to the SEAL, afraid he’d catch the slip. She didn’t want to scare him by calling him Daddy even though in so many ways she considered him her other dad. “He said we can stay with him. He’s going to take me there as soon as they let me out.”
“I’ll be glad to be home with you guys too. He told me we were going to stay with him. That sounds like a really good idea.”

She smiled at his easy consent. She’d been worried that he would argue about not wanting to get in the way, but she could always tell that Steve never thought they were in the way. He was always so happy to see them both and sad when they left. He tried not to show it, but the little girl could tell.

Before she could respond, the door to the room opened and Chin entered with Kamekona hot on his heels.

Hearing the sound, Danny reluctantly said goodbye, promising again that he’d see her very soon. Steve was pleased to see the smile on Grace’s face at the large Hawaiian’s appearance.

“I thought you went out to get food?” He joked with Chin.

“I did, but he wouldn’t let me have the food unless he could come back with me.” Nobody was surprised. As part of their extended ohana, he would want to be there for Grace too.

“I brought options.” He held up a few different bags and moved toward a small table to set them down. As he sorted out the food, the nurse came back in to check on her patient again.

Seeing the girl awake, she smiled sweetly. “Hi, Grace. I’m Nurse Amy. How are you feeling? We gave you something to help keep it from hurting, so if you start feeling the pain again you need to let one of us know, okay?”

“It doesn’t hurt much now. Thank you.”

Spotting the small shrimp buffet now spread on the table, the nurse laughed. “You guys are going to make us all hungry with the smell of all that food.” Seeing the group was about to start apologizing, she waved them off. “Don’t worry, it’s a pretty slow day around here, so you shouldn’t get mobbed for it. Grace, if you’re hungry you should try to eat some. It does smell really good.”

Before the nurse could leave the room, Kamekona cut her off with a plate heaped with several kinds of shrimp. “For you and the other nurses. Enjoy.”

“Thanks, we will.” Looking back at Steve and Grace, she smiled again. “I’ll be back to check on you again soon.”

For the next hour, the small group ate the shrimp and goodies that Chin and Kamekona brought with them as the adults tried to keep Grace’s attention occupied with anything other than the last few days.

At one point, Kono decided to bring up the newly proposed living arrangements. “So, Grace, are you going to convince the guys to let you pick out some new stuff for your room? I think it needs a little more of your personality.”

Though the bedroom she stayed in was perfectly nice, it was very neutral and looked too much like an adult’s bedroom.

“We don’t need to redo it. I don’t mind what my room looks like.” She sounded a bit nervous, causing Kono to wonder why her suggestion might have upset the girl.

Steve also noticed the small shake in her voice, but he suspected he knew why. As worried as she was about having a place to call home earlier, she was afraid that if she made it difficult he might change his mind.
“Actually, Gracie, I think redecorating is a great idea. We should start with your room, but I bet if we go through the whole house, we’ll find other things that we might like to change too.” He was glad to see her eyes light a bit at his assertion that it really was a good idea. “Maybe since Auntie Kono thought of it first we should send her to get some color samples and stuff to help us figure out what you’d like.”

“I like that idea.” The adults all relaxed now that she no longer seemed upset.

“By the time we get out of here, it should be about dinner time. Why don’t I stop and grab some pizzas while Kono rounds her assignment up. We can meet back at your place for dinner.” Chin suggested.

“Sounds like we have a plan.” Steve agreed. He had a feeling he knew what his team was up to; everyone wanted to stay close to Grace as long as possible.

She would have to come to terms with everything, but perhaps they could help keep her focused on other things a bit longer so that her Danno would be with her when the full weight of the prior days came crashing down on her small shoulders. Even then, the SEAL knew that they would all face it together.

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Please, take a few seconds and leave a comment.
Pulling up next to the house, Steve was relieved to be free of the hospital. He estimated they had about 30 minutes before Chin and Kono showed up with their respective assignments. He was grateful Chin had volunteered to grab Grace’s prescriptions when he went to get the pizzas. It saved the two of them a stop and the wait time.

Glancing back at the young girl, he saw her staring back at him with her wide eyes. He was incredibly impressed with how well she’d kept it together through the day, but worried that it may just be the calm before the storm. He sent up a silent prayer that the worst wouldn’t hit before Danny made it home.

“Ready?” At her nod, he climbed out of the truck and opened the back door for her. As soon as he opened his arms toward her, she leaned over and wrapped her small arms around his neck. As he gently pulled her out of the truck, she wrapped her legs around his waist like the monkey Danno always accused her of being.

Carrying her to the house, the SEAL was careful not to tickle her as he usually did when carrying her like this. Danno always accused him of forgetting Grace could walk when they unloaded from the truck, but the teasing never stopped them. She had secretly admitted one weekend that she loved the view from up high and Steve was the only one tall enough to provide it.

Quickly unlocking the house and disarming the alarm, he set her carefully on her feet. “Do you want to take a quick shower and get changed before Chin and Kono get here?”

Her gaze dropped to the floor and her hands tightened his oversized shirt around her. She’d refused to take it off to change at the hospital.

Thinking quickly, Steve reached forward and grabbed her hand. “Why don’t I help you find something to wear?”

Leading her up the stairs, he guided them to his room first. Releasing her hand for a moment, he ducked into the closet and came out with one of his softest button up shirts. Seeing her smile, he grabbed her hand again and they continued on to her room.

“Why don’t you pick out a t-shirt and shorts to wear under this?” He set the shirt on the bed and was glad to see her smile and nod.

Opening up the suitcase Kono had placed on the chest at the foot of the bed, she found what she needed. “Got it.”

“Perfect. Now, let’s grab you a towel and wash rag and you should be set for the shower.” He noticed the slightly panicked look in her eyes. He gave himself a mental slap on the head remembering she’d just spent two days locked in a bathroom. “I’ll be right down stairs the whole time and will make sure nobody comes up until you come down, so it’s okay if you leave the door open.”

“Okay. Thanks.” Her voice was quiet, but she wrapped her arms around his waist in a tight hug. He had to think even Danny would be impressed with how well he was managing the situation.

A few minutes later, Steve could hear the water start running from the kitchen. Opening up the fridge, he pulled out some fruit and veggies to add to the dinner menu. The gang all loved pizza, but aside from his partner, they also had an appreciation for slightly healthier fare.
Grabbing a beer from the fridge, the SEAL sat on one of the bar stools. Normally he would head out to the lanai, but he’d promised her he would be downstairs and he wasn’t about to break his word. There was so much he couldn’t give her; but right now, he knew she needed someone she could trust absolutely and the unconditional love and support of her family. Until Danny got back the morning he and the rest of Five-0 were going to provide just that.

The vibration of his phone interrupted the relative quiet of the kitchen. Pulling the device out, he groaned seeing the Governor’s number.

“Commander McGarrett.”

“McGarrett, I heard what happened at the Edwards’ place and that you’re taking care of Grace until Danny arrives.” The politician suspected his care wouldn’t end then. “You and your team are not expected in the office for the next several days, barring any emergencies.” Anticipating an argument, he quickly continued. “That is not meant to prevent any visits to Mr. Edwards. I’m aware that you are likely to want to speak to him directly and will in no manner stand in your way.”

Relieved that he wasn’t going to have to argue with his boss, Steve was happy to consent. “We appreciate that, Governor. The whole team will be happy to know we can focus on ensuring Grace is taken care of.”

“Good. Word has gotten out quickly, so I’m going to hold a brief press conference confirming the minimal details and requesting that my task force be left alone to handle this tragedy privately. I’m hoping that is enough given the reputation of your team, but if the press starts to hound you let me know. In the meantime, I’ll let you go, but make sure you let me know if there is anything I can do to help.”

“We appreciate your help, sir. I’ll contact you if we need anything, but I suspect time and privacy to deal with this will be the best thing you could provide.”

With no further conversation, the two men disconnected. Steve knew their relationship with Governor Denning was not always a great one, but in many ways, they seemed to have worked through and found a way to co-exist peacefully with a certain level of mutual respect.

Setting his phone on the island, he turned the volume up knowing that Danny would likely call at some point after landing in California. He estimated they had another couple of hours before that, but wanted to make sure they caught it when he did. If he had to guess, the SEAL suspected that the Jersey native was about to pull his hair out at the slow speed of cross-country travel to get to his daughter. Of course, he also admitted that he would fair no better and may have resorted to commandeering military resources to help accelerate his travel schedule.

Hearing a car door slamming out front, he headed to the door to greet whichever member of the ohana had just arrived. Opening the front door, he stepped out and saw Kono coming down the path, several bags in her hands and a wide grin on her face.

“I think I found every possible color scheme and girl friendly decorating magazine or book on the island.” Knowing better than to offer assistance with the bags, Steve settled for holding the door open as the petite Hawaiian entered the house. “Where’s Gracie?”

“Showering. I promised we’d stay down here until she came down so she wouldn’t have to shut the door.” The look he gave her was a mix of confidence in his decision and concern that he may have done something wrong.

“Smart thinking. Keeps her from try to avoid the room altogether while not making her feel trapped.”
She reassured her boss. “She’s incredibly tough, so I’m sure she’ll get past her fear sooner than any of us could imagine, especially with you guys here to keep her safe.”

Having set her treasures on the floor in the living room, Kono came back over to Steve and gave him a brief hug. “You’re doing great, Boss.”

Returning the easy embrace, Steve appreciated her reassurances. “Thanks, Kono. I’m glad you and Chin are here to help though. I’m so afraid I’m going to end up being out of my element and screwing up. I don’t want to disappoint her or hurt her worse after everything.”

Stepping back staring at her boss, she couldn’t help but shake her head at him. “I highly doubt that, but never fear. Your back up here is here; at least until we have to go to work.”

“Actually, I had a call from Governor Denning. The entire team has been granted a leave of absence. Even better, he’s trying to run interference with the press since you can imagine the feeding frenzy this story creates.”

Hearing the water shut off upstairs, Steve decided a change in subject was a good idea. “Care to come help me chop up some fruits and veggies to go with dinner? I pulled them out but got distracted.”

“Sure, Boss.” The woman followed him in to the kitchen where they fell into a companionable silence as the worked and waited for Grace to appear.

The wait was short lived, as the girl appeared moments later, the shirt Steve gave her held closed over her own clothes by the two buttons she’d fastened. Hair still wet, she climbed onto one of the bar stools.

“Want something to drink, Gracie?” He didn’t bother to list the options; she knew all the things he kept in stock for her.

“Pink lemonade?” He smiled when she picked one of their favorite treats to share.

“Good choice.” The SEAL quickly filled a cup with ice and poured some of the lemonade he always kept on hand for her. “It looks like we’re going to have our work cut out for us with your room. Kono brought an entire bookstore back with her.”

The three kept up the easy banter about crazy decorating ideas until Chin let himself in with the pizzas.

“Are you really sure Danny’s going to let you decorate her room like the inside of a military helicopter?” The older man couldn’t help but laugh.

“No, but we think it’ll be fun to mess with him.” Steve shared a conspiratorial look with Kono and Grace. He’d torture Danny with just about anything if it meant hearing the little girl laugh.
Nearly two hours later the living room floor was scattered with pages pulled from magazines and paint sample cards; while the remnants of dinner sat on the coffee table. Chin and Kono were both impressed that the boss’s normal OCD tendency to keep things neat and orderly seemed to have abandoned him.

Steve and Grace had thrown themselves into the process of sorting through the ideas. To them, the apparently chaos was an organizational system. There were the rejects, the maybes, and the running favorites each careful spread so you could see which ideas had already been reviewed when a similar one came up.

Sitting on the floor, his back leaned against the couch and the little girl perched on his lap reclining against his chest, they flipped through another magazine together.

“Gracie, do you not like the color pink?” He pointed toward the reject pile full of everything pink they’d come across.

“Not really. I like all those colors more.” She pointed to the other sets of piles full of purples, blues, reds, yellows, greens, and oranges.

The SEAL was surprised given that her room at Rachel’s had been covered in pink. He’d always assumed she’d helped pick it out. Maybe her tastes had just changed over the last couple of years. Thinking back, he realized she never picked anything pink when she was with any of the team.

Before he could make any other comment, she continued. “Mommy and Step-Stan were so convinced that every girl loved pink, so they always bought all kinds of pink things for me. They always seemed so happy when they gave them to me that I just went along. I didn’t want them to fight because of me.”

Chin and Kono stared silently at the pair, waiting to see if there would be any fallout from the first mention of either Stan or Rachel since they’d found Grace. They also all mentally filed the piece information about them fighting away.

Wrapping his arms tightly around her, Steve’s mind raced to come up with something to say. “It was very sweet of you to be so nice about accepting the things they gave you, but I’m sure they would have picked other colors had they known.”

Her shrug and rather unconvinced, “Maybe,” did little to convince the adults that she believed that. They all wondered about what things had really been like for Grace with her mother and stepfather. It was clear to everybody that she preferred her time with Danno and the Five-0 ohana, but she’d always been careful not to mention anything bad about the parents she spent the majority of her time with.

The quietness of the room was interrupted by Steve’s cell phone ringing from the island. Kono jumped up to grab it so he and Grace didn’t have to move.

“McGarrett’s phone, this is Kono.”

“Why are you answering Steve’s phone? Is Grace okay? Is he okay?” Danny fired of the questions without breathing. His heart couldn’t take more bad news.

“Relax, Danny. They’re nice and comfy in the living room. I answered so they didn’t have to move.
Here’s Steve.”

She handed the phone off to the boss. “Danno, take a breath. We’re just hanging out at home sorting through every possible bedroom idea that existed on the island, thanks to Kono.”

“Let me guess, babe, it won’t be pink.” From the tone of his voice, Steve guessed that Danny had talked to Rachel about the color to no avail.

Putting the phone on speaker, the SEAL smirked. “Nope, we were thinking more of a military helicopter theme. I bet I can get some really good pictures for the walls. Maybe even some spare pieces to mount around the room.”

“You are not turning Grace’s room in to some… some… shrine to the Army.” Hearing him get keyed up for a long rant, everyone in the room fell into a fit of laughter.

“Danno, its Navy not Army.” The little girl managed to choke out between laughs. Even knowing he was joking, she loved to correct him every time she made the mistake.

“Am I on speaker phone? You set me up!” The detective sounded indignant, though Steve could hear a hint of laughter in his voice. He could readily imagine that the sound of his daughter’s laughter was something his partner loved to hear, need to hear, even if it was at his expense.

“Just a bit. Don’t worry Danno, there aren’t any helicopters in the ranks of possibilities yet, though that could change before you get back.”

Before the detective could respond, Chin interrupted. “Hate to break this party up, but Kono and I are going to head home and get some sleep. One of us will be at the airport, Danny, so look for our cars. It okay if we come back around about lunchtime tomorrow? We’ll bring the food.” The pair had scouted out the kitchen earlier and decided they’d need to stock the boss’s place a bit better given all the time everyone would likely be spending there in the coming days.

“Yeah, that’d be good.” Steve gave them a nod as Grace stood to give them both a hug. While she was occupied, he took the phone off speaker and spoke quietly. “I’ll give you a call later if I can.”

Danny was grateful. He wanted to know more about how his baby girl was, but couldn’t dare ask anything that might upset her. For now, he’d settle for an update on how the evening was going.

As the cousins headed out, the little girl reclaimed her spot on Steve’s lap and he shifted the phone back to speaker.

“How was your flight?” The SEAL asked the obvious question.

“Boring, but I’ll be happy when I get home. Aside from helicopters, what are you thinking about for your room, Monkey?” He was more than willing to talk about home décor forever if she was enjoying it.

“We’ve got lots of options, Danno. We’re waiting to narrow it down until you get home.” She looked over the options spread around them. “Aunt Kono found some ideas with dolphins and fish, they look really neat.”

“You mean being on an island surrounded by water and unknown sea creatures isn’t enough?” He joked.

“Trust me, Danno. You have to see the pictures. They are awesome!” Both men could already tell there was a high likelihood that they’d be buying all kinds of marine life décor in the near future.
The detective thought the amount of time she spent with Super SEAL clearly impacted her growing love of the ocean and its occupants. He’d lost count of the number of times he heard Steve answering her questions and showing her new things. For someone that lacked patience with some people, he’d spend hours explaining things to her as if there were nothing he’d rather be doing.

Personally, Danny preferred to be on dry land, but it never failed to make his heart melt when he watched his beloved daughter and partner get excited over their latest aquatic adventure.

“Gracie, is it starting to hurt again?” She’d reached to grab one of the magazines and he noticed her wince. You’re about due for another dose.”

She met his eyes and then looked at the phone, not wanting to worry Danno when she knew he would already be upset that he wasn’t there.

“It’s okay. It’s not that bad.” Her face didn’t match her words and Steve nodded in understanding, though he suspect Danny would catch on too. He gave himself a mental kick for asking while they were still one the phone.

“Gracie, if it hurts you need to take the meds, Monkey. We don’t want you to be in pain.” Despite the joking tone of the call to this point, his heart broke that his baby was in pain, he hadn’t been there to prevent it, and he wasn’t there to help fix it yet.

“Why don’t I go grab them and some juice while you talk to Danno some more?” Steve wanted her to feel better and wanted to give his partner a chance to speak to his daughter alone.

Gracie nodded and shifted to sit beside him as he handed her the phone. He quickly rose, grabbed the remnants of dinner, and headed toward the kitchen.

As he cleaned up, he listened to her quiet voice in the other room, reassuring Danno that she would be okay until he got home.

“It’s okay, Danno. You’ll be home soon and Da… Steve is taking great care of me. Kono, Chin, and Kamekona too.”

He caught her almost slip again. Outside Rachel’s house Sunday, he thought he was just hearing things. He was starting to be convinced this wasn’t just his imagination and wishful thinking.

He was going to have to ask Danny about that when he got home, although he was unsure exactly how to bring it up or what to say. Admittedly, a very large part of him wished that she would call him Daddy, that the three of them were really a family. Of course, admitting the latter part of that to anyone other than himself might be a challenge.

Hearing Grace’s footsteps coming toward the kitchen, he quickly finished cleaning up and grabbed a carton of juice and a cup to set on the island.

“Okay Danno, I’ll tell him. Love you. We’ll see you in the morning.” She set the phone on the island in front of her and accepted the pain medicine and juice from Steve.

“Danno said to call him when you have time to talk.” She looked up at him. “I think he meant after I’m asleep.”

The SEAL chuckled as he mussed her hair. “One day, Gracie, you are going to make an excellent detective.”
Chapter 7

Thirty minutes after taking her meds, Grace could barely hold her head up as she lost the battle to stay awake.

“Ready for bed, kiddo?” Steve asked quietly, trying not to startle her. A sleepy nod was the only answer he received.

Standing up, he carefully reached down and scooped her off the couch. Her head fell naturally onto his shoulder as she wrapped her arms around his neck.

Carrying her up the stairs, he continued speaking gently. “If you need anything tonight just let me know. I’ll be right across the hall in my room. Do you want me to leave the bathroom light on so the hall isn’t so dark?” His mind raced to think of anything else she may need.

“Yes.” She whispered.

Setting her on the bed, he quickly opened a dresser drawer and found the shorts and Navy PT shirt she usually slept in when she and Danny stayed over. He couldn’t even remember how she’d manage to get ahold of it, but he’d long since given up on getting it back. Honestly, he’d give up his entire wardrobe to her if it meant they stayed here and she was happy.

Setting her pajamas on the bed next to where she sat, he leaned down to give her one more hug and a kiss on the forehead.

“I love you, Gracie.” His normally strong voice wavered a bit. It had been a long day and the idea that he could have lost her rattled him.

“Love you too, Uncle Steve.”

Heading out of the room, the SEAL glanced back to make sure she was still awake enough to change. Seeing her standing by the bed, PJs in hand, he pulled the door closed.

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Sitting on the edge of the hotel bed, head buried in his hands, Danny fell apart. He’d been on the verge ever since the first conversation with Steve, but the rush to get home and crowds of complete strangers forced him to keep it together.

He wanted to be home. He wanted to have Grace wrapped in his arms. If he was completely honest, he wanted to have them both wrapped in Steve’s arms. Danny just knew Steve’s strength was going to get them all through this.

Deciding he was going to get nowhere berating himself over not being there for Grace, Danny opted to focus on his other problem – what to do about Steve.

He really wasn’t sure when things had changed. When had he gone from being the crazy SEAL’s reluctant partner, to considering him his best friend, to considering him one of the most trusted and adored people in his world?

He supposed the first step probably started when Steve arranged for he and Grace to spend the weekend at a hotel, swimming with dolphins, instead of at Danny’s dump of an apartment. He hadn’t known either of them, but he was so quick to do something nice for Grace. So quick to make sure
she enjoyed spending time with her dad.

The Mission Impossible theme song erupted from his cell phone and he immediately reached for it. Taking a deep breath, he pulled himself together as best he could.

“Hey, babe. How are you two holding up?” He was relieved to hear from his partner again.

“We’re keeping it together.” Steve sounded tired. “Danny, I’m worried about her. She’s been amazingly calm so far, but I really think we need to get her into counseling quickly. I don’t want her to bottle everything up inside and try to cope alone.”

The detective shared those sentiments. “In other words, you don’t want her to become like you?” His attempt at their normal banter fell flat. “I’m sorry, babe. You know I don’t really think you’re that messed up, right?”

The line was silent for a short moment. “S’okay, Danno. I know what you meant and I’ll admit that, yes, my own experiences are part of why I feel so strongly about getting her to see someone. I’m sorry, Danny. I’m not her father and I’m sure you’ve got it covered, but that little girl means the world to me.”

The Jersey native could barely keep from falling apart again. They definitely needed to talk when he was back on the island.

“I know, Steven, I know. You don’t have to apologize. I have thought about it, but I have no idea who to take her to. It’s not as if a parent being killed is an altogether normal. I can’t imagine there are that many child psychologists truly experienced with handling this.”

“Actually, I have an idea.” The SEAL sounded almost happy to be able to assist. “I can check with the base shrink for some referrals. I trust him and any good military shrink has a network of civilians for the families of service members.”

Danny smacked himself in the head. He should have realized that. “Of course, that’s a really good idea.”

“I’ll make the call tomorrow. In the meantime, Gracie fell asleep, thanks to the meds, about twenty minutes ago. I left the bathroom light on in case she needs to come find me.”

Cracking a small smile, he realized that his partner had hit the point of too much emotion and had now fallen back into the safety of rattling off an update like any other situation report at work.

“She ate plenty for dinner. A couple slices of pizza and a bunch of fruits and veggies that we had to munch on while we worked. I really think the effort to keep her distracted with the designs made a huge difference. I owe Kono for pulling that together.”

“Ah yes, just how many neatly filed design magazines do you have tucked away in that house somewhere now?” He knew how OCD the man could be about keeping things neat and orderly.

Steve actually laughed. “None. They are all strewn, in an a system organized by Grace, across the living room floor. We didn’t want to mess them up only to spread them out tomorrow.”

“I’m impressed.” More like he was shocked. “All kidding aside, Steve, how are you doing?”

“I’m fine.” The SEAL clammed up.

“Like hell you are.” He wasn’t going to let him off that easy and was actually surprised when Steve
spoke up again.

“Fine. I’m not fine, but I’m damn sure trying to be. I’d like to have ripped Stan to pieces this morning. Hell, I’d like to be there now giving him a piece of my mind, but right now I’m trying to focus on keeping things as calm and normal as I can for her.”

The mix of frustration, determination, and pain in his partner’s voice made tears pool in Danny’s eyes. He could envision the ferocity of the emotions his extremely lethal partner was struggling to bury to take care of his daughter. Hell, he was struggling with the same ones.

“That answer I believe. I’d feel the same way in your shoes and you have no idea how much I appreciate that you are there with her. So, when do you plan to pay Stan a visit?”

“In the dead of night; when no one is watching.” His tone was serious, but he paused. “Well, I wish anyway. Once you get home. If Grace is doing okay Chin and Kono can watch her for a bit while we go pay him a visit.”

Danny liked that plan. “Think they can bail on work for a while to cover for us?”

“No. They won’t need to. Denning granted all of us leave to handle our family crisis. He’s even running interference with the press.”

“Wow, what’d you do to convince him to do all that? I know he’s been warming up to us, but still.” The Governor had been growing on the team as well, but Danny didn’t think they’d quite reached that level yet.

“You know he and his staff aren’t immune to Grace. They’ve met her and they all adore her, just like everyone does.” Danny held his tongue and decided not to point out that clearly not everyone, even those that should have, felt that way. “Enough about the Governor. How are you holding up? I’m half surprised you didn’t hijack a plane to make it home tonight.”

“Don’t think I didn’t consider it; however, that is something you would do. I can’t fly one of those things, so the option was somewhat limiting for me. Honestly, it’s killing me not to be there, but at least I know Grace has the next best thing to her Danno.”

“Danny.” The detective knew where his partner was headed and cut him off.

“No, Steven. You are not allowed to argue. Shit, my phone is about to die and I have to find my charger.” The obnoxious beep came at the most inopportune time. “You are not allowed to stay up all night brooding over things that you couldn’t control. I’ll be home as soon as I can and we’ll talk more then, but don’t you dare think that any of us blame you for everything that went wrong this week. You… you are the only reason I haven’t completely lost it today. Just keep doing what you’re doing.”

“We’ll be waiting for you. Let me know when you land.”

Receiving quick agreement, they disconnected the call. Instead of getting up to find the charger, Danny stared at the phone in his hands.

How was he going to handle this? How as he going to act like moving in with Steve wasn’t a big deal? He’d already figured out that the SEAL and Grace had no intention of this being a short-term arrangement. With the way they were together, he wouldn’t dream of separating them, but could he keep his own feelings out of the equation?

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Changing into a pair of cotton pants and a t-shirt, Steve stared out the window from his room. He hadn’t lied when he told Danno he wanted to rip Stan apart. He wanted him to pay for every second of sadness, fear, and uncertainty Grace was facing.

He wondered how he was going to help fix this. Therapy would help. He should probably encourage Danny to see the therapist as well. He’d gladly go too, if invited, but not having any real claim or relationship to Grace meant that was unlikely.

He was glad he decided to have them move here. Even more so that Danny had offered no resistance at this point. He only wished he knew how this would work. Was it too much to hope that this might help change the dynamic of their relationship? Or would he remain the faithful best friend?

Looking at the clock, he realized he’d been staring out the window for well over an hour. Hearing a muffled sound from Gracie’s room, he wasted no time going to check on her.

Her small frame was shifting restlessly in the bed. “No! No! Please no!” The whimpered cries came from the sleeping girl.

Sitting on the side of the bed, Steven gently shook her shoulder. “Gracie. Wake up. It’s okay, you’re safe.”

As he continued to gently shake her and repeat the words, her eyes finally opened. She seemed to be searching the room before her eyes finally met his.

“Daddy!” She launched herself into his arms and sobbed loudly.

He knew he hadn’t heard her wrong this time. Part of him wanted to ask her, but this wasn’t the time to dig into his mysterious new title. Instead he wrapped his arms tightly around her, wishing he could this all better.

Lifting her in his arms, he rose, grabbing a blanket and headed to the door.

“Why don’t we go camp out on the couch tonight?”

Her sobs had quickly subsided to a quiet cry in his arms. She nodded her head against his shoulders, seemingly wrapping her small arms tighter around his neck.

Settling onto the couch, Steve kept her cradled against his chest, her legs resting on the cushion next to him.

Somewhat awkwardly, he managed to spread the blanket over them. He’d slept sitting up in far more uncomfortable positions countless times, so if this allowed Grace to sleep peacefully, he’d be perfectly content to stay like this forever.
“Thanks for picking me up, Chin. You know I could have just grabbed a taxi.” Danny shoved his suitcase in the back seat.

“Brah, that’s insulting and you know it. No ohana of mine is taking a taxi from the airport. Besides, I lost. Kono gets to pick Mom up this evening.”

Chin was glad to see the indignant frown on the other man’s face.

“Seriously? I’m being trumped by my own mother? You guys have only met her once.”

The Hawaiian laughed. “I know, but her cooking will never be forgotten. Think we’ll ever convince her to move here?”

Danny watched the island scenery fly by as Chin navigated toward Steve’s house.

“A year ago, heck a week ago, I would have denied that possibility. Now, faced with both Grace and Steve for however long she stays on this trip, I’m not so sure. I swear my mother loves them both more than me.” He smirked.

Everyone knew his mom adored all three of them, though she did seem to have a soft spot for Steve. He’d yet to figure out how the Super SEAL managed to win her over so fast. Of course, Danny had to admit while it had taken longer for the SEAL to win him over; the result was no less concrete.

The rest of the drive passed with Chin reviewing the details of his conversation with Stan. There was no indication of prior physical abuse at the Edwards house and the men were still stunned Stan had snapped so completely.

“How are Steve and Grace holding up?” He knew they’d both been trying to play tough for him. Even though he’d gotten Steve to open up some last night, he worried that he was still trying to put on a good front. “We’ve only swapped texts this morning to confirm I made it on the plane.”

Continuing to watch the road, Chin contemplated is answer.

“They’re making it. They both miss you.” He silently wondered if Danny and Steve would ever quit dancing around things and admit their feelings. The cousins were convinced this tragedy might actually be the catalyst. “Steve is being Steve.”

Danny quirked an eyebrow at his friend. “I assume you mean Gracie’s Steve not Rambo Steve.”

“Precisely, brah. Precisely. He has been there for her since the school called. Anyone outside our ohana would be floored to see it.”

“I don’t doubt it. I don’t think any of us would believe it if we hadn’t been there to see it develop.” Of course, Danny knew that, at least in Grace’s eyes, there was even more to it than the others saw.

“Anyway, she’s doing remarkably well given everything that’s happened. Not sure how much is just shock at this point though, so I’d imagine it’s going to get worse before it gets better. I’m sure the funeral will be rough, but we’ll all be there.”

Danny sighed, he hadn’t thought about the funeral.

“Rachel’s mother is flying in and handling the arrangements. Duke spoke with her yesterday.”
He was relieved it hadn’t somehow fallen to him. He would have done it for Grace’s sake, but it was a distraction he didn’t welcome.

Pulling into Steve’s driveway, Chin gave Danny’s shoulder a reassuring squeeze. “Kono and I will be back in about an hour with lunch. She’s off doing some shopping now so you guys won’t have to.”

“Thanks man. We’ll see you soon.” He hopped out and grabbing his bag.

Approaching the door, he found it still locked and fumbled in his pocket for his keys. If they’d fallen asleep, he didn’t want to wake them.

Opening the door quietly, he left his bag in the entry and crept toward the sound of soft snoring in the living room.

Seeing the scene in front of him, he couldn’t resist taking his phone out and snapping a picture. The sight of his partner sitting up, head fallen back against the back of the couch, and arms wrapped securely around Grace where she was curled into his chest made Danny’s heart clench. He loved them both so much.

Phone safely tucked back away, Danny slid onto the couch next to his daughter’s feet.

At the slight movement of the couch, Steve’s head snapped up instantly alert.

“Relax, babe.” Danny whispered just loud enough for him to hear. “It’s just me.”

“Welcome home, Danno. Sorry, I didn’t mean to fall asleep again before you got here.” He still sounded a bit groggy.

“Rough night?” The detective gestured to the sleeping girl.

“Not too bad. One bad nightmare about an hour and a half after we talked. I brought her out here and that seemed to help.” Steve leaned closer to Grace’s ear. “Gracie, Danno’s here.”

Her eyes opened sleepily and looked up at Steve. He looked toward his partner and was thrilled to see the smile spread across her face as her eyes followed his.

Opening his arms to her, Danno moved closer, so her legs draped over his lap and he was next to Steve.

The little girl slipped into her father’s lap and hugged him tightly. Tears filled the man’s eyes as he looked to his partner.

“Thank you.” He mouthed silently.

Shaking his head, as if to deny he’d done anything, and suddenly feeling as if he were intruding on the reunion, Steve started to stand.

Arms wrapped around his daughter, Danny still managed to get a hand on Steve’s forearm, stalling his retreat. As their eyes met, he shook his head. “Stay.” He mouthed.

The SEAL gave him a cautious look, but leaned back into the cushions. Continuing to watch the father and daughter, Steve wondered what would happen now that they were reunited. Would they settle into comfortable routine with the three of them or would he end up being the close range outsider looking in on the family.
Giving himself a mental shake, Steve decided he was going to try his best to make them a family. Clearly, Grace already considered him family. It was just a matter of figuring out what role Danny was going to let him play.

Looking back to the pair beside him, he found them both staring at him.

“Lost ya there for a second, babe.” His partner elbowed him in the ribs.

“I’m glad you’re home, Danno. We’ve missed you.” Grace smiled up at both of them. With the two men here, she could almost pretend everything was still okay. That nothing at the Edwards’ house had actually happened.

“I’m very glad to be home, Monkey. I missed you too. Both of you.” He heard Steve’s stomach growling and chuckled as he gave the larger man a sardonic look. “Skip breakfast?”

Looking rather sheepish that he’d failed to feed Grace, he admitted quietly. “We lost track of time. I’d planned to fix breakfast, but apparently, I fell back asleep. Sorry.”

Danny’s hand clamped firmly over his mouth stalled his apology. “Relax, babe. It’s not the first breakfast missed in the Williams’ house. From the look of it, you two needed the sleep more than you needed breakfast. Anyway, Chin and Kono will be here in less than an hour with food.”

Grace wriggled around on her father’s lap until her feet where draped over Steve’s legs. One arm stretched across her stomach to clasp Danny’s hand on her side. Without thinking, she stretched her other out to grab Steve’s hand where he’d rested it on her knee and pulled it further into her lap.

“Can we show Danno the ideas for my room?” She looked hopefully up at Steve.

“I have an idea, Monkey.” Her father answered first. “Why don’t the pair of you go get dressed for the day before everybody gets here while I go make some coffee. Then you can show me everything.”

“Okay.” Giving both men a hug, she slipped off their laps and scurried up stairs. Hesitating for only a moment, Steve rose and started to follow up the stairs. Before he could get more than a step away from the couch, he felt Danny’s hand on his arm.

Turning, he was surprised to be pulled into the shorter man’s arms for a tight hug. “You, Super SEAL, are an amazing man.” The detective’s voice was thick with emotion.

Steve was still too shocked to argue with his partner as he wrapped his arms around him, returning the hug. They remained in the silent embrace far longer than usual, before Danny loosened his grip.

“Now, get your ass upstairs and get dressed while I fix the coffee. I think we could both use some.”

“Thanks, Danno.” Steven turned to head up the stairs. His return wasn’t going to mean things would be perfect; things were going to get harder before they got easier, but somehow it felt more manageable now.

Watching the SEAL disappear up the stairs, Danny smiled. Pulling out his phone, he looked at the picture of the sleeping pair. That one needed to go somewhere that he could see it often.

Still looking at the picture, he headed toward the coffee pot realizing he better make good on the promise of coffee.
Danny had barely turned the coffee pot on when his partner reappeared. He quickly decided he could get used to the sight in front of him.

“Steven, do you own anything other than cargo pants?” Though the detective had to admit the man looked good in them with a snug grey t-shirt that seemed to set off his eyes. He grinned seeing Steve still with bare feet.

“Of course I do.” He scoffed indignantly.

“Army issued uniforms and PT gear don’t count.” He smiled at the grimace on Steve’s face.

“Danno, he’s in the Navy, not the Army. Get it right.” Grace entered the room, defending the SEAL once again.

Turning to the entry, Steve reached down and swept the little girl up into his arms. As her legs wrapped around his waist, she gave him a broad smile.

“Thank you, Gracie. Nice to know someone can tell the difference.” He smiled at her choice of shirts. The ‘Five-0 In Training’ shirt Chin had given her for her birthday the year before was well worn. She’d told him once that it reminded her she was strong and tough like all of them. At the time, he’d wondered why she needed to feel strong and tough. Right now, he was glad she had something to remind her.

“Okay, fine. Navy. Still Navy issued clothing doesn’t count.”

Thinking for a second, Steve appeared to running a mental inventory. “I bought my swimming trunks.”

The three erupted in laughter.

“Monkey, we may need to take him shopping someday. Expand his fashion horizons beyond the military standard.”

Steve groaned as Danny slipped a cup of freshly brewed coffee into his hands.

The three fell silent as they settled into stools at the island. The men drank their coffee as Grace sipped the juice Steve gave her with a couple of Tylenol, staring at the glass.

“Why did he do it?” Her voice broke the silence. Danny and Steve both looked to her. “Why did Stan kill Mommy? He could have just left.”

She shed no tears, as she looked up, a serious expression on her face.

“We don’t really know, Grace, but we plan to find out.” Danny wanted to speak to Stan before giving her the story Chin had relayed to them. Plus, he needed time to sort out what to tell her.

“I want to know. Can you go ask him now that you’re home?”

They’d planned to have the cousins watch her so they could do just that, but had thought they’d need to come up with a way for her to be okay with them leaving.

“Yes, Grace. Danno and I can go after lunch if you’re okay staying with Kono and Chin.”
She nodded her head and took another drink, leaving the two men staring at each other a bit confused. Grant it, neither of them blamed her for wanting answers, but they hadn’t expected her to send them off to find them.

After a few moments of silence, Grace looked up again. “Can we show Danno the ideas for my room now?”

The pair released the breath they’d both been holding.

“Of course, Monkey. I’d love to see what you guys came up with. I’m quite impressed with how fast you two have mastered interior design.”

Excited to show off what she’d decided she wanted as her new room, Grace hurried off to the living room.

Following more slowly behind, Danny looked up at Steve. “She had me scared for a minute there.”

“Me too, Danno, me too.” Steve wrapped an arm around his best friend and led him into the living room.

Grace already had the stuff for the favored design in hand and was kneeling in front of the coffee table, facing the couch. Taking their seats, both men focused their attention on her.

“I really like this one.” She declared. “But if you don’t we can find something else.” She added hastily as if afraid being so decisive about her own room would upset them. Given what Steve had learned about her room at Rachel’s he could understand.

“Gracie, we talked about this yesterday. I want you to make it your room. Unless you plan on covering it with something we think is inappropriate, which I know you don’t, it’s your choice. Right, Danno?”

Steve took the lead knowing his partner was likely to harbor some concern about upsetting what he always seemed convinced was Steve’s delicately balanced structure in the house. Albeit, until Grace that wasn’t far from accurate, but now he wanted it to feel like home not just the house he’d inherited.

“Right. It’s your room, so show us what we’re going to do.” If Steve was prepared to go all in on this, he wasn’t going to argue. He just couldn’t muster up any motivation to argue them living here when a part of him wanted the proximity to the SEAL for other reasons.

Satisfied that she wasn’t in trouble for making up her mind, Grace set out several pages and a few paint sample cards.

Steve nearly beamed at her. The ocean was their thing and seeing her so excited to bring that to her room made him incredibly happy.

“I like both of these colors for the walls.” She held up two shades of a beautiful bluish-green. “I just can’t decide which one.”

Danny grinned at her. “It’s going to look like you’re sleeping underwater.” She raised her eyebrow at him. “Okay, I suppose that’s the point. Anyway, I bet we can get some small sample jars of each and decide then.”

Leaning forward to pick up a magazine page, Steve held it up for the other two. “Maybe we can do something like this.” He pointed to a picture where one wall was in a darker shade.”
“Never would have pegged you as the Martha Steward type, babe, but you may be on to something.” He and the little girl both laughed at Steve’s mock offended face.

The next half an hour was spent looking at pictures Grace really liked. Noticing she seemed to lean toward the realistic paintings and pictures of ocean life, Steve had an idea.

“Hey Gracie, I have a friend that paints murals of sea life. Would you like to meet her and see if she can do something cool for one of your walls?”

The little girl jumped up and nearly launched herself at him. “Yes. Please. Can we?”

Danny smiled at the pair of them. “I think she likes that plan.”

Situating her on his leg, one arm wrapped around her, the SEAL laughed. “Never would have guessed.”

The trio all seemed pleased with the progress they’d made thus far. Danny was happy to see Grace smiling, having feared the worst during his entire trip. Once again, he considered how easy it would be to get used to life with the three of them together.

As Grace chattered away about picking out bedding, Danny stole a glance at Steve and was surprised to find the SEAL staring at him with a somewhat wistful expression. Their eyes locked for a moment before Steve looked away.

Before he could wonder more about their shared look, he heard the sound of car doors closing.

“Sounds like lunch is here.” Steve commented as Grace stood next to him. “Let me go unlock the door.”

For the second time in less than twenty-four hours, McGarrett opened the door to find Kono with her arms full of bags. This time, Chin followed behind, equally laden.

“There’s more in the car, brah.”

Steve looked somewhat bewildered. “Are we expecting company for lunch?”

Chin paused in the doorway. “No, just didn’t think you guys would be quite ready for the grocery yet.”

Understanding hit Steve. The cousins were protecting them from prying eyes and question they may not be ready to face yet. Denning said word was out and, as Five-0’s leader, plenty of people would recognize him.

“Thanks, Chin.” Letting the door fall closed, he jogged out to get the remaining bags. When he returned to the house, he found the rest of the team and Grace busily putting things away. After so many team gatherings and weekends spent here, they all knew their way around the McGarrett kitchen almost as well as he did.

Starting on a second bag, Danny help up a box of lasagna noodles and looked accusingly at the cousins. “Why am I noticing a very Italian trend here?”

Both cousins froze in place.

“What did you two do?” Danny stared them down, hands on his hips.

Exchanging guilty looks, Kono finally spoke up. “We may have talked to Mom last night and gotten
a list of ingredients she would need for cooking.”

“You called my mother? In the middle of the night in New Jersey?” Danny sounded both exasperated and amused.

“Actually, she called us. Right after we left here. She was up all night in a flurry getting ready for the trip. Said she’d sleep better on the plane if she knew she’d be able to cook a good meal tomorrow, but didn’t want you two fussing over groceries.”

Danny shook his head as he threw his hands up in defeat. “That sounds just like her.” Turning to face Steve, he asked. “Are you sure you are prepared for the force that is my mother to take over your house?”

“We’ll be fine, Danno. I’m looking forward to seeing Mom again.” He struggled to admit it, but lethal SEAL or not, he missed having a mother to take care of him sometimes. Doris had briefly reappeared in his life after he’d discovered her, but just as quickly vanished again. Even if she’d stayed he wasn’t sure he could really trust her again, really let down his guard enough to let her be mom.

Danny fought the urge to cross the room and wrap his partner in his arms. He didn’t have to be a genius to know what Steve was thinking. He could kill a man in more ways than Danny could imagine, but sometimes he was just a lost little boy.

In a move that didn’t really surprise her father, Grace did exactly what he wanted to. For someone so young, she was incredibly adept at ready Steve.

The little girl wrapped her arms around Steve’s neck. As soon as she reached out to hug him, he’d lifted her into his arms. “It’ll be nice to have Grandma here.”

Of course, Grace wasn’t about to tell that that this unexpected trip meant she and Grandma could enact their plan sooner than either had expected.
Chapter 10

Sitting out on the lanai after lunch, the men watched as Grace and Kono built what started as a sand castle, but was starting to look a fair bit more elaborate.

“What time are you guys planning to go to HPD?”

They’d discussed the plan over lunch with the cousins readily assenting.

“We should probably go now. From the looks of it those two are building an entire sand city and will be well occupied until our return.”

Chin continued to watch his cousin with the little girl. “Don’t worry; we’ll take good care of her. I’ll give Duke a call and let him know that you’re coming so they’re ready for you.”

The partners thanked him and moved toward the water to let the girls know. They were pleased that while Grace hugged them both tightly, she didn’t seem afraid that they were leaving for a bit.

In the Camaro and headed toward HPD both men were quiet at first.

“You know, I should call Dr. Thompson and get those referrals.”

“Good idea, babe. I’m sure it’ll take a few days to get in with one of them. Do you have the number?”

Not answering the question, Steve tapped the phone mounted on the dash and a few touches later, it began to ring.

Danny filed that information away for later. Steve had a shrink in his phone contacts. That was unexpected.

On the third ring, a pleasant sounding man answered the phone. “Commander McGarrett, how’s my favorite patient?”

“I’ve been better, doc, but this call isn’t about me. It’s about Grace.”

Danny gave him a puzzled look. Not only was the shrink in his contacts, he clearly knew Steve well, and knew who Grace was?

Steve continued, “Danny is here with me.”

“I should have expected this call. I heard what happened on the news. How is Grace?”

Steve glanced at his partner from the corner of his eye and saw him staring back expectantly.

“All things considered, she’s doing great. She’s with Chin and Kono now. She asked us to go find out why he did it.”

“From what you’ve told me about her, I’m not surprised. Although she’s young, she is also very mature and seems to adore Five-0, so I suspect she’s attacking this entire crisis in a very logical manner. She knows the when, the where, the who, and the how. The missing piece is the why and knowing that piece of the puzzle may eventually allow her to come to terms better. However, I suspect you had more of a reason in calling and I’d be happy to send you a list of a couple very good child and family therapists that will be well prepared to help. I suspect they’ll all be familiar with the
basics from the news, but if you need helping getting in quickly tell them I sent you.”

“Thanks, doc. You knew before I even asked.”

“That, Commander, is why they pay me what they do. Now, go get your girl some answers and I’ll send that email in about five minutes. When things settle down I expect to see you in my office.”

With no further conversation, the line disconnected, leaving the car in silence for a few miles.

“Go ahead, Danno. Just say what’s on your mind.” He could only imagine the rant was coming now that his partner knew he’d been seeing a shrink. He’d been going since not long after he met Grace. Things that never bothered him before suddenly did. He had a hard time reconciling the killer he knew he was with the person he wanted to be for the little girl.

“Actually, babe, I’ll admit I was taken by surprise, but I’m really proud of you. I know too many tough guys that won’t talk to anyone when they need to and I’m really glad to hear that you do.” The absolute sincerity in Danny’s voice was unexpected.

Pulling into the parking spot, Steve turned off the car, closed his eyes and took a deep breath. After what felt like minutes, but was really just a few seconds, he turned to look at his partner.

“Really?” His voice was hopeful.

“Yes, Steven, really. I worry about you sometimes. I know we talk, but I also know there is a lot you have to censor and I’m profoundly happy to know you have someone that you can speak freely to without worrying about security clearances. Believe it or not, Super SEAL, your ohana doesn’t expect you to be invincible all of the time.”

Danny’s heart melted at the smile on his partner’s face. He could only imagine the courage it took for him to make that call with him in the car, knowing his relationship with the Navy doctor was likely to come out. He’d gotten over whatever fear he had about the reaction because it was the best thing for Grace.

“Thanks, Danny. Means a lot to know you understand.” Clearly reaching his capacity for heartfelt discussions, he pushed the door open. “Now, let’s go pay Mr. Edwards a visit.”

Duke met them at the door. “He’s waiting for you in the interrogation room.” The three headed that direction. “So far he’s maintained his story from yesterday. At least he didn’t try to play stupid. It appears his lawyer won’t touch the case, so he’s stuck with the provided council. Apparently, that’s one lawyer with a bit of conscience and a fear of crossing Five-0. Governor Denning made sure we have the best prosecutor on the case.”

Reaching the door, Duke nodded to the officer standing on guard and watched the pair disappear into the room. He ducked into the small observation room. No matter what happened, he’d swear their behavior was above reproach, although he knew them well enough to know they would be careful with this one because it was so close to home.

Stan looked up at the sound of the door opening and had to swallow back the bile that rose in his throat. Though everything had been done by the book, his handling had been far from friendly thus far.

Seeing McGarrett and Williams enter the room, he thought there was a chance they’d decided to dispense with the formality of a trial altogether and dispose of him now.

He had a fleeting thought that the taller man resembled a caged tiger ready to spring as he positioned
himself in the back corner of the room. His back leaned against the wall, arms crossed menacingly in front of him; McGarrett didn’t look pleased, making Stan swallow nervously.

Danny pulled out the seat across from the prisoner, flipped it backward and sat. Clearly coiled to jump up at the slightest provocation, the smaller man was only slightly less frightening than his counterpart. Stan was slightly amazed that every suspect they faced didn’t immediately confess.

“Tell me about what happened, Stan?” The detective’s voice dared him not to answer.

“I already told Chin, things have fallen apart at work. Things were already rough between Rachel and me, so I’d kept it from her. I didn’t want another reason to fight when things were already clearly ending. I got home after having a couple of drinks and we argued. I lashed out and the next thing I knew she was on the floor bleeding.”

Danny’s icy glare scared him; however, Steve’s stony voice terrified him. “You didn’t think to call 911?”

“I was drunk. All I could think is how bad it would look. Then Grace was screaming. She and I struggled and the next thing I knew she locked herself in the bathroom and I was in the kitchen with a bottle of scotch and a black eye.”

“You struggled?” Steve’s voice took on a deadly edge that even gave Danny the chills as he came away from the wall. “You tore her clothes, left bruises all over her body, and all you can say is you struggled?”

It took every bit of restraint the SEAL possessed not to jump over the table and throttle Stan. The prisoner, for his part, seemed scared into silence.

“What I want to know and what Grace wants to know, is why. Why did things turn violent? Why is her mother dead?” Danny fixed his eyes on Stan. He wanted answers for his baby girl.

“It’s not like I planned it. Yes, I believed our marriage was over, despite Rachel’s attempts to convince herself and everyone around us otherwise, but I never intended to hurt her. It was just too much, she wouldn’t stop pushing for answers and I needed her to be quiet. One second we were arguing and then she was silent.”

“Well, that’s a pathetic excuse for us to give Grace.” Danny stared down his ex’s killer as Steve lurked barely a foot behind him. The closer the SEAL got to Stan the more the detectives skin crawled with nervous anticipation of what would happen next.

“How is Grace doing?” Stan brazenly asked. His tone convinced neither man he actually cared.

“You don’t get to ask that question anymore.” Danny replied flatly.

“Why the hell not? I’ve been playing the part of daddy for quite some time now.”

The words were barely out of his mouth when Steven lunged. “You have no claim on that name. All you’ve ever given that little girl is rabbit and a lifetime of therapy bills.”

Scrambling to get away from the clearly enraged SEAL, Stan managed to tip his chair back and crash to the floor.

Towering over him, Steve’s voice dropped so low that no one in the observation room would have heard his next words. “I’ve been more of a father to that little girl than you ever dreamed of being, you stupid son of a bitch.”
Before Steve could get his hand on Stan, Danny grabbed his shoulder from behind. “Steven, look at me.” His voice sounded a bit panicked feeling the tension radiating from where his hands gripped his partner.

He waited for the taller man to turn and comply. Seeing the look in his eyes, Danny could well understand Stan’s attempts to flee.

“I know you want to kill him, so do I, but right now Gracie needs us both to keep it together. One or both of us sitting in a jail cell because of him will do her no good.”

Nodding silently, the SEAL gave the still handcuffed man on the floor one final glare before he turned and left the room, the detective right behind him.

Duke met them in the hall. “I think he might need to change his pants after that.” The older man snickered. “He’ll get what’s coming to him. I have no doubt word will get out among the other prisoners and you know they don’t typically take well to violence against women and children.”

The pair appreciated Duke’s comments. Though they both wished they could have a hand in roughing him up, they knew that keeping themselves clean in his mess and being there for Grace was far more important.

“Speaking of Grace, everybody at the station pitched in and got her something. I’ll meet you at the car in a few minutes with it.”

“Thanks, Duke.” The pair turned to leave.

Walking down the hall, they heard him direct two other officers to pick the trash up off the floor and put him back where he belonged.

Approaching the Camaro, Danny handed over the keys without question or comment. He could sense Steve needed to be in control of something and at the moment the car might be the only thing that would cooperate.

They stood staring at each other over the roof of the car, waiting for Duke to reappear with the gift. The expression on Steve’s face worried Danny, but he couldn’t quite place which face he was seeing.

“Steven, we need to talk. Let’s go grab some coffee and go someplace we can talk privately.” McGarrett’s rarely seen kicked puppy face followed the fleeting look of panic; unfortunately, before he could say anything else Duke appeared with a rather large wrapped box for Grace.
Chapter 11

Chapter Notes

Since at least one person commented on it, I will confess. The rabbit and therapy bills line was the plot bunny behind this entire fic. It's amazing how one little line can turn into such a beast of a story. I hope you continue to enjoy!

Steve got behind the wheel and brought the car to life as soon as Duke stepped away. After his outburst in the interrogation room, he expected Danny to be mad. Hell, he should have kept his mouth shut. It didn't matter than in every way that matter he was more of a father to Grace than Stan was; he never should have said that in front of his partner, in front of her actual father. Danny was a wonderful father and no one could ever dispute that or replace him in anyway.

Getting in the car, the shorter man said nothing. McGarrett's mind raced, trying to figure out a way out of this, a way not to lose them both because he'd opened his big mouth. Daring a sideways glance at his best friend, the man he often wished was more; he found Danny’s blue eyes intently fixed on him.

The Jersey detective was growing increasingly worried about his partner. The interview with Stan had been intense, as he'd anticipated, but nothing jumped out at him as a reason for Steve to break out the kicked puppy look. Danny hated that look, it made him want to wrap the SEAL in his arms and swear everything would be okay, but right now he wasn't actually sure what was wrong.

Several long, silent minutes later Steve pulled into a parking spot along the beach. There was a small coffee shop, but the area was largely abandoned at this time on a Thursday. The pair quickly exited the car.

"Why don't you go pick a bench and I'll grab the coffee?" Danny pointed in the direction of some empty benches facing the water and far enough away from the little shop that any interruptions were unlikely. He didn't particularly want to separate from Steve at that moment, but was half convinced he would scare the poor barista to death if he ordered his own coffee.

Giving a silent nod, Steve quickly made his way to an empty bench and sat. Staring out over the water, he rested his head in his hands as his mind raced. It killed him to think Danny was so mad that he couldn't even be near him. After a few minutes, his eyes dropped to the ground.

Sooner than expected, he saw Danny's shoes on the ground in front of him and felt the heat of the coffee cup pressed against his hand. Looking up, but managing not to meet the other man's eyes, he accepted the drink.

"Babe, I said we needed to talk, not that I was sending you to face the firing squad."

The SEAL carefully avoided looking at his partner. Danny should have known he'd gotten too much out of Steve easily today; this was going to be challenge. Preparing himself to drag information about of him by force if necessary, he plopped himself down on the bench. Leaving barely an inch between them, he could feel the heat radiating from his partner and hoped that perhaps this physical proximity would help shake something loose.
“I'm so sorry, Danny. I didn't...” This wasn't McGarrett’s half-assed apology for something stupid and the pain in the other man's voice finally made the Jersey native snap.

“Steven, why exactly does your Neanderthal brain see the need to apologize?” The SEAL looked over, but quickly realized that an answers wasn't necessary. The shorter man was gearing up for a rant. Part of him wanted to relax slightly, a ranting Danny was a normal Danny and right now normal was a welcome feeling; however, he feared this rant would rip everything he’d hoped for away.

“I swear if I hear you apologize one more time for anything related to Stan Edwards I will throttle you myself. I don’t care how well trained you are to defend yourself!” Still going, he set his cup on the ground and rose, hands gesturing wildly to emphasize his point. “You had no way of knowing what was happening this week. Given Rachel's comment Sunday, you had every reason to believe she was keeping Grace from calling you. You didn't cause Stan to lose his job. You didn't make him lie to Rachel about all the problems at work. You didn't make him drink so much. You didn't make him kill her, and you damn sure didn't make him lay a hand on Grace!”

Steve stared up at him, slightly in awe of the fact that he'd gotten through all that without seeming to breathe. Maybe somehow is flailing hands were channeling oxygen to the rest of his body. Realizing his partner had gone quiet, Steve stared back out over the water, waiting for the axe to fall. After things remained silent for a moment, he opened his mouth.

“I know all that. As much as I want to think I could have and should have stopped it; it isn't my fault it happened. Believe me, I hold Stan firmly accountable for what he did, but I'll still always feel like I should have been there sooner. Danny, she spent two nights locked, terrified in that bathroom. She needed someone to be there and I failed her.”

They hadn't come to the point of why he was actually apologizing yet, but Steve assumed they would get there soon enough. If this was the end, he didn’t mind it dragging out longer.

“Steven, listen to me. That's not how I see it. To me, you were there when I was clear across the country. You didn't just pick up a phone to call too see if she was okay; you drove to that house and found her. You held her and stayed with her when I couldn't.”

He moved to stand directly in front of his partner, blocking his view to the water. When he stubbornly shifted his eyes to the ground, Danny carefully placed a hand under his chin and forced him to look up and meet his gaze. “Damn it, Steve, that's not how Gracie sees it either. To her, you are her Guardian Super SEAL. You made good on your promise to make time for her, to be there for her. That little girl loves you so much.” Danny’s voice shook with the pure weight of the emotion he felt as tears stung his eyes. The reality of just how alone she could have been hit him along with just how incredibly important Steve truly was to them both.

“I know she does and I try to be worthy of it, but I'm so afraid I'm going to fail her. I love her so much. I just don't want to let her down. I'm so incredibly far out of my element.” Steve knew what he needed to say. He couldn’t avoid it any longer, no matter the consequences, so when Danny started to speak again, Steve held up a hand to quiet him.

“I'm so sorry I snapped in the interrogation room. What I said to Stan, I was so far out line.” Danny was confused; he thought Steve was right on point the entire time. “Grace is your daughter. She has a wonderful father in you. She doesn’t need another one and she certainly doesn’t need a screw up like me making claims like that.”

Returning to the seat next to the SEAL, Danny took a deep breath. Now he was starting to understand why his partner had closed himself off so quickly. Ever the tactician he went for the
preemptive strike, so convinced he’d messed up; that he’d be sent to solitary for breaking the rules.

“Steven, do you remember Sunday when we dropped Gracie off?” He looked sideways to see the confused look and affirmative nod. “Did you catch the slip when she was thanking you?”

“I...” The SEAL's voice was eerily quiet and he didn't finish, but Danny knew he’d caught it.

“Steven, listen to me. I am Grace's Danno, a title I wear most proudly and is infinitely more special to me than daddy ever could be; however, I think it's time I fill you in on some background.”

Pausing, he looked to make sure the SEAL was following along.

“Several months ago, I picked Grace up from school and was regaled with stories about the new student at school, Nikki, and how they’d become immediate friends. Apparently, Nikki spent the day telling Gracie how she had two daddies and all kinds of stories about how great they were. One of her dads had dated her mother, but things didn’t work out. The mother wanted nothing to do with her daughter, so he gained full custody. About two years ago, he met her second dad and all is now seemingly perfect in Nikki’s world.”

Danny wasn't surprised to see his partner looking somewhat confused, so he charged ahead with the story.

“Anyway, this was around the same time that things started falling apart with Rachel and Stan. They were spending a fair amount of time arguing and in Grace's mind, she decided having two daddies instead of me, her mother, and a step-Stan would be wonderful. At that point not much else was said since we had arrived at Rachel's and I was only supposed be playing transport that day.”

Steve detected a hint of bitterness in Danny's voice. He knew how much it irked him to only have those little bits of time with his daughter. Staying quiet, he waited for Danny to continue.

“That Friday, I picked her up for her weekend with me. It was one of those rare weekends that I'd let you convince me to bring her over and stay so we could play on the beach. She was so excited to get in the car and get going. I mentioned something about home, referring to Rachel's house, and she reacted a bit oddly. I started asking questions and she finally admitted that with the two of them arguing every time they thought she couldn't hear that it didn't feel like home, just some big house she happened to occupy. We pulled into your driveway and I asked her if somewhere did feel like home. I wanted so badly for her to be happy, to feel like she had a home, but with my apartment I was terrified my little girl was going to say no.”

Danny fell silent, leaning forward and staring toward the water. Steve mimicked his pose, but turned his head to watch him.

“She didn't miss a beat, Steven. She didn't even think twice. She looked me square in the eye and said, ‘Here, Danno. Here, when the three of us are together. This is home.’ Then she jumped out of the car and took off running to where you were waiting as if it were no big deal.”

The pair fell silent, as Steve processed what he'd just heard. Home? Home was with him? Piecing the information together, he sat back.

“Wait. Is that why you suddenly stopped arguing that you were invading and in the way every time I invited you two to stay for the weekend? I never bothered to question it, but looking back it was as if a switch flipped. I went from practically begging you to bring her over, to being able to plan weekends with the three of us like clockwork.”

Danny couldn't help but smile. “Guilty. I couldn't do it; I just couldn't fight it any more. I didn't want
us to become a burden, but to know that we were family, that we were home to her ... I would have given anything for her to keep that feeling.”

Elbowing Danny in the ribs, Steve couldn't help a small smile. He wasn't out of the woods yet, but it was starting to feel like this story was going to end in a far better place than he expected.

“So, I'm not in trouble for crossing a line because you don't want Grace to lose home right when she needs it most.”

Danny thought for a second. “Actually, babe, you're not in trouble, because you just managed to cross a line that Gracie and I crossed shortly after your place became home.”

“Explain, please?” Steve was puzzled.

“You remember I asked you about Sunday, right? That's where this entirely too long winded explanation began, but I needed you to understand home before I thought you'd have any chance of getting this one.”

Not sure if he should be offended or not, the SEAL just laughed. “I know, I'm emotionally challenged.”

“Actually babe, after today I'm starting to think that is just a front you put when people are watching, but don't worry, your secret is safe with me. Anyway, over the next few weeks I heard an increasing number of stories about Nikki and her dads and eventually the topic of Grace wanting a second dad came up again. I told her I wasn't sure how I'd going about finding her one of those and she actually laughed at me. ‘Silly, Danno. We already have him.’ Somehow I felt like that stupid rabbit from the Trix commercials. She carefully explained that she didn't just want any daddy, she wanted you. Apparently she'd given this a lot of thought.”

The detective paused here, waiting to see how Steve was reacting. “Me?” The question was a a mere whisper, nearly lost on the ocean breeze.

“I asked her if she wanted to talk to you about it, but she was determined to keep it quiet. She didn’t want you to feel pressured and made it abundantly clear that she'd rather have you as Uncle Steve and keep you close than risk pushing you away. Sunday I really thought she was going to slip.”

“I thought I'd imagined it.” Steve finally spoke louder. “Up until yesterday, I really thought I'd imagined it. She almost said it a few times when she was awake and then in her sleep she was calling for both Danno and Daddy. Last night, when I woke her up from the nightmare, I think she was too upset to filter herself and actually called me Daddy.”

Danny realized he detected a hint of pride along with a certain amount of sadness in Steve's voice. The sadness worried him.

“Babe, how do you feel about being called Daddy?” They were this far down the path; they might as well finish it.

“Doesn't it bother you?” Upsetting his partner's position with Grace was what worried Steve the most.

Of course, the crazy SEAL was sad because he expected Danny to object. “Is that your only concern, Steven? It doesn't bother you what people might say if they hear her calling you Daddy? It's not like we’re exactly unrecognizable around here.” Any misconceptions on that front wouldn't bother Danny in the least. The women that practically threw themselves at Steve everywhere they went made him insanely jealous; unfortunately, he had no basis to claim the SEAL has his.
“Danno, half the island thinks we're more than just partners anyway.” He couldn't help the hint of longing in his voice, though Danny wrote it off as wishful thinking on his part. “I've long since stopped caring what any of them think.”

“True. I think there are a fair number of people that suspect we're married.” Danny didn't look at his partner, trying to keep his tone joking, so he missed the look of absolute longing on Steve's face. “And no, for your question, it doesn't bother me. I've always been her Danno, never Daddy.”

Steve smiled, thinking that Danno truly was a special nickname. He’d noticed his partner no longer argued when he used it. Of course, he was probably just tired of arguing about it. Though that seemed to be the only thing Danny ever got tired of arguing about.

“Honestly, Danno, I never imagined my life with kids because it didn't seem realistic, but now I can't imagine my life without Grace.” Without you went unspoken. “You have no idea how incredibly honored … how incredibly humbled I am to think she believes me worthy of that name. I spent years working to earn the rank of Lieutenant Commander, but I can honestly say I'd trade that in in a heartbeat for Grace to call me Daddy.”

Rising from the bench, Danny turned and extended a hand to pull the SEAL up, reluctantly letting go when he was on his feet. Giving him a brief hug, that they both wished were longer, they headed toward the car together.

“Steve, if my Monkey is going to call anyone else Daddy, I'm very glad it's you.”

McGarrett grinned wildly; this entire conversation had reoriented his world. “Let's go home, Danno.”
Kono watched Grace as her eyes followed Chin toward the house to get drinks. The Hawaiian suspected something was on her mind since it was her prompting that sent Chin on his errand.

As soon as he disappeared through the door, the little girl sat back from their sand city project, looking like she wanted to ask something, but couldn't decide how to start.

“Gracie, is there something you want to talk about?” Her cousin wasn't likely to take long and she didn't want the opportunity get missed.

“Promise you won't tell Steve and Danno?” Her serious tone and expression alarmed Kono.

“I'll promise, as long as nothing is wrong that they'll need to know to take care of you.” She hedged her answer. She didn't want to go back on her word once she gave it, but there was no way she'd take a chance with Grace's well-being.

“That works.” She shrugged her shoulders before getting to the point. “Do you think Danno and Steve will ever figure out that they're supposed to be together?”

Kono was suddenly glad Chin hadn't arrived with the drinks yet. She would have choked with surprise. “What do you mean by together?”

“You know, like Nikki's dads?” After the last hour or so, Kono was quite familiar with Nikki's family. The focus of the conversation was starting to make sense.

“Honestly, Gracie. I don't know. Why?”

The little girl thought for a moment. “Because I love them and I want them to be happy. They love each other too, but I think sometimes guys are a little slow with this kind of thing, so I'm starting to wonder if they'll figure it out.”

Kono couldn't help but smile and laugh at the incredibly astute observation and blunt honesty of the child.

“I think you might be right, Gracie. They might need help figuring it out.”

Hearing the door of the house open and close, the pair looked up to see Chin returning, water bottles in hand. “Grandma will help, but I wanted to see what you thought before she got here in case we need your help too.”

Kono grinned at the girl. “I bet Uncle Chin would help too.”

“And just what are you volunteering Uncle Chin for?” The man in question distributed the drinks and sat down in the sand.

“Just a little match making after Mom gets here.”

The girls didn't have to elaborate. “Oh, I'm in. I'm definitely in.” However, he suspected the pair wouldn't stand a chance faced with Grace and Mama Williams. “It'd be nice to see them quit skirting around things.”

The three settled into putting the final additions on the main castle in their little sand city. The adults both surprised and delighted with Grace's revelation. When the time was right, they would make sure
there support was clear as well. McGarrett and Danno needed to know their ohana was happy for them, or they would be if they would ever get it together.

Hearing a car in the driveway, the cousins turned to shield Grace in case it was someone unexpected and unwelcome. The effort was unnecessary, as Grace immediately spotted Steve and ran to meet them. “Danno! Da… Uncle Steve!”

The SEAL swung her up into his arms, giving his partner a meaningful look. “Monkey, what do you say we got for a little walk?”

Looking down at her Danno, she waited to see if he was coming too. “Why don't you two go ahead? I need to make a call, but I'll catch up.” The pair had decided it was best to let Steve have the Daddy talk with her alone; meanwhile, Danny would call the school to let them know how she was doing and see what arrangements could be made.

“Walk or ride?” The SEAL inquired.

Wrapping her arms tighter around his neck, she giggled. “Ride.”

“Don't get lost you two. I'll meet you on your way back.” He'd never catch them anyway and wanted to give the pair as much time as they needed. The three of them would have plenty of time to talk after.

Stopping briefly on the lanai, Steve set Gracie down while he ditched his shoes and rolled his cargo pants up a bit. Knowing him, they’d still end up wet, but it would help keep them from collecting sand.

Chin and Kono passed by them on the way into the house, “We're going to head out and run a couple errands before we get Mom.” Pulling the paint cards from earlier out of his back pocket, Chin waved them at Grace. “Grabbed these off the table. We'll pick them on the way.”

“Thanks, Uncle Chin!” Back in Steve's arms, she waved to the Hawaiians as she and the SEAL headed out toward the water.

They simply enjoyed the sound of the waves for a few minutes before Grace spoke. “Are you okay, Uncle Steve?” She'd seen that look on his face before, the look that said he was thinking really hard about how to tell her something.

Kissing her forehead, he squeezed her more tightly to him. “I am. Sweetie, do you remember last night when I woke you up from your nightmare?”

Grace leaned back a bit, one hand resting on his chest as the other remained wrapped around his shoulder. Her brow furrowed and she refused to meet his eyes as she remembered what she'd said. Sensing her unease, the SEAL feared he'd already botched the conversation. “Gracie, please look at me.”

Blinking back tears that threatened to spill, she forced herself to meet his eyes. The wetness in his eyes surprised her, Steve didn't usually cry. Had she disappointed him that much? Had he told Danno they needed to leave?

“I'm sorry. I didn't mean to.” Her panicked apology broke the SEAL's thin control on his emotions.

“Oh Grace, please don't apologize. You didn't do anything wrong.” The tears spilled unencumbered. “Don't be mad at Danno, but he explained about Nikki’s dads before we came home. I said
something while we were at the station and I thought Danno was mad at me. He had to tell me so I would understand.” He fumbled through the explanation, rushing to explain so she wouldn’t be upset with her father.

“You know?” Her small voice held the slightly hint of hope. “Are you mad? It's okay if you don't want to be my Daddy. I'll still love you if you just want to be Uncle Steve.”

Pulling her back close to his chest, he kissed her hair. “Gracie, I would love nothing better than being your Daddy. You have no idea how incredibly happy I am that you want me to be.”

Her chin resting on his shoulder, she whispered in his ear. “If you're happy, why are you crying?” Happy was not one of the few reasons she'd ever seen him cry. Last time it was when Danno was in the hospital with the toxin stuff.

She could feel the laugh vibrating in his chest. She loved his laugh. She really loved it when he and Danno made each other laugh. “Sweetie, I’m crying because I never thought I’d be Daddy. Family isn't something I’ve got a lot of and finding out that you wanted to keep me around was just a really great surprise today.”

“So Danno and I don't have to move out?” She wasn't really sure Steve was making sense at this point, but he’d said ‘keep’ and she wanted to make sure he meant it.

“No, Gracie. This is home for you. This is home for all three of us.” He smiled at her when she leaned back to see his face. “I love you, Gracie. You will always have a place here,” he placed her small hand over his heart, “and here,” he pointed back toward the house, “with me. So will Danno.”

“I love you too, Daddy.” She spoke slowly, seeming to test out the words as she spoke them for the first time. Her bravery was rewarded with one of his incredible smiles.

The pair continued to walk down the beach for a while, simply enjoying the view and the sound of the waves. Grace felt happy, but she also felt guilty for feeling happy after what had happened.

“Daddy?”

“Yes, Gracie?” Steve stopped walking, turning to see if Danno was headed their way yet. Seeing the shorter man walking toward them, the Seal smiled.

“Does it make me a bad person that I feel happy even though I'm still sad about Mommy? Will she be mad that I'm not crying all the time?”

Steve looked to her and then stared out at the ocean and he started walking toward his partner. He wasn't entirely sure how to answer that, but as he thought, he realized his sessions with Dr. Thompson might have helped him. It wasn't the same thing, but he could relate based on the loss of close friends and comrades on missions.

“No, Gracie. It doesn't make you a bad person.” He was glad to see the distance to Danny quickly closing. “You're going to be sad a lot and you're going to miss your mom, but you have to remember that she loved you and she would want you to be happy and have a full life. It's okay to cry when you're sad, but I don't think she'd ever want you to spend all your time crying.”

The little girl was quiet in his arms as they closed the gap toward her father. Walking the last few feet, Danny and Steve’s eyes locked on each other as they came to a stop less than a foot from each other.

Gracie turned to face Danno, and leaned down to accept his open armed invitation into his arms.
Steve looked on, a mixture of love and longing on his face, as his partner held his daughter closely.

Seeing Steve’s expression, Danny extended one arm toward him, inviting the Super SEAL to join the family hug.

“Everything okay with you two?” He had to ask. They seemed a bit more serious than he’d expected.

“Yeah, Danno. We're good.” Steve answered the unasked specifics of the question.

Gracie leaned back a bit, wrapping an arm around each of them as they stood planted on the beach. “Daddy says that Mommy would want me to be happy. That she wouldn't be mad.”

“Gracie, you should listen to Daddy. Sometimes he's smarter than we give him credit for.”
Walking hand in hand between her Danno and her Daddy along the beach, Grace kept sneaking glances up at each of them. They both seemed content and sad all at the same time. First she'd catch one staring at the other, then staring at the beach in front of them, and then smiling down at her.

Part of her wanted to just pull their hands together and tell them to quit being stupid boys, but she was just nervous enough about that plan that she decided to wait for Grandma to arrive and help. Daddy was going to grill something for dinner and she bet that would give her a chance to talk to the older woman and maybe even Kono in the kitchen.

Steve looked over at his partner again, silently watching him as he stared across the sand. He felt like he was an emotional live wire about to ignite. He was both happy and relieved that he and Grace had sorted out his status in her life. Meanwhile, the fury at Stan and desire to strangle him still boiled inside him.

As if that weren't enough, he was thoroughly confused about Danny. Little things were starting to add up, making him think that perhaps an advance on his part might not be entirely unwelcome, but he couldn't decide if he was just imagining what he wanted things to mean or if it was real and he was terrified of scaring the other man away. Afraid of being caught staring, he averted his gaze to the water.

Eyes focused on the sand in front of them, the Jersey native was in a state of utter and complete turmoil. Fear for his daughter and partner and rage at Stan had fueled him as he'd traveled home. Now the fear had only lessened, not disappeared. They had a long way to go before he would believe Grace was truly out of the woods. Her question about being happy made it clear that things were starting to surface.

Turning his head slightly, he glanced first at his smiling daughter, and then at the man who'd become such a steadying force in his life, when he wasn't trying to get them killed. Steven was so much more complicated than he'd ever believed possible. He hated to remember how he'd pegged him as the emotionless Rambo type as soon as they'd met. He was starting to think the SEAL held in more emotion than most people ever felt.

Releasing a sigh that was quickly lost on the ocean breeze, Danny closed his eyes briefly. Part of him regretted that he hadn't pushed further in the conversation with Steve at the beach earlier. They'd clarified where he stood with Grace, but left so much unanswered in where they stood with each other. Was he reading Steven wrong, did the SEAL just view them as friends? He was beginning to think he'd lose his mind being so close and yet so far away from what he wanted.

Crossing the lanai, the trio headed back into the house. Danny led them into the kitchen where he’d placed the monstrous box from HPD on the island.

Gracie spotted it immediately, “Danno, why is there a huge present?”

Both men laughed as she approached the box cautiously. “It's for you, Monkey. Duke said everybody down at the station pitched in for it. They wanted to remind you that they're all there if you need them.”

Steve lifted her carefully to kneel on one of the bar stools, hands on either side of her small waist to make sure she stayed balanced. Danny moved to stand across from them, unable to contain the smile at the picture they made together.
“Go ahead, open it.” As she and the SEAL became engrossed in unwrapping the box, he sneaked his phone out of his pocket and snapped a picture. Steve’s eyes flashed up to meet his at the sound, but the taller man only grinned when he realized what Danny had done. He’d have to ask his partner to send him the picture later.

Removing the box lid, Grace stretched up to see what was inside. “It's huge!” The little girl exclaimed, at what looked to be very large stuffed animal hunched down in the box. Her face turned up to Steve, an unspoken request for him to pull it out. Freeing one hand from her side, he reached up and grabbed what appeared to be the bear’s neck. Pulling it out, he lifted Grace back to the floor with his other arm and handed her a teddy bear that was almost bigger than she was and sported an HPD polo shirt.

Steve looked back to the box, head cocked sideways. “How the heck did they get that,” he gestured to the bear, “to fit in there?” He pointed back to the box.

“I don't know, babe, but that is one humongous bear. Hope it knows how to swim or it might have a hard time in the ocean room.”

Steve erupted in a full laugh at his partner's observation. Danny and Grace both smiled up at him before joining his laughter.

“Danno, can we call Duke?” She loved her bear and wanted to let the officers know.

“Of course, Monkey. I'm sure he'd love to hear from you.”

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An hour later, Duke and the others at HPD had been profusely thanked for the gigantic bear and the three had ventured up to Grace's room to look at their workspace for the pending decorative overhaul.

The room was fairly large and had the nicest bedroom set of all the spare rooms, though Steven realized that since it had been his room the furniture had a more masculine feel to it.

“Maybe we should move this furniture into one of the other rooms and start fresh in here? The stuff in the other rooms could really stand to be replaced.” He gave Danny a look that told him he was not allowed to argue. “This is the stuff I had in high school. It's not going to look right with the new theme.”

The detective shook his head and shrugged. “It's your house, Super SEAL.” He regretted the words immediately. Steve's face fell before he turned away, before Danny could take it back.

“But it's our home.” The shorter man barely heard the whispered words. Looking over at Grace to see if she had noticed, she stood with one hand on her hip giving her father a look that clearly said ‘Fix it!’ Sometimes he truly thought she was much more adept at handling Steve than he was.

“Be right back.” Grace disappeared from the room and Danny heard the bathroom door shut behind her a few seconds later. So much for getting her to help.

Walking up behind McGarrett, Danny wished he could just wrap his arms around the man and tell him just how much he believed this was their home, but what if it backfired? What if that wasn’t what he wanted?

“Babe, please turn around. I didn't mean it like that.” Instead of turning, he stepped further away, standing in front of the window. Reaching his hands up, he gripped the frame on either side, letting
the structure support him.

Intellectually, Steve knew Danny hadn't meant it the way he took it, but his heart was having a hard time reconciling itself with his head.

Danny's cell phone ringing cut through the silence in the room. Recognizing the ringtone for his mother, the detective reluctantly answered.

“Hi Mom.”

“Daniel, what's wrong?” He groaned; his mother was far too perceptive. “Don't tell me nothing, I can hear it in your voice. Are Gracie and Steve okay?”

“Gracie is fine, Mom, and Steve will be if I can ever finish apologizing for saying something stupid.” Danny knew his partner was listening and was granted a small spark of hope when the taller man released one hand from the window frame and turned partially toward him.

The haunted look in the SEAL's eyes nearly took Danny to the floor. He'd done that. He and his big mouth had put that look in those eyes. Steve could put a puppy to shame with those eyes.

“Daniel, give Steven the phone and leave him alone for a minute. I'm in the car with Chin and Kono, and will be there soon.” She sounded a bit exasperated.

Knowing better than to argue with his mother, especially when he was in the doghouse, Danny extended the phone to his partner. As their fingers touched, he mouthed a silent, “I'm sorry,” before he turned for the door.

“Steven, are you okay? You don't have to tell me what he said, but you know how his mouth runs away with him sometimes. You know he would never mean to upset you.”

He cracked a small smile at the phone. “I know, Mom. I just… I don't know. I'm a mess.”

“Oh, my dear boy, I think sometimes you forget you aren't really Superman. You are only human, Steven. We will all still love you just as much even if you can't be strong all the time. I don't know everything that's happened, but my guess is you're trying to be strong and keep it all together for Danny and Gracie.” She heard his mumbled confirmation. “Now, I want you to listen to me. When we get off here, you tell Danny to start prepping the steaks, so they'll be ready in plenty of time for dinner. Then you go change and go for either a run or a swim. You have to take care of yourself too.”

“I'm glad you're coming, Mom.” Right now he was so off-balance that he just wanted his mom and she was the closest thing he had.

“Me too, son, me too. Now hop to it. You'll feel better by the time I get there. I love you, Steven.”

“Love you too, Mom.” He stared at the phone for a second before moving. Sometimes it amazed him just how well she knew him. He'd only seen him twice, once when she came to visit and the other when Danny dragged him to New Jersey with Grace, but once Danny and Grace had started staying over every weekend he was always included in the weekend call with the New Jersey family.

Having stayed right out in the hall, the detective stepped back into the room. Grace had left the bathroom, given him a repeat of the earlier look, and gone downstairs as soon as he explained Steve was talking to Grandma. The look of satisfaction on her face should have worried him, but he had equal faith in his mother.
“Steven,” Danny started to apologize again, but stopped when the other man shook his head no.

“I'm under orders from Mom. You are supposed to get the steaks ready so I can grill them for dinner. I am supposed to go get some exercise.”

Danny processed this new information for a moment before deciding his mother was a genius. “Got it.” He held his ground as Steve approached the door, forcing the taller man to stop. “We'll talk later, but babe, I'm sorry I opened my mouth without thinking. This has always been your house where we came to visit. It's just an adjustment, but that doesn't mean this isn't home for all of us now.”

Not trusting his voice, the SEAL just nodded his head. They'd talk later when he'd regained some semblance of balance.
Chapter 14

Pulling up to the house, Chin grinned at Danny's mom. “You head on in. We’ll get the stuff.”

She started to argue, but the silent shake of his head made her smile instead. She’d learned on the way here that one of her priorities on this trip was to knock some sense into her boys. Everyone except the two of them appeared to agree on this point.

The cousins made it clear that they were prepared to be delighted for Danny and Steve and that Grace clearly wanted it. They were both concerned that the unresolved emotional tension was going to boil over soon. Once the pair was headed in the right direction, they were convinced the road to Grace’s full recovery would be far smoother.

Armed with this information, Mama Williams headed toward the house.

Having heard the car pull up, Grace flew out the door to greet the older woman. “Grandma! You made it.”

Leaning down to embrace the young girl, she grinned. “Of course I came. Your Danno was so worried when he left that I just had to follow.” Lowering her voice to a rather conspiratorial whisper, she continued. “And from the sound of things, it’s a good thing I didn’t wait.”

Grace leaned back a bit to look at her Grandma’s face. “You have no idea. I think Danno almost made Daddy cry.” It was clear that Gracie was not happy about that, and her grandmother was inclined to agree with the cousins; letting this drag out wasn’t going to help her.

“Ah, I see that piece finally sorted itself out.” Grace had explained the Daddy conundrum to her one evening when she called while Stan and Rachel argued.

Nodding her head, the little girl smiled as she looked out to where the SEAL was swimming. “Yep. It was kind of an accident, but turns out Uncle Steve really wanted to be Daddy. He said he was really happy I wanted to keep him.”

“Oh, Sweetheart, I have no doubt that he is delighted with that.” The two watched as Steve emerged from the water. Seeing the pair, he waved. “Why don’t you go see if Chin and Kono need any help? I think I need to go talk to him?” She pointed a thumb in Steve’s direction.

Receiving a quick smile and thumbs up from Grace, Beth Williams paused on the lanai to kick off her shoes and headed toward the SEAL.

Steve’s heart melted seeing the little family reunion. He was glad, for all their sakes that she was here. He wondered if they’d be able to convince her and Danny’s dad to move out to the islands. With Matt off the grid and Susan having moved to Texas with her husband, very little was holding them to Jersey.

“Welcome back to Hawaii, Mom.” Steve gave her a broad smile as she approached. “I’d give you a hug, but I’m all wet.”

Ignoring his statement, she walked right up and wrapped her arms around him. A petite five foot and two inches, the SEAL towered over her. “A little salt water isn’t going to hurt me and you, young man, needed a good hug.” She squeezed him a bit tighter as she spoke.

“You’ve got me there.” When they finally let go, the smile was still on his face, but she could see
something different in his eyes. “You didn’t have to come out here to say hello, I would have been back to the house in a few minutes and you're bound to be tired after your trip.”

“Actually, after spending all day cooped up on a plane, a short walk on the beach would do wonders for me. Care to accompany me?” The look she gave him didn't really leave him an option.

They walked in silence for a few moments, following the same path he’d taken with Grace earlier in the day. He wondered just what revelations might come with this walk.

“It's always so beautiful here.” Mama Williams leaned her head back as the breeze lifted her hair. “But I didn't drag you out here to talk about the scenery or the weather.”

Direct and honest, he appreciated those particular Williams' traits even though they sometimes scared him.

“Steven, Chin and Kono filled me in on the drive from the airport. I can't imagine how difficult the last two days have been for you, but seeing Grace when I got here, hearing her calling you Daddy at last, you can't imagine how incredibly grateful I am that you found your way into our lives.”

The SEAL looked down, meeting her eyes. He wasn't sure what to say, knew he'd never really get across how he felt. “I could say the same about all of you. What you've given me, this family, is more than I ever imagined. I just…” He stopped himself, unsure of how to continue. Unsure of how accepting Danny's mom would be when she learned just how much he loved her son.

“Steven, listen to me for a minute and I mean really listen. I want you to know that Dad and I both will always consider you our son no matter what your relationship is with Daniel. I may live 5,000 miles away, but I talk to both of you boys and Grace all the time. I'm not oblivious. All we want is for both of you to be happy.”

The SEAL couldn't hide the look of complete surprise that covered his face. “You mean… you know? How?”

“Oh, Steven. I honestly think you and Daniel are the only two that have taken this long to figure it out.” She couldn't help but shake her head at him. Gracie was right boys were incredibly stupid sometimes.

“But he…”

“Is being just as foolish and stubborn as you are. One of you is going to have to make the first move.” She turned to head back toward the house. After a moment, where he was still too stunned to move, he jogged to catch back up.

When he drew even with her, she wrapped an arm around his waist, leaning in a bit closer as he wrapped his around her shoulders. She treasured this latest addition to her family. The lost little boy hidden in the body of one of the strongest men she'd ever known.

When they finally entered the house, Steve gave mom a quick kiss on the top of her head before slipping upstairs to throw on some dry clothes.

Danny turned as she entered the kitchen, “Now you come say hello to your first born.” He teased. “I was starting to think I'd been replaced.” He knew he was in for it if Steve was still upset.

“How, Daniel. You could never be replaced and a mother is capable of loving all her children.” She teased back. “Now, what can I do to help with dinner? Steven just ran up to change, so why don't you go light the grill?”
“Yes, ma’am.” He mock saluted his mother and headed out to the lanai. She hadn't lectured him about his careless remark to Steve. He hoped that indicated the SEAL was feeling better.

Chin, Kono, and Grace all turned their eyes to her, curiosity burning bright in all of them.

“We’re making progress. If I can get some time alone with my eldest this evening, I think they'll be well on their way.” Small cheers erupted from each of them, especially Grace.

Picking up the knife Danny had left on the cutting board, Beth jumped right in to helping with dinner as the others resumed their tasks.

“Chin and I won't stay too late. Just long enough to help clean up.” Kono offered.

“What do you think, Gracie? Think you can find a way to keep Super SEAL out of the way?” Chin queried. She nodded.

“Actually,” Beth answered first. “I don’t want you guys to run off, but I'm going to insist that we put off cleaning up until later. Then I think my darling son can help me with that while Gracie gets Steven to read her a story before bed.”

“And that, Mrs. Williams, is why you are the genius of this operation.” Chin laughed. He had a feeling at some point down the road the story of getting Danny and Steve together was going to an often told and much loved tale among their ohana.

A few minutes later, Steve reappeared in the kitchen. Giving mom and Gracie both a hug, was surprised not to see Danny.

“He's outside.” Mom pointed him in the right direction. “The grill should be almost ready.”

Grabbing the platter of steaks in one hand and two beers in the other he retreated toward the door.

“Danno, grab the door.” Everyone in the kitchen smiled as he called to his partner.

Jumping at the sound the SEAL's voice, Danny hurried to comply. Opening the door, he accepted the offered beer and followed him back toward the grill. He wanted to ask if they were okay, if he was forgiven, but 'grab the door' was a far cry from 'let's sit down and talk'.

“Relax, Danno. We can talk later.” His partner seemed to read his mind. “The swim helped. Let’s just enjoy dinner with our ohana. I, for one, could use a good night's sleep before I get into any more deep conversations.”

“Cheers to that, babe. Cheers to that.” Clinking the beer bottles together, they each took a long drink. For tonight, it was enough to know that they were all together.

Checking the grill, Steve carefully arranged the steaks before sitting down in the chair next to the grill and right across from Danny. Leaning back into the chair, he realized just how exhausted he really was. Closing his eyes, he relaxed to the sound of the waves hitting the shore.

It wasn't until he heard his partner get up to check the steaks that he realized he'd dozed off. Starting to get up, he felt Danny's hand on his shoulder.

“Stay put, Superman. After everything you've done, the least you can let me do is finish the steaks so you can rest.” As their eyes met, Danny fought the urge to reach up and wipe the stray eyelash from the SEAL's face. “I've had those nights on the couch with Gracie when she's sick. While I wouldn't trade a single one of them for the world, I also know they are anything but truly restful.”
“Thanks, Danno.”

An hour later, they all sat around the dining room. As promised, Mrs. Williams had ensured that no one decided to jump up and start cleaning up the dishes.

Everyone seemed perfectly content to relay all the funny stories since last they’d seen her, which in Chin and Kono’s case had been quite some time. The shared looks between her to boys as the cousins told of some of the pair’s more risky endeavors warmed her heart even as she reminded herself that she shouldn’t scold them for their more reckless behavior.

Even though it was only about eight in the evening, everyone was quickly showing signs of being tired. For two older members of the Williams clan they were fresh off the Eastern Time zone and even having slept on the planes, their bodies weren't adjusted yet.

The cousins said their farewells and promised to check in the next day, likely around lunch again, but they would call first.

Once the door was shut, Grace smiled across the table to her grandmother. “I’m gonna go take my shower.” She knew she needed to get that out of the way before she could convince Steve to read her a bedtime story.

“You have what you need, Gracie?” The SEAL asked.

“Yeah, Daddy, I put everything where it belonged yesterday.”

Watching her disappear around the corner, the adults remained quiet. Mother and son weren't quite sure what Steve was listening so intently for, but he clearly was and they weren't going to startle him.

A few moments later, he heard the bathroom door pull to, but not quite latch before hearing the water start.

Looking back at Beth and Danny, he realized they were both watching him with slightly puzzled expressions.

“She didn't quite close the door, but it's not wide open like it was last night.”

Danny cocked his head. “You got all that from what little sound she made?”

“Yes, Danno. I'm trained to pick up things that others might not notice and I've lived in the house long enough to know that you can hear that door when it latches closed.”

Seemingly satisfied with that answer, Danny continued to watch his partner, expecting an answer on why this information was so important.

“Yesterday when we got home, she got spooked when I suggested she take a shower. It made sense; she'd just spend two nights locked in a bathroom. I didn't want her to freak out, so I promised I would stay downstairs while she showered. That way she could leave the door open if she felt more comfortable.”

Understanding dawned on both faces as they continued to watch him. Earlier today, when she bolted from her room,” he gave Danny a pointed look, “she actually closed the door all the way. Tonight she pulled it too, but didn't quite close it. Maybe it has something to do with how long she'll be in there. Heck, I don't know, but its progress, right?”

“Very true, son. That was quick thinking on your part.”
He smiled at the simple confirmation that he’d handled the situation well.

The three sat chatting casually around the table, until Beth heard the water turn off. It was time to start her part of the plan.

“Why don't you boys help me clear the dishes so we can get the kitchen cleaned up?” Rising from the table, they were both quick to comply.

They’d barely gotten all the dishes into the kitchen when Gracie appeared in the room. She gave Grandma Williams a hug first, and then moved on to Danno. When she reached the Seal, she gave him a big hug.

“Daddy, can you read to me before bed?” Steve’s eyes flew to his partner's worried that on his first night back Danny might resent being ousted from story time.

The detective shooed Steve up the stairs with Grace before turning to his mother. “Why do I feel like this was a carefully orchestrated effort to get me alone?”

“Good catch, Detective Williams.” His mother laughed.

“Am I still in trouble for earlier?” He started washing dishes. It didn't matter than he was a responsible adult, getting scolded by his mother still hurt.

“Daniel, you are not in trouble. I don't believe you intentionally tried to hurt Steven and neither does he.”

Grabbing the dishtowel, she passed behind him to start drying the dishes.

“Why do I sense a but coming?” He looked toward her.

Still holding the plate she’d already dried, she stood to face her son, watching him dutifully scrubbing dishes.

“Daniel, is there a reason you haven't told Steven how you feel?” This dish in his hand slipped back into the soapy water.

“I … We … Uh … How?” The normally verbose man suddenly couldn't form a sentence.

Trying to stifle a laugh, Beth shook her head. “Daniel, you have no reason to be embarrassed. Your father and I both love you no matter what, and we both adore Steven.”

Turning to face his mother, his hands started gesturing even while the words stuck in his throat. Finally, he managed to get a coherent thought out. “How did you know?”

“Just because I'm a country a way doesn't mean I don't pick up on things. Based on this evening, I believe the only two people around here that haven't figured it out are you and Steven.”

He turned back toward the sink, leaning forward, his elbows resting on the edge of the counter. “I don't know what to do, Mom. He means everything to me, but I'm so afraid that's not what he wants. He has most of the women on the island throwing themselves at him, why would he need me.”

She wrapped her arm around his shoulders. “Just trust me. Give yourself a chance. Give him a chance. You might be surprised.”

Hearing footsteps on the stairs, mother and son quickly returned to washing the dishes.
Less than a half hour later, the dishes were done and the exhausted trio was headed to bed. Giving each of the boys a hug, mom turned to head into her room.

“Steven, make sure you get your workout in tomorrow morning. We'll all still be here when you're done and you'll feel better.”

“Listen to Mom, Steven. She's usually right.”

Disappearing into their rooms, both Danny and Steve leaned back against the shut doors. Taking a deep breath, they considered mom's advice.
Rolling over, Steve cracked his eyes open and noticed it was barely light yet. Unless he'd completely missed something, Grace had slept through the night, a fact that pleased him immensely. Sitting up, he stretched before finally rising from the bed. Looking out the window, the waves seemed to beckon to him and he decided to heed Mom's advice.

Quickly changing into his trunks, he slipped out of the room. Quietly crossing the hall, he peeked into Grace’s room and saw she was still sleeping before trotting down the stairs.

Grabbing one of his refillable water bottles from the kitchen and a towel, he slipped out the door and toward the water. It was a beautiful morning for a swim. Tossing the items in one of the chairs, he jogged the short distance to the water and dove in.

Much like the day before, his mind raced as his body sliced through the water. Mom's words from the evening before echoed in his head. “One of you is going to have to make the first move.” He could hear her voice on repeat.

Pushing himself harder, trying to decide what he should do, his mind replayed all the moments with Danny. All the moments that he wished for more, all the ones where he thought he saw some glimpse of possibility. Reconciling the idea that he was going to have to take a leap of faith, he began to relax slightly. Allowing his mind to wander to the visions of what life could be like; the SEAL slowed his pace to allow his body to cool down some before he headed back to dry land.

Hearing his partner's quiet footsteps in the hall, Danny rolled over and looked at the clock. Only the SEAL would be up and moving willingly at this hour, but he was relieved that he was following Mom's advice. Staying in bed for a few moments longer, he considered her words last night. She'd pushed him to give them a chance, made it sound like everyone around them was just waiting for them both to get a clue.

Part of him wondered if she was right. He still couldn't pinpoint the moment in time where he actually fell in love with his crazy partner, the moment where he started wishing for more. All he knew was that somewhere along the line he'd realized that Steve was so much more than his best friend.

Having made up his mind, but still unsure of exactly how he was going to broach the subject, Danny decided there was no time like the present. Getting out of bed with far more energy than he usually had in the morning, he took a moment to stop and look at the window. The vision of Steve's lithe form cutting through the water filled him with longing. Taking a deep breath, willing his body to behave, he quickly turned to get dressed.

Emerging from the water nearly forty-five minutes after he'd entered, the SEAL saw his partner waiting for him. Droplets of water rolled down his body and into his eyes as he took the final steps out of the ocean. Danny rose from the chair, towel in hand, and sauntered toward him.

He loved seeing the shorter man in the more relaxed attire he tended to where when home here.
There were no slacks and dress shirts, definitely no ties. Danny was dressed simply in cargo shorts that hung low on his waist and a pale blue t-shirt that clung to his chest. Taking a deep breath, Steve struggled to control his rather visceral reaction before the need arose to retreat to the water he'd just left.

“Mornin' babe. Good swim?” The detective’s voice was huskier than usual, as he was unable to take his eyes off his bare chested partner. The struggle to control himself from the bedroom window now seemed like a walk in the park. He gave himself a mental shake. He had to figure out how to approach this without ruining their friendship in the process if Mom was wrong.

“Felt good to start the morning in the water. Mom was right.”

“Of course Mom was right. She usually is.” Steve noted a more serious tone to Danny's response than he'd expected. For his part, Williams was hoping Mom truly was always right. Without saying another word, the shorter man took a step toward the SEAL, closing the gap between them. Planning simply to hand him the towel, he found himself reaching up and carefully beginning to dry Steve's hair.

Startled by this unexpected closeness and contact, the taller man looked down at his partner, searching for an answer he wasn't sure he was ready to see. What he saw there was an intensity that mirrored his own.

In that instant, all logic escaped him as he brought his hand to the back of Danny's neck, pulling him closer as he lowered head. A bolt of searing heat shot through him the instant their lips met, but he quickly realized Danny wasn't returning the kiss. His partner remained frozen in place. Thinking he'd drastically misjudged the situation; that perhaps Mom wasn't always right, Steve released his hold and fled back to the water.

Left standing frozen in place, Danny's mind hadn't caught up with what had just happened, but he knew he'd missed a perfect opportunity. He'd been so busy trying to figure out what to say, what to do next that his mind had completely shut down when Steve kissed him.

“Steven, come back here!” He yelled too late, the SEAL was already underwater. Not even bothering to return to the chairs, he sat in the sand where they'd stood, where only a second before Steve had kissed him. The crazy SEAL couldn't stay in the ocean forever.

Running his hands through his hair, Danny didn't even try to check the tears that fell. He didn't know what he'd do if he'd managed to lose McGarrett before he'd ever really had him.

Staring out at the water, vision blurred by tears, he waited. Licking his lips, he could taste the saltwater on them from the all too brief kiss. The taste brought him back to the feel of it all, Steve's lips on his, his hand pulling Danny closer.

He was an idiot. He should have pulled the stupid SEAL closer, wrapped him in his arms, not frozen like an inexperienced schoolgirl. Seeing that Steve was swimming back toward shore, he decided he was going to have to suck it up and go stand in the water if he had any hopes of catching his wayward partner. Not caring if his shorts ended up wet, the detective ventured forward into the water and toward the man he loved.

Steve wasn't sure how far he'd made it from shore before he convinced himself to turn around. He was a trained Navy SEAL, trained to stand his ground and fight not flee at the first sign of trouble. But this wasn't just any fight. He hadn't planned to kiss Danny. He wasn't sure exactly what he had planned, but it involved speaking first. He needed to know where they stood and yet in that moment, with Danny so close, touching him, he'd simply needed to feel him.
Taking a breath as he swam, he spotted the Jersey native wading into the ocean. Danny clearly didn't plan to let him escape the coming confrontation. Pulling up a few feet from the other man, Steve rose to his feet, the water continuing to lap around his waist.

“I'm sorry.” Both men spoke at the same time.

Danny held up his hands in an effort to silence his partner. “No, Steven. You do not get to apologize this time. Unless you are apologizing for running off to hide in the ocean. Then yes, you may apologize.” The shorter man was so keyed up he couldn't stop himself once the rant began. “I am the one that's sorry. I came out here to talk to you. To explain how I feel, how much I love you. Instead, when you did exactly what I've wanted you to do for I don't know how long, I froze. I panicked. And then you ran, disappeared into the water right when I realized just how much I didn't want you to stop.” His voice broke and he had to stop.

Steve stared at his partner. “You love me?” His mind had stopped working at those words.

“Yes, my crazy Neanderthal, super SEAL. I love you!” He gestured wildly with his arms as if somehow they could convey just how much he meant those words.

“You love me?” Steve still looked completely stunned.

“Steven, you're repeating yourself. We've established that I love you. Pick a new question.” He wanted to close the distance between them, but his partner looked so overwhelmed that he was afraid any movement might send him back into the waves.

“When? How? Why?” He couldn't seem to figure out which question to settle on.

“That, Steven, was three questions not one, but I'll play nice since you seem to be a little slow this morning. I don't know exactly when I fell in love with you, because I was too far-gone before I even realized it. If you mean when I realized it that's easier; it was the day I almost died from the Sarin gas. Thinking I would never see you again. Seeing the look in your eyes when you realized something was wrong.”

The SEAL took a haggard breath, that day was so clearly etched in his memory. Thinking back, that was the day he'd admitted to himself just how much his partner meant to him. Just how much he couldn't imagine his life without him.

“It's hard to separate the how and why of it all.” Danny continued answering the questions. “Now I see a new reason to love you every day. I think early on it was because of Grace. Steven, you are the only person on the planet that loves Grace as much as I do. Rachel loved her, but always loved herself a bit more. You put her before everything. After Rachel, I swore that I would only ever let someone close if they could do that. You have no idea how much I wanted to admit this yesterday at the beach, but I couldn't. I was too scared. Too afraid that you wouldn't want me the way I wanted you, and I couldn't put my happiness ahead of Grace's. I want you; hell, I need you, but I knew she needs you more.”

Danny's eyes glistened as he looked up at Steve. This was not how he'd envisioned this conversation, this confession of his innermost feelings, but he didn't care. He had said it and Steve hadn't run, hadn't yelled, hadn't sent him away.

Hearing his partner's admission, knowing now that all his fears had meant wasted moments, wasted days, that could have been spent together, Steve closed the gap between them.

Before Danny could open his mouth to speak another word, he was wrapped in McGarrett’s arms. “I
love you, Danno.” The taller man whispered in his ear. “I love you so much. I've wanted to tell you, to show you, so many times. Yesterday, I was so afraid I'd lose you both.”

Pulling away just enough that he could see Steve's eyes he shook his head. “You won't lose us. We're here. We're staying. We're family.”

Those words pushed the taller man over the edge. For the second time that morning, his hand found its way into Danny's hair, pulling him closer. This time, when his lips captured the other man’s there was no hesitation, no resistance. Every emotion pent up within the men poured into that kiss.

When they finally broke apart, both gasping for breath, Danny looked up at him and smiled. “If you don't mind, I think I'll remember that as our first kiss.”

///// From the kitchen window, Mama Williams looked on at the men she loved so dearly. Perhaps she shouldn't have watched, perhaps she should have given them more privacy, but it was such a beautiful scene to behold that she just couldn't look away.

Hearing footsteps behind her, she turned to see Grace.

“I think it's time to make some celebratory breakfast.” She glanced out the window to see the pair walking down the beach, hand in hand. “I think they finally sorted things out.”

Chapter End Notes

I'd love to know what you guys thought of this one. :)}
Looking back to her granddaughter, Beth could tell she hadn't sleep well despite not waking up with any nightmares. While the girl was clearly delighted with the prospects of her Danno and Daddy working things out, the older woman suspected the overwhelming reality of everything else was starting to creep up.

Having taught in elementary school for thirty years in New Jersey before retiring, Mrs. Williams was reasonably adept at reading children and catching signs of stress. Given how calm the little girl had been since Steve found her, she suspected Grace had been working hard to stay focused on anything other than what she had witnessed Monday afternoon. Unfortunately, reality always managed to come crashing down. This was not the first time she'd seen someone cope with extreme grief this way.

Beth was glad to know that Daniel managed to get an appointment for Saturday with Dr. James. As the most highly recommended on Dr. Thompson's list they'd been surprised to get in so quickly; however, it appeared Steve's doctor had given her a quick call to smooth the way and she was willing to meet with them on the weekend.

As Grace climbed up into a stool on the counter, her grandmother looked her over carefully. Still wearing her pajamas, she'd also wrapped herself in what appeared to be one of her Daddy's button up shirts.

"Gracie, darling, how are you doing?" Beth rounded the island and perched on the stool next to her.

"I'm … I'm … I don't know."

Wrapping her arms around Grace, the woman was so glad she'd made the hasty trip to Hawaii. Holding her granddaughter tightly, she wondered if perhaps her husband was right. Maybe it was time to consider relocating to Hawaii.

"It's okay not to know, darling. You don't have to pretend to be okay for us. Remember, we're family. We're here to help you in any way we can."

Grace nodded against her grandmother's shoulder. She'd spent all the time locked in the bathroom focused on every possible way that Steve might figure out she needed him to come for her, the first day after he found her being so relieved that he'd come, and yesterday focusing on the plans she'd had for months to get Daddy and Danno together that she'd managed to push the memory of Monday down.

Last night, she'd had no nightmares. She hadn't woken up screaming, but when morning came the memories came with it. She'd swallowed the scream that threatened to rise and reached for Steve's shirt draped on the foot of the bed, determined to be tough like him.

////////

Not expecting the others to be awake yet, the guys decided to take a short walk before heading to the house. They didn't realize Mom had caught what they'd agreed would be their official first kiss.

Starting off hand in hand, it wasn't long before they'd gravitated closer. Steve's arm slung around
Danny’s shoulders as Danny's slipped around his waist.

Reaching a small area of beach largely hidden by trees, the SEAL finally turned on his partner. Capturing Danny’s lips again, he moaned as the kiss was eagerly returned.

Several moments later, the pair finally stepped apart again. Looking up at the sun, Steve realized that by now there was a good chance Mom and Grace would be awake. Guiding Danny back toward the house, he relished this quiet time together. This new dynamic between them would take some getting used to, but they'd been so close for so long that it actually felt like a relatively easy transition.

“Why do I feel like this is the calm before the storm?” Steve finally asked as they came within sight of home.

“You consider the last two days to be calm?” The detective’s tone was a bit startled.

“The more I think about it, yes. I do. I know they’ve been eventful, but after what we know Grace experienced Monday I do think things have been entirely too calm.” The SEAL was genuinely worried.

Her question the day before had made him start thinking about things from his past. Things he'd tried so hard to forget, but that one-day always managed to come back with a vengeance.

“I know. It's a good thing Dr. James was willing to get us in so fast. Next time you talk to Dr. Thompson let him know how much I appreciate his help there.”

Smiling down at his partner, Steve was glad his visits to the shrink were no longer a secret. “I will. He knows how much you guys mean to me, so I'm sure he was more than happy to help.”

“Why do I feel like there's something else you aren't telling me?” Stopping to retrieve the discarded towel and water bottle, Danny turned to face the SEAL. “This isn't just some generic concern about Gracie, is it?”

The usually stoic man met his eyes. “No Danny, it's not. I’m afraid she's going to try to be like us. To be tough and not let people see how scared and upset she really is. I don't want to scare her with the things I've done, but I feel like I need to tell her more. Tell her that I'm not always tough; tell her how trying to be so tough almost did me in. I want her to know that she can talk to us, tell us anything, and we won’t think she's weak because of it. I want her to know that seeing Dr. James isn't something to be ashamed of.”

The detective stared up silently at his partner before giving in and folding him into his arms. His voice quiet, he was in awe of the man he loved. “That, babe, is part of why I love you so much. You are willing to do whatever it takes to help our daughter. Don't think I don't know just how hard it is for you to admit all of this; how hard it is for you to dredge up memories and emotions that you wish would stay buried. Why don't you talk to Gracie today?”

Giving the SEAL a gentle kiss on the cheek, Danny released his hold and reached for the other man's hand. “Why don't we go see if they are awake?”

Opening the door to the house, the pair heard Mom's voice muffled in the kitchen. Not wanting to startle them, Danny called out a quick hello.

What they weren't expecting was the sight of Grace running past them and fleeing up the stairs. The pair gave each other a startled look. Both wanted to run after and make sure she was okay, but it took them a moment to regain the ability to move. By that time, Beth was standing in the entry with them.
“She didn't want you to see her cry. Didn't want you think she was weak.” Mom looked at them. She'd tried to tell her granddaughter that it was okay. She tried to explain that even Danno and Daddy weren't always tough, but the girl was too upset to consider all the time's she’d see the two men show it.

“Babe,” Danny turned to Steve. “I hope you're ready, because I think it's time for that talk.”

Nodding his head, the SEAL quickly bound up the steps after their daughter as the detective turned to his mother. “He may be emotionally challenged sometimes, but that man is incredibly perceptive and loves that little girl more than life itself.”

He wrapped an arm around his mom and led her back to the kitchen.

“I do believe he loves someone else that much too.” She smiled at him. “I'm glad you two worked things out. She's going to need both of you to get through this.”

///// The door to Grace's room was still ajar and Steve could hear the sound of quiet sobbing within. Hearing that sound, it felt like someone had ripped his heart out and was doing an Irish jig on it.

Knocking softly, he called out to her. “Gracie, its Daddy. Can I come in?”

He didn't hear a negative, so he gently pushed the door open. What he saw only made him feel worse. She was draped across the bed, head buried in the crook of her arm, back facing the door.

Not wanting to get her bed wet with his still damp trunks, he walked over to the side of the bed where her head was and knelt on the floor. Placing his arms on the bed next to her, he threaded the fingers of his hands together and rested his chin on them.

He wanted to reach out and haul her into his arms, but if she was as much like he and Danny as he feared she would need a chance to collect herself before she would let him. A terrified Grace couldn't get into their protective arms fast enough, but this wasn't just fear.

“Sweetheart, I know you're upset and I just want to help. I think maybe it's time I told you a few things about me.” Her sobs seemed to be quieting. A part of him hoped that his presence was enough to help calm her that she would be able to listen.

“Before I met you and Danno I was really lonely. I'd done a lot of things that I didn't like to think about. Things that helped keep us safe, but that were really hard. I had nightmares sometimes, but I never told anyone. I kept everything bottled up, believing that if I told anybody, if I showed anybody that those things hurt me, that they would think I was weak.”

Continuing to stare at the brown haired girl in front of him, he noticed a small shift of her head. Just enough to tell him that she was hearing him.

“I didn't want them to think that. I'm supposed to be one of the tough ones, somebody that everyone else can rely on. After I met the two of you, I started to realize that maybe trying to take on everything myself wasn't so tough. Danno was so quick to admit that he needed you. He didn't try to hide how he felt, when he was worried he'd tell me all about it. I started to see that it didn't make him weak to need someone else or to admit it. It made him stronger. When he admitted he didn't know what to do or how to fix something we could always figure it out together.”

He gave a weak smile when her eyes finally looked up at him.
“Gracie, it was you and Danno that taught me that it was okay not to bottle up everything inside. I started talking to Danno sometimes, when it was things I wouldn't get in trouble for sharing, and that helped. He would listen, sometimes he would tell me how stupid and reckless I'd been, but he never made me feel bad for needing to talk. Even you, there were days when you just seemed to know that I was sad or something was wrong. You never pushed me to talk, but you were always there with a hug; a chance to remind myself that I wasn't just the man that had done all those things.”

The little girl sat up and scrambled down from the bed to sit next to him. Shifting his own body, he sat with his legs stretched out in front of him, watching her look up at him. Opening his arms, she wasted no time accepting the silent invitation and launched herself into his lap.

Wrapping his arms around her, he held her tight and kissed the top of her head. “We don't want you to bottle everything up, Gracie. We want you to talk to us, to talk to Dr. James tomorrow.” They’d already mentioned she was going to see the doctor. “The thing is we didn't just pick Dr. James out of a hat. I have a doctor just like her that works for the Navy. Dr. Thompson is the one that I talk to when I need to talk about stuff that I can't tell Danno. I called him, because I wanted you to have someone to you could trust, someone that might have better answers than Danno and me.”

Steve heard Danny's footsteps as he entered the room. Lowering himself to the floor next to his daughter and partner, Danny leaned against the SEAL's shoulder. He'd been standing outside listening and was impressed with how well Steve was explaining things in a way that would hopefully help her start to see she didn't need to hide what she was feeling.

“Monkey, we will love you no matter what, and we will be here to help you in every possible way, but Super SEAL is right. There are answers that we may not have and we want you to be comfortable talking to Dr. James. We will go with you too, because sometimes we might all want to talk to her together.”

The little girl nodded her head. “You won't be disappointed that I can't be tough all the time?”

“Gracie,” Steve was quick to answer. “You don't have to be tough all the time, but what I've learned is that sometimes admitting you need help and letting people in actually means you're a lot tougher than trying to hide it all inside.”

The little girl rested her head against his shoulder, right next to her Danno's. He shifted slightly, so his arm could join Steve's wrapped around her. For a while, they remained quietly on the floor each gaining a bit of strength to face whatever came next simply from knowing that they would all face it together.

Chapter End Notes

Guardian is written with a focus on the boys and Grace, and intended to be appropriate for a wider audience, including those that do not prefer more explicit scenes. However, I'm sure there are others, like me, that do enjoy the racier bits, so I have added a second story, Guardian: Love Explored (GLE). The chapters in that story fit within the plot, but opting not to read them will not impact your ability to follow the main story. GLE will just be more detailed, explicit versions of scenes found here or occassional bonus scenes. I will leave a note at the end of any chapters that have an associated GLE version.
Consider this your note - the first GLE chapter is up.
Chapter 17

Walking into his closet, Steve took a deep, shuddering breath. Glad that what he'd said seemed to help Grace, putting so much of himself out there still wasn't something that came easily for him. He wanted to collect his thoughts and emotions before going down for breakfast. She didn't need to see how rattled he was.

He stared unseeing at the shelf of shorts and t-shirts in front of him. The SEAL was so distracted, he didn’t hear the sound of the bedroom door opening as Danny slipped in only a moment behind him. Having made sure his little girl was settled and getting dressed, the Jersey native came to check on his partner. He'd been right about Gracie and was bound to be feeling incredibly exposed after the conversation in her room.

Following the abnormally uneven sound of the SEAL's breathing, he quickly found him. Hesitating slightly at the closet door, he quickly closed the gap between them. After the morning they'd shared, he no longer felt the need to stop from wrapping the taller man in his embrace.

“Oh babe.” His partner seemed to crumpled against him, long arms returning the embrace. “Please don't tell me you were trying to hide from me?”

“No, never from you. I just needed a few minutes to pull it together.” Steve leaned back from him, straightening to his full height. “I'm okay. Just not used to… didn't expect…”

Placing one finger across his partner's lips, Danny shook his head. “I know. That's why I came to check on you. I know you don't want her to see how much it takes you to put all that out there to help her, but that doesn't mean I don't see it.” He hated the little bit of fear he saw in the SEAL’s eyes. “Steve, listen to me. What you did in there, everything you said to her, just gave me even more reasons to love you. It's okay that it wasn't easy. That just makes it all the more endearing that you did it.”

Danny reached forward and gave him a quick, chaste kiss. “You, my crazy Super SEAL, are an amazing man and an amazing daddy.” Reaching around him, he pulled shorts and a t-shirt from the shelf. “Now get your gorgeous behind dressed so we can go have breakfast with our daughter and Mom.”

“Yes, sir.” Steve mock saluted him before passing him to reenter the bedroom, earning him a swift smack on the ass from Danny.

A few minutes later, the pair emerged just as Grace was leaving her room. They both noticed her arms wrapped around her body, hands rubbing her shoulders as if she were cold even though it was a perfectly beautiful Hawaiian day. Having noticed she was wearing his shirt from Wednesday again this morning, Steve guessed it had acted as something of a security blanket for her.

“Hey Gracie,” he lifted her into his arms and welcome the feel of her arms wrapped around him. “Did I ever tell you how Mary used to raid our dad's closet all the time when she was little? She was forever running around in his shirts, said it made her feel like he was always right there, and reminded her that she was safe.”

Both Williams faces turned up to look at him. “Since we haven't gone to get all Danno's clothes yet, would you like to raid my closet?” His idea was rewarded with two huge smiles and an enthusiastic nod from Grace.
Heading back into his closet, his newly claimed daughter still in his arms, he heard Danny murmur under his breath. “One more reason, babe. One more reason.”

Several minutes later, their little girl was wrapped safely in a khaki color shirt and had stashed a few others in her bedroom closet for future use, the trio headed downstairs to find Mom sitting at the island with a huge breakfast spread in front of her.

“Hope you're hungry.” She gestured to the pancakes, bacon, and juice. “Sit down and eat before it all gets cold.”

Danny made his way to the stool next to her, leaving Grace and Steve to sit across from them. As the Seal piled the little girl’s plate with food, Mom snuck a glance at her biological son.

His answering smile was all she needed to see. The new daddy had managed to calm her. Albeit, this was only the first step in the process to see the little girl truly heal from the trauma.

“So, what's on the agenda for today?” Mom asked.

The men both looked to Grace. Though there were things that needed to get done in the coming days, they were prepared to let her set the pace for the day.

“Danno needs to go get his stuff from the apartment.” She declared. The mention upstairs of his clothes reminded her that in some ways they were still straddling two places. She wanted them to be completely here, completely home.

“You sure you're up for that, Monkey?” Danny queried. That would allow them to knock out one of the things they needed to deal with. He could hand in his notice to cancel the lease. Though he wasn't looking forward to paying his way out of the remaining three months of agreement, he was more than willing to do just that. He knew Steve's house was long since paid for, so he wasn’t even going to broach the subject of paying rent and offend the Neanderthal.

“Yeah, Danno, I'm sure. You need your stuff and then we don't have to go back there again.”

Beth imagined this was a small way of putting a bit of closure on the chapter of her life that involved Daniel's small apartment and Rachel and Stan's house. This little step gave her some measure of control.

“I'll give Chin a call and see if they can meet us there with some boxes.” Steve stuffed another bit of pancakes in his mouth, groaning at the small bit of heaven. Beth and Danny both laughed at him. “What? I don't get homemade pancakes often.”

“Well, my dear boy, I'll be glad to cook you breakfast as long as I'm here.” Beth reached across the island and squeezed his hand.

Danny turned to her and frowned. “Just remember, if you spoil him I have to live with the consequences. Be careful what precedent you set.”

Steve looked from his partner to Grace, a pout forming on his face.

“Danno, play nice. You've had years to enjoy Grandma’s pancakes. We still have to catch up.” She gave the Seal a wink. She was taking Daddy's side on this debate.

Beth smiled at the three. She'd always been close to her eldest. The last couple of years, so far away, had been hard on her and her husband. She missed getting to see Grace grow up. They spoke every week, but it wasn't the same as being here for the little moments. Steven may have come into their
lives later than the other two, but he clearly need the unconditional love and caring that only a mother could provide.

Seeing them here, she could see that Paul was right. Before she called him and told him to start making the necessary arrangements, she needed to speak with her sons. While she expected no resistance from them, she respected them enough to give him a say in the matter. After they'd all eaten, far more than they probably should have, Grace excused herself to go brush her teeth, leaving the three adults sitting at the island.

“Boys, I need to speak to you about something.” They both looked to her, waiting for her to continue. “Your father and I have been discussing making a change.” Their faces both fell immediately. Reaching out to clasp one of each of their hands on the table, she laughed gently.

“No. No. Not that kind of change. We’ve been discussing relocating. With Great Aunt Meg finally passing away, there's no family left to hold us in New Jersey.”

“Where?” Steve spoke first and neither Williams missed the hint of hope in his voice.

“Here. Not here in his house, but here on this island. Close enough to be a part of Gracie’s life. Close enough to be a part of your lives.” Daniel was still looking relieved that his parents weren’t getting a divorce. Steven looked like a small child at Christmas.

“Really? You want to move here?” The SEAL sounded like a kid being told he was having his favorite dessert.

“I wanted to talk to you about it first, both of you. While your dad and I have discussed the possibility, and I know he’s fully prepared to make the move, I didn't want you to feel like we were encroaching on your lives.” She looked to Danny, as her eldest they’d always been close, but he’d always had an independent streak.

Realizing she was waiting for him to respond, he glanced first at his partner before looking to her. “We'd love to have you closer. We've created an ohana here, but having you and Dad close ... Having you around for Grace, for us, would be wonderful.”

As much as Danny was loath to admit it, he was tied to this island now more than he'd ever been. Rachel’s death meant technically he could take Gracie and move wherever he wanted, but their life was here with Steve.

The SEAL sat silent as the detective answered. It hadn't dawned on him until Mama Williams mentioned moving that Danny could have decided to do just that, pack up Grace and move back to New Jersey. That he was instead encouraging his parents to move here meant that this was finally becoming home in every sense.

Their eyes met across the island, an unspoken message shared, a reminder that what they shared wasn’t just a fleeting, temporary thing, but a commitment to each other. A commitment to Grace and the family they created.
Opening the door to the tiny apartment, Danny was anxious to get it packed and cleaned. It wouldn't take too long. He hated this place so much that he'd never really bothered turning it into home, and once he and Grace started spending their time together at Steve’s he'd done little more than sleep within these walls.

Looking back, he realized Steve had known. Not only that, but in his own subtle way he'd helped. The SEAL was forever coming up with some ridiculous reason to grab dinner, a beer, or go unwind at his place after work, always preventing Danny from going back to the apartment for the evening.

“Okay, son, what can I do?” Beth was quick to volunteer. She could sense his desire to leave this place behind and could see why.

“Kitchen?” He questioned. “Just don't judge.”

She laughed, but quickly smiled as Steve defended him. “Any cooking usually happened at my place.”

Walking into the tiny kitchen, she quickly called back to them. “I can see why!” There was barely room to fix a bowl of cereal; much less a real home cooked meal.

“Chin and Kono should be here soon with boxes.” Danny reminded everyone. “Cleaning stuff is under the kitchen sink.”

“Found that already. Go pack up your room. Grace and I can handle things out here.”

They'd already determined his sparse and rather underwhelming furniture collection would get donated. One of Chin's many cousins would be stopping to pick it up for them in about an hour.

As the women set to work, the boys disappeared to the bedroom. Stopping inside the door, Danny felt his partner press against his back as his long arms wrapped loosely around him.

“You sure you're ready for this? Giving up your own space?” Steve spoke quietly.

“Are you kidding me, babe? You know how much I hate this place. Matter of fact, I was realizing just how useful you've been in keeping me from losing my mind by spending too much time here. Don't think I didn't notice.” Leaning his head back against Steve’s chest, he smiled. “Let’s pack up my meager belongings and get back home.”

Steve moved to the closet, pulling hangers of slacks and dress shirts of the bar. “I'm just gonna put these in the back seat. No point taking them off the hanger for such a short trip.” They'd brought both their vehicles plus would have Chin and Kono's cars, so there would be no shortage of room to fit everything.

Jogging back up the stairs a few minutes later, the SEAL heard the sound of glass shattering against a wall in the apartment. Breaking into a sprint, he burst back through the door to find Grace staring at the wall, tears streaming down her face.

Danny and Beth both stood a few feet away starting at her; seemingly frozen in place. The adults were unsure what sparked the sudden outburst. From his vantage point, Steve could see the shatter frame and picture. It was a picture of the little girl with Stan and Rachel that the woman had insisted she have with her at Danny's place. Of course, Grace had stuck it in a drawer and forgotten about it,
until now.

Steve mouthed “the picture” and gestured his partner forward and the pair cautiously approached their daughter. Hearing footsteps outside, Beth snuck quietly out the door to keep the cousins from intruding. They’d give the boys a few minutes to make sure Grace was okay.

As the door clicked behind her, the men knelt on either side of Grace. Her small frame crumpled into her Danno’s arms, Steve immediately engulfing them both in his strong embrace.

“I hate him!” She choked through the sobs. “I hate him. He killed her.”

The men clung to her as her angry sobs continued. Danny could have kicked himself for forgetting that stupid picture was still in the drawer. It hadn't seen the light of day since the weekend Grace brought it. He'd asked her if she wanted to take it to Steve's and she flatly refused.

Unsure of what to say, Steve could only hold them more tightly to him. He understood her anger, but had no answer to help make it better. He couldn't protect her from this hurt. A renewed desire to beat Stan within an inch of his life surged through him, but he knew in the end it would get them nowhere.

“Gracie, do you want to talk about it?” Danny finally asked. Very little had been said up to now about what had happened. They hadn't wanted to push her when she was clearly not ready. “We're here for you.” And he knew it would always be we not just him. Steve was just invested in his little girl as he was.

“No.” She paused for only a second. “I'm just so angry at him. He didn't have to do it. Mom was trying to get us out.” Despite her negative answer, the words seemed to pour out of her. “It was the first time she tried to leave during a fight. He was still drinking. He looked so scary. I tried to pull her out of the kitchen so we could go, but he grabbed her and wouldn't let go. I wasn't strong enough. I couldn't get her free from him. I ended up getting thrown into the cabinet when he jerked her away.”

That explained some of the bruising on her back. The men clung to their daughter, afraid if they let go one or both of them would land in jail for killing a prisoner.

“That's when he did it. He pushed her so hard. The sound when her head it the counter, it was ... There was so much blood. I couldn't move at first, just stared at the floor. Then I screamed and he lunged for me, grabbing my shirt.”

The SEAL remembered her torn clothing all to well.

“I wasn't strong enough. He kept hitting me, trying to make me hold still, be quiet. I thought he was going to do the same thing to me that he'd done to Mommy. I knew she was dead, there was so much blood and she'd stopped moving, stopped making any noise. When his hand finally slipped a little, I hit him with my elbow. His other arm finally let go and I ran. I heard him yelling my name, coming after me before I could get to my room, so I locked myself in the bathroom.”

It made sense, she was aiming for her room. The room where she could have locked the door, but also had a phone and could have called for help, but she was afraid she couldn't make it all the way down the hall. She'd hid in the first room that locked.

“Gracie, I'm so sorry. I should have been there sooner.” It didn't matter that it wasn't his fault; he would never forgive himself for not being there to rescue her. Steve wanted to ask why she hadn't told them how bad things were with the Edwards. He would have done everything in his power to get her out of what had clearly become a toxic environment.
The little girl squirmed in their arms until they loosened their hold. Then she turned toward the SEAL.

“I knew you would come. I knew if I could only call you, you'd be there. I wanted to get to my room, to the phone, but every time I started to try I'd hear him walking around, and I was too scared to try.” She wrapped her arms around his neck. “He kept yelling that no one would come for me. That nobody would care that I was locked in there. ‘Danno isn't here to save you now.’ He kept yelling, but I told him. I told him my Daddy could come.”

Her faith in him made it hurt even worse that he hadn't come sooner. Steve remembered the nightmare, her declaration that Daddy would come. He hated that she'd had to wait so long for him to make good on her words.

Danny wrapped his arms around the pair as best he could. His anguish at seeing the pain in both of them made his heart physically hurt. He wanted to fix this, but he just didn't know how. “We will always come for you, Grace. Always.” The detective spoke with fierce determination. He'd tear the island, the entire world, apart to find her if needed and he knew his partner would too.

“I know.” She didn't hesitate with that declaration. Her incredible conviction that they wouldn't fail her humbled both men.

The three remained in a silent embrace for several long moments.

“Do you want to go home, Gracie?” Danny didn't want to make her stay here after rehashing what she'd seen on Monday. He could deal with the apartment later.

“No. I want to finish.” They both detected a bit of the Williams' steel in her voice, a hint of her determination to make it through.

Slowly breaking away from their spot on the floor, Steve reached behind him and picked up the picture before she could spot it again. He didn't want her to see it again so soon, or possibly ever.

The little girl gave them each another hug before moving to the door, having heard Kono's quiet voice outside. Opening it, she looked at the three waiting faces and tried to force a smile.

“Sorry.” She felt bad for leaving them stuck outside.

The Hawaiian woman squatted down in front of her, pulling her into a loving hug. “It's okay, Gracie. We didn't mind waiting.” Leaning back a bit, she looked the little girl in her eyes. “I'm here if you need me, okay?” Receiving a quick nod and small smile, Kono released her and headed in.

Chin leaned down to give Grace a hug of his own. “That goes for me too, you know. Anytime you need me. I'm there.” He felt her nod against his shoulder.

It was killing both of the cousins to know what she was going through. They couldn't change what had happened, but they'd be there for the fallout. Be there to help her pick up the pieces. Reaching back, Chin grabbed the stack of flattened boxes and followed Kono inside, leaving Grace and Beth alone on the landing.

“Are you okay, sweetheart?” Her grandmother asked as she pulled her into a tight hug.

“No, but I will be.” The hint of steel was still in her voice. She really was her father's daughter. Beth hoped her recovery would be eased by the amount of support she clearly had and the little girl's determination that she would indeed by okay.
“That's right, Gracie. You will be and we're all here to help along the way.” She kissed her granddaughter's cheek before they ventured back into the apartment.

The remnants of the broken picture frame were gone. The small living room now housed a growing pile of boxes ready to pack.

“I put a couple in the kitchen with some paper to wrap the dishes.” Chin offered when he saw them. “If you two want to tackle that we'll finish in here.” He wasn't sure if there were any more potential landmines in the living area and didn't want to take that risk.

Two hours later, Danny closed the door on the now vacant apartment and turned to the elderly woman that had been his landlord.

“How much do I owe you for breaking the lease?”

The woman smiled at him, eyes crinkled. “Nothing my dear. I heard what happened on the news and that handsome partner of yours explained why you needed to move. I'll get it rented back out quickly enough.” She handed him a check. “Here's your deposit. Now you go take care of that little girl.”

The older woman shuffled off, leaving Danny speechless. He wondered what exactly his partner had explained to her, but decided to take the little bit of good fortune without question or complaint. Meeting the others at the cars, he gave the SEAL a warm smile. “Let's go home.”

“I like the sound of that.” Steve climbed into his truck, Grace already safely strapped in the back. Danny was a bit surprised when his mother climbed into Chin's vehicle instead of his car.

“We'll be right behind you. We're going to call one of his cousin's so he can start pulling together real estate listings.” Beth waved to him before closing the door.

Of course, Chin and Kono seemed to have cousins that did almost everything. Firing up the Camaro, Danny gave the apartment one last glance in the rear view mirror before following his partner's blue truck onto the road.

Having a rare moment to himself, the detective considered the whirlwind of a week they were wrapping up. Sunday had been hard, Grace was so unusually distraught over his departure, but he'd needed to make the trip to Jersey for the funeral. Of course, knowing what he did now he would have pulled her out of school to come with him.

When Steve dropped him off at the airport, he'd struggled with his desire to give the SEAL a proper goodbye kiss, but had fully expected that would have landed him a punch in the face and a quick end to what relationship they did have. Now he wished he'd taken that chance.

Wednesday had been a wreck. He'd forgotten his phone when they went to the actual funeral, which had subsequently caused a delay, no matter how small, in finding Grace. He was incredibly glad he'd fought Rachel and insisted on Steve's inclusion on every emergency contact form for that related to Grace.

The long hours of travel had been torture. He'd wanted to be there, to hold his baby girl, but had also struggled with Steve's uncharacteristic declaration that he needed him. Yes, he'd said Grace needed him to come home, but he'd also admitted he needed him too.

What a difference two days made; it was going to take time for Grace to feel anything closely resembling normal again, but she was doing better than expected.

Judging by the experience in the apartment, she was moving into the anger stage of grief. He could
understand that phase and suspected so could Steve. He only hoped the anger didn't channel itself in a direction she would regret later.
Hauling the hangers full of Danny’s clothing up the stairs, Steve hesitated at the door to his own bedroom, suddenly unsure if he should put them in his closet or if his partner wanted to maintain a separate bedroom at this point.

Deciding to err on the side of caution, he started to pass his door when Grace’s voice stopped him.

“Isn't Danno going to stay with you?” She sounded slightly worried.

“I'm actually not sure, Gracie. I forgot to ask him about that before I started carrying stuff up here.”

“Forget to ask me about what?” Danny's voice carried up the stairs before he appeared.

“Room arrangements.” Steve gave him a small shrug of the shoulders. He hadn't anticipated Grace bringing it up.

“Mommy and Stan stopped sharing a room before they started fighting so much.” Grace offered up. This observation suddenly made it very clear why she was worried about where Danno's stuff was going. In her experience, separate rooms meant fighting.

“Well, Monkey, I'd love to share Super SEAL's room, but I don't know if he has room for my stuff with all his Army uniforms.” The detective hoped to diffuse the serious tone a bit. He'd love to share Steve's room, but didn't want to push too fast.

“Danno! It's the Navy!” Grace glared up at him, a smile playing on her lips.

Chuckling at the pair, Steve smiled. “And I'm quite certain I can make room.” He'd throw half his wardrobe away if it meant making room for Danny.

Grace’s smile bloomed more widely when her Daddy took a step toward his room with the pile of Danno's clothes. No matter how off balance she currently felt, it was comforting to know that Danno and Daddy were happy together. Proceeding to take the small box of her things into her bedroom, she set it on the floor before grabbing the giant HPD bear and climbing onto her bed.

Ever since she’d told them about what happened Monday, she'd been angry with Stan. Sitting on the bed, she realized she wasn't just angry that he'd killed her mom, she was angry that he'd hurt her and she hadn't been able to stop him. She was angry because she hated feeling like a victim, Danno taught her to be stronger than that.

Coming back out of what was now their room several minutes later, Steve and Danny went to check on Grace. It had been a difficult morning for her and they worried that things were only going to get worse. Seeing her on the bed, clinging to the huge bear, Steve immediately recognized the look on her face.

“Gracie, you look like you're thinking really hard about something.” He perched near the foot of her bed as Danny circled around to sit beside him. “Care to tell us what you're thinking about?”

She squeezed the huge bear tighter before meeting Steve's eyes. “I’m scared.” Her voice was small and quiet. “He hurt me and I couldn't stop him and now I’m scared that when I'm not with you,” she
looked to both men, “that I'm not strong enough if someone tries to hurt me again.”

Both men wanted to reassure her that they would never let that happen, but they knew better. Before Danny could reply, the SEAL's hand on his forearm stalled him. Looking to his partner, the detective raised an eyebrow.

“I have an idea.” He stood and stretched a hand toward the little girl. “Let's go see what they've got for lunch downstairs. We're going to need help with this plan.”

Grace clasped his hand and followed. If Daddy had a plan, she would trust him implicitly.

Danny followed behind them. Steve's plans usually scared him as they often involved gunfire, explosives, or the occasional shark cage, but where their daughter was involved, he trusted the maniac to keep her safe.

Ten minutes later, they'd all taken seats around the dining room table for an easy lunch of sandwiches and a variety of other side items, when the doorbell rang. Not expecting anyone, Steve gestured the others to remain seated. He would deal with the visitor.

Much to his surprise, he saw Catherine through the window. She always visited when she was in port, but he hadn't realized she would be in town. As he opened the door, she spoke before he could. “I saw the news. I had to come check on you guys. I'm sorry. I should have called first.” She seemed like she might be rethinking the decision to just show up.

“Relax Cath. Ohana's all here. Just sat down for lunch if you’re hungry.” Though she wasn't as much a part of the close-knit group as the members of the task force, she'd spent plenty of time with them. Steve knew she and Grace had grown particularly fond of each other, particularly after his relationship with Catherine had changed.

She stepped inside at the invite. With no family and few other good friends on the island, she was glad they maintained a close friendship even after their romantic involvement ended.

“I could actually use your help with something if you'll be here for more than a day or two.” McGarrett queried as they walked toward the dining room.

She nodded. This clearly wasn't the kind of Navy resource help he usually asked her for. “Anything. We're scheduled to be in for at least a month.”

Following him to the table, Cath wasn't surprised to see everyone, including a woman she assumed was Danny's mom gathered. She carefully chose a seat away from Steve. Judging by the look from Danny they'd either worked things out or were close to it and the SEAL hadn't explained the full and current nature of his relationship with her to Danny yet.

“Sorry to just drop in, but I wanted to let you all know I was here and wanted to help if I could.”

Her eyes met Danny's and though he gave her a cautious look, he appeared accepting of her presence. She couldn't help the wide smile when the detective openly claimed Steve's hand on the table with his own.

“Thanks Catherine. We appreciate it.” The Jersey native relaxed slightly noticing her pleased expression at his stupidly territorial move. Maybe she was included in the group that had been waiting for him and Steve to get to the point.

“Catherine's arrival is actually very well timed.” He remained oblivious to the exchange between his former and current lovers. He paused to look at Grace, an unspoken request for permission to share
what she'd divulged upstairs.

She nodded her consent. This was her ohana, even Catherine, and she knew it was safe for them to know her fears. She knew they wouldn't judge or laugh.

“Grace was brave enough to tell Danno and me that she's feeling scared after what happened, especially when she's not with one of us. After getting hurt on Monday, she's afraid of being hurt again because she doesn't know how to defend herself.” He was careful to word the challenge in a way that presented a solvable problem.

Catherine looked at Steve; she had a growing suspicion what kind of help he was asking from her and was pleased that he trusted her.

“I'd really like to teach Gracie how to defend herself, but I'm going to need some help. Originally, I'd planned to ask Kono to help, but now I think Catherine can help too. They are both very skilled at handling themselves in a fight and would make great self-defense teachers.”

Danny looked up at him and grinned lovingly. “Brilliant plan, babe.” He whispered quietly. He knew someday Grace would need to learn more, but hadn't expected it to come so soon. While he'd wanted to reassure her that he'd protect her, Steve had considered the broader tactical picture, considered a course that would be far more beneficial.

“Of course I'll help!” Kono exclaimed. She'd learned to fight her bigger cousins as a kid and knew she could show Grace quite a few tricks.

“Me too!” Catherine smiled at the little girl. “We'll teach you how to take down Uncle Chin in no time.” She suspected it would be a while before Grace discovered the fun in sparring with Steve and Danny.

The table was full of excited chatter about Grace's self-defense training. Though the reason behind it was one they all wished never existed; they would do everything they could to make it a fun learning experience and give some of her confidence back.

Beth's unusually timid voice eventually broke into the chaos. “Would you mind if I joined the training? I'd like to learn too.” She'd thought about it before, but had never followed through despite Danny and her husband urging her to take classes.

“Of course not, Mrs. Williams.” Catherine answered then quickly froze. The abrupt silence in the room left her wondering if she'd stepped out of line by agreeing.

Beth smiled as she corrected her. “It's Mom dear. Not Mrs.Williams as long as you a part of this ohana.” Cath released the breath she'd been holding and smiled warmly. She'd never had a family quite like this one.

After the meal, Danny started clearing the dishes and Catherine quickly volunteered to help while encouraging the others to relax. Once they'd set the dishes down in the kitchen, she reached for Danny's arm before he could jump into cleaning. “I take it you two finally quit beating around the bush?”

The detective laughed. “Yeah, shortly before breakfast this morning.” He blushed slightly. “Sorry about my little display back there. I just found out you guys weren't still intimate,” he stumbled over the word, “this morning and he was too busy to elaborate on exactly what that meant. Apparently my inner caveman still saw you as competition.”

Catherine laughed at his honesty. “Don't worry; I know how it feels seeing every woman on the
island ogling him. Danny, trust me when I say that I figured out a long time ago that he had eyes for no one but you. Steve and I have a history. We kept each other occupied for a bit, but I've always known our hearts weren't in it. I'm just glad to see him happy; glad that we were able to stay friends when it was time to move on.”

Danny leaned in and gave her a hug. “Thanks, Catherine. It means a lot to know you're okay with it, and I'm glad you managed to stay friends too. I'd hate to see Grace lose one of the positive female role models in her life.”

As they moved to start washing the dishes, the detective gave her the rundown of everything she'd missed knowing that the news would have only provided the barest of details.

Dishes finally done, Catherine leaned back against the counter. “I should probably go see if I can find a place to stay on base. I really don't want to crash on the ship if I don't have to, but I think Casa de McGarrett is a bit full at the moment. I'll come back once it's sorted so we can give Gracie the demo we talked about.”

Kono entered the room just in time to catch her comment. “How about checking out Casa de Kalakaua? I've got a spare room that's been sadly lacking in visitors lately.”

Catherine appeared startled at the offer. “Are you sure?” The Naval officer didn't want to encroach and while she and Kono got along, they'd never been particularly close. “I'm supposed to be here for a month and I don't want to be in the way.”

The Hawaiian rolled her eyes. “Seriously? We all spend most of our time together anyway and I could use some female company. I'm around the boys way too much!” Kono proceeded to put the leftovers away.

“In that case, I'd be delighted to crash with you.” She helped fit the last few things into the fridge.

Danny started to leave the kitchen, but stopped short. “Kono, Catherine, I just wanted to say I really appreciate you guys being so willing to help.” He held up his hands when they both started to argue. “I know. I know, but it doesn't change the fact that it means a hell of a lot to me that you're here to help.”

Chapter End Notes

For those that are interested, the boys might have gotten a bit distracted in the closet while hanging Danny's clothes. You can go find out in the 2nd installment of Guardian: Love Explored. I posted it just before posting this, so it's available for immediate reading.
ChapterNotes

It’s been an emotional string of chapters, so I think it’s time to let them all catch their breath a bit. This chapter was fun to write since I used to help teach women’s defense.

With seven of them, it took little time to unload the rest of Danny's belongings. Aside from the clothes, most of the boxes ended up piled in the den. They’d deal with them later.

“Can you show me now?” Grace ran up to Catherine and Kono. “Please.” They'd promised to give her a demonstration of some of what they'd learned over the years.

“Tell you what, Gracie,” Steve interrupted, “why don't we all throw on our swimsuits under some comfortable clothes. Then we can for a swim before dinner after we get all sweaty.” The SEAL had no doubt the simple demonstration was going to lead to most of them getting sweaty. They always enjoyed a chance to spar and most of them could use the chance to unwind a bit.

The little girl gave him a quick hug before scurrying up the stairs, leaving the adults smiling after her.

“Just take it easy on my right side today.” Catherine eyed all the men. “I took a misstep on the ship. Looks worse than it feels, but play nice.”

The three looked concerned. “We don't want you to end up getting hurt worse. We can always just attack Kono today.” Chin offered.

“Oh no. I'm not missing out on the fun. It's mostly healed up anyway, just looks horrible.”

Twenty minutes found everyone out on the beach. A few blankets spread for those not actively participating at any point. Grace grinned up at Beth, she’d seen the team spar together before and it was always fun to watch.

“Just wait, Grandma. You'll never believe the stuff they can do.” The older woman grinned back. She had to admit she was looking forward to seeing what this bunch was capable of after the stories she'd heard from them.

As everyone else watched, Catherine and Chin stood on the sand. They had decided they would start slow, explaining what was going to happen and each step of what Cath would do to defend herself. They'd work up from there so she could see how well the two trained women could react to a surprise attack, but wanted to tread careful to see how she reacted.

“First, I'm going to come up behind Catherine and try to grab her.” He got his arms around the women, trapping her arms beneath his own.

The Navy officer grinned at the other women. “I'll try not to hurt him too bad.” Looking over to Steve, she laughed. “We should probably get some training pads to help prevent injuries before we get too far into their training.”

“Good call.” Steve and the other men laughed.
“In the meantime, yes, please take it easy. I don't want to walk around the island looking like I've been beat up.” Chin laughed as he attempted to brace for what was coming next.

Before moving, Cath explained her intended targets. “I'm tall enough to have several options for fighting back, but even if you’re much shorter, you should be able to use one or more of these techniques. First, the instep stomp. This one is good in just about any shoes or even bare feet, but down right fun in heels.” She gave Grace a wink.

She went through the motion of slamming her heel down on Chin’s foot; careful not to hit hard. “That will often startle them enough to make them loosen their grip. Remember you can always do it more than once. Your heel is far tougher than the top of their foot, so they'll cave before you will.”

“I don't see you volunteering to let Catherine beat you up.” The Hawaiian retaliated.

“That's because Kono called dibs on that honor, so I'm already spoken for.” Steve stuck his tongue out at his friend.

“Okay boys, you're both beautiful.” Danny mocked the men. “Now can we let Catherine finish the job?”

The woman in question laughed from her still restrained position as she imagined Chin's expression mirrored the one on Steve's face. “Thanks Danny. Now, as I was saying, you can always do the instep strike more than once.” She hit a bit harder the second time making her aggressor yelp.

“Another option is a head strike. The back of your head is a lot harder than the assailant's nose. You really want to put some force behind it, lean forward and then slam your head back hard and fast.” Knowing was coming, Chin leaned his head sideways in case she got a little too enthusiastic.

“I moved,” he commented, “but typically you won't announced your intentions, so the attacker wouldn't have the chance to duck it.”

“One or both of those moves is pretty sure to make them lose their grip at least a bit. If they let go enough that you can get lose, then you run. If they don't let go completely, you go for the elbow to the kidney.” Careful not to put any real force behind it, she demonstrated where to aim on Chin.

The man released his hold on her. “Trust me, even with those basic moves, you're likely get away.”

As the afternoon progressed, Beth watched in awe at the abilities of the entire group. Of the bunch, she noticed Danny was probably the least comfortable with hand-to-hand combat, but he would be able to hold his own. When the other three ganged up on Danny and Steve, she glanced down to see how Grace was handling it and was surprised to see her smiling widely. Seeming to sense her grandmother's eyes on her, she looked up. “Watch. This is always the best part.”

Looking up, she watched the three aggressors circling the pair. Danny and Steve were back to back. Had she not been watching closely, she would never have believed it. Before anyone could get a hand on her eldest, the SEAL had Kono and Catherine on the ground and Chin in a chokehold.
Looking back at Grace, she just mouthed, “Wow.”

The little girl shook her head and giggled. “It gets better.”

“What the hell, Steven. Are you ever going to let me defend myself? Every time we do this, you go all Super SEAL Ninja on them and I never get to play. Every time!” Danny was in the SEAL’s face, hands flailing. “What the hell is it with you and your need to play Superman?”

The other three kicked back on the blankets watching the rant.

“Just because you can handle them yourself doesn’t mean you can’t let me help. We are partners, Steven. Partners work as a team. Partners do not have to take on every attacker themselves.”

Having stood stoically through the first part of the rant, Steve finally broken into a grin that made Danny lose his train of thought every time.

“May I speak now?” The SEAL tried not to laugh.

“Yes.” The detective was too distracted to remember where he was in the rant.

“Good.” Instead of defending himself, Steve wrapped his hand in Danny’s hair and pulled him in for an all too brief kiss, remembering their audience.

Beth looked at the others as they all watched the scene in front of them. “Do they do this often?”

“Every time we spar.” Kono laughed. “Though this time the boss’s method of diffusing the rant was far more effective than usual. I wonder if Danny will ever realize that no matter how much Steve may intend to let him defend himself, when actually faced with an attack he just can’t do it.”

Beth smiled. She’d often worried about her son and his line of work, but seeing them all this afternoon, she realized that Kono was more right than she knew. Every single one of them was exceptionally talented and would use those skills to protect their ohana.

Danny and Steve finally sat down with the others. The entire task force and Catherine were all hot, sweaty, and far more relaxed than they’d been earlier. It felt good to work out some of the physical frustration they all felt; the pent up anger they all held toward Stan.

“That was awesome.” Grace laughed. “Think I can learn to do that when I get older?”

The adults all laughed at her eager enthusiasm. “Gracie, something tells me you’ll put the five of us to shame by the time you’re our age.” Chin smiled. “After all, you have the benefit of learning from each of us.”

Beth loved seeing the group together like this. “Why don’t you kids go cool off?” She pointed toward the water. “I’ll go grab us some drinks.”

As Mama Williams made her way up the beach, Grace looked over the water longingly. She had her suit on under her clothes, but when she put it on earlier, she’d realized how bad the bruises looked and was hesitant to take the shirt and shorts off.

Sensing her unease, Danny and Steve were trying to figure out how to make her more comfortable, when Catherine interceded. Walking up to Grace, she pulled her own shirt off, revealing the massive bruise she’d mentioned earlier. Both men winced as it looked painful.

“Grace, did you see what I managed to do?” She angled so the little girl could see. “Lost my footing
on the ship while we were out to sea and managed to bang myself up pretty bad.”

The little girl looked up at her, in awe of the older woman's confidence.

“It's ugly, but it'll fade soon enough.” Her eyes met Grace's. “I bet all of us have had some pretty nasty bruises before. We're all kinda used to it.”

The Five-0 team quickly agreed, throwing out reminders of the multitude of bruises they'd all sported.

Grace smiled up at Catherine. She was smart enough to know what she was up to, but had to admit it helped. It reminded her that the bruises would fade, but even while they lingered she didn't have to hide them. Not here; not with her family.

Peeling out of her own shirt and shorts, Grace grabbed Catherine and Kono's hands and ran toward the water.

The men were left watching them for a moment. Steve was a bit surprised when Danny spoke. “I'm really glad Catherine decided to come. She and Kono are great examples for Grace, especially now.”

“You're right. We can't protect her from everything, but with their help we can damn sure teach her that she doesn't have to be a victim.” He was glad they were able to do something to help.

Looking down at his partner, Steve raised an eyebrow in challenge. Before Danny could question him, the SEAL gave Danny's backside a quick squeeze before sprinting toward the water.

“Neanderthal!” The detective hollered before chasing after him.

Before Chin could follow, Beth appeared at his side. “I know there's a long way to go, but it's good to see them all smiling.” She smiled at the man next to her. “You better go keep them from drowning each other.”

Watching him join the others, she set the tray of drinks on the small table in the sand settled into one of the two chairs.

Pulling her phone out of her pocket, she pushed a few buttons before waiting for Paul to answer.

“Hello?” Her husband’s voice came through the line.

“Hey there, handsome.” She smiled when he picked up.

“How are things? I wish I was there with you.” She could tell he missed her. The house in Jersey would be far too lonely for his liking.

“I wish you were here too.” She watched the kids all playing in the water. “Paul, I talked to the boys earlier. It's time to sell the house.”

He laughed. “You sure?”

“Yes, I'm completely sure. You should see them together. It's everything we've ever wanted for Daniel. Things have changed since we came last time. This group isn't just a group of friends and coworkers anymore. They're family and they are all ready and willing to invite us right in.”

They'd often talked about how much they missed the days of having a house full of people around every weekend. Things in Jersey just weren't the same when it was just the two of them to fill the big house.
“I'm glad to hear it. It's too lonely here.”

“Do you want me to come home to help?” It would be a while before she was ready to leave Hawaii and her children to do it, but she didn't want to leave him to handle it all.

“No. I started getting quotes from movers right after you left. I suspected this might be the straw that broke the proverbial camel's back to get you to move.”

She smiled into the phone. “Should have known you'd see this one coming. Well, get them scheduled then. We should have listings to start looking through tomorrow from Chin's cousin. He wasted no time getting us connected today.”

“I look forward to seeing them.” He’d be watching his email for them. “Hopefully we can find the right house quickly. I'll get things started to list this house too.”

“Sounds like a plan. I'll email you the listings as soon as I have them.”

“Excellent. Now what are you doing on the phone with me when you should be doing something with the boys and Grace. Give them all a big hug from me. I love you, Beth.”

“Love you too! I'll be sure to pass along the hugs.” Disconnecting the phone, she set it on the table next to the drinks before peeling down to her bathing suit and joining the rest in the ocean.
Placing the large dish of homemade lasagna on the table next to the salad and bread sticks, Beth smiled fondly at the looks of anticipation on everyone's faces.

“It smells divine, Mom.” Steve looked up at her as she stood next to his chair.

Giving him a quick kiss on his head, she laughed and patted his shoulder. “Compliments will get you everywhere, Steven.”

Taking her seat, she watched as everyone dug in. “So, I spoke with Grandpa Williams today.” She'd waited until they were all together to give them the update.

“Is he going to visit, too?” Grace asked. Though the adults knew, they'd decided to wait to let her know until Beth had spoken with Paul.

“Actually, sweetheart, he's getting things wrapped up in New Jersey so we can officially move here. Depending on how quickly he can schedule the movers, it may take him a couple of weeks to get here, but he can't wait.”

She could easily see that everyone at the table was delighted with the announcement. This wasn't Jersey, only one of these children was hers by blood, but the new family her eldest had found made Hawaii feel like home. She couldn't wait for Paul to see it. No matter what she said, you could never adequately describe what it was like in the midst of them.

Dinner was filled with lively conversation about what they wanted in their new house. She'd managed to sum it up into three key elements. It needed to be close to Steve's house, have a very large kitchen, and plenty of room for the entire family to come for dinner.

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“Ready Catherine?” Kono asked as she gathered her things. Stopping to give Grace a hug, she leaned down. “We'll see you tomorrow, okay?”

Hugging her adopted aunt, Grace whispered in her ear. “Can we practice more?”

Kono smiled at her. “Of course.” The cop was happy to see she was enthusiastic about the training.

“Love you, Kono.” The little girl let her head rest on the other woman’s shoulder for a moment.

“Love you too, Gracie.” Standing back up, she gave her boss a quick hug. “Give us a call when it's okay to come over.”

The appointment with Dr. James was the following morning and no one wanted to intrude if she needed time with Danny and Steve. Even Beth had decided she would go out with Chin and his cousin to see some houses and start getting a feel for what the island offered.

After the last of the three walked out the door, Steve locked it behind them. It had been a long and eventful day and they were all tired.

“Gracie, how would you like it if I read you a bedtime story tonight? Your Daddy and Danno look
like tired.” She gave a pointed look to the two men. She was giving them a bit of time together knowing that their daughter was safe with Grandma. They’d barely had more than a few minutes alone since this morning on the beach and they deserved a bit of time without the threat of interruption.

“Can we ready Harry Potter?” Danny and Steve had bought the books a while ago, but they had just finished the other book they’d been reading so they could start the new series.

“As long as these two don’t mind.” Beth didn’t want to ruin any plans they had.

“No worries there.” Steve laughed. “We read the first one before we gave them to Grace, so we won't get behind.”

The little girl smiled at her Daddy before explaining to her Grandma. “You have no idea how many times I've caught them reading my books, but it's fun because then we get to talk about them and they know what I'm talking about.”

It had thrown the little girl the first time she caught Steve reading one of her books. She was used to Danno doing it, but was initially surprised that the SEAL would read them just so he could talk to her about them.

Giving her Danno and Daddy both hugs and kisses, the little girl headed up the stairs to get ready for her shower.

Once she was out of range, Beth turned to the boys. “It's been a very long day for all of us. I hope you don't mind me commandeering bedtime, but I would like some time with my granddaughter and I think the two of you need some time with each other.”

She gave both of the men a hug.

“Thanks Mom.” Danny was too used to his mother to be embarrassed that she had knowingly maneuvered the evening so he could go enjoy time with his partner behind closed doors.

“Now, I'm going to finish a few things in the kitchen before I head up. You two should head up before she gets into the shower in case she needs to leave the door open.” She shooed them up the stairs. “I'll fix breakfast in the morning after Steven has a chance to swim.”

Reaching the top of the stairs, they saw Grace emerging from her bedroom. “We'll see you in the morning, Monkey.”

Shutting the door to their bedroom behind him, Danny leaned back against it. Only the night before he was leaning against a different door wondering what life would be like if his mom was right.

Danny’s breath hitched as the SEAL pulled his shirt over his head and casually tossed it into the hamper. Steve without a shirt wasn't an uncommon occurrence, but never in a setting that implied so much intimacy. Closing his eyes, he let the image etch itself into his brain even as he tried to push back the insecurity that suddenly gripped him.

Turning around to see why his partner had stopped, Steve's breath caught as he saw him against the door, eyes closed. It felt like his heart could barely withstand the emotion running through him, but something in Danny's expression gave him pause.

Crossing the few steps back to his partner, he placed one hand on the door above his head. Letting the other hand gently caress his waist over the t-shirt he wore, the SEAL leaned in to nuzzle his neck.
The SEAL slipped his hand under the hem of the t-shirt, wanting to feel the heated skin underneath, but froze when the detective’s hand suddenly knocked his away. Stepping back, he struggled to hide the hurt and rejection on his face.

“Danny? What’s wrong?” After this morning, after everything today he couldn't believe his partner was pushing him away.

The shorter man's blue eyes finally met his, tears threatening to spill as he opened and closed his mouth seemingly unable to form the words.

“Please, Danny. Don't shut me out.” The SEAL stepped back toward him, leaving only inches between their bodies. His hand cupped his partner's neck, thumb brushing the tears away.

“Sorry babe. I just panicked for a second.” Danny tried unsuccessfully to make it sound like no big deal.

“Panicked about what?” Steve racked his brain for something that would make his normally confident partner panic. “You know we're both in new territory here. We'll take it slow.” He considered the possibility that Danny was spooked by what would eventually happen behind closed doors in this room.

Danny leaned into the SEAL, hiding his face against his strong chest. “Taking my shirt off.” He mumbled against the bare skin.

“Danno, you aren't making much sense here. I've seen you without your shirt on. Hell, I saw you without it on the beach this afternoon.” He'd never seen any reason to complain about the view.

“I'm not like you, Steven. I don’t have the hard-muscled body of a Greek god.” Steve smirked at the comparison. “I'm shorter, I'm hairier, and I definitely do not look like I've been sculpted from marble. And yes, I know you've seen me without my shirt on, but somehow here, now, the realization that I can in no way hold a candle to you just made me panic.”

Steve pulled him closer, wrapping his arms around him, the smirk now gone. While he took some measure of pride in the body he worked hard for, he'd never considered that it would make Danny insecure.

“Listen to me. I love every inch of you, but Danny it's not just your body I fell in love with.”

Still holding him with one arm, the other hand grasped Danny's hair. Pulling his head back, Steve leaned down to capture his lips. He suspected he would need to show him, more than tell him, just how much he loved his body and was more than willing to rise to the challenge.

The detective responded to the kiss, no matter his insecurities, he found it impossible not to respond to the feel of Steve's lips against his own.

Feeling the shorter man relax into his embrace, Steve broke kiss briefly. “Danny, I've seen you without your shirt on and I'd very much like to see you without anything one. Just trust me. I’ve got you.” He whispered against the reddened lips. “I love you.”

Sometime later, the men were freshly showered and dressed in sleep pants and t-shirts as they drifted off to sleep. Though both would have preferred less clothing, they also anticipated the potential need to reach Grace quickly.
Steve bolted straight up in bed, breathing labored, sheen of sweat covering his face and neck. His eyes searched the room frantically before he became fully aware of where he was.

Throwing his legs over the side of the bed, his head fell into his hands as his heart raced. He tried to quiet his breathing, focusing on slow deep breathes so he wouldn't wake Danny.

He glanced at the clock, frowning at the display reading 1:30 in the morning. It wasn't close enough to morning for him to sneak out for a swim.

Hearing movement behind him, he turned and found piercing blue eyes staring up at him from the pillow. He'd already woken Danny.

“I'm sorry.” He started to apologize, but was cut off.

“No. No apologies. Come here.” The detective opened his arms to his partner. He knew Steve sometimes had problems with nightmares, but had never realized just how intense they must be. He'd woken before Steve when he'd starting tossing, mumbling in his sleep, but was unsure how to wake the other man without sparking a violent reaction before the SEAL realized where he was.

Resting his head against Danny's chest, Steve felt arms wrap around him. “It's okay, babe. I've got you.” Tears pricked the detective's eyes. He suspected that in putting himself so far out there to help Grace recover, the SEAL had pried some of his own wounds open.

Steve reached his hand up to rest over Danny's heart. The soft rhythmic beating lulled him back to sleep.

Two hours later, Steve's eyes flew open, searching for the threat that had woken him from a dead sleep. It took him only a second to recognize Danny's sleeping form spooned against his side.

He'd no more than sorted out the lack of actual threat in the room than he realized what woke him, a muffled cry from Grace's room.

Slipping out of bed, he heard Danny mumble as he approached the door.

“You okay, babe? Where ya goin'?” The detective’s voice was still thick with sleep.

“I heard Grace.” Danny immediately sat up, starting to get out of bed. “Stay put,” Steven motioned for him to stay, “I'll bring her back with me.” They'd never all fit in the smaller bed in her room and after waking up twice in one night, he suspected he and Danny would both sleep better knowing she was safe.

“K.” The detective conceded and Steve heard him straightening the bed as he entered the hall.

Hearing another cry from Grace's room, he hurried toward her door, only to stop short at the sound of footsteps down the hall. Spotting mom, he smiled. “Go back to sleep. I've got her.”

She nodded, a smile of understanding on her face, before disappearing back into her room.

Pushing Grace's door open, the SEAL saw her small body tossing and turning as another whimpered cry escaped her.

“No. No. Daddy, where are you?”

His heard broke at her plea. In three long strides he was beside her bed, reaching to gather her into his arms.
Holding her close, he whispered in her ear. “I'm right here, Grace. Daddy's right here.”

Her small fist wrapped itself in his t-shirt as she sobbed into his chest.

“It's okay sweetheart. I've got you. Daddy’s right here.” He continued murmuring quietly as he retraced his steps back to bed, back to Danno.

Sliding back into bed, Steve carefully laid the still sobbing girl between him and Danny as she still clung to his shirt.

The shorter man reached out and stroked her back, rubbing small circles as he often did when she was upset.

“It's okay, Monkey. We're here. We’ve got you.” He added his soothing voice to Steve's whispered words.

After several long moments, the tears subsided and her breathing slowed. One hand still grasped the SEAL’s shirt as her head rested on his strong arm.

Danny found her other hand and wrapped it in his own. His eyes met Steve's over her small head. The mirrored look of pain and anger at what she was going through eventually calmed to determination and love.

They would see her through this. They would get her through the pain and fear. They would help her find her way back to a good place.

Chapter End Notes

Two quick things. First, if you're interested to know what happened behind closed doors with those two, pop over to Guardian: Love Explored. There is a new chapter there ;) Second, please take a second to leave a comment and let me know what you think. I love hearing from each of you.
Chapter 22

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

As the first hint of morning crept through the window, Steve gazed at the sight in his bed. Grace and Danno were curled up beside him, both turned to face him. Grace’s small hand was curled inside his own as Danny’s wrapped around his forearm both maintaining their connection to him even in their sleep.

He could watch the two of them for hours. It brought a feeling of contentment that the SEAL was unfamiliar with; a feeling of belonging that went even deeper than he’d felt with his SEAL unit, the one place he’d ever truly felt like he belonged.

Danny’s blue eyes cracked open as if he’d felt Steve staring at him. “Mornin’ babe.” He whispered quietly. “You look entirely too awake for it to be so stupidly early.”

Steve just smiled back at him. Their definitions of stupidly early varied by a few hours.

“Not that I don’t love waking up to your smiling face, but you should go get your workout.” Seeing his partner was about to argue, Danny raised an eyebrow in challenge. “I will not let you start neglecting your well-being. It was a rough night and it’s likely to be an even rougher day.” The whispered rant started.

“Oh, Okay.” Steve leaned over, placing a gentle kiss on Grace’s forehead before giving Danny a quick peck.

Slipping out of bed, Steve disappeared into the closet to grab his trunks before heading to the bathroom to change. Emerging a few moments later, he leaned against the bathroom door to watch the sleeping forms for a minute. He wanted to be able to remember mornings like this forever.

Afraid that Danny would catch him lingering, the SEAL finally sneaked out of the room and down the stairs. Ducking into the kitchen, he was surprised to see a towel neatly folded on the island, a small piece of paper resting on top.

‘Steven – Enjoy your swim. There’s a cold water bottle in the fridge for you. See you at breakfast. Love, Mom.’

The Seal stared at the neat handwriting for a moment, blinking back the tears that blurred his vision. Unfamiliar emotions welled up inside of him. Opening the fridge, he found the water bottle sitting right in front waiting for him. Grabbing a pen, he stared at mom’s note for a moment longer before adding his own distinctive writing underneath.

Two minutes later, Steve stood with his feet in the water, stretching his long arms over his head. The sun was still low, but the water was warm and inviting. Jogging further into the water, he eventually dove through the surface. Propelling his body forward, away from the shore, the exertion felt good.

Stroke by stroke, the SEAL thought about the situation with Grace. Yesterday he’d been able to do at least one thing to help her cope with her fear, but he hated that he couldn’t just fix it all for her. He knew she was incredibly strong, she got that from Danno, but no matter how well she coped, they could never erase what she saw; never reclaim the childhood innocence she lost that day. No child should ever have to witness a scene like that.
The SEAL knew what it was like to see things you spent the rest of your life wishing you could forget; spending the rest of your life wishing you could have changed the outcome. His nightmare had brought some of those moments crashing back down on him last night. He needed to go see Dr. Thompson soon. In trying to figure out how to help Grace, he was resurfacing painful memories of his own. Maybe setting the example was one of the best things he could do; reinforce what he'd told her the morning before.

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Steve had been out for about forty minutes when Beth's footsteps in the hall woke Grace. Realizing she wasn't in her bed, it took only a few seconds to recognize Danno's arm wrapped around her.

“Danno, why am I in here?” She questioned as a she snuggled a bit closer to her father. She didn't immediately remember the nightmare or Steve coming to get her.

Squeezing her closer, he spoke quietly. “Steve brought you in last night. He heard you having a nightmare.”

She squirmed around to face him, curling into a ball with her knees tucked against her chest, the Navy PT shirt seeming to swallow her whole. “I'm sorry Danno.”

Reaching up, he brushed a lock of hair from her eyes. “You don't need to be sorry, Monkey. Hopefully being able to talk to Dr. James today will help, but I think nightmares are pretty normal right now.” He reassured her. He debating mentioning Steve's nightmare, but decided that bit of information wasn't really his to share.

“But I woke you and Daddy up.” She hated feeling as if she was being difficult or getting in the way. She wasn't clueless to what grandma had been up to the night before. Grownups needed time alone sometime and she didn't want to be in the way.

“I'll let you in on a secret.” Danny whispered conspiratorially. “I think Steve is trying to making up for all the snuggling, hugs, and kisses he's missed out on. I'm pretty sure he didn't mind one bit.”

Grace smiled back. She and Danno had talked about Steve before, even before he was Uncle Steve. The little girl had asked her father why the SEAL always seemed a little sad. Not sure how to explain the complex psyche of his partner, he'd simply told her that Steve didn't get enough hugs. He'd had no idea just how seriously she would take those words. From that day on, Grace had hugged the SEAL as often as the opportunity presented itself.

She was convinced her father had been right because the more she hugged Steve, the happier he seemed. Eventually the hugs led to them all spending more time together, to the SEAL carrying her around all the time so she could wrap her little arms around him whenever she wanted. That led to hours of conversation and exploration around the island; those hugs eventually turned Danno's partner into Uncle Steve and eventually Uncle Steve became Daddy.

“Is Daddy swimming?” Grace knew he usually started the day in the water. When they stayed on weekends, sometimes she would sneak out after him before Danno woke. She'd curl up in his towel in one of the chairs and wait for him to come out of the water. She loved mornings with Daddy on the beach; loved it when her Danno would come find them, grumbling that his Neanderthal partner was corrupting his little angel.

“Yeah. I kicked him out of bed a while ago.”

Grace laughed as she sat up. “I'm gonna go get dressed and help Grandma make breakfast. You
should go make sure he gets out of the water in time to eat.”

“Yes, ma'am” He laughed as she scurried out of the room. It warmed his heart to see just how much Grace loved Steve. He adored them both and it was easy to see just how good they were for each other. Getting out of bed, Danny quickly threw on shorts and a t-shirt before heading downstairs.

As expected, mom was in the kitchen, though she was absorbed in the small piece of paper in her hands that it took her a moment to realize he was there. When she did look up, the tears in her eyes worried him.

“Mom, what's wrong?” He walked over and wrapped his arms around her in a tight hug.

“Daniel, how many times in your life have I set your things out for you before bed, leaving you a little note just to remind you that I love you; that I was your mom and would always take care of you?”

He wasn't sure where this line of questioning was going, but went with it. “Too many to count. You did it for all of us, even for dad.” Little things like that were commonplace in the Williams house.

“Did you ever feel the need to leave a thank you note?”

Danny stepped back and considered the question. “No. Suppose I should have, but it was just one of those things that you did. It was one of those things that reminded us that no matter what you were always in our corner. Am I in trouble for not leaving thank you notes?” He was thoroughly confused about why this was suddenly an issue.

Holding out the paper she'd been staring at when he entered, she shook her head. “No son, you aren't in trouble, but as a mother …” She couldn't find the right words to describe how she felt. “As a mother, it makes me incredibly sad to think that little things like setting out a towel, filling a water bottle, and leaving him a note are that significant to him.”

Danny looked down to find his partner's writing beneath a note his mother had clearly left.

‘Mom – Thanks for so much for thinking about me. I’m not used to people doing stuff like this and it means a lot. I love you. — Steve’

Now the tears pricked his eyes. The SEAL was so strong, was always there for everyone he cared about and sometimes it was easy to forget that in so many ways he'd been so closed off for so long that normal things just weren't normal to him.

“Honestly Daniel, if I hadn't already made up my mind to move here, that would have done it for me. He needs to learn what it really means to be part of a family that loves him.”

Danny pulled her to him again. “I know the feeling Mom. I used to joke that he wasn't held enough as a child, but I'm really beginning to think he just wasn't held enough period.”

Neither adult heard Grace enter the room until she spoke. “Does that mean we all need to hug Daddy more?” She didn't know what had started the conversation, but she was more than willing to help with that mission. She loved hugs, especially her Daddy's hugs.

“Yes, Gracie. I think we need to make sure he is well and truly introduced to what it means to be a part of the Williams clan.” Beth answered. “Your Daddy just needs to learn what it's like to have people that love him and want to take care of him.

The detective laughed. “Good thing he likes to exercise or he'd quickly stop fitting into his clothes.”
Danny knew that one of his mother's favorite forms of showing affection involved home cooked meals. “On that note, Grace was going to help with breakfast while I went out to make sure Super SEAL didn't swim through it.”

Beth gave Grace a hug, she loved being able to cook with her granddaughter. “What do you think about omelets this morning?”

The little girl gave her approval of the plan and Danny headed out to retrieve his partner. Sitting in one of the chairs facing the beach, the chairs where he'd enjoyed many evenings with Steve, he simply enjoyed the view.

He had to admit, watching the SEAL in the water was rather awe-inspiring. The power and grace he exhibited in what Danny sometimes swore was his native environment was truly something to behold. Though he was loath to admit it, there was something very calming about sitting here. He was starting to think more mornings should start this way; well maybe without the SEAL making his mother cry.

About the time he was considering the need to try and actually to catch the wayward SEAL and drag him onto dry land, Steve emerged from the water. Danny gasped. He'd have to rethink his earlier idea, he wasn't sure his heart could take this sight on a daily basis. Steve looked like he belong on the cover of some stupid fitness magazine. Shaking the water from his hair, drops streamed down his chest before reaching his low-slung trunks. Of course, the SEAL was oblivious to the picture he presented.

Danny knew the second his partner spotted him as the disarming smile spread across his face, his eyes lighting up.

“I could get used to seeing you here waiting for me in the morning.” Steve grinned as he approached and grabbed the towel only to have it snatched out of his hands.

“Allow me.” Steve's eyes met Danny's as the shorter man started drying his chest.

“Danny.” The single word was the only warning he received before Steve's lips crushed against his own. He'd have to offer to dry him off more often if this was the way he was thanked.

The detective laced his hands around Steve's neck, not caring that his shirt was getting wet as their chests pressed together.

When the SEAL finally lifted is head to breath, he smiled down. “Yes. I could definitely get used to this.” He placed another gentler kiss on Danny’s lips. “I love you.” Reaching up, he took the towel from Danny's hands. “Maybe you should let me finish or we have to revisit our spot down the beach before breakfast.” He smirked.

Relinquishing the towel, Danny slid back into the chair. “While that idea has serious merit, I'm afraid Grace will be out here to find us if we don't appear from breakfast soon. They're making omelets.”

As if on cue, Steve's stomach growled. Quickly drying off, he grabbed the bottle of water and downed half of it in one long drink before reaching for his partner's hand to haul him out of the chair.

“Let's go babe. I'm hungry.” Steve grinned.

Unable to resist, Danny pulled the SEAL into a firm embrace before he could start walking. The often stoic man was going to have to get used to hugs, lots and lots of hugs. When they finally made it to the house, Gracie met them at the front door and wrapped her arms around Steve's waist, not caring that his trunks were still wet.
“I helped Grandma make breakfast, Daddy.” She squealed as he lifted her into his arms where he could better return her hug. With her arms now wrapped around his neck, she smiled down at Danno before looking back to Steve. “I love you Daddy.”

She caught the thumbs up Danno gave her out of the corner of her eye.

“I love you too, Gracie.” He wondered if he would ever get used to just how much he loved the little girl. “You suppose I should go change so I don't drip all over the kitchen?”

She nodded and laughed as he set her back on her feet. “You better hurry, it's almost ready.”

Quickly kissing the top of her head, Steve ran up the stairs. Grace turned and wrapped her arms around her father. “I love you too, Danno.”

Having heard the exchange from the kitchen, Beth smiled. Hawaii was definitely home now and she couldn't wait for Paul to get here.

Chapter End Notes

I'm not sure about the rest of you, but I would gleefully participate in the #HugASEAL campaign for Steve ;)}
Danny entered the kitchen with Grace to find that the pair had been busy. There were plates with hot omelets already on the table along with juice. Turning, his mom handed him a cup of coffee already fixed just the way he liked it.

By the time Steve made it downstairs, his coffee was already waiting by his plate. Beth and Danny both noticed the look in his eyes at the small gesture. Before he could sit, Beth reached out and pulled him into a hug, squeezing as tightly as she could. Though she hated that the affection always seemed to surprise him; it warmed her heart to see that he was willing to accept it now.

She still remembered the first time they’d met. Knowing how much the SEAL meant to her son, even then, she’d given him a hug. It had thrown her when he’d completely frozen at her touch, as if something so simple was foreign to him. Danny had explained later that only with Grace did simple affection seem to even come close to natural for him; even the other members of the task force trod carefully in those days.

Once they all sat down to eat, the four dug into their food. They all enjoyed the chance to have breakfast as a family and discuss the day's plans. Today the adults had agreed to forego any specific plans for the afternoon until they knew how Grace faired at her appointment.

“Are you ready to meet Dr. James today?” Steve asked between bites.

Finishing the bite in mouth, Grace looked up at him as she considered the question. “I think so. You guys will be with me, right?”

The SEAL looked to Danny before answering, making sure he didn't want to take over. “I haven't met Dr. James, but from what I know she will probably want to talk to the three of us together, Danno and I together, and just you while we're there.”

The detective had made it abundantly clear that Steve would not be excluded from the sessions in any way. If the doctor wanted to speak to her father, she was going to get both of them.

He could see the hint of trepidation in her eyes. “It's okay to be nervous, Gracie. I was the first time I met Dr. Thompson, but they are there to help us. You can tell Dr. James anything and she'll be able to help you work through it; even things that you might not want to share with Danno and me.”

Everyone ate in silence for a stretch as she thought through what he'd said.

“I'm actually going to call Dr. Thompson after breakfast. I had a nightmare last night before you did. I know he'll be able to me deal with what I was feeling and the bad memories. Talking to him always helps make them go away faster.”

The SEAL was so focused on Grace that he didn't see the expressions of pure love and pride from the Williams adults. The pair were well aware that he typically wouldn't admit things like that over breakfast, but was trying to put the little girl at ease by setting a good example. That he was also taking steps to take care of his own well-being made them equally happy.

Her fears around the impending doctor's visit dealt with, the rest of breakfast was spent with Grace and Beth rehashing their view of the sparring matches from the day before. Though he hated the idea
of either of them ever being attacked, Danny was thrilled to see they were both looking forward to more lessons.

Glancing up at the clock, Steve decided it was about time for him to get ready for the trip to Dr. James so he wouldn't have to rush at the last minute. Standing up, he started to clear his dishes.

“Just leave them, Steven. Chin and his cousin won't be here for almost two hours, so I have plenty of time to clean up before I go.” They had scheduled things so she would easily still be gone with Grace and the boys returned home.

“But …” He started to argue.

“No buts, Steven. You boys need to go get ready.” She shooed him away from the table.

“I'll help as soon as I brush my teeth.” Grace offered up. She'd already dressed for the appointment.

Conceding that he wasn't going to win against Mom, the SEAL turned to head upstairs. He needed to rinse the saltwater off and put on something better than cargo shorts and an old Navy t-shirt.

Danny gave his mother a quick hug before following his partner up the stairs. By the time he shut the door to the bedroom, Steve was holding his phone to his ear already speaking Dr. Thompson.

“Hey, doc. No, she's doing okay. We're headed to go see Dr. James this morning. Really appreciate you helping with that.”

Danny headed into the closet, trying to give him some semblance of privacy for the conversation.

“I just wanted to see if I could get on your schedule soon. Had another nightmare last night, and I don't want to fall apart on them.”

The detective hated to hear the frustration in the SEAL's voice. He didn't know all the details of the nightmares, couldn't know thanks to security clearances, but he knew they were an unwelcome reminder to Steve that he wasn't really an unbreakable Super SEAL.

“Thanks doc. I'll see you tomorrow.” Danny breathed a sigh of relief that the good doctor was clearing giving up part of his weekend to expedite the appointment. Of course, given that Danny hadn't known about the appointments until two days ago, he suspected that the doctor often kept odd office hours for his partner.

Grabbing a pair of slacks and a shirt, the detective came back out of the closet just in time to hear the water start in the shower. Checking the clock, Danny decided he had time to distract the SEAL for a bit before they had to get dressed.

Emerging from the bathroom a while later, both men appeared considerably calmer as they started getting dressed.

“Dr. Thompson said he could see me tomorrow at 11:30. We'll eat lunch at his office, so you guys won't need to wait on me.” Steve updated Danny on the details of the conversation he hadn't heard.

Buttoning his shirt, the detective crossed to where Steve stood, busy fastening his black cargo pants. He hoped this conversation wasn't going to bring all the tension back into those beautifully sculpted shoulders.

Danny covered the SEAL's hand with his own. “I'm glad you called him, babe. I'm here to listen anytime you want to talk, but I know he knows details that you can't tell me. Just remember there are
people here that care. Just because we're all worried about Grace doesn't mean we don't see that you're hurting too.”

Steve forced himself to meet Danny’s eyes. “I know, Danno. I know I don't always act like it, but I do know.”

Danny's cell phone ringing from the pocket of his shorts startled them both. “Rachel's mother.” He knew it from the ringtone and wasn't particularly enthused about this conversation. He and Rachel had their difference, but he and his ex-mother-in-law had never gotten along. Danny was never good enough in her eyes and she loved to remind him of that.

“Detective Williams.” He answered the phone somewhat formally as he began pacing.

“Daniel.” She sounded irritated.

“Mrs. Bradley, I'm sorry for your loss. HPD mentioned you were handling the funeral arrangements. Will you be arriving soon?”

“My flight lands in Honolulu at 1:50 this afternoon. Services will be at the Immaculate Conception Church Tuesday at three before I bring her back to England. I want you to bring Grace and her things to the Halekulani at four so she can stay with me.”

Steve was standing close enough to hear both ends of the conversation and placed a restraining hand on his partner's shoulder. “Stay calm, Danny. We have to deal with her while she's here and she's going to want to see Grace.” He whispered.

Taking a deep breath, he nodded at Steve. Fighting the urge to tell Rachel's mother to fuck off, he attempted civility. “I appreciate that you want to see Grace while you are here, and you are more than welcome to visit as much as you like, but I am not going to drop her off at a hotel with you. No offense, but you've only seen her once in the last two years. Right now, she needs as much stability as possible.”

He could hear her indignant huff through the phone. Mrs. Dianne Bradley was not used to being denied. “We'll see about that.”

“There isn't much to see about it.” Danny tried to keep his voice level. “I am her father. It is my job to look out for her best interests and that is exactly what I am doing. Now, if you don't mind, we have an appointment to keep.”

“This conversation is not over, Daniel. We will discuss this further when I arrive.”

Disconnecting the call, Danny sagged into Steve's waiting arms. “You head down. I'm gonna make a quick call to Governor Denning and I'll be right behind you.”

The SEAL held him tighter. “Whatever it is she's up to, we'll figure it out together.” He shared the suspicion that Rachel's mother meant more than just her daughter's body when she said she was bringing her back to England. Could the woman really be delusional enough to think that Danny would let her waltz off with his only daughter?

Finishing getting ready, Danny managed to calm himself down. Steve was right. They would figure things out. Rachel's mom had no right to take Grace away.

“You ready?” The detective watched his partner where he stared out the window.

“You head down. I'm gonna make a quick call to Governor Denning and I'll be right behind you.”
“Really think we need to involve him?” Danny was surprised that Steve was ready to bring Denning in before trouble actually landed on their laps.

“Not taking any chances, Danno. He said to call if we needed anything at all from him and I'm going to hope he meant it.”

Danny reached up and gave him a quick kiss on the cheek. “I'll see you downstairs.” He started toward the door. “Think we should tell Grace about the impending visit?”

“Yeah, the doctor might be helpful in navigating this one.” The detective nodded as he disappeared out the door.

Pulling his phone out, Steve punched the buttons to call the governor and waited for him to answer.

“Commander McGarrett, how is Grace?” The politician sounded genuinely concerned.

“She's hanging in there. She has Danny's fight, so she'll make it through. We're actually about to head out for the first session with a therapist.” He wanted Denning to know that they were taking her welfare seriously.

“I'm glad to hear it. Now, assuming you didn't just call to say hello, what can I do for you today? The press aren't hounding you are they?” He sounded irritated at that idea.

“No sir, we haven't seen them yet. Although we've been lying low. It's not the press I'm worried about. We just received a call from Rachel's mother, Dianne Bradley. She'll be arriving this afternoon and staying at the Halekulani. She wasn't pleased with Danny's refusal to drop Grace off to stay at the hotel with her.”

“Tough shit for her. The last thing that little girl is to be jerked around less than a week after watching her mother get killed.” Steve's eyebrows shot up at the unexpected outburst.

“Well sir, I'm afraid that may be exactly what she's planning. She didn't come out and say it, but I suspect she may try to take Grace back to England with her.” The SEAL waited for Denning’s reaction.

“Like hell she will. You keep me posted on everything that happens with her. I'll make a few phone calls and make sure the appropriate parties are prepared to intercede if needed. No Hawaiian judge in their right mind will take that little girl away from her father and send her to a foreign country.”

Steve let out the breath he'd been holding. “Thank you, Governor. We appreciate your assistance.”

“Call me after you speak to her again and let me where things stand.”

“Will do, sir.” McGarrett disconnected the call. That had actually gone better than he'd hoped. If Rachel's mother thought she was going to come whisk her granddaughter away to England without a fight she would be sorely disappointed.

Chapter End Notes

You know the drill. If you want to know what Danny did to distract Steve, go check out chapter 4 of Guardian: Love Explored.
Chapter 24

Chapter Notes

Just for the record, I'm not a therapist. This is purely a work of fiction, so please forgive any deviations from how a professional would handle this situation.

Pulling into the parking lot of Dr. James's practice, Steve parked the Camaro right in front glad that the odd schedule for the visit meant no one else was here.

Danny led the way into the building, it didn't escape his notice that the SEAL hovered behind Grace looking like he was ready to shield her from some invisible threat. Honestly, he couldn't blame him. They were both feeling rather overprotective and this was a new and unfamiliar location.

A well-dressed, petite, blonde woman looked up from the receptionist's desk as they entered. Rising, she held out her hand as she approached. “I'm Dr. Monica James. You must be Detective Williams, Commander McGarrett, and Grace.”

“Ma'am.” Steve nodded.

She gave the men each a firm handshake before squatting down so she was just below eye level with Grace. “It's nice to meet you.” She shook the little girl's hand gently.

Circling passed them; she flipped the lock on the door. “I'm not usually here on weekends so no one else should be stopping by.” She noticed McGarrett's shoulder relax only slightly. While she'd never met any of the task force members, the doctor had studied up over the last few days. Based on what she knew, minimizing any potential threat to her patient's safety would go a long way to making the visit easier on all of them.

“Why don't you follow me?” Scanning the ID clipped to her side, she held the door to the rest of the office space open. Catching the surprised look from the SEAL as he passed, she quietly explained. “I deal with all matters of child and family counseling and take steps to ensure my patients feel safe when they are with me.”

He nodded in understanding. Angry husbands and such storming into a session would be disconcerting to their victims.

Walking in the midst of the family, Dr. James gestured to a brightly colored, kid friendly area with a variety of games and tables covered with paper and crayons.

“Grace, if it's okay with you, I'd like to talk to these two for a few minutes first.” While speaking, she led the girl toward one of the tables.

“Okay.” They'd told her to expect this.

“While we talk, I'd like you to draw me a picture of your family. Can you do that for me?” The doctor gestured to the necessary supplies.

Pulling out a chair, Grace grabbed a piece of paper to start. “Yes, ma'am.”
Returning to where the men stood, Dr. James waited silently for a moment, letting them see that the little girl was settled before guiding them toward her office. Shutting the door behind them, she took her seat behind the desk as they sat in the chairs opposite her.

“I understand from my conversation with Detective Williams that you, Commander McGarrett, will be fully involved in all matters involving Grace. Is this correct?”

Amidst the research she'd done, she was surprised to find quite a bit of speculation that the head of Five-0 was involved with his partner though nothing was confirmed.

“Yes, ma'am. It is. Please call me Steve.” Steve answered with a disarming smile.

She suspected Grace's family picture would likely help clarify the roles of the two men in front of her. Though she was tempted to ask, McGarrett was just scary enough that she couldn't bring herself to come right out and ask.

Danny chuckled quietly. He could imagine the doctor was trying to piece together the puzzle of their little family without coming right out and asking if they were gay.

“And just call me Danny, Dr. James. As I we discussed on the phone, Steve will be involved in every step of Grace's recovery.” He reached out and clasped the SEAL's hand. “Our family is fully committed to helping her in any way we can.”

Smiling at the couple, the doctor wondered how much the influence of the military man would affect her ability to get the little girl to talk. The next several minutes were spend bringing the doctor up to speed on what had occurred Monday, based the information from both Stan and Grace, and how their daughter was faring.

Before they wrapped up, Danny brought up the phone call from Rachel's mother and her demands. “I don't want to prevent her from seeing Grace, but at the same time, I'm not comfortable with the idea of leaving my daughter with a woman that she barely knows. Not to mention potential threat implied by her words.”

The doctor was saddened to hear that the little girl's grandmother would resort to such behavior at a time like this; though she imagined her own grief at her daughter's sudden death might have driven some of the behavior.

“Would you like to discuss this with Grace here?” Since he brought it up, she suspected they were open to her assistance.

“Yes. I want her to be prepared to deal with her grandmother and Rachel's funeral, but I don't want to make her worry.” Clearly, the pending discussion was stressing Danny out.

Dr. James nodded her head. “Why don't I show you two to the waiting area? After Grace and I talk for a while, I'll have the two of you join us. We can broach the subject of the funeral and Mrs. Bradley then.”

The three rose and she led them to a comfortable waiting area furnished with a variety of magazines and a few small tables for kids to draw. Steve sat on one of the two couches, resting one elbow on the arm and running his hand through his hair, he stretched the other across the back.

Danny stared at the door where the doctor had retreated for a moment before turning to face his partner. Keyed up by the looming threat of his ex-mother-in-law he wasn't sure he could sit still; however, the space next to Steve looked so inviting. Slipping onto couch, he let himself lean into the SEAL's warm body.
“It'll be okay Danny. There’s no way we’re letting her take our daughter.” The words held such conviction that the detective had no choice but to believe them. He knew Steve would stop at nothing to protect Grace from being taken.

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“Grace, is it okay if I sit with you?” Usually she would take her patient into one of the other rooms, but with no one else in the building she decided to stay at the table for now.

“Sure.” The little girl looked up at her and smiled sweetly.

Dr. James pulled a chair up next to her where she could clearly see the picture Grace had drawn. She was surprised to see so many people in the picture of her family. It made her happy to see it since far too many children of the children she saw were so alone that a family picture may only include one other person.

“Can you tell me about the people in the picture? Are they all your family?”

“That's Danno.” She pointed to her a blond man with a badge. “And that's Daddy holding me.” She pointed to the taller man standing next to her father. “Daddy's bigger so he can carry me around easier than Danno can.” At almost 10 she was quickly getting to big for Danny to carry at all.

Dr. James smiled at the little girl. “They both look pretty strong to me.”

Grace giggled. “They are, but the view is better from up there.”

“So who are the other people?” There were six other figures in the picture, including one floating above them with wings.

“That's Grandma and Grandpa Williams, Uncle Chin, Aunt Kono, and Aunt Catherine.” From her quick research on Five-0 the doctor recognized two of the names.

“Are you very close to the people your father works with?”

“We're ohana.” Grace looked her straight in the eyes and answered as if that explained everything, and the doctor supposed in many ways it did.

“What about this one?” She pointed to the winged woman, strongly suspecting the answer.

“That's Mommy. I know she's probably watching us from heaven now.” Grace's voice cracked slightly as she spoke.

Reaching to the other end of the able, Dr. James grabbed a small box of tissues just to be prepared. “Do you miss your mom?”

The little girl nodded, tears welling in her eyes. “Yes.” She accepted a tissue and wiped at her eyes. “She didn’t deserve what he did to her.”

Wrapping a comforting arm around the little girl, the doctor let her cry for a while before attempting further conversation.

“Grace, I need to ask you some questions and I want you to be honest with me, but first I need to know if you're comfortable talking to me. I know sometimes it can be weird talking to someone you don't really know.”

“It's okay, Daddy told me about how he talks to Dr. Thompson.” The doctor tried not to cringe.
Having a Navy SEAL as her example on how to interact with a therapist could lead to a very restricted conversation.

Nearly two hours later, Dr. James was quite impressed with how open Grace was with her. She'd told her all about being locked in the bathroom for the two nights; how she knew Steve would come get her. She talked about the nightmares, about how Daddy always saved her from them. She filled the doctor in on self-defense training and how it would make her stronger so she didn't have to be scared all the time.

“Grace, I'm going to go talk to Danny and Steve for a few minutes and then we'll all come back in here to talk a little more, okay?” She waited until the girl nodded before rising.

Finding the two men talking quietly on the couch, Steve's arm wrapped around Danny, she knocked on the door frame to avoid startling them.

“How did it go?” Steve asked as they rose.

“Honestly, I am quite impressed with how she's doing. It's going to take time for her to come fully to terms with the violent nature of her mother's death and witnessing it, but she's coping tremendously well. I believe the support system she has in her ohana is playing a large role in her recovery.”

Neither man looks surprised at the reference to their ohana. Any lengthy conversation with Grace was bound to include talk about them.

“I will admit I was a bit apprehensive when she told me she was okay talking to me because her Daddy told her about talking to Dr. Thompson.”

Steve smiled timidly at her before speaking. “I've come to value my time with Dr. Thompson. I wanted her to have the opportunity to reap the same benefits from her time with you.”

Placing a reassuring hand on his forearm, she smiled back. “Thank you. It certainly makes my job easier. I must say it's very reassuring to see someone like you advocating for therapy, even if it's only to your family. I wish more of our service members and law enforcement were comfortable doing so.”

“Thank you, ma'am. There is very little I wouldn't do for her.” Meeting his eyes, Dr. James didn't doubt him at all.

“As far as things going forward, I'd like to continue seeing her twice a week for the next few weeks. Given your profiles on the island, I'm opening to doing Wednesdays at 5:30 since my last patient is usually gone by five and the same time as today on Saturdays if that works for you.” She wanted them to feel comfortable coming and having other people around wasn't likely to help.

“Yes, we can do that.” Danny answered after a quick confirming glance to his partner.

“Otherwise, keep doing what you're doing. The self-defense training was an amazing idea. I might have to borrow that one for some of my other patients. You and the other primary figures in her life appear to be doing a wonderful job of balancing letting her grieve with helping her move forward.” She dug in her pocket and produced two cards. “My cell phone is listed on that, so if you need to reach me at any time between appointments I'm only a phone call away.”

Accepting the cards, the men both breathed a sigh of relief. It was reassuring to hear they hadn't screwed up with Grace's recovery.

“Shall we do finish up so you three can go home. I'd imagine you didn't plan on spending your entire
day here.” It was already after eleven.

They followed her down the hall as Danny answered. “We'd stay all month if it helped.”

Rejoining Grace, the men were relieved to see her smiling up at them. The doctor gestured to a collection of more comfortable chairs in one corner. “Why don't we go sit over there and talk for a bit.”

Not surprisingly, Steve and Danny seated themselves on either side of their daughter.

“Grace, there are a couple more things that we want to talk about while you're here.” The doctor started them off before looking to Danny to see if he wanted to explain.

“Monkey, Grandma Bradley called this morning. She is flying in for your mom's funeral and will be here this afternoon.” Grace didn't show any reaction to this news. “She wants to see you while she's here.” He hesitated.

“Is she going to come see me at home?” She sounded a bit nervous.

“Possibly. She asked if you wanted to stay with her while she's in town.” Danny softened the woman's actual demand. Despite his issues with her, he wanted Grace to have a relationship with her grandmother, and setting Dianne up as a tyrant would prevent that in a hurry.

“But I don't want to go away. I want to stay with you and Daddy.” Tears welled in her eyes as she looked nervously between the men. “Please don't make me leave.”

Dr. James watched the scene unfolding.

“Grace, we're not going to make you stay at the hotel.” Danny responded as both he and Steve reached for her small hands.

“Would you like it if she came to spend some time at the house during the days?” The SEAL asked. “Or maybe we could go visit her together at the hotel.”

“You won't leave me?” Her voice was still slightly panicked.

Although she wasn't surprised at her patient not wanting to stay at the hotel, the doctor was a bit surprised with her hesitancy to be left alone with her grandmother.

“Grace, are you close to your grandma?” She knew the woman lived in England, but distance didn't always preclude a close relationship.

“No. She only comes to visit every couple of years and then she and Mommy always ended up arguing.”

Danny remembered them arguing when he was still married to Rachel, but then it was usually because she’d 'reduced herself to marrying a lowly cop'. He had hoped their relationship had improved after he was no longer a factor.

“We used to try to call her sometimes, but usually Mommy just ended up yelling or crying, so we stopped. It was never fun like calling Grandma Williams.”

The doctor exchanged a meaningful look with Danny and Steve. It was no wonder the young girl didn't want to be left with her grandmother. She associated her with more anger and tears.

“From what you've told me, it sounds like you're worried about seeing your grandmother alone.”
Grace nodded. “Would you be more comfortable seeing her with your ohana around?”

She nodded more enthusiastically. “Yes.” Grandma Bradley would seem less scary with the rest of the family there.

“Okay. Danny, why don’t you arrange the initial reunion in a group setting?” She watched for his nod before turning back to Grace. “When that visit is over the three of you can sit down and decide how you are most comfortable handling additional visits. I would also recommend that you have some sort of code word that you can use with any of the other adults if you feel like you need to get away for a few minutes.”

She often suggested that with potentially confrontational reunions whether the patient was an adult or a child. It helped them feel more in control of the situation and gave them a means of escape without simply fleeing the room.

“Surfboard?” Grace suggested.

“That will work.” Steve smiled at her. “Easy enough to work in if needed.”

The three adults all noticed that she had visibly relaxed once they made a plan. At this point, feeling like she had some measure of control over a potentially uncomfortable situation would help.

“Now Grace, I’ve asked Danny and Steve to come back with you on Wednesday afternoon. Your mom's funeral is Tuesday, so I thought you might want to talk some more then.”

The little girl nodded. “I’d like that.” Saying goodbye to her mom was going to be hard, so talking to Dr. James again would be nice. Daddy had been right, having someone that she could talk to about anything without getting in trouble for saying something did make her feel better.

“I might suggest you hang onto your code word for Tuesday.” Dr. James recommended as they stood.

“Yes, ma'am.” Steve answered.

A few minutes later, Dr. James escorted them to the front door. Giving Grace a hug, she reminded the men to call her if they needed anything.

Getting into the car, they all felt more relaxed than they had upon arriving that morning. “Are Chin, Kono, and Catherine coming for lunch?” Grace asked from the back.

“Would you like them to?” Danny questioned.

“Yeah. We need to explain surfboard to them.” She said as if she were stating the obvious.

“Chin's out with Grandma, so we can catch him when they get back. I'll call Kono now.”

As Steve navigated the car toward home, the detective pulled out his phone to make the call. He was starting to think that things might actually be okay eventually. If only they could divert the potential crisis that Dianne Bradley posed. Given that she’d shown little interest in Grace before, Danny wondered if there wasn't something else at the root of Dianne's behavior.
Chin's car was already in the driveway when Kono pulled in right behind the Camaro. The women were ready when Steve called and wasted no time heading over. If Grace wanted her ohana there and she was going to have it.

Hopping out of the car, Catherine went to retrieve a bag out of the trunk. Noticing the curious looks from Steve and Danny, she laughed. “We stopped and picked up a few supplies on the way home last night.”

Steve noticed the logo for the sporting goods store and smiled. “Thanks! I'm sure we'll appreciate those.” The girls had evidently followed through on getting the pads for sparring.

The five made their way into the house, following the sound of Beth and Chin’s voices to the kitchen. “We started pulling lunch together.” Mama Williams announced, looking up from the cutting board. “Nothing fancy, just some veggies and sandwiches.”

“Thanks ma.” Danny gave her a quick peck on the cheek.

Plates piled with food and drinks in hand, the group ventured out to the lanai to eat. It was far too beautiful to stay cooped up inside the house.

Conversation focused on the houses Beth and Chin and looked at that morning. It had been a productive morning and she thought a few of the houses had real potential. One in particular was only a few minutes away.

When everyone was finished, Grace looked at her dads expectantly. She knew her grandmother's arrival was imminent and wanted to be prepared. Clearing his throat, Danny tried to decide the best way to explain. Eventually he needed the adults to understand the larger threat, but he didn't want to spell it out in front of Grace.

“Rachel's mother called this morning.” All eyes immediately turned to him. “She'll be arriving in Honolulu in about,” he glanced at his watch, “20 minutes. She requested that we bring Grace to her hotel to stay; however, after discussing it at Dr. James's office we've agreed that we will invite her here.”

The adults remained quiet, somehow knowing there was more to it. The tone of his voice when he said ‘requested’ implied more.

“Due to the strained relationship between Rachel and Mrs. Bradley, Grace hasn't had a very close relationship with her, and is a bit nervous about the coming visit. We'd like all of you to remain here when she comes; hoping that it will makes things a bit easier.”

Everyone immediately agreed. If Grace needed backup, she had it.

“Additionally, Dr. James suggested that Grace have a code word she could use with any of us to indicate she needs a breather from the situation.”

“Smart thinking.” Chin nodded his head approvingly. “What's the word?”
“Surfboard.” Grace replied, smiling at Kono. The little girl was becoming rather proficient at surfing thanks to the Hawaiian.

“So if she uses that word with any of us, find a way to slip away with her for a bit. The rest of us will keep Dianne distracted. We’ll also use that word at the funeral on Tuesday.” Steve offered.

“Don't worry Grace; we've got your back.” Catherine squeezed her shoulder reassuringly.

Strategy in place, the ohana cleared their plates before deciding to come back out and relax a bit. When Danny's phone rang, they all looked expectantly.

“Detective Williams.” He answered grudgingly.

“Daniel, I'm getting ready to get into a car at the airport. Have you reconsidered our conversation earlier?”

Closing his eyes, he tried to remain calm. “Mrs. Bradley, we understand that you want to see Grace, but given the circumstances your reunion with your granddaughter needs to happen somewhere she is comfortable. If you want to see her this afternoon, you need to come here.”

“Fine. Where exactly is here?” Her tone was sharp.

He'd expected more of a fight, but quickly gave her Steve's address. “We'll see you soon.”

Phone call ended, Danny shrugged. “She's coming here from the airport.”

Grace had a feeling her Danno wanted to tell the other adults something, but didn't want to say it in front of her. “I'm gonna run to the bathroom. I'll be right back.” She trusted them to tell her if it was something she needed to know.

When the door closed behind her, Steve shook his head. “I swear that kid is too perceptive sometimes.” Looking to Danny, the SEAL decided to explain the additional concerns. “We think there may be more to Dianne's visit than just wanting to see Grace. Her comments this morning made it sound like she might try to take her back to England.” Shocked gasps erupted all around them.

“Like hell!” Beth exclaimed, surprising all of them.

“She hasn't come right out and said it, but I made a call to Governor Denning just in case and we have his support. I should actually give him a call and let him know she's coming. Excuse me.” Rising from the chair, he ventured toward the driveway to call the politician in private.

“McGarrett, how are things?” Denning didn't bother with the usual pleasantries.

“Mrs. Bradley is on the way here from the airport. Grace is quite apprehensive about her visit. Apparently she and Rachel argued a lot, so she had no real relationship with her grandmother.”

Steve heard the sound of a car door closing and assumed he'd caught the Governor on the way to an appointment.

“Is the team there?”

“Yes, sir. They met us here for lunch and have been briefed.” The SEAL realized this was starting to sound like a Five-0 op more than a visit from a family member. Hopefully they could refrain from the usual gunfire that happened during ops.

“Good. I have one quick appointment, but will follow up with you as soon as that is over.”
McGarrett was surprised by how invested Denning appeared to be, but appreciated the support.
“Thank you, sir.”

Disconnecting the call, he ventured back to the lanai. Grace had returned and was sitting in the chair he’d, vacated wrapped in one of his shirts. As he approached, she jumped up so he could sit before climbing onto his lap to curl up against his chest.

Sitting next to them, Danny smiled lovingly at the pair. While he was always slightly jealous of any attempt on Stan’s part to take his place in Grace’s life, he felt nothing but a deeper love for Grace and Steve when he saw them together. Of course, he knew that the SEAL genuinely loved their daughter and it wasn’t some asinine competition for her affection.

Steve caught him staring and arched one eyebrow at him in question. “It’s nothing. Just thinking how much I love you two.” He answered quietly.

“We love you too.” Grace and Steve answered in unison.

Hearing a vehicle pull up, the adults all struggled to appear calm. They’d wait to see how Rachel's mother acted before getting to defensive. In an effort to be civil, Danny rose to go greet his ex-mother-in-law. Rounding the corner, he took a deep breath and reminded himself to stay calm.

“Mrs. Bradley, I hope your driver didn't have any trouble finding the house.” She had a car and driver. Rachel's mother would never drive herself or stoop to the level of taking a taxi.

“He was competent enough. Now where is my granddaughter?” She demanded, not bothering to actually greet him.

“She's out back with everyone else.” He gestured in the direction they would take. “Follow me.”

The detective could feel her glaring at the back of his head as he walked. When the reached the others, she stepped around him. Danny noticed that his daughter was standing immediately in front of Steve, her hand holding onto his where it rested on her shoulder.

“Grace, come here and say hello.” She opened her arms stiffly, eyes shifting to the series of unfamiliar faces. Aside from Danny and Grace, the only person she knew was Mrs. Williams.

The detective watched as Steve squeezed her hand encouragingly before she hesitantly released his hand and stepped forward. “Hi Grandma.” Grace was clearly nervous as the older woman gave her a cautious hug.

“Are you ready to come to the hotel with me?” Mrs. Bradley asked as if everyone was on board with the plan.

Grace immediately broke free and practically flew into Steve's arms. Lifting her easily, the SEAL held her close. “Sshh, it's okay Gracie.” He whispered in her ear. “You're safe.”

“Mrs. Bradley, we've already discussed this. Grace will not be staying at the hotel with you.” Danny fought to keep his voice level, the sight of his now terrified daughter making his blood boil.

Beth and the others converged around Steve and Grace. From her position, Grandma Williams could hear her granddaughter mumbling “surfboard” against her Daddy’s shoulder.

“Grace, why don’t we go in and fix some drinks for everyone.” She reached up and brushed the hair from the little girl's eyes.
After the SEAL gave her a tight squeeze and a kiss on her head, she let him set her down and grabbed Beth's hand to go in the house.

“What have you told her? Why is my only granddaughter afraid of me?” Dianne all but shrieked.

“Have you considered what she's been through in the last six days? Considered the fact that trying to take her away from her father to some strange hotel is not what is best for her?” Danny was about to snap.

“But I'm her grandmother.” Mrs. Bradley nearly shouted.

“When was the last time you saw her?” Steve challenged. “How many times has she actually seen you, talked to you in her life? You may be related to her by blood, but that doesn't mean she’s going to automatically trust you.” The SEAL's voice was tight. The rest of the ohana knew just how true those words were for him.

“Is there a problem here?” An unexpected voice interrupted the confrontation.

“And just who do you think you are?” Dianne turned to face off with the new stranger.

Extending his hand, the visitor spoke. “Sam Denning, ma'am, Governor of Hawaii.”

Taken aback by this unexpected turn, she shook his hand. Even in her state, she knew better than to ignore someone of his standing.

“And why are you showing up at lowly cop's house?” She had never paid attention when Grace tried to explain what Daniel and Steve did. She only barely remembered that Steve was his boss in whatever little group they worked.

“Is that really what you think they are? Just some lowly cops?” He couldn't hide his shock. “I can't imagine Rachel or Grace ever having described them that way.”

“That is all he has ever been.” She pointed at Danny. “A cop that ruined my little girl's life and turned her against me.”

“I assure you, Detective Williams, Commander McGarrett, and the rest of their team are anything but lowly cops. My Five-0 task force is the most well respected law enforcement team in this state. They are the ones that I trust above everything else.”

The team was almost as shocked as Dianne at his declaration.

“I don't care what they are. Grace is the only family I have left, and I want her to come with me. She deserves to be with family.” She didn't sound nearly as confident has she had earlier. Everyone picked up on the more hesitant tone of her voice.

“Take a look around you. This is her family. I have no doubt that every person here would lay down their life to protect that little girl.” The entire task force and Catherine all stood a bit straighter at his words, crossing their arms across their chests as if daring her to argue.

“But she's all I have left!” Mrs. Bradley stared at them, voice filled with desperation.

Denning softened his tone a bit when he spoke again. “And I assure you that no one is trying to stop you from spending time with her, but if you have any ideas about taking that little girl from her father, from her ohana, you better reconsider. There is not a single judge on this island that would let you take her. I can assure you of that.”
Oh the drama. I feel just a bit bad to leave you all hanging here when the next chapter is hanging out on my computer, but I'm also kinda evil like that. Maybe if I get a decent response to the two chapters I just posted I'll cave and post chapter 26 early.
Chapter 26

Chapter Notes

Since several of you left very nice comments on chapter 25, I'm delivering on the promised early appearance of chapter 26.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Dianne Bradley seemed to deflate in front of them at the governor's words. A few moments ago, she'd presented the perfect picture of arrogance; now she appeared unsteady on her feet. Not for the first time, Danny wondered what was really behind Dianne's threats.

"Is Grace inside?" Denning asked. "I'd like to see how she is doing."

"We'll show you the way." Kono answered, pulling Chin and Catherine along with her. She suspected the remaining three could use some privacy to talk now that immediate threat had been diffused.

When the door closed behind them, Steve looked down at his partner before taking a cautious step forward. Placing a strong hand on the woman that looked strikingly like an older version of Rachel, the SEAL kept his voice quiet but firm. "He's right, you know. There is no way you are taking her from us, but that doesn't mean we want to keep you out of Grace's life. She needs all the family she has, but you have to accept that we make up a large part and very permanent portion of that family."

Dianne looked up at him, surprised that the intimidating man had approached her. "I just thought … Oh, I don't know what I thought. Rachel and I have barely been on speaking terms in recent years. Every time we spoke, it ended in a fight. I should have tried harder to fix things, but she was so stubborn, so much like me."

Danny stepped forward, as much as he'd always resented her attitude toward him, he could only image the pain she felt at losing her only child. Rachel's death had hurt him despite their strained relationship in previous years, and he shuddered to imagine what he would do in Dianne's shoes.

The SEAL carefully guided her to sit in one of the chairs, before tugging another one around to face her. A second later, his partner pulled another chair next to his.

"Dianne, I know this is hard for you. It's too late to fix things with Rachel, but that doesn't mean it's too late to build a relationship with your granddaughter." The detective reached to clasp her hand.

"How can I do that when she's afraid of me?"

As furious as the men had been with her only a few moments before, they both felt for her. They were used to Rachel's self-centered behavior when reacting to a situation she didn't know how to handle and could recognize that same trait in her mother. All Dianne had paid attention to was her own pain, her own desire to fill the hole in her heart. Anger now subsiding, it was in their best interest to find a path forward. Grace needed stability, but she also needed to know what little remained of her mother's family.

"Mrs. Bradley, I don't think she is truly afraid of you. Your threat to take her away from us is likely
what scared her most. Right now she's not comfortable being away from the ohana. While we're working to overcome that, it's going to take time. While she is usually quite the adventurous one, right now she seems to need the safety of her home.” Steve took her free hand as he tried to make her feel a bit better while making it clear that this was Grace's home.

“Aside from that, you have to remember that Grace's memories of you largely involved your arguments with Rachel. Especially right now, that is going to rattle her.” Regret sat heavily on Dianne's features at his words. "I'm not sure how much you know about the details of Rachel's death, but she and Stan had been arguing frequently.” He paused to let her process that bit of information. “Ultimately, that led to Rachel's death, and it happened in front of Grace. If you truly want to be a part of her life, you're going to have to take the time to establish her trust.”

She looked to the men, a single tear streaking down her face. “How am I supposed to do that when she won't get near me?”

“You spend as much time as you can while you're on the island here.” Danny gestured to the house and beach. “This is Grace's home, the place she feels safest. Don't push, but let her see that you love her. The group you saw when you arrived is the same group that is here in large part every day right now. You want to create a real bond with your granddaughter, you plan on spending every moment you can being a part of that group.” He wasn't sure how well this rather icy woman would be able to show it, but he hoped for her sake and Grace's that she could.

Steve chimed in again. “If you want her trust, you're going to have to earn the trust of her ohana, her family. She trusts every single one of us, and it is uncanny how well she can read each of us. You have an amazing granddaughter. I only hope you can bring yourself to appreciate her the way we do.”

"Other than the arrangements for Rachel and hopefully sorting through a few of her things, I have no fixed plans while I'm here."

"Then we expect to see a lot of you.” Danny confirmed.

Dianne stared at her hands, both wrapped in the stronger, smoother hands of the men, vision blurred by tears. “What about when I leave? When I go back to England?” A few days was all well and good, but even Dianne knew things could easily fall apart again.

“You should probably consider visiting more than once every two or three years. Outside of that we can set up a regular schedule for calls or video chats. That's what we've done with my parents since moving here. Grace talked to them every weekend and always knew she could call them any time she needed.”

She looked up at the detective. “You’d really do that?”

He nodded. “Yes. While I will not ever allow you to take our daughter from us, I will also never stop her from getting to know her grandmother. Family means everything to me, and I want the same for her.”

Dianne leaned back into the chair, gently removing her hands from theirs. She was beginning to realize just how unreasonable she'd been, coming here expecting to take Grace away from Daniel. She knew her falling out with Rachel wasn't really his fault. She and her daughter were so much alike that they'd always clashed. She supposed that somewhere deep inside she'd hoped to find him as inattentive as her own father had been. Then it would have made sense to take Grace with her, but she could see that idea could not have been further from the truth.
“I realize I have no right to ask, but in the few conversations I've had with my granddaughter, I know Steve's name came up almost as much as yours, Daniel.” She remembered that even though she couldn't remember anything else about what was said. "I also noticed that you refer to her as 'our daughter' instead of just your daughter.”

Danny reached out and took his partner's free hand in his own. If the judgment of their relationship started now, so be it. They weren't going to hide. “If you're asking the nature of our relationship, Steven and I are partners both at work and at home. I hope that isn't an issue for you.”

She smiled, somewhat sadly, and shook her head. “I suppose Rachel never told you about my brother, did she?”

Danny shook his head no, confused by what Rachel's uncle had to do with anything.

“Henry was a few years younger than me. He was gay. I knew, but he was afraid to tell our parents; afraid they wouldn't love him the same. I suppose he might have been right. He tried to live a lie for years, but it caught up with him when Rachel was a teenager. My own brother took his life because he was afraid to let people know who he truly was. So, to answer your question, no it isn't an issue for me. I loved my brother dearly and wish that he'd been able to find someone to love him, to stand by him. Then maybe he would still be here.” She wiped at the tears that streamed down her cheeks.

Danny leaned forward, placing a comforting hand on her knee. It bothered him that he'd actually learned more about her in the last several minutes than he'd ever known when married to Rachel. Rachel never got passed the arguments with her mother while they were married, so on the few occasions they were around each other he had no chance get to know his mother-in-law.

Collecting herself at last, Dianne looked up at the pair. “I botched my arrival pretty well, didn't I?” The expressions on their faces confirmed it. “Do you suppose we could start over? Maybe start by introducing me to all these people that are so fiercely attached to my granddaughter.”

“I think that is an excellent idea.” Danny rose and extended a hand to help her up. Ever since the call this morning, he'd been gearing up for a fight. It was a huge relief to know that this wasn't going to turn into a long, drawn out distraction from Grace's recovery. He'd have to thank the governor later for acting as the catalyst to the resolution.

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Stepping inside the door, Denning turned to his escorts. “Well, I hope that worked.”

“Me too.” Kono agreed, eyeing the man beside her curiously. His arrival and display of support was unexpected. When he'd told Steve he would help, she'd expected a few phone calls with some well placed pressure if things escalated. She never dreamed he would go so far as to show up in person to prevent the escalation in the first place.

Catching her look, Governor Denning paused before entering the kitchen. “I know I haven't always been easy on Five-0, but you have all earned my respect both as members of the task force and as people. I've seen what this team is capable of and I've seen how close you are to each other.” The cousins both looked at him as if he was going crazy. “I was serious out there. I both respect and trust this team. I'm just sorry it took a tragedy like this for me to make my opinion clear to you and to everyone else. Rest assured, there will be no question going forward when it comes to my opinion of Five-0.”

Sensing the conversation was quickly becoming uncomfortably serious, Chin clapped him on his back. “Better late than never, brah. Better late than never.”
Shaking his head, the Hawaiian turned to the kitchen. “How you holdin' up, Gracie?” He crossed to the stool where she sat drinking a glass of pink lemonade and wrapped an arm around her shoulder.

“Is she going to try to take me away? I don't want to leave Danno and Daddy.” Grace looked up at him, tears filling her eyes.

“I don't think so, Gracie.” Before he could explain further, the governor grabbed a stool and pulled it up to sit next to her.

“I think it’s going to be okay, Grace. Danny and Steve are talking to her now, but we made it very clear that you are staying here with them.” He reached over to take her small hand. “You have a lot of people in your corner, and we will all make sure you stay right where you belong.”

The governor liked the sweet little girl that managed to make everyone smile. He hated the idea of her being hurt, but he also had to admit that he knew the task force would crumble if Danny and Steve left. He was positive that if Grace was taken away, Danny would follow. He also had no doubt that if Danny left, Steve would be right beside him.

Her small smile made everyone relax a bit. She already had enough to worry about without adding a fear of being taken from her family.

Sitting and chatting with the little girl for a few moments, Denning finally stood and walked back to Kono. “So, am I to assume that their partnership is more official now?” He leaned down to speak quietly.

Officer Kalakaua couldn't help laughing. “Yeah, it's a pretty new development, but it is.” She finally met his eyes. “How'd you know anyway?”

“Those two have been at each other like an old married couple as long as I've known them. It seemed rather inevitable.” He grinned broadly. “I'm happy for them.”

“Us too. They deserve a chance at happiness.” Kono left no doubt to the opinion of the rest of the team.

Hearing the front door open, everyone immediately gravitated to stand around the island, a quiet show of support for the little girl. While the expected this second meeting would be calmer, they were taking no chances of Grace feeling threatened.

McGarrett led the way into the room, Dianne and Danny following right behind him. Seeing his daughter's nervous expression, he smiled at her reassuringly.

After a few seconds of awkward silence, Mrs. Bradley stepped out from behind the SEAL. “I would like to apologize for my behavior this afternoon. After talking to Daniel and Steven, I would very much like to start over if you are willing to give me a second chance.”

Her eyes looked from person to person, finally settling on Grace. Underscoring McGarrett's earlier words, she could see her granddaughter searching the faces of the two men behind her before turning to look at the rest of the group. Seemingly satisfied with what she saw, Grace nodded her head.

“In that case, I would like to start by introducing myself. I'm Dianne Bradley, Rachel's mother and Grace's grandmother.”

Beth stepped forward, though they knew each other already, she decided she would encourage the new direction the visit was taking. “It's lovely to see you again, Mrs. Bradley.” She gave the other woman a quick hug.
“Please, call me Dianne.” She smiled nervously at Daniel's mother, wishing that she was as comfortable with this group as Beth appeared to be.

Not wanting to drag the introductions out, Danny stepped to Diane's side. “You'll have a chance to get to know everyone better during your visit, but let's start with the basics. You've already met Governor Denning. The lovely ladies next to Grace are her aunts, Kono Kalakaua and Catherine Rollins.”

“It’s a pleasure to meet you both.” Dianne smiled at them.

“Behind them is Chin Ho Kelly, Grace's honorary uncle and Kono's actual cousin.” The detective smirked at the other man.

“Nice to meet you as well, Mr. Kelly.”

“Please, Mrs. Bradley. We are all family here. First names are fine.” Chin corrected her.

“Thank you Chin. Please, all of you call me Dianne.” She fought a yawn. After the confrontation and emotional conversation that followed, she was beginning to feel rather exhausted.

Steve glanced at the clock. Seeing it was only 3:30, he made a suggestion. “Dianne, why don't you go check into your hotel and take a short nap? We'll have dinner around seven, which gives you three and a half hours to get some rest and make it back here.”

“Are you sure? I don't want to intrude.” She asked politely, though the hope was clear in her voice.

“Of course, Grandma.” Grace beat him to the response. “Daddy's grilling chicken tonight and Grandma Williams promised to make tiramisu for dessert.” The little girl slipped off the stool where she'd remained and approached the woman.

“A nap sounds divine right now, but I will make sure I am back for dinner.” She hugged her granddaughter before letting Danny and Grace escort her to the car.

As they left, Steve turned to Governor Denning, extending a hand to him. “Thank you, sir. I believe you just saved us a tremendous amount of stress.”

Denning shook his hand firmly, meeting his task force leader's eyes. “It was my pleasure. As I was telling your team earlier, I've been remiss in expressing my respect and appreciation for you all. I want there to be no doubt that I stand behind you and your team one hundred percent.”

Steve stared at him for a moment, trying to gauge just how serious he was. Denning met his eyes, hoping McGarrett could see how sincere he was. Deciding the tides truly had turned with his boss, Steve clasped the other man's shoulder. “Thank you.”

Chapter End Notes

Alas, Rachel's mother isn't evil. She's just distraught and misguided. We all know how Steve likes to fix broken things, so this should be fun.
Chapter 27

Chapter Notes

I don't know about the rest of you, but I think our little ohana could use a bit of a reprieve from the drama for a bit.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Waving at the car as it drove away, Danny looked down at his precious daughter. “How you holdin' up, Monkey?”

She’d had a busy day so far; hell, they’d all had a busy day. The therapy session had gone amazingly well. Danny would have to thank Steve for that later as he had no doubt that his partner's candor with Grace about his experience was the primary reason. Top that off with the initial trauma of Dianne's visit and he was both impressed and concerned that she seemed so calm. Watching her, he could see the tension in her small body. She was trying to stay calm, but clearly, it wasn't entirely working.

Grace leaned into her father's side, wrapping an arm around his waist. “I don't know.” She was relieved that she didn't have to leave, both happy and a bit nervous about Grandma Bradley, and slightly overwhelmed. She was a bit tired, but at the same time she was sure she wouldn't be able to sleep at the moment.

Danny shifted toward her, squatting down in front of her. “I know the feeling, Monkey. What do you think you'd like to do now? We have some time before dinner. We could take a nap, go for a walk, watch a movie, anything you'd like.” He wanted her to have a chance to relax a bit before dinner.

“Can we try out the pads that Kono and Cath brought?”

The detective smiled. “You are so much like Super SEAL it's scary sometimes.” He hugged her. “I think that's a wonderful idea. We could all do with a chance to work out some tension.”

Holding her Danno's hand, she led the way back to the house where the family and Governor Denning waited. As soon as she crossed the threshold to the kitchen, Steve turned and stretched his arms toward her. Everyone watched fondly as the little girl let her Daddy sweep her up, holding her closely to his side. Wrapping one arm around his neck, Grace leaned the side of her head against his.

“What's on your agenda for the afternoon, Gracie?” Steve inquired. He could feel the tension in her small frame even as she tried to relax into his hold. He worried that even with therapy she wasn't getting adequate opportunity to deal with all the stress of the last several days.

“Danno said we could try out the new pads that Kono and Cath brought.” The SEAL was a bit surprised and looked over to his partner. He knew Danny was on board with her training, but had expected him to try some other diversion today.

“Grace and I thought we could all use a chance to unwind a bit before dinner.” Steve didn't miss the look in Danny's eyes. She needed to channel some energy to help her relax.
“Oh boy,” Kono smirked. “She’s just like her Daddy.” Her joking comment made everyone laugh.

From her perch, Grace turned to the Governor. “Do you want to stay and watch? It's really fun.”

Seeing Denning hadn’t really followed exactly what he was being invited to witness, Chin clarified. “We’re teaching Grace self-defense. Yesterday we gave her a series of demonstrations.”

“I see.” The governor nodded. He was actually rather intrigued by the unexpected opportunity to witness his task force display their skills. “Are you sure you guys don’t mind? I don’t want to get in the way.”

“Not at all, sir.” McGarrett answered. While he was still a bit unsure of this new found camaraderie between his team and the governor, he was inclined to run with it. Perhaps letting Denning see a bit more of what the team was like off duty would help cement this new phase of their relationship with the politician. Of course, Steve could also see a bit of the same loneliness in Denning that he’d often felt before. Though that surprised him, he still wanted to help alleviate it.

“In that case, if you don’t mind, I’m going to run out the car and grab a change of clothes. Pretty sure I have something a bit more appropriate in the trunk.” He gestured to the suit he was wearing.

“You girls can get changed in my room.” Beth looked to Kono and Cath. “I'm going to get the water bottles ready first.”

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Following Danny into their room, Steve closed the door before catching his partner's arm and pulling him into a firm embrace.

Danny didn’t even try to fight it. Wrapping his arm around the SEAL's waist, the detective could feel his carefully maintained control slipping. “How’d you know?” The words were muffled against the strong chest.

Gently kissing the blond locks, Steve's voice was low and full of concern. “Danny, I am your partner. I’ve become quite adept at reading you.” He knew the reality of Rachel's death was starting to seep in to his partner's mind. He'd managed to block it out thus far, focusing on Grace instead, but after Dianne's appearance and their conversation there was no way he could keep it at bay.

They stood silently for a long moment. “I can't lose it. Not yet, Steven.” His voice was desperate, a plea for the SEAL to understand, to help him keep it together.

“I know, but you have to let yourself deal with it eventually.” He tightened his hold on the shorter man. “I'll understand if you don’t want to talk to me about it, but please talk to one of us ... soon.”

Danny pulled back a bit, looking up into Steve's hazel eyes. “I appreciate that, but we,” he pointed at Steve's chest and then his own, “will talk tonight. After Grace is in bed. I promise.” He stretched up to place a chaste kiss on the SEAL's lips. “In the meantime, we're supposed to be getting ready to teach our daughter how to kick some ass.”

Knowing that the promise to talk later was a step in the right direction, Steve nodded. “Right, ass kicking. I could do with some of that right now.” Fighting was mostly instinctual for him at this point, but it also forced his mind to focus in the moment. Not to mention, without the fear of injury from fighting a hostile opponent, it was just plain fun.

As the men moved around the room, gathering their clothes and changing, Danny couldn't help but harass his partner. “You know, I offered up a nap, a walk, even a movie, and it was Grace's idea to
train instead. As soon as she said it, the first thing I thought was heaven help us, my baby is turning into Super SEAL."

Steve threw him a goofy grin. “Think of it this way, by the time she's a teenager we will have less to worry about with the boys. They'll be too afraid of her to try anything.”

Danny threw the balled up pair of socks in his hand at the SEAL's head. “I don't want to think about my baby being a teenager or boys wanting to try things with her.”

Catching the socks before they hit him, Steve was glad to see his partner relax just a bit. “Then let's go teach her how to stop them.” While the idea of Grace using the skills she was going to learn to fend off unwanted advances was disturbing enough, the prospect was still slightly more appealing than the idea of her fighting off an attacker.

Coming down the stairs, Steve met Kono's concerned gaze and just shook his head, letting her know that everything was okay. He wasn't surprised she was worried. He suspected the entire ohana was worried about Danny. None of them were crazy enough to believe Danny wasn't hurting. No matter how much he and Rachel didn't get along, she was still Grace's mother and was once his wife.

“Mom's getting changed, but everybody else is out there already. I just came in to grab these.” She held up a pair of shin pads that must have fallen out of the bag.

Emerging from the house, the trio heard Chin's voice. “So Grace, are you ready to try a little bit of what Catherine showed you yesterday?”

“Really?” The little girl sounded excited making Danny shoot a playful glare at McGarrett.

“You've corrupted our daughter.” He elbowed his partner in the ribs earning him another goofy grin. “You're hopeless.”

Governor Denning was already perched on one corner of the blankets, dressed in khaki shorts and a green t-shirt, when they arrived. It was odd seeing their boss in this setting.

“Why do I feel like I'm seeing the future of Five-0 here?” He pointed toward Grace where she stood with the other half of the task force and Catherine.

“It wouldn't surprise me.” Danny admitted as he and Steve sat a couple feet away on the blanket. His little angel was so much like him that he'd often wondered if she wouldn't end up following in his footsteps. While he hated the idea of her in danger, he knew better than to think he could stop her if she wanted to pursue that path.

Beth made it out a few seconds later. Spotting her grandmother, and heading toward her when Grace motioned her over. “We get to practice today, Grandma.”

“Sounds like fun.” Beth smiled as she came to stand next to her. “So what's the plan?”

Everyone looked to Catherine and Kono to see what they intended. The Hawaiian spoke up. “Catherine is going to work with Grace, while Chin works with Beth.” Her cousin nodded his agreement. “And if boss is up for it,” the Seal jumped up to join them before she even finished, “I'll work with him so you guys can follow along.”

Everyone, the governor included, laughed as Steve failed to mask his excitement at getting to participate. Danny smiled lovingly at the sight of his partner acting like a kid at Christmas, barely
able to stand still.

After roughly thirty minutes of watching, Governor Denning had an idea. “I'm really impressed with this.” He motioned toward the six as he looked to Danny. “What do you think of holding some type of Five-0 self-defense class for women and children?”

Hearing his question, Kono and McGarrett froze mid-attack. “What do you have in mind?” Steve asked as he released his hold.

“It's nothing I'd expect you to tackle immediately, but just an idea. It could be an outreach for victims or those at risk of becoming victims. I'm sure we could get some help from HPD, but given the Five-0's reputation and your obvious skill in this area, it seems like a great outreach opportunity.”

By this point, the other four had stopped and were listening as well. Beth and Grace slipped over to the other blanket to get a drink. The little girl was more tired now that she'd worked out some of her earlier tension.

Denning didn't want the team to think it was an order they had to execute. “I understand if you aren't interested. I know you guys don't have much free time, but …”

Taking in the expressions on his team members' faces and the look Grace was giving him, Steve interrupted. “Let us come up with a workable plan. We wouldn't be able to commit to an every week class, but I bet we could coordinate something each month. Maybe do a half-day session or something.”

“I'd love to help when I'm in port.” Catherine chimed in.

The governor was impressed with their obvious enthusiasm for the new project. “Like I said, there's no rush. You all have enough on your plate right now. We can regroup on this in a few weeks and hash through more details.”

“Sounds like a plan.” His eyes's shifted to Grace. "You done for now, sweetie?” The Seal asked as she slid down to rest her head in Beth's lap. Her only answer was a sleepy nod and a yawn.

“That's it Super Seal. It's game on now.” Kono laughed. “Come on Danny, you can be on our side this time.”

The governor watched, completely engrossed, as Catherine and the other three members of Five-0 circled Steve.

Thirty minutes later, there was no clear winner in the engagement. The team had yet to take the SEAL down and every time he took one or two of them down the others kept him occupied while they recovered.

“I give, babe.” Danny collapsed onto the blanket and grabbed a bottle of water.

Denning laughed. “I feel for the criminal that is stupid enough to resist an arrest with the lot of you. That was one of the most impressive displays I've ever seen.” The group all smiled and laughed at his compliment.

“Alright kids, I need to get started with dinner. You should probably start getting cleaned up if you all expect to be respectable by the time Dianne returns.”

“Yes mom,” came a chorus of responses.
Steve reached down and plucked Grace off the blanket where she'd fallen asleep. “I'm going to take her up to her room so she can nap a bit longer.” Turning toward the governor, he nodded a head toward the house. “If you don't need to leave feel free to grab a beer out of the fridge and enjoy the view or the television while we get cleaned up.”

“Thanks, McGarrett. I think I'll take you up on the beer, but if it's all the same to Mrs. Williams I'd prefer to make myself useful and lend a hand with dinner prep.”

“I won't make you call me mom, but I will insist on Beth instead of Mrs. Williams.” Danny's mom laughed. “And I can always put a spare set of hands to work.”

That settled, the last of the group ventured into the house to get ready for dinner.

Chapter End Notes

I know I've been posting 2 chapters on most days, but I'm going to drop down to 1 per day. I promise I'm not trying to torture readers. I'm just trying to prevent there being multi-day gaps in posting as I finish out the final chapters of the story. I'm going with the idea that 1 a day is better than none.
Working together to prepare the tiramisu, Beth watched the man standing across from her. They'd maintained a casual conversation so far, but she knew it wouldn't be much longer before the others started to rejoin them.

“Governor Denning,” she waited for him to look up at her, “I have to ask, why the change of heart with Five-0? I talk to my boys and Grace all the time and unless I missed something, they had no indication of anything more than a hesitant acceptance of their existence from you.” He looked rather taken aback by her forthright question. “I apologize if my asking seems rude, but that team is like family to me. Those are my kids in every way that matters, and I don’t want to see any of them get hurt.”

He held up a hand to stall any further explanation. “I'm sure I would feel much the same way in your position. I know it took me a while to warm up to them. What I eventually came to realize is that McGarrett's unorthodox approach to things is actually highly effective. He was also smart enough to surround himself with a team that balances him. From a professional perspective that has worked well for them. Add to that the fact that they operate with closeness I imagine is akin to a SEAL unit, and they seem to be virtually unstoppable.”

He paused and smiled at Beth. Her grin told him that he could sing the team's praises for hours and she would gladly listen.

“I think, most importantly, I realized that they do what they do because they genuinely care about the safety and welfare of others, often above their own. Before that, I'd wrongly assumed it was arrogance and disregard for collateral damage, but when I figured that piece out it made it impossible to hold their unconventional techniques against them.”

Covering the tiramisu and slipping it into the fridge, Beth laughed. “I'm glad you figured that out. I've always known Daniel was that way, and it didn't take long to realize that Steven may actually be worse. I swear that boy gives no thought to his own safety if he thinks he can save someone else.”

The governor laughed loudly at that comment. “I do believe you are right about that. I gather Danny and Grace are often the only reason he does consider his own well-being.”

Pulling out the vegetables that would eventually go on the grill with the chicken, Beth decided to ask one more question. “You weren't surprised by the new nature of their relationship?”

Picking up a knife to start working, he laughed again. “Not a bit. I've been waiting for one of them to make a move for months.”

The sound of Kono's laughter preceded her into the room. “You and half the rest of the island, I think.” She gave Beth a quick hug before grabbing a glass of water. “What can I help with?”
Pulling a clean t-shirt over his head, Steve watched his partner staring at his own pile of shirts. “Danny, relax. I don't think Dianne is going to care which shirt you wear.”

He closed the distance between them and wrapped his arms around the bare torso. The closer they got to her return, the more nervous the shorter man seemed to get.

“I know. I'm glad she's coming over to spend more time with Grace, but it's a big adjustment. For years, our relationship has been icy at best and hostile at its worst. This afternoon was a huge revelation for me. The idea that she isn't nearly the tyrant I always assumed.”

Steve reached forward and plucked a nice royal blue t-shirt from the pile. “I know, but I'd imagine she's feeling more nervous than you are. She's being forced to re-evaluate the preconceived notion she held that you were nothing more than a dumb cop and she has the disadvantage of being in potentially hostile territory. We've all agreed to give her a chance, but I'm sure she realizes that any misstep on her part will spell trouble.”

Danny laughed as he accepted the chosen shirt. He could only imagine the hell there would be to pay if she stepped out of line with Grace or him.

“I'll admit it's nice to know I have backup this time.” The detective donned the shirt before smiling up at Steve.

Pulling Danny to him for a quick kiss, Steve's eyes were ablaze with emotion as he pulled back. “As long as I'm alive, you will always have backup.”

“I know. I love you.” He hoped the SEAL really did understand just how much he meant that.

“I love you too. Now, let's go check on Grace and see how dinner prep is going.” He grabbed his partner's hand and pulled him toward the door.

Knocking gently on the door to Grace's room, Danny called out. “Hey Monkey, you awake?”

“Yeah, Danno. Come on in.” She answered quickly.

Pushing the door open the two men filed into the room. “You look a bit more awake than you did.” They found her looking through a drawer of shirts.

“I didn't mean to fall asleep.” She started to apologize.

Sitting on the edge of her bed, Steve shook his head. “It's okay, Gracie. This way you won't be so tired for dinner.” Seeing her biting her lower lip, he turned his gaze to Danny.

“Are you nervous about this evening?” Danny moved to sit on the bed next to the SEAL.

“A little.” She admitted as she finally settled on a shirt. “I want her to like everyone so she'll want to spend more time with us. I love having Grandma Beth around and it doesn't seem fair that I've never gotten to have Grandma Bradley around because she and Mommy always fought.”

Reaching out, Danny grabbed her hand and pulled her onto his lap, so she could see them both. “Monkey, I promise we'll all do our best to make sure she enjoys her visit. Tonight is going to be a little weird for all of us, but we know that your grandmother very much wants to get to know you better and spend more time with you. She will have to go back to England at some point, but we're going to start doing video chats with her like we always did with my parents.”
Looking up at her father, Grace smiled. “Really? I'll still get to talk to her?” The hope in her eyes made both men glad things appeared to be working out with Dianne.

“Absolutely, sweetheart. After all, she's family.” The SEAL reassured her. He only hoped that dinner really did go well. Things had ended on a positive note when Dianne left, but it was going to take a bit more time before he felt truly at ease in her presence.

Steve turned slightly, angling so he could wrap father and daughter in his long arms. “I love you two.” He couldn't resist telling them both.

“I love you too, Daddy. You too, Danno.” Grace giggled from her spot squished between her two favorite men.

“I love you both, too.” Danny smiled as he tried not to laugh in response to her giggles.

Letting them go, Steve rose from the bed. “We should probably let you finish getting ready.” When their daughter climbed out of Danny's lap, Steve extended a hand back to pull him up and out of the room.

“We'll meet you downstairs, Monkey.”

Shutting the door, he heard her call out that she'd be right down.

The pair made their way to down the stairs. Hearing the sound of laughter from the kitchen Steve stopped a step below his partner and turned to face him. “Remember, you have backup, lots of backup.” He pointed toward the kitchen. “For Grace's sake we're all going to do our best to make Dianne welcome and help them build a relationship, but do not ever doubt that the people in this house have your back.”

Taking advantage of their position, Danny reached out and kissed the SEAL enthusiastically. Breaking away to catch a breath, he finally answered. “I promise, babe. I will remember that.” It was amazing how much life had changed since he'd first come out to this pineapple infested island.

When they finally entered the kitchen, Chin handed them each a Longboard. “Took you two long enough.” He joked. When Danny turned an interesting shade of red as he opened his mouth to explain, he just shook his head. “Brah, we really don't want to know.”

“The tiramisu is setting in the fridge. I'm afraid we'll have a late dessert tonight since I didn't think to put it together earlier. We're just getting the rest of the prep work done.” Beth gave them a quick status update, happy to steer the conversation away from what the two had been up to.

“Leave anything for us to do?” Steve questioned.

“Just drink the beer, boss.” Kono pointed to the drink in his hand. “Actually, why don't you guys go see if there's a game on while we finish up.” The kitchen was getting a bit too crowded for anyone to get anything done.

“But…” Steve didn't want to feel useless.

“Out.” Beth pointed to the door and laughed. “You can start the grill and handle that part when it's time.”

Knowing it was pointless to argue with mom, Danny and Steve turned for the door. “Come on you two. If we don't go now they'll remove us by force.”
The governor and Chin followed obediently behind the pair. “She doesn’t leave much room to argue, does she?” Denning asked the other three.

“Trust me, she’s mellowed out. You have no idea what it was like growing up with her.” Danny groused, his grin giving him away. He adored his mother.

Grabbing the remote off the coffee table, Steve sat on one end of the sofa. Grabbing his partner’s hand, he pulled him into the seat next to him. As they got comfortable, the SEAL shot a nervous glance at Governor Denning. Spending an entire afternoon together, he imagined the other man had figured things out, but he didn't want things to get awkward.

Seeing the look from Commander McGarrett as he was taking his own seat, Denning gave a reassuring smile. “I’m glad to see you two finally worked things out.”

Danny looked up, startled by the politician's words. Looking from his partner to their boss, he raised an eyebrow in question.

“Relax, Williams. I could see the look when McGarrett realized just how cozy you two look together. As I told Kono earlier, I’ve been waiting for this development. You’ll hear no complaints from me as long as it doesn't impact your performance and knowing the two of you I suspect it will be more likely to improve it.”

Chin chuckled from his chair. “You’re probably right. Speaking of work, when do you want us back on duty?”

“I don’t have a firm timeline for that. At a minimum, I expect you to be left alone through Tuesday.” There was no way he’d allow the team’s family time to be interrupted before the funeral was over. “At that point, I think we can play it by ear. Until Grace has gone back to school, I don’t expect to see all four of you in the office at the same time.”

Leaning back against Steve’s arm stretched behind him, Danny was glad to hear that. “Thank you, sir. I really appreciate you being so understanding.”

“You’ve sacrificed enough time and blood for the benefit of the state. I believe we can allow you adequate time to grieve and care for your daughter.”

The four fell silent for a few moments until Steve flipped on the television. Finding a random game, they kicked back to watch, enjoying a few moments of seemingly normal life.
Manning the grill, Steve had one arm wrapped loosely around Danny's shoulder. Everyone else had stayed inside to watch the game, giving the two a quiet chance to enjoy each other's company.

Hearing a car pull up, he reached down and gave Danny a kiss. It was about fifteen minutes before dinner would be ready and he guessed the sound marked Dianne's arrival. "Remember, we've got your back." He whispered into his partner's ear before releasing him.

"Thanks babe. I'm going to go greet our guest." The detective gave the SEAL's backside a swift swat before heading toward the driveway.

Grinning after his lover, Steve sincerely hoped the evening went well. It would certainly make their conversation tonight easier if Danny wasn't overly stressed already.

Danny spotted Dianne coming toward him as her car pulled away. "Welcome back." He smiled reminding himself that she was here as friend not foe.

"Thank you, Daniel. I appreciate the chance." When he started to turn and head back toward the house, she reached a delicate hand out and grasped his arm. "Daniel, may I speak with you alone for a moment before we join the others?"

Turning to face her, he nodded, concern etched on his face. "Of course."

She took a deep breath before speaking. "I wanted to apologize. I spent most of the afternoon thinking about our conversation earlier and about the last several years. I know I was always very clear in my disapproval of you, and the fact that I blamed you for my estrangement from Rachel. I just wanted you to know that I know it wasn't really your fault. It was just so much easier to blame you than to admit that Rachel and I were never going to be close.”

Her voice quavered. The admission had not come easily for her, but she knew it needed to be said if they were going to make this new alliance work.

“I appreciate that. I really do. I can't imagine it was easy for you, being pushed away from your daughter and Grace. I'm sure it's going to take a while for us to really be comfortable with each other, but for my daughter's sake and your own I hope we can make it work.” He covered her hand with his own where it still rested on his arm.

“Thank you. I don't deserve your understanding, but I am very glad that I have it. I believe I misjudged you horribly over the last few years. I suspect the next few days are going to be very educational for me in finding out just what kind of son-in-law I missed out on having thanks to my pride.”

Danny smiled warmly. "Well, why don't we go join the others? Steve was just finishing up at the grill, so we should be ready to eat soon.” Following the path, her hand now wrapped around his arm, they made their way to the lanai and Steve.

Turning from the grill, the SEAL smiled at the pair. Danny had been gone longer than he'd expected, but judging by his expression, the delay had not been cause for alarm. "Welcome to our home, Mrs. Bradley."

“Please Steven, call me Dianne.” She hoped she could prove herself worthy of their trust and earn her spot in Grace's life. Getting them to stop addressing her so formally would be a step in the right
direction. “That smells delicious.” She gestured toward the grill.

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“Thank you. Actually, if Danny can go grab the platter from the kitchen, I think it's about time to eat.”

“Yes, dear.” The detective laughed as he led Dianne into the house. “Look who I found.” He announced as he stopped in the living room. “Steve's getting ready to bring the food in, so I suggest we move this party into the dining room.”

As the others rose and led Dianne to the dining room, Danny ducked into the kitchen to grab the requested item. Less than ten minutes later, the eight of them were seated around the table ready to enjoy the meal.

“It all looks mouthwatering, especially after all that traveling.” Dianne was quite impressed with the meal before her. The table was covered with salad, grilled vegetables, barbeque chicken, and steamed rice.

Mrs. Bradley looked around the table as everyone began filling their plates. She was seated between Danny and Grace on one side of the table. Steven was positioned at the head of the table with Grace to his right and Governor Denning to his left next to Beth. Chin was seated opposite Steve with Danny and Catherine on either side of him.

Not for the first time, she wondered at how this seemingly diverse group had not only come together, but become the family they were. Despite her words earlier, it was easy to see that this group was truly family not only to Grace, but to each other. Conversation seemed to flow easily as they ate, everyone contributing and make sure she was included. She imagined many of the stories they told were for her benefit, helping her to understand the people she dined with better. She greatly appreciated the effort they were making to help her get to know them.

She found herself especially moved by the retelling of how Five-O started. It was clearly a bittersweet memory, particularly for Steve. She saw the pain in his eyes when he spoke of his father's death, but also saw love and pride there when he spoke of the how he and Daniel ended up as partners.

She saw the bond of long-time acquaintances turned brothers as Steve and Chin explained how the task force gave him a fresh start. Though the words were never said, she could see that in some way the SEAL's faith in him had helped return his self-respect and given him something to truly live for again.

The entire team contributed to the story of Kono's start with the team. Though she and Chin were family by blood, it was evident the other two saw her as a younger sister. What impressed her most about the dynamic was the evident respect the men all held for her skills.

As the story wound down, Governor Denning spoke first. “I must say, I wasn't close to the events that brought the task force together and I'm certain I wouldn't have picked any of you as my top candidates for the job.” Dianne shot him a startled look at his words, causing him to grin. “That being said, I'm immensely pleased that it is the four of you that make up my task force. I have a hard time imagining anyone else doing what you have.”

The four grinned back at him. They could very well imagine the impossibility of finding another team of individuals that would be anywhere near capable of replicating the events of their time together. Frankly, the prospect that such a team existed was a bit terrifying. Sitting back in their chairs, enjoying their drinks and the conversation, there was no hurry to move from the dining room. Looking around, Dianne felt she knew Grace's family a bit better now, though one still remained a mystery.
“Catherine, I hope you don't mind me asking, but how do you fit into the picture?” The younger woman laughed openly at this question.

“Don’t worry; you're not the first person to ask that question. I've actually known Steve for years. We served together and became very good friends. Whenever I was in port, I would spend my free time with him. Before long, I realized hanging with him was a package deal with the rest of Five-0 and Grace. I don't have any family here, so it was nice to have a bit of a home away from home.”

She was careful not to mention the nature of her prior relationship with Steve. After she and Danny spoke, it had become a non-issue and she preferred to keep it that way.

“Of course, Cath also helps us out from time to time on cases. She's something of an unofficial Five-0 consultant.” Steve laughed. Though the Governor was aware of it, her assistance was usually highly unofficial.

“Yeah, an unpaid consultant.” She fussed at him playfully.

“I thought he paid you in steak?” Danny tried to act serious, but lost the battle not to laugh.

“True and it is some of the best steak around, but I might have to start increasing my fee.” Catherine drummed her fingers together, giving a sardonic smile.

“You mean I have to start throwing in side dishes too? That wasn't part of the initial contract negotiation?” Steve failed at keeping his expression serious.

Witnessing the banter between friends, Grace was giggling so hard she was almost in tears. Dianne looked down at her, unable to control her own laughter. “Are they always like this?”

Unable to speak, the little girl just nodded. Before long, everyone at the table was laughing. When Beth finally managed to catch her breath, she rose to start clearing dishes.

Steve's sharp, “Sit back down!” made her jump, but she immediately complied. That particular tone of voice didn't leave room for argument.

“Sorry.” He suddenly looked a bit sheepish. “What I meant was, you stay here and relax.”

“And we'll clear the dishes.” Danny interrupted him as he rose and started grabbing dishes. It was no surprise when Chin followed suit, but when Governor Denning rose and started grabbing plates he received several funny looks.

“What, I'm not going to be the only guy left in here.” He joked, throwing a smile at the ladies. He also wasn't going to come off as the pretentious politician. He'd genuinely enjoyed the afternoon and though he knew he wouldn't often get the chance, he hoped he'd be welcome back.

With four of them working, it took only two trips to clear everything from the table. Danny and Chin started scrapping dishes off as Steve ran the dishwasher.

“Why don't you let me wash and you can dry? If I dry you may never find your dishes again.” Denning joked with the SEAL.

“Fair enough, sir, but really you don't have to help us clean up.” He saw Denning arch an eyebrow in question. “What? Can you blame me? It's not every day my boss, the highest ranking official in the state, shows up at my house, saves us from a potential nightmare, spends the day hanging out with my ohana, and then proceeds to offer to wash my dishes.”
Grabbing the dishrag from McGarrett, the governor laughed. “I’d imagine not; however, I hope the rarity of the situation doesn't prevent me from being permitted to return.”

It was Steve’s turn to arch a brow. “Really?”

“Yes, this has been one of the nicest days I’ve spent since taking office. As you are aware, with power and responsibility comes an obligation to be careful with your social life. Sometimes Governor is a rather lonely role if you strip away the people that only want to be around you for what you might be able to do for them.”

The three members of Five-0 nodded their understanding. “In that case, start scrubbing. I hear there's some tiramisu hiding in the fridge for dessert.”

Beth had warned them it wouldn't be ready until about nine, but looking at the clock, Steve had noticed it was nearly time. Thanks to all the stories told over dinner, the meal had taken the better part of two hours. The men quickly fell into a steady pattern. Once the dishes were all neatly piled for washing, Danny and Chin grabbed towels to help with drying and putting away. Unlike the governor, they were well acquainted with the McGarrett kitchen layout.

By the time the dishes were done, it was after the proscribed hour so the men grabbed dessert plates, forks, and the waiting tiramisu before heading into the kitchen. Reentering the dining room, they were happy to find Grace and the four women enjoying themselves.

“I see you found dessert.” Beth laughed as Steve set it on the table, smiling like a kid at a candy store. He’d never appreciated tiramisu until she’d made it for them while he was in New Jersey with Danny and Grace. He suspected that the little girl's request for it today had more to do with him wanting it than her.

As soon as Grace ate her dessert, she disappeared upstairs for her shower. Catherine and Kono insisted they would handle the dessert dishes, knowing that once the little girl was back down to give everyone hugs and kisses it would be time for everyone to disperse for the night. They finished just as Grace was coming back downstairs and managed to intercept her for the first goodnight hugs.

“We'll see you in the morning, okay Grace?” Kono asked as she hugged the little girl.

“Yep! Daddy has an appointment, but I'll be here with Danno and Grandma.”

After saying goodnight to the governor and her Uncle Chin, Grace waved as they headed out the door.

“Call me if you need anything. Otherwise, I'll see you Tuesday.” Denning called to Steve and Danny before slipping out the door.

“Oh, I should have called my car twenty minutes ago.” Dianne realized that she’d been so caught up in what was going on that she hadn't thought about it.

“Why don't you call it now and then you can help me get Grace settled into bed while you wait?” Beth offered.

“Please, Grandma. Can you?” Her granddaughter smiled brightly at her.

“Of course, sweetheart. I'd love to.” As soon as she spoke, she looked to Danny nervous that she was encroaching on his territory.

“I think that is a wonderful plan.” The detective assured her.
“Good. Now you boys give us some hugs and scoot yourselves off to bed. Dianne and I will get Grace settled and I'll make sure she makes it safely into her car.”

“Yes mom.” Steve obediently leaned down to give the petite woman her hug and a kiss on the cheek. “Love you.” He whispered quietly.

“Love you too, darling. Try to get a good night's sleep tonight. I think Grace and I might have a little slumber party in my bed tonight.” She met his eyes to make sure he understood. He'd told her he planned to try to get Danny to talk tonight and she making sure there would be no worry about their daughter needing them in the middle of the night.

After both mothers and Grace had been adequately hugged, the two shuffled up to their room.

When the door closed behind him, Danny turned to look at Steve. “I know. I haven't forgotten.”
Curl up on the couch between her grandmothers, Grace was reading her book to them. Grandma Williams had heard her read many times during their video chats, but this was a first for Grandma Bradley.

Finishing the chapter, she tried to stifle a yawn. Even with the nap, it had been a long and eventful day. The little girl was very surprised to have Grandma Bradley here. Even though the woman had always scared her a bit, she'd missed getting to know her grandmother. This evening she'd been really nice, even to Danny and Daddy.

She hoped this meant she would see more of her now. Closing the book and setting it on the coffee table, Grace smiled at Dianne.

“Are you coming back tomorrow?”

The English woman smiled back. “I would love to, if you don't think I will be in the way.”

Dianne was a bit surprised when Beth laughed, but the Jersey woman quickly explained. “This house is something of a central hub for the whole family when they aren't working. I'm pretty sure an extra body won't be an issue.”

“In that case, yes, I'll be here. Should I bring anything?” Dianne wasn't sure what a Sunday with the family would entail.

“A bathing suit, if you brought one, is always a safe bet given the location and their propensity to end up in the water. Otherwise, just dress comfortably. They're a pretty laid back group.”

As the two women spoke, Grace started drifting off.

“Gracie, why don't you go climb into bed in my room? I'll be up as soon as Grandma Bradley's car picks her up.”

The little girl nodded and reached over to hug Rachel's mom before trudging up the stairs. When she heard her close the door, Dianne looked to Beth.

“I appreciate you being willing to share your time with her.” She looked slightly embarrassed. “I hate to admit it, but I find myself a bit jealous of how easy your relationship is with everyone. I know I have not earned my place with them and I suppose I wonder if I ever will.”

Beth took her hand and gave it a gentle squeeze. “You'll find your place with them. I know they can be an intimidating bunch, but you'd be hard pressed to find a group that cares more about each other than they do.” She couldn't hide the adoration and pride in her voice.
“I believe that after what I heard at dinner. They are most definitely a loyal lot.” Dianne wondered how she had ever though so meanly of Daniel.

“That they are. Paul and I are thrilled that we'll be here full-time soon.” Dianne looked surprised and Beth remembered that nothing had been said at dinner. “We're the last of the family in New Jersey, so we're in the process of moving to Hawaii. We miss having a large family around us and we'll have that here. Plus we want to be here for Grace.”

“I wish I could do that too, but it is just not realistic for me right now.” Mrs. Bradley hated that she was going to be half a world away.

“Well, make the most of this visit. I know it will be hard. I can only imagine the pain of losing a child, but I hope you will let us all be there for you like we are for each other. And when it is time to go back to England take the boys up on the offer to video chat. That's how we've been able to stay close to Grace and Danny from Jersey.”

Dianne looked down at her lap. “I'm not even sure I know how to do all that.” She hadn't mentioned it earlier, but she had never bothered getting into all the new technology since there was never really had a reason.

“Do you have a computer with a web camera?” Beth asked.

Dianne gave her a completely confused look. “I have a computer that is so old it is probably about to give up and die. I take it I am going to need some new equipment?” She sounded a bit nervous.

“Don't worry. I bet Chin and Kono can help you figure out anything you'll need while you're here. From what I know those two are pretty savvy and for simple web chat it really is quite easy.”

Hearing a car door shut outside, the women moved to the front door.

As they walked up the path, Dianne reached for Beth's hand. “Thank you. It means a great deal to me that you are being so kind after how atrocious I was to Daniel. He never deserved it. I realize that now.”

Beth pulled her into a hug. “We all make mistakes, but Daniel is determined to make this work for Grace's sake and I support that. For her sake and our own, we need to move beyond the mistakes of the past and focus on building a future. I'm just glad you’re finally seeing how wonderful those two really are.”

Mrs. Williams watched as Dianne slipped into the car and the driver shut the door.

“Ma'am, I'll wait here until you are back in the house.” The driver smiled courteously. His boss had warned him whose house this was and was taking no chances of getting fired if anything went awry.

“Thank you.” She returned his smile before heading back to the house.

Beckoning his partner forward, Steve opened his arms in invitation. “Danno, relax. I'm not going to water board you to make you start talking.” He wrapped his arms around his lover. “I want you to talk because it is clear to the people that care that you need to, but I won't force you to talk to me.”

Danny smiled against Steve's chest. “I know. I need to talk or I'm going to lose it, and I will not do that in front of my baby girl.” He wrapped his arms around the SEAL's waist. “And I want to talk to you, not someone else.”
Steve ran his fingers gently through his partner's hair trying to soothe him. He'd discovered, the night before, that the small action that would earn him a serious rant and possible threat of violence during the day was perfectly allowable when the day was done and they were alone. Last night he thought Danny was going to start purring when he started absentmindedly playing with his hair while lying in bed.

“Come on, let's sit down and talk.” Steve pulled him toward the bed. Kicking his sandals off, he leaned back against the headboard and scooted toward the center.

Removing his shoes, Danny gave the SEAL a long look before sliding onto the bed beside him. He wasn't sure he could handle seeing Steve's face when he fell apart over his ex-wife's death.

Sitting in silence for a while, Steve recognized the Jersey native wasn't quite ready to start talking yet. “I promise I'm not going to think less of you for being upset or crying over her. Daniel, I know things have been ugly between you in recent years, but they weren't always that way.” The SEAL reached over and laced his fingers through Danny's, carefully folding their hands together.

“I keep thinking his is all some strange nightmare. That I'm going to wake up and everything will be normal again.” Danny heard Steve's breathe catch and realized what he'd said. Squeezing his hand more tightly, he amended his words. “Not everything. Not this. I wouldn't want to lose this. Honestly, I wouldn't want to lose having Grace full-time either. Just Rachel's death and Grace seeing it; those are the things I want to change.”

They sat in silence for a while. Somehow Steve knew that his partner didn't need him to speak yet. He just needed him to listen. He needed to process and Danny tended to process verbally, he'd learned that very quickly.

“Until Dianne showed up I don't think it had really sunk in that Rachel was dead. I don't think it really made sense. Even now, I'm mad as hell at Stan for what he did to Grace, but Rachel being dead almost seems unreal. Part of me just doesn't believe that it is true.” He quieted for a moment, obviously thinking. “Maybe it'll be more real at the funeral when I actually see her. That'll be great.” The last statement was full of sarcasm.

Steve could only imagine the breakdown Danny envisioned having in front of a full audience. Thanks to Max, he had an alternative to offer. Though part of him hated to push his partner to the breaking point, he had considered that letting him more fully process Rachel’s death within the confines of their bedroom was far kinder than letting it happen in a more public setting. Even more so knowing that Grace would be present at the funeral.

“Danno.” He waited for him to turn toward him. “Would it help to see? To not wait? I know it sounds strange, but I suspected you might not really get it until you saw.” Steve realized he was rambling and fell quiet.

“What? Are you offering a late night raid to the morgue or the funeral home?” Danny could only imagine Steve breaking in to find her body in the middle of the night. Visions of him in the all black ninja gear surfaced.

Steve looked surprised before remembering he hadn't actually explained.

“No, Danno. Nothing so dramatic. If I'm going to sneak anywhere at night it will be Stan's cell. Anyway, I had Max send me a picture. I wanted to be prepared. The team and Grace, we all saw her, so we know, but you didn't and while I'm glad you didn't have to see her like that …” He wasn't sure how to explain why the thought this had ever been a good idea. The SEAL suddenly felt completely incompetent to handle this conversation. “Never mind, forget I …”
“Steven, breathe babe. I think that is one of the strangest and sweetest things anyone has ever done for me.” He waited for the SEAL’s eyes to meet his. “Yes, I would appreciate seeing it.”

After a few seconds of stunned silence, Steve dug his phone out of his pocket and found the email from the medical examiner. He was thankful Max had been careful to clean as much of the blood away as he could before taking the picture. Steve brought knee up and motioned Danny to move. When his partner moved, he bent the other leg to the side so Danny could settle between his legs, using one leg as a backrest, his side against Steve's chest. This new position would make it easier to hold the detective close if needed and he strongly suspected it would be needed.

“I'm ready.” Danny took a deep breath and looked up at him before accepting the proffered phone. He stared in shocked silence for a moment.

“Oh god, Rachel.” His voice broke as the phone dropped to the bed. The death of his ex-wife was suddenly very real. Curling into Steve's chest, he let the SEAL’s strong arms envelope him as he sobbed.

Steve held him as tightly as he could without hurting him, not caring the salty tears were soaking his shirt. He'd been expecting this. He knew Danny felt nothing by halves, and he'd once loved the mother of his child deeply, no matter how short lived or long ago it was. Years of frustration and anger couldn't completely wipe that away.

The SEAL didn't try to offer any platitudes, he just held the man he loved, gently kissing his hair and forehead as he let him cry. Eventually, the Jersey native exhausted his tears, though he remained nestled in the safety of Steve's embrace.

Held securely in those arms, Danny completely understood Grace's love for letting the SEAL hold her. He didn't care how tough he was supposed to be, there was something about the warmth, the hard muscle, the feel and sound of his steady heartbeat. Somehow, the most dangerous man he knew had an innate ability to make the people he loved feel safe and cherished when things fell apart.

“Thank you.” Danny finally whispered, knowing Steve would hear him.

“You don't need to thank me, Danny. Like I've been telling you all day, I've got your back. You aren't facing this alone.” He kissed the blond head again.

“I know, but that doesn't mean I can't appreciate that you thought about this enough to know what I was going to need. That you cared enough to do that; to let me fall apart and cry over my ex. A lesser man wouldn't do that.” He met Steve's hazel eyes with his red-rimmed blue ones. “Don't think I don't know just how lucky I am to have you.”

“No …”

Danny cut Steve's argument off with a kiss.

“You, Super SEAL, are not allowed to argue. You are gracefully going to accept my appreciation. Babe, you have been the rock that is getting Grace and me both through this.”

Steve actually laughed at that idea. “Yeah, sure. The rock that is going to see my shrink tomorrow before I crack.”

Danny shook his head. “That doesn't make you less of a rock. It just makes you a rock that is smart enough to know that calling in reinforcements can make the difference between the success and failure of a mission.” He smiled at Steve's bewildered expression. Clearly, the rock analogy was getting tangled and he’d lost the SEAL.
“Speaking of you and the mental health profession; I wanted to tell you how much I appreciate your help with Grace. I never imagined meeting Dr. James would go so well. I really expected more resistance, but with your help she really seems to be embracing it.”

Steve smiled. He’d been extremely pleased with how the appointment had gone. “I’m glad I could do something. I remember how terrified I was meeting Dr. Thompson the first time. I think it took a full hour before he pried more than a one or two word answer out of me.” He grinned at Danny’s shaking head.

“I’m actually impressed it only took an hour.” Danny absentmindedly played with the neckline of the SEAL’s t-shirt, letting his fingers brush over the rough stubble on his neck.

“Well, in all fairness to your assumption, he is the first in a long line of military shrinks that ever got more out of me than was absolutely necessary to keep myself cleared for duty. I’ve had plenty of very quiet sessions with shrinks in my career. He's also the first one that I went to see voluntarily.”

Steve’s voice started to falter. Danny’s fingers were starting to have a very real and likely unintended effect on him. “Daniel.” The name came out far huskier than he’d intended.

The warning in Steve's voice was clear, even through the desire. The detective’s fingers stilled for a space of a few heartbeats before they wrapped themselves in the shirt and pulled Steve's lips to his. He’d exhausted his tears and in that moment, he needed a very real reminder that, despite everything, he was still alive.

Fisting his hand into Danny's hair, Steve finally managed to break the frenzied kiss. Taking a deep breathe, he met his partner’s blue eyes. “Danny?” He spoke the name as a question, a need to know just what his partner needed from him. Whatever it was, he would give it, but he wasn’t going to make assumptions.

“Please Steven.” The shorter man was ready to beg. “I need to remind myself that this,” he gestured between their chests, “is real. That this has not all been a nightmare. That I’m still here.”

That was all Steve needed to know. He’d been there before, had felt the need to feel well and truly alive after witnessing death and destruction.

Sometime later, the pair had managed to very thoroughly remind Danny he was alive, shower, and crawl back in bed completely exhausted.

The sheet pulled over them and Steve's long limbs wrapped around Danny, they settled in to sleep.

“Thank you babe.” Danny whispered sleepily.

Steve didn't even try to argue this time. He didn't need Danny’s thanks, but he understood. He wasn’t even hurt that his partner hadn't expected him to handle things the way he did. Hell, had it been anyone but Danny he probably wouldn't have, but it was Danny.

Most importantly, Danny was his now and he was going to do his damnedest to take care of him just like he so often did for Steve.
If you didn't switch over at the cue, but are interested, make sure you check out the extended version of the scene in the latest Guardian: Love Explored chapter.
Chapter 31

Beth rested on her side, one hand softly rubbing Grace's back where she slept. The little girl had quietly cried out in her sleep a few moments before, but thankfully seemed to settle quickly.

She wondered how long her granddaughter would struggle with the nightmares. It was difficult to imagine what it was like for someone so young to witness something so horrible. Grace's tendency to take after her father would certainly help. They shared a certain tenacity, a determination to endure, to live, that served them well. That Williams' trait coupled with the all-encompassing love of the people surrounding her would pull Grace through, of that Beth was certain.

Mama Williams struggled to imagine how badly the day had almost turned out. Despite his rough history with her son and the rest of Five-0, she was immensely grateful to the governor for his arrival on scene. While she hoped things would have eventually come to the same conclusion, she imagined it would have taken hours or even days longer and included a great deal more harsh words.

Stifling a yawn, Beth allowed her eyes to slip closed again. Her last thought as she drifted off to sleep was a hope that Steve was successful in comforting her eldest son. As his mother, part of her wished she was the one he needed, but she had a feeling Danny needed Steve's particular brand of love and comfort to get through his current struggle. For all that Danny had spent weeks griping about being kidnapped by Steve in the beginning, she was glad the SEAL had forced his hand. She knew that was one of the single best things to happen to Danny.

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Steve watched through the scope of his sniper rifle as one of his teammates struggled against the armed militant holding a gun to the back of his head. Unfortunately, Jackson was much larger than the man was and his body blocked any possible shot on Steve's part.

As an enemy patrol approached behind him, the SEAL hoped his cover held, hoped that they moved on quickly in case a clear shot became available. Unfortunately, the men nearly stepped on him as they moved to look down at the camp.

Hearing them laugh about the dumb American, Steve forced himself to remain calm. Attacking them for mouthing off about Jackson’s predicament would only make things worse and he needed to maintain any chance he had for salvaging the situation; any chance to walk out of here with his entire team still alive.

Just as body's started to shift to allow for a clean shot that might save his teammate, Steve saw Jackson's face through the scope, saw the almost imperceptible shake of his head and the “don't take the shot” mouthed at him. He debated taking it anyway. He'd have to be ready to fight the two men that were still almost on top of him, but it just might give Jackson a chance to survive. Staring through the scope, he could see Jackson's eyes fixed on his location and another slight shake of his head. A split second later the captor's gun fired and Jackson crumpled to the ground in a pool of blood.

McGarrett knew Jackson had just sacrificed himself so the team could get away. If he’d taken the shot and saved the captive man the two men in front of him would have likely killed him and there would still be no guarantee that Jackson would make it out of the camp alive. Remaining frozen in place, he tried to make his mind focus on the mission as he waited for the two men on patrol to move away from his position. All the while, his eyes remained focused on the lifeless body of his teammate, his friend, in the camp below. Even after the enemy left and it was safe to move, he
couldn't tear his eyes away.

“Steven.” He heard a voice call from far away, but the voice was out of place. It wasn't his team and they would never call him by that name. “Babe, come back to me. Come on Steven.” The voice kept calling and he wanted to turn to find it, but he couldn't look away.

“Please babe.” The voice begged as the sight of Jackson's body began to blur away. “You're home. You're safe. Come on babe; wake up!” As the voice began to sound more frantic, his eyes opened.

It took him a moment to figure out where he was. He wasn't on top of that hill; he was home in his bed. As reality flooded back, he turned his head and found a very worried Danny lying on his side, but carefully maintaining a safe distance.

Danny knew better than to try to wake Steve from a nightmare using physical contact; knew the self-preservation instinct that would take over if the SEAL felt physically threatened. He'd made that mistake once when Steve had fallen asleep on the couch during one of their weekends with Grace.

The look on his lover's face was no longer that of the hardened military man, it was the look of the lost boy that had just witnessed something terrible and blamed himself. “Steven, babe, come here.” Danny whispered the words as he stretched one arm out on the bed in front of him, raising the other in invitation. He'd expected the taller man to hesitate, to insist that he was fine and they should just go back to sleep.

What he didn't expect was the SEAL's complete and utter lack of resistance. Steve slid across the space between them, knocking Danny onto his back as he curled around him. The normally stoic man said nothing as he rested his heard over his lover's heart.

Danny felt the moisture of silent tears hit his chest, but said nothing. He simply held the SEAL, running his fingers through his short hair and let him cry. Whatever nightmare this was, Danny readily imagined it was some godforsaken classified op and he'd never hear the details to know why it tortured Steve. As he held on tight, he was very thankful that Steve would see Dr. Thompson later that morning.

After several silent moments, he felt Steve's body begin to relax and heard his breathing slow as he slipped into a deeper sleep. Snuggled tightly against the larger and warmer body, the detective quickly felt himself drifting off as well.

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Cracking his eyes open, Steve was still wrapped around his partner. He'd slept surprisingly well after his nightmare, usually he'd spend the rest of the night staring at the ceiling. Carefully extricating himself from Danny's arms, he leaned over and placed a gentle kiss on his lips before slipping from the bed. Avoiding the squeaky part of the floor, he moved quickly to grab his swimming trunks and get ready.

In less than five minutes, he was in the kitchen. This time the note on top of the towel simply read, “I love you! – Mom.” He scrawled a quick “I love you too” underneath before grabbing the towel and the waiting bottle of water from the fridge.

Dropping the items into one of the chairs, he approached the water's edge slowly. It was a beautiful Hawaiian morning, the sun barely creeping over the horizon the water seemed to beckon to him. When the water nearly reached his chest, he dove, taking it slow to start. He spent the first several minutes focusing on his breathing and the feel of his muscles working as he sliced through the water. He took that time to clear his mind.
As he picked up his pace, his mind shifted back to the coming appointment with Dr. Thompson. Unsure of how much time he had with the doctor, he tried to organize his thoughts, decide what things he absolutely had to cover. The nightmare was primary. Rationally, he knew there was nothing he could have done to save Jackson without risking the safety of the rest of the team, but part of him still felt like he'd sacrificed his teammate for his own survival.

Second to that was Grace. He valued Dr. Thompson's opinion and wanted to talk through everything that had happened and any ideas on how he could continue to help her. Of course, Steve also suspected the topic of his partner would come up. He was a bit nervous about that part of the conversation. DADT's recent repeal meant he could talk about it, but it was new territory. There was no guarantee that the doctor would be open and accepting, but the SEAL refused to hide such a vital part of his life. If he had learned anything in his time with Dr. Thompson, it was the need to be completely honest with him for the sessions to actually do any good.

After what he estimated was about an hour, Steve emerged from the water. Swiping the water from his eyes, he spotted Danny in a chair intently watching him. He immediately felt a wide grin spread across his face.

“Hey there good lookin’.” He accepted the water bottle from his partner and took a long drink.

“Have a good swim out there with the rest of your aquatic family?” Danny laughed as he began drying his lover. He knew Steve was capable for doing it himself, but he enjoyed the chance.

Chuckling as the question, Steve nodded. “Yes. Did you enjoy sleeping in?”

“I don't think being awake and outside at this hour counts as sleeping in, but yes. I enjoyed my time in bed.” Continuing to dry the SEAL, he gave up his attempt to resist temptation and leaned in to place a kiss over his heart. “Are you okay?” The detective asked, a hint of worry in his voice. Steve looked calm enough, but he was worried after last night.

“Shouldn't I be the one asking you that question?” Steve answered the question with one of his own, attempting to dodge the inquiry.

“I am just fine. Someone took very good care of me last night, but you didn't answer my question.” Danny reached up and caressed the SEAL’s cheek.

Leaning into the warm hand, Steve closed his eyes for a brief moment. “I’m good, Danno. Slept surprisingly well after …” He couldn't quite bring himself to finish the sentence.

“Good.” Sensing Steve wasn't in any frame of mind for delving further into what happened the prior night, Danny decided not to push. ”Now let's go see what the ladies are concocting for breakfast this morning.” He let his hand fall from Steve's face, grabbing his hand instead as he pulled him toward the house.

“I love you, Danno.” The SEAL followed obediently, relieved the shorter man hadn't pushed for more than he could give this morning.

“I love you too.” Danny smiled.
Chapter 32

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Entering the kitchen wearing his usual cargo pants, t-shirt, and an open button up shirt, Steve smiled at the trio he found waiting for him. Graced slipped out of Danno's lap and reached up for a hug. Happy to oblige, he swung her into his arms.

“Good morning, sweetheart.” He relished the feel of her small arms wrapped around his arms. “Love you.”

“Love you too, Daddy.” She squeezed him a bit harder. “Are you hungry? We made breakfast.”

“I am starving.” He laughed as his stomach growled in agreement.

“I would imagine so after swimming so long.” Beth smiled as she handed him a cup of coffee.

“I swear the animal is going to swim all the way to the mainland one of these days.” Danny set two plates with eggs, bacon, and hashbrowns on the island for Grace and Steve.

“I don't think I'll make it that far, Danno.” The SEAL set Grace on one stool before sitting down next to her and picking up his fork.

“Good to know you have some sense of boundaries.” The detective continued to tease as he took his own seat.

“I might have to take up swimming again.” Beth surprised them all into a shocked silence. While she was always willing to get in the water with them, they'd never really seen her swim. “Don't look so surprised. I used to be a very good swimmer; just fell out of practice when I had kids.”

“Well you picked the right place to live if you want to swim.” Steve pointed out the window toward the water. “You're welcome to take advantage of the proximity any time you want.”

“Thank you, son. I'm sure I will have to start easy. Maybe start off with someone else to be on the safe side.” She could imagine how freaked out Danny and Paul would be at the idea of her taking off into the ocean alone.

“No worries. Just let me know when you want to give it a go.” Steve offered without hesitation.

Smiling fondly at his partner, Danny laughed. “There are some advantages to having our very own Super SEAL in residence.” For all that he harassed Steve about being careless of his own safety, he would never doubt the safety of their family with him.

Before Steve could respond Grace interjected. “Maybe after you practice some Kono can teach you to surf too.”

Seeing Danny's expression, Steve and Beth both erupted in laughter.

Pointing his finger at McGarrett, the detective tried to act mad but the laughter gave him away. “This is all your fault. You have corrupted my sweet little girl, and now you are starting on my mother.”

The four continued laughing together well after their food was gone. While they all enjoyed time with the whole ohana; it was also nice to have mornings with just the four of them.
“So, what's the plan for the day?” Beth finally inquired as she started to clear the dishes.

Standing to help, Steve shrugged. “I'll leave here shortly before 11 to meet Dr. Thompson. Not sure how long I will be gone, but I'll likely be back early to mid-afternoon.”

“I know Dianne will be over at some point and I'm sure everyone else will round in eventually. Any ideas for dinner?” Beth wanted to make sure she was prepared.

“Thought we might do some fish tacos. They are pretty simple. Maybe we can mix up some homemade ice cream for dessert.” The SEAL looked to Grace for approval of his plan and grinned at her enthusiastic smile.

Steve's cell phone rang, interrupting their planning. Recognizing the caller, he answered. “McGarrett.”

“Howzit?” Kamekona's distinctive voice answered.

“It's going. What can we do for you?” Steve couldn't help but smile at the big Hawaiian's friendly tone. He was actually surprised it had taken this long for him to call or show up.

“Just wanted to see if I could drop by and say hi to my favorite little haole today.”

“Well, I'm going out for a bit, but I'll see what Danny thinks.” Lowering the phone for a second he received the answer before he could repeat the question.

“Yes. Tell him he's welcome to stop by.” The detective recognized Kamekona's voice and could guess the question by Steve's response.

Putting the phone back to his ear, he realized Kamekona had heard the reply. “Excellent. I'll be there in time for lunch and tell the haole not to worry; I'm bringing the food.”

“Hope you're bringing a lot. We have quite the crew around the house these days.” McGarrett warned.

“I know. Chin told me. Don't worry, brah. I've got it covered. See you later.”

Setting the phone on the island, Steve laughed. “Well, Dianne will be in for an experience this afternoon.”

The kitchen cleaned up, the four headed into the living room, content to kick back and watch a movie for the morning. Sitting on the corner of the couch, Steve stretched his arm out as Danny claimed the seat next to him. The Jersey native did the same as Grace curled up next to him.

Beth started to take the chair next to the couch, but relented when Grace patted the spot next to her. Cuddled together as they were, the four easily fit on the couch. As the movie ended, Steve carefully extracted himself from Danny's sleeping form. He and Grace had both fallen asleep the last twenty minutes.

Beth watched as he grabbed a few pillows for Danny to rest on and carefully covered them with the blanket from the chair.

“Don’t worry, son. I'll keep an eye on them.” She could see his reluctance to leave them in such a vulnerable position. He nodded before leaning down and placing a kiss on each of their heads.

“Thanks mom. I'll be back soon.”
“Take your time, Steven. We'll be here when you get back and I'm sure the others will be here soon.”

Giving a small smile, he grabbed his keys and phone before heading out to his truck. Before climbing in he fired off a text to the team, Cath, and Kamekona warning them to enter quietly in case Danny and Grace were still sleeping when they arrived.

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Knocking on the door to Dr. Thompson's office, Steve waited to hear the familiar voice call out.

“Come on in.”

Slipping through the door, the SEAL smiled at the therapist. “Good morning sir.”

“Commander, how many times have I told you not to call me that during our sessions?”

“Every time Mike. Why buck tradition now.” McGarrett laughed as he sat in one of the two large chairs next to a small table that held two bottles of water and bags that likely held their lunch.

“I ordered the usual, hope you don't mind.” Dr. Thompson pointed to the spread.

“Not a bit.” He wasn't surprised. Typically if he requested an extra session the doctor would have lunch waiting so they didn't have to waste time making decisions on what to eat.

“Steve, how are things going with Grace?” Mike took the seat opposite him and started pulling food from one of the bags.

“She's doing remarkably well. The first meeting with Dr. James went better than anyone anticipated.” He cracked open the bottle of water to take a drink.

“And why do you think that is?” The doctor had his suspicions about why Steve was having nightmares again, but wanted to see if his patient realized it.

Leaning back into the chair, Steve arched an eyebrow at Dr. Thompson. “I can guess where you're going with the questions and you're right. I talked to Grace a fair amount before she went and told her about my sessions with you.”

The doctor smiled. “And you think that triggered the nightmare?”

“I don't think just talking about our sessions did, but those aren't the only conversations I have had with her. Helping her cope with things has meant reminding myself how I felt at certain times in my life and the reasons why. Those are things I have managed to avoid doing for quite some time.”

Mike leaned forward, elbows resting on is legs. “Do you regret digging those memories back up?”

Steve shook his head adamantly. “No. I would do it a hundred times over if it meant helping her recover.”

The doctor was not surprised with this admission. His patient had long ago revealed that the little girl was a major motivator in his voluntary pursuit of therapy and they had many long sessions that involved talk of both her and her father. He wondered what impact all this was having on the Lieutenant Commander's relationship with the detective.

After a few moments of eating in relative silence, Dr. Thompson broached the subject. “So, how have recent events impacted your relationship with Grace and Danny? From what little we have
discussed I gather you have spent a significant amount of time with them since you found her.”

Setting his food back down, Steve smiled at the thought of how much time they had spent together.

“You could say that. They're living with me now.” He hesitated, unsure of how the doctor he had come to like and respect was going to react to his new relationship with Danny. “My relationship with both of them has shifted in some ways.”

Noticing McGarrett's failure to meet his eyes, Mike waited to see if he would say more before responding. “Steve, you can speak freely here. You have no reason to worry about what I will think.”

The SEAL's eyes shot up, surprise written clearly on his face.

“As many hours as we've spent talking about the two of them, you didn't think I would have figured out how much you care for them? You've never come right out and said it, but ever since Williams almost died I could tell you were struggling with not admitting it to him.”

Taking another drink of water, Steve regained his composure. He was starting to wonder if anyone on the damned island hadn't already been aware they were in love with each other and why, if they all knew, someone didn't help clue him and Danny in sooner.

“I guess that little secret wasn't as well hidden as I thought it was.” He laughed quietly. “Actually, things with Gracie changed before things with Danny did, but we're more of a family now than we were a week ago.”

Over the next hour, Steve filled him in on the conversations he'd had with the little girl and his new title. The doctor seemed quite happy for him; knowing how much he adored Grace. They also covered how things finally came to a head with his partner.

“It certainly sounds like you have had a very busy week. I must say, I am incredibly impressed with how you have handled everything.” Seeing Steve was about argue, he held up a hand to silence him. “The nightmare does not mean you are not handling it well and even with that you did the right thing. You called me. That is exactly the right way to handle it.”

“You sound like Danny.” He smirked as he remembered the rock conversation and what had followed.

“Well, your partner is clearly a very intelligent man.” He cleared the remnant of lunch into the trash and grabbed them each a fresh water from the fridge. “Now, why don't we talk more about his nightmare?”

By the time Steve walked out of Dr. Thompson's office, it was after two in the afternoon. He hadn't meant to take up so much of the doctor's Sunday, but appreciated the other man's insistence that they keep going until they both felt Steve was in a better place inside his own head.

If felt good to talk through what had happened with Jackson; to hear someone else tell him what he knew was true when thinking rationally. There was no way that scenario could have played out better. His teammate made the same sacrifice he would have willingly made had the roles been reversed, choosing to put the lives of his entire team ahead of his own.

Jackson's death still hurt, but talking it through made it hurt a bit less and helped him cope with the survivor's guilt he often felt. Climbing into his truck, he brought the engine to life and started toward home. He was anxious to see Danny and Grace again even though he had only been gone a few hours.
Chapter End Notes

Hope you guys enjoyed the latest installment. Please take a few seconds to leave a comment.
Chapter 33

Chapter Notes

You're getting a bonus chapter today because I will be out of pocket tomorrow and wouldn't be able to post until very late in the day. I thought I'd be nice and post early instead of late.

Feeling an elbow digging into his ribs, Danny's eyes slowly opened. It took him a moment, but he finally realized he was still on the couch, the offending elbow belonging to Grace.

Glancing up at the clock, he guessed Steve was already gone for his appointment which explained the pile of pillows where the SEAL had been seated. Danny found it unexpectedly sweet that he'd thought to ensure his comfort before leaving. Still nestled into his side, Grace started to whimper. Stroking her arm, he hoped to calm her, but she only seemed to get worse. He silently cursed the nightmares that continued to disrupt her rest.

“Daddy? Daddy? You came?” Danny's heart broke again at the pained sound in her voice as she talked in her sleep. He couldn't even be upset that it was Steve she called for in her sleep. She'd spent that entire time in the bathroom knowing that he couldn't come for her; that her only chance was the SEAL.

He'd been honest with Steve when they'd talked about his relationship with Grace, he wasn't upset with her reliance on his partner. He was the only person Danny could imagine trusting so completely with her and he was forever grateful that Steve took that honor and responsibility so seriously.

Shaking Grace's shoulder a bit more, the detective tried to rouse her from the nightmare. He didn't want to scare her, but he couldn't let her stay trapped and scared her in sleep.

Jerking awake as a hand shook her, Grace looked around the room slightly panicked. She wasn't in the bathroom, she was at home. Recognizing the body she was curled against, she relaxed slightly. She remembered the nightmare; knew that she'd called for Daddy just like she had every other time.

“Sorry Danno.” Her voice was sad and worried.

The apology threw him. She'd done nothing wrong and this wasn't the first time one or both of them fell asleep before a movie was over. “Why are you sorry Monkey?”

Burrowing closer to him, she didn't answer. Her silence worried him given how close they'd always been; how willing she was usually was to talk to him.

“Grace, you know you can always talk to me, right?” He tried to reassure her.

She nodded against him, sobbing quietly. Hoping she would talk when she was ready, he shifted and pulled her into his lap. Brushing the hair from her face, he whispered, “Danno loves you.”

His quiet words seemed to break something loose in her. “I'm sorry, Danno. I'm sorry I couldn't save her. I'm sorry I didn't fight harder. I'm sorry I keep calling for Daddy and not you. I'm…” Her sobs halted her frantic apology.
“Oh Grace.” He held her more tightly. “You don't need to be sorry about any of that. There was no way you could have saved her and if you'd fought harder you probably would have been hurt worse. You did the right thing and you made it through. That is what's important.” Looking down at her, he met her tear filled brown eyes. He suspected her apology was largely associated with her final statement. “You definitely don't need to be sorry about calling for Steve. You knew I couldn't get to you because I was in Jersey. You also knew that he could and would do anything to save you, so calling for him made the most sense. If I'd been in that position I'd be calling for him too.”

“But you're here now.” Her voice was full of guilt and apology.

“I am, but I'm guessing your nightmares are about what happened, so it makes total sense that you're calling out for him. I am here now and will do anything I can to help you including understanding that sometimes you're going to need Daddy instead of Danno. He was the one that rescued you, but more than that he has had a unique set of experiences in is life that means he understands some of what you are thinking and feeling more than I do. I don't ever want you to think that I'm upset that you need him.”

Seeing her slightly surprised look he smiled at her. “Truth be told, I need him too. Our crazy Super SEAL is uniquely qualified to handle members of the Williams family in distress.”

“So you really aren't upset?” She still sounded concerned; worried that she was hurting her Danno.

“Promise, I'm not upset. You have both of us. We're all in this together and we'll both play whatever part you need us to in helping you.” He kissed her on the forehead.

“How Danno. Love you.” She settled more comfortably in his lap, visibly more relaxed than she had been now that he'd assured her. She knew he'd do anything for her. He'd proved that when he picked up and moved to Hawaii for her, but he was right; over the last week it seemed like Daddy understood how she was feeling and could relate.

Hearing a car pull up outside, Danny smiled. “Speaking of people that are here for you, I think more just arrived.”

Grace gave Danny a hug before slipping out of his lap. “I'm gonna run upstairs real quick. Be back down in a minute.” She wanted to wash away the tears before seeing everyone. She didn't want to have to explain why she'd been crying.

Nodding, he rose to go let their visitors in, assuming it was one or more of the ohana or Dianne. Approaching the door, his mother appeared at his side.

She gave him a quick hug, before leaning against him with one arm still wrapped around his waist. “Everything okay?”

“Yeah, it is now. She was worried that I was upset with her about Steve. I think if it were anyone but him I would be, but with him I get it. I'm just glad the Neanderthal loves her so damned much. I couldn't stand to see her get hurt by someone else that should be protecting her.”

Beth nodded in understanding. “I don't think you have anything to worry about there. It's easy to see how much he loves you both.”

///////// As the car pulled into the driveway, Dianne noticed a car and motorcycle she'd figured out belonged to Kono and Chin as well as one additional car she didn't recognize.
“Just call when you're ready to be picked up, ma'am.” The driver reminded her as he opened her
door.

“Thank you. I'd imagine it will be after dinner sometime.” She found herself unusually concerned
that he'd be sitting around waiting for her all day.

“Not a problem, ma'am.” He smiled and nodded as she headed toward the house.

Chin appeared before she made it too far. “We're all out back if you want to join us.” He welcomed
her, taking the small bag she'd brought with a change of clothes. She'd donned her bathing suit,
hastily purchased from the shop at the resort, under her clothes so she wouldn't have to change twice.

“Thank you, Chin.” She followed him around the house. Seeing a large man she didn't recognize,
she looked to her companion. “That's Kamekona. He came over to check on Grace and brought
lunch with him. I hope you like shrimp.”

Dianne nodded, slightly nervous about meeting another person that probably knew her
granddaughter better than she did.

“Don't worry, he won't bite. His personality is bigger than he is though, so don't let it scare you. He's
really just a big teddy bear.”

She smiled at his warning, seeing that his eyes were full of laughter. “I appreciate the warning.”

As they neared the group, Grace broke away and ran over to give Dianne a hug. “Hi Grandma. You
made it just in time for lunch. Kamekona brought shrimp and we're having a picnic on the beach.”

When Kono had suggested lunch on the beach Danny had taken one look at Grace and conceded.
He'd long ago admitted to himself that Steve's ability to be soothed by the sand and water had rubbed
off on Grace. He was slower to admit that at some point it started having the same effect on him.

“Welcome back.” Danny came to greet her. “There are drinks in the cooler and likely more
variations of shrimp than you ever dreamed existed.”

As everyone settled onto the blankets and filled their plates there was plenty of talking and laughter.
Dianne found herself more at ease with the group than she expected. Even Kamekona did his best to
help her feel welcome.

Finding herself next to Chin, she decided to ask about the computer assistance. “Chin.” She spoke
his name and waited for his head to turn. “Beth mentioned you or Kono might be able to help me
with something.”

He looked a bit puzzled, unsure what he could possibly offer. “Happy to help if I'm able. What's the
problem?”

She smiled at his quick willingness. “Danny and Steve offered to let me talk to Grace by video chat
when I return to England, but it sounds like I don't have the right equipment. I have needed to
replace my computer for some time, but never really had a reason to bother. I am afraid I am going to
get back home and have no idea what to get or how to use it.”

The Hawaiian chuckled. “Ah, that's an easy enough problem to fix. When are you headed back?”

Everyone seemed to fall silent at his question. Oddly enough that bit of information hadn't come up
in previous conversation.
“My flight is scheduled for Wednesday.” She was less than enthused about the quick departure now that things had changed.

Seeing his daughter's face fall at this bit of news and the saddened look on Dianne's face, Danny spoke up. “Do you have to rush back so soon or would it be possible to adjust your flight and stay a few days longer.”

She thought about it for a moment. “I don't think it would hurt anything to stay for a few extra days. My itinerary information is back at the hotel so I'll have to call the airline this evening or tomorrow.”

“Which airline are you flying?” Chin questioned.

With that information he tapped away on his phone for a moment before handing it to her. “Just press send and you can call them now. They should be able to look up your flight info.”

A few minutes later, Dianne's departing flight was moved to Sunday, gaining an extra four days to spend with the family.

“Great. That give us time to get our outfitted for the video chats and show you how to use everything.” He already had a good idea of what they would need to get.

“Thank you. Just let me know if it is easier for me to give you the money or to come with you to get things.” She was very grateful for his help.

“If it works for you, we could go pick everything up Wednesday while Grace is at her appointment.” Everyone was aware that she was going to see Dr. James that evening and since that only involved Danny, Steve, and Grace it seemed a convenient time for a little tech shopping.

“I have no other plans that evening, so that works for me.” She watched as Grace rose from her place and ventured over to Kono and Catherine.

The two women smiled and nodded before rising to join her. Dianne was curious what they were up to and surprised when Grace met her eyes and motioned for her to come with them.

“We're gonna go build a sandcastle. You can help if you want.” She invited her grandmother.

Beth smiled over at Dianne. “Be forewarned, Grace and Kono are quite proficient at building sandcastles. I've lost count of how many pictures I've seen of their masterpieces.”

Standing up, Mrs. Bradley laughed. “Then I suppose I should learn from the masters. I don't know that I have actually built a sandcastle before.”

The entire group gasped in mock horror at this revelation before Catherine replied. “In that case, we insist that you join us. There is no time like the present to introduce you to one of our favorite past times.” She turned to Beth. “You should come too.”

Danny watched as the women all headed a bit closer to water to start their latest feat of engineering. He was very glad to see Grace happy surrounded by the four women. They were far from out of the woods, but it gave him hope for what the future held.
Chapter 34

Chapter Notes

For those following Guardian: Love Explored there is a marker when you can switch to that story.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Pulling into the driveway, Steve wasn't surprised to see the vehicles already there. He would have been both shocked and concerned had they not been here.

Shutting off the truck, he wasted no time climbing out, anxious to see the family. Pausing for only a second at some noise, he quickly recognized the sounds of the family on the beach and headed that direction.

Barely making it around the corner of the house, he heard a voice yelling, “Daddy!” mere seconds before he caught Grace as she leapt into his arms. Clearly she'd heard him arrive. This was a welcome he could get used to.

“Welcome back! How was Dr. Thompson?” She asked as she wrapped her arms around his neck.

“He’s good. We had a nice long talk.” He held her close as they walked toward the others. “What have you guys been up to while I was out?”

She pointed toward where all the other females sat in the sand. “We taught Grandma Bradley how to make a sand castle. She'd never made one before.”

Steve's expression reflected the same shock everyone else had earlier. “I hope she enjoyed it.”

Danny rose to meet them. Not wanting to interrupt their conversation he just observed his partner. It was evident that the appointment with Dr. Thompson was productive. Steve looked considerably calmer then he had earlier in the morning.

“She did. Do you want to come inspect the castle?” Grace asked excitedly. No matter how good anyone else said the sand castle was, she wouldn't consider it up to the proper standards until the SEAL gave it his blessing.

“Of course, just let me kick my boots off first.” She immediately wriggled down from his arms so he could sit down on the blanket and remove his footwear.

Danny and Steve both watched as she ran back toward the sand castle. The detective continued to watch him carefully.

Pulling one boot off, the SEAL met his partner's eyes. “Relax, Danno. I'm good. The session helped a lot.” He leaned over, closing the small distance between them and gave Danny a quick kiss.

“Sorry, I know you hate it when I worry about you, but you know that's never going to change, right?” He watched Steve's expression carefully and was a bit surprised by the small smile playing on his lips. As much as the SEAL complained about his mother hen tendencies, he started to wonder if he actually appreciated the fussing for what it was; an expression of how much Danny cared.
“I know. Promise I'll try not to get too annoyed about it.” The second boot off, he pulled himself up off the ground. “We can talk more later; right now I have a sand castle to inspect.”

Flashing Danny his best goofy grin, Steve trotted down the beach to where all the women sat, still making minor refinements to their masterpiece.

“So, I hear someone got their first lesson in sand based architecture today.” The SEAL looked down at Dianne.

“I did. Grace is an excellent teacher.” She smiled back at him. “I gather she learned from you.

Nodding, Steve started to walk a circle around them, one arm crossed over his chest, the other bent at the elbow with his hand on his chin. He could see the laughter in everyone’s eyes, except Dianne, at his serious expression.

Squatting down, he took a closer look at one section of the castle wall. “Impressive.” He commented before rising and shifting a few inches further around. After repeating this a few times, he was finally finished with his thorough perusal of the sand castle.

“So what do you think, Daddy? Did we do a good job?” Grace was nearly bouncing with nervous excitement as she awaited his verdict. Dianne continued to look puzzled. When her granddaughter insisted that Steve would check out their work when he returned she had no idea just how serious an affair that was.

“I think it's absolutely magnificent.” His smile spread wide across his face. “You must have done an exceptional job teaching Grandma Bradley.”

“Kono, Cath, and Grandma Williams helped too.” The three were all smiling.

As Grace busied herself explaining some of the castle features to her Daddy, Dianne leaned over to Kono and spoke quietly. “He had me worried for a bit, he looked so serious.”

The Hawaiian grinned. “He actually takes this incredibly serious. When this first started she wasn't nearly as good, but he'd always find plenty to praise even as he made suggestions on ideas for future builds. She soaked up every comment he made and has gotten so much better. You should ask to see the pictures.”

Before she could ask what pictures, Steve's voice interrupted. “You guys get around the back of it so I can take the picture.” He pulled his phone from his pocket, ready to take the shots.

A few minutes later, Dianne understood. The SEAL had taken pictures of them with the castle, but also of each angle of the castle and close ups of various features.

When he ended up sitting next to her, she finally took the chance to inquire. “I gather there is a collection of these pictures.” She pointed to his phone.

“There might be a few.” With the grin on his face, he looked a bit younger and so happy. She noticed that his gaze would find Grace every few seconds and the warmth it held when it landed on her. It warmed her heart to know that, while she would not be with her granddaughter as much as she would like, Grace was clearly among people that loved her deeply and would take exceptional care of her.

“I would love to see them if it is not too much of a bother.”

“Absolutely. We usually post them up a site that my sister, Danny's parents, and all of us here have
access to so that all the interested parties can keep tabs on the progress. We can get you set up with access before you go back to England.”

His voice trailed off a bit at the end, and she realized he wasn't aware of her departure plans. “I switched my flight this morning from Wednesday to Sunday so I will have some extra time here. Chin is going to help me get whatever I need for the video calls when you, Grace, and Daniel go to Dr. James's Wednesday.”

As she spoke Danny, Chin, and Kamekona approached. They'd tried to check the sand castle out while Steve was gone, but had been shooed away.

When Chin stood behind him, Steve addressed both he and Dianne. “Glad you're able to stay a bit longer. Chin can get you set up on the family site when he sets up the new gear. We'll make sure you're all set to keep in touch before you leave.”

“Yes we will.” The Hawaiian agreed. He'd had his reservations about Dianne even after she'd seemed to tone down with the governor's intervention, but he was finding he actually quite liked Rachel's mom. Of course, her apparent efforts to get to know Grace and her ohana helped that opinion.

Eyes drifting out over the ocean, Steve was enjoying the chance to spend time with the family after his session this morning. His thoughts were interrupted by Grace as she plopped onto his lap. “Daddy, can we go swimming?”

“I don't know, Gracie, can we?” He grinned at her, one eyebrow arched.

“May we go swimming?” She corrected as both her grandmothers laughed quietly as his response.

“I suppose so, but I need to go change first.” Seeing that Cath and Kono were already stripping down to their suits, he continued. “Don't let those two drown before I come back.”

“Hey!” The two adults both exclaimed, playfully indignant expressions on their faces.

Before they had a chance to retaliate for being left in the care of the youngest person present, Steve jumped to his feet and headed toward the house. “Gotta go change!” He called back over his shoulder.

As the SEAL made a run for the house, Danny started to follow. “Guess I should get changed too.”

All the adults smiled as they suspected there was more to it than a need to change, but no one called him out on it. As far as they were concerned, if the pair needed a few minutes to themselves they were more than happy to oblige; after all, it had been a hell of a week.

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** Switch to Guardian: Love Explored Chapter 7 if you want the M rated version**

Pulling his shirt over his head as he headed up the stairs, Steve was excited to get back to his family and enjoy the rest of the afternoon. Tossing the shirt into the hamper as soon as he ducked into the bedroom, he started working his pants loose.

His back to the door, a low whistle from that direction startled him for a split second before he recognized his partner's tone. A shiver of desire immediately rushed through him.

“See something ya like, Danno?” The SEAL looked over his shoulder toward the door, a playful
Danny had followed Steve so he'd have a few minutes to catch up on their respective days, but his intention went out the window when he saw the inviting expanse of bare skin.

"Matter of fact, I do babe." The detective's eyes slowly ran over the sculpted shoulders and back, watching as the muscles twitched. Desire coursed through him.

Seeing the heat in his partner's eyes, McGarrett proceeded to tuck his thumbs into the waist of his cargos and slowly tugged them over his narrow hips. Turning his head back toward the wall, he heard Danny's breath catch as he bent over to finish removing the pants.

"We're never going to make it out to swim if you keep that up, babe." The detective's voice was nearly a whisper as he stepped closer. If the whole Five-0 thing ever fell through his partner had a promising future as a stripper.

Reaching his hands out, Danny lightly traced a trail from the SEAL's shoulders down to his now bare ass. Steve couldn't control his sharp intake of breath at the contact.

"I think we may need to take care of a little issue before we head back to the beach."

Several moments later, both of their issues resolved, the pair stood still embracing each other.

"How long do you think it will take before we get beyond this …" Steve struggled with the right words to explain what he meant.

"You mean this incredibly intense need to get each other off nearly every time we're alone? Or do you mean the instantaneous arousal every time one of us sees the other one partially unclothed." Danny chuckled as he spoke.


"I have no idea and quite frankly I don't care. I'm sure I will the first time I'm sporting a raging boner somewhere completely inappropriate or can't think straight when I need to be focused because I'd rather be taking advantage of you, but right now I just don't care. I love you and I love this." Wrapping a hand around the SEAL's neck he pulled him down for another kiss.

"I love you too, Danno."

Having taken care of the immediate issue, the pair realized they should probably get ready to swim and get back before their absence was cause for too much comment.

As Danny went to grab their trunks, Steve disappeared into the bathroom to grab a wet rag to clean up their messes.

A few minutes later they were both cleaned up and outfitted for the water. Grabbing Danny's hand, Steve tugged him toward the door and down the stairs.

"Time to go swim!" As soon as they were out of the house, the pair broke into a jog as they headed toward the family where they played in the surf.

Chapter End Notes
I hope everyone is continuing to enjoy the story.
I have a little homework assignment for you all. It will make sense around chapter 53, but for now just humor me ;)
Your assignment, should you chose to accept it is to leave comments with questions you would like to see any (or all) members of Five-0 answer if they were being interviewed for television.
Grace saw her Danno and Daddy heading toward the water, but saw Steve hold a finger to his lips before she called out to them. She wasn't sure exactly what he was up to, but since Kono and Cath had their backs to the beach, she could easily venture a guess. Not wanting to give anything away, she continued playing.

Kamekona and Chin also spotted the pair from where they stood in the surf with Grace's grandmothers. They quickly averted their gazes, hoping that if it came down to it they could make a case that they hadn't seen them coming. After all, neither man wanted to get on the wrong side of Kono and Cath or of Steve and Danny. They trusted that their fellow males wouldn't throw them under the bus when all hell broke loose.

As the approached the edge of the water, Grace called. “Uncle Chin, did I show you what Daddy taught me how to do?”

“Nope, you haven't. Why don't you come over here and show me.” He knowingly played into her scheme to distance herself from the targets. If a small war broke out between the four adults it was safer for her to be out of the crossfire.

Watching as the little girl crossed the few feet between them and Chin, both Kono and Cath shrieked when they were lifted unceremoniously and thrown out into the deeper water. The Navy woman landed a bit further out having been launched by McGarrett, but Williams still managed to get Kono out a ways.

Breaking through the surface, they both came up yelling at their attackers. They weren't injured and had never been in any real risk, but they would get even.

“Danny!” “Steve!” There was no question who was behind it.

Grace's laughter was enough to save Danny and Steve from any immediate retaliation. The pair was smart enough to know any attempts to out maneuver the SEAL in on his own turf was futile, but they would bide their time.

“You should have seen your face, cuz.” Chin tried to stifle his laughter, but largely failed.

“Well maybe if someone had warned us…” Kono let the accusation hang.

“Would have if we'd seen them.” He shrugged innocently, hoping the two women bought it.

“Right.” Cath and Kono both leveled a glare at him before turning to face off with Danny and Steve. Soon water was flying everywhere as the four splashed around, not caring how childish they may look.

Chin, Kamekona, and Grace joined the four after a couple minutes of laughing at them.

Beth observed the smile on Dianne's face at the scene before returning her focus to her eldest. She knew things were hard on him and it made her very happy to see him relaxed and having fun with this extended family. She hated to think how lonely and sad he'd been those early months in Hawaii, but saw now that without that he never would have become part of Five-0, never would have had the
chance to build this new family.

“It is good to see them like this, isn't it?” Dianne spoke quietly next to Beth. Not waiting for a response, she continued. “We never had a big family, never really created memories like this with what family we did have. My parents were always so strict and careful not to make a mess and that level of discipline continued in my own house long after Rachel left. Seeing this, seeing them, it is hard not to image how much different life could have been. You only have to open your eyes to see the love between them all.”

Beth wrapped an arm around her as they stood in the waist deep water, watching all the kids play. “That is very true. Though you have to remember they weren't always like this. The early days were different as they all tried to feel out their roles. Remember the stories they told you, these bonds were formed through time, trials, and a willingness to let each other in. Though the willingness took a bit longer with some than others.”

Seeing the group was not likely to tire out any time soon, the two ladies retreated out of the water. Grabbing one of the blankets, they brought it down by the sandcastle and stretched out atop it.

“I gather you've only actually met the team a couple of times, so how did you end up so close to them all?” Dianne was quite curious and hoped that Beth's story might give her some idea of what the future would hold for her.

“Most of my headway with Chin and Kono was made by cooking when I came to visit Danny. Apparently the best way to win over anyone in law enforcement involves their stomach.” She laughed at the memories of those first meals with Five-0.

“Things with Steve were more involved. We started hearing about him as soon as they met. What was initially a myriad of complaints about the new partner that all but kidnapped him changed over time. It became clear they were growing quite close. He'd found an unlikely friend and ally. Then Daniel brought him up to Jersey when he and Grace came to visit. They hadn't admitted anything to each other yet and he tried to play it off that he was trying to keep Steven from staying here alone for the holiday, but even then we could see the love between them. It was evident he cared deeply enough to make Steve travel all the way across the country just so he could keep him close. Even as stoic as Steven tried to be, watching him with Grace was enough to melt even the coldest heart.” She fell silent for a moment, lost in the memories of that visit.

“Shortly after they returned, we noticed the weekend video calls with Grace were always here at the house. Steven initially tried to stay in the background, not really participating, but over time he couldn't resist the force of the Williams clan and allowed himself to be included. Week over week we could see the way he interacted with them, see how much he loved them both. On top of that we'd chat with Grace and Daniel at other times and he always came up as did Chin and Kono on many occasions. Since the team is often here at some point in the weekend, we occasionally get to see the cousins on the video calls. At some point they all just started to feel like family.”

“I can tell they are all thrilled that you are going to be staying on the island. Hopefully they will be equally happy if I am able to come visit more often. I would love to think I could make it at least a couple of times each year.” Mrs. Bradley was determined to make up for the years she had lost.

“I'm sure they would love that.” Beth smiled and pointed to Grace perched on Steve's broad shoulders. “Looks like she went for the high ground.”

“Can't say I blame her. She looks so at home with him.” Dianne felt a tear slip down her cheek. Swiping at it, she risked a glance at Beth and saw the other woman had noticed. “I don't know why I am crying.”
“It’s okay, Dianne. You have plenty of reasons to cry. No one here will judge you for your tears. Just remember that you have plenty of reasons to be happy too. We can’t replace the family you’ve lost, but I’m reasonably certain I speak for all of us when I say we would like you to consider us family."

The English woman reached her hand across the small space between them and clasped Beth’s hand. “Thank you. It’s all just been so much to take in so quickly. Losing Rachel hurt badly, but when I thought I was losing Grace too, I just didn’t know what to do. I thought taking her with me would be the only way to keep her close. I can see how wrong that assumption was now. She would have hated me for taking her away.”

Beth pulled her upright a bit and wrapped her arms around the crying woman.

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Kneeling on a stool next to her Daddy, Grace carefully listened as he explained what how he was seasoning the fish for the tacos.

“Now, we’ll let those sit for a few minutes before we go put them on the grill.” Steve slid the dish full of fillets across the island.

“Grill's ready when you are, babe.” Danny's voice rang out from the doorway. “What else can I help with?”

It was just the three of them in the kitchen. After everyone had cleaned up from the beach, they’d let them grab drinks before ushering them off into the living room. As much as they all loved Mama Williams' cooking it was time for her to get a break.

Steve had started to chase Danny and Grace off to join the others, but quickly released that wasn’t going to be easy. The little girl's puppy dog eyes were his undoing. And really, who was he to argue when she said she wanted to learn how to make fish tacos.

“We already made the guacamole and pico de gallo. Just need to get the lettuce shredded and I was going to make some rice and some black beans to go with it.” Steve ran through the inventory. “Oh yeah, need to mix up the dessert too so it can chill.”

Both Grace and Danny licked their lips at mention of his dessert. The concoction that involved a graham cracker crust, chocolate pudding, Cool Whip, and other sugary goodness was one of their favorites.

“Why don't I take the first three and you can focus on dessert.” Danny's grin made Steve laugh.

“That works. Heaven forbid dessert not be ready.” He nudged his partner with his elbow when he appeared at this side. Danny just grinned as he leaned up to give the SEAL a quick kiss.

“I'll help Daddy.” Grace volunteered, eyes sparkling as she watched her two favorite men messing with each other. After spending so much time around fighting at the Edwards' residence their playfulness and affection made her feel at home.

“Can't blame you there, Monkey. Licking spatulas for dessert sounds far more promising than licking spoons for the black beans and rice.” Danny and Grace started pulling out the necessary ingredients, utensils, and dishes for their respective tasks.

Steve leaned against the island and smiled as he watched the two move around the kitchen so comfortably. This big house full of memories that often haunted him was home again with the two of them here, and he looked forward to making lots of new memories.
As Grace set the last of their supplies on the island, he carefully lifted her back on to the stool so they could get started.

“You want to start mixing while I prep the crust?” The SEAL asked.

“Sure thing, Daddy.” She pulled the cookbook closer and started measuring out the ingredients.

Danny snuck the opportunity to snap a few pictures of the cooking duo before settling into his own duties.

Once the graham cracker crust was ready, Steve glanced at the clock. He needed to get the fish on the grill. “Gracie, do you think you can handle putting the rest of it together while I start the fish?”

Her wide-eyed expression and huge grin made the SEAL smile more broadly. “Really?” She sounded surprised that he would trust her to finish it alone.

“Absolutely. You've helped me make it before, so I know you can handle it.” Giving her a kiss on the forehead he grabbed the platter of fish.

Before Steve could escape the kitchen, Danny caught his wrist from where he stood at the stove. “Love you,” he whispered before giving him a kiss.

“Love you too.” The SEAL murmured against his lips before heading out of the room.

With just the two of them left in the kitchen, Danny watched Grace from his spot by the stove. He could tell she was focusing hard, trying to make sure she didn't mess up anything with her new responsibility. The recipe was an easy one, something he was perfectly confident she could execute perfectly on her own and he thought it was very sweet of Steve to give her that chance.

Pulling his phone from his pocket again, he snapped a couple more pictures of Grace hard at work.

A few minutes later, she turned to face him. “All done!” Hopping down from the stool, she looked at the dish for a moment. “Danno, can you help me put it in the fridge?”

“Your wish is my command.” He playfully bowed in her direction. “Grab the door?”

Dessert safely stowed, Danny went back to the stove, preparing to put the rice and beans into their serving dishes. “Why don't you take the clean platter out to Super SEAL so he can bring the fish in when it is ready?”

Grabbing the dish, the little girl scurried toward the back door. Seeing her granddaughter headed out, Beth jumped up.

“I bet that means dinner is almost ready. I'm going to see if Danny needs a hand getting the table ready.”

Dianne rose from her seat. “I'll lend a hand as well.” She followed Beth through to the kitchen.

Ten minutes later, all nine of them were seated around the table to enjoy their dinner, an extra chair being squeezed around the already full table. To an outsider, it would have looked like quite the odd gathering, but to those present it was simply a family dinner.

Chapter End Notes
Please take a moment to comment. It is nice to know that people are still reading and engaged.
Sitting around the dinner table, all traces of fish tacos having long been devoured by the family, Steve was a bit surprised when his cell phone started vibrating in his pocket. Usually he would suspect a case, but the governor had already promised that was not going to happen.

Fishing the phone out, he recognized Mary's picture on the screen. Flashing it to Danny so he would know what was up, Steve quickly excused himself from the table to take the call.

“Hey Mary. Was starting to think I wasn't going to hear back from you.” He'd left a message earlier in the week just letting her know about Rachel and that Danny and Grace would be staying with them.

“How's my big brother holding up?” She jumped right to the point, concern etched in her voice. “I'm sorry I'm just now calling. Work's been crazy and I never could seem to get to the phone to call you back.” In truth, she wasn't really sure what to say and knew that he would have immersed himself in taking care of Danny and Grace.

“I'm okay. It has been one hell of a week, but we're making it through. Funeral is Tuesday though, so we're not even close to passed the worst of it is my guess.” After being separated following their mother's faked death, they were never as close as they used to be, but Steve wished his sister could be here. She was the missing piece of the expanding family. Of course, he'd never actually ask her to come. He didn't want to cause problems in her clearly hectic schedule.

“Guess it's a good thing I fly in tomorrow then, isn't it? Is there room for me there or should I crash at a hotel. I know your message said Danny, Grace, and Mrs. Williams were all staying at the house.” She was partly curious about where she would stay, but was also curious if she would get any admission out of her big brother about his relationship with his partner. Last time she'd visited it was pretty apparent they were both head over heels for each other.

“There is one guest room open. Danny is in with me now.” She could hear the smile in his voice though she was also a bit surprised it hadn't taken more prodding to get him to admit it.

“Does that mean congratulations are finally in order?” She was happy for them.

“I suppose so. It is all very new, but honestly sis in so many ways it just feels right.” He sighed contentedly, pleased that she didn't seem bothered by his new relationship.

“Yeah, doesn't take a brain surgeon to figure out you two were meant for each other. I assume Grace is pleased with this new development.” She'd seen the little girl with her brother before and knew how much they adored each other.

“Yeah, you could say that. I should warn you, in Grace's book I'm now Daddy, so don't let it throw
you when you get here. Speaking of, what time do you land tomorrow?”

“Daddy, huh? Something tells me you wear that title very well. I always knew you'd be a great dad someday.” Despite her giggle, she sounded sincere. “Anyway, flight lands at 12:20. Should I catch a cab?” She knew what the answer would be, but didn't want to make someone come get her given the circumstances.

“Like hell. I'll come get you. Just call me when you're ready and I'll meet you out front in the truck.”

“Thanks, Steve. It will be nice to see you for a few days. I couldn't get too much time off, so I'll have to head back late Friday. I just needed to come make sure everyone was okay.” He could tell she missed him just as much as he missed her.

“I'm glad you're coming. I am sure Danny and Grace will appreciate it as well. Love you, Mare. I'll see you tomorrow.”

“Love you too.” She disconnected the call before he could say anything else.

Returning to the dining room, Steve discovered the dishes had been cleared and dessert was waiting on the table.

“You guys didn't have to wait for me.” He pointed to the still unserved dessert.

“Now he tells us!” Danny threw his arms up in mock exasperation. He lowered his voice as Steve sat next to him. “Everything okay with Mary, babe?” The detective rested a hand on his partner's thigh.

“Yeah. She's flying in tomorrow and staying until sometime late Friday.” He was still a bit surprised that she had actually gone to the trouble.

“Yay! Aunt Mary's coming!” Grace beamed from across the table. She got along well with Steve's sister when she visited.

“Sure is. Her flight lands at 12:20, so I'll have to grab an early lunch before I go get her.” The SEAL started serving up the dessert as he spoke. Even though it was Grace that asked for it, it was one of his favorites too.

Passing plates around the table, the conversation fell silent as everyone started eating again. Finishing off her piece, Dianne leaned back in her chair. “That was delicious. My compliments to the chef.” She nodded at Steve.

“Actually, I just put the crust in, Grace did the rest.”

A chorus of congratulations and praise echoed around the room at that news.

“You'll be a master chef yet.” Kono laughed.

Grace tried to fight a yawn when she responded. “Thanks Aunt Kono.” The words out, she let out a big yawn.

“Monkey, looks like it is time for you to head to bed.” Danny smiled affectionately at her.

Nodding, the little girl rose from the table and made her way around, giving each of the adults a big hug.

“Would it be okay if I stayed for bedtime again?” Dianne asked, looking to the two fathers and Grace.
The men both nodded as Grace smiled. “Yes, please.”

“Oh, okay. Go get your shower and then we can read for a bit.” She gave her granddaughter a kiss on the cheek before the little girl stopped to give her Danno and Daddy hugs.

When she disappeared out of the room, Danny looked back to Dianne. “You don't need to ask about staying for bedtime while you're here. While we both love being able to read with her and tuck her in we are capable of sharing.” His grinned at the grandmothers.

“Thank you, Daniel. I appreciate the chance to spend the extra time with her.” She smiled back at him.

As everyone started to rise and clear the table, Dianne reached out to stop the detective. “Daniel, I hate to ask you this, but I'm supposed to meet the funeral director for the final funeral arrangements at noon. I thought I was okay to handle it alone, but now…” She fell quiet before she could actually ask him anything.

“Would you like me to come with you?” He guessed she was working up to asking for his support.

“You wouldn't mind? I know you and Rachel were barely on speaking terms in recent months.” She hated to ask him.

“That is true, but as Steven reminded me, there was a time when I loved her deeply and no matter what, she gave me my daughter. Not to mention, no one should have to go to a meeting like that alone.” He set the dishes he'd been holding down and pulled her into a hug.

“Thank you.”

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The grandmothers upstairs with Grace and everyone else having left for the night, Steve looked over at his partner where he stood looking out the window over the sink. Though they'd had a great day with the family the SEAL now felt an overwhelming need to simply spend some time unwinding with his best friend.

“Danny?” He waited for the man in question to turn. “Wanna grab a couple beers and sit outside for a bit?”

The shorter man pushed himself away from the sink and moved to open the fridge. “You read my mind, babe.”

Slipping out the back door, the pair kicked their sandals off before they strolled down to the chairs. Slipping into their chairs, they both stared over the moonlit water content to simply enjoy the quiet in each other’s presence.

Shifting his beer to his other hand, Steve finally reached across the table and grasped Danny's free hand. Lacing their fingers together, he leaned back against the chair.

“Is it just me or does it feel like we've been doing this a lot longer than the last few days?” The detective squeezed the SEAL's fingers to make it clear what he meant.

“I hope you don't mean that in an 'oh god this is never going to end' kind of way?” McGarrett teased, though part of him was genuinely worried that Danny would want out. That Danny was already tired of the baggage that came with being in a relationship with him.
“Hey, Super SEAL, that's not what I meant.” He turned to face his partner. Danny spent enough time listening to McGarrett, that he recognized the slight shift in his voice. “I meant it in a very good way. We get to bypass some of the awkward new love stuff because we've spent the last couple of years forging a partnership, a friendship that you just don't have with most people when you decide to pursue a romantic relationship.”

Steve laughed a bit. “I suppose we did take a rather unique path to where we are. You don't regret this do you?”

Danny turned to look at Steve. “No babe, I don't regret this. I guess part of me wishes we hadn't both been so afraid of admitting we wanted this. I regret the lost time, but I don't regret taking this step at all.”

The SEAL gave him a heartwarming smile, the smile he only reserved for him and Grace. “Me too. It feels so strange. I have had team members that I would lay my life down for, I had my friendship with Catherine, but until you I never had a best friend. Guess that whole thing about marrying your best friend really does apply.”

“Are you saying you want to get married?” Danny looked a bit surprised.

“At some point, yes. I think so. I don't want to rush into it, but quite frankly I can't imagine ever wanting to spend my life with someone the way I do with you, ever wanting someone as much as I do you.”

His words seemed to be drawing Danny closer and Steve finally let himself lean in to meet him. Their kiss was slow and gentle, an expression of the incredible love they both felt and a promise of a future to come.

When they finally broke apart, they both relaxed into their chairs again, taking a sip of their beers.

“So, I should probably tell you that I had a conversation with Grace earlier.”

“Just one?” Steve smirked. “Could have sworn I saw you talk to her more than that.”

Danny smacked the SEAL’s stomach with his free hand. “Smart ass. Yes I had lots of conversations with her today, but I believe one in particular should be shared.”

Steve continued to watch him as he gestured to continue. “She woke up from our nap having a nightmare, calling out for you, and was afraid that I was mad. Given how often the pair of you seem to operate on the same wavelength, I thought it warranted repeating. I hope you already understand this after our conversation the other day, but just sit still and listen.”

“I'm all ears Danno.” He sat up a bit, angling himself in the chair to focus more carefully on his partner.

“Good. First, she apologized for not being able to save Rachel and not fighting harder. I assured her, just as I’m sure you have that there was nothing she could have done and that she did the right thing by taking refuge instead of fighting. Oddly, that was the easier part of the conversation. The second part of the conversation is where you really come in; I am not upset that Grace is calling for you in her sleep. I understand the nightmares are tied to her being trapped in that bathroom and that you were the only person she knew could come rescue her. Beyond that, I also understand that she is leaning more heavily on you now in some ways than she is me. Again, I am not upset by this. For better or worse your life experience to this point has created a unique ability for you to relate to the way she thinks and feels right now.”
Danny stopped talking for a moment, watching Steve to gauge his reaction.

“You told Grace all this?” He arched an eyebrow in question.

“Yes, I did. When she apologized to me for needing you so much even though I'm here now, it just about killed me. I know I have often been selfish when it comes to letting others hold a place close to her, but that just does not apply with you. When I see the two of you together all I see is the two most important people in my life. That you love each other so much and care so deeply about each other only makes me love you both that much more.”

Danny was surprised to see unshod tears glistening in Steve's eyes. Being used to seeing him as the ferocious Super SEAL at work, it was always a bit disarming to realize just how deeply he really felt things.

“Come on, babe. I wasn't trying to make you cry.” Danny brushed a tear away with the pad of his thumb.

“I know Danno. I'm just not used to this much love. I know I said last night that I understand that when you feel you feel deeply, but I guess sometimes it just hard for me to realize that holds true where I am concerned as well. To hear you talk of how much you love me in the same sentence as how much you love Grace, it is ... overwhelming.” He leaned into the hand that still rested on the side of his head.

“Too much?” The Jersey native was still a bit concerned about pushing him into emotional overload.

“No. It is an unfamiliar feeling, but one that I would trade for the world.” Steve turned his head slightly to kiss Danny's hand.

“You know, I think that accusation of feeling deeply could apply to both of us, Steven.” He pulled the SEAL forward until their lips met.

“You might be right about that Daniel.” He traced his tongue along his partner's lower lip before pressing their mouths together again.

Hearing a car pull up, the two leaned apart and looked toward the house. A few seconds later Dianne emerged. Spotting them she waved and blew them a kiss.

“I will see you two tomorrow.” She called softly as she headed toward her car.

The pair listened as the car door shut behind her and then the driver's door shut and the car pulled away.

“Hard to believe how much that has changed. I never imagined she could actually be so incredibly human. It is hard to reconcile the Dianne we are getting to know with the Mrs. Bradley that I lived in constant terror of when I was married to Rachel.”

Steve chuckled at his observation. “I can only imagine based on the glimpse I got the other day. I am glad it is working out. Grace will certainly grow up knowing she is loved deeply by a large number of people. She will never have to feel like she is facing the world alone.”

Danny realized just how true those words were. It wasn't just he and Steve that would be there for her, it was the entire family. “You know, I think the same applies for the two of us as well.”

“This pineapple infested hellhole isn't quite so lonely after all, is it?” The SEAL smiled at him.
“No, my pineapple infested home is far from lonely.” There was no doubt, this island, this house were now home.

Chapter End Notes

As always, comments are much appreciated.

For interested parties, the next installment of Guardian: Love Explored is up and follows the end of this chapter.
Chapter 37

Waking up with Danny's arm slung across his chest and one leg tangled with his own, Steve seriously contemplated closing his eyes and trying to fall back asleep for a while. As it was he took a moment to just enjoy the warmth of his partner pressed against him and the sound of his deep, even breathing. Running his fingers through the blonde hair, the SEAL grinned as the touch seemed to make Danny snuggle closer.

"Shouldn't you be out finishing a triathlon or something?" Danny murmured against his chest.

"Actually I was contemplating a short biathle this morning." The SEAL smirked, knowing his partner couldn't see his face and tried not to laugh.

"Okay Super SEAL, you've got me. What the hell is a biathle?" From the tone of his voice he clearly thought McGarrett was messing with him.

"Running and swimming, no cycling. If you don't believe me I can look it up." Steve reached one hand for his phone where it was charging on the nightstand.

"Nah, I believe you. When it comes to that stuff I am willing to concede you know far more than I do." He absent mindedly ran his hand over the hair of Steve's chest as he spoke and for a brief moment thought the taller man might start purring.

The quietness of the moment reminded him of the vow the three members of the Williams' clan had made to indoctrinate the SEAL into the family one small act of affection at a time. "Would you like me to come run with you?"

"Really?" Steve lifted his head to really look at Danny's face.

"Well, by with you I mean you can speed off on your stupidly long legs and complete the ridiculous number of miles you like to do and then meet back up with me on the return trip and we can finish the rest together." He knew he needed to get back in to his own workout regimen. Though he'd never really enjoyed the process it was one he knew he had to endure for the sake of his career choice.

"You would really do that?" Steve still sounded shocked.

"Yes, Super SEAL. I would really do that. If I am going to spend the rest of my life keeping up with you I might as well start training for it. Something tells me I am in for one hell of an endurance sport." Lifting himself off Steve, he moved to get out of the bed. "Come on. If we're going to do this we should get going."

Danny watched his partner nearly spring out of bed, a huge goofy grin spread across his face. Hell, had he known offering to go for a run with the guy would produce that kind of result he would have done it months ago. The pair got ready in an easy silence. Despite Danny's penchant for ranting and talking so much of the time, they were actually quite comfortable simply sharing the same space.

Heading downstairs and into the kitchen, Steve seemed less surprised to find the towel and note than he was the previous mornings. He quickly read the simple note before grabbing a second water bottle to fill with ice and water for Danny.

Before heading out, the SEAL jotted his own note to Mama Williams letting her know Danny was with him for a run so she wouldn't worry if she came down to find the towel and water gone and him
not on the beach. He'd already figured out she was watching from the kitchen window during some part of his swim. He felt the eyes on him yesterday morning, but instead of being bothered it simply made him feel cared for. She cared enough to look out and make sure he was there and safe.

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Waking in her granddaughter's bed, Beth felt the little girl's back pressed against her side and heard her quiet breathing.

A moment later she heard what sounded like two sets of footsteps headed downstairs. Glancing at the clock she was surprised that her son was up and moving this early. When she heard the back door close a few minutes later, she decided to get up and go make some coffee. Either Daniel was sitting downstairs alone and she could join him or he had gone outside with Steve and she would have time to enjoy her first cup of coffee alone. Either prospect was welcome.

Slipping from the bed, she pulled the blanket more snugly over Grace to offset the now missing body heat before sneaking quietly out of the room. She suspected today would be a bit hard on everyone given that the funeral was tomorrow. The dread of what was coming was almost inevitable.

Twenty minutes after the boys had left, Beth finally headed down to the kitchen dressed and ready for the day. She immediately noticed Danny didn't appear to be in the house and then spotted the note. She was pleased to see that her son was out with his partner. She knew he kept in pretty good shape, but his penchant for less than healthy eating had always concerned her a bit. She could readily imagine his relationship with Steven would provide some additional motivation to take even better care of himself.

Getting the coffee maker ready, she milled around the kitchen pondering what she could come up with for lunch. Based on schedules, she was going to need to make sure Danny, Steve, and Dianne were fed early even if everyone else waited a bit. It appeared she had the materials to throw together a pasta salad and extra fruit and veggies to act as sides. That would work well and could be pulled out for people to eat as they wished.

Digging through the cabinets, she found a large pot and filled it with water to cook the pasta. She could wait until later, but it would be better if it had time to sit. Plus, she also found the rituals of preparing food for her family rather relaxing. Just as she was finishing mixing everything together with the pasta her cell phone rang on the counter. Glancing at the caller id she was surprised to see it was Dianne.

“This is Beth.” She answered quickly, concerned that something may be wrong.

“Beth, sorry to bother you so early. I didn't wake you did I?" The British woman was suddenly concerned she was calling so early.

“No, I was actually just finishing up some pasta salad for lunch while the boys are out getting some exercise. I believe Grace is the only one still in bed.” She put the pasta in the fridge and climbed onto one of the stools to finish her second cup of coffee.

“That explains why Daniel didn't answer his phone. I didn't realize he went out with Steven in the mornings.”

Beth laughed at that comment. “He doesn't usually, though I won't be surprised if he starts joining him a bit more often. It would be good for him.”

“Yes, I am sure it would be. Anyway, when was unable to reach Daniel I thought I would try you, I
“Not at all. What can I do for you?” Beth hoped everything was okay.

“I just wanted to see if it was okay if I came over a bit earlier today. There is a delicious bakery here, and I thought I might bring breakfast if everyone has not eaten yet.”

Beth smiled at her phone. “That sounds like a wonderful idea. I am not sure how much longer the boys will be out, but you should have time to get here before their appetites really make an appearance.” If they showed up early she could probably placate them with coffee and the promise of baked goods to come.

“Wonderful. I will make sure to pick up plenty so they don't go hungry. I will see you shortly.”

“See you soon.” Mrs. Williams set the phone back on the counter. At least that solved the question of what to do for breakfast.

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Rounding corner toward the back of the house, Steve and Danny were both covered in sweat from their run. They had been out for roughly an hour.

“Well babe, you managed not to kill me.” The detective gasped as they rounded the corner to the house. “You going for a swim still?”

McGarrett laughed as he grabbed his partner's hand, dragging him toward the chairs that held their water and his towel. “Of course.”

Reaching their destination and taking a quick drink of water, he removed his sneakers and socks. Grabbing the back of Danny's neck, he hauled him close for a brief, but passionate kiss. Just as quickly, he let go, stripped out of his shirt, and jogged toward the water.

“Thank you!” Danny called after him, laughing as he fell back into the chair. Leave it to his crazy Super SEAL to kiss him senseless and then run off. At least this time he wasn't running off for fear of rejection.

After catching his breath and drinking some water, the detective rose and started stretching. It had been a little while since he had really pushed himself running and he knew he would be sore later. Steve probably had the right idea with heading into the water, though his present pace looked more like a race than a cool down to the Jersey native.

Hearing a car pull up, Danny turned to look toward the house. When he heard doors shutting and then the car pulling away he guessed it might be Dianne. It was nice to see Rachel's mother truly making an effort to follow their advice to spend as much time here as possible during her stay on the island.

Turning back to face the water, he was completely absorbed in watching his partner's long arms slicing through the water, heading away from shore again. Apparently he was so lost in the sight that he didn't hear the back door open or Grace approaching as she seemed to just materialize beside him.

“Mornin' Danno! Did you have fun running with Daddy?” She asked innocently. His daughter knew running was not one of his favorite pastimes.

“It actually wasn't too bad, at least not once he came back and was running with me.” He noticed her confused expression. “I sent him ahead since I knew he would want to go further and faster. He
caught me on his return and we finished the rest together.”

She nodded in understanding. “One of these days I'll go run with Daddy.”

Looking down at his daughter he rested a hand on her shoulder and pulled her against his side. “I bet he'd like that, Monkey.” No doubt, Super SEAL would gleefully adjust his pace and distance to accommodate her.

“Grandma Bradley bought breakfast from the bakery at the resort. It looks really good, so I came out to see if you guys were almost done.” They both looked out to see where the SEAL was since it was him they were waiting on.

McGarrett was surprising close to the water’s edge, having spotted Grace approaching when he had turned for his last lap out. Already having run pretty aggressively this morning, he opted for a few shorter laps instead of going further out in a single lap as he was sometimes prone to doing.

Seeing Steve about to emerge from the water, Grace grabbed his towel and ran down to meet him. Though tempted to follow, Danny settled for watching his two favorite people. Accepting the towel, Steve quickly dried off enough that he wouldn't get the little girl soaked when he gave her a hug. Leaning down, he welcomed her embrace.

“Mornin' Gracie. How did you sleep last night?” He asked as she leaned further into his arms.

“Pretty well. I just woke up a little bit ago. Grandma Williams already made stuff for lunch and Grandma Bradley just got here with breakfast. Are you hungry?”

She backed up a step as he moved to stand, since he was still pretty wet it didn't seem like a good idea to hitch a ride back to the house on the Super SEAL this time.

“Starving. Should we collect Danno and head that way?”

Grabbing his hand, she led the way, grabbing her father's hand when she reached him. Danny tossed Steve his water bottle before grabbing his own and heading to the house with them.

The two women met them at the door, having watched them approach from the kitchen window.

“You two go get changed. I will make a fresh pot of coffee so we can enjoy it with our breakfast. You will never believe the delicious looking things Dianne brought with her.”

Grace slipped over to stand between her grandmothers, wrapping an arm around each of their waists.

“Yes mom.” Danny and Steve answered in unison as they hurried off to the stairs.

“Well, they certainly know better than to argue with you, don't they?” Dianne laughed.

Beth and Grace both laughed loudly at that assumption. “Pretty sure it had more to do with wanting to get to the food than actually listening to me.”

The three ladies turned and headed back to the kitchen to make sure everything was set out for the inevitable hasty return of the pair. It was going to be a rough week, but they would face it as a family. They would find strength in each other and in the other members of their ohana that would surround them, but first they would enjoy a quiet breakfast with the five of them.
Chapter 38

Although breakfast was usually enjoyed in the kitchen, the addition of Dianne to the usual morning group warranted sitting in the dining room. Anything more than four and they ran out of places to sit around the island. Having put a healthy dent in the tasty treats Mrs. Bradley brought with her, they now sat around telling her some of the stories of the many exploits McGarrett and the two younger members of the Williams clan enjoyed.

“I still remember the first time we actually got Danny out on a surfboard.” Steve was laughing so hard he could barely speak.

“You mean when we couldn't actually get him to stand up?” Grace added.

“Hey, in my defense I was technically capable of standing on a surfboard in the water thanks to training with Kono, but you two made me nervous.” Danny defended himself. Before the other two could argue, he laughed. “Yes, I know that was stupid, but I just knew I would screw up with the pair of you watching.”

After a moment of laughter, Dianne finally asked. “Have you managed to get over that?” She could not imagine Steve letting Danny get out of surfing in front of him forever.

“Yes. As much time as we spend at the beach here and other places on the island I did finally get over it. Of course, Kono forced the issue. She told these two when and where to be during one of my lessons, so they were watching without me knowing. They were so excited when I got back on land that I couldn't very well hide anymore.”

Both mothers laughed. They could readily envision Kono arranging that little scene.

“Speaking of the devil,” Danny looked toward the door. “I think I heard car doors.” Glancing at the clock he saw that it was already close to 10 o'clock.

Steve rose from his seat, motioning the others to stay put. “I'll grab the door.” Nearing the door he could see Kono, Cath, and Chin through the window. He supposed it wasn't surprising that they'd come a bit early today knowing that he, Danny, and Dianne would all be leaving before noon.

Opening the door, he smiled widely at the trio. “Mornin'!”

“Hey boss. Hope we aren't here to early?” The Hawaiian woman stepped inside, followed by the other two.

“Not at all. Danno and I already got a workout in and Dianne brought breakfast. There's still plenty left on the table if anybody is hungry.”

The newcomers all followed him back to the dining room, greeting the waiting family warmly as they grabbed seats.

“Do you kids want some coffee? I was about to make another pot anyway.” Beth pushed away from the table and moved toward the kitchen.

“I certainly won't turn it down if you were making it anyway.” Catherine quipped. She'd had a cup earlier in the morning, but wouldn't mind another.

“Same for me, mom.” Chin answered as his cousin nodded her agreement. “Can I lend a hand?” He
followed her toward the kitchen, not really leaving her room to argue.

“So, what’s the plan for today? I know Daddy, Danno, and Grandma,” Grace looked toward Dianne, “have to go out around lunch. Grandma Williams already made pasta salad so we can eat whenever we get hungry.”

“Well, what would you like to do Grace?” Kono asked. With the funeral tomorrow she wasn't sure how much it was going to impact the little girl's mood today. She, Chin, and Cath had all agreed they’d stay flexible with whatever Grace felt like doing.

“Could we practice some?” She sounded hopeful. “I bet Grandma would like to practice too.”

Dianne looked across to her granddaughter, slightly puzzled. She assumed she meant the other grandma since Grace knew she was going to the appointment, but wasn't sure what they were practicing.

Seeing the puzzled look, Cath explained. “We are teaching Grace and Beth self-defense. We have only practiced a couple of times so far, but they are both quick learners.”

Mrs. Bradley nodded her head, smiling at the group. “That sounds like a really neat idea. Maybe next time I come visit you can help teach me a few things.”

Steve could see the older woman thinking from her seat across the table. “We would love to teach you.”

Grace smiled up at the SEAL. “It was Daddy's idea for Aunt Kono and Aunt Cath to teach me. He didn't want me to have to be scared all the time.” She leaned into the arm he wrapped around her shoulder from his seat next to her.

“Sounds like your Daddy is a pretty smart guy.” Dianne smiled at the pair. She realized that she never would have considered teaching Grace something like that, but that it made perfect sense.

Returning with her hands full of coffee cups and Chin on her heels with more, Beth laughed. “I would have to agree, Dianne. Though I think that statement could apply to all the kids.” She sounded every bit like the proud mama.

“I do believe you are right.” Mrs. Bradley quickly assented.

“So did I overhear that we will be sneaking in some practice today?” She looked to her granddaughter and received a quick nod. “Sounds like a plan.”

“I shouldn't be gone too long to pick up Mary.” Steve interjected. Everyone gave him a sympathetic smile, the tone of his voice gave away his disappointment as missing the practice session.

“Don't worry Daddy, we won't start until after lunch.” Grace grinned up at him. “I bet you will be back with Aunt Mary in time to have some fun.”

Leaning over he kissed the little girl on the top of her head. Noticing his partner's expression, he stuck his tongue out playfully in his direction.

“I swear, sometimes I am not sure which one of you is actually the kid.” Danny shook his head as he grinned at his daughter and partner.

After everyone finished enjoying their fill of the treats from the bakery, Grace volunteered to clear the table and wash up the dishes.
“Would you like some help, Gracie?” Steve offered, not wanting her to have to do all the work since she had offered to do it without being told.

“It's okay Daddy. You don't need to help. I've got it.” She stacked all the plates and headed toward the kitchen.

Chuckling at her refusal to let the SEAL help, Chin rose and started grabbing coffee cups. “Maybe she'll let her Uncle help her.” Truth be told, the Hawaiian really just wanted to see how his little niece was holding up and spending a few minutes washing dishes together seemed like a prime time to find out.

Apparently Grace's refusal of assistance didn't hold up against his offer as the pair returned to the dining room together to grab the remaining dishes before disappearing into the kitchen. After getting the dish water ready, they stood next to each other quietly working for a few moments before the little girl spoke.

“Everything okay, Uncle Chin?” Though he was usually the quietest of her ohana she had still learned to read him very well in recent months.

Chuckling quietly, he looked down at his honorary niece as he rinsed the dish in his hand. “I actually wanted to ask you that question.”

He watched as she let the plate she was washing sink to the bottom of the water and stood staring at the soap suds for several long seconds.

“Gracie, it is okay if you don't really want to talk. I know you have got all kinds of people to make sure you are okay, but I just wanted to make sure you knew you could talk to me if you wanted.”

The little girl finally looked up at him. In all the craziness, she'd forgotten that her Uncle Chin could understand some of how she felt since it hadn't been that long since he'd lost Aunt Malia.

“Thanks Uncle Chin.” She gave him a small smile. “I miss mom a lot, but I'm not as sad as I thought I would be when everyone is here with me.” She admitted quietly.

“I know the feeling. It hurt a lot when Malia died and I was very sad. I still miss her, but having our ohana here with me helped me get through it. I think it is easier to move forward when you have so many people around you to love you and remind you of all the good things you still have.”

Picking up the plate again, Grace resumed washing. “I think you might be right.”

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Driving toward the funeral home, there was no conversation in the car as Danny was unsure of what to say. He had volunteered to come with Dianne, but wondered if he would actually be of any use.

“Daniel, before we get there, can I ask you a question?” Watching the road intently, the woman's voice actually startled him a bit.

“Of course.” He tried to sound calm even as he was more than a bit nervous about what the question was.

“Did you and Rachel ever talk about what she wanted to happen if she passed?” Her voice faltered with the final words.

Instinctively, the detective reached a hand across and wrapped it around one of her slender hands,
giving it a small squeeze of encouragement.

“We did.” He replied. “Why?”

She was quiet for a moment before explaining. “It is just that I made all these arrangements and I am realizing that I really have no idea what she would have wanted. I planned to have the body brought back to England with me, but now I wonder if that is really fair to Grace. She will have no grave to visit. If I leave Rachel here I won't have a grave to visit at home, but I can always come see her when I visit.”

Danny took a deep breath. “She actually wanted to be cremated.” He spoke quietly, afraid of what kind of reaction that might receive. As traditional as Dianne had always seemed it didn't seem unlikely that she would balk at the idea of cremation.

“Oh.” The older woman did sound a bit startled. “I never even considered that option.”

The car remained silent for several moments, Dianne lost in thought and Danny unwilling to interrupt her after delivering the last startling revelation.

“I suppose I will have to ask about changing the arrangements. I have realized I was never overly supportive of the decisions she made while she was alive and I will be damned if I am going to disregard her wishes for how she would be treated in death.” She spoke with conviction. “Thank you.”

Danny chanced a sideways glance at her, surprised by the thanks.

“Thank you for being honest with me and giving me the chance to do as she wished. I know it won't change the way our relationship ended, but maybe she will still see that I tried.”

He squeezed the hand he still held again. “I am sure she will and I am sure she will appreciate it.”

The rest of the drive was finish in silence, though it was a much more relaxed silence than they’d started.

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Pulling up in front of the passenger pickup area, Steve quickly spotted Mary as she waved in the direction of his truck. Coming to a stop beside her, he didn't even have a chance to get out before she tossed her bag in the back of the truck and opened the passenger door.

Climbing in, Mary gave him a big smile. “How's my favorite big brother?”

Reaching across and giving her a quick hug, he laughed. “I am your only big brother.” Throwing the truck back into drive he pulled away from the curb and started the trip toward home.

“Technically yes, but I think Chin and Danny both claim spots on the list as well.” She laughed as she continued to watch Steve. “Seriously though, how are you holding up?”

“It has been rough, but I'm dealing with it.” He threw her a nervous sideways glance. I am glad you were able to come home for a bit. You were the missing piece to having the whole ohana together and right now having everyone together seems pretty nice.”

“I'm glad I could make it. I miss you.” She reached across and squeezed his forearm where it rested.

“Miss you too.” Despite the certain level of chaos that seemed to follow Mary, Steve really did love
his sister a lot and missed having her around more. “Given any more thought to moving back to the island?”

“It has crossed my mind, but I am not quite ready yet. Maybe in a few more months.” She admitted.

“You let me know when you decide. You know we will do whatever we can to help you get resettled.”

She laughed. “Trust me, I will. Now, tell me how everybody else is holding up and what I should expect when we get to the house.”

The rest of the drive was spent catching her up on more details of things with Grace and Danny, Beth and Paul's pending move, and Dianne's appearance in their lives.

Pulling up at the house, Mary looked at her big brother for a few seconds before moving to get out of the truck.

“Come on, I want to go see my niece.” She opened the door to climb out.

“Check out back first. I'll stick your bag outside and meet you guys out there.” He guessed they'd all be out practicing.

Grabbing her back from the back, he headed toward the house as he heard Grace's voice from the back. “Aunt Mary!”

McGarrett smiled to himself. It was definitely nice to have the whole family home.
Steve dropped Mary's bag inside the house and quickly made his way to the back where everyone was gathered. He smiled to see Grace impressing his sister with what she had learned so far in her self-defense lessons. Seeing Chin's face as the little girl landed a good defensive blow, he couldn't help but laugh.

“Hey, you just wait until she's practicing on you.” The Hawaiian snickered at him.

“Yep. We are teaching her control for practice, but we are also using the target pads to have her practice at full strength.” Catherine interjected.

“That's good.” Steve grinned at the group. “I'll be more than happy to take the beating when Grace decides she wants to take me on.” He winked at the little girl as he sat down next to Mary.

The others continued practicing as the siblings watched. “She is a natural.” Mary commented quietly.

“Yes. She is. It is going to be a lot of fun watching her as she gets bigger if decides she wants to keep up the training.” She could hear the love and pride in his voice as he spoke of the little girl.

“Given how much she clearly adores you, and the rest of this crazy group, I have no doubt that she will keep it up. Heck, I would be seriously surprised if she doesn't end up pursuing a career in military or law enforcement.” She leaned over and nudged her brother's arm with her shoulder.

“Yeah. I think that is both Danny's worst nightmare and something that would make him immensely proud.” Speaking of his partner, he glanced down at his watch. It likely wouldn't be too much longer before he and Dianne reappeared at home. He hoped the appointment went well.

“Daddy.” Grace’s voice interrupted his thought. “Do you want to practice with Aunt Kono and Aunt Cath?” He noticed that Beth has just sat down to get a drink of water.

Hopping to his feet, he gave his daughter a wide smile. “Of course I do!” Stepping away from where Mary sat, he eyed his opponents cautiously.

“Bring it, Super SEAL.” Kono laughed mockingly. The two women had been waiting for the chance to go up against him since his stunt with Danny on the beach.

Grace plopped down next to her Aunt Mary, though both kept their eyes focused on the trio in front of them. Not wanting to get caught in the middle of things, Chin circled around and came to sit on the little girl’s other side.

“I am impressed, Gracie. You are quite a natural with how fast you are picking up the moves.” He stretched his legs out in front of him as he leaned back next to her.

“Thanks Uncle Chin. Learning how much I can do even at my size is pretty neat.” She couldn’t hide the surprise in her voice.

“Remember what we told you, it is not all about size. Though being big can sometimes be an advantage, it can also be a disadvantage. What is important is learning how to use your size and skills to your advantage.” His words of encouragement were interrupted by a yelp from McGarrett,
immediately followed by howls of laughter from the two women.

“Seriously, I leave him unattended for a couple of hours and he manages to get himself into trouble already?” Danny’s voice sounded from behind them followed by a laugh from Dianne.

“Danno! You're back!” Grace scrambled up to hug her father and grandmother.

“Of course I’m back.” He ruffled her hair. “Think I should go save him?”

Chin snickered as he watched Danny kick off his nice shoes and loosen the tie so he could pull it over his head. The Hawaiian could tell his boss was content to hold back some of his almost inhuman skills and settle for a good fight with the two rather formidable women as long as it was just him at risk. In about two seconds when the SEAL realized Danny had entered the fray the Super SEAL would come out to play and it would all be over.

Mary was slightly confused, as Dianne sat down next to her, but didn’t even introduce herself as her attention was fixed on the sparring match in front of them. Glancing at Chin and Grace, she noticed they were also completely engrossed. Curious what they expected to happen, Mary turned her attention back to her brother.

If you asked her later what had happened, she couldn’t have told you. She remembered seeing Steve’s hand reach out and touch Danny’s arm with the women closing in on them, and the next thing she knew her brother had his partner tucked safely behind him and both women were on the ground laughing.

Hearing the laughter around her, she looked over to Grace and Chin. “What was that?”

The little girl giggled. “That is Daddy in protective Super SEAL mode. Drives Danno nuts every time.”

Mary glanced up at Chin hoping for a better explanation. “I would imagine the same thing would happen if you or Grace were in danger. Steve seems to operate at two different levels. There is the normal human Steve, highly trained but also highly controlled. That is what you see if it is only his skin at risk. Then there is the Super SEAL mode that seems to automatically come out to play when someone he cares about is at risk. Even then I am pretty sure he uses more control in situations like this than he would if it were an actual attacker. In that case I am pretty sure we would either be calling in an ambulance or possibly even Max.”

The Hawaiian laughed as she shook her head. Mary knew her brother was both extremely protective and extremely dangerous to potential threats, but she had never seen him in action like that. After a few silent seconds, the sound of a voice clearing behind her interrupted her. Turning, she faced the woman she assumed was Rachel’s mother.

“You must be Mary. I am Dianne Bradley, Grace’s grandmother.” She extended a hand in greeting.

“I am. It is nice to meet you. I am so sorry for your loss.” She squeezed the offered hand in sympathy.

“Thank you dear. It has been hard, but I also feel like I have gained an entire new family in the last few days, and I am trying to focus on that.”

Mary smiled and nodded. She knew the feeling. When she had been sent away to live with her aunt she had to learn to do much the same thing. Focus on the new life that was presented to her and try to move past the overwhelming grief at not only losing her mother, but also her father and brother in many ways.
Distracted by her thoughts, Steve's sister almost didn't realize that everyone else was now sitting around the blankets with them. The sound of Danny ranting at her brother about not letting him fight brought her back to the present.

“Oh come on Danny, from what I hear you should be used to it.”

The detective reached over and gave her a quick hug. “You would think so, but just once I would like to be able to prove that I can actually hold my own.”

“Maybe next time we should handcuff him to the truck so he has to just stand there and watch?” Kono teased.

“Nah, cuz. That would just end in the truck needing to go to the shop or our crazy boss dislocating something to escape.” Chin laughed.

“Hey!” Steve tried to sound offended.

“It's okay Daddy.” Grace scooted over to his lap where she could cuddle with him while keeping a hand on Danno's arm. “We know you just do it because you love us.”

The SEAL leaned down and kissed the top of her head as he curled one arm protectively around her, the other wrapped loosely around Danny's waist.

Beth watched the scene around her and smiled sadly, wishing Paul were here with the family. At the surface they all looked reasonably calm and relaxed, but she could see the tension and sadness building under the surface as the day progressed. By tomorrow afternoon she imagined the mood was going to be considerably different. Though having Paul around would have helped and provided some comfort to her, she was glad to know that this group would get through the funeral the way they seemed to get through everything – as family.

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Kono and Danny stood in the kitchen, grabbing refills of drinks to take back to the others in the living room. Somewhere along the line pizzas had been ordered and everyone had settled in to watch How to Train Your Dragon and Megamind. It seemed everyone was reluctant to leave as if that would make tomorrow come sooner.

“Danny?” Kono spoke quietly as she placed a hand on his arm, stopping him from grabbing the tray and heading back to the living room. When he met her gaze, she continued. “How do you want us to handle tomorrow before the funeral? Do you want us to meet you guys there, meet here just before, or be here in the morning?”

The detective's shoulders sagged, he had not really thought about it. Honestly he had tried not to think about the coming day. Seeing he was struggling with what to answer, Kono pulled him closer and wrapped her arms around the man that was so much of an older brother to her.

“I'm sorry Danny. I didn't meant to upset you, but we didn't want to make any assumptions.”

Stepping back slightly, he met her eyes again. “I appreciate that. Honestly, I think having you guys here in the morning would be good. I am not sure how Grace, Dianne, or I will be feeling, but so far we all seem to hold it together better as a unit.” He paused for a second. “Can you remind the others about surfboard?”

“Oh, of course, I don't think anyone forgot, but I will make sure to remind them.” She squeezed his arm again. “We will bring some stuff over for breakfast so mom doesn't have to do everything.”
Danny chuckled. “You know that won’t stop her from cooking, right?”

She smiled back at him. “I know, but at least it will reduce the amount she has to worry about.”

“True.” Grabbing their trays the two headed back to join the others.

Setting them on the table, Kono reclaimed her spot on the couch as Danny slid back onto the blanket and pillow covered floor next to Grace. She immediately reached for his hand. He smiled seeing her other hand curled inside one of Steve’s even as he felt the SEAL’s free hand snake behind her to grip his own shoulder.

Meeting his partner’s eyes, his breath caught for a moment. He honestly was not sure he would ever get used to the depth of feelings he saw there — love, devotion, protection, loyalty – the list could go on for quite some time. More importantly, he knew those feelings did not just include him, but the little girl tucked safely between them, shielded from the outside world by two men that would do anything to keep her safe, and surrounded by an ohana that would do the same.

As the second movie ended, the group reluctantly started preparing to disperse for the night. By the time all the hugs were exchanged, Dianne’s car had arrived and Chin, Catherine, and Kono walked out with her.

When the door closed behind them, Beth looked at her boys and granddaughter and then to the living room.

“Why don’t you three head on up to bed, and I will pick this up real quick.” When both men started to open their mouths, she held a hand up. “No. Go to bed.”

Nodding their heads, the pair conceded defeat. As she watched them head toward the stairs, Grace holding each of their hands between them she heard the little girl’s voice.

“Danno, Daddy?” She sounded both tired and nervous. The men both froze and squatted down to see what was wrong.

“What is it, Monkey?” Danny asked when she didn’t continue.

“It’s okay, sweetheart. You can tell us.” Steve added when she was still quiet.

Staring down at the floor, she finally spoke. “Can I stay with you tonight?” Beth caught the instantaneous relief on their faces as the men both nodded.

“Sure you can.” Danny answered. “You go brush your teeth and get your pajamas on then you can come over to our room.

Watching them head up the stairs, Beth wiped a tear from her eyes. She felt incredibly blessed to witness those small moments of her eldest son and his family, incredibly lucky to be able to be so close to them.

Chapter End Notes

As I'm sure you can tell, we are getting very close to the funeral. Part of me is tempted to post the next few chapters quickly just to get the worst of it over with. So let me know, would you prefer to get the worst of it out of the way on a Monday or carry it out
for a few days?
There will be a few chapters going up today simply because I need to not spend my week reliving the emotional trauma that is the funeral chapters. Based on experience with my ff.net readers, I am issuing a tissue warning now. If you tend to cry when reading, please be prepared. On that note, I'm sorry, but it must be done.

Slipping downstairs, Mary found Beth already awake and in the kitchen with a freshly brewed pot of coffee.

“Hey. I didn't think anybody else would be up yet.” She nodded when Danny's mom held up a cup, silently asking if she would like coffee.

“I am not the only one. Your brother is already in the water.” The older woman turned her gaze out the window, checking to make sure he was still going strong.

Catching the expression on Beth's face, Mary smiled as she joined her by the window. “You care a lot about him, don't you?” Her voice held a certain sadness. Though she would never begrudge Steve the love and care of a mother figure, she missed having that in her own life.

Beth handed her the cup of coffee and wrapped one arm around the younger McGarrett. “I care a great deal for all my children no matter how they may have landed in my life. Hopefully with Paul and me moving here we will be able to count you among those children.”

Unable to resist, Mary leaned closer to the petite woman as she blinked back the tears that pooled in her eyes. Sniffing quietly, she took a drink of the coffee. “Thanks.” They stood silently for a moment. “I told Steve that I might actually think about moving back in a few months. LA just doesn't feel like home anymore and I guess I am hoping I can find a more settled place with the family here. I just don't want to get in the way and ruin it for him.”

Guiding the younger woman toward the island, Beth slipped onto one of the stools and waited for her to do the same. “Mary Ann, I do not believe your brother or anyone else in this family would think you were getting in the way. I know you have had your rough spots, but watching this bunch together I can tell how much having those he loves close means to Steven.”

Mary just shook her head. “It seems like he has changed so much since he first came back. Danny has been really good for him. I am really glad they finally figured it out.” She stared down at her coffee for several long seconds before looking back to Beth. “I would never forgive myself if I caused a problem and messed it up for them.”

She was so caught up talking that she missed the sound of footsteps approaching until Danny appeared a few feet from her.

“Hey, there is nothing you can do that will mess this up. We finally got it right and I will be damned if I let anything tear it apart. That being said, I really do hope you decide to move out here sooner rather than later. I think the giant goof would feel better knowing you are close and quite frankly, so
would I. Plus, having an extra aunt around to help with Grace will definitely be a good thing.”

Danny accepted the cup of coffee that Beth pressed into his hands as he pulled a stool around the island to sit at the corner next to Mary.

“Thanks, ma.” He gave her a quick kiss on the cheek before placing his hand on top of Mary's on the island. “We don't want you to feel pressured into moving before you are ready, but know that we genuinely look forward to having you close.”

“Thanks Danny. It is good to know.” She smiled back at him though she still felt like everyone was just saying what they thought they should. Mary knew she was too much of a mess to serve any purpose here.

“So, apparently Grace and I slept straight through my crazy SEAL sneaking out to swim this morning. How long has he been out?” The detective somehow knew his mother would know. She had an uncanny ability to keep track of where everyone in the house was at any given moment in time.

“He has been out for nearly an hour, so I suspect he will be headed back in soon.” She turned to look out the window again as she spoke. “Looks like he is headed back toward shore now.”

Hearing the sound of car doors slamming outside, Danny glanced up at the clock. “Well, Kono did say they would come bearing contributions for breakfast.” He hopped off the stool. “I will go let them in. Grace should be down in a minute.”

Opening the door, he was a bit surprised to see Dianne arriving with the other three. “Well, that was some impeccable timing.”

“Actually, Daniel, they insisted on coming to get me this morning.” She threw a fond smile at the other three.

Cath, Kono, and Chin smiled sweetly at the two of them. They had all agreed Rachel's mom did not need to be left alone or at the mercy of a driver, no matter how competent, on this day. For the three of them today was all about strength in numbers and providing back up for their ohana.

“We brought food.” Chin raised the bags he carried up.

“Do I smell malasadas?” Danny leaned toward one of the bags.

“Some police groups have bomb sniffing dogs, we have a malasada sniffing detective.” Kono ribbed as she walked passed him. “Guess we all have to have our talents.”

Ushering them all inside, Danny followed them into the kitchen just as Grace arrived downstairs. She glanced at the clock and seemed surprised it was still early given that everyone was here.

Noticing her observation, Chin set his bags down and moved to give her a hug. “We thought you might appreciate having us here early today.” He leaned back slightly and met her eyes.

She nodded, understanding after their conversation the day before and leaned back in to give him a second hug. “Thanks Uncle Chin.”

By the time they rose and looked toward the rest of the group, the women were busy pulling things out of bags and taking inventory of what they had. They had brought a bunch of malasadas and fresh fruit, so Beth just decided she would scramble some eggs and cook up some sausage for anybody that wanted some protein. Even if no one else did, Steve would feel better eating more than just sugar
and that was enough for her.

When Dianne started pulling the eggs out of the fridge, Beth rested a hand on her shoulder making her pause. “You don't have to help.”

“I know, but if I sit still I will start thinking about later today and I just can't …” Her voices dropped off.

“In that case, you want to tackle the eggs while I get the sausage going?” She received a quick appreciative nod and smile from Ms. Bradley as they set to work.

The sound of the lanai door closing was nearly missed amidst the breakfast prep and general chatter in the kitchen, but Grace heard it. Giving Chin a small smile, she slipped off in the direction of the door to find Steve. Spotting the little girl as he turned from the door, Steve closed the distance between then and dropped to his knees to embrace her. Her face said it all, she had come for a hug, and he was more than willing to supply one.

Resting her head on her daddy's shoulder, Grace closed her eyes and let the heat of his sun warmed skin soothe her. She had woken earlier snuggled into Danno's arms and they had stayed that way for quite a while before finally getting out of bed, but now she needed the reassurance of the SEAL's presence.

When she finally loosened her grip on him, Steve sat back on his heels and looked at her. “Everything okay?” His hands still rested on her upper arms.

She nodded. “Yeah. Everybody is here in case I need them, but I just needed one of your hugs. They brought food.” Smiling at him, she knew he was always hungry after his swim.

“Think I have time to grab a quick shower?” He arched an eyebrow as he asked.

“You better hurry. The Grandmas are making the eggs and sausage to go with the malasadas and fruit.” She watched as he rose back to his full height.

“Then I better hustle.” He leaned back down and gave her a quick kiss on the top of the head. “I love you, Gracie.”

“Love you too, Daddy.” She watched as he disappeared up the stairs. Turning around she saw Danno leaning against the wall. When he opened his arms to her, she quickly went to him and wrapped her arms around his waist.

“Love you too, Danno.”

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Straightening his tie, Steve watched Danny in the mirror as his partner fidgeted with his shirt cuffs. He sent up a silent prayer that the next several hours would go as smoothly as possible. He worried about how Dianne was going to hold up, but his primary focus would be Grace and Danny. Fortunately, Catherine had pulled him aside earlier and let him know that she would stay close to Rachel's mom and offer what support she could.

Feeling like he was being watched, Danny glanced up and met Steve's eyes in the mirror. He tried to offer up a reassuring smile, but it fell short. Before he could muster up anything to convince his partner he was okay, the SEAL crossed the distance between them. When the long arms wrapped around him, pulling him close he did not even try to fight it, but let himself go limp against the protective frame of his partner.
Holding Danny tightly, the SEAL kissed the top of his head before whispering reassurances. “Remember Danno, you are not alone out there today. I am there for whatever you need, and the rest of our ohana will be right there with us too.”

He felt the shorter man nod against his chest even though he did not speak. They stood in the silent embrace for several moments, Danny drawing strength from Steve's warm and solid presence.

When he finally stepped back, the detective could not help let out a small laugh. Seeing his partner's concerned face, he offered a better smile than he had managed earlier.

“I just realized that apparently it is a Williams' family thing, trying to hide in your hugs when we are getting overwhelmed.” Steve's arched brow told him he had not quite connected the dots. “I could give you plenty of examples, but I was watching this morning when you came in from your swim.”

Nodding his head, Steve continued to watch his partner. He knew how Danny felt about his role with Grace, but some small part of him still feared being told he was out of line.

“It is very nice to know that we can rely on those hugs right now. Hopefully you don't get tired of having one of us constantly climbing into your arms.” Grabbing his suit jacket off the bed, Danny slipped it on before handing Steve's to him.

Accepting the jacket, the SEAL let his fingers linger on Danny's longer than was necessary. “I will be here for as many hugs as it takes. Pretty sure I can even fit both of you in my arms at once if needed.”

Shrugging his jacket on, he grabbed his partner's hand and they headed for the door. Entering the hall, they were greeted by the sight of Kono, Cath, and Grace emerging from the little girl's room. The women had accepted her offer to get ready with her, understanding that she really did not want to be left alone to get ready for her mother's funeral.

They released her hands as soon as they spotted her fathers and watched as she immediately positioned herself between the two men. Hearing doors open down the hall, they turned to see Dianne and Beth came from one room and Mary from another.

The eight headed downstairs and found Chin in his suit waiting in the middle of the living room. The house was uncharacteristically quiet as they all gathered for the final moments before they would pile into three vehicles and head to the church.

“We do this together.” Steve's strong voice finally broke the silence. “Everyone stays with at least one other member of the family and uses the code word if needed.” They had discussed it earlier and decided that any of them could use surfboard rather than strictly limiting it to Grace.

Everyone closed in around Steve, Danny, and Grace in one last family hug before they had to face the rest of the world.
Chapter 41

Chapter Notes

This is one of those chapters that I will shameless beg for comments for… pretty please. You guys are a pretty quiet bunch.

Please note that this chapter does not claim to be an accurate description of any specific religious funeral services, etc. This chapter is meant to focus on the family and the emotion of the day.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Pulling into the church parking lot, Dianne and Beth were both shocked to see the number of police cruisers in the area. “I suppose this is because the governor said he was attending.” Mrs. Bradley appreciated that he was coming, but hated to think it would turn her daughter's funeral into a three ring circus.

“No, ma'am.” Catherine shook her head, as she maneuvered Steve's truck into the parking lot behind the Camaro. “I think this is just a show of support for Five-0 and their family.”

Dianne and Beth looked at each other and then back out of the windows.

Pulling the car into one of the closest parking spots to the entrance, Steve looked around them and then over at Danny.

“I never imagined this.” The detective met his partner's eyes as he struggled to blink back tears. Aside from Meka, he had always been made to feel like the outsider, the haole cop from Jersey, before he had joined the task force. Even the early days of Five-0 saw tension between HPD and the task force.

Climbing from the car, Danny grabbed Grace's hand and held her close as they headed for the church. Steve met them at the front of the car, clearly watching their surroundings to ensure they met no surprises.

Duke and a few other uniformed HPD officers met them on the sidewalk. Nodding, silently the officers fell into step with the family, escorting them toward the door.

“Thank you.” Steve's words were quiet and heartfelt when he opened the church door to usher his family inside.

“There will always be guys close by if you need one of us.” Duke grasped the taller man's shoulder. Though they knew their presence would be impossible to miss, he was closest to the members of the task force and had agreed to handle any necessary communication with them to avoid overwhelming them.

The governor had blessed this unofficial HPD mission, understanding that there would still be plenty of officers on patrol even while half the force was at the funeral. Many officers had given up part of their day off to assist with this vigil. Despite early tensions with McGarrett and Five-0 they had all seen the good the four did and appreciated their value to their home.
Once the last member of the family passed through the door, McGarrett stepped inside behind them.

“A few of us will come in when others start to arrive.” Duke spoke as he closed the door behind the SEAL. Steve understood, they would have warning before they were expected to deal with anyone else.

The priest was standing between Dianne and Danny assuring them that everything was taken care of when Steve approached. Not wishing to interrupt, he took his place behind Danny and Grace, placing a reassuring hand on each of their shoulders.

“Would you care to see her before the others arrive?”

A sob escaped Dianne even as she nodded yes. Danny reached one hand out to capture hers, but was relieved when Catherine stepped up next to the older woman and wrapped an arm around her.

“Would you like me to go with you?” The Navy woman whispered.

“Please.” Her voice broke as she answered. Turning to go to the front of the church, Dianne felt another strong, but feminine arm slip around her from the other side. Peering sideways, she was not surprised to see Kono's brown eyes watching her. “Thank you.”

The three women made their way forward, their progress slowing as they neared the casket where Rachel's body was carefully arranged for mourners to say goodbye.

At the back of the church, Danny watched his ex-mother-in-law and two close friends. He and Grace would be next, but he wanted Dianne to have her chance to say goodbye without concern for her granddaughter witnessing it. For what felt like the thousandth time, he appreciated the strength and compassion of his ohana that they stepped in to help her and by extension him make it through the afternoon.

His heart lurched as he watched Kono and Cath's arms support Mrs. Bradley as she nearly crumpled under the weight of her grief upon seeing her daughter. They could hear her cries from where they stood, Danny tried not to imagine the anguish she felt at seeing her only child like that. He shuddered at the thought of having to do the same.

Feeling Steve's hand still resting on his shoulder, Danny leaned into his touch, trying to absorb a bit of his strength. He could not help but think back to Meka's funeral. Things had been far different between them then, but even so his partner had been there offering his quiet support and comforting presence to ground Danny during the gathering. When questioned, Steve had simply stated that he may not have known Meka, but he knew Danny. He would need that presence even more today.

After several long, silent moments Dianne, Catherine, and Kono turned away from the casket and made their way to the front row to sit. Realizing it was time for them to go, Danny looked down at Grace. Tears were already welling up in her eyes. This would be the first time she had see her mother since the night she died and the last time as well.

Squatting down, Danny held both her hands in front of him and looked her in the eyes. “Grace, you do not have to go up and look if you do not want to. The choice is entirely yours and no one will be upset with whatever you decide.”

“I want to say goodbye.” The first tear slipped down her cheek, crushing Danny's and Steve's hearts with it. “You will stay with me, right?” She looked from her Danno to her Daddy for confirmation.

“We will be right by your side.” Steve assured as he squatted down next to the father and daughter.
Standing back up, the men walked up the aisle with the small girl between them. Just before they were close enough for Grace to see Rachel she froze in place. Looking first to Danno, she stared up at him.

Danny knew what his daughter was asking with that look, no words needed to be spoken. She could not do it, she could not take those last few steps on her own, but with a maturity and wisdom beyond her years she knew she could not hold them both up. He nodded his understanding and support, offering a small smile that was at best utterly pathetic.

Watching the silent exchange, Steve was unsure what it meant until Danny nodded and Grace turned to him. Her tear streaked cheeks and trembling lips were nearly his undoing, but he understood then. Reaching down, he pulled her up into his arms, settling her on his hip and wrapping his arm securely around her.

As soon as she was settled, Danny stepped closer to them. Wrapping an arm around Steve, his hand found Grace's arm where it clung to the SEAL.

“We do this together.” Steve whispered the words so only the three of them could hear it. When both Grace and Danny nodded, the two men stepped forward.

Their daughter kept her face buried against Steve's neck until they came to a stop in front of the casket. Feeling Danno's hand tighten on her arm and hearing the choked cry escape him she knew she needed to look. The SEAL tightened his hold on her as he watched her lift her head to see her mother for the final time. He felt her small frame shake as sobs wracked her body and she fell apart in his arms.

At the same time, he felt Danny crumple against his side. Holding on to the two as tightly as he could, he was determined to be the rock they needed even as their overwhelming pain threatened to tear him apart. He was equipped to endure endless amounts of pain and torture, but he was suddenly completely unsure he was capable of handling the pain of those he loved so deeply. He knew he could not take it from them; he could only stand strong and support them.

Just as he began to think he would crumble, he felt Mary wrap herself around Grace where she was attached to his side. A second later, Chin and Beth appeared on Danny's other side helping to support the Jersey native. Though the pain in Steve's chest did not lessen, the silent reminder that it was not just him, but their entire ohana that would see Danny and Grace through the pain of losing Rachel helped keep him upright.

After what felt like a year, but was likely only a few moments, the six made their way to the seats next to the rest of their family. Through the tears blurring his own vision, Steve could see tears falling down the faces of everyone with him. No matter what their individual relationships to Rachel were, the family mourned together for the loss of Grace's mother, Dianne's daughter, Danny's ex-wife, and the impact on those they held dear.

The priest hovered near by, ready to console if needed, but seemingly unsure what to do given the obvious reliance of the key mourners on those with them. When the door opened at the back of the church, he excused himself and headed back to see to the new arrivals.

Steve turned his head toward the back and noted Duke, Governor Denning, Kamekona, Max, Charlie, Ms. Jones, and several others from HPD that were reasonably close to the task force. This group filed in quietly and seated themselves in the row immediately behind the family.

Danny felt the pats and squeezes on his shoulder and back as their friends took their seats and cherished each show of silent support. Even in his somewhat dazed state, he recognized the care they
had taken to arrive early enough to come in and provide a buffer between them and others that would join the funeral.

As the church continued to fill, various groups and individuals made their way forward to say their goodbyes to Rachel. Dianne was pleased to see that there were people that cared to come and honor her daughter.

Eventually the priest came forward and spoke. Dianne, Grace, and Danny could not have told you a word that was said later. They were certain they had only managed to go through the correct motions thanks to the rest of the family guiding them through it.

After the service ended, Dianne made her way to the casket flanked again by Catherine and Kono before following the others to the back. She was placed at the head of the line next to Danny.

Grace stood next to her father, leaning into him with her arms wrapped around his waist. She was determined to be strong in front of all these people. It helped that she could feel Steve's solid leg pressed against her, his hand resting gently on her neck from where he stood behind Danno. Her Uncle Chin was next to her Daddy, positioned to easily shield her.

This would only be the beginning, everyone would reconvene in the fellowship hall after stopping to convey their condolences to the family. Thus far interaction had been constrained by the nature of the services, but this would mean less structure and more potential landmines to navigate.

Steve did his best to encourage people to keep moving through the line. From where he stood he could feel both Dianne and Danny sway slightly every once in a while and he knew this was taking a great deal out of both of them. Fortunately, many of the mourners seemed content to leave Grace alone and not force her into engaging with them.

When the entire line had exited the church, the nine stood silently for a moment before Dianne finally moved toward the door.

“I am not sure how long I can face them in there.” She admitted as she stood staring the large door to the outside.

“Remember, you just give one of us the sign and we will get you out.” Steve reminded her.

“I will not leave without you.” Catherine wrapped a supportive arm around Dianne again. She had the keys to Steve's truck so she knew she could provide an escape if needed.

“I will make sure all of us are out before I leave.” Chin offered. “That way if any of you need to head home before the others can get away we will not end up with anyone left behind. We can go as groups if needed.”

Taking a deep breath, Dianne rested her hand on Cath's arm and nodded her head. “Let's do this.”

The members of Five-0 and the Naval officer could not help but smile at the steel in Mrs. Bradley's voice. She was definitely one of the ohana.

Chapter End Notes

I would like to say the sad part is over, but alas we still have to get through the next piece of the gathering before I let the family go back to the McGarrett stronghold and
recover.
Again, comments are very much appreciated.
Duke, Governor Denning, and several other HPD officers were waiting just outside the main door when the family emerged. Though it was a very short walk to the fellowship hall entrance they had no intention of leaving the family unattended.

Seeing the governor, Dianne stopped in front of him. “Thank you for coming today. I imagine it was not easy with your schedule.”

Reaching out and taking her hand, he held it between his as he replied. “Mrs. Bradley, nothing could have prevented me from being here today. Please, let me know if there is anything I can do to help.” He held her eyes for a moment longer before making eye contact with each of the other family members, including Grace. “That goes for all of you.”

Hearing some noise across the parking lot, Steve looked up to see a reporter and cameraman trying to get a shot of them. This was the part of leading an increasingly high profile task force that he did not care for. Fortunately, HPD was blocking the pairs attempted entrance to the area and Duke and the officers standing with him immediately formed a barricade of blue to shield the ohana from view.

“Perhaps we should head inside.” The governor offered Dianne his arm as he guided her toward the fellowship hall, the living HPD barricade moving with them.

Once inside the room, the family appreciated that the gathered crowd gave them a bit of space to get their bearings. One end of the room held tables where several people had placed light refreshments. Steve recognized a few of the women assisting others at the table from his attendance at last year’s end of semester chorus performance at Grace’s school.

Throughout the rest of the room there were chairs lining the walls and gathered in small groups spread across the floor. The space had been set up to allow people to mix and talk comfortably.

Feeling Danny and Grace both sagging slightly against him, Steve quickly guided them toward one group of empty chairs. The others followed and soon Dianne, Grace, and Danny were seated. Steve, Chin, and Cath stood behind them, carefully arranged so people could approach the three from the front and sit to speak with them, but not surprise them from behind.

“Why don't we go see what we can find for them to drink?” Beth asked Mary and Kono. Nodding, the two younger women followed Danny’s mom across the room. Once they delivered the drinks they would make the rounds of the room, careful to keep an eye on the rest of the ohana.

When the other guests saw that the family was settled, people began trickling over to speak with them. Dianne clung to Danny’s hand as she listened to the stories Rachel’s friends told. It was nice to hear about pieces of her daughter’s life she had missed out on, but also difficult to be reminded how little she really knew her only child.

Catherine kept her post behind Mrs. Bradley, determined to keep her word to stay with the woman throughout the day. She realized that in some ways the English woman reminded her of her own mother, perhaps that was why she felt such a strong desire to protect her. Regardless of the reason, she would occasionally feel the older woman’s hand cover hers where it rested on her shoulder; a silent thank you for being there.
Danny felt as if he were stuck in a haze. Seeing Rachel's body, he was glad his partner had helped him prepare; otherwise, he was sure he would have ended up on the floor. Despite their difficult relationship in recent years, he did not believe she deserved to have her life taken so abruptly and so early. Now, hearing everyone that knew and cared for her speak he was reminded of the more pleasant side of his ex that he had not seen since the divorce.

Steve listened carefully as people spoke, ready to intercede if anyone treaded into the dangerous ground of how Rachel died. This was a day for remembering how she had lived, not rehashing her brutal death in front of her mother and child. The two of them and Danny were having a hard enough time already, he'd be damned if he let it become more difficult.

At some point Ms. Jones came and pulled a chair closer to Grace. Steve paid close attention to see how the little girl reacted to her teacher. Though she seemed hesitant at first, she quickly relaxed with the familiar woman. Ms. Jones looked up at him and gave a warm smile to the SEAL as Grace settled in to talking with her.

She was pleased to see two men with her student seeming to provide her some measure of comfort without even thinking about it. Her father had one arm stretched out to her, holding one small hand safely in his though the angle of his arm could not have been comfortable. Ms. Jones rather thought it looked like he would be torn in two if Rachel's mother and Grace leaned away from him.

Commander McGarrett's interaction with her was another interesting phenomenon. Though she did not know the full extent of his relationship with the Williams family it was obvious he was a fixture in their lives. The way Grace held onto the hand he had draped protectively over her shoulder spoke volumes to the woman. She had spent her entire career working with children and this one clearly trusted the men with her.

Seeing that Grace was okay with Ms. Jones, Steve allowed his attention to shift back to listening to the conversation between Danny, Dianne, and one of Rachel's friends. Though she seemed friendly enough she was starting to edge around questions that he did not like. When the woman glanced up nervously at him, his face made it clear she should move along.

As she walked away, his partner looked up at him. “Why do I get the feeling she received some encouragement to leave?”

The SEAL's arched eyebrow said it all. He would not deny it, and he would do it again as many times as needed.

“Thank you.” Danny looked to his daughter and noticed Ms. Jones helping keep her occupied though Grace maintained her handhold on both he and Steve.

“How are you Mr. Williams?” She asked, though she clearly did not expect an answer. “I was just telling Grace how much we missed her at school and how we look forward to seeing her again when she is ready.”

“I will give you a call later this week to start figuring that out. We are meeting with Dr. James again Wednesday and I would like to see what she thinks.”

Still sitting in the chair Grace was starting to squirm a bit.

“That makes sense. You have my mobile number, right?” He nodded his head. She had given it to him during their first conversation after Rachel's death. “Feel free to use it so you don't have to worry about catching me during office hours.”
Turning her attention back to her student, Ms. Jones noticed Grace's fidgeting. “Do you need to find the ladies room?” Including the funeral they had been here for a little over two hours by this point.

When the little girl nodded, Danny started looking around to find it.

“It is right over there.” Ms. Jones pointed to a door. “I would be happy to take her and from the looks of things Commander McGarrett will keep an eye on things for the short time we will be gone.”

Danny and Ms. Jones both looked up to Steve. Though he was reluctant to let her out of his sight, Danny knew there was nothing he could do other than stand outside the bathroom door.

“Thank you. That would be great.” The two fathers watched nervously as their little girl crossed the room with the other woman.

After a moment, Danny’s attention was claimed by another friend of Rachel’s. Steve on the other hand, continued watching Ms. Jones and the door where she stood. He was not thrilled when one of the other school moms came up and drew her into conversation. Though she remained in front of the door, her attention was now divided.

The SEAL’s attention remained fixed on the door; however, he caught sight of an unfamiliar man that seemed to be heading in that direction from the corner of his eye. There was something off about him and Steve did not recall seeing him among the mourners exiting the service earlier. When the man reached into his jacket pocket and pulled out a flask, he had a sinking feeling this was going to lead to trouble.

Not wanting to alarm Danny yet and cause a scene in the midst of the somber gathering, Steve remained silent yet on full alert. It took some effort to keep the hand on his partner's shoulder relaxed even as the rest of him stiffened.

Standing next to his boss, Chin could sense the shift in his demeanor and his eyes immediately sought out whatever had caused it. Spotting the same man, he also became suspicious. Spotting Kono watching him, Chin signaled for her to check the mystery man out.

Unfortunately, before she could get to him the man reached the ladies room door and pounded loudly on the wooden surface. The majority of the room seemed to freeze in place at the unexpected and out of place interruption to the quiet murmur of conversations throughout the room.

Danny was not sure what had happened. One second he was talking to Rachel's friend, Steve's hand resting on the back of his neck. The next, his Super SEAL partner had launched over the chair beside him and broken out in a dead run across the room. It only took the detective's brain a fraction of a second longer to realize the SEAL was headed in the direction Grace had gone with Ms. Jones. Launching from the chair, Danny immediately followed.

Reaching the unknown guest, Steve grabbed his hand before it could connect with the door again and wrenched the man's arm around. Danny winced, remembering that painful maneuver from their earlier days together.

“What the hell are you doing?” The SEAL's voice was dangerously low, coming out as nearly a growl.

“I just wanted to say hello.” The slightly slurred, sarcastic tone in the answer did nothing to help McGarrett calm down. He was seeing red, something told him this was no just an unhappy accident.

“Who are you and what are you doing here?” Leaning over the man’s back, close to his ear, he could smell the alcohol on this breath.
“I am just a friend of the family.” He sneered. “Thought I would pass Stan's regards along since the bitch and her little brat ruined him.”

Standing behind him, Governor Denning and Duke had heard enough and realized they needed to intervene before Steve did something he would later regret in front of a room full of witnesses. The HPD officer glanced at the politician before stepping in to help. “McGarrett, why don't you let me escort our friend out? Perhaps he should take advantage of our fine facilities to sleep off his current state.”

Looking up he met the officer's eyes and then looked to Governor Denning. Both men looked at him expectantly. Glancing out over the rest of the room, he quickly noticed the view was obstructed by the semi-circle of police forming a barrier between the ohana and the rest of the mourners.

Steve gave the man's arm one last jerk, causing him to grimace in pain before handing him over to Duke. As soon as his hands were free, he whirled around toward the now open bathroom door.

“It is okay Monkey. Danno's got you and Daddy is fixing it.” The SEAL could hear Danny's voice as he approached the door. He froze in the entry, unable to come closer when he saw Danny kneeling on the floor, Grace curled in a sobbing mess in front of him.

The SEAL closed his eyes, the scene bringing back the memory of finding Grace at the Edwards's residence. He imagined she was having the same flashbacks. Unsure of what to do, afraid he would scare her if he came closer, Steve remained frozen in place.

Somehow Grace knew that her Daddy was watching them, that he had taken care of the person that had scared her so badly. Looking up, she could barely make out his form in the doorway through the tears in her eyes.

“Daddy.” She stretched out one hand that had been wrapped around Danny's neck, reaching for him even as she curled closer against her father.

Steve was on his knees next to the two before it even registered he was moving. His long arms wrapped protectively around his family, he pulled them securely against his chest as the tears finally fell from his eyes.

Chapter End Notes

There will be one more chapter today.
Chapter 43

Chapter Notes

Just have to say – I really love Grace sometimes. She kind of ran away with a piece of this chapter and I just did not have the heart to stop her. Admittedly, while I know the major points of the story, it is the characters that are really steering this story. I have long sense given up fighting with them.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“Any idea just who that creep was?” Governor Denning asked Chin and Kono as they stood next to him, still inside the wall of officers. They had parted long enough let Duke through with the unwelcome guest before closing ranks again. The governor was impressed with how fast they all seemed to materialize around the family once the commotion started.

“No. Clearly he is a friend of Stan’s that did not care for Rachel or Grace.” The Hawaiian man replied. “Perhaps we should ask and see if anyone recognized him, see what we can learn in case he clams up.”

Before anyone replied, one of the HPD officers turned toward them. “I have someone asking to speak to Five-0. Says she knows the guy that Duke just hauled out of here.”

Chin and Kono nodded. They had see what information they could get. They were anxious to find out what kind of threat he posed to Grace safety and recovery.

“Looks like you won't even have to ask. Why don't I start encouraging people to clear out while you speak to her?” When Kono looked surprised at his offer, Sam explained. “I do not want Grace to have to deal with a crowd, no matter how well meaning they may be, when she is ready to leave.”

Catherine, Mary, Dianne, and Beth all stepped closer to him. Dianne and Cath had been only a few seconds behind Danny and the other two had followed quickly after seeing Steve flying over the chair.

“We will help.” Dianne offered. When Denning and Cath looked like they were going to argue, she continued. “Right now the best thing I can do to honor my daughter is to protect hers and if that means helping clear a room of people then that is what I am going to do.”

Everyone around gave her a supportive smile. Dianne seemed like a completely different person from the woman that shown up only a few short days ago. For Grace's sake they were all happy to see her quickly finding her place in the ohana.

“In the case let's go.” Cath slipped an arm around her, ready to stay with her as they tackled this unexpected task. The British woman was clearly determined, but that did not mean she couldn’t use some backup.

Slipping through the wall of HPD officers, the five were met with concerned looks from many of the mourners. They had all stepped back several feet, largely trying to respect the family's privacy while still incredibly curious what exactly was going on.
Exiting the building, Duke was being less than gentle with the man as he guided him toward his cruiser. Officer Kapahu had joined him on the way out, they had not cuffed the guy yet and he wanted to make sure he did not get loose and make it back inside.

Halfway across the parking lot, the clearly intoxicated man started struggling against Duke's hold.

“Where the hell do you think you're taking me?” He tried to jerk his arms away. “Let me go you fucking jerk.”

Duke looked over his shoulder at Kapahu and was surprised when he mouthed, “Loosen your grip.” He hesitated until he realized the other officer had pulled his taser out. The younger man clearly had an idea. Nodding, he turned his attention back in the direction they were walking. This was going to hurt, but it would be worth it.

“You are headed to HPD lockup, so I suggest you settle down and make it easier on all of us.” Duke barked at the perp has he continued to struggle.

His words, of course, had the opposite effect. Duke loosened his grip just slightly as the man began to struggle more aggressively against the hold. When one arm slipped free, he immediately swung wildly around and landed a fist right across Duke's face.

“Freeze!” Officer Kapahu yelled and was completely ignored a second before he triggered the taser. The jolt of electricity effectively took the man to the ground so Kapahu could cuff him. Duke rubbed his jaw where the punch landed as he watched. He had to give the younger officer credit, it was worth getting decked to watch the guy that had scared Grace get tased for assaulting a police officer.

“Duke, you okay?” Another HPD officer ran over to where they stood. “That guy looked like he was going nuts until Kapahu managed to get him down.”

“Yeah brah, I’m fine. Nothing a little ice won't fix when we get back to the station.” He saw the glint in the officer's eyes and knew that he understood exactly what he just saw happened, but that he would have done the same.

Beth spotted Ms. Jones and could readily see that the woman was upset. Approaching, she caught her eye just before she reached her.

“Is Grace okay?” The question was almost panicked.

“Her dads are with her, so I would imagine she will be. Though I am sure she is quite rattled.” Beth answered, wanting to calm Ms. Jones while not yet knowing just how bad the aftermath would be.

“It is my fault. They trusted me to watch her and I got distracted. I should have paid more attention. Detective Williams explained how she was found and what had happened when we spoke the other day, so I know just how bad that was for her.” She gestured toward the door.

“Well, I am sure you will hear from Daniel soon about what needs to happen to keep Grace from falling behind, but right now we are trying to encourage people to head out so she does not have to face a crowd.” Beth knew her son thought well of Ms. Jones, but at the moment she could not help being a bit irritated. There may not have been much the woman could have done to prevent the man from reaching the door, but had she been paying attention it may have slowed him down.
“I understand. Please let him know that we will be willing to work with you all to handle things in the best possible way for Grace. We all adore her and do not want to make this any harder than it already is.”

“Thank you.” Beth replied as Ms. Jones headed toward the door. After today she expected they were going to be treading carefully with sending Grace back into the world without a member of her family.

///// GUARDIAN /////

“Ma'am, I am Detective Kelly and this is Officer Kalakaua. Officer Reese said you wanted to speak with Five-0.” He motioned her over to an area by the wall, but behind the bathroom door so they would not disturb Grace and her dads.

“Yes.” She followed the pair. “I can't believe Jason just did that. I knew he and Stan were close, but I heard what he said to Commander McGarrett. I can't believe he would do that to a little girl.” Clearly upset, the woman was rambling before they could ask her any questions.

“Ma'am.” Kono rested a calming hand on her shoulder. “Do you know Jason's last name?”

She looked up, slightly started, at the sound of Kono’s voice. “Dyer. He is my brother.” Her voice faded to a near whisper as she admitted their relationship.

“Did he attend the funeral?” Kono felt sorry for the woman, but she needed to get any information she could from her.

“No. After he spoke to Stan's lawyer and found out he would not represent him, he was furious. When we found out about the funeral arrangements he said he wasn't coming. I didn't argue with him. Despite she and I becoming fast friends, Jason never got along with Rachel.”

Chin was less than pleased to hear Stan's lawyer had spoken to someone else about the case after refusing to represent him. “Ma'am.” He realized they did not know her name.

“Please call me Jane.” She offered before he continued.

“Do you know if the lawyer told him anything else about what had happened?” He had met with Stan and gotten his full story, including details around Grace being locked in the bathroom.

“He didn't tell me, but I know they were on the phone for quite a while.” The look on her face shifted to pure horror. “Him banging on the door like that, you think it has something to do with what he heard from the lawyer?”

“Possibly or it could just be a sad coincidence.”

“I swear if he weren't in police custody right now I would beat him senseless. To do that to little Grace.” She shook her head, balling her hands into tight fists at her side.

“Is there anything else you can tell us about what might have prompted your brother to show up like that?” Kono was ready to be done with this and check on Grace.

“No. I mean, I know Jason has been drinking more lately. He and Stan were partners at work and them letting Stan go really seemed to mess with him, but I never expected this. He is not usually the type to get violent.”

Guiding her gently by the elbow, Chin started moving toward HPD again. “If you think of anything
else that might help, please give HPD a call. They will be able to get us the information.”

Turning back to his cousin after she left, he shook his head. “Well, that isn’t great news. I sure as hell hope his damned lawyer didn’t run around spouting off details of the case to every mutual acquaintance they had.”

Looking around the room, it appeared the others had been successful at clearing the room pretty quickly.

//////// GUARDIAN //////////

The tears burned Steve's eyes, but he did not care. All that mattered in that moment was the two people wrapped safely in his arms. He had reacted on pure instinct and adrenaline when he saw the man move to lay a hand on the bathroom door.

He realized, in that moment, that the single most important thing to him was keeping her safe. The fact that for the second time in recent history he was too late to stop the damage completely killed him. Yes, Grace had still called him Daddy and reached a hand out to him. Yes, she and Danny were clinging to him just as much as he was clinging to them. But Steve feared that this second failure would be too much, that he would lose them both.

“I am so sorry.” The words came out as a hoarse whisper, so different than the voice of the hardened SEAL only minutes before.

Danny's head shot up from where it had rested next to Grace's on Steve's chest. “No!” The Jersey native adamantly refused.

“Yes. I am. I should have …”

Danny cut him off. “No! You did nothing wrong. This was not your fault.” One hand seemed to involuntarily shoot up and start motioning for emphasis.

Steve felt Grace squirm closer to him, so she was sitting on his thighs still sandwiched between the two men.

“Daddy.” The little girl's voice stopped her father's rant before it could escalate.

Steve and Danny both looked down at her. “Why are you sorry?” They were both surprised by her question.

“Because he's …” The Jersey native started to answer when his daughter's look made him stop.

“Danno, I asked Daddy.” She gave him the same exasperated look she had used the day that he had almost made Steve cry in her bedroom. Both of members of the Williams clan turned back to look at the SEAL, waiting expectantly for his answer.

“I am sorry because I should have stopped him sooner. I should not have let him reach you. I should not have let him scare you.” The SEAL's eyes fell to the floor. He could not handle seeing the disappointment in her big brown eyes when she realized that he had failed her again.

“Did he tell you what he was going to do?” She asked. Her innocent voice remained focused and serious, the tears and panic of a moment before forgotten as she concentrated with an amazing intensity on finding out why her Daddy was so convinced he had done something wrong.

Grace was incredibly smart and perceptive. Her mother had always sworn she had too much of her
father in her as if they were things to be ashamed of; however, Danno, Steve, and the rest of the ohana encouraged those traits. Time spent with them had managed to magnify those skills. As part of that, she had quickly realized that anytime something happened to those he loved, Steve immediately blamed himself no matter how irrational it was.

“No.” The SEAL answered, still staring at the floor. Facing armed opponents, explosives, or other life threatening situations was far easier for him than facing the idea of failing his family.

Grace continued to question. “Were you the only person here that could have reacted?” She continued to push. Danny watched silently, realizing exactly what his daughter was doing and how much more effective it was coming from her.

“No.” He still refused to meet her eyes.

“Were you the closest one when he started banging on the door?” She knew the answer, knew he would have been standing across the room with her Danno.

“No.” His eyes flicked up for a split second before falling back to the floor.

“Were you the one that made him stop?” Her voice was nearly a whisper, but the sideways glance she gave her Danno told him she knew she had the SEAL right where she wanted.

His reply was slower this time, his eyes finally finding hers when he answered in a mere whisper. “Yes.”

“Daddy.” She held his gaze. “I know you want to stop anything bad before it happens, but you can’t. I know that and so does Danno. What matters is that you did everything you could to fix it when it happened.”

She felt Danno’s hand rubbing her back and gently squeezing her side, a silent encouragement from him.

“I…” Steve was at a loss for words. The little girl that had only claimed him as Daddy a few days before, but she could see through him so well. Chancing a glance at his partner, what he saw in those blue eyes only reinforced her words.

“It is okay, babe. We know.” Danny pulled the two of them impossibly closer together for a tight hug.

“Can we go home now?” Grace's muffled voice asked from between her dads.

Chapter End Notes

That's it for today. Please drop a comment or two on the chapters from today and let me know what you thought.
Danny would have argued that Steve was being over protective when he stood and used his body to shield them as they moved toward the bathroom door, but frankly he just could not muster a rant. When the SEAL relaxed slightly and proceeded through the door, the detective followed holding their daughter tightly in his arms. The room was empty aside from their ohana and Governor Denning. Danny’s face must have shown his confusion as the governor spoke up.

“We thought it best if you did not have to deal with any more people today. I am sure you would like to get home, but if it is okay I will stop by shortly with dinner.” Everyone looked surprised by his words. “Don't worry, I did not cook, but I arranged to have something made. It seemed like the least I could do.”

“Thank you.” Steve reached out and shook his hand. “We certainly appreciate the thought and, I am sure Mom will not mind having the night off from cooking.”

“Good. I will be by to drop it off in about an hour and a half.”

The entire group made their way to the door, instinctively wanting to be free of the room and back to the McGarrett house where they could let their guard down a bit.

Steve was unsurprised to find nearly all of the HPD officers waiting for them just outside the building. Heads nodded and some they were more familiar with reached out to squeeze a shoulder or pat a back, but they remained silent, standing guard as the family climbed into the three vehicles.

In the Camaro, Steve was not surprised that his partner had climbed into the back with their daughter. Though he tried to stay focused on the road, his eyes kept shifting to the pair in rearview mirror.

Aside from the incident, the afternoon had gone much as Steve had imagined, but something about the look on his partner's face now concerned him. The closer they got to home, the more he seemed to shut down. The distant look in his eyes made the SEAL uneasy. Parking the car in the driveway, Steve immediately moved to help Grace out of the back as Danny climbed out the other side. The little girl yawned at him as he swung her into his arms without a second thought.

Her head resting against his neck, Grace's arms wrapped tightly around him. “I love you Daddy.”

Steve stood rooted in place for a moment, eyes closed, letting himself feel the precious little girl he held so close to his heart. “I love you to Gracie.” Standing with her, he promised himself that he would say those words as often as he could. He never wanted her to doubt just how much she was loved.

Hearing footsteps behind him, he turned to see Chin and noticed Kono and Cath standing by his car still as Mary and Beth seemed to be leading Dianne and Danny toward the house.

“We thought we might swing by HQ and see if we can find anything out about our surprise guest, and if there is any news on where things stand with Stan.”

Steve's expression must have given away his surprise that they were leaving, because the Hawaiian quickly continued. “We should be back shortly after dinner arrives, but from the looks of it I think some of you are in need of a nap before then.”
Glancing down at Grace, he saw her eyes drifting closed. “Thanks brah. I appreciate you guys getting the intel for us. Just come on in when you get back, no need to knock.”

Nodding, Chin turned back toward his car as Steve carried his very sleepy daughter back inside. Clearly the stress of the afternoon had exhausted her. Inside the door, he found the other four waiting in the living room. The women were all watching them, but Danny seemed lost in his own world staring at one of the pictures on the wall.

Mary moved first, giving him a quick hug and whispering that she was going to go rest for a bit before dinner.

“I am going to go get changed, but I will be around if you need anything.” Beth gave him a pointed look. Mom was clearly staying on duty in case anyone needed anything.

As she disappeared up the stairs behind Mary, Steve's gaze turned to Mrs. Bradley. The woman looked exhausted and at a complete loss.

“I suppose I should call the car and go back to the hotel.” She sounded like that was the last thing she really wanted to do.

The SEAL stepped closer, leaving only a few inches between them.

“Dianne, you do not need to leave. Honestly, I would rather you stay here where we know you are okay.” He could see she was going to argue that he did not need to worry about her. “Plus, Grace is clearly exhausted and I really do not want to leave her alone right now.”

He let his eyes drift toward his partner, hoping she would understand what he meant. He was not sure Danny was even hearing what was going on around him, but he did not want to take that chance.

Dianne's eyes followed Steve's and fell on the alarmingly quiet form of her daughter's normally quite animated ex-husband. Shifting her gaze back to Steve, she nodded in understanding.

“Why don't you let me take her upstairs? I think I could do with a nap myself and I would much rather it be with my granddaughter than alone in a hotel room.”

As he shifted the sleeping girl into her arms, he watched carefully to make sure the girl's weight was not too much and mouthed a silent ‘Thank you’.

“Don't worry, I've got her. I may not be as young as I used to be, but I am not some frail old woman.” She smiled up at him.

“Pretty sure frail is not a word I would associate with anyone in this family.” He replied as he watched her carry Grace up the stairs.

Left alone with his partner, the SEAL knew it was time to see if he could bring him back from the abyss the overly emotional afternoon seemed to have plunged him into.

"Danny," Steve watched as his partner continued staring unseeing at the framed photograph on the wall. Stepping closer, he wrapped his arms around the shorter man's chest and pulled him against his own. Leaning down, he kissed the top of his head before speaking. "Let's go get changed, then I will grab us a couple of beers and we can sit outside for a bit."

The voice so close to him startled the detective, but he nodded his agreement and allowed Steve to lead him toward their bedroom. He knew he needed to snap out of this fog he seemed to be trapped
in, but he just could not do it.

Understanding that Danny still seemed to be in a bit of a daze, the SEAL left him standing in the middle of their bedroom as he disappeared into the closet to find them both a change of clothes. Reappearing a moment later, the detective had not moved.

Grabbing his hand, Steve led him closer to the bed. Tossing the t-shirts and shorts onto the bed, he took his suit jacket off, tossing it aside, before turning to focus on his partner. Moments later, with minimal assistance from the detective, the SEAL had them both changed and suits stashed in a bag to take to the dry cleaners at some later point.

Grabbing Danny's hand again, he guided him back out of the room and quietly down the stairs.

"Go sit down. I will grab a couple of beers and be right behind you." He nudged his partner out the back door and watched to make sure he headed in the right direction. Satisfied that he had made it to their favorite chairs, Steve ducked into the kitchen to grab the beers.

Beth sat at the island, having come back down after changing, she watched her son's partner and saw the concern etched on his face. "Is he okay?"

"Not yet, but he will be." Steve grabbed the bottles from the fridge before pausing to stand next to her. "Danny is one of the strongest men I have ever seen, so once he has had a chance to process everything I know he will be okay. In the meantime ..." He stopped, unsure how to explain.

Beth reached out and wrapped her arms around his waist, pulling him closer so her head rested on his chest from where she sat. "In the meantime, you will be the anchor that keeps him grounded." She squeezed him a bit tighter before letting go. "He loves you, Steven. Do not let his grief make you forget."

"I know and I won't. I can understand how he feels and I am okay with it. I just do not want him to forget that with all the bad that has happened there is still a lot of good in his life."

Danny's mom smiled up at him. "He will remember. He is surrounded by a loving family that will make sure of that. Grace too. Now go take care of my boy." She shooed him toward the door. "Steven." She waited for him to turn back. "Don't forget we are here for you too. I love you, son."

"Love you too, mom." With those words he quickly headed for the door to start trying to bring his partner back.

Reaching the chairs and Danny's entirely too still form, Steve set the drinks on the table and paused to look at his lover from where he stood.

"I am so sorry." Danny spoke the words without looking at him.

"What? Why?" The SEAL remained rooted where he stood. He was not sure what surprised him more, that the Jersey native spoke unprompted or that the first thing out of his mouth was an apology.

"You do not deserve this. You do not deserve to have to deal with me falling apart over Rachel." Danny's voice was insistent. "You can do so much better than this." He gestured at himself.

"Bullshit." The SEAL nearly growled. He had half expected this reaction though, so he was prepared. This was not Danny saying he did not love him; this was Danny trying to protect him in his own illogical way.

"I am serious, Steven. You deserve so much better." His eyes remained fixed on the water, refusing
to look at his partner, knowing his resolve would crack the minute he did. "I will sleep on the couch tonight and figure out what to do tomorrow."

"Daniel," Steve crouched down in front of his chair, refusing to back away. "I am not letting you push me away. Not now, not when the only thing keeping us all sane is each other. We have been over this already. Rachel may have loved antagonizing you, but you loved her enough to marry her and it was not your choice to walk away. Not to mention, she gave you Grace. You can not expect to walk away from this without feeling anything."

Despite the SEAL's face being only inches from his, the detective stubbornly refused to meet his eyes.

Slowly reaching up, Steve gently wrapped a hand around the side of his partner's neck, letting his thumb brush softly over the tense jaw. Leaning in closer, he kissed a cheek, then the tip of Danny's nose, before finally placing a single chaste kiss on his lips.

"Babe, please do not shut me out. I swear, you have nothing to apologize for and I do not, will not, love you any less for needing to mourn Rachel's death." His voice was quiet, but Danny caught the cracks despite Steve's effort to sound calm. "Hell, the entire ohana was crying at the funeral. We may not have the history with Rachel that you did, but her completely unexpected death hit us all and knowing how badly it hurt you and Grace made it even worse."

When his partner still did not speak, Steve took a deep breath and prepared to play his trump card. "Daniel, if anyone deserved better in this relationship, it is you. I come with so much fucked up baggage that no one should have to put up with it. If you are going to walk away, do it because I am too messed up to deserve the kind of love you have to give, not because you do not think you are good enough because that is bullshit and you know it."

Intense blue eyes, immediately flew up to meet his. "No." Danny shook his head vehemently. "You are not too messed up to deserve how much I love you."

Before the Jersey native could argue further, Steve pulled him closer, crashing their lips together. Letting himself fall to his knees from the crouching position he had been in, Steve was not letting Danny loose this time.

One hand still wrapped around Danny's neck, the other snaked around and pulled him forward in the chair forcing his partner's knees to part so his body fit between then.

Danny fleetingly realized that he had been tricked, before he was completely consumed by the solid and overwhelming warmth of his crazy partner's body. He could not fault him for playing dirty, if the roles had been reversed he would have done the same. Despite his declared intent to leave only moments before, he knew it would have been impossible to follow through.

When Steve was reasonably certain they were past the immediate crisis, he loosened his hold slightly as he released Danny's lips.

“I love you Daniel. Nothing is going to change that and I am not going to let you just walk away. You need time to come to terms with Rachel's death and I get that, but I am going to be here every step of the way with you."

Nodding silently, Danny's tear filled eyes met Steve's and was surprised to see the unshed tears there. Crazy Neanderthal he may sometimes be, but the detective knew better than to argue. Instead he gave in and let himself lean into the strong chest and protective arms.
Steve was right, it might take some time for him to fully get over Rachel's death, but he would not make the mistake of pushing the SEAL away again. As the sturdy arms wrapped tightly around him, he closed his eyes and let the tears fall.

“'I've got you.’” The SEAL whispered against the blond locks. “'I've got you.’”

Chapter End Notes

I swear those two are such a hot mess sometimes. They have so many issues, but I love them for it.
I tend to listen to music all the time and have a playlist full of songs that are somehow associated with this story in my mind. Though some are more general associates, occasionally one song really resonates with a particular scene, chapter, or collection of them. At the moment that song happens to be Aftermath by Lifehouse.

Waking up, it took Grace a few seconds to recognize that she was in her room. The last thing she remembered was being in her daddy's arms outside. Feeling a warm arm wrapped around her that was too light to belong to either Danno or Daddy, she looked at the hand and immediately knew it belonged to Grandma Bradley.

“Are you awake dear?” Her grandmother's voice whispered.

“Yes.” She turned so she could see the older woman.

“How are you feeling?” Dianne queried, concerned about how traumatic the day had been for the little girl.

Grace stared back silently as she contemplated her answer. “Better now that we are home.”

Dianne felt a twinge in her heart, knowing that this was not really home for her. In too few days she would have to return to England. “Good. You let me know if you want to talk about anything, okay?” She squeezed the little girl tighter.

“Thanks Grandma. You too.” Grace offered. She worried that her grandmother was going to be too lonely when she left Hawaii. “What time is it?”

Dianne reached back and grabbed her watch from the nightstand. “Almost time for the Governor to get here with dinner. What do you say we put ourselves to rights and go see what everyone else is doing?”

“Okay.” Grace agreed and followed Dianne's lead in getting out of the bed. Standing, she turned to look at the older woman. “Grandma?”

“Yes dear?” She turned to face the girl.

“Do you think you could stay here tonight?” Her big brown eyes pleaded.

“I would love too, but with your Aunt Mary here I think your dad is out of extra beds, and I do not have any of my things.”

“You could stay here, with me.” Grace countered immediately. “I bet Aunt Cath or Uncle Chin could take you to pick up anything you needed from the hotel after dinner.”

“Okay, you have convinced me. As long as your fathers do not mind I will stay.”

//////// GUARDIAN //////////
Two empty Longboard bottles sat on the table between them, next to their joined hands. Steve had listened as Danny told stories about his time with Rachel for the last 45 minutes. He had laughed when warranted, smiled encouragingly when needed, but he had never let go of Danny’s hand.

“Thank you babe.” The detective looked over at his partner.

Steve wanted to argue that listening was the least he could do, but he could not bring himself to be contrary at the moment. “You are welcome.”

“I actually feel a lot better now. Never really considered that talking about her would actually help.” He sounded a bit surprised at his revelation.

“Danno. This is you, of course talking helps. That is how you process.” Steve chuckled quietly as he ribbed his partner.

“Touché” The Jersey native conceded. “I suppose you are right. We all have our coping mechanisms. I talk; you blow shit up.”

The pair smiled as they stared out over the ocean. They each knew that the aftermath of Rachel’s death was far from over, but the two of them and their ohana would be together through the storm and end up stronger for it.

“The governor should be here soon.” Steve commented, wanting to make sure that Danny was ready for his arrival.

“We should invite him to stay for dinner. After all, it is not every day the governor of Hawaii brings us dinner.” The detective replied somewhat sarcastically. “Seriously though, he has been unexpectedly incredible through this whole mess, and I want him to know that we genuinely appreciate it.”

The sound of a car door shutting interrupted their conversation. The pair rose, Danny grabbing their empty bottles, and headed toward the house. Before Steve could reach for the door, it opened for him and Grace jumped toward him for a hug.

“You look like you had a nice nap with Grandma Bradley.” The SEAL could not help but laugh at her enthusiastic greeting.

“I did. Can Grandma stay the night? She can stay in my room with me.” She asked without hesitation just as Dianne and Beth walked into the room.

“Of course she can.” He could see from the older woman's face that she had already agreed to the plan and was more than happy to share her granddaughter's bed for the night. “Do you need anything from the hotel? One of us can run you over after dinner.”

Her answer was delayed by a knock at the door. “Must be Governor Denning, the others would just come in.” Steve commented as he started toward the front door.

Opening it, he was met with the sight of his boss, changed into more casual attire than earlier, carrying what looked to be enough food to feed a small army or in this case the entire Five-0 ohana.

“Come on in Governor.” Steve motioned him in with one arm, the other still holding Grace securely against him.

“Thank you and please, you should all call me Sam when we are here.” He entered the house and immediately started toward the kitchen.
“What smells so good?” Mary's voice carried from the stairs as she joined them. Seeing the governor she smiled. “Nice to see you again.”

“You too.” Setting his burden on the island, he turned to face Steve and Danny. “There should be plenty to eat. Now I will get out of your hair.”

As he started to move passed them, Danny's hand on his forearm stopped him. “Please, stay and eat with us.”

Sam looked from the detective to the SEAL and was surprised to see agreement with the request. “Please.” Grace added her voice to the request.

“Well, when faced with that plea how could I say no? You are sure I will not be in the way?” He seemed genuinely happy to be invited.

“Not a bit.” Steve answered.

The three women had already started unpacking and setting up the meal and they quickly shooed the three men and Grace back to the living room. Before they could settle in, the door opened and the three missing family members entered.

“Aloha governor.” Chin greeted the politician before reaching down to give Grace a hug since she had climbed from Steve's lap to greet them. “Please Chin, I have asked everyone to call me Sam while I am here.”

The Hawaiian nodded at the man as he crouched down to Grace's level. She had remained standing next to him after their hug and he guessed she wanted to say something. “What's up Gracie?” He queried quietly.

“Would you mind taking Grandma to get some things from the hotel after dinner? I asked her to stay the night and I don't want her to have to call that car to take her.”

“I don't mind at all.” The request was an easy one to grant, and he could see that having her grandmother stay the night was important to her.

From where they sat on the couch, Steve whispered in Danny's ear. “She is definitely your daughter. It is clear she is trying to prevent Dianne from being alone.”

The detective turned his head just enough to catch his partner's eye and smile. “Babe, I think her compassion comes from more than just me.” She may not be Steve's biological child, but with the amount of time she spent with the SEAL she had picked up a fair number of things from him. His huge heart had simply magnified what she already possessed.

When Kono and Cath decided to go see if they could help in the kitchen, Grace opted to go with them. Tucked between her aunts as they left the room, the men all smiled to hear her giggle at something Kono said.

Once she was out of earshot, Denning asked the inevitable question. “How is she doing?”

“Honestly, she fell asleep as soon as we got here, but she seems to be doing remarkably well.” Danny answered.

“She is just like her old man. She channels all her energy and focus into those around her.” Steve
shook his head and smiled. “Grace has an amazing maturity and poise for someone so young.”

“That she does, Commander.” The governor agreed, laughing a bit when Steve gave him the stink eye for breaking out his rank instead of his name. “Steve.” He corrected. “That little girl of yours is going to be a force to be reckoned with when she gets older.”

“Oh trust me, we will make sure of that.” Chin interjected. “On a serious note, do you two want to hear what we know so far while she is otherwise occupied or would you prefer to wait until she is in bed for the night?”

Glancing at his partner, Steve answered. “Now is good.”

Both men sat forward on the couch, elbows resting on their knees. Chin had their full attention.

“First, as we all knew, Stan's lawyer refused to represent him after their initial meeting, so he has been appointed the most junior public defender on the roster. Speculation is he will plead guilty. He would be a fool to go up in front of a jury with this.”

“Very true. Can't say I enjoy the idea of him getting anything less than the strictest possible sentence, but I enjoy the idea of this dragging out and possibly affecting Grace any more than necessary even less.” Danny's shoulders sagged slightly in relief at this update.

“So what did you learn about today's events?” Steve wanted to keep the update going. He could not imagine it would be more than a few minutes before they were summoned to dinner.

“His name is Jason Dyer. He is a good friend of Stan's. As suspected, learned some of the lesser known details of what had happened from Stan's lawyer when they spoke after he refused to represent him. We also know that he has taken to drinking more than is usual. That much we learned from his sister before we left.” Chin quickly summed up their conversation.

“Learn anything new at HPD?” Danny asked.

“Not much. He was locked up in a call passed out cold and still twitching from being tased.”

“What?” Steve, Danny, and Sam all asked at the same time.

“Apparently he started resisting as Duke and Officer Kapahu were taking him to the car. He managed to get one hand free and landed a fist across Duke's face. Fortunately, young Kapahu reacted quickly and he was tased back into submission.” Chin's expression told them the parts of the story that were left unsaid.

“Which reminds me, I want to do something nice for all of the officers that came today. They did not have to, and their presence turned out to be quite a blessing.” Danny looked to his partner to see if he agreed.

“Absolutely.” The SEAL agreed. “We should include the others as well. I suspect their lack of presence was more because someone needed to be taking care of the rest of the island than a lack of desire to be there with us.”

“I would like to help with whatever you decide.” Chin chimed in.

“Same here and I believe Steve is correct in his assessment.” Governor Denning was impressed that the members of his task force were thinking of how to thank HPD in the midst of everything else they were dealing with.
“Seems like food would be the way to go, but that is a lot of mouths to feed and would quickly become an expensive venture.” Steve offered, his expression telling the others he was trying to figure out a way to do it.

“You may be on to something there.” Denning agreed. “Perhaps my office can help with procuring the materials if Five-0 can cook?”

“I like that plan.” Danny readily agreed. “Would it be too much to include families?”

“Not at all.” The governor acquiesced. “Why don't I check calendars, and we can try to do it in a month or so? I am sure they would love it if Grace attended, but I do not think it is fair to expect that of her too soon.”

“That sounds like a plan.” Steve smiled as he nodded.

“Boys, dinner is ready.” Beth's voiced beckoned them from the kitchen before they could think of getting any further in the planning.

Rising to head to the dining room, Sam paused in front of Danny and Steve for a moment. “I am serious when I say if there is anything I can do to help her or any of you please let me know.”

“We will sir, and we truly appreciate knowing we have your support.”

Governor Denning turned toward the dining room. The more time he spent around this unusual group the more he found he liked and respected them. Even dealing with their own family crisis they each took the time to look out for each other and think about those around them.

All things considered, he would cherish whatever small place they allowed him within their inner circle. To no longer be considered only their boss or the governor was high praise among ones so loyal to their own.
Chapter 46

Dinner was a relatively quiet affair. Tonight they were all content with the peaceful reminder that they were surrounded by friends and family, however unlikely some of those included may have seemed several days ago.

“Dianne,” Chin gathered his dishes as he started to rise. “We should probably go grab your things before it gets any later.” He suspected Grace would be ready for an early night, but would not want to head to bed until her grandmother was safely back at the house.

“You are right.” She rose and started to clear her dishes. Catherine's hand covered hers, stalling her motions.

“Don't worry about those. We will take care of them. You just go get what you need.” Her words were gentle but firm. Mrs. Bradley smiled down at her and nodded before heading to follow Chin from the room.

Catherine, Kono, and Mary slipped from their chairs and began gathering the remnants of dinner to take to the kitchen. When Steve started to push his chair back, Mary swatted at his shoulder. “Don't even think it Super SEAL.”

Turning to face her, his eye brow shot up in surprise. “What?” He questioned indignantly.

“You can either stay where you are, go sit in the living room, or go sit outside, but you are not going anywhere near dirty dishes or the kitchen right now.”

Danny picked that moment to move his own chair back and lift his own plate to clear it. “That goes for you too.” Catherine's bark stopped him as he was only half standing.

“You too, Grace.” Kono chimed in before the little girl could even try. “The three of you just go stay out of trouble for a bit. We will join you shortly.”

Smart enough to know that arguing with the women would get them nowhere the three simply nodded in mute agreement. As the trio and most of the dishes disappeared into the kitchen, Sam and Beth could not hold their laughter in any longer.

“Well, at least I know who to call if I ever need to reel you two in.” The governor laughed.

“What? I never need reeling in; that is all Super SEAL.” Danny could not help but laugh.

Beth and Grace both giggled quietly at his assertion as Steve pretended to look incredibly offended.

“Come on. It’s a beautiful evening. What do you say we grab a couple of blankets and go enjoy it on the beach?” Beth suggested.

“I will second that idea, ma.” Steve grinned at her attempt to diffuse the teasing attack on his tendency to get into trouble. He also knew that, much like him, Grace found the beach soothing.

“Think they will let me in the kitchen long enough to grab some drinks?”

“It is worth a try.” Danny laughed. “Why don't I go find the blankets while you brave our fearsome
trio of Amazon warriors?"

“Ha! Do not let them hear you say that.” Steve stood as he shook his head. He had to admit the nickname was probably appropriate for at least two of the three and a big part of him hoped that Mary had a bit more warrior in her than he had often seen.

“Grace, why don't we go pick a spot?” Beth extended a hand to her granddaughter, the little girl quickly coming to her side and clapping the offered hand.

The governor rose, a bit unsure if he should bid his goodbyes and leave for the evening. He had been assigned no specific role in the after dinner plans, but he also had not been pointed to the door.

“It appears my backup is abandoning me to find blankets. There is a beer in it for you if you care to fill the vacancy.” McGarrett appeared beside him, nudging him in the side with an elbow.

Shaking his head, Sam could not help but smile at the offer. “That is probably the best offer I have had all week.”

Poking his head into the kitchen, Steve was immediately spotted by Catherine. “Don't shoot. We come in peace.” He held his hands up in surrender as he entered the room.

“You come in peace, eh?” Kono questioned. “Were you not told to stay out of the kitchen?”

Governor Denning stepped around the corner to Steve's side. “We will leave as soon as we grab drinks to take outside. The other ladies have requested we join them on the beach for an after dinner beverage.”

The three women eyed them skeptically, but finally relented. Cath reached inside the fridge and grabbed three longboards and one of the fruity drinks mom liked as Kono grabbed a reusable bottle to fill with pink lemonade for Grace.

“We will bring more out with us when we are done.” Cath commented as they handed the drinks over to the waiting me. “Now get outta here before we remove you by force.”

“Yes ma'am” Both McGarrett and Denning turned quickly and left before the women decided to follow through with their threat.

Walking toward the door, Sam paused for a moment. Sensing the other man's hesitation, Steve stopped a step ahead of him and turned to see what was going on.

“This is one of the first times I have actually had a chance to speak to you alone and in person since all this happened.” Denning paused, slightly unsure of how to proceed.

McGarrett looked back at him expectantly, completely at a loss as to what might come of out his boss's mouth next.

“I know I have already explained to everyone here just how highly I think of you all, but I feel like there is more that should be said.”

Steve shook his head, “Sir, after everything you have done for us since I found Grace, I do not think there is much more that needs to be said.”

“I appreciate that, but I want there to be no doubt. I have learned to trust you and your team implicitly. I have also learned that the loyalty between you all is like nothing I have ever seen.” His words halted for a second, but he held his hand up slightly to keep McGarrett silent. “Even then,
after the betrayal you suffered from my predecessor, I always expected you would all continue your excellent work because of your ties to each other and dedication to protecting this islands. I assumed it would be nearly impossible to earn any true trust and loyalty from you.”

Steve could not help but snicker a bit at that statement. “I can understand why you would think that.”

“Then I suppose you understand why I am more than a bit surprised that you have welcomed me so warmly into your home, among your ohana, especially in the middle of a family crisis.”

Another snicker escaped Steve before he responded. “I could kick you out if that would make you feel better?” The glint in his eyes and tone of his voice clearly said he was joking. “I will be honest. We had our reservations, but we have come to respect you over time and your actions since you found out about Grace and Rachel have been nothing short of what we would expect from a member of the family.”

They stood in silence for a few seconds before Steve spoke again. “Listen, I know there will always be some level of formality required in our professional interactions, but at this point everyone on my team trusts you and Grace likes you. So unless you decide to prove us wrong, we are happy to have you.”

“Well, I can promise I have no intention of doing that. I have no wish to end up on the wrong side of this family. Especially Grace, I bet she is a force to be reckoned with when she is mad.”

Stepping forward to open the door, Steve looked over his shoulder at the governor. “Just like her father.”

Stepping through the door, the SEAL immediately heard a small voice. “Daddy! We are over here.”

“I am right behind ya.” Danno called before the door shut behind them, prompting Steve to hold it open a few seconds longer as his partner emerged, arms overflowing with blankets.

“Did you leave any in the house?” McGarrett teased even as he leaned in to steal a quick kiss.

Together men made their way toward Grace and Beth. The Williams trio quickly spread a few of the blankets out before the five settled on to them, leaving plenty of room for the other to join them.

Danny and Steve's eyes met as they sat, legs stretched out with ankles crossed and shoulders pressed against each other. Grace immediately nestled her way into the space between their legs, her back against the length of her Daddy’s leg and head resting on Danno’s thigh.

Listening to the sound of the soft breeze rustling the palm trees and gentle waves lapping at the shore, the five felt no need for conversation. The governor stared out over the water, pondering how much things had changed with his task force since he had come into office. Knowing what he did now, he was immensely relieved that he did not dismantle it as he had originally considered.

Beth could not help but watch her son with the new family he had formed. She could see his time with Steve earlier had helped ease some of the intense sorrow and tension he had been carrying since the funeral. She hated to see her son hurting, but saw she had been right that it was Steve that he needed to lean on most to get through this.

Eyes falling to her granddaughter, Beth could the sadness still present in her small features even as she tried to be strong. The little girl's hands moved quietly and slowly, seeking the comfort of two very different hands. She watched as Steve's long, tanned fingers wrapped securely around the small hand that had Grace had maneuvered in his direction even as Danno's more compact and pale hand found the other.
Beth's gaze flicked up to their faces, and she noted that neither man appeared to be watching Grace, but somehow they had both known she was reaching for them. The two seemed to move with an automatic awareness of each other and their daughter that spoke of many hours spent together.

Mary, Cath, and Kono appeared after several minutes. The three were content to join their family in the peaceful, quietness found on the McGarrett beach. The only sound was the occasional movement as someone took a sip of a drink. Sometime later the sound of Chin's car pulling into the driveway interrupted the atmosphere. Kono immediately saw that Steve was moving to go find them and shook her head.

"I sent him a text." She whispered from her position near him. He gave a small nod and smile before letting his eyes close again and he listened to the sound of the water. When the last two joined them, the silence held for a short while longer before Danny cleared his voice, bringing everyone’s attention to him.

"Not to interrupt the lovely ambience we have going here, but I want to thank you all for being here for Grace and me these last several days.” His eyes shifted from person to person, catching each pair of eyes for a second before moving on to the next. “I just … I can not …” Unable to finish, he felt his daughter climb into his lap and wrap her small arms around him.

“I think what Danny is trying to get at is how much the family we have all built here means to him … to me.” Steve tried to continue for him as he wrapped an arm around his partner's shoulders, pulling them closer to his chest. “I … we …”

“Give it up boss man.” Kono interrupted, her voice thick. “We know.”

“We are ohana, brah. You both know that, and you both know what that means.” Chin summed everything up in those two sentences.

As the family pulled together in a tangled collection of arms and hugs surrounding Grace, Danny, and Steve, Governor Denning and Dianne both were surprised to feel themselves being tugged into the fray.

“Ready or not, I believe you have both been claimed as member so the extended Five-0 family.” Chin gave them both a warm smile.

Nearly an hour later, after more hugs and tears than any of them would care to recount, it was finally decided that Grace should head to bed. Those that would leave for the night gave the little girl a final hug before heading to their vehicles, most knowing they would return the next day.

When Steve started to rise to help Danny up, he felt Beth's hand pressing him back down. “We will get Grace down for the night. You two just stay out here for a bit longer and enjoy the quiet.”

Before he could argue, Mary set two fresh beers next to him and gave him a knowing wink. Grace appeared fine going with her aunt and grandmothers, stopping only to give Danno and Daddy both big hugs before heading into the house.

When he heard the door close behind them, Steve handed Danny one of the beers before reaching for his own. “She is an amazing little girl.” Steve could not help making the observation. “So much like her father it is amazing.”

“Love you, babe,” was Danny's only answer before he moved to sit between the SEAL's legs, leaning back against the warm chest.

“Love you too, Danno.”
Chapter End Notes

The next chapter will be up tomorrow, but in the meantime there is some between chapter naughtiness happening over on Guardian: Love Explored. (and yes for those that have been following along I finally got a clue and am embedding the links.)
The room was dark except for a slender ray of moonlight that sneaked through the curtains. Glancing at the alarm clock, Steve noted it was only 4:30 in the morning, too early to go out for a swim. He was not sure what woke him. There had been no nightmare, he did not hear Grace or any other sounds from the house, but something had brought him out of a dead sleep.

Knowing he would not easily fall back asleep until he knew why he was awake, the SEAL carefully rolled onto his side to watch his sleeping partner. After a few quiet seconds, a strangled mumble escaped the sleeping man's lips.

Bingo. That was the reason he was awake. Unsure what was causing the evident distress, Steve slid closer to his partner and pulled the shorter man's body into his arms. At first, the movement drew another anxious sound from him, but once he was settled against Steve's chest, long arms wrapped securely around him he quieted. Letting his chin rest a top Danny's head, Steve guessed it had been a bad dream and hoped his presence would help keep it from returning.

Two hours later, the pair remained in the exact same position. Steve's eyes remained open, diligently keeping watch over his slumbering partner. He knew it was time to go workout, had planned a run and swim this morning, but hesitated to leave Danny.

After a few more minutes, Steve felt the Jersey native move against him. He nearly jumped when he felt warm lips press against his collarbone. His breathe caught when the lips continued.

“How long have you been awake?” The words were muffled against his skin.

“A while.” He hedged, not wanting to Danny to feel guilty about the loss of sleep.

“Not that I am complaining, but is there a reason you are awake and wrapped around me like a security blanket instead of hanging out with your fellow marine life?” The detective quickly guessed McGarrett was trying to hide something. The answering silence only confirmed it. “When you say a while, does that mean minutes or hours?”

“Doesn't matter.” Steve's long arms seemed to involuntarily wrap more tightly around Danny's body.

“I will take that to mean hours.” Danny quipped, no longer expecting or hoping for a straight answer. “Were you just feeling an irresistible urge to play guard SEAL or did I manage to wake you up somehow?” He did not remember having a nightmare, but he also did not remember what he had dreamed so the possibility seemed likely.

“Guard SEAL?” Steve asked and Danny’s mind filled in the arched brows that inevitably accompanied those words.

“If the title fits ...” The detective smirked lovingly. He was beginning to realize that accepting McGarrett's protective tendencies would be far easier than fighting them, and if he was honest with himself, it felt good to have someone that both wanted to protect him and was capable of doing just that.
“Alright. I give. No more questions. Well, one more. What time is it?”

“6:41.” At least the SEAL did not try to evade that one.

“Shouldn't you be outside getting sweaty by now?” Danny asked playfully.

“Maybe.” Steve replied.

The detective read quite a bit into the evasive answer. Yes, he should be, but he refused to stand down from guard SEAL duty while Danny was sleeping.

“You know, I could use a workout this morning. Why don't I join you for the run? Then I can hit the shower while you swim to the mainland and back?” He offered. It was true, the workout would do him good, but it would also ensure that even if Steve had lost sleep on his account, he would not also lose the peace he found in his morning exercise.

“Yes, really.” The detective squirmed so he could place a soft kiss over the SEAL's heart. “Come on. If we are going to do this we should get moving.”

Steve loosened his hold on Danny, tugging him up slightly to find his lips. After a quick kiss, he rolled over and sprang out of bed.

Following more slowly, Danny could not help smiling at the overgrown kid he had fallen in love with.

Ten minutes later, the pair were slipping out the back door. Leaving Steve's towel and their water bottles on the lanai, they headed toward the road. This time, Steve matched his pace to Danny's shrugging off the funny look he received. “What?”

“You know I do not expect you to slow down and stay with me, right?”

“I know, but I like the idea of being able to run with you, not just at the same time as you.” The look Danny gave him made him laugh as they continued down the road. “If it makes you feel better, I will do some sprints so you do not think I am going soft.”

Danny reached over and smacked the SEAL on the stomach. “You better. I can not have you ruining your perfectly sculpted physique. That would ruin this.” He teased.

“Perfectly sculpted physique? Seriously, who talks like that?” Steve argued, seeing the glint in his partner's eye that warned of a coming rant.

“I will have you know …” Danny started before it registered Steve was sprinting away from him. “Neanderthal!” He called after him, laughing as he followed at a more reasonable pace.

Steve grinned at Danny's teasing nickname as he widened the gap between them. He would not let himself get too far away before he turned back and rejoined him for another stretch. He would just give his partner a couple minutes to let the rant die down first.

///// GUARDIAN /////

Watching her granddaughter sleep, Dianne thought over the last week. Last Wednesday she had woke alone in her too large house in England, having no idea her entire world was about to be tossed
That night she had crawled into bed in a state of grief stricken shock that her only daughter had been killed by the husband Rachel had always led her to believe was perfect. She wished they had been closer; that Rachel had trusted her enough to be honest. Based on what she knew now, her daughter must have been miserable and she had been to blind to see it, to blind to help her.

Yawning, she glanced at the clock and realized it was still early, not even seven yet. Allowing her mind to drift to the more pleasant reality of the family she now found herself a part of, Dianne's eyes drifted closed again. Slipping back to sleep, she rested one hand on the small of Grace's back, a physical reminder of the family she still had.

Dripping in sweat, Danny and Steve approached the lanai and grabbed their water bottles.

“You sure you do not want to join me for swim before you head inside?” Steve slipped behind Danny as they each took a drink and pulled him snuggly against him.

“As tempting as that offer is babe, I think I will pass. I am sure people will be waking up by now and if we wait and shower together they will all starve waiting for us to eat breakfast.”

Only pouting slightly, Steve gulped down the rest of his water before turning Danny for a quick kiss.

“Fine, but next time I might just take you with me by force.”

“Neanderthal.” Danny repeated the word that was quickly becoming an unconventional term of endearment for his crazy SEAL. “Go bond with your fishy friends. I am going to grab my shower.”

Swatting at McGarrett's backside, Danny stayed planted where he was for a moment as he watched the taller man jog down the beach, tossing his towel into a chair before diving into the surf.

Finally pivoting around, the detective headed inside to grab a quick shower and get ready for the rest of the day.

Coming out of the bedroom freshly showered and dressed Danny nearly collided with a frantic Dianne.

“Daniel, Grace is gone. She is not downstairs or in her room. I was awake less than an hour ago and she was still in bed, but I woke back up and she is gone.” She was almost to the point of tears. “Beth is in the shower, so she is not with her and she is not downstairs. It is too early for her to be outside, especially by herself.”

The detective smiled as he gently grasped her arm. “Just take a deep breath. I would be willing to bet she is just fine.”

Guiding her back down the stairs, he led her to a window facing the beach. “Look.” He pointed toward the chairs near the water where two feet hung visible over the edge, wrapped in the towel he had watched Steve toss into the chair not long before. When she started to pull away and head to the door, he kept the hand on her arm, restraining her.

“But Daniel, she is alone out there. It is not safe.” Her voice was full of worry.

“No. She is not alone and she is perfectly safe. This is a private beach so there are no strange people out there.” He turned her to look back out the window. Judging by the time, Steve would emerge
from the water any moment. “Just trust me and watch.”

He would explain after, but he did not want her to miss it or she would not understand. He still remembered the first time he witnessed it.

As they watched, the SEAL rose from the water where Dianne had not realized he was. The pair watched as Grace scrambled from the chair and ran, Steve's towel flying like a cape behind her. Spotting her, the SEAL dropped to his knees in the sand, opening his arms to catch her.

They stayed like that, his arms wrapped protectively around her, for a while before he rose. She remained in his arms, wrapped around his wet body as he grabbed the towel and draped it across his shoulders. When they reached the chair, he stood her carefully on it so he could dry off before pulling her back into his embrace and cradling her small body as they sat.

Standing at the window, Dianne and Danny were both a bit awed by the love and devotion evident between the pair.

“They share a special bond, don't they?” Mrs. Bradly finally spoke, a bit choked up by the scene they had just witnessed.

“Yes. They do. It is like nothing I ever imagined when I first met him, but now it is hard not to see it every time I look at him.” Danny's voice was also full of emotion. “Aside from the biology, he is every bit the father to her that I am.”

He felt her head lean against his shoulder. “I can not believe I ever thought to take her away from here. I had no idea how close she was to the people here. I did not pay enough attention on the rare occasion I spoke to her, and Rachel was always so hostile when she spoke of you and your team.”

“I am glad you changed your mind. It is so much better this way.” He pulled her into a hug as they both continued to stare out the window at Steve and Grace.

Chapter End Notes

Tomorrow's chapter starts with the last scene from Steve and Grace's side of the window.
Propelling himself through the water, Steve let his thoughts wander as his muscles burned. It was not so long ago that he would have pushed himself to go longer, his morning workouts sometimes taking close to two hours. Now although the water still calmed him, he felt no desire to drag out the swim, no need to hide in the water were solitude was acceptable.

Turning toward the beach, toward the house that held some of those he held dearest, he noticed his towel was not how he left it. Spotting small feet dangling over the edge of the chair, he pushed his body faster toward the shore. Part of him was surprised, though this was a bit of a routine for them. With everything that had happened recently, she had not been there waiting for him since she came home from the hospital.

Entering shallow water, the SEAL rose, shaking water from his short hair and wiping it from his eyes. Just clear of the water, he dropped down to his knees and opened his arms. Smiling, he watched her take the last few steps, the towel billowing behind her, as she dove into his embrace.

“Good morning.” Steve whispered into her ear as he relished the enthusiastic hug.

“Did you have a good swim, Daddy?” His smiled broadened at the easy way she spoke the word daddy, as if she had never referred to him as anything else.

“I did. Did you see Danno before you came out?” He felt her shake her head no against his shoulder. Rising to his feet, carefully bringing her with him, Steve laughed.

“You would be impressed. He went running with me again today.” Her expression was full of surprise as this revelation.

“Like last time?” She queried, remembering Danny's description of his previous run “with” Steve.

“No. This time we ran together more. I did some sprints so he would not accuse me of being lazy, but I always looped back so we could run more together.” Grace's smile lit up her whole face. He knew part of her worried about her Danno not taking good enough care of himself, so his sudden interest in joining Steve for workouts pleased them both.

“How much bigger do I have to be before I can run?” Her innocent question surprised him.

“We would not want you to run alone at your age, but you do not have to be older to run if you want to run.” Reaching the chairs, she straightened her legs from around his waist so her feet settled on the chair. She remained quiet as he dried off. “Gracie, did someone tell you that you were too little to run?” He hoped it was not Danny, though he had a hard time imagining her already trying to undermine something her Danno had told her.

“Stan, but Mommy agreed.” Her voice was a bit sad, but she kept her eyes locked on him.

Sweeping her back off the chair, Steve cradled her to him as he sat down in the chair, settling her in his lap with her head resting on his shoulder. He was not quite sure how to continue the conversation, not wanting to say anything negative about Rachel to her daughter. He also suspected that her mother's lack of argument with Stan may have had more to do with keeping the peace than any actual issue with Grace taking up running.
“Well, why don't we talk to Danno today and what he thinks?”

“Okay. Do you think it will be a pain for somebody to run with me?” True to form, Grace was concerned about causing a headache for anyone else.

Steve shook his head and chuckled softly. “Grace, I am pretty sure between me and your aunts and uncles you will have plenty of running partners. At the distances you are likely start at I will not have any problem going with you even if I already ran in the morning.” In his head, Steve acknowledged that it would likely be a fight over who got to go with her on any given day or it would end up being a group thing. “So how are you doing this morning?”

Letting her head rest on the SEAL’s sun warmed shoulder, hand settling over his heart, the little girl sat quietly for a moment. Grace knew that he was not really superhuman, but she found the sheer energy and larger than life presence that made him Super SEAL reassuring, the strong beat of his heart was just a physical reminder.

Steve did not press her to answer quickly. Though he did not know the reasons, he noticed when she rested her head or hand over his heart she was usually thinking. Content to give her time, he fixed his gaze on the open water as he contemplated the idea that the little girl he had come to love so quick after Danny let him into her life viewed him as a father figure. Not for the first time, he said a silent prayer that he would not let her down.

“I think I am okay.” Grace answered the question at last. Though her pause was longer than would be deemed socially acceptable, Steve cared little for that. “The funeral was sad, but I thought it would be harder.”

The SEAL thought of his own mother's funeral, with his dad and Mary. They had all been a mess, but instead of pulling together, their family had crumbled at the loss. Perhaps that was one upside of Danny and Rachel already being divorced, Danny and Grace had formed a family that would remain intact and supportive throughout the loss. “What do you think made it less hard?” He was not about to say easy, nothing about this was easy.

This time the response came much faster as her big brown eyes looked up at him. “You and Uncle Chin and Aunt Kono and Cath. Danno and I knew you had our backs. Even when I got scared in the bathroom, I knew you were all close and someone would come.” Her faith in them made his heart swell even as the desire to live up to it humbled him.

Steve grinned down at her. Sometimes her choice of words gave a clue just how much time she spent around Five-0. “We will always have your backs. Even when we can not physically be with you, we will do our best to make sure you are capable of dealing with the situation.”

With everything he had seen in his time in the Navy and with Five-0, part of Steve wanted to lock the entire ohana in his house where he could protect them, but he knew that was a ridiculous idea. The only suitable alternative was to equip them with the skills they needed to remain safe.

“Do you think Kono and Cath will show me more self-defense stuff today before the appointment with Dr. James?” It seemed her mind was wandering in the same direction as his. Danny way right, the two of them really did operate on the same wavelength sometimes.

“I bet they would love that. Bet they will be here before ten this morning.” He would be surprised if they made it that long before appearing at the house. “Do you think they will let me play today?” He gave her his best pouting face.

Giggling up at him, Grace shook her head as she left. “You don't have to give me the puppy dog
face, Daddy. It is the two of them you have to convince.” Steve tried not to laugh when he realized the look on her face was an exact replica of one of Danny's looks. For all that the Jersey native insisted that he had face, Danny was just as guilty. Of course, Danny also had tones. Thinking of his partner, Steve realized they should probably head inside and see what the plan was for breakfast.

“Think we should go see what they have to eat in there?” He jerked his head toward the house. “I am kinda hungry, and I bet you are too.”

Grace’s stomach growled at him, answering the question for her. “Guess so,” was her only addition to the growl.

“Ready?” He asked as he stood up from the chair with her still in his arms.

“Yep.” As soon as the word was spoken, he swung her body around so she was on his back, arms and legs wrapped securely around him.

Dianne smiled watching her granddaughter with Steve. “That looks like a move they have practiced a few times.” She knew Grace's slight weight would be little challenge for the SEAL to maneuver, but it was evident the little girl had done her part to shift from his lap to his back more than once.

“A few thousand at least. Sometimes I swear riding around on Super SEAL is her preferred method of transportation.” He grinned as he watched them start toward the house. “Though she was loath to admit it and potentially hurt my feelings, I did get her to confess that the view is better from up there.”

They both laughed as he shrugged, Beth's laughter joined from the kitchen. “Sorry son. You were destined to be short.”

“That's okay, ma. Now that I am training my neanderthal SEAL to make himself useful, it does not matter quite as much.” His voice was full of laughter and he and Dianne made their way into the kitchen. “Now, what can we help with? It looks like those two are headed this way, so they must be hungry.”

“We have it all under control.” Mary shooed him away from the island. “Mom let me help.” She gave him a wink.

Looking around the kitchen he could not argue with her assessment. Of course, his mother would have been keeping an eye on Grace and Steve through the window to know when they were approaching.

“Here, just carry these into the dining room.” Beth shoved a tray of juice glasses and coffee cups into his hands. Once he turned to do as he was bid, she pulled a large bowl of cut fruit off the counter and handed it more gently to Diane. “If you would not mind taking these.” Her tone was far nicer with Mrs. Bradley, causing the British woman to laugh as she accepted the bowl.

“Of course, my dear.” She followed Danny toward the dining room just as they heard the sound of approaching footsteps.

Steve entered the room with Grace still clinging to his back. “Something smells good.”

“Mary and I made biscuits and gravy, but if you don't go get changed there may not be any left for
you.” Beth retorted even as she walked up to give him a quick kiss on the cheek.

“Yes, ma'am.” The SEAL quickly helped Grace to the ground before bolting up the stairs to change.

“You enjoy your time with Daddy?” Beth asked as Grace gave her a hug. When the little girl nodded, she smiled. “Sometimes that is just what you need to start a day right.”

“As always, you are right Ma.” Danny replied as he reappeared in the room, wrapping his arms around his mother and daughter. She was more right than she may have realized, apparently sometimes all he or Grace needed to start their day off right was some time with Steve.

Chapter End Notes

I know this chapter basically oozed sweetness and fluff, but after the preceding chapters I thought they deserved a reprieve as much as we did.
Chapter 49

Putting up the last breakfast dish, Grace turned to give Steve a high five. “Done!” The SEAL grinned down at her. When he had insisted on handling clean up, she had been equally insistent that she would help.

“Now what?” Heading toward living room, he swung her up into his arms. Part of him wondered how much longer she would let him carry her around. He already knew she would outgrow this phase long before he was ready. Passing the front door, he caught the sound of car doors slamming shut. “Sounds like the others are here.”

“Can we go meet them?” Not bothering to answer, he veered toward the door. Catching Danny's eye, he gave a quick smile before heading outside.

“Morning brah!” Chin called when he saw them.

“Hi Uncle Chin.” Grace reached over, giving him a welcoming hug as he met them on the walkway. Steve's eyes met the older man's, giving a small smile and nod at the silent question he saw there.

“We just finished cleaning up from breakfast.” The SEAL wrapped his free arm loosely around Kono in a brief hug as she and Catherine appeared beside them.

“Knew we should have gotten here earlier.” Chin faked a pout as they turn toward the door.

“Do not let them hear you say that or they will start cooking again.” Steve laughed as he teasingly reprimanded the Hawaiian.

“I do not doubt that.” Conceding, Chin held the door open for the others to head into the house. “Is there a plan for today?” He asked Grace and Steve as he followed them through the door.

“Dr. James this evening, but nothing specific until then.” While the original plan had been for Chin and Kono to head to the Five-0 headquarters for at least part of the day, the disruption following the funeral had the governor adamant that they wait until the following week to return.

“A quiet day at Casa de McGarrett sounds fine with me.” Kono grinned.

In the end, a quiet day is exactly what they had. Grace seemed somber, not unexpected the day following her mother's funeral, so the ohana did their best to let her set the pace for the day. Before they knew it, it was time for Grace, Danny, and Steve to head to Dr. James's and for Chin and Dianne to go shopping.

“The taco soup is in the slow cooker, so there will be food ready when you get back home.” Beth reminded them, giving Steve a tight hug as they headed toward the door.

“Thanks ma. We will be back in a bit.”

Pulling into the parking lot, Steve was relieved to see it was mostly empty. After the crowd yesterday at the funeral, he was not sure how Grace would handle an unexpected group of strangers here. Familiar with the security measures at the therapist’s office, both men were slightly less keyed up than they were heading into the previous visit.

“Welcome back.” Dr. James greeted them as soon as they walked through the door. Just like before, she stepped around them and secured the lock on the door. “Two of the other doctors are finishing
up some paperwork in their offices, but they will relock the door when they leave.” Both men nodded as she shifted her focus to her patient. “Hi Grace.”

“Hi.” The little girl returned her greeting, accepting the hand the doctor extended to her. The doctor and Grace leading the way, they headed through the interior door to the same area where they’d sat at the last appointment.

“Grace, if it is okay with you, I would like for the two of us to talk first today. Then I will talk to your dads, and then, if any of us think we need to, the four of us can sit down for a bit together again. Does that sound okay to you?”

“Yes ma’am.” Grace nodded, giving a small smile.

“Okay. We can either stay in here,” she gestured to the tables and chairs around the room, “or we can go into my office.” She pointed to an open door just down the hallway, giving Grace the option to decide where she would be most comfortable.

“Here.” While the little girl knew she would eventually have to meet with Dr. James in her actual office, there was something about this room that helped her relax a bit.

“Alright.” Angling to face Steve and Danny, she prepared to send them off to the room they had waited in before.

“We remember where it is.” Danny spoke before she could ask. Before heading down the hall, both men gave Grace a kiss on the head and a quick hug.

Settling into the same couch as before, it was some time before either of them spoke.

“What if we are not handling this right?” The detective's voice broke the silence, the words spoken in a rush of air.

McGarrett shifted, sitting sideways on the couch to face his partner. Reaching for one of Danny's hands, he squeezed it gently. “Grace losing her mother is wrong, no matter how we look at it, so I am not sure there is an absolute right way to handle it. Are there specific things you are worried about?” Steve schooled his features, not wanting to show the fear he felt. What if Danny was deciding he was not what Grace needed right now.

Steve felt the pressure of Danny's fingers wrapped around his increasing for a brief second and looked down to their hands. “Not this, and not you with Grace. Those have both been a long time coming and if anything are helping her feel more secure in her new home environment.” The SEAL looked back into his partner's eyes. “Do not give me that look. I know you, and I know the first thing you always think is that somehow you are at fault. You are not. At least not this time, so calm down.”

“Thanks.” The word was only a whisper, but he knew Danno heard it. “Honestly, I have thought the same thing. She seems so calm most of the time, going through as if things are normal. It is like she is really only letting it out in short bursts.”

“Can't imagine where she picked that habit up from. Ma swears I was the same way. If anything bad happened, I would throw myself into whatever else I had going on to keep the bad from drowning me. Then I would process in bits and pieces either as I felt ready or as I was forced to.”

“I suppose we should talk to Dr. James about it. She has dealt with situations like this far more than we have.”
“True.” Danny let himself lean into the larger man as she closed his eyes, hoping that everything they were doing for Grace was helping her and not making it harder to cope with the loss of her mother.

They remained in silence, Steve's arm wrapped around Danny's shoulders as they waited for Dr. James to join them. When she finally did, the SEAL did not miss the smile that flitted across her face when she saw them.

“How is she?” He did not wait for her to take a seat before asking.

“She is a remarkable, strong, little girl.” Both men level her with a 'tell us something we don't know' look, prompting her to continue. “She filled me in on everything that happened since Saturday. I know you will not want to leave her alone for long, so I will run through my comments and then we can address any remaining questions or concerns the two of you have.” The pair nodded their assent to her recommendation.

“The situation with Ms. Bradley seems to have been handled better than anyone could have hoped. I do not know if Governor Denning realizes just how big of an impact he made with his actions, but I can tell you they likely made the difference between pushing her recovering several steps ahead and sending her spiraling backward indefinitely.”

“Trust us. We are all beyond grateful for his support.” Danny acknowledged.

“Grace does have some concerns about her departure on Saturday. She understands it is necessary for Ms. Bradley to go back to her home, but is worried things will return to the way they were. From what she said, you have done a great job at trying to overcome those concerns. I gather by the time you get home she will be ready to start video chatting.”

“Yes, ma'am.” “I might suggest letting them practice before Ms. Bradley leaves. Seeing that things really are set up to be able to talk may offer a bit more surety for her.” The men nodded at her suggestion, readily agreeing. “You may also want to talk to Ms. Bradley when Grace is not around and see if she has an idea of when she will plan to return. Even if she does not yet, you might encourage her to pick a date soon so that Grace has something a bit more concrete to hang onto.”

“We can do that. I want to get a calendar for the kitchen anyway to help us keep track of important dates and appointments, so we could add her visits where Grace can see them.” Steve responded. With just him he had never bothered with a calendar, but with three of them in the house he wanted a way to ensure they all knew about any important events.

“That would be good.” The therapist encouraged the idea. “Now, it sounds like yesterday was a rather trying day. Grace was definitely rattled by the unexpected confrontation, but what really stood out to me was where her focus was when telling the story. She did not fixate on the man yelling or banging on the door, though those did scare her. The pieces she focused on where how fast you reacted, how her entire family worked together to fix it, and even the behavior of the HPD officers that were trying to protect you all. To her it seems to have reinforced the idea that while bad things may happen, she is not alone to deal with them.”

The room fell silent for a long moment as Danny and Steve processed what the doctor said.

“She told me about your conversation immediately following the attack. You know she is right Commander. You can not prevent everything, but your handling of the situation shows a great deal about how much you care about your family. As for Grace, with the presence of mind to think like
that at her age in such a situation, she would make a fine therapist some day.”

The guys smiled rather proudly. Neither of them would admit that living around them, she was likely to get plenty of practice with those skills.

“As best I can tell from Grace, you are both doing everything you can to help her process her grief and find ways to settle into this new version of her life. I definitely want to keep up the twice weekly sessions as long as they are proving beneficial. I imagine in a few weeks she will probably be okay to transition to once a week, but at any time if you or Grace feel I can help with something, you have my number and I expect you to use it. I am sure you intend to, but I also strongly encourage you to keep up with her self defense training. The trauma of this entire situation is seated as much in seeing her mother as a victim to a violent crime and feeling like a victim itself as it is in the pain of losing her mother.”

“Believe me, we have no intention of stopping that.” Danny confirmed.

“As for how she is doing with the loss. Based on our conversations, it appears she processed a lot of the situation while locked in the bathroom. The loss will continue to hit her at various times, much as I gather it has with the picture and such up to now, but right now the best thing you can do is what you already are. Letting her make choices about her room is helping her gain a sense of permanence with the new living arrangements. Surrounding her with the people that love her and are willing to provide a stable and supportive environment is huge. Often one of the hardest parts of losing a parent young is the loss of that unconditional love and acceptance, but for Grace it sounds like she viewed the two of you and your team as her biggest source of that. While she loved her mother, she also felt like she was often in the way and more of a burden than she should have been.”

Steve felt Danny's fist clench against his leg. Hearing Grace believed something he suspected of his own mother broke his heart. He could only imagine how furious it made Danny.

“I know I have said quite a bit already. Is there anything else you two want to talk about before we rejoin Grace?”

“We were going to ask if you felt we were handling the situation correctly or if there are things we should do differently. I know you addressed some of that already.”

“Honestly Commander, I wish I had more parents like the two of you. You are both doing remarkably well given the circumstances. Just keep paying attention to how she reacts to things. She will need your encouragement to get herself ready to face going back to school and finding a new routine. Try to give her chunks of time with the other members of the ohana, people she trusts, but without either of you present. While it is normal and perfectly healthy for her to want to be close to both of you right now, you do not want to her to become too dependent on your presence to feel secure in her world.”

“That makes sense.” Danny agreed. As much as he would love to stay glued to her side, he knew his responsibility as her father was to ensure she grew up as strong and independent as he had always hoped she would.

“One other thing, with Ms. Bradley leaving on Sunday, would the two of you be open to having she and your mother,” she motioned to Danny, “join us for the Saturday session. I think it might do Grace and Ms. Bradley both some good to feel like they have a plan and support before her departure.”

Steve glanced down at Danny before answering. “Yes. We will ask them to come with us.”
“Excellent. Now why don't we go check in on Grace. I do not think there is anything else that needs attention today, so unless you have additional concerns, I think you are free to go enjoy your dinner.”

“Thank you.” Danny and Steve replied in unison even as they were halfway to the door, headed for Grace.

Approaching the room, they spotted her putting the finishing touches on a drawing of what appeared to be her between the two of them, standing on the beach facing the water. “You're becoming quite the artist there, Gracie.” Steve spoke quietly hoping not to startle her.

“Thanks Daddy.” She smiled up at him.

“You ready to go home, Monkey?” Danny asked from beside his partner.

“I will see you three and your grandmas in a few days Grace. You guys call me if you need anything.” Dr. James offered as she watched her young patient swing into Commander McGarrett's arms. If her other patients had a fraction of the support this little girl did, they would all be far better off.
“I do not think I am going to fit any of my clothes when I get back home.” Dianne set her fork on the side of her empty dessert plate, leaning back into the chair. “With just me in the house I am not used to eating half so well as this.”

Everyone around the table laughed. It was a very good thing the task force and Catherine stayed active or with the Williams parents moving to the island they would all be shopping for new larger clothes soon.

“Now that we are moving to the island, I think I am going to have to learn my way around some of the fish and fruits. I know Paul and I could stand to mix it up some, and Steve has introduced us to some delicious things.”

“Please tell me this does not mean you are going to start trying to make me eat pineapple too.” Danny fussed. “It is bad enough that Super SEAL convinced Grace it was an acceptable topping for pizza.”

“But Danno, it really is good.” Grace defended before yawning.

“Maybe we will wear him down before you head off to college.” Steve laughed. “But for now, you should probably go get ready for bed.”

The little girl gave him a quick hug before heading toward the door. “I'll be back.”

“I suppose that means we should stick around until she returns.” Kono grinned. “I do not know about the rest of you, but I am not leaving without my hug.”

“Relax rookie, we will not kick you out.” The SEAL rose to start collecting dishes.

Danny quickly joined him. “Why don't the rest of you relax while we clean up.” As much as he loved having the house full of people, he just wanted a few moments of relative normalcy with his partner, and washing dishes seemed like as good an option as any.

“I would argue, but I am actually rather tired, so for this evening I will concede.” Dianne admitted. The emotional whirlwind of the last few days was finally catching up with her. The others murmured their assent, opting to head back to the living room.

Setting the last of the dishes next to the sink where Steve had already started washing, Danny paused. Wrapping his arms around the SEAL's waist, he let his head rest on the broad back. He heard a plate getting set on the drying rack and then felt Steve's still damp hands cover his own.

“You okay?” Steve's voice was barely more than a whisper.

“Yeah.” The response was muffled against his back. Gripping his partner's hands tighter so he could loosen them from his middle, Steve pivoted around to face the shorter man before he could protest the loss of contact. Pulling the detective to his chest, he wrapped his arms around him, letting his chin rest on the top of his head. They stood embracing for several moments before Danny spoke again. “You know we are supposed to be washing dishes.”
“I was washing dishes, but something more important came up, so I decided to tend to that first.” Steve kissed the top of Danny's head as the shorter man started to step back.

“Thanks.” Danny spoke quietly as he reached around the SEAL to grab a towel to start drying the dishes. “I don't know why …”

“Hey. I know this will sound funny coming from me, but you do not need a reason to need a hug, a kiss, or anything else from me.” Steve interrupted, his expression serious.

The detective couldn’t help but laugh. “You are right. Coming from the man that has traditionally run screaming from all forms of affection, that does sound funny.” Swatting the SEAL on the backside with his towel, he kept laughing. “It is nice to see that even a neanderthal can be domesticated.”

Steve laughed at the remark, too happy that he had managed to make his partner laugh to let the teasing bother him.

It did not take long for the pair to finish cleaning up once they settled into the task. Putting the last dish away, Steve grabbed Danny's hand and led him toward the living room to join the others. Given that there were not really enough seats for the entire crew, they grabbed a spot on the floor along with Catherine, Chin, and Kono.

“I am starting to think I need different furniture in here.”

“Nah, brah. Maybe just some cushions to throw on the floor.” Chin replied. “There would barely be room to move if you actually had enough seats for all of us.”

“And where does one find things like that?” The look on Steve's face made everyone laugh.

“Perhaps one just gives the women some money and they find them for him.” Kono managed to answer between giggles.

“That I can do.”

“Speaking of women,” Dianne spoke up. “I would really like to treat all the ladies to something nice before I leave. Do you think you could spare a few hours on Friday?”

“You don't need to do that.” Beth retorted.

“I know, but I would very much like to. Despite the circumstances, I have enjoyed this trip far more than I ever expected and you all played a big role in that. I thought perhaps a few hours at the spa might do us all some good. Mary, what time do you fly back to LA?”

“Not until six in the evening. I have to be at work on Saturday, but wanted to stay as long as I could.”

“Perfect.” She looked to Danny and Steve, “I would love for Grace to come if we can find a location you think she would be comfortable with.”

“I think with both her grandmothers and all three of her aunts, she should be okay.” Grace knew Kono and Catherine were more than capable of protecting her if the need arose.

“Kono why don't you call Kalea, and see if she can fit you all in?”

“Good plan, cuz.” The petite Hawaiian grabbed her phone from her pocket as she stood.

“Another cousin?” Danny guessed.
“You got it, brah.”

“Dianne, why don't you join me and we can arrange the details if she answers.” Kono asked has she headed toward the kitchen to make the call in the relative quiet. Ms. Bradley rose and followed.

“While they all go play, I think I will pop by HPD and see what the latest is. Speaking of, Duke called just before dinner and said that they have everything they will need from Rachel's house. He thought we might want to know in case Dianne would like to sort through Rachel's things, plus he thought we might want to get more of Grace's stuff.”

“Good to know.” Danny replied. He understood why Chin waited until neither of them were in the room to mention it. “We can ask Dianne what she would like to do once Grace is in bed.” He had barely finished speaking when they heard the girl's footsteps coming down the stairs.

“All clean, Gracie?”

“Yep.” The little girl came straight to her Daddy and Danno to give them hugs. She was still with them with Kono and Dianne rejoined the group.

“We are all set. She had plenty of room for us Friday starting at 10, and she is even going to have a nearby restaurant bring in lunch for us.” Seeing Grace’s confused look, Dianne clarified. “We are having a bit of a girls' day on Friday at the spa.”

“Oh.” Grace looked a bit nervous.

“I thought it would be a nice chance for you, your aunts, Grandma Williams, and me to relax a bit.” Dianne spoke quickly to reassure her granddaughter that she would be surrounded by family.

“That sounds fun.” Grace spoke with much more enthusiasm this time as she continued to make her way around to give everyone hugs.

“Would you like someone to read with you?” Steve asked as she finished.

Looking around the room, Grace’s eyes settled on Mary. “Would it be okay if Aunt Mary read tonight? She is leaving soon.” Her eyes flitted to her grandmothers, a little afraid they might be upset given that they had handled bedtime reading since their arrival.

“I bet your Aunt Mary would love that.” Dianne encouraged knowing she still had a few more nights with the little girl.

“I would love to.” Mary jumped up from the chair, taking Grace's hand. “You know your Daddy used to read to me when I was little.” Her voice faded as they headed up the stairs.

“Never thought I would see Mary so excited about bedtime.” Steve's eyes were still fixed on the point where his sister and daughter disappeared. “Then again, I never thought I would be getting called daddy either.” Danny squeezed his hand.

“I think it is just impossible not to love that kid.” Catherine spoke in a hushed tone as the room fell silent.

A moment later, Danny cleared his throat and looked at his ex-mother-in-law. “Dianne,” he paused as she turned to face him. “We have been informed that Rachel's house is no longer under police lock down.” He did not want to say it was no longer a crime scene. “I am sorry to bring it up, but we wanted to make sure you had time to go through her things before you left if you wanted.”
The older woman sat looking a bit stricken for a moment. Beth reached over and took one of her hands, a silent gesture of support.

“I could go with you if you would like.” Catherine moved so she sat at Dianne's knees. After helping Dianne through Rachel's funeral, she had grown especially fond of the woman.

“My too.” Kono offered.

“Thank you. I do not think I could do it alone, so I would truly appreciate that.”

“I will let you decide what you would like to take and what you think Grace might want, now or in the future.” A few days ago, he imagined she might have taken anything of meaning, but now he guessed she would only take the things that had some shared meaning to her and Rachel and leave the rest for Grace.

“Do you think we should go tomorrow?” While she was not looking forward to it, Dianne thought it might be best to get it over with instead of dampening her spirits after Friday's intended fun.

“There are some boxes left over in the garage that we did not use moving my things. You are welcome to use those. If you label them we can make sure anything you would like to take home with you is packed safely and shipped.”

“Thank you, Danny.” Hearing the clock chime, she glanced at the time. “Oh dear. I should have called for a car.”

“No need. We will take you with us, and then we can pick you up in the morning. If that works for you, we can do the hard part of the day first so it is over.”

“Then maybe we can do a Skype test run when you guys get here.” Chin offered, wanting to give her something else to think about for the following day.

“That sounds like a plan.” Seeing Kono yawn, she smiled at the others. “I think that is a sign that we should all be heading to our respective beds.

“Give us a call around eleven and let us know if you will make it for lunch.” Beth requested as she gave Kono and Catherine each a hug.

“Yes, ma'am.” They agreed.

Several minutes later, Beth, Steve, and Danny were the only ones remaining as they listened to the sound of car doors shutting.

“I do not know about you boys, but I am tired.” Beth gave them each a fond look. “I am going to head to bed. I will see you tomorrow morning.” Danny watched as she headed toward the stairs, Steve busy checking the locks behind him.

Feeling strong arms wrap around him, he felt a tremor run up his spine when Steve's breath ghosted over his ear. “Ready for bed?”

“For bed or for sleep?”

“Whichever you would prefer.” The SEAL pulled him tighter against his chest.

“Mmmmm.” Danny hummed contentedly.

“Just let me know what you decide.” Steve released him and headed for the stairs.
“Neanderthal.”

Chapter End Notes

The next chapter of Guardian: Love Explored picks up with the last few lines of this one. Check it out if you care to enjoy.
Judging by the faint light coming from the window, Steve had been staring at his sleeping partner for at least a half hour. Fortunately, the smaller man had slept through his abrupt waking from a new nightmare. The vivid images of Danny screaming accusations of trapping him on this pineapple infested hell-hole persisted in playing on a loop in his head.

Unfortunately, the last 30 minutes had done nothing to calm these new concerns. Things had moved so fast over the last week that he had not thought to take a step back and ask Danny if staying here was what he really wanted. It did not matter that his partner had not implied any interest in going back to Jersey. It did not even matter that Danny's parents were moving to the island. Steve remember all too well the energy Danny spent loudly claiming that Rachel having Grace here was the only reason he stayed in Hawaii, and he was so worried about her right now that it would not immediately dawn on him that he was free to leave.

Giving up on the idea of sleeping, the SEAL slipped out of bed, careful not to disturb his still sleeping partner. Not really in the mood to workout yet, he threw on his running clothes anyway. Maybe after Grace woke up the two of them could go for a short run. For now, he just needed to get out of the room.

Ducking out of the room, he crossed to Grace's room and opened the door just enough to peek inside. The sight of the little girl curled up with her Aunt Mary, both still sound asleep, made him smile. It was great to see the two growing even closer. Backing away and shutting the door, he headed down the stairs. He was almost to the kitchen before he registered the scent of freshly brewed coffee in the air.

“Morning son.” Beth greeted him before he could consider whether he was ready to face someone else.

“Mornin’.” Steve busied himself getting a cup of the coffee and wiping down the already clean counter before sitting on one of the stools across from Danny’s mother.

“Not going for your swim this morning?” While she waited a few moments to ask, he could see a hint of surprise on her face.

“Grace mentioned wanting to start running the other day. I thought I would see if she wanted to go out for a short run later.”

She gave him an approving smile. “It is wonderful that you encourage her with things like that. It is never too early to build those habits, and I am sure she will love sharing that with you.”

“I hope so.” Sitting across the island from the man she now claimed as her son, Beth could see something was bothering him. Danny was right, his face made him easy to read if you paid attention and he was not keeping his 'I'm a bad ass SEAL' mask on. She had been pleased to notice that when at home he let it slip more and more. Grabbing the coffee pot and refilling both of their cups she decided to try to get him to open up to her.

“Steve?” He immediately looked up at her, “What is bothering you son?”

He met her eyes for a brief moment before returning his gaze to the coffee cup and frowning.

“Do not tell me nothing. I may not have given birth to you, but as the mom in residence I can tell when something is wrong.” She kept her voice firm, but still full of love.
Shoulders sagging, he had the good graces to appear slightly embarrassed at his attempt not to answer.

“I am worried that Danny is going to blame me for being stuck here. He has always made it very clear that Grace was the reason he came, the reason he stayed.” Before she could reassure him, he continued. “There is nothing stopping him from going now.”

Placing her hand over his much larger one, she managed to stop him. “My dear boy, it has been a long time since Grace was the only thing keeping him here. For him, home is with you now.”

“But I would go with him. For him, for Grace, I would go anywhere they wanted. I would move to Jersey in a heartbeat to make them happy.”

Beth was taken a bit by surprise with how ready he was to give up everything for her son and granddaughter.

“Not to mention that his father and I are moving out here now.” Before she could say more, she saw a slight movement in the doorway. Danny held his finger up, telling her not to announce his presence as he quietly slunk into the room and pulled up the stool next to Steve. Seeing the two would work out Steve’s concerns, Beth handed Danny a cup of coffee before slipping out.

“I suppose it is too much to hope that you missed all that.”

“Is that why I found you in the kitchen with mom instead of still in our bed or out swimming with your aquatic brethren? Where did this sudden concern even come from?” Something about the look in Steve's eyes gave it away. “You had a nightmare. Why didn't you wake me up? We could have talked about it.”

Steve took a deep breath, bracing himself for Danny's reaction to his answer. “Because I was afraid it would be true.”

The detective reached a hand out and squeezed the SEAL's forearm. “Babe, I do not want to go back to Jersey.” Steve turned to face him, a look of total shock on his face. “Listen to me, yes I miss the pizza and the weather, but family was always the biggest reason I missed Jersey.” Reaching up, he held McGarrett's face, forcing him to meet his eyes. “My family is all here or spread out now and I do not just mean my parents. Between you and the rest of the lunatics we call ohana, this place is home now. We are not going anywhere; not that I would argue if there were a few less pineapples running around. Besides, Grace would hate me if I took her away from the warm ocean.” Reaching forward, he placed a gentle kiss on the SEAL's lips. “I do love you for being willing to go, but you would seriously hate living in Jersey. I ca not imagine taking you away from here.”

“You are sure?” Steve asked on last time. “I have had to adapt to plenty of places being in the Navy. I could do it.”

“Yes babe. I am 110% sure.” Danny laughed. “I have no doubt you would do it for us, but I also know that is not the right thing for any of us.”

Pivoting on his stool, Steve faced his partner with his full body. Grasping the shorter man's hips, he tugged him off the stool and firmly between his long legs.

Before Danny could argue about being manhandled, Steve captured his lips. The kiss was rough and possessive as Steve's arms wrapped around his partner, one securely around his lower back and the other holding the blond head. Recovering from this abrupt attack, Danny responded quickly, wrapping his own arms around Steve's neck as the nestled his body closer. When the kiss broke, they
were both breathing heavily, eyes alight.

After a moment, they had both calmed their breathing, but Danny remained trapped by Steve’s arm when they heard footsteps approaching. Rather than release his partner, the SEAL simply pivoted them around to face the entrance, turning Danny so his back rested against Steve’s chest.

“Mornin’” Steve greeted Mary and Grace as they entered, Beth right behind them. Her eyes shifted from Steve to Danny, silently assessing if they had resolved things or if she needed to find a way to get them more time alone. Seeing Steve much more relaxed and both of them smiling, she decided things must be okay.

Grace managed to maneuver so she was sitting on the SEAL’s lap with Danno pulled close to her. Steve’s arms wrapped around them both, his eyes closing briefly at the feel of his family in his arms.

“Daddy, did you skip you workout?” An accusatory voice interrupted the hug. “You have not had time to change and you are not wet or sweaty.”

“I thought I might take it a bit easy this morning. Believe it or not I do not do crazy workouts every morning.”

“So what, you are only going to run up half a mountain today instead of a whole one?” Danny quipped. Steve lowered his hand and made the smaller man yelp when he pinched his backside. “Hey!” Everyone laughed at his indignant tone.

“No. We talked the other day about Grace wanting to run. I thought before we went and bought her new running shoes, I might take her out for an easy run and see if she enjoys it.” He looked to the little girl. “What do you think?”

“I will go change.” She hopped off his lap and ran upstairs before anyone could say anything else.

“Looks like she approves of the plan.” Danny grinned at him. “You two have fun.”

“What? No mile long list of restrictions and warnings?” Steve looked slightly surprised.

“Nope. She is your daughter too. I trust you to take good care of her.” Reaching up on his toes, Danny gave his partner a quick kiss to help wipe the look of surprise off his face. “Maybe while you two are off working up a sweat, the three of us can manage to wrangle breakfast.”

“I think we might be able to do that.” Mary laughed. “You better go lace up your shoes before she gets back down here and leaves you behind.” She shooed her brother out of the kitchen.

A few moments later, the three heard the door close behind Grace and Steve.

“I take it he is feeling better now.” Beth commented to her son.

“Yes. Neanderthal had a nightmare. That is what brought it up.” His shoulder sunk a bit. “I guess I can't blame him for thinking about it though, I may have stopped being quite so vocal about wanting to go back to Jersey, but I never told him I had changed my mind.”

Mary did not say a word during their conversation, busying herself instead with getting ingredients out to fix omelets. She could fill in the blanks well enough though, and was glad that Steve was not stuck still worrying. He seemed so content with Grace and Danny here, she hated the idea of him losing the family he had built.

“How long do you think they will be out?” She finally spoke up seeing that the other discussion
seemed to have died down.

“Can't imagine they will be gone more than a half an hour. Knowing him he will be making sure she warms up, cools down, and stretches, but he will not push for any real distance today.”

“This coming from the man that accuses him of swimming to the mainland.” Mary rolled her eyes at him.

“He may be reckless and extreme when it is just him, but you know how protective he is of Grace. Plus, I can tell he really wants her to enjoy it, so he will make it as easy a start as possible.

////GUARDIAN/////

“You feel warm enough to try a short run?” They had been walking for about five minutes, so Steve guessed she would be about ready.

“Yes.”

“Okay. Let’s aim for that red car up the road.” He pointed to a vehicle about a tenth of a mile ahead. “Once we get there you decide if you want to go further or stop. Like I said earlier, we will start off mixing up running and walking, and eventually the walking will just get squished out.” Grace giggled at his word choice before she took off running.

They did not speak while running, but Steve fell into an easy pace next to her. He was not surprised at all when they passed the red car without slowing. They had gone for roughly three minutes when Grace finally slowed to a walk.

“Way to go, Gracie!” Steve gave her a high five as they walked. “That is an impressive start.”

She had a huge smile on her face as she looked up at him. “This is fun.” She was breathing a bit heavier than usual, but loved the feeling of pushing herself. She had definitely picked up some of the Williams and McGarrett competitive streaks.

“Ready to go again?” Steve asked after a couple of minutes. He watched as she looked ahead of them.

“Black truck.” She pointed before taking off.

The SEAL took off after her, quickly spotting her assigned target a ways in front of them. By the time they made it back to the house, both were sporting huge smiles and shirts full of sweat.

“I would say that was a pretty impressive first run, Gracie. What do you say we go clean up and see what they fixed to eat?”

Rounding the corner, they found Mary, Beth, and Danny carrying trays of food and drinks out to the lanai. “We thought you two might be hungry by the time you got back, so we would eat out here where you will not stink up the kitchen.” Danny teased.

“You are a god among men.” Steve gave him a quick kiss, stealing a piece of melon off the tray in his hands.

Recounting their run around bites of food, everyone was properly impressed with Grace’s tenacity.

“Think we should go get some new shoes after you two clean up?”

“Really?” Grace’s voice was full of excitement. “Can we please?”
“Of course. We probably need to restock the kitchen too.” Steve could not help the grin that was plastered on his face at her excitement about another thing they could share. Maybe they would even get Danny out more often with Grace running.

“Why don't we divide and conquer. Mom and I can cover groceries, and you three can handle shoes.” Danny's suggestion was met with easy agreement from everyone. Less than an hour later, breakfast dishes were cleaned, Steve and Grace were no longer covered in sweat, and they five split off into Steve's truck and the camaro to knock out the errands.
Not wanting to risk big crowds on Grace's first venture into an uncontrolled public location, Steve opted to take her to the small, family owned running shop. Her new shoes might cost a little more than if they went to a big shoe store, but he would gladly pay the price.

“You sure this place will have her size?” Mary asked as they approached the entrance.

“Yes. Have a little faith.” He held the door open ushering them both inside.

“Commander McGarrett! We did not expect to see you again so soon. You have not worn out your shoes already have you?” The man that approached was easily in his sixties, but had an obvious runner's build about him.

“Mikey, how many times do I have to tell you not to call me Commander every time I come in here.”

“At least a dozen more.” The older man gave him a sly grin even as his eyes drifted to Mary and Grace. Since they were the only three customers in the shop, Mary had led Grace toward a rack of brightly colored t-shirts while they let Steve talk. He leaned closer to Steve, dropping his voice near to a whisper. “Is that your partner's daughter?”

“Yes. That is our daughter, Grace.” He might as well get used to explaining it to people, because there was no way Grace would stick to only calling him daddy at home.

“Does that mean you two finally sorted things out?” Steve stuttered, trying to form a response but was saved the effort. “After you brought him in that one time, my wife would not stop going on about what an adorable couple you two would be when you … well you get the picture.”

“Seems like that was a popular sentiment.” He laughed.

“I was sorry to hear about her mother. It cannot be easy for any of you, but I am sure that is not why you came in today. You shoes are not worn out, are they?” Mikey sounded concerned that he had somehow given Steve a defective pair to run out so fast.

“No. No. Nothing like that. Mine are still holding up great. We came to get Grace some good running shoes.” They moved closer to the little girl and Mary.

“Decide to start running with the old man here, eh?” Grace nodded. Mikey noticed that while she met his eyes when he spoke to her, she scooted slightly closer to McGarrett. “I have been putting him in running shoes since he moved back here, so we will take good care of you.”

While she did not leave Steve’s side, the little girl did relax some at the news that her daddy had known the store owner for so long.

“Are we going for cute or for fit?” Mikey inquired, causing Grace to give both he and Steve a funny look.

“For adults they always go through a fit assessment to make sure you get the shoes and inserts that will work best with your feet, but sometimes kids are convinced they must have a certain style instead.” Steve explained. He could guess what Grace would say.

“Fit.” She did not disappoint, making both men smile.
Less than a half an hour later, they left the shop with a new pair of purple and grey running shoes, a couple of new running outfits with reflective patterns designed into them, and some socks. While Grace had insisted she did not need anything but the shoes, Mary had convinced her brother that having cool clothes to run in would make it even more fun for the little girl. Mary had won the argument and Grace had conceded defeat with a smile when Steve showed her the cool visibility features built into the clothes.

“Commander McGarrett,” an unknown female called to him as he was closing the truck door for Grace. Turning, he saw what appeared to be a reporter rapidly approaching.

“Mary, get in the truck with Grace and stay there.” He was relieved she did not argue, but quickly hopped into the passenger side back seat next to the little girl.

“Commander, I would like to ask you a few questions.” The reporter stopped about two feet from him.

“I am fairly certain Governor Denning asked that all media be respectful and leave Five-0 alone during this time.” He replied sharply. “I am not interested in answering your questions.”

Not unsurprisingly, she did not back down. “We have heard from Detective Williams's neighbors, or should I say former neighbors, that he has vacated his apartment and moved in with you. Can you confirm this?”

“I have already told you I am not answering any questions, and if you so much as think about getting near my property to see for yourself I will have you arrested.”

“Come on Commander. We do not want to bother the little girl.” Steve stood a bit taller at the mention of Grace, his face slipping from the annoyed but neutral look to his ‘I'll kill you if you make one wrong move’ look. “Our readers just want to know if Honolulu's hottest couple has finally come out of the closet.”

“I have already said I am not answering your questions. We are done here.” Steve turned his back and slid into the truck, firing the engine up before she could protest further. “You okay Gracie?” Steve would hunt the woman down if she had upset the girl.

“Yeah.” She had been a little afraid when the woman first approached, thinking that she would start asking questions about what had happened, but she was used to people being curious about her dads. Everyone thought she did not hear it, but she knew people had been wondering about the two of them since shortly after they met.

“I took a picture of her since she did not volunteer her name.” Mary offered as they pulled out. “Thought you might want to know who was nosing around.”

“Thanks, sis. Can you send it to Chin? He was planning on stopping by HQ this morning, so he may still be there and can run facial rec for us.”

“Sure thing.”

While she emailed the file, Steve dialed the Hawaiian's cell number.

“Everything okay?” Chin answered on the second ring.

“Yeah. We are fine. Mary's emailing you a picture. We took Grace to Mikey's to get shoes, and some reporter cornered me in the parking lot.”
“Is Grace okay?”

“Yeah. The questions were around Danny moving in with me. Apparently the woman has been snooping around Danny’s place, and must have eyes somewhere near my house to have known where I went.”

“I will run facial rec and see what I get. If she is that annoying, someone is bound to have complained about here before and landed her in the system. I will send you and the team the info as soon as I have it.”

“Thanks Chin. You coming for lunch?”

“Yeah. I will head over as soon as I finish this.”

“Okay. See you soon.” Steve disconnected the call. “So much for a quiet outing.”

“That was not too bad.” Mary tried to keep him from getting too aggravated.

“It is okay, Daddy. At least she was nice about it.” Grace had a point. While the woman had been persistent, she had not gotten aggressive and aside from the initial yell to get his attention had kept her voice at a reasonable level. What bothered him most was not her behavior in the parking lot, but that she knew where to find him.

Pulling into the driveway several minutes later, they were the first ones back home having had the easier of the two errands to run. As they headed toward the door, Mary and Grace walked just ahead of him.

“Why don’t I help you get all your new stuff put away?” Mary asked Grace.

“Okay.” Before they headed up the stairs, she gave Steve a tight hug. “Tell Governor Denning I said hi.” Not giving him a chance to say anything, Grace scurried up the stairs.

Mary followed more slowly, shaking her head. “She is going to be just like you and Danno. I hope you know that.”

Checking his phone, Steve saw that Chin had emailed him the information while he was driving. Popping the file open, he was not surprised to see the woman worked for one of the local gossip websites. He did not think any of the reputable press outlets would have condoned reporters disregarding Denning’s request to leave them alone.

Hearing a car door, Steve stepped back outside to see if it was Chin or Danny and his mom.

“Hey brah. Hope you do not mind, but I let Duke know about your run in and shared her info with him. He caught me as I was leaving. He is going to do a bit of digging and see if he can find anything useful. You call Denning yet?”

“Just getting ready to. You know, Grace told me to tell him hi and I had not said a word about calling him.”

“She is a smart one.”

Steve nodded as he found the governor’s number and waited for someone to answer.

“Is Governor Denning available?” Steve asked when the governor’s new assistant answered.

“He is in a meeting right now. If you would like to leave a message, I will give it to him when he is
“Yes. Just tell him that McGarrett called, and ask him …”

“Commander McGarrett?” The woman interrupted.

“Yes, ma’am.”

“Oh my gosh. Commander, hold on just a second and I will get him.” Before he could tell her that a message was fine, she’d put him on hold.

“Commander, what happened?” Governor Denning was on the line in less than thirty seconds.

“Sir, I am sorry to interrupt your meeting. I was just giving your assistant a message.”

“Don’t worry about it. She was under strict orders to make sure I received any calls from your or your team directly. Now what has happened. I know you did not just call to say hello.”

Steve quickly relayed the information about the reporter from the morning. “Duke is looking into it, but I know you asked to be kept informed if anyone caused a problem.”

“I am glad you called. I am familiar with the site. They tried to stir up trouble for me just after I took office. I do not like the idea that they are following you. This meeting is just wrapping up, and I have a couple of free hours for lunch. I will connect with Duke.”

“Thank you sir. By the way, Grace said to tell you hello.”

“How is she doing?”

“Pretty well all things considered. If you really are free for lunch feel free to swing by and grab something here, so you can see for yourself.”

“I just might do that.”

Finished with the call, Steve and Chin headed back inside.

“So what is on today's agenda?” Chin asked as Mary and Grace descended the stairs.

“I thought we might try to get those paint samples up on the wall. Otherwise, we will never get the room painted.” This was the first chance he had really had to think about it.

“Well, let's go.” Grace turned around and headed right back up the stairs.

Grabbing the samples and foam brushes, Steve followed. “You heard the boss. Let's go.” He poked at Mary as he passed her at the bottom of the stairs.

Standing inside Grace's bedroom, they surveyed the area. “Alright. We have two options for the accent wall, and two for the other walls. How do we want to do this?” Chin inquired.

“I would say we put the accent wall colors on the intended accent wall.” He turned to Grace. “Which wall is the accent wall?”

Grace looked to Mary, hoping she might have an idea.

“The accent wall will have the mural on it, right?” Everybody nodded at Mary. “Then I would suggest the wall without any doors or windows so it is a full, uninterrupted canvas. Albeit my old
dresser is a rather big distraction on the wall at the moment.”

“...We planned on new furniture anyway. Something more appropriate for the new look. Have you thought about what color you would like?” While Steve preferred wood tones, he knew that would not necessarily look right in an underwater themed room or be popular with a young girl.

“Something simple and white might be good.”

“I agree.” The SEAL backed her decision. “White would look good. Maybe we can find a set that includes a desk too.” Moving around the room, contemplated placements. “This is just one idea, but we could put a desk along the accent wall, the bed and nightstand similar to where they are now, and the dresser and mirror over on the wall with the closet. What do you think?”

“It would be neat to see the painting while I am at my desk.” She nodded her head as she turned slowly around the room, seeming to visualize his suggested placements. “I think that will work.”

“Okay. So we will put the accent samples over here. Probably best to put one set toward the middle and another toward a corner so we can see the color next to its possible mates.” Chin started pointing.

“Honey, we're home.” Danny's voice called out from the main floor. “Where are you guys hiding?”

“We are in Grace's room.” Steve called back since he was closest to the door. “Need help with the groceries?” He did not get an immediate response. “I will be back. You guys carry on.” He jogged down the stairs, catching a worried looking Danny.

“Is she okay?”

“Relax. We are getting ready to test out the paint colors. Grace is just fine, though we do need to chat about the reporter we ran into outside Mikey's.” Usher his partner back outside to grab more grocery bags, Steve explained everything, carefully assuring Danny that Grace was just fine.

“Aside from the fact some jerk is creeping around and following you, this does bring up something we need to consider.” Danny stopped, staring at his partner. “Breathe babe. Are you okay?”

Steve opened his mouth, but was not sure what to say. Part of him had expected Danny to rant about Steve putting Grace in the position to face a reporter in the first place. His calm acceptance of what had happened, and how Steve had handled it was a bit baffling, but now his mind was scrambling to figure out what other things this brought up.

Giving up on getting a coherent response from the SEAL, Danny decided to keep going. “What I mean is, we need to figure out how public we are going to be.” He let the words hang there for a moment, waiting for Steve to think about it.

“I am not hiding us Danny. That is not fair to Grace, and it’s not fair to either of us.” He looked a bit hurt that Danny might not want people to know.

“That’s not what I want either, babe, but we need to figure out how we want to answer questions like those when they come up, because they will come up.”

“I know. You are right.” Still standing next to the open trunk full of grocery bags, Danny leaned against his partner's chest. “We know we have plenty of support with our decision. I am sure there will be idiots with other opinions, but that is their issue not ours.”

Kissing the top of Danny's head, Steve nodded. “Why don't we get the rest of the groceries in the
house before they cook in there. We can figure out our PR plan later. Since we are agreed that we are not hiding, it might be a good idea to discuss it with the entire team. No doubt our decision is going to impact them too."

Grabbing the rest of the bags, the two were headed toward the house before Danny responded. “That is a good thought, oh wise and fearless leader.”

Beth met them at the door, seeing their hands full, she held it open as they shuffled inside. “Anything left in the car?”

“ Nope. I just need to pop out and close the trunk.”

“I will do that while you two start unloading.” She was out the door before he could object.

By the time the groceries were unloaded, the three went upstairs to find a collection of large bluish green squares painted on what was previously solid beige walls.

“I thought there were only four samples?” Danny cocked his head in confusion when he counted ten different squares.

“There are, but we wanted to see it in a few different lights.” Mary explained as if this should be common sense.

“Got it.”

“Give it an hour or two and we should be able to get fairly good idea of what they will look like.” Chin wrapped the used foam brushes in the bag to contain the mess.

“Anybody care for some lunch while we wait?” Beth offered, knowing the crew would likely be getting hungry. “Kono just texted and said they were on their way back.” The doorbell rang before anyone answered if they wanted lunch, but the group took it as their cue to head back to the main floor.

Steve trotted over, peering through the side window before opening the door wide. “You are just in time, Governor. Mom was getting ready to feed us.”

“What did I tell you about calling me Governor when I am here?” He said with mock severity.

“Good afternoon, Grace.”

“Are you eating lunch with us?” She seemed pleased to see him again.

“I thought I might.” Without further discussion, Grace grabbed both their hands and led them toward the kitchen. The two men shared a laughing look, but followed quite willingly. After all, there was not much they would not do for that little girl.
Chapter 53

Chapter Notes

This one got a little long. I blame it on certain characters that shall not be named. They forgot to tell me important things before I started writing this chapter.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

By the time Beth and Danny had lunch pulled together, Dianne, Kono, and Catherine had arrived at the house as well. The three looked tired, but Ms. Bradley declared she felt much better having taken the time to sort through things.

“There are quite a few boxes of things for Grace to go through as she is ready.” She spoke in a hushed whisper as she stood next to Danny just outside the kitchen while the others filled their plates.

“We will get them moved into the garage this afternoon. They will be easy to access there, but not staring her down.”

“There is one smaller box of jewelry and such that you might want to keep somewhere more protected. I kept it separate so we would not lose track of it.”

“We will put that one in our closet for now, unless there are particular pieces you would like Grace to know about from you.” Danny knew Rachel had some older pieces when they were still together, but she had always brushed it off when he asked about them. Knowing how much his mother and sister loved the stories behind their family pieces, he hated for Grace to lose out on that.

“There are a few. I will make sure I show them to her before I leave.”

That settled, the two headed toward the kitchen island to fix their plates before joining the others in the dining room. Everyone fell into an easy rhythm of quiet eating interspersed with bits of random conversation as they finished their meals. When it appeared every one had gotten their fill, Danny nudged Steve in the side.

“Think we should get it over with?”

“Get what over with?” Sitting across from them, Kono's face flooded with concern.

“Relax, rookie. Nothing life threatening this time.” Danny teased. He did not want everyone worked up before they even had a chance to explain.

“Go for it Danno.” Steve gestured toward the family around the table.

“You are all up to speed with Steve's little run in this morning.” He paused as everyone confirmed they knew. “That got us both thinking. While we would love to believe that our personal lives are none of any one else's business, we are well aware that being part of Five-0 means people are curious. Steve and I have agreed that we have no interest in hiding our relationship; however, we realize that for some of you that openness may create unwarranted headaches.” By some, Danny really meant all of them, but he was trying to sound optimistic.

“Brah, quit trying to use all the big words and sound so PC. We know some people are going to act
like jerks about the two of you. Their opinions do not matter to us any more than they should matter to you. We have your backs. We have been waiting too long for you two to get it together, no way are we going to try to make you two keep this under wraps.”

“Cheers to that!” Governor Denning raised his water glass, and chorus of agreements filled the room.

“I know you guys all mean it, and you have no idea how much that support means to us, but Danny and I agree that we need to come up with an offensive strategy that will hopefully prevent any of us getting ambushed in a parking lot similar to this morning. Unfortunately, we have not had time to determine what exactly constitutes a .”

“Might I make a suggestion?” Sam spoke up again.

“Consider this Camelot and you are sitting at the round table. All ideas are welcome.” Steve encouraged.

“Even if the table is a rectangle.” Danny patted his leg, unable to help laughing at his partner.

Stifling his own laugh, the governor shook his head. “What if we work with my press secretary to set up an exclusive interview with Five-0? You four are past the point of being able to do your own undercover work anyway. It would keep the entire focus from being on the two of you, while giving you a chance to put the information you are comfortable sharing out there in a controlled environment. It will also help make it clear that Five-0 is as united as ever.”

“I was going to say we just scare a reporter into playing nice, but that idea works too.” Kono threw it out as if she were serious. Danny considered that given how much she had picked up from his neanderthal partner, she might be.

“You,” Danny pointed at Kono, “have spent too much time around Super SEAL here for your own good.”

“Not possible.” Her retort was immediate.

“You see what I have to do deal with?” Danny turned to the governor with an exasperated sigh.

“You seem to be coping just fine.” Sam laughed. “Do not expect me to try and stop them.”

As the laughter finally started to die down, Steve returned to the initial topic of conversation. “In all seriousness, I think your idea has serious merit, but I want everyone in this room to consider the consequences of going so public. It may be the four of us on camera, but there are other people that will get caught up in any backlash.”

“Bring it.” Catherine gave him a look that left no doubt she was serious.

“I will leave no doubt that you all have my full support.” The governor no longer had any intention of letting people wonder where his loyalties were.

“You realize there is likely to be some vocal opposition to that stance come reelection, right?” Steve appreciated the support, but did not want Denning to regret it later.

“I do, but I trust the majority of the citizens of this fine state will be less prudish.”

“What about the school? We know Mrs. Jones is aware, but we should probably meet with them before anything makes it to television.” Danno knew even if kids did not watch it, parents and teachers would.
“My classmates will think it’s cool. They all think Daddy is totally awesome.” She grinned at him.
“Plus a bunch of them asked questions when Nikki first started. It is not like I am the first kid in the
class with two dads.”

“She has a point.” Beth agreed. “Not being the first is almost always far easier.”

“If we are all agreed, I will ask George to start working on it as soon as I get back to the office. I
imagine we want to aim to get this out quickly before more reporters with questionable ethics start
poking around.” Everyone around the room nodded “In that case, I better head that way and see if I
can catch him before my next meeting.”

Steve rose, opting to escort the governor out. Once they had stepped outside, Sam paused beside
him. “I will make sure he is careful about the selection and that the terms of the interview are very
clear. All questions will be reviewed and approved beforehand and both my office and Five-0 will
review and approve the piece before it airs. We had to run through quite the gamut with the press
when I took office, so I have no doubt George will find a good fit.”

“Thank you, sir. As much as I hate the idea of us having to do this, I think the preemptive strike may
be the only option. Once it is public knowledge, there is no race to see who can get the scoop first.”
McGarrett was more than a little relieved to have a decent start to a plan.

“I will call you as soon as I have an update. Also, I did not want to mention it with Grace there, but I
received word on my way over that Edwards is planning to plead guilty to voluntary manslaughter
and assault of a minor. I am sure this means he will end up with a lighter sentence than he would in a
jury trial…”

“But it also means it will be done and over without turning into a media circus and putting Grace at
risk of having to hear all about it for any length of time. I would love to watch him squirm at trial, but
that does not mean it would help her at all. Nothing is going to bring Rachel back, and nothing is
going to change the fact that Grace had to see it.”

“I know.”

“I do hope Duke is right.”

“About what?”

“Word will get out in the prison about what he does, and even criminals do not abide by violence
against women and children.”

The governor nodded at that sentiment. “Someone will have to make sure to tell the guards to speak
loudly when discussing the prisoner.” He gave a quick wink as he turned to head toward his car. “
am sure we will talk in the next day or so, but call me if anything at all happens.”

Ducking back inside, Steve headed to the kitchen where all the voices seemed to be coming from,
but Danny caught him before he made it. “Everything okay? You two were out there a bit.”

Relaying his conversation with the governor, Steve could see the gears in Danny's head turning.
“You are both right. I would love to see a prosecutor rip him to shreds, but in the end it would
probably only gain a couple of extra years on his sentence at best. What is he looking at, maybe
ten?”

“Unfortunately.” He pulled Danny into his arms. “You know I could still make that night time visit.”

“Believe me, it’s tempting, but Grace would never forgive me if I let you do something like that and
you got caught.”

“I could call in a favor.”

“And with your luck it would still get traced back to you. For now, I will have to let the knowledge that you would kill him for us be enough.” He let himself lean more heavily on Steve. As much as most people would believe Steve was joking, Danny had no doubt that he really would kill to protect him and Grace without a moments hesitation if needed, and it was a strangely comforting thought.

“Can we go check the paint?” Grace asked as soon as she found them. “It should be dry enough now, right?”

“Lead the way.” Steve waited for her to go first, pulling Danny by the hand beside him.

“I am going to start showing Dianne how to set up her new laptop.” Chin called as the three climbed the stairs followed by Kono, Catherine, and Beth. Mary followed Chin and Dianne, curious if she could figure out the whole video chatting thing too.

The six spread out, looking at the various paint samples on the wall. “Which ones do you like, Gracie?” She looked between the wall and her daddy several times, and he was not sure if she was trying to decide if he had a preference or just was not sure which one she liked best. He leaned down so only she could hear him. “This is your room Gracie. As long as you like what you pick, there is no right or wrong answer.”

He guessed it was going to take a few more reminders and a good bit of time before she was completely confident in being able to give her honest opinion when asked. She had enough of Danny in her though that he was sure she would get the hang of it.

“These.” She pointed to one color on each of the two walls where they stood at the corner.

“Oh. I like those.” Catherine fussied over the choice.

“Great choices.” Kono gave Grace a big thumbs up.

“Why don't we run out and grab the paint supplies. I think Chin was hoping to do a trial run of Skype with Dianne, and I am pretty sure we are not needed for that.” Catherine offered. She knew Steve could do it himself, but it gave her a way to feel useful.

“Sounds like a plan. Do you want my card or do you want me to pay you for it later?”

“Later is fine.” The two women headed for the door just as Beth's phone rang.

“Looks like it is your granddad. I am going to go take this in my room.”

Realizing it was just the three of them, Steve looked to his partner. Judging by his face, he had realized it as well. Without saying another word, the two sat down on Grace's bed, backs against the headboard, legs stretched out. The little girl had been holding up one of the pictures from the magazine against the paint sample on the wall, smiling at whatever she was picturing with the two, but it only took a moment for her to realize her dads had moved. When she spotted where they were, she climbed over Danny's legs and leaned back in the space between them.

“Are you excited about redoing your room?” Steve asked.

“It is going to look really cool, isn't it?” It would be so neat to have a room that really showed what she liked.
“We should think about getting furniture ordered. We can either go look at some places or we can scope out the options online.”

“Online works.” The idea of going out with the two of them did not scare her, but she did not see the point in having to drive all over to look at stuff when there would be pictures on the websites.

“Easy enough.” Danny was not going to argue.

“I should call Alyssa and see when she is available to come talk to us about doing the mural.” Pulling his phone out of his pocket, Steve found the painter's number and put her on a speaker phone.

“Hey McGarrett. To what do I owe this honor?”

“Hey Alyssa. I have got Danny and Grace here with me. We wanted to talk to you about a painting project.”

“Hi Danny and Grace. I sure hope this means I get to meet the two people that Steve cannot shut up about soon.”

“Alyssa …” Steve started to fuss at her.

“Pretty sure it will.” Danny stopped him. “The Neanderthal here mentioned you painted murals.” He decided to get the conversation back on track. He could tease Steve later about her comment. He vaguely recognized her name from Steve mentioning it at some point, but was curious to know how she knew about him and Grace.

“I do. Mostly sea life scenes. Why? Are you in need of a fish or two?”

“Something like that. Really more like an entire wall of Steve's aquatic cousins.”

“That sounds fun. Where is this wall going to be?”

“My old room.” Steve answered even though he knew it would lead to some crack on her part.

“Well that makes for a very long overdue makeover. How soon are you wanting to do this?”

“We just picked the main colors for the walls today, so hopefully we will have the base colors up by the first part of next week. Any time after that should work, so just tell me when you can fit us in.” Worst case they could get everything else done and the mural would get added in later.

“How about this? I will be done with my current job tomorrow afternoon. Why don't I stop by your place tomorrow around five and we can talk about what you are looking for. I have got another job scheduled to start on Sunday, but I expect it will be finished in two to three days at most. My next scheduled job after that is not for another two weeks, which should be more than enough time.”

Grace barely contained a squeal at this news.

“That sounds perfect. Thanks for fitting us in so quick.” Steve was surprised how fast she had worked it into her calendar.

“Anything for you, McGarrett.” Danny gave Steve a questioning look at her tone. If he had to guess, he would say there was some history between the two of them. He could tell it was nothing to worry about, but part of him was still just a bit jealous.

Chin appeared at the bedroom door carrying Steve's laptop just after they disconnected the call. “It is time for a trail run. I know your user info, so I will watch for you to show up online and we will call
“Got it.” Not bothering to move, Steve cracked the laptop open and it booted up and ready to go. Opening the Skype app, they waited for the call to come. As soon as the incoming call from Dianne Bradley appeared, Steve accepted it, positioning the computer so Dianne would see Grace.

“Hi Grandma!” Grace waved at the screen.

“Hi sweetheart. This is so neat.” Dianne's smiling face looked back at them. “I cannot believe how easy this is. I thought it would be a great deal harder.”

“I think I might even be able to do this once I get computer.” Mary's voice chimed in from the background.

“What happened to your computer?” Steve asked. After several seconds of silence, he asked again. “Mary, what happened to your computer?”

From the view on the screen, they could see Dianne and Chin both looking off to the side where Steve guessed Mary was sitting. “Fine. I am coming down. You can tell me in person.”

Steve jumped off the bed and stormed down the hall. Danny and Grace looked at each other before slamming the laptop closed and charging after him. Whether their rush was to stop him from saying something he should not or out of morbid curiosity about what Mary was trying to hide, neither of them were quite sure.

“Mary Ann McGarrett! What aren't you telling me?” Steve's voice rang out the second he entered the living room.

“I lost it?” Mary sounded unconvinced at her own answer.

“Like hell. If it was something you had done to it you would not have tried to dodge the question.” He squatted down on the floor in front of where she sat on the couch. His sister refused to look at him. Squeezing her knee with one large hand, he tried again. “Come on sis. What happened? You clamming up is just scaring me.”

“Somebody broke into my apartment.” She buried her head in her hands, embarrassed to look at him. She had promised him she was doing okay, that she had found a decent job and was living in a safe neighborhood. She might have stretched that just a bit. Living in LA, she was lucky to find a postage stamp sized apartment that was only on the fringe of the ghetto.

“When? Where you home? Are you okay?” Steve was furious, not at his sister, but at the idea that someone had the nerve to violate her home. He was also hurt that she had not told him before now. He still did not look up, mumbling answers through her fingers. “A few days before I came out here, no, and obviously. I made it out here didn't I?”

“Why didn't you tell me?” Steve's voice gave away the hurt he was trying to hide, even though he still sounded fit to kill.

“Youare always so busy. I knew Danny was traveling and you would probably be busier than usual. I did not want to be a problem again.”

Chin and Dianne slipped off the couch. Motioning for Grace to follow, they headed to the kitchen, leaving Steve and Danny alone with Mary. This was not a conversation they needed a big audience for.
“Is that really what you think? That I think you are a problem?” Steve sounded devastated.

“I am. You have gone and done all these great things with your life. You protect people, you have always got it so together, and I am barely holding down two waitress jobs trying to keep in together to prove that I can do it on my own.”

“Shit, Mary. Who are you trying to prove it to? I am your big brother. You are supposed to be able to tell me if you need help. I would have helped you.” He paused, pleading at her with his eyes to really listen to him. "And no matter what you may think, I have not kept it all together on my own. The only reason I am still even close to being in one piece is because of the ohana I found when I came home and regular visits with a therapist. Hell the only reason I have not pushed you to move home and be a bigger part of that family is because I thought you were happy in L.A.”

“I can't move back here and get in the way. Not with you guys just getting settled.”

“Oh no you don't!” Danny practically shouted. “You are not using Grace and me as an excuse to stay in a city where you are clearly not safe. So what if the house gets a little crowded for a while.”

Over Danny's dead body would something happen to Mary because she thought he would not want her here. “You are family, Mary Ann McGarrett. That is what we do for family.”

“Actually, I have an idea about that.” Beth's voice startled them all. She had caught just enough to have an idea of what was going on. “Sorry I was tied up for so long, but I have an update and I think it might just work out well for everyone.”

“We are all ears.” If Beth could fix this, Steve would gladly let her. He was sane enough to realize that with him, Danny, and Mary at a stand off, it could be weeks and many arguments before anyone backed down.

“Paul will be here on Monday. The movers are packing up everything we plan to bring with us tomorrow, and it should be here in about two weeks. He also agreed with me about the house that I really liked the other day, so I called and had Chin's cousin put an offer on it. The house was already vacant, so we hope to be able to close fast.”

“Damn. You two do not waste time.” Danny was impressed.

“No point in wasting time when we know what we want.” She gave her son a reproachful look. “Anyway, this will work perfect. The house is really bigger than what we would need for just the two of us, but we wanted to have plenty of space for gatherings and overnight guests. There are three spare rooms and one of them has its own en suite bathroom, so Mary could stay with us as long as she liked.”

“I cannot do that.”

“Yes, Mary, you can.” Beth sound down next to her on the couch. “I know you do not want to be a burden to anyone, but Paul and I both miss having kids in the house, even the grown up kind. Plus, you are so much more familiar with the island than we are, so you would be able to help us get settled in and find things.”

“That is true. Like it or not, we are going to have to go back to work soon, which means we will not be able to help as much as we would like with that.” Steve encouraged the idea.

“And maybe with both of you around we can work out something so we do not have to put Grace in one of the after school programs while we are at work.” Danny added more ammunition to the argument. He knew Mary understood how much he would hate the idea of Grace being left with
“Yeah, because I am sure those would play great with your crazy schedules when cases hit.” Mary cracked, warming up to the idea.

“You boys do not even worry about that. I am sure between Paul, Mary, and me we will be able to work something out so at least one of us is available to watch her any time day or night.” Beth patted Steve’s shoulder, seeing both he and Danny relaxing a bit.

“So what do you think, sis? Would moving back to the island really be that bad?” Steve sounded like he was a step short of begging.

“I guess not.” She smiled, then shifted her look to Danny. “Are you sure you are okay with this?”

Nudging Steve over with his leg, Danny took his place in front of her. “Like it or not, Mary, you have inherited another big brother. No cracks about my height.” He pointed a finger at her before she could say anything. “Having family close is important, and you are very much a part of this family.”

“Then I guess it is settled. I will start wrapping things up in LA when I get back. I should able to get back in two or three weeks if I can find a ticket.” More like the money for a ticket. She had nearly maxed out her credit card with this emergency trip.

“Leave the ticket to me, and let me know when you find out what it will cost to ship your things. I will cover that.” Steve was not about to have her spend what little money she apparently had on another flight.

“I don't have much to bring with me aside from clothes. I can probably just ship everything through UPS.”

“I was not joking, Mary. I will cover everything. Shipping clothes, breaking your lease, whatever you need. If i is easier, I can just transfer you some money before you head back.”

“Fine.” She huffed as she scooted forward to wrap an arm around each of the men. “I suppose as far as big brothers go, you two are pretty awesome.”

“Don't give them big heads dear.” Beth teased. “Now why don't we go see what everyone else is up to? I thought I heard them sneak outside.”

Hauling themselves off the floor, Steve and Danny helped the other two off the couch. Following the two women toward the back door, Danny wrapped an arm around Steve's waist. “Yep. This is definitely home now.”

Chapter End Notes

I really did not plan on this going quite so long, but the Mary's little bomb shell was as much a surprise to me as it was to Steve. I just love it when the characters forget to tell me important things. Anyway, hope you are still enjoying. Please take a few seconds to drop a few lines and let me know what you think.
Following the sound of Grace’s voice out to the beach, Danny smiled warmly at the sight of his daughter building another sand castle with her Grandma Bradley. “She will have Dianne building them like a pro before she leaves on Sunday.” He had to admit it was a bit strange seeing his ex-mother-in-law settling in so well to their more relaxed life here. He had always associated her with posh surroundings and money, assumed that was what made her happy.

He felt a pang of guilt, wondering if perhaps Rachel had housed some of the same regrets that her mother did. For all that she seemed to like flaunting Stan’s money at him, it clearly had not bought her the happy ever after she had hoped for. All bitterness aside, Danny worried that it would be hard to help Grace remember her mother. She had not been the best mother, but she had been the best mother she could be, and he knew she loved their daughter. He also knew it would be important for Grace to hang onto the good memories. He just had to remember some of those himself instead of the animosity between them.

“What is going on in that head of yours?” Steve’s voice whispered gently in his ear as his partner pulled him closer against his side. Danny could feel worry radiating off the SEAL.

“Nothi …” Steve’s hand tightened on his side, stopping him before he finished the word. “Something that has no immediate bearing on today or the safety of anyone here, so I will stop brooding and we can discuss it later.” This earned him a kiss on his temple.

“Did you ever study psychology?” Danny asked, making Steve pull away just enough to give him a look that screamed ‘what the fuck.’ “Do not give me that look.”

“Why does a class I may or may not have taken 15 years ago at Annapolis suddenly matter?”

“Just wonder if you even realize what you are doing.” Danny walked off toward the others without waiting for Steve to respond, leaving the SEAL staring after him with a perplexed expression.

Giving up on figuring out what in the heck Danny was talking about, Steve took off after them.

“Daddy, can you help me show Grandma how to properly fortify the castle?” Grace smiled up at him when he got close.

“Properly fortify? Did my nine year old daughter actually just utter the words ‘properly fortify’ in casual conversation?” Danny swung around to face Steve.

Head thrown back laughing, Chin interrupted the “She even used it in the proper context.”

“If she joins the Army because of you …” Danny ranted, even though everyone knew he was not serious.

“Danno! It is the Navy!” Grace threw a handful of sand at her father.

“Of course I will, Gracie.” Steve lowered himself to the ground next to her, not bothering to respond to Danny’s comments.

Sitting down in the sand with him mom, Mary, and Chin, Danny smiled warmly as he watched the
SEAL explaining the best methods for fortifying sand castles to Dianne. Most impressive was how he often set it up so that Grace could explain something to her grandmother rather than just taking over the instruction. Watching them, it dawned on Danny that he had call Grace ‘my daughter’ without thinking. Looking more closely at Steve, he searched for any signs that his words had been taken wrong and upset his partner.

“Daniel.” Beth’s quiet voice caught his attention. “Relax. He knew you were teasing.”

“How …” He started to ask.

“Call it a mother's intuition. Though if you really want him to feel secure in his position as her second father, I would not recommend that word choice in normal conversation.”

“I know.” Danny admitted.

“But he was grinning from ear to ear while you were busy spouting off. Stuff like that is routine with the three of you. If I had to guess, I would be willing to bet Grace knew exactly what she was doing when she chose those words. They love to get you riled up.” Beth leaned her head on her son’s shoulder, speaking quietly enough that the conversation would stay between the two of them.

“That they do.” It was hard to remember a time when Grace and Steve were not conspiring against him. It seemed like from the very beginning those two had a bond that was as concrete as it was unexplainable.

“And you love to let them and then rant about it. It is almost like you three have your own little strange code for reminding each other how much you love each other.” Beth smiled when he wrapped an arm around her shoulders.

“I guess you are right.” Hearing car doors slamming shut, Danny listened trying to determine if it was Cath and Kono returning, or someone unexpected. A few minutes later, the two popped out of the house.

“We miss anything fun?” Kono plopped down next to Mary as Cath went to join the construction crew.

“Um. I am moving to Hawaii?” Mary replied.

“Why did that sound more like a question than a statement?” Kono’s brow shot up.

“Not sure if you count that as fun.” Mary had to admit, while she adored Kono, she was also a bit intimidated by the young Hawaiian. She seemed to have it all together where Mary could not seem to get anything right.

“Let me think. Having another woman around to help balance the excess testosterone I am exposed to on a daily basis from the three of them,” she gestured around at Danny, Steve, and Chin. “Yes. I think that counts as something fun. When are you coming back?”

“In a couple of weeks. I am going to stay with Mr. And Mrs. Williams.”

“Do not start that dear. I have already told you to call me mom, and I assure you Paul will be perfectly content to be Dad or Paul.” Beth leaned forward so Mary could see her around Danny.

“I …”

“Don’t bother trying to argue, Mary. You have not spent as much time around them as I have. There
is no winning this argument.” Danny patted her leg. “Just go with it.”

Kono and Chin both laughed.

“It will be nice to have you here all the time. I know Steve hated not being able to see you more.” Chin knew his boss had to be relieved she agreed to move.

The afternoon sped by with everyone just enjoying the time together before Mary would be leaving, at least temporarily, the following day. When Beth decided to go grab drinks for everyone, Mary was quick to volunteer her help. The younger McGarrett said little as they approached the house, but once inside grabbed Beth's hand to stop her.

“Are you sure I am not going to be in the way.” Part of her was afraid Danny's mom had only offered because she thought it was what Steve and Danny wanted. Her own father had not wanted her at home when she was a teenager, so why would a relative stranger want her.

Knowing everything she did about their background, it was not hard for Beth to understand the fear of rejection written on the younger woman's face. Pulling her into a tight hug, Beth simply held her for a few moments before speaking.

“Mary Ann, I did not offer you a place to stay out of some misguided attempt to make your brother's life easier. However crazy it may seem, we are all part of this ever expanding family he has built around him. I know we have not spent much time around each other prior to this week, but you are as much family to me as Steven is.”

“But …”

“No buts, dear. I was not kidding before. Our house has been so quiet since everyone moved away. It is hard to know what to do with an empty nest when you are so used to taking care of others. And whether you and your brother want to admit it or not, you are both very much in need of having a strong, supportive family around you. You are not alone here, and you certainly are not trespassing on your brother's territory. We all want you here.” Beth was quite adamant.

“Are you sure Paul will feel the same way?”

Pulling Mary toward the kitchen, Beth pulled her phone out of her pocket. When she placed it on the island between them, Mary stared at it as she waited for someone to answer Beth's call.

“Hello beautiful.” Mary was slightly taken aback at how much love she heard in those few words. “Everything okay? Did you get word on the house already?”

“Everything is fine and not yet, but I wanted to run something past you.”

“Fire away, love.” Beth gave Mary a look that told her to just listen.

“How would you feel if Steve's sister came to stay with us for a bit after we move?”

“You mean Steve finally convinced her to stay? I know it has been driving him crazy having her so far away.” Paul sounded thrilled.

“Let's just say circumstances changed today.”

“Is she okay? Did something happen to her? Didn't you say she was leaving tomorrow.” His words were rushed.
Mary was three steps beyond confused. How did Paul know so much about her.

“The boys just found out she was not exactly in the safest location in L.A.”

“Does she need help getting packed? I could change my flight arrangements for Monday. Did you tell her she could have the second bedroom suite? From the pictures you showed me it is probably almost as big as any reasonably priced LA apartment. She would have plenty of room to stay instead of worrying about finding somewhere else. I am sure Grace would love to have her around in the afternoons. You did tell Danny and Steve that we wanted to watch Grace for them, didn't you?”

“Yes. I offered to let her stay there, and yes us watching Grace did come up. Anyway, Mary and I just popped in to grab some drinks for everyone, so we should get back out, but she wanted to make sure you were not going to mind having her around.” Beth knew she needed to cut him off or they would never get off the phone. Danny came by his ability to talk at length quite honestly.

“Oh! Is Mary there? Hi Mary! It will be great to have you with us. This old house has been far too quiet. Do you need me to stop in L.A to help with anything? I don't mind at all.” Mary stared at Beth, in shock that he could sound any more enthused than he was when he first answered the phone.

“Hi Paul. I do not have much to grab from LA, so I am pretty sure I will be okay on my own. I am looking forward to seeing you in a couple of weeks though.” Mary was still a bit shocked at his response.

“Okay. That is great, but you let us know if that changes. I can pop back and help if you need. In the mean time, you two better get back to what you were doing.”

“Yes dear. I love you.” Beth shook her head as she picked the phone up again.

“Love you too.” Paul responded before the call disconnected.

“Does that answer your question?” Beth looked at Mary.

Nodding her head, Mary had not quite recovered from the call yet. “That just explained so much about Danny.”

“Yes. It does, but do not worry, he is not always quite so excitable. It has been hard on him not being here. Initially he stayed behind because he had to wrap up his aunt's affairs after the funeral, and then it just made more sense for him to get everything wrapped up and make one trip all the way from Jersey to here. I think part of him would have just set fire to the Jersey house and hopped the first flight he could if it thought it would not get him in trouble.”

The two continued laughing about Paul’s excitement as they grabbed enough drinks for everyone. Heading back out, they handed off their spoils.

“I should probably head back in and start dinner.” Beth had caught the time when she was inside. As it was she’d be pushing it to get things done at the time they normally ate.

Steve looked up. Beth looked a bit on the tired side and he hated to see her disappear into the kitchen where she would no doubt refuse to let anyone help because everyone else seemed so content on the beach.

“Sit back down, mom. I think we’ll let Johnny's cook for us tonight.”

Steve was reaching for his phone when Chin halted him. “I got it, brah.” He was dialing before Steve could argue.
“You will be happy to know, ma, that there is at least one place on this island that can produce a slice worthy of our roots.” Danny smiled. He could have kissed Chin when he finally introduced them all to Johnny’s pizza.

Dinner arrangements settled, Chin disappeared to go pick the food up while everyone else settled back into the quite rhythm of family life on the island.

Chapter End Notes

Kudos to anyone that understood Danny's psychology question. This is what I get for having a mother that is an intro psych professor.
For those that did not get the psychology reference in the previous chapter, just look up operant conditioning. The reference was not planned, but I realized what Steve was doing as soon as I wrote it, and could not resist letting Danny call him on it.

Double checking that the doors were locked, Danny and Steve headed up the stairs. Catherine, Kono, and Dianne would be back around eight thirty in the morning for breakfast before all the women headed to the spa. Chin said he was going to go take care of a few other things but would be back in time to say goodbye to Mary before she had to head to the airport.

For now though, the house was settling in for the night. Mary had gone up with Grace about twenty minutes before to read and tuck her in for the night, and Beth had gone up just before the two of them. Reaching the top of the stairs, they saw Mary slipping quietly out of Grace's room.

Stopping when she saw them, Mary smiled. “She's out cold.”

“That's good.” Steve turned to his partner. “You head on in to bed. I need to talk to Mary for a minute.” Steve gave Danny a quick kiss at their door before stepping across the hall to where his sister stood. “Do you have a few minutes?”

“Of course.” Mary mumbled quietly. The two had not had a chance to speak alone all afternoon, and she was a bit nervous about the conversation. No matter what everyone else had said, no matter what he had said in the living room, she worried that Steve really was not so enthused about having his baby sister move back underfoot.

Wrapping an arm around her, Steve led Mary back down the stairs. Heading to the kitchen, he pointed her to a seat the at the island, grabbed two beers from the fridge, and settled in next to her.

“Mary, what is wrong? You do not look happy. Do you not want to move back here?” Steve worried that she felt forced into the decision.

She took a slow drink and then stared at the bottle. “No. I do want to move back. I have wanted to move back home since you got back, but …” She let the sentence fall, opting not to finish the sentence.

“But what?” Steve pressed.

“I do not want to get in the way. Things may be a bit crazy right now, but I have not seen you this happy in years. You have this whole family around you. You have got Danny now. I do not want to get in the way and mess it up for you. You deserve to be happy. I cannot even get a decent job. You and your team and Catherine are all busy saving the world, and I am nothing but a waitress.” She took another drink.

“Mary Ann, didn't we have this conversation earlier?” He turned to face her. “Have you heard anything today that gave you any indication that I do not want you here?”

“No.” She admitted grudgingly.
“Exactly. Hell, everyone here has had to listen to me bitch for months that I did not know how I was going to convince you to leave your life in LA behind to come back here. You are right. By some miracle, I have managed to become a part of this rather unexpected family, but I can promise you that for all some of them do not know you very well, they all view you as family too.” He paused, hoping the words were really sinking in at last. “As for you being nothing but a waitress, you know that is complete bull. You are a smart woman. You just need a chance to do something else. You have got two weeks while you are wrapping stuff up in LA to decide what you want to do. I hope you actually take that time to think about where you would like your life to be in a few years. Between all of us, we have got enough connections to help you get in the door all kinds of things. If you want to go back to school and learn how to do something brand new, then we will make that happen. You figure out what it is that you want to do and either tell me what you need from me to make it happen, or tell me what it is and we will come up with a plan together.”

Mary just stared back at her brother. The idea of actually being able to pursue something she enjoyed was exciting and terrifying all at the same time. “I looked at becoming a certified nursing assistant a while back, but I could not swing the tuition and rent plus fit in studying with two jobs.” She finally admitted. Eventually she wanted to go further than that, but it seemed like a solid step in the right direction.

“Well, rent just became a non-issue, because I can guarantee Danny's parents will have a conniption if you so much as think about paying them anything. If you want to work while you are in school, I am sure we can find you something that will cooperate with a class schedule. The fall semester is just starting, so by the time you get settled you should be able to apply to attend somewhere in the spring. That gives you time to get settled back in, help Beth and Paul settle in, and get yourself ready for school.” Steve rattled off, pleased that she had readily spilled what she wanted to do.

“You are really going to make sure this happens, aren't you?” Mary marveled at him.

“I told you, I am your big brother. It is well within my rights and responsibilities to help take care of you. If becoming a nursing assistant is what you want to do, then I am damn sure going to make sure you have a chance to do just that.”

Polishing off the last of their beers, both McGarrett siblings rose.

Hesitating at the edge of the kitchen, Mary finally worked up the courage to ask the one question she had been avoiding for a long time. “What are we going to do if mom shows back up?”

“I do not know. She has made it pretty clear that I cannot trust her. I suppose if she made any effort, I would have to let her try, but I am not just going to welcome her back with open arms. I just cannot.”

“Me either.” Mary tucked herself against Steve's side as they headed for the stairs. Though she hated to admit it, she preferred to just keep believing their mother was dead. It was easier than believing she had abandoned them by choice and then done it again almost as soon as she had reappeared. “It is nice to have a family again.”

“Yeah it is.” Steve pulled her into a tight hug when they reached his bedroom door. “Get some sleep, sis. I love you.”

“Love you too.”

Steve watched as she headed toward her bedroom, waiting until the door was shut securely behind her before he turned to his own bedroom.

“You two get things settled?” Danny asked as soon as the door shut.
“I think so. Sounds like she is going to try to go back to school to become a nursing assistant in the spring.” Steve stripped his shirt off, preparing himself for bed. “She sounded so excited about the prospect of getting to do it.”

“I assume by the time she gets back we will have a collection of information for any local CNA programs for her.” Danny grinned at him. “I am glad she is getting a second chance. She deserves it. And I can already tell my parents are over the moon with excitement over the prospects of having a kid at home again, even if she is full grown.”

Steve crawled in bed beside Danny. “It will be good for all of them I think.”

“Yeah it will.” The detective rolled over, resting his head on Steve's chest.

“So, you going to tell me what was bothering you earlier?” The SEAL ran his fingers through Danny's hair, trying to help take the edge off whatever was bothering him.

“Should have known it was too much to ask for you to forget about that.” Danny teased, but felt guilty when Steve's hand froze. “Hey. I am just kidding. It was not anything earth shattering. It just dawned on me that somehow I am going to have to find a way to keep the memory of Rachel alive for Grace. You know how things were between she and I, which is making it really challenging for me to remember details of the good times to share with Grace. I am afraid by the time she is ready to talk about her mom, I will not be able to remember any of it.”

The pair fell silent for several minutes. Danny's confession had them both thinking.

“Well, we know Dianne has some stories to tell of Rachel from the time before you were married. Maybe we should see if she has some pictures or anything that we could get copies of to hang onto for Grace.” Steve suggested. “Kono mentioned there were some photo albums that they included in one of the boxes in the garage. It sounded like there were quite a few pictures of Grace and Rachel together from their time with Stan. Fortunately, he must have been the one behind the camera because Kono said he was not in the pictures. Still, we might want to wait a while to break those out, since they will likely remind her both of them.”

“Good to know those exist though.” Danny was slightly comforted to know that things like that existed.

“So that leaves the period from while you and Rachel were married. I have a hard time believing that not a single picture or video exists from that period.” Steve knew Danny loved to capture special moments. “What happened to all of them after the divorce?”

“Mom.” Danny let out a small laugh with the word.

“Mom?”

“Yes. Rachel did not want any of them. She was in such a snit when she left me that I think she was going to destroy them all. Fortunately, Mom and Dad were helping me move out. She knew I was not going to want the reminders of my failed marriage staring me in the face, so she took them home with her. At the time she said something about keeping them safe for when Grace was older, so I have no doubt that somewhere in the boxes that will soon be headed here from the mainland, there is an entire box full of memories from the early days.”

“That is fantastic.” Steve declared.

“Babe, you realize there are pictures of Rachel and me together in that box, right? Probably videos with the two of us looking stupidly happy because I am pretty sure for at least some period of time
we actually were.” Danny cautioned.

“And Gracie needs to see that. She needs to remember that despite what happened later, she came into this world with two parents that loved each other and loved her. I will never begrudge you the time and love you gave to Rachel. Those things are ultimately what brought you to me, and those are things that Grace will need help remembering when her memories of Rachel start to fade.” Steve stared down into Danny’s blue eyes, willing him to understand that he would never try to make him feel bad for needing to acknowledge that part of his past.

“I swear by all that is holy, sometimes I do not understand how you can be the same man that dangles suspects off roofs and puts them in shark cages.” Danny gave Steve a quick kiss before slipping out of bed and disappearing into bathroom to grab some ibuprofen for his slight headache. Reassured and feeling better that Grace would not grow up with nothing good to remember, he was ready to lighten the mood.

“Easy. Those suspects were nothing more than a source of information to me.” Steve retorted, sliding further into the bed.

“Ah. I see. So as a source of sex, I am accorded higher level of consideration.” Danny continued to tease as he opened the bottle of pills.

Steve scrambled out of bed. “What? How can …. Is that … Danny. No.” He stood in the door to the bathroom, startling Danny with his hasty appearance.

“Down boy. I am just kidding.” Danny approached him, hands out in front of him as if Steve were a skittish dog that might run. He had honestly been joking, and had never thought Steve might react this way. He was beginning to realize he needed to get a leash on his mouth. He had honestly been joking, and had never thought Steve might react this way. He was beginning to realize he needed to get a leash on his mouth. He was not used to the more open and emotionally available version of Steve quite yet. Which also made him wonder how many cracks he had made since they met that Steve had just taken and buried. “Steven, listen to me. You have to know I was not serious.”

“I know.” The SEAL's voice was less than convincing, the expression in his eyes even less so.

“You say that, but I can tell you are not convinced. Babe, you know I tend to run my mouth. I joke, sometimes without thinking, but it does not mean that is what I think. I am sorry I said that. While I will admit that sex with you is pretty damned fantastic you are much more than that to me, and I know full well that I am more than that to you.” He dry swallowed the pills in his hand and stepped closer to his partner.

Steve stood his ground. “So what exactly am I to you?”

“The love of my life?” Danny took another step forward.

“Are you asking me or telling me?” Steve pushed.

“Telling.” Danny nodded his head. “Yes. Definitely telling.” He closed the last step between them, wrapping his arms tight around Steve's waist, sighing in relief when he felt the other man's strong arms wrap around him.

“Come on, Danno. Let's get some sleep.”
Chapter 56

Eyes flying open, Steve felt the solid weight of his soundly sleeping partner's arm across his stomach. Focusing on calming his breath from the nightmare, he heard what sounded like a muffled cry from across the hall. Carefully lifting Danny's arm, he slipped out of bed and toward the door. Out in the hall, he saw mom and Mary both at their doors.

“Go back to bed. I've got her.” They nodded sleepily as he headed toward Grace's door. Pushing it open, he saw her curled around the HPD bear, soft cries escaping as tears ran down her cheeks. Sitting on the edge of the bed, he pulled the little girl into his lap.

“Gracie, wake up sweetheart. I've got you.” He held her close, rubbing her back as he tried to rouse her from the dream.

“Daddy?” She wrapped her arms around his neck, burying her head against his warm skin.

“Sshhh. I've got you, Gracie.” Making sure he had her securely, Steve stood from the bed. “Come on, let's go snuggle with Danno.”

“I am sorry, Daddy.” She whispered against his neck before he had taken two steps from the bed. Backing up, he sat back down on the bed with her. “Gracie, look at me.” He helped her shift so she could see his face. “You do not ever have to apologize for having a bad dream or needing Danno or me. We will always do our very best to be here for you when you need us, whether it is a bad dream or anything else. We love you.”

Steve heard the door pushing further open, and looked up to see Danny leaning against the frame. “Everything okay?”

Grace nodded at him.

“You know, Steve is right. No matter how old you are, no matter where you are, you never, ever have to apologize for needing us. Trust me, we prefer to feel needed.” When Grace finally cracked a small smile, Danny beamed back at her. “Now why don't we move this party back to our room.”

“I can stay here.” Gracie offered, not wanting to be in the way.

“Nope. I am pretty sure I heard Super SEAL here say something about snuggling with Danno. No way are you getting out of that.” He gave a slightly guilty grin to Steve as the taller man rose from the bed, their daughter wrapped safely in his arms.

“Just how long were you standing out there?” Steve asked as they made their way back to their room.

“I was just a few seconds behind you.” Steve's arched brow prompted him to continue. “You had it covered. I knew you would bring her back with you, so I was just enjoying listening.”

Carefully setting Grace in the bed between them, Steve yanked the sheet up so it made it all the way up to her chin. Gracie shifted so she was curled against Danny’s chest, with both her arms wrapped around Steve's arm. It was less than five minutes before the three of them drifted back to sleep.
When Steve woke up a few hours later, Grace's head was resting on his shoulder, her back curled against his side. Danny's arm was draped over her shoulder, his hand resting over Steve's heart. Judging by the light from the window, it was around 6:30 and time for him to get his butt out of bed and go for a run and swim. Trying to carefully extricate himself without waking them, he realized he failed when Grace promptly rolled over, big brown eyes staring up at him.

“Sorry. I did not mean to wake you.” He leaned down and placed a kiss on her forehead.

“Can I come with you?” She whispered before he straightened back up. Something about the look in her eyes said she needed to expunge the memories of her nightmare before she could let go and enjoy her day. He would have said yes anyway, but there was no way he would deny her the chance to find some peace.

“Of course. Just throw your running clothes on over your bathing suit.” She scrambled out of bed and bolted for the door, leaving him smiling after her.

“I will never understand how she is turning out so much like you already.” Danny mumbled as he peered out from the rumpled sheet.

“I promise it is not an intentional effort on my part.” Steve grinned at him.

“I did not say I was complaining. All things considered, I will gladly accept the idea of her using workouts to help her cope with life. I have seen far too many people opt for far more detrimental coping mechanisms.” He rubbed his eyes before sitting up in the bed.

“That is very true. Where are you going?” Steve asked as Danny started to slide out of the bed.

“With the two of you. I told you I needed to start running more often. Cannot think of a better way to do it than with my two favorite people.” Danny stopped for a quick kiss before heading to the closet for his clothes. “Come on Super Seal. We cannot leave our daughter waiting for us.”

A few minutes later, the men opened the door to the hall to find Grace ready to go in one of her new running outfits.

“Danno?” The look of pure shock on his daughter's face made him laugh.

“What? I am not allowed to decide I want to go for a run too?” He leaned down as she threw her arms around him in an excited hug. Letting go, she grabbed their hands and tugged them toward the stairs.

Hearing a door behind them, Steve turned and caught sight of Beth’s head sticking out of her door, a warm smile on her face as she watched them go.

“You kids have fun. I will put a couple of extra bottles and towels out on the lanai before you get back.” She called quietly, ducking back into her room when Steve gave her a thumbs up.

After just over a half an hour of combined running and walking, the three were making their way around to the back of the house.

“I swear you two are trying to kill me. How is it even close to fair that our nine year old daughter is faster than me?”

Steve took a drink, while Grace stripped down to her bathing suit trying to look innocent.

“It isn't, but that is what you get for not exercising enough.” Steve teased. Seeing that Grace was
ready to swim, he winked at her. “Plus, if you think she creamed you out there, I would hate to think what she will do to you in the water.” The last few words were called over his shoulder as he and Gracie both sprinted for the water, leaving Danny sputtering on the lanai.

Kicking his shoes off and pulling his shirt over his head, Danny followed after them. “I cannot believe I am doing this.” He yelled at them as the pair dove into the water. He kept grumbling until he noticed that they had both popped back up and were waiting for him.

“Come on Danno. It's fun.” Grace encouraged him as he waded out to where they stood.

“Fun? No. This is not fun. This is insane. I cannot believe I let you two talk me into this.” He glared at the pair of them.

“Technically Danno, we did not talk you in to anything. We never uttered a word about you actually coming swimming.” Steve splashed him playfully.

“No. You just baited me with trash talk about how much faster our daughter would be than me in the water.”

“Well, you are already wet, so here is your chance to prove your skills.” Steve gestured out over the water. “Let's see what you've got.”

“Fine.” Danny stuck his tongue out before diving into the water and taking off.

“I cannot believe we did it.” Grace looked at Steve, grinning before she took off after her father. Steve followed right behind her.

Danny was actually a stronger swimmer than you would imagine given his propensity for fussing about the water. Steve knew he could have gone faster, at least over a short distance, but could tell his partner was pacing himself to avoid any risk of wearing Grace out. Much to the SEAL's pride, Grace was quite a natural in the water. While she had taken swimming lessons at the country club at Rachel and Stan’s insistence, she had learned all the important things about open water swimming from him and Kono. While Danny had fussed at them about it, he had also thanked them both for ensuring she was as safe as she could be in the ocean.

When Danny popped up, treading water, Steve and Grace both paused beside him. Rather than turning into a race, the three had fallen into an easy pace together on the way out.

“Race you back to shore?” Grace challenged Danno.

“You got it.”

They both looked to Steve. “On three.” Steve announced. “One. Two. Three.” He laughed as the two took off for shore. Continuing to tread water for a few seconds, he watched them go. Danny had strength on his side, but Grace had a higher degree of ease in the water. It would be anyone's bet which one made it first.

Deciding they had enough of a head start, Steve took off after them. He caught up with them easily, then surged just beyond them so he could turn and declare the winner. Standing up in waist deep water, he held his hands out as targets for the racers. It looked like it would be neck in neck until the final push when Gracie managed to push herself just ahead of her father, tagging Steve's hand for the win.

As soon as she popped up, he gave her a high five.
“Is this what you two were conspiring about when you sprinted off without me while we were running.” Danny started ranting the second he popped out of the water.

“I do not know what you are talking about.” Steve gave him an innocent look.

“I swear you two are going to turn all of my hair gray.” Danny fuzzed as he elbowed Steve playfully in the ribs. Grace ran ahead of them, grabbing the towels from the chair and throwing one at each of her dads.

Steve watched her closely, checking for any residual signs of anxiety from the night before. Seeing none, he smiled as he dried his hair. If only everything could be fixed by a run and swim, life would be so much easier.

Heading back toward the house, Mary and Beth popped out of the back door carrying cups of coffee and a glass of juice for Grace.

“Kono called and said they are bringing malasadas for breakfast, but we thought you guys might appreciate your coffee.” Beth greeted them all. “Did you three have a good workout?”

“I beat Danno!” Grace was bouncing with excitement as she declared her victory.

“That's right. Rub it in that you are faster than your old man.” Danny griped with a huge grin on his face.

“You said it.” Steve chuckled at him.

“Said what?”

“Old man.” Steve, Beth, and Mary all answered at the same time, everyone laughing as he stuck his tongue out at them.

Lowering himself into one of the chairs, Steve wrapped an arm around Gracie has she slid into his lap. They were both still a bit wet from the ocean water, but it did not bother either of them. The SEAL realized he would be quite content if more mornings started like this, and with Danny's parents and Mary all moving into a house only a few minutes away, it was not unreasonable to think that they just might.

Chapter End Notes

This was just supposed to be one short scene but you know how this bunch likes to run away with things. Gracie announced she wanted to go running with Steve, and I wasn't about to be the one to tell her no. Hope you all enjoyed!!
Chapter 57

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

“You guys have fun.” Steve called from the door as all the women filed toward the car.

“Don't worry boss. We will not let anything happen to her.” Kono gave him the 'remember you trained me' look, and it did wonders to help ease the tension in her shoulder. “Plus, Chin said Duke mentioned something about him and Kapahu patrolling the area today.”

“Thanks, Kono.” Steve gave her a quick hug. “Now you guys go have fun.” When the last car door shut, Danny headed back to him.

“What were you two back here plotting?” Danny asked as Steve ushered him through the door.

“No plotting. Kono was just assuring me that Grace will be well protected while they are gone.” He smiled.

“I have no doubt. Anyone tries anything today and they are likely to crawl away with a bloody stump. The only question will be which one of the aunts will be responsible for the bloodshed.” Danny stood in the middle of the living room, staring around at the house. “Do you realize this is the first time the two of us have been alone in this house in I do not know how long?”

Crossing the room, Steve pressed himself against Danny's back, grinning as he kissed his neck. “Yes. The thought had occurred to me. What do you think we should do? We know they are not due back until between 2 and 3.”

“What sounds good to you? Do you want to try to knock out the rest of the boxes in the office?” Steve offered. Aside from the fact that he kept running into the boxes when he went into the room, he also thought it would be nice for Danny to have his few remaining things settled.

“I will admit, I had other ideas about what the first suggestion out of your mouth might be, but that one has merit.” Danny started for the office.

“Work first. Play later.” Steve called after him before following. “And believe me, we will play later.” He said under his breath.

“Ten boxes. How is that all I kept from an apartment I have spent almost two years in is ten lousy boxes?” Danny popped the first one open. “Kitchen.” He handed the box off to McGarrett.

“I will go find places for these.” He paused at the door. “Feel free to move stuff around in here to make room.”

“And mess up your finely honed system of organization? I think not.” Danny scoffed.

“Not kidding, Daniel. Half the stuff in here is my dad's and I just have not cleaned it out yet.” Steve looked around at the shelves full of things that he had been dusting since he moved back to Hawaii. “Maybe after I unpack this stuff we should recycle the box to clean out a few things.”

Not waiting for an answer, he ducked toward the kitchen. Thanks to the tiny size of Danny’s apartment kitchen, there were only a few basic kitchen staples to find homes for in the larger kitchen. Quickly finished, he hauled the now empty box back to the office. He found his partner on the floor
in the middle of a stack of books and CDs.

“I would harass you for still having CDs, but I really have no room to comment.” He pointed to one
corder where a stack of CDs covered a large portion of one shelf. “If you do not mind them mixing,
you can just add yours to the collection there.

Danny scooted his pile of CDs over to that corner. “I really should load these stupid things onto the
iPod that Rachel let Grace get me for Christmas a couple of years ago. I think the poor thing has all
of twenty songs on it.”

“Seriously? That is just sad. As long as you do not have a bunch of inappropriate stuff, we should
make a thing of it some night with Gracie.” Steve continued putting random books his father had
accrued over the years into a box.

“Make a thing of what?” Danny asked.

“Putting the music on your iPod. One of the things I remember growing up was listening to the
music that my Dad loved with him. Given your taste in music, I bet you did the same thing. Our
tastes evolve over time as we find new and different things we like, but I think every kid should have
the chance to appreciate the music their parents grew up with and loved.” He placed another few
books into the box, content to continue working during the conversation, so Danny's arms wrapping
around his waist as he reached for books from the top shelf startled him.

“You are a genius.” Danny sighed as he spoke.

“Not that I am not flattered by that statement, but what the hell are you talking about?” Steve set the
books carefully in the box beside him before turning to return Danny's embrace.

“Yes, we should definitely do that with Grace, but think about what we talked about last night. If
there is one thing I know about Rachel, it is that she had very distinct taste in music. She loved
classical stuff, but there were also a couple of British bands that I remember her listening to all the
flippin' time. They used to drive me crazy. It cannot be that hard to find their stuff these days. I will
be able to give those to Grace. Rachel played those things so much when she was really little. I can
give her those as a connection to her mother.” Danny stretched up on his toes and kissed Steve.

“Happy to help.” Steve gave him a quick kiss before his partner released him and returned to what he
had been doing. Just over an hour later, they had all the boxes dealt with and three of them refilled
with things that had belonged to the elder McGarrett that were cleared to donate.

“I do not know about you, but I am ready for lunch.” Danny surveyed their progress with a smile.
“And maybe some dessert.”

///// GUARDIAN /////

Kalea had outdone herself. The six women sat around the spa, sipping sparkling lemon water in
stemmed glasses as their feet soaked in the jetted tubs of warm water.

“What color are you going to get?” Kono asked Grace as the little girl held a tray full of brightly
colored, but age appropriate, nail polish options. Grace could not decide. She had never been a spa
like this before. Rachel went to get some 'me time', and had always promised she would take Grace
when she got older, but that day never came.

Seeing the little girl's expression cloud, Dianne reached over and squeezed her hand gently. When
Grace looked at her she just gave a small smile. “I am glad you came with us today. It has been
forever since I have had a chance to have a day like this and share it with someone.”
Grace’s face brightened a bit. She was sad she had not gotten to come with her mother, but she was happy to know that sharing with with her grandmother was something special for both of them.

“You ladies,” one of the employees frowned at Catherine and Kono, “need to make a more regular habit of this.”

“I am afraid it is hard to show off a pedicure in combat boots.” Cath retorted. “Not to mention, there is a shortage of nail salons and spas on naval vessels.”

“Fair enough.” Kalea countered. “But I expect both of you back in here every time you are in port. The rest of you with them.”

“It might be tricky for me to accommodate. The trip from England takes a bit.” Dianne retorted.

“Fair enough, but you come when you visit.” Kalea was not letting up.

“We get it. We will be back.” Kono shook her head.

“You better be. We have not had this much fun around here in ages.” Kono’s cousin grinned. She and her staff had given them massages and facials, then they had all taken a break for a late lunch, and were now working through the manicures and pedicures. It was rare for them to get a group this size that was just enjoying a day together instead of getting ready for a big event, and the mutual affection between the six was easily apparent. Walking over to Grace, she sat down on the stool by the little girl, ready to continue her pedicure. “You, nani wahine, can come back any time you want. You tell your daddies it is my treat.”

“Thank you.” Grace grinned at the woman that had been so kind to them so far.

“So have you picked a color?”

“This one.” She held up a beautiful purple color.

“Excellent choice.” Kalea set the rest of the colors off to the side so she could get to work, smiling as she listened to the chatter among the women. She was happy to see her cousin surrounded by so much love. She knew things had been rough for Kono between losing her surfing career and sticking by Chin’s side when the rest of the family turned their backs on him. It had never sat well with her, but she had not been strong enough to stand up to them.

“Kalea.” Kono called her name. “Why don’t you come by sometime for dinner with Chin and me. I know he would like to see you.”

“I would like that.” She did not know how the younger cousin had known what she was thinking, but it was an olive branch she would gladly accept.

///// GUARDIAN /////

“Fruit is not dessert, even if is not pineapple.” Danny argued as he watched Steve filling two bowls with fresh berries and other assorted fruits that Danny was not even sure he could name.

“Sure it is. It is even better with this.” Steve grabbed a can of whipped cream and sprayed some on top of each of the bowls. Handing Danny one bowl, he tucked the can under his arm before heading to the lanai.

“Still not dessert.” Danny yelled after his before grabbing a fork and following.
If you want to know what happens when you mix Steve with whipped cream covered strawberries, you might want to flip over to Guardian: Love Explored. If you don’t, then congratulations, you have more will power than I do. ;)

The music bit is something that actually came out of a conversation with my husband and our 9 y/o son recently. We listen to wide variety of music and ended up taking a little stroll down memory lane with some of our favorites over lunch. There are also certain songs that I will forever associate with my parents or other moments of my life, and I imagine that is the same for many of us.
“Danno! Daddy! Look!” Grace ran toward them, fingers splayed in front of her to show off her freshly painted nails. Steve caught her mid-jump, swinging her around to rest on his hip.

“They look beautiful, Monkey.” Danny held her fingers in his open palm so they could properly fuss over them.

“And my toes match.” She held her leg out so they could see the purple toes wiggling in her sandals.

“Purple is a good color for you, Gracie.” Steve added his approval.

“Ms. Kalea said I can come back any time and she'll do my nails for free.” Grace was almost bouncing in Steve’s arms.

Kono laughed at her enthusiasm as she approached. “Correction. Kalea basically ordered us to return frequently with her. I think Ms. Grace has another fan.”

“Better you than us.” Danny laughed. “I'll leave all scheduling of such things to the lot of you.”

The roar of Chin’s motorcycle interrupted the teasing. As promised, he had arrived in time to bid Mary farewell, even if she was only going to be gone for two weeks.

“I'm going to go grab my bag and call a cab.” Mary skirted passed Steve, Grace, and Danny toward the door.

“You what?” Steve almost yelled.

“I've got this.” Danny shushed him, rushing to follow inside. “Drop that phone!” Danny barked just inside the door. “If you think for once second that I am letting you get in a cab to go to the airport then you are even crazier than that Neanderthal brother of yours!”

Mary lowered the phone, but did not let go. “It's fine, Danny. I use cabs all the time in LA.”

“Yes, because you don't have family there.” She started to speak, but his glare stopped her. “So help me, Mary Ann McGarrett, if the next words out of your mouth are anything to do with not being family to anyone here but Steven, not wanting to be a bother, or any other such nonsense I will be forced to retaliate.”

Mary stared back at him in silence.

“Good. Now, go grab your bag so you can say goodbye to everyone. I'm going to grab my key, s and the two of us will head to the airport.”

“But …”

“No. No arguing. We are going to have a nice little brother - sister chat on the way to the airport and put all this nonsense about you being less important or less a part of this ohana than anyone else here to rest once and for all.” Danny gave her his best big brother glare, and waited for her to go upstairs.

When she did, he ducked into the kitchen to grab his keys and wallet.
“I take it I won’t be taking her to the airport.” Steve’s voice made his partner jump.

“No. Indeed, you will not.” Danny turned to face him. “You and my parents had your go at her. Now it's my turn. If I'm lucky, her head will not be as hard as yours, and I will succeed in convincing her that she deserves to be loved, protected, and included in things faster than I did with you.”

Steve stared as him, no longer sure what to say. He couldn't argue, because Danny was right. Steve loved each member of their ohana fiercely, but while he'd been willing to do anything for each of them from the beginning, he had resisted allowing them to do the same for him for months. Only their determination, spearheaded by Danny had worn him down. That Mary fought those same demons crushed him.

“Don't start feeling guilty. You did not create this issue, and you're already doing your best to solve it, but you can't do it alone. Just like you are a vital part of Grace’s coping and recovery, I want to be a vital part of helping Mary understand what being part of this family means. She is my sister now too.” Danny stood toe to toe with his partner, daring him to argue.

Instead, Steve wrapped his hands around the back of Danny’s neck and pulled him in for a kiss.

“Alright you two. Break it up.” Mary interrupted them.

“I'll be outside when you are ready.” Danny grabbed her bag from her and disappeared toward the door.

“Come here.” Steve opened his arms to his little sister. “You be careful. Call me if you need anything. I mean it.” He squeezed her tight, holding her close. “I'm glad you're coming back. I really am. I love you. No matter what, always remember that, okay?”

Despite her best efforts, Mary felt tears seep out of her eyes dampening her brother’s shirt. “I love you too.” She wrapped her arms around his waist and let him hold her.

Letting her go after several minutes, Steve looked down at her. “Are you sure you don't need any help getting things packed up?”

“Yes.” She huffed as she started toward the door. Outside, Danny waited at the end of the path, on the other side of a gauntlet of people, of ohana, that she had to say goodbye to for at least a couple of weeks.

More hugs and tears than she was able to count later, Mary Ann climbed into the passenger seat of the Camaro and let Steve shut the door behind her. As the car drove away, Steve felt Beth and Grace come to his sides, wrapping their hands in his.

“She'll be back before you know it.” Beth assured him. “Now why don’t we go see if we can find a snack before Alyssa comes to talk paint?”

Steve let the pair lead him toward the house, the others falling in step behind them. It was bittersweet to see Mary go. He hated that she had to leave at all, but was happy to know it was very temporary this time. He hoped his partner was able to convince her just how much a part of this family she really was.

///// GUARDIAN /////

Fidgeting in her seat, the silence of the first few minutes alone with Danny was making her nervous. She had never actually been alone with the detective. Until this trip they had only been around each other in the presence of her brother. This time there had always been someone else around or at least
very close. Now she was trapped in a moving vehicle with no escape and no idea what he wanted to talk about.

“Why is it that every time I tell a McGarrett we're going to have a chat you look like you think I'm taking you face a firing squad? Seriously. Are conversations with me that frightening?”

She continued to face forward, watching him out of the corner of her eye as one hand remained on the wheel and the other flailed around in front of him.

“You know you are allowed to speak, right? I get enough of the crazy expressions from your brother.”

“I’m sorry.” She wasn’t sure why she was apologizing, but he sounded annoyed and it seemed appropriate.

“What the hell? Did your brother give you a script to follow? First look like a kicked puppy. Second start apologizing for doing nothing wrong.” Stopping at a red light, Danny turned to look at her.

“Whatever you think you should be apologizing for, let’s just assume you shouldn't be so we can skip that part. Now, before I continue lecturing you, because that may very well take us right up until I leave you at the airport, I need to ask you a question.”

“Okay.” Mary was staring at her brother’s partner. He really was a force of nature when he got going.

“I'd like to add you to the emergency contacts list at Grace’s school. Steve and I will be the first two, but I want to have the entire family on it in case we're having our own emergency at work and something happens at school.”

“Okay.” She nodded.

“Okay? Is that the only word you are going to say now?” Danny fussed at her.

“Yes. You can add me to the emergency contacts. You know I'd do anything I could for her.” She elaborated before he could start ranting again.

“Good. Now, speaking of people we would do anything for.” The light turned to green and he turned his eyes back to the road. “I know you and Steve both got a royal mind fuck about what it really means to be part of a family thanks to your parents.” Mary actually laughed at his rather blunt observation. “It has taken me roughly two years to convince your Neanderthal of a brother that he's actually allowed to be loved and show affection, and even now he doesn't always grasp the concept. I am every bit prepared to spend just as much time convincing you of the same thing, but I'm very much hoping that given the brilliant example he is now setting, most of the time, you will allow yourself to be persuaded considerably faster.”

Mary was not quite sure what she was supposed to say to that. The silence hung heavily in the car for a moment before Danny decided to try a different approach.

“Fine. Let me say it this way. Whether you like it or not, you are very much an integral part of this family. And by this family I mean the entire Williams-McGarrett-Kelly-Kalakaua-Rollins and now Bradley clan. Heaven help me if we ever need to make a t-shirt for that. We're an oddly assembled gathering of broken toys that your brother managed to cobble together into a group of people that would quite literally lay down their lives for each other. Though I do hope it never comes to that. The point being, no one of us is more important than another. No one of us expects the others to act a certain way or say a certain thing to remain part of the family. If I have learned anything in the last
two years, it is that our ohana will stop at nothing to remain ohana. All we ask is that you love as best as you are able and allow us to love you in return. That's it. No membership fees. No educational requirements. No bullshit worthy of a highly paid therapist. Well, unless you count your brother getting me shot at, but that has more to do with Five-0 and his stupid Super SEAL tendencies. He tends not to get the ohana shot at. So please, stop worrying that you're not enough, that you somehow don't deserve this. Just get your shit from LA, tell us when to book your return trip, and get your ass back home. This is where you belong.”

They were pulling into the airport before Mary finally spoke. “I love you too, Danny.”

Stopping at the passenger drop off, Danny turned off the car and grabbed Mary’s bag from the back. Pulling her into a hug, he kissed her cheek. “I am glad you finally figured it out. Now fly safe and call us when you land so we don't worry. We love you.”

She gave him one last squeeze before heading to the airport.

Danny leaned back against his car for a moment, watching her go. Hopefully his words really did sink in this time. Walking back around the car, he hopped in, and sped off toward home.

Chapter End Notes

Geez. I’m writing Danny and even I can’t shut him up when he gets going. Hope you all enjoyed the latest installment. Take a minute to review and let me know.
“Alright, you kids take your drinks outside and go play. I'm going to get the pork chops into the marinade so they have plenty of time to soak before dinner.” Beth started shooing everyone out of the kitchen.

“Can I help?” Steve asked as the others did as they were told.

“Yes. You can go play with Grace. Now shoo.” She gave him a one armed hug before swatting at him. “I'll be out in a bit.”

“Okay. I'm going.” Steve knew better than to try and argue with her.

“Come on Daddy.” Grace called to him. “We're going to have a sand castle competition. You're on my team.”

“Who are we building against?” Steve asked as he followed Grace closer to the water.

“It is you, me, and Grandma against Chin, Cath, and Kono. We'll make Danno and Grandma Williams judge them later.”

“What are the rules?” Chin asked as he sat down with his team mates several feet away.

“We have 30 minutes to build. Castles will be judged on creativity and structural integrity.” Grace declared, making Steve smile. She reached for his wrists, pushing buttons on his watch. “Time starts now.” She pushed the button to start the timer.

By the time Beth came out, the two groups only had about five minutes left. Steve gave her a rushed explanation before turning his attention back to their project. Beth just smiled and took a seat where she could watch both teams work.

“What did I …”

“Ssshhh.” All six contestants hushed Danny when he appeared.

“Have a seat son.” Beth patted the ground next to her. “Best I can tell we will be judging the results sometime in the next few minutes.”

“The what?” Danny sat down next to his mother.

“Judging by what they are up to, I would say a sand castle building competition. Steve didn't exactly elaborate when I came out.” The pair watched the frantic activity as the final moments wound down. When Steve’s watch beeped, everyone froze.

“Time is up.” Grace squealed. “Danno. Grandma. You guys have to decide which one you like best.” Grace instructed them. “You are looking at how creative they are and the overall structural integrity.”

Danny gave Steve a playful glare. “First she is properly fortifying things. Now she's concerned with structural integrity. What's next?”

“Don't tempt him, Danny. You know he will come up with something.” Chin smacked Danny on the shoulder.
The six builders sat back giving the judges room to look at their masterpieces. Then Danny and his mom huddled off to the side, conferring on their decision.

“I believe we have a tie. While we think this one,” he pointed to Chin, Catherine, and Kono’s castle, “was the more creative one, there is no doubt that this one would be most likely to survive a monsoon.”

“Cheater.” Steve reached out and grabbed Danny, pulling him into his lap. “You just didn't want to play favorites.”

“That might have factored into the decision too.” He gave his partner a quick kiss. “Now give me your phone and I'll take the pictures with you guys and your creations.”

Steve forked over the device before gathering Dianne and Grace close next to their castle. “Everybody smile.” Danny snapped their picture, one of the other group, then stepped back so he could fit them all into a shot.

“Would you like me to get a shot of all of you together?” A feminine voice called from the corner of the house. “I knocked, but nobody answered so I thought I’d check the most likely place.” The tall Hawaiian woman kicked her sandals off on the lanai before heading toward them.

“Alyssa! I am sorry I must have lost track of time.” Steve apologized. “Let me introduce you.”

“You didn't lose track of time, I just got here about 20 minutes early. I hope I'm not interrupting.” She apologized.

“Not at all.” Steve gave her a quick hug.

“Why don’t I get that picture first and then you can do introductions.” She reached her hand out to take the phone from Danny. Still processing that his partner’s painter friend was quite the beauty, Danny almost dropped the phone.

Everyone gathered around the sand castles, Danny and Beth in between the two, and smiled for a couple of quick shots. Handing the phone back to Steve, Alyssa turned to Grace.

“You must be Ms. Grace.” She squatted down to eye level. “I cannot wait to see what you want me to paint for you.”

The little girl gave her a huge smile. “I am. It's nice to meet you.”

“And you must be the one that is finally taking Steve McGarrett off the market.” She turned to Danny. “I’m sure you will hear hearts breaking across the island as women find out he is settling down.” Alyssa teased. It was easy to tell that he was feeling a bit ruffled with her arrival. She would have to clue him in that anyone that knew Steve at all would be able to tell he had eyes for no one but his partner.

She grinned as Steve slipped his arm around Danny, pulling him to stand at his side. Alyssa could not suppress her smile at how obvious their body language was. No wonder she kept hearing talk that they were secretly married.

“Yes. This is Danny.” Steve’s eyes fell briefly on his partner. “And this is the rest of the ohana. This is Danny’s mom, Beth, and Rachel’s mom, Dianne. And this is the rest of Five-0, Chin and Kono, and you have met Cath before.”

“It's lovely to meet you all.” Alyssa waved at them all.
“Why don’t we go show you your canvas?” Steve asked.

“Let’s go.” Alyssa held her hand out to Grace. “You want to lead the way?” The little girl took her hand, and turned for the house, her fathers following behind them.

Still not over the revelation that Steve’s painter friend, whom he appeared to have a history with, was so attractive, Danny was prepared to sulk a bit. Having no choice but to follow along, he chanced a glance up at Steve, expecting to find him watching Alyssa. Instead he found him staring back down at him, brows furrowed in confusion.

Leaning down, Steve nuzzled Danny’s ear. “What is wrong?”

Danny felt the SEAL’s hand caressing his side. “Nothing. I was just being stupid.” The fact that Steve was so entirely focused on him despite Alyssa’s presence was enough of a clue to relieve his concerns. Some part of his brain acknowledged that he was going to have to get a grip on himself if he was ever going to let the SEAL out in public again. Women weren’t particularly subtle about their appreciation.

“Okay.” Steve grinned as they climbed the stairs toward Grace’s bedroom. Before following them into the room, the SEAL pulled Danny to a stop, capturing his lips for a brief kiss. By the time they made it into the room Grace was already showing the paint colors they’d chosen and some of of the inspirational pictures they had pulled together for the room.

“So this wall is for me?” Alyssa eyed the wall, stepping to the other side of the room to get a good look at the lighting and her full work surface. “Any specific animals that you absolutely must have?”

“Dolphins. The first time I got to pet one was because Daddy sent Danno and I to a fancy hotel for a weekend where I got to swim with the dolphins.” Grace explained to Alyssa.

“You told her about that?” Steve whispered to Danny.

“Not initially, but it did come up.” The detective confessed. “I couldn't take credit for something so nice when you were the one to do it.”

“It would've been fine with me.”

“All the more reason why I couldn't do it. If you had been an ass about it I wouldn't have minded taking credit.” The pair watched as Grace and Alyssa talked animals. Alyssa pulled an album full of pictures of her paintings out of her small bag so Grace could point out things she did or didn't like. Before long it was clear that the two would get along very well.

“It will make for a few long days, but I bet I can have it done in under a week. I should be able to start by next Wednesday.” Alyssa told them as she put the album back in her bag. “Grace, would you like to help me when you aren’t at school? I can always use a good assistant.”

“Really? That would be awesome.” The little girl could barely contain her excitement. “Is that okay?” She looked to her fathers for permission.

“Of course. It will make the room even more special to know you helped with it.” Danny did not hesitate to answer. If Steve trusted Alyssa enough to introduce her to Grace, he would trust her enough to let Grace help.

“Perfect. I'll call you Tuesday evening and let you know if everything is on track to start. You will have the base layers up by then, right?”
“Yes, ma’am.” Steve laughed. We are going to start Sunday after we get Ms. Bradley to the airport and should have the second coat up Monday night.”

The four headed down the stairs so Alyssa could head out and the men could see what they needed to do for dinner.

/// GUARDIAN ///

Grace safely tucked in for bed, all the adults were back in the living room. It was getting late, and everyone was starting to wind down.

“I think it is time we call it a night.” Kono yawned. She and Catherine both rose from their spots on the couch.

“Before you guys go, we would like to talk to you about something.” Danny’s voice made Catherine and Kono pause and sit back down. “I called Ms. Jones earlier to set up time to meet with her and the school’s director Monday morning. She emailed us the emergency contact form so we could update it.”

“While we certainly hope there isn’t a time when the school is unable to reach both Danny and me, we thought it best to make the list as comprehensive as possible. Mary has already consented to being added, and we would like to include each of you as well. It gives the school the best possible list of people to reach should anything happen, and also provides consent for any of you to pick her up should the need arise.”

“But I’m …”

“On a Navy ship a good portion of the time? Yes. We know that, but we still want to include you for when you are here. Given the circumstances, Ms. Jones has assured us that only people on this will list will be permitted to take Grace. While we know some of you,” he looked to Dianne, “will not often be in a position to do so, we feel it is important that the list is complete.”

“In that case, I’m in.” Catherine didn’t argue further.

“Are you sure?” Dianne asked. She had not forgotten how badly things had started when she arrived on the island with her threat to take Grace.

“Yes. First, over the last several days you have demonstrated how much you care about your granddaughter. While we know it will not be the same as having her there or having you here all the time, we do look forward to seeing you more often. Second, you are a smart woman. Even if you did get a crazy idea, you’re bound to realize how incredibly stupid trying to take her would be.” Danny chuckled with his last statement, hoping he knew that he was joking, though if she ever turned on them she would have no way to save herself.

“Believe me, I have no desire to cross this family. I do however hope to visit more often, at least twice a year if all goes well.” She admitted.

“And we’ll be happy to have you stay here when you do.” Steve offered.

“And if for any reason you can’t stay here, you are always welcome at our place.” Beth seconded the offer.

“Thank you.” Dianne clasped Beth’s hand, giving the other woman a genuine smile. She had been very surprised at how well they got along when she stopped being such a horrid snob.
“Okay. We have that settled. I assume the rest of you have no objections to being placed on the form?” Steve asked.

“None at all son.” Beth confirmed.

“Quit asking stupid questions.” Kono climbed back out of the couch, giving both men a hug. “I’m too tired for stupid questions.”

“If you are so tired, I’ll drive.” Catherine grabbed the keys from Kono’s hand. “Dianne, do you want us to drop you off?”

“That would be lovely.” The older woman accepted the offer.

“We’ll see you tomorrow, brah.” Chin patted McGarrett on the shoulder before leaning in closer. “You still want to do the thing?”

Steve nodded. “We are meeting Dr. James at ten, so we should be in good shape for lunch.”

“I’ll touch base with the big guy and wrangle Cath and Kono, and we’ll meet you there.” Chin confirmed.

“Mahalo.” Steve nodded as Chin headed for the door.

When it was just Steve, Danny, and Beth left in the room, Danny gave him a suspicious look. “What exactly is the thing?”

“The thing is a surprise Daniel. I promise you’ll like it.”

“Does it involve guns or explosions?”

“No.” Steve answered indignantly.

“Does it involve strenuous physical activity?”

“No. There will be a very short walk, but it’s easy terrain and will take less than ten minutes. I promise, no one in the group will have a problem with it.” The SEAL replied with dramatic sigh.

“Okay. Then I’ll let you surprise us. But I warn you. If anyone gets injured …” Danny did not bother finishing his threat. Instead he turned to give his mother a hug and a kiss good night.

“You boys sleep well.” Beth came to give Steve a hug before heading up to her room.

Checking the locks, Steve grabbed Danny’s hand. “Come on Danno. Let’s get some sleep. I don’t know about you, but I am tired.” Danny yawned, but followed behind the SEAL.
Chapter 60

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

A tingling sensation in Steve’s arm lured him out of his sleepy haze on Saturday morning. Not bothering to open his eyes, he wrapped the arm that wasn’t tingling tight around Danny’s waist. The detective was spooned against his chest, head resting heavily on Steve’s bicep. The SEAL managed to shift his position just enough to move his partner’s head to his shoulder, allowing his arm to begin regaining feeling.

Judging by the light in the room, it was still early, but not ridiculously so. Steve knew he should get out of bed and get moving if he was going to stay on plan for the day. First, he needed to go change the sheets in the guest room where Mary had been staying. While part of him was tempted to just stay in bed and enjoy Danny’s solid warmth against him, he knew there would be more chances for that later.

Nuzzling Danny’s neck, he felt the detective begin to stir. “S too early for sex.” Danny mumbled, making Steve chuckle against his ear.

“I’m not waking you up for sex, Danno. Though we can certainly do that later.” He smiled against his partner’s ear when the smaller man wrapped his own hand around Steve’s where it rested against his stomach.

“Then why?” He heard the pout in the Jersey native’s voice.

“I am going to go get Dianne. Didn’t want you to worry when you woke up and I was not in the usual places.” Steve whispered.

Danny flopped around in the bed until he was facing Steve. “Is this part of your plan that you refused to tell me?”

“Yes. I'm going to go convince Dianne to spend her last night here instead of the hotel.” Steve admitted. This part wasn't really a big secret, though I thought it would be a surprise for both Dianne and Grace.

“That is not the whole surprise though, is it?” Danny pushed.

“Nope. You'll find out the rest of it later. I promise, it will be nice.” Steve stretched forward to give him a quick kiss. Danny had other plans though, and it was several minutes before he managed to untangle himself from the bed to get dressed.

“Go back to sleep for a while. I'll be back soon.” McGarrett watched his partner nestle back into the sheets, already content to drift back to sleep. Despite Danny’s frequent trouble sleeping, it didn’t appear he was having any issues these days. Hustling to get ready, Steve was out the bedroom door in under ten minutes.

“Where are you headed this early?” Beth asked before he had taken two steps toward the other guest room.

“What makes you think I'm heading somewhere?” Steve grinned like a teenage boy caught sneaking out of the house.
“Cargo pants and combat boots are not appropriate attire for swimming or running, and those are the only two activities that usually have you up.” Beth smirked. She wasn't the mom for nothing. “Or am I not allowed to know?”

Steve laughed. “Nothing is top secret until after we meet with Dr. James. Then things are on a strictly need to know basis.” He winked. “First two steps are to change the sheets in the room Mary was staying in and collect Dianne from her hotel.” He spoke quietly, eyes drifting to Grace’s room.

“And the latter is a surprise to both of them?”

He nodded.

“It's very sweet of you to think of that. Why don’t you skip straight to step two and I'll handle step one?” She crossed the hall to stand right in front of him, her hand reaching up to wipe away an eyelash that had fall on his cheek. There was more Beth wanted to say to him, but standing in the hallway when there were things to do was not the time or place. “Get going. I will have something ready for a late breakfast when you two get back.”

Steve pulled her in for a quick hug, kissing the top of her head, before trotting down the stairs.

Pulling up in front of the grand entrance to the Halekulani, Steve was glad he had arrived early enough to beat the normal tourist traffic. He pulled off to one side of the area, trying to avoid blocking any traffic that might come through.

“Can we help you sir?” One of the staff rushed to help him open the door.

“I'm here to pick up a family member. Would it be okay to leave my truck here while I get her and her things?” He asked politely, but with his best 'just do as I say and no one gets hurt' voice.

“Of course sir.” The young man closed his truck door for him, stepping aside so McGarrett could pass.

Thanks to the team, he already knew Dianne’s room number. He quickly navigated his way to the elevators and up to her floor. She had already spent one night at the house, so Steve wasn't sure why he was worried she would push back on his idea to spend her last night with them.

Knocking at the door, he waited patiently. He knew she was an early riser, but also knew his arrival was unexpected. He heard footsteps approaching the door.

“Ms. Bradley, it's Steve.” He heard the door begin to open before he finished.

“Steven? Is everything okay? Is it Grace?” Steve kicked himself for not thinking his appearance might scare her.

Reaching out to gently squeeze her arm, he gave her a reassuring smile. “Everything is fine. I didn't mean to scare you. I just wanted to surprise you and Grace.”

“Come in.” She stepped aside to let him into the room. He could see she had many of her things already packed up. Given that she had spent so little time in the hotel, that made sense. “I will say I'm surprised to see you popping up here first thing in the morning. I was going to call my car soon to make sure I was there in plenty of time for the appointment with Dr. James.”

Stopping in the middle of the room, he turned to face her. “I want you to check out of the hotel this morning.” His request was met with a look of startled fear reminding him she didn't have a clue what he was talking about. “What I mean is, we want you to spend your last night at home with us, not in
a hotel. Since Mary left last night, we have a guest room available.”

“Are you sure?”

“Yes. Grace doesn't know yet. I thought it might be a nice surprise for her. There is no reason for you not to be able to spend the entire day and tomorrow morning with her instead of spending any part of it alone in a hotel room. No matter how nice the hotel room actually is.” He had to admit it was one of the nicest rooms he had ever seen.

“I suppose I can't argue with that logic. It will just take me a few minutes to gather up the last of my things. I had most of it together already since I didn't really expect to get back until late this evening. Not that I have spent that much time here anyway.” She moved around the room collecting the few things that were sitting out. “I hope you and Daniel realize how much I appreciate your openness to allowing me to spend time at your home. I realize I was completely out of line when I first arrived. Had I been in your shoes I am not sure I would have been quite so graceful and forgiving.”

He watched as she paused to look at him, seeming to gauge his reaction.

“We have all made our fair share of mistakes. Our primary concern is Grace’s well-being. She just lost her mother. She didn't need to lose her grandmother too.”

“Still, I appreciate the opportunity you and the rest of the family gave me. It means more than you may ever know to go back to England knowing that I won't lose her completely.” Setting one last small bag on her larger suitcase, Dianne face him again. “This is it.”

McGarrett grabbed the bulk of her luggage, leaving her only one small bag and her purse to carry as they headed out of the room. “I'll go ahead and put these in the truck while you check out.”

When they pulled into the driveway, Steve killed the engine and hustled around to help Dianne out of the passenger side. His truck was taller than the vehicles she was used to maneuvering in and out of.

“Why don’t you head inside and I'll grab the bags.”

“Nonsense. I can help.” She challenged him, her expression reminding him so much of the ones Rachel used to give Danny when she was being stubborn.

“Okay.” Crazy SEAL he may be, but he was not crazy enough to argue when that look was in play.

Approaching the door, Dianne jumped a bit when it opened suddenly. “Grandma!” Grace stood staring at them in the entry. It was easy to see she had been coming to find Steve, not expecting someone to be with him.

“Your daddy thought we might like to spend my last night here together. Want to help me put my bags in the room Aunt Mary was in?” Dianne gave her granddaughter a warm smile. Grace grabbed the small suitcase and ran for the stairs. “I think your plan can be counted as a success.” Ms. Bradley looked up to see Steve’s smile matching his daughter’s.

“Looks like it.” He laughed as they followed Grace up the stairs at a slower pace.

“Breakfast is ready, so don't get lost up there.” Danny’s voice called from the kitchen.

“Got it, Danno.” Steve acknowledged as the crested the final step.

Stowing her bags in the guest room, the three hustled to join Beth and Danny in the kitchen.
“Something smells delicious.” Steve immediately when over to investigate what Beth was pulling out of the oven. “What can I do to help?”

“Go sit down and stay out of the way.” She gently elbowed him in the side as she passed with the piping hot dish full of breakfast casserole. “We already have the table set and drinks prepared. We were just waiting on the two of you to arrive.”

The SEAL followed obediently, taking his seat next to Danny at the table. Grace was already seated next to Dianne, and Beth slid into a chair on her granddaughter’s other side. Digging into the meal, Danny laughed as Steve fussed over his mom’s cooking again. He couldn’t really blame the guy, she was one hell of a cook.

“Do we get a clue about what the surprise is for this afternoon?” Danny asked between bites.

“Just wear something comfortable with shoes you don’t mind walking just a bit in when we go to see Dr. James. That is all you need to know.”

“And that does not tell me much.” Danny fussed.

“Come on, Danno. Don’t be such a spoil sport.” Grace teased her father. While Danny generally hated surprises, Grace loved them. Since Steve’s first surprise today was bringing Grandma Bradley to stay for the night, she was pretty sure she would like whatever he had planned next.

“Fine.” The detective leaned back in his chair, giving his daughter his best pouting face. Unfortunately for him, he could not hold it once she started laughing.

When everyone was done, Steve rose to start clearing plates. “Why don’t you all go finish getting ready, and I’ll take care of these.”

Everyone but Danny cleared the room. “I’m good to go.” He swiped a hand in front of his body, indicating his cargo shorts, polo shirt, and sneakers. “I assume this meets your exacting standards.”

Setting the plate he had been holding down, Steve stretched his arm out, catching Danny by the front of his shirt and tugging him forward. “Is that attitude you are giving me, detective?”

“Maybe. What are you going to do about it?”

Steve leaned closer, hovering his lips less than an inch away from Danny’s, feeling the detective shudder in anticipation. Instead of capturing Danny’s lips, Steve shifted, letting his nose graze against his partner’s cheek and down to his neck. “Nothing.” Steve whispered against Danny’s flushed skin before turning and grabbing the dishes from the table.

“You are evil.” Danny muttered under his breath. “Pure evil.” The detective remained frozen, forcing calming breathes in through his nose and out his mouth, willing his body to calm before his daughter or either grandmother reappeared. Finally feeling a bit more in control, he grabbed the remaining dishes and made his way into the kitchen. “You don't play fair.” He griped.

“Never said I did. And technically, weren’t you supposed to be in trouble for copping an attitude?” Steve arched his brow at him in challenge.

“I will be prepared to serve my penance later.” Danny set the dishes on the counter before giving the SEAL a look full of challenge and promise.

“I can't wait, but right now we better get these dishes done before someone catches us in a compromising position.” Steve handed Danny the dish towel and resumed washing plates.
Saturday is going to take a few chapters to get through because there is a good bit of stuff going on. We've got the appointment with Dr. James, Steve's surprise, a special request for Dianne, and the aftermath of the request. Hope you enjoy!
Dr. James was waiting for the family at the door when Steve pulled the truck into the parking space. He and Danny were both relieved to see hers was the only other car in the lot. Duke and the governor had assured they there should be no other unscrupulous reporters lurking, but they both knew those were not exactly the sorts to care about breaking the rules.

Steve and Danny opened the back doors, using their bodies to shield the ladies as they exited the truck. While neither of them had consciously done so, both grandmothers noticed.

“I don't think anyone is going to start shooting at us.” Beth whispered to Steve when she slid out of the truck.

“What?” He arched a brow at her while maintaining his position.

“You look like you're about to shield us from a hail of bullets.” Her look challenged him to deny it. “Not saying I fault your instincts. Grace is right, you make one heck of a guardian Super SEAL.” This earned her a smile as they followed Danny and the other two into the office building.

“Welcome back, Grace.” The therapist greeted the little girl first. “Would you like to introduce me to your grandmothers?” Based on appearance, she already had a guess which was which.

“This is Grandma Bradley.” She motioned with the hand that was clasped in one of Dianne’s. “And this is Grandma Williams.” She held her other hand up, now holding firmly to Danny’s mother.

“I am Dr. James. It's a pleasure to meet you both. If you'd all like to follow me, we can get started. I am sure you have plenty of other plans for the day.”

“That is the theory.” Danny grumbled under his breath, giving Steve an accusatory glare.

“You'll know soon enough.” Steve slipped his hand onto Danny’s side as they followed the women through the security door to the inner portion of the building.

“Grace, why don’t you show your grandmothers around,” she motioned to the room where Grace had spent much of her time with her. “I just want to talk to your dads for a couple of minutes before we get started.”

The little girl nodded before leading the two women further into the area. Dr. James motioned Danny and Steve toward her office.

“How have things been going this week?”

“Better than expected. Which seems to be the trend so far.” Danny admitted.

“And you are concerned about that?” The therapist asked in an understanding tone.

“Yes. What if she isn't really processing this? I know we talked about this Wednesday, but my worst fear is that she is not as okay as she is letting on.” Danny elaborated.

“Unfortunately, only time will tell us for sure, but as I said Wednesday, based on my time with Grace my professional opinion is that she is coping quite successfully. Based on what I have seen so far this
morning, it appears her bond with Rachel’s mother is continuing to improve. I believe over time, that relationship will be quite beneficial as it will provide her a means of getting to know the mother she lost too young.” She paused to let him consider her words for a few seconds. “Has anything happened since our last appointment to raise new concerns?”

“No. But I’m sure you have figured out that I like to worry.” Danny answered.

“He is quite a professional worrier.” Steve teased even as he kissed the top of Danny’s head. “As he said, there have been no issues or red flags, but it's hard for either of us not to worry where she is concerned.”

“And that level of concern is serving you well. From what Grace has told me, I have no doubt she is well aware that either of you would do anything needed to help her come to terms with things. Even better, she knows it's not just the two of you, but the people you have surrounded her with. Sometimes the single most important thing to recovery is the unshakable belief that you are not alone, that you have a network of support if you fall apart. Your daughter’s belief that she has that is absolute.”

Both men smiled at her assertion. If there was one thing they could do for her, ensuring she had her ohana was it.

“Now, if there are no other concerns I suggest we join the others.” They both nodded before following her back toward Grace and her grandmothers.

They found the little girl drawing a picture and chatting with the older women. Doctor James looked at the picture, noting it appeared to be the start of a new family portrait.

“What are you working on there, Grace?” She inquired.

“A picture of the family for Grandma to take home with her.” She looked up at the doctor.

“That is very nice of you. Why don’t we just sit here and talk so you can finish that for her?” The girl nodded, so Dr. James took a seat around the table as the men did the same. “Like I said earlier, we'll keep this short today so you can enjoy the rest of your day. Mostly I wanted to make sure that the three of you are all okay with the coming changes and what it means for your positions in each other’s lives.”

Grace looked at her when she spoke. “I'am sad that Grandma Bradley is going back to England tomorrow, but we're going to video chat every Saturday morning at nine.” Her eyes shifted to Rachel’s mother as they exchanged conspiratorial smiles. They had figured that out right after the test call.

“And I’m going to come back for at least a couple of weeks around Christmas this year while Grace is on school break.” Dianne added. “The plan is for me to come twice each year. Once during summer break and once during winter break.” She did her best to portray a confidence she wasn’t sure she really felt about going back to England. It was no longer the separation from Grace that bothered her the most, it was lack of closure she felt around Stan’s part in this whole affair.

Dr. James could tell there was something Ms. Bradley wasn’t saying. “Are you …” a small shake of the woman’s head and the pleading look in her eye as she glanced from the therapist to her granddaughter, made Dr. James deviate from her original question. “Are you looking forward to enjoying a warm Hawaiian Christmas?”

Dianne’s shoulders visibly relaxed, a detail not missed by the doctor, Steve, or Danny.
“I am. It will also be the first time in years that I've been a part of a big gathering for the holiday.” She admitted.

“I assume it's safe to bet that all the people in Grace's drawing are likely to be there.” The therapist looked at the picture noting there were more additions that just Ms. Bradley to this edition.

Grace seemed to notice her looking and starting pointing them out. “That is Aunt Mary, Daddy’s sister, and that is Kamekona. Aunt Mary left yesterday, but she is going to come back and stay with Grandma and Grandpa Williams.”

Chatting for a while longer, it was clear that both women and Grace were as comfortable as they could be with the way things stood. Most surprising was the strong friendship that was obviously developing between the two grandmothers.

As things wound down, Dr. James decided to see if she could get Ms. Bradley to speak with her away from Grace for a moment. Seeing that the little girl was still putting the finishing touches on her drawing, the doctor decided to make use of the time.

“Ms. Bradley, would it be okay if you and I stepped into my office for a few minutes?” The older woman looked concerned, but seemed to calm some when Steve reached over and took her hand. “Steve is welcome to join us if you prefer.”

Dianne’s grip on his hand tightened. Taking that as his cue, he rose and helped her to her feet. “We'll be right back Gracie, okay?”

“Ohana.” His single whispered word forestalled anything she might have considered saying.

Closing the door to her office, Dr. James took a seat across from the two. “I didn't mean to alarm you by requesting we speak in private, but it was evident earlier that something else was on your mind, something you did not wish to speak about in front of Grace.”

“I …” Dianne started but then stopped.

Before the therapist could encourage her, Steve leaned forward on his knees, bringing him at eye level to Ms. Bradley. “Dianne, whatever is bothering you, it's better to tell us now than hold onto it until you are back across the ocean. We can't help if we don't know what it is.” He held her eyes as he spoke, encouraging her to put the same faith in the ohana that he did.

Dr. James leaned back in her chair. She would interject if needed, but in reality, letting part of the family get her to open up would be more effective in the long run.

“I know it will sound unreasonable, but it bothers me that I couldn't confront Stanley about what he did to my daughter. I know he is pleading out. I know he will spend some number of years in prison, but part of me wants to look him in the eye and see if he even comes close to realizing how horrible his actions were.”

Dianne stared at the floor as she spoke, but Steve looked to Dr. James to see her reaction. “That is not unreasonable. I'm not sure how likely it is to happen before you leave, but wanting to
confront the person that did something like this to your family is far from unreasonable.” Dr. James reassured her.

“Let me make a phone call. I can’t make any promises, but I may be able to make it happen later this afternoon.” Both women stared at him. It had never dawned on either that given the parties involved, even with limited time it could be feasible. “If for some reason we can’t make it happen today, I’ll set it up for when you are back in December. Worst case, it takes two and a half months to be able to have that conversation, but we will make sure you have the chance.”

Dianne continued to stare at him. “Thank you.” Not for the first time, she thought she understood even better what it meant to be part of this family. When one of them needed something, there was no protracted argument over reasoning or the validity of the request. There was no being made to feel inadequate because you asked for something. There was simple acceptance and steps taken to fulfill the need. After less than a week with these people, Dianne felt a greater sense of belonging and family than she ever had in her life.

Chapter End Notes

The big surprise will finally show up in the next chapter.
Turning off the main road, Steve couldn't keep the grin off his face as Danny sat in the passenger seat ranting.

“What part of I do not like surprises do you not understand you crazy Neanderthal? You promised you would tell us what was going on as soon as the therapy appointment was over. We left Dr. James’s office half an hour ago, and yet we are no closer to knowing what in the world you have planned. I swear, if this is some hair-brained idea that gets us shot at, I will shoot you myself.”

Grace’s uncontrollable giggles from the back seat filled the cab of the truck. Steve gave his partner a sideways glance as he made another turn and could see the laughter in his eyes as he kept fussing about not knowing where they were going. Danny really didn't care where they were going at this point. He had absolute faith that whatever Steve had planned would be something fun and no doubt memorable for all involved, but his teasing rant had thrown Grace into such hysterical giggles that he couldn't resist keeping it up.

“For the tenth time Danno, if you would stop talking so much and pay attention you might actually figure out what we are doing.” McGarrett laughed as he talked over Danny. He knew exactly what Danny was doing. No doubt everyone in the truck, including Grace, knew what he was doing, but they were all having so much fun laughing that nobody would call him on it.

Pulling into a small parking overlooking a beautiful view of the island and ocean, Steve parked next to the two other cars that were already there.

“They all knew?” Danny turned on him. “I wasn't allowed to know, but they did?”

“Until this morning, only Chin knew. Kono and Cath just knew to keep their afternoon free, and Kamekona knew he was providing some food but not for what.” Steve defended.

“Quit griping, Daniel. If my guess is right, Steven just arranged a picnic that will easily outdo any I have ever been on before. Don't ruin it.” Beth reached up and tousled his hair just to annoy him further.

“Good call, Ma. I just need to make a quick call then we can head up to the spot.” Steve jumped out of the truck and turned to help Dianne out. “Everything set?” He called to Chin as the man approached.

“It's ready and waiting for us, brah. Kamekona is on guard duty to make sure the food stays safe until we get there.” Chin confirmed. Steve stepped off to the side to make a call and find out about getting Dianne that meeting with Stan.

“Hopefully he doesn't eat it all.” Danny cracked as they lingered at the trail head waiting for McGarrett.

“Doubtful. Even the big guy couldn't demolish that much food that fast. We won't be going hungry today.” Kono laughed.

“So how long are we going to be traipsing around the wilderness?” The detective asked as Steve joined him, the others just ahead following Chin.
Grabbing his partner’s hand, Steve shook his head. “Less than ten minutes.” Despite the laughter in his voice, Danny noticed a hint of something else in his eyes. Sensing that now was not the time to ask about it, the Jersey native settled for listening to the chatter from those ahead of them as they made their way up the trail. “Halawa is expecting one of us with Dianne before dinner. It cram’s a bit more into today than I had planned, but I feel like that is at least a tiny bit of closure we can give her before she goes back.” Steve had managed to brief Danny about Ms. Bradley’s request before leaving the therapist’s office.

“I hate to ask this, but can you take her? I’m not sure I am ready to face off with him again yet. Plus, he is way more scared of you than he is me. The intimidation will do him good.”

“Of course, Danno. When we’re done here, we will stop by the house to let you guys out and change clothes before we head over.”

“Worried about looking good for Stan?” Danny teased, though he was curious about his partner’s need to change for a visit to the prison.

“Not exactly.” Steve replied stoically.

“Then what?” Danny pushed.

“Just taking every opportunity to impress upon him that, whether intentional or not, he is on the wrong side of some very dangerous people.” Steve’s tone was pure ice.

“I should find everything about what just come out of your mouth terrifying, instead I want to shove you up against the nearest tree and demonstrate just how not terrifying I found that.” Danny practically growled as they continued along the path, glad that they were just far enough back from the others to keep the conversation private.

“You can show me later.” Steve brought Danny’s hands to his lips, eyes full of promise.

True to McGarrett’s word, the trail was an easy one and they arrived at a large flat area perfect for a picnic, and Kono hadn’t been kidding about the food.

“Look who finally decided to show up.” Kamekona gave Grace a quick squeeze. “I hope you brought your appetite, sista.” She nodded her head at him turning back to her dads.

“It’s so pretty.” Grace exclaimed as she ran toward the pair. “How did you find it?” She let Steve lift her into his arms, wrapping her arms around his neck as he carried her closer to the edge. Still not sure what the deal was with this particular location, Danny followed right behind them, letting his hand rest on McGarrett’s lower back when they stopped.

“My parents brought Mary and me up here once when I was fourteen. For about two hours, it was one of the best days I had ever had.” He did not elaborate on what happened after that.

“Monkey, why don’t you go see what we have got for lunch.” Danny smiled as she gave Steve a quick kiss on the cheek before sliding out of his arms. “You okay, babe?”

“Yeah. I guess.” Steve shrugged.

“How about you tell me what is going through that head of yours, and I’ll decide for sure.” Danny pressed, slipping his arm around his partner’s waist as they stood overlooking the edge of the landing. When Steve wrapped his own arm around Danny’s shoulders, the detective knew he was going to answer and opted to just wait him out.
After a long moment of silence, the SEAL finally cracked. “Everything was great that afternoon. We had a picnic. Mom was taking video of us together. Then some guy in a suit showed up. I assumed it was somebody from HPD at first, something for dad’s job, but it was Mom that hurried over to meet him. They spoke for a few minutes. Then he left and Mom and Dad argued. Mary and I had no clue what was going on, but all of a sudden our very rare perfect day as a family disintegrated. Looking back it makes more sense. Then it was just another source of disappointment.”

They stood silent for another minute before Danny spoke. “So why did you decide to bring us here now when you have avoided it thus far?” Steve had taken him and Grace to a multitude of his favorite spots, but this one had never come up. “Why dredge up bad memories?”

“Because it’s one of the most beautiful places I’ve ever seen and it deserves a memory to match.” Steve hedged, not quite revealing the full answer.

“And we could have done that any time over the last few months. Why now?” Danny pushed. He wasn't sure why, but for some reason it felt like it was important for Steve to answer the question.

The SEAL looked back over his shoulder, watching Grace with the rest of their ohana and struggling to find the right way to explain without sounding like an overly sentimental idiot.

“Babe, tell me what is going on. You can't honestly believe there is a single thing you can't tell me.” Steve looked back to him, eyes misty.

“It's stupid.” He shifted his eyes back to the landscape before them. “It's just that I always wanted this to be somewhere that could be special for my family.”

“But …”

“Not just family Danny, but my family. My children, my spouse, my family in the most literal sense of the word. Honestly, in the last few years I had given up on the idea of ever coming back here.” His tone was emphatic even as his voice dropped so low it was nearly a whisper. He chanced a look at his partner, needing to know if he understood.

“Oh Steven.” The detective turned, wrapping his other arm around his partner, embracing him as he rested looked up into his eyes. “I get it. I know we aren’t married, so technically I am not your spouse, but we are very much a family. You can bring us up here any time you like.”

Steve leaned his head down, grazing his lips gently over Danny’s. “I love you.”

The moment was interrupted by Grace barreling into them from the side, wrapping her short arms around their waists as best she could. “Come on you two. It's time to eat.” The men each wrapped an arm around her, pulling her into their embrace.

When they finally stepped apart, Grace took one look at Steve and immediately extended her arms up so he would pick her up. “Are you okay, Daddy? You look sad.” She wrapped her arms tight around his neck.

“Yeah, Gracie. I'm okay. I was just telling Danno how happy I am to have a family to share this spot with.” Holding her close, the headed back toward the others. The others had left a spot big enough for the three of them open on the blankets, and he managed to lower himself to the ground without releasing Grace. “Mmm. This looks delicious.”

Everyone agreed as they began to dig into the meal. As they ate, Steve noticed that Cath, Chin, and Kono were passing a camera around, taking turns snapping pictures of everyone. While Chin didn't know the full history of the spot, he knew enough to know this was an important milestone to his
boss. With Dianne leaving tomorrow, they also wanted to capture the moments for her to take home.

His family leaning against him and surrounding by the laughter of his ohana, Steve felt his mood lightening. He knew he had made the right decision bringing them all hear, though he did wish they had managed it while Mary was there too.

“Does your camera have a timer on it?” Beth asked after everyone had finished devouring the food.

Holding the camera, Kono looked down at it. “I see something that looks like a timer button.”

“Here we can prop it up on this.” Kamekona stacked one of the coolers on top of another. Without further explanation, everyone hopped up for a group picture.

“We should take it over there.” Catherine pointed to the area where Danny and Steve had stood earlier.

Kamekona and Steve repositioned the coolers to put the camera in the right angle as Chin figured out how to turn the timer on.

“Everybody get in position. We’ll see if this works. It should take 3 shots a few seconds apart.” When they were all ready, he pushed the button and sprinted around to the spot they’d left open for him.

In the end, they went through a few rounds of shots, trying to get one where everyone looked good and then a few where they all looked pretty crazy. Then the camera got passed around as different smaller groups posed for pictures.

“I’ll load all these onto the shared site so everyone can get them.” Chin announced, making Dianne smile. Chin had set her new laptop up with the access so she could see everything and add any pictures she wanted to share from England.

“Hey cuz, did you bring the horseshoes?” Chin called to Kono.

“In that bag over there.” She pointed to a black carrying case.

Chin grabbed the case and brought it over to Grace and her grandmas. “It is just a plastic set, but we thought it might be fun.”

“I haven't played in years.” Dianne laughed as he started setting things up.

“Me either.” Beth smiled. “This should be entertaining.”

“Who’s up first?” Chin looked to Grace. “Why don’t you take a quick practice throw to get a feel for the weight?” The little girl accepted the plastic horseshoe and followed his example of what to do. When she released it, it fell mere inches from the post.

“Looks like we're going to have some stiff competition.” Beth smiled at her granddaughter.

Several rounds of horseshoes later, Grace came out as the victor. Steve and Dianne were the only two that came close to holding their own against the little girl. Nearing three thirty in the afternoon, the group decided it was probably time to head back down.

“Thank you for the lovely afternoon.” Dianne spoke as she walked back down the trail with Steve. “It will be wonderful to have the pictures to remind me of the ohana I have here when I leave.” She stumbled slightly and he reached out to steady her, wrapping her hand around his arm to encourage
her to hang on if needed. “Leave it to me to trip on a perfectly clear path.”

“Happens to the best of us.” He assured her.

“Sounds like there is a story there.” She teased him.

“Let’s just say after my first hike with Danny ended finding a dead body and me getting hauled out by a helicopter with a broken arm. I wasn’t sure if I would ever get him on a trail again.” He shook his head, chuckling at the memory of their misadventure. Remembering Danny’s signed ‘I love you’ made him wonder if his partner had been joking as much as he thought he was at the time.

“So how did you ever convince him to go back out?” She was genuinely curious. Grace had told her about some of their hiking trips, so she knew it happened.

“Gracie. Just like surfing and a lot of other things, she stayed after him. We picked her up from school one Friday, and I was talking about a spot I wanted to go visit. It had a small waterfall, just a very peaceful area. We had a rough case that week, and it just felt like what I needed to help get my head right again. Of course, Grace being Grace could tell that neither of us were feeling quite right. It was her weekend with Danno, back before they became regular fixtures at the house, but she was adamant that they would not leave me alone.” He grinned. “He protested, though I think it was more for appearances than anything. We were both rattled from the case. I don’t think he was ready to leave me that day any more than I was to leave him.”

“How long ago was this?” Dianne asked. She could see Steve realizing that all the signs had been there even then.

“Back in the spring. Just a few weeks before Grace got out of school. Anyway, she had so much fun on the little trip that we ended up going to several other spots over the summer.” Steve finished as they reached the edge of the parking lot. Stopping to let the others get a bit further ahead, Steve turned to Dianne. “We're going to drop the others off at the house, and then we're going to see Stan. It's all set.”

“Thank you.” She nodded at him. “You'll stay with me?”

“Of course.” He assured her as they headed to the truck.

“We'll come by in the morning to say goodbye, okay?” Catherine checked with them as she stood at the passenger door to Kono’s car.

“Sounds good.” Danny called back to her before hoisting himself into the truck.

Less than five minutes into the ride home, Grace had fallen asleep in the back seat, a smile on her face.

“As far as surprises go,” Danny started, “I will acknowledge that this ranks among the best I've ever had.” He reached over and laced the fingers of his hand with Steve’s. “Thanks for sharing it with us.”

“Thanks for being there.” Steve replied before they fell into an easy silence to continue the drive home.

Chapter End Notes
Hope you enjoyed the little dose of feels and fun that came with Steve's surprise. If you haven't guess already, the mood of the next chapter will take quite a turn.
Because I know I won't have a chance to post tomorrow, I'm going to go ahead and post this chapter a day early.

If the last chapter was feels and fun, this chapter is more fury and fear. I'm not quite sure how else to explain this, so I'll just let you get to it.

Tucking Grace in for a nap, Steve kissed her forehead before stepping back to let Danny do the same. The pair then ducked into their own room, where Steve disappeared into the closet to grab a change of clothes. Danny sat on the edge of the bed watching his partner get ready.

“I do believe you'll leave Stanley with quite an impression of just how dangerous you are.” He licked his lips, watching the SEAL clip his badge to the belt of his black cargo pants. He briefly considered that it should be illegal for cargo pants to fit anyone quite so well. Noticing that Steve had changed into a pair of his combat boots that seemed to add just a bit of height compared to his normal boots made the detective snicker. Steve finished off the ensemble with a simple green t-shirt that hugged his chest, shoulders, and biceps in a way that made it impossible not to notice the strength there. Danny knew that while his partner didn't go out of his way to hide his physique, he rarely went to such lengths to display the threat inherent in his build and the way he carried himself. “I expect a full report later if you manage to make him freak out again.” The Jersey native added innocently.

“I would pretend I don't know what you are implying, but we both know I'd be lying. Yes, every bit of this is intended to scare the shit out of him. He may not have set out to kill Rachel and hurt Grace, but the son of a bitch made all the choices leading up to it knowing what he was doing was shady at best. I could almost forgive all that if he hadn't knowingly kept Grace locked and terrified in that bathroom for two fucking nights.” His voice was a low, threatening growl.

Danny stood, approaching his partner cautiously. Steve’s eyes were filled with the same wild fury Danny felt every time he so much as thought about what had happened. “I would ask if you think it's a good idea for you to go see him when you are so pissed, but I'm actually all for it this time. Just try not to give Dianne a heart attack in the process. I actually find myself growing rather fond of her these days.” Danny pressed a hard kiss to the SEAL’s lips.

When the pair reached the living room, both Beth and Dianne stared in open mouth appreciation of Steve. Danny smirked at the two while Steve seemed oblivious. When the SEAL ducked into the kitchen for a moment, Danny joined the women.

“Are we going to talk to Stanley or kill him?” Dianne asked.

“I believe the plan is for you to talk and for Cujo in there to stand around looking threatening. I will warn you, last time he was in the same room with Stan, the idiot spoke without thinking and Cujo lunged. It was only a few days ago, so you're likely to see him squirm.” Danny could not help the rather pleased tone of his voice.

“Good.” Dianne was not usually the vindictive type, but between a sense of betrayal that the son-in-
law she had embraced killed her only daughter, and the fury she felt over what he had done to Grace, she was making an exception this time around.

“I should also note that the previous visit occurred while Steve was still considerably more unsure of his standing with Grace and me. He was treading carefully for fear of overstepping boundaries he thought were in place on my account. Super Seal went in before believing he was only Uncle Steve. He is going in this time knowing he is Daddy.”

“Should I be concerned that he'll end up in a neighboring cell to Stanley?” Dianne asked.

“I don't believe he will put a toe out of line, but I didn't want you to go in unprepared. Since you arrived you've had the uncommon privilege of seeing the softer, gentler side of him. What you just saw down the stairs is only the tip of the iceberg for the amount of fear he can instill in a person. Whatever happens with Stan, it would kill Steve to think he scared you or made you think less of him.”

Rachel’s mother nodded in understanding as Steve returned to the living room, Camaro keys in hand.

“Mind if we take yours?” Steve jingled the keys.

“Not a bit. We're not planning on going anywhere, and in case of emergency I believe I can maneuver that tank of yours.” He gave Steve a quick kiss before letting him head toward the door.

“We'll see you guys in a bit.” Beth called as the door shut. Turning to her son, she just stared at him for a moment. “You know, I've always understood, in theory, what his background meant. Suddenly that theory has taken on a whole new meaning. That just made the Super Seal you guys joke about while sparring look like a harmless little kitten.” Her voice was full of awe.

“He will always be that harmless little kitten when it comes to you, ma. Don't let what you just saw scare you. I wasn't kidding. It would kill him to think any of us were afraid of him.” Danny’s voice was on edge, afraid that his mother wouldn't understand.

“Oh son, I am not afraid of him. I'm just damned glad he is on our side.” She patted her eldest on the shoulder. “As a mother, it is actually a bit reassuring to see that. Believe me, I have wished on more than one occasion that I could be that scary when someone hurt my family. Now if he ran around like that all the time it would be disconcerting, but the man we just saw walk out the door did so with the express purpose of instilling fear in the asshole that hurt your daughter.”

“Mom!” Danny’s jaw dropped at her uncharacteristic choice of words.

“Don’t Mom me.” She let out a short laugh. “Just because I haven't asked to confront him doesn't mean I wouldn't like his balls on a platter for what he did to my granddaughter and what that has done to all of you.” She watched as her son’s face turned red.

“I can' believe you just said that. This is some crazy alternate reality, isn’t it? Shit. I need a beer.” He turned for the kitchen, leaving his mother to follow.

/// GUARDIAN ///</>

“Steven?” Dianne’s voice broke the silence as they sped down the road to the prison. “Whatever happens when we get there, whatever you say or do to put Stanley in his place, I do not want you to worry about what I will think.”

The SEAL’s head whipped around to look at her. “We're going so you can speak to him. I'm just there for moral support.”
“And to scare him to the point where he never considers coming near your family again. You may not intend to open your mouth, but it doesn't take a genius to see that you don't intend to simply remain a fly on the wall during this meeting.” She stared at him.

“I…”

“Steven, I'm not calling you out to make you uncomfortable. Quite the opposite in fact. I trusted him. I believed he would take care of my only daughter. I believed he was better for Rachel and Grace than Daniel was. I was wrong. He betrayed every bit of trust I ever placed in him and hurt them both. Now I want him to feel every bit of pain that we all do because of him. I want you to do your level best to make him feel that, whether you open your mouth or not. The point is, do not let any concern regarding my opinion of you make you hold back if he steps out of line. I will not be scared of you when we walk back out that door, and I will not think less of you. I will be forever grateful that you are able to do what I know I would not be capable of.” She stared him down during this entire speech, determined that he would see she was serious.

“Okay.” Steve didn't argue this time. Her wishes aligned with his own. If she wanted to see Stan scared, she would see Stan scared. If his arrogance in their last meeting was indication, it would only be a matter of time before he gave Steve an excuse.

Once they arrived at the prison, Dianne stayed close to Steve’s side. This was her first experience such a facility, and she was not planning on making it a routine thing.

“Don't worry. You'll be completely safe. The only prisoner you will be around is Stan, and I will be with you the entire time.” Approaching the visitor check in, Steve saw the guard snap to attention.

“Commander McGarrett. They said you were coming. I'll call and have them bring him to the room while you sign in.” The young man picked up the phone, eying Steve with a measure of fear.

Within minutes, they were approaching a room where Stanley had been placed. Given McGarrett’s involvement, there had been no issue with arranging a private meeting instead of making Dianne confront him on the other side of a Plexiglas divider.

“You ready?” Steve asked before the guard accompanying them opened the door.

“His hands are cuffed behind the chair and you will have Commander McGarrett with you the entire time. The guard that is there now will step out here with me to allow you some privacy.” His eyes cut to Steve at the last statement, an unspoken promise that anything McGarrett did inside the room would not be noted. “We'll be right out here when you are ready to leave.”

Dianne took a deep breath and nodded. “I'm ready.”

He opened the door, letting Dianne step inside, Steve right on her heels. Dianne tried to hide her smile when her former son-in-law’s eyes went as wide as saucers and he immediately started scrambling backward almost tipping his chair over. McGarrett did not hide his amusement. His laugh was so different than the relaxed and happy sound she was used to hearing from him that it made her skin crawl. If laughs could kill, Stan would be on his way into a body bag.

“What are you doing here?” Stan’s voice cracked in fear as he watched the guards leave him alone with McGarrett and Ms. Bradley. “I thought Danny was bringing Dianne.”

“Don’t you dare address me so informally.” Ms. Bradley snapped at him.

“But Dianne …”
“You heard her.” Steve snarled, stepping forward toward the table that separated them. Stan visibly blanched at his approach. “You have lost whatever right you think you had to address any member of this family with any degree of familiarity.”

“She's not your family, so why do you care?” Stan continued to speak without thinking, even as he tried to scoot the chair further from the enraged SEAL. Steve couldn't decide if it was more arrogance or stupidity that let him open his mouth.

For her part, Dianne was determined to appear calm and unruffled despite Steve’s somewhat homicidal looking demeanor. She pulled out the chair that was obviously meant for her, and took a seat looking for all the world like she was not witnessing a scene that could turn bloody at any moment. From the look of it, Stan had already been roughed up by someone. He was sporting a nasty looking black eye and a collection of other cuts and bruises visible above his prison issue jumpsuit.

“Once again,” Steve rounded the table, leaning over Stan’s chair, “you are wrong. She is part of Grace’s family and that makes her part of mine. Now I suggest you rethink your approach to this conversation.” Stan tried to lean away from him, but couldn’t get any distance because of his restraints. “I brought her here so she could look into the eyes of the man that killed her daughter. So she could try to get some closure for what you did. Choose your next words wisely.”

Stan gulped as McGarrett grabbed the back of his chair, shoving him hard into the table. Meeting Dianne’s eyes, Steve was a bit surprised when she gave him a small smile and nod. Rachel’s mother had some serious grit. Looming behind the prisoner for a few seconds longer, Steve stepped away to lean against the wall where he was slightly removed from the interaction but still in easy reach if he needed to help remind Stan how to behave.

“I didn't mean to do it.” Stan looked to Ms. Bradley

“So I've heard.” Dianne’s voice even made Steve’s brow raise. She made the version of her that showed up demanding Grace look warm and friendly. “Save me your bullshit excuses. I came here today to see if you had an ounce of remorse in you for what you did.” She stared him down, channeling a ferocity she didn't know she had, but garnering strength from Steve’s steady presence.

“Of course I do. I would never hurt Rachel or Grace intentionally.” Steve and Dianne both narrowed their eyes at him, unimpressed with what they heard. “You honestly think I would intentionally do something that was going to land me in a place like this for the next ten years.” He glared at McGarrett. “Don’t think I don't blame you for ending up with a ten year sentence even after pleading guilty.”

“Are you fucking kidding me? You murder your wife, leave her daughter bruised and terrified, locked in a bathroom for two god damned nights, and you want to blame being behind bars for the next ten years on ME?” McGarrett bellowed as his fists slammed onto the table, making the entire thing shake. “You have some fucking nerve if you try to pin the blame for anything in your miserable life on me or anyone else. This shit is ALL. ON. YOU.”

Dianne slipped from her chair, taking a few steps back. She wasn't sure what would happen next, but didn't want Steve to feel guilty if she was caught in the crossfire.

“You have no business in the middle of this. All you are is Danny’s stupid rag tag partner. I hope he packs up and takes his little brat back to Jersey.” Steve shoved the table, sending it several feet across the floor. Stan jerked back so hard he toppled the chair over, leaving him trapped with his arms behind him and his legs in the air. Steve reached down, yanking Stan back up by the front of his jumpsuit.
“You better hope like hell you even survive ten years.” The SEAL reared back, sending his fist crunching into Stan’s face, whipping the man’s head back. “If I ever see your face again, it will be too soon.” Steve wheeled around, trying to regain a level of composure he did not feel. “Are you okay?” His question was directed at Dianne, staring back at him with wide eyes and an expression he couldn’t quite read.

“Yes. What do you think? Shall we go home?”

McGarrett nodded, hitting the door once to let the guards know to open up. When the door opened, one guard slipped into the room. He looked to the prisoner and then to Steve. “Unfortunate what happens to prisoners that hurt women and children when they’re in gen pop, isn’t it?”

“Yeah. It is.” McGarrett gave him a grin as he followed Dianne and the other guard down the hall.

When the pair were finally back in the Camaro, headed away from the ugliness they had just experienced, Steve worried that Dianne was regretting what she had just witnessed.

“Thank you.” Her voice interrupted his brooding. “I cannot explain how disappointed I am in what I heard from him. That is not the same man my daughter fell in love with, not the same man she married. I don't know what caused it, but any redeeming qualities he once had seem to have evaporated.” She reached into her purse, pulling out a well worn handkerchief. “Let me see your hand.” She motioned to his right hand, knuckles still smeared in blood.

Steve stretched his arm so she could reach the hand.

“I am sorry you had to see that. That is a side of me I would prefer my ohana never see.” Steve’s voice was quiet. Even though she thanked him, he still hated that she had seen that part of him, the wild rage barely hidden beneath the surface.

“Steven, I told you before we went in there that I would not be afraid of you when we came back out, and I’m not. Have I ever seen anything quite like that? No. Is it an experience I care to repeat? Not particularly. Am I glad that you did what you did? Yes.” She tended to his hand with a gentleness he was unaccustomed to. “Now, when we get back to the house, why don’t you pop out for a quick swim. If Beth is to be believed, and I find she generally is, it will do wonders to soothe you. Don't worry that you are going to come back to find anything other than a group of people that love you for everything you are, not just the side I have seen prior to this afternoon.”

The SEAL nodded, unsure of what to say in response to her reassurances. In his gut, he knew she was right, but his mind raced with a dozen other less pleasant outcomes. She was right about one thing, he needed the release of the water to help him find his center, to help him shake off the remnants of the enraged SEAL and settle back into the man he knew he truly was.

Chapter End Notes

Just a few thoughts. First, anybody else surprised my Mama Williams in this one? I almost choked on my lunch when she fired off the last couple of lines from the scene with her and Danny. Second, I’ve come to realize that Stan is really quite the SOB. As of this chapter he has zero redeeming qualities no matter what canon says. Third, it may be slightly inappropriate how much I like it when Steve goes all bad ass. And finally, oops. I didn’t mean for this to go so long, but some things just can’t be glossed over in a few sentences.
Anyway, this is one of those chapters where I will shamelessly beg for comments because I’m just dying to know what you all thought. Pretty pretty please take a few seconds and leave one and let me know.
Chapter 64

Chapter Notes

And then there is the aftermath of Steve going all Cujo. This took a little bit of a different turn than I expected, but hopefully you’ll like the way it turned out.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

“You head on up to change. I will let them know we are back.” Dianne squeezed Steve’s forearm as they approached the door.

“Thanks.” He gave her an apologetic look before he rushed through the door and up the stairs.

Hearing voices from the kitchen, Dianne made her way to the others. Beth immediately came and gave her a hug. “Did everything go okay?” Dianne glanced around, spotting Grace before she answered.

“It was eventful to say the least.” She stayed vague, but saw both Danny and Beth understood. “I’m glad I went. It wasn’t pleasant, but I would have regretted it had I not.”

“Where’s Cujo?” There was an edge of concern to Danny’s voice and Dianne thought he looked like he was about to bolt in search of his wayward partner.

“I sent him up to change. He needs to decompress a bit before he is ready to settle in for the evening.” Dianne reached out, giving him a reassuring pat on the shoulder. “It was a rough afternoon for him, but he did us all proud.” She could see the worry flaring in her ex-son-in-law’s eyes. Looking to Grace, she could see the little girl was concerned as well. If Dianne had noticed anything during her visits, it was that Grace was as attuned to Steve’s emotional well-being as any adult in their ohana, if not more so.

When they heard footsteps on the stairs, Danny was out of the room before either mother could stop him.

“We'll never convince either of them not to worry about the other. Steven may not be ready for most people yet, but I don't believe that statement ever truly applies to Daniel.” Beth reassured Rachel’s mother before turning to Grace. “You almost ready to stuff the shells?” The pair were working on stuffed pasta shells for dinner.

Steve had his hand on the door when he felt a vice like grip on his other wrist. Closing his eyes, he took a deep breath, not ready to see the disappointment he was sure would be in Danny’s eyes.

“Damn it, Steven. Turn around and look at me.” The detective’s voice was gentle but firm. Releasing the door handle, the SEAL pivoted around. “Dianne told us it was an eventful visit. She also told us that you were feeling rather discombobulated and needed to go for a swim before facing any of us.”

“I see you listened.” Steve’s tone was cool.

“Of course I didn’t you idiot.” Danny pushed him against the door. “I know you better than that. There was no way I was going to let you go out there alone and convince yourself that you did something wrong. I don't know exactly what happened; though you better plan on giving me a full
report later. I want to know every little detail about how you made that prick squirm. Right now, you only need to know one thing. Not a single person in this house is upset that you went all Cujo on his ass. The only. And I repeat ONLY thing that gives me any pause about whatever happened at Halawa is the mind fuck you will give yourself over it.”

Placing his hands on Steve’s chest, Danny stretched up, giving the SEAL a bruising kiss.

“Now go for your swim before you come unglued, but don’t you dare stay out there all evening brooding.” This time, when he leaned up the kiss was far more gentle. “I love you. Don’t forget that.”

Steve let his head drop, his forehead resting against his partner’s. “I love you too.” This time, it was him that leaned in for a kiss. “I’ll be back in a bit.”

Danny watched him jog toward the water and dive into the waves before he finally shut the door. Rejoining the others in the kitchen, he found Grace busy putting the finishing touches on dinner prep under the doting supervision of her grandmothers.

“Is Daddy okay?” His daughter looked up at him. Her father had explained earlier why Steve and Dianne had left after the picnic. Despite her young age, Grace understood. Grandma wanted answers just like she did, but where Grace had sent her dads to get them, Dianne was old enough to go herself. She just told her father than when she was old enough, she wanted the same opportunity. She knew the look he gave her said he hated that idea, but he had agreed. He’d also assured her that Stan would not hurt Grandma because Super SEAL was in full guard SEAL mode.

“He just needs to decompress a bit. Super SEAL gets angry when people upset his family, but he doesn’t want to be angry around us.” Danny reassured her. “I’m pretty sure the silly SEAL went out there without a towel, so if you wanted to go take a towel out for him in a bit, that would be okay.”

She nodded, shifting her focus back to the pasta shells. By the time they were all stuffed, Danny handed her a towel and a water bottle and sent her out to find her SEAL.

A week ago, Dianne would have launched into a tirade at Danny over the insanity of sending a nine year old girl out to confront a highly trained Navy SEAL that had spent the afternoon about a step away from killing someone. Today, she understood. She and Danny had started pulling the man back from the brink, the swim would resolve much of the unused physical energy, but it would be Grace’s presence that would put the demons he fought to rest.

“I am so glad he was with me.” Dianne sank onto a stool at the island when she heard the door shut. “The man I saw today, that is not the same man Rachel married. I wanted to hurt him for the the things he said, for the way he said them, and I couldn’t. But Steve, he went in there fully prepared to battle the devil that I could not. It looked like someone had already worked Stan over before we got there, but I am fairly certain Steve broke his nose before we left.”

She laughed nervously as she told them.

“I’m glad it was one of us that got that pleasure.” Danny confessed. “Are you sure you are okay?”

“Yes. I told him on the way there that no matter what happened, I would not be afraid of him when we left the prison, and I was right. I gather he thinks he was out of control, crossing a line that he wants to stay firmly away from in front of us, but I have never seen such furious control in my life. It’s hard to describe.”

“I know.” Danny agreed.
Steve swam hard and fast as soon as he hit the water needing to let the rage inside him uncoil. The harder he pushed, the more he felt the tension seep out of his muscles. He did his best to focus on Dianne and Danny’s words, their assurances that this was a part of him they acknowledged and accepted.

His biggest fear was Grace. Would she think he was as much a monster as Stan if she ever found out what had happened? He’d been relieved when she had fallen asleep on the way home from the picnic and hadn’t seen him leaving the house fit to kill. Seeing her afraid of him would be enough to rip his heart right out of his chest.

Forcing his fears out of his mind, Steve focused on the rhythmic in and out of his breathing and the pull of his muscles as he sliced through the water. Turning back toward the shoreline, he felt in control enough to make it through the evening. He wondered if Grace would think it strange if he just wanted to hold her for a while. If there was one thing he had learned since she and Danny had come into his life, it was that her simple presence could make him feel better when nothing else could. Of course, first he had to find out if she was afraid of him or not. He had no doubt she was in the kitchen when they got home, which means she knew something was amiss.

Hitting the shallow water, Steve remembered he had forgotten a towel. Rising to his feet, he started to shake the water from his hair, swiping at the droplets on his skin in an effort to divest himself of as much moisture as possible before he reached the house. Opening his eyes, he saw Grace running toward him fully prepared to launch herself at him.

“You’ll get all …” he caught her as she leaped in the air, “wet.”

“Don’t care.” The little girl squirmed so the towel was wrapped around his shoulders, then wrapped her arm around his neck, clinging to the SEAL for all she was worth.

Neither said anything as they approached the chairs where she had been waiting on him. When he moved to set her down so he could dry off, she clung to him with a ferocity he rarely saw from her. Too happy to be holding his daughter in his arms, Steve turned, shifting her legs so they wouldn’t get caught on the chair as they sat. Leaning back into the chair, he held her cradled in his lap, arms still tight around his neck as her head rested on the damp towel around his shoulders.

“You know, I think when they sent you out with a towel they expected you to bring me back dry, not bring both of us back soggy.” Steve chuckled.

“It will give Danno something to rant about.” She giggled, curling herself tighter against the SEAL. “I helped Grandma Williams make dinner. She even let me stuff the big pasta shells.” Gracie told him.

“Mmm. Are they the ones with all the cheese?” Steve asked.

“Yep. Just like you like them.” When Grandma gave her and Danno the list of options for dinner, they’d immediately picked the one he liked the most. “We made a key lime pie for dessert too.”

“You have been busy.” Steve smiled.

Grace continued to chatter on about helping Grandma and Danno cook. She didn't say anything that need a reply, but as she spoke she felt the tension she had recognized in her SEAL’s body when he first held her start to fade. She had learned a long time ago that hugs and talking usually made him feel better. The trick was, it usually wasn't him talking that helped, it was her or Danno. Her dad told
her once that talking to Steve was sometimes like talking to a skittish dog. The sound of a familiar voice was enough to help him anchor himself. She wasn't sure she completely understood it at the time, but she was starting to understand better. When she was upset, listening to Daddy and Danno talk, even if they weren't talking to her, gave her something to focus on.

“Daddy?” The little girl sat up enough that she could really look at him. “Danno said you were angry because Stan upset Grandma Bradley, and you didn't want us to see you angry. You told me it was okay to be angry at him, so you know it is okay if you are angry at him too.”

Part of Steve wanted to wrap his arms around the little girl and fall apart. Her honest and forthright assessment of the situation hit him like a ton of bricks. Every last one of them was furious with Stan, but they had trusted him to channel it for all of them and act without going to far.

“Did you make him regret scaring Grandma?” She looked him square in the eyes, wanting to know that someone had made Stan pay for his latest crime.

“Yes. I'm pretty sure he got the point that he shouldn't have scared Dianne.”

“Good.”

In that one word and the look she gave him, Steve understood. He hadn't lost his family in his fury. He had given them each a small piece of vindication that they could not claim for themselves. He was not the monster he feared Grace would believe him to be. He was the guardian Super SEAL that would protect her and those she loved.

Chapter End Notes

I really don't think there will ever be enough Steve and Grace moments.
Chapter 65

Chapter Notes

I’m sure I could have found a spot somewhere to split this into two normal length chapters, but I’m being stubborn and really just want to wrap Saturday up. So I give you a chapter on steroids and it comes with an extended final scene if you pop over to Guardian: Love Explored.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Watching Steve carrying Grace toward the house from the window, Danny knew that his daughter had taken her time to help his partner firmly anchor himself. He marveled at her ability to connect with him, handling him with such ease. Their bond with each other rivaled his own with each of them. While he didn't completely understand it all the time, he accepted it fully and without question.

Turning from the window, he saw his mom and Dianne both watching him as they pulled out plates and silverware to set the table for dinner. “Go on. We have this covered.” His mom gave him an understanding look.

By the time they opened the door, he was standing in the middle of the entry waiting for them. “I thought I sent you to give him a towel, not to get yourself wet.” He laughed when he saw that despite sitting out under the Hawaiian sun for quite some time, Grace’s clothes were still damp where she'd been curled against the SEAL. Grace squeezed her arms tight around Steve’s neck, giving him a kiss on the cheek before slipping out of his arms to go change.

“You never told me to stay dry.” She quipped as she headed toward the stairs.

“Oh hell. We're in so much trouble when she gets older.” Her father shook his head, unable to contain the smile on his face. He would take a daughter full of spirit any day. “You. Come here.” He pointed at Steve. When the SEAL stepped forward with little hesitation, he grabbed his hand and started for the stairs. Not another word was spoken until the door to their bedroom shut.

“Danny, I'm sorry about earlier.”

“I swear I'm going to get a shock collar for you so I can zap you every time you apologize for something when you shouldn't.” The detective laughed. “Go put some dry clothes on and then come here.” He sat on the edge of the bed, much like he had earlier in the day only this time the mood was entirely different.

Steve nodded, grabbed some dry clothes, and headed toward the bathroom to get rinsed off and changed. When he reappeared, Danny just patted the bed next to him. The SEAL sat down, leaving almost a foot of space between them. Instead of fussing at him, Danny just scooted himself over until their thighs were touching and grabbed one of Steve’s hands.

“I assume our daughter talked you out of the tangled web that is your head.”

“She keeps this up, she's going to put Doc Thompson out of a job with me.” Steve confirmed.

Danny laughed. “She might.” He paused for a second. “Dianne said you broke his nose.”
“There is a good chance she was right.” Steve glanced at him.

“You have no idea how happy that makes me. I might have to pay him a visit some day and help him readjust it. I want all the gory details later.” He smiled at the image of leaving Stan with another broken and bloodied nose. “So are you okay? Or at least as okay as you can get for now?”

“Yeah. I think so. Grace …” he paused for a minute, trying to decide how to explain what he felt. “The way she talked and the things she said. I started to see that instead of seeing me as the monster I fear I've turned into, she sees me as a protector. As a guardian.”

Danny could see the SEAL was still coming to terms with this new way of thinking. “You're her guardian Super SEAL. I know we tease you with that nickname all the time, but there is more truth to it than you let yourself acknowledge.” Wanting his partner to really get what he was saying, Danny lowered himself onto the floor, kneeling between the SEAL’s legs so he could really see him. His voice was quiet, but with his eyes locked on McGarrett’s he knew the other man could hear him. “I want you to listen to me. You are a Navy SEAL, a trained killer, conditioned to stay cool and controlled in situations that would break a lesser man in seconds, but you're also a great many other things. You are a father, a friend, a lover, you're the biggest damned softy I've ever met when you let your guard down, a pain in my ass, a collector of broken people, the glue that brought this ohana together, fiercely loyal, an absolute menace when provoked, and the list could go on forever. No single one of those things defines everything you are, but they're all pieces of what makes you the person you are. You are not a monster, even when you let Cujo out of his cage. You are never a monster. You are the man I love and the only person I trust to be Grace’s Daddy.”

Steve’s hands rose from his lap, his thumbs reaching to brush the tears that Danny hadn't realized were falling from his eyes during his rather passionate lecture. He could see the moisture pooling in the SEAL’s eyes as the taller man slid off the bed and onto his knees in front of him. The hands resting gently on the side of Danny’s head pulled him closer, until their lips met.

When they broke apart for air, Steve’s forehead rested against his partner’s. “Danny, I don’t know what to say.”

“You don’t have to. And do not think for one minute that I think this is over. I have long since figured out it is going to take a good long while before I get you over all the bullshit that's happened in your life. I signed on to this knowing exactly that, so don’t you ever think, even for one second, that I'll walk away because you come with enough baggage and emotional trauma to fill a cargo ship.”

“I wouldn't blame you.” Steve gave him a small smile.

“I know. And I know you're going to spend far more time than you should thinking you have done something that is going to change that. Just know that every single time that happens, I will be there to prove you wrong. Grace will be there to prove you wrong. And heaven help you, so will my mother.” Danny gave him a gentle kiss.

“Speaking of mom, do you think we should head down for dinner?”

Instead of answering, Danny rocked himself back onto his feet so he could stand, watching as Steve did the same with far more grace and ease. “I hate you some times, you know that.”

“But you just said you loved me.” Steve reached for his hand as they headed for the door.

“I do, but then you go and make shit like getting off the floor look so easy. We're the same damned age, and yet there are times you make me feel like an old man.”
“But you’re my old man.” Steve grinned before ducking just out of Danny’s reach and making a break for the dining room.

“Why are you running from my eldest?” Beth smiled as he scrambled into the room and sat in his chair, Danny hot on his heels. The SEAL gave her an innocent smile that made her and Dianne both laugh. “You two behave.”

Grace giggled from her seat. With only the five of them there for dinner, she was seated across from her two dads between her grandmothers. Seeing Steve come downstairs smiling and laughing made all three women happy.

Dinner was a simple affair with just the five of them. They ate and chatted. Dianne told them more about her life in England. Grace insisted she wanted to go visit when she got a little bit older. In short, they all enjoyed these final hours together. By the time they all pushed back from the table, it was getting late and despite her earlier nap, Grace was getting tired.

“Before you head to bed, there are a few things I’d like to show you.” Dianne told Grace. Danny had brought the small box of jewelry into her room earlier, guessing she’d want to take the chance to show them to Grace tonight. “Why don’t you join us, Daniel?” She beckoned to him as she and Grace stood.

Knowing his daughter might need help remembering some of what she learned, he followed without question.

“We'll clean up down here.” Beth gave Grace a hug and a kiss before the little girl went to say good night to Steve.

When the three were headed up the stairs, Beth and Steve grabbed the dishes. They washed up all the plates in a companionable silence. Beth kept watching her son’s partner, but standing over a sink of dishes didn't feel like the right place for the conversation she wanted to have. For his part, Steve kept staring out the window toward the water as he washed the plates.

As they finished up, Beth turned to him. “I'm just going to go wipe down the table. Why don’t you go sit out by the water. You look like your mind is already out there.” She pushed him toward the door, watching from the window as he went. She could tell he was doing remarkably well considering the day he’d, but it was also clear he needed to hear certain things a few more times before he really let himself believe. Knowing that Danny and Dianne were likely to be tied up for a while, she decided there was no time like the present.

Once she finished wiping off the table, Beth grabbed two bottles of beer from the fridge and headed out after the man she considered one of her children.

Steve eyed Beth as she handed him a beer. He'd known this was coming since the first look she gave him before dinner. “Mind if I join you?” She asked, gesturing to the chair where Danny usually sat while they enjoyed a beer at the end of a long day.

“No. Not this time.” She sat down, taking a sip of her own drink. “You did good today, you know that?”

“So I've been told.” He angled his head toward her, brow arched.

“I imagine so. Not a single one of us was blind to what going in there to confront Stan with Dianne
did to you today.” She pivoted around in her seat, tucking her leg up so she could sit sideways in the chair and watch him. “Steven, I know that no matter how much we all tell you things, it takes more than words and the short amount of time we've had to counter a lifetime of doubts. Neither you or Danny have told me the full story of what happened when you were growing up, what drove you to Annapolis, or what you went through while you were on active duty, but it doesn't take a rocket scientist to piece together the important stuff.” She reached across the small table, resting her hand on his forearm. “I have no doubt your parents loved you in the best way they could, but they both made choices that left you feeling vulnerable. Parents are supposed to teach their children the concepts of unconditional love and acceptance, or at least that is what I've always believed. You didn't get that lesson, but that doesn't make it your fault that you find it hard to accept the idea that those things exist.”

Steve stared at her. He had expected another version of the ‘you're not a monster’ speech, but Beth went for an even deeper pain.

“I know.” He wasn't sure what else to say.

“You know in your head when you are thinking clearly, but Steven do not expect me to believe for one moment that you know that with every fiber of your being. That you know it so well that you remember it when things go sideways. You can lie to yourself, but don't try to lie to me.”

“I don’t know how to fix it. To fix me.” His face fell, full of all the sadness he felt because he knew she was right. Deep down, he was still the broken boy trying to earn his parents’ approval, trying to do anything so they might decide he was worthy of their love and attention.

“It's not you that needs to be fixed. You, my darling, are one of the best men, the best people, I've ever met. Next to Daniel, I have never seen anyone that loves so fiercely and cares so deeply for the people he lets in. All you have to do is give the people that love you a chance to prove it. Let us prove how much we love you. Let us prove that we accept you for all of you, not just the polished parts.”

“How?”

“You already are, Steven. You've let a growing group of people in to your inner circle. Some closer than others,” she smiled, “but you have let people in. You are so adamant in making sure that each person in your ohana knows they have a place there, sometimes I think you fail to realize that you are what binds us all together. As long as you don't push us away, I'm convinced that some day you will realize you are not waiting for us to set you aside and run. Some day you'll look around and know with a certainty you never thought possible, that we all love you and accept you just as much as you do us.”

Steve leaned forward, elbows resting on his knees as he considered what Danny’s mom had said. Her words were different, but she echoed the same ideas Danny was so adamant about. They knew he was broken, but that wouldn't drive them away.

Deciding she'd given him enough time to think about her words, Beth interrupted his thoughts. “You really are good for them you know? It's so nice to see Daniel and Grace with someone that will truly take care of them.”

“I … They …”

“I know. They take care of you too, but that doesn't lessen the importance of what you do for them. You and Daniel compliment each other well. As a mother, I couldn't ask for more for my eldest or my granddaughter.”
Steve smiled thinking about the two of them, especially Grace. "I just want better for her. I want her to grow up with no doubt that she is loved. No doubt we believe in her. No doubt that we will love her no matter what she decides to do in her life." He spoke with a passionate determination that made Beth proud.

"And that is what makes you an amazing parent. You may not have brought her into this world, but Steven DNA doesn't always matter. What you feel for her; all those things you want for her. Those are the things that matter most. You know as well as anyone, the bonds of family are often strongest with the family we chose, not the family we are born with." She wondered if he realized how clearly he had articulated his desire for Grace to have the very things that Beth had pointed out his own parents failed to give him. Would his drive to ensure she understood those fundamental truths help him to accept that the same was true of himself?

Draining the last of her beer, she set it on the table and reached over to take his hand.

“I'm very glad you are part of our family, Steven.”

“Me too, ma.”

//// GUARDIAN/////

Standing at the kitchen window, Danny watched as his mother held on to his partner’s hand. He wondered what she’d told him, wondered if it had made a difference.

“She's all settled in for the night.” Dianne spoke quietly as she stepped up beside him, looking over the scene he had been watching. “You two really have something special. I know I’ve said it before, but I feel very blessed that after everything I’ve said and done to you, you still let me in. I’m honestly not sure I would’ve survived this trip without your family and the team.”

“They're your family now too, you know? They may be a little more unconventional than what you are used to, but it includes you now too.” Danny wrapped an arm around Rachel’s mom.

“I'm sorry I didn't give you a chance when you were still married to Rachel. I don't believe it would have made a difference for the two of you, and you are very much where you belong now, but it might have made things a bit easier. You are twenty times the man I ever gave you credit for being, and you're the best father my granddaughter could ever ask for.”

“Thank you. You're right, it wouldn't have saved my marriage, but from what I have seen this week, it would have been a lot of fun to get to know you better. I am just glad we still have a chance. We're not kidding about keeping you closer. Video chats every weekend, phone calls any time in between, and I hope you are serious about those twice a year visits. Maybe between the two of us we can keep enough of Rachel’s memory alive so that Grace doesn't feel like she has lost her completely. And she can get to know what an amazing woman her grandmother is.”

Dianne leaned her head on his shoulder. “I look forward to it.”

“I still can't believe you got to see Steve punch Stan in the nose.” He chuckled.

“That wasn't the half of it. Your partner is a thing of beauty when he is enraged. I may not have gotten any answers worth remembering from Stanley, but knowing what he did to them, it was oddly satisfying to see him put so squarely in his place.” She admitted, safe in the knowledge that Danny would think no less of her because of it.

“For all his issues, he is always a thing of beauty.” The stood together watching as Beth and Steve approached the house.
Drifting into the living room, they met other two.

“Have a good chat?” Danny asked.

“Yeah. We did.” It surprised him when Steve answered for them, pulling Beth into another hug. “Love you, ma.” He whispered before letting her go.

“Love you too. Now you two better head on up to bed. We'll lock up down here.” Beth grabbed the empty beer bottle from his hands. “We'll see you in the morning.”

**** Switch to Guardian: Love Explored if you desire the full uncensored version of the last scene****

Steve kicked his sandals off just inside the bedroom door. Watching as Danny sat down to remove his own shoes. Heading toward the hamper, he was surprised when Danny stepped up and blocked his path.

“Am I about to get another lecture?” Steve asked, only half joking. Danny’s eyes darkened, making Steve’s breath catch.

“No. No lecture. Tell me what you need, babe. Do you want to sleep …”

“No. Not sleep. I need you.” And while he had not given much thought to being intimate since their teasing earlier in the day, Steve found he meant that with ever cell in his body.

“Okay. I can work with that.” Danny closed the distance between them. Running his fingers along the hem of Steve’s shirt, he edged them underneath until they splayed over the SEAL’s heated skin. He watched Steve’s expression, watched his eyes flutter closed at the contact. “Come on babe. Tell me what you need from me. Let Danno take care of you.” His voice was soft as the pushed the t-shirt up, prodding Steve to lift his arms so he could remove it. “Do you want to give or take? Take control or let yourself go?”

Danny knew Steve would let him do whatever he wanted, but this was the first time he was able to handle his partner in this way after Steve had gone into full on Cujo mode. Knowing the demons he fought over that side of himself, Danny didn’t want to push too hard.

“I want you to push me Danny. I want you to make me come unglued. I want you to take control.” Steve’s voice trembled as he stared into his partner’s deep blue eyes. It was a huge step of faith to put those sentiments out there for the first time in his life. His entire life had been about maintaining control, but right now he needed to know that he could lose control and still be completely safe.

“Okay. But if I go to far, you tell me to stop.”

“I know.” Steve’s eyes softened.

“Okay.” Danny placed his hands on Steve’s abs, feeling the muscles tremble under his touch. He had honestly expected a repeat of the prior day with Steve in full dominant alpha mode. Knowing the demons he fought over that side of himself, Danny didn’t want to push too hard.

“I want you to push me Danny. I want you to make me come unglued. I want you to take control.” Steve’s voice trembled as he stared into his partner’s deep blue eyes. It was a huge step of faith to put those sentiments out there for the first time in his life. His entire life had been about maintaining control, but right now he needed to know that he could lose control and still be completely safe.

“Okay. But if I go to far, you tell me to stop.”

“I know.” Steve’s eyes softened.

“Okay.” Danny placed his hands on Steve’s abs, feeling the muscles tremble under his touch. He had honestly expected a repeat of the prior day with Steve in full dominant alpha mode, so Danny was going to have to wing this a bit, to let Steve’s reactions guide him.

He had a feeling this was as much about Steve affirming is trust in Danny as it was in letting his own control break. That he was putting himself in this position told Danny a great deal about just how concrete their relationship was, even if the silly SEAL still questioned it himself.

“I want you to remember four things tonight. One - Danno loves you.” He placed his hand over Steve’s heart, felt it racing at his touch. “Two - Danno’s got you. No matter what, you are safe with
me.” He ran his other hand across the SEAL’s cheek. “Three - You are allowed to let go and simply feel. Don’t try to control your reactions. Just let them happen.” His hand skimmed down Steve’s neck and chest, sending a shiver across his skin. “Four - I want you to tell me what feels good, or what does not.”

“Good. This is good.” The SEAL’s voice quivered.

Chapter End Notes

So when I said the final scene in the Guardian: Love Explored version is uncensored, I really mean what you got above is the censored version of the opening to that chapter of GLE. ;) Venture on over at your own risk. Either way, leave a comment and let me know what you thought of the conclusion of a very long Saturday.
Chapter 66

Chapter Notes

First, sorry it took a few days to get this one up. I actually just finished writing chapter 72, so my pre-written material to post daily updates is quickly dwindling.

Anyway, I was all excited that the drama from Saturday was winding down. I thought we’d say goodbye to Dianne in this chapter, and maybe try for something fun. It turns out Grace and Steve had other plans. I love them, but why don’t the characters ever want to follow my plans?

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Danny woke with a start, eyes darting around the room to assess the threat. A pained moan from the other side of the bed led him straight to the source of his waking.

“Steve. Babe. Wake up.” Danny spoke gently but loud enough that he hoped the SEAL would hear him in the throes of whatever nightmare had him trapped. He should have known he'd have nightmares tonight. “Come on babe. You're home. Danno’s got you.”

The SEAL’s eyes were still clamped shut, his breathing hard, but Danny felt a hand shoot out to grab him. He jumped at first, aware that Steve’s first instinct would be to protect himself in his sleep. Fortunately, the hand didn’t attack. Instead it wrapped around Danny’s arming, clinging to him with a desperate sense of need.

“It's okay, babe. You're home in our bed. Come on. Open your eyes and look at me.” The detective continued to coax.

With a shuddering breath, long lashes finally parted and Steve’s eyes searched frantically for his. Pupils blown wide, Danny could tell whatever this nightmare was, it had rattled his partner.

“Korea. I was back in Korea, hanging from …” Steve’s words were interrupted from a loud scream from Grace’s room. Danny’s eyes went wide, torn between making sure his partner was okay and the need to go to his daughter. “Go. I'm okay. I just … go.” The SEAL practically shoved him off the bed, and the detective’s feet were in motion as soon as they hit the floor.

Flinging their bedroom door open, Danny almost collided with his mother in the hallway. She took one glance at him before pointing him back toward his room. “You take care of him. We have her.” She gestured to where Dianne approached.

“But…”

“I heard him before I heard her. You can't take care of both. If she doesn't calm for us, I will bring her straight to you guys. Just go.” By the time she finished speaking, Dianne already had Grace’s door open, and he could here the older woman’s British accent soothing his daughter. Nodding his head, he turned back toward the bedroom and Steve.

“Is she okay?” The SEAL was sitting up against the headboard, knees drawn up to his chest with his arms wrapped tight around them. He looked three steps beyond rattled.
“The moms are checking on her.” He reassured as he approached the bed.

“You should be with her, not in here worrying about me.” Steve shook his head so hard Danny thought it might detach.

“I am under mom’s order to ensure you are okay. Apparently she heard you before she heard Grace.” Danny sat on the bed, his leg resting on top of McGarrett’s toes. “They’ll bring her to us if needed.”

“But …”

“No buts. Now, you said you were back in North Korea. Do you want to talk about it?” Danny reached out slowly to caress Steve’s arm, hoping the gentle contact would help soothe him.

“I was hanging by my arms from the ceiling. I had to watch while they killed Jenna. I couldn't stop them. She didn't deserve to die, Danny.” McGarrett’s voice cracked as a sob escaped him.

If the detective was being honest, he didn't 100 percent agree with Steve’s assessment. Jenna had knowingly lured Steve to hostile country to hand him over to Wo Fat. He didn't particularly care that she thought she was doing it to get her fiance back. That wasn't a fair trade in his eyes. If losing her was the price to get Steve home safe, it was a price he was willing to pay.

“I know. I know it tears you apart that you couldn't save her, but you know that it was a price she was willing to pay. She lost everything she cared about when she found Josh there dead. She knew you still had people to come home to. And you know that Wo Fat would have killed you both if given the chance, no matter what she did for him. He never intended to let her walk back out of there alive.”

Steve stared at him, but gave a small nod. They had rehashed this repeatedly after bringing Steve home. Despite his reticence, the SEAL had opened up some to Danny over beers while overlooking the water. Danny wondered if this nightmare was somehow triggered by the strain of the day before, or if it was a more regular thing. Before he could ask, there was a soft knock at the door.

The SEAL wiped at his eyes, trying to make himself look less panicked, and nodded for Danny to answer.

“Come on in.” The detective shifted to face the door, leaning his back against Steve’s legs.

Dianne entered carrying a trembling Grace. “She's calmer than when I first woke her, but she keeps asking for the two of you.” Danny rose to meet her, taking his daughter into his arms.

“Danno.” She whimpered against his neck.

“It's okay, Monkey. Danno’s got you.” He whispered against her head. “Thank you.” He met Dianne’s eyes, trying to convey his genuine appreciation for her help.

“Just holler if any of you need anything. Beth ducked down to get a couple glasses of water to bring to you.” Her eyes rose to meet Steve’s for a moment, hoping he was okay as well. He gave her a weak smile, but it was enough for her to know he would be okay.

Danny handed Grace to his partner and watched as she curled against the SEAL’s chest. Steve’s arms came around her, and it broke his heart to see how they looked like they were clinging to each other for dear life. At the same time, he knew there was something about the rawness they both felt that would help them soothe each other.
Another soft knock at the door preceded his mother’s entrance, three glasses of water balanced carefully between her hands. He immediately jumped to free her of two them. “Thanks.” He set them carefully on the nightstand next to his partner.

“Is there anything else I can get you guys?” Beth set the third glass down before reaching over to kiss Steve and Grace on the top of their heads.

“I think we're okay for now.” Steve looked up and her, his voice quiet and shaken.

“Well, just holler if that changes. I love you. All of you.” Saying nothing else, she slipped back out of the room, pulling the door closed behind her. A part of her wanted to stay and protect them, but she was reasonable enough to know that given a few more minutes they would likely all be curled up together asleep. After all, 2:30 in the morning was far too early for anyone to consider staying awake.

Steve cradled Grace close as he lifted a glass to offer her a drink of water. She took it willingly before nestling back against his neck. With more strength than he felt like he had, the SEAL managed to maneuver the two of them to slide under the covers as Danny slipped back into bed from the other side. The detective lay on his side, arms outstretched in invitation, and Steve carefully shifted so his head rested on Danny’s bicep, Grace tucked snuggly between the two of them.

Her trembling had stopped almost as soon as she had landed in the SEAL’s arms. Her father stroked her arm gently even as he curled his arm around Steve’s head and let his other hand stroke his partner’s hair. After a few moments, both men could tell that their daughter has slipped back into a hopefully more peaceful sleep. Danny continued his gentle caress of both the people in his arms, and watched as Steve’s eyes began to flutter closed, his breathing evening out. It was several minutes before the Jersey native felt sure they were both sleeping soundly and allowed himself to drift off as well.

The next time Danny woke up, he could tell he was being watched with his eyes closed. “What time is it?” He murmured groggily.

“Almost seven.” Steve whispered.

“And you two are staring at me why?” He groused at them.

“Because we can.” The two in question answered, both fighting not to giggle.

“Why is this my life?” Danny tugged the sheet over his had for a brief moment before pulling it back down and finally opening his eyes. “So what are you to up to over there?” Grace was spooned against Steve’s chest, her head tucked underneath his chin as they stared back at him from only a few inches away.

“Getting ready to go workout.” Grace answered.

“And I needed to be awake for you two nuts to go sweat yourselves into oblivion?”

“No, but we did want to let you know before we disappeared and made you worry.” Steve stretched his finger out to brush against the part of Danny’s hand exposed at the top of the sheet.

“I appreciate the thought. Now why don’t you two hop to it so I can get a little more shut eye before I go in search of coffee.”

Grace leaned over and gave him a kiss on the nose before scrambling toward the foot of the bed. “Meet you downstairs.” She calls over her shoulder to Steve as she rushes to the door.
“You have corrupted her already.” Danny stared at this smiling partner as he teased. “You better get moving before she leaves you behind.”

The SEAL stretched himself toward his partner, nuzzling his nose across Danny’s jaw. “I’m going.” Steve grinned as Danny’s breath hitched. Knowing he really could not take too long or Grace would come find him, he settled his lips against his partner’s for a brief kiss before pulling away.

By the time the SEAL was leaving the bedroom, the detective was curled up softly snoring in the center of the bed. At the bottom of the stairs, Grace waited with water bottles and towels in hand. Steve couldn’t help the grin plastered on his face at her enthusiasm. His workouts were often solitary affairs where he mulled over his life. He’d never minded. No one ever questioned his apparent preference to go alone. In reality, he went alone because no one ever expressed an interest in going with him.

Accepting his bottle from Grace, he followed her toward the door. He loved that Danny was willing to join him sometimes, but it was apparent that Grace intended to make this a routine thing. As they dropped their stuff on the lanai chairs and headed for the road, Steve finally spoke. “I’m really glad you asked to come with me again.”

“You don’t mind? I’m not messing with your workouts?” She gave him a sideways glances as they picked up to a slow jog.

“Not a bit.” He assured her.

“Our gym teacher told us we should try to be active for 60 minutes a day when we play, but he also said it was good do things like running three times a week. Do you think I could come with you that much?”

“That sounds perfect. You don’t want to overdo it early on, so three times a week gives your muscles plenty of time to recover. What would you think of signing up to do a 5k with me in a few months? There are usually some fun ones in December.”

“Really? We could do that?” Her eyes lit up at the suggestion.

“Sure we can.” He would start checking out potential races as soon as possible, and let her make the final decision.

A little over an hour later, Grace and Steve were headed back up toward the house. Both of them had shaken off any residual tiredness from their interrupted sleep the night before, and headed in ready to join the remaining three for breakfast.

Chapter End Notes

Hope you all enjoyed the latest installment. I’d love to hear from you in the comments.
Chapter 67

Chapter Notes

And again this bunch does not know how to follow a plan. At least this time they did actually take a step in the right direction before getting sidetracked.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Wiping at her eyes, Dianne tried to pull herself together. It was still a little over an hour before she needed to head to the airport, but the atmosphere in the house had already begun to shift. Coming to Hawaii on this trip, she never thought leaving would be quite so hard.

“Focus on the positive. You will be back in about three months for Christmas. You'll be spending your holiday on a nice warm beach while your friends in England are bundled up in the snow.” Steve hugged her tight.

“This is why I can't let you take me to the airport. If you or Daniel or Grace are there I'll end up falling apart again. I need to spend the ride pulling myself together if I'm going to make it to the plane.”

Steve and Danny both glared at this statement. Family did not take hired cars to and from the airport. Family was escorted to and from by at least one other member of said family. There were no exceptions to this.

Before Dianne could argue, Chin, Cath, and Kono strolled through the door. They'd stayed scarce following the picnic to let Dianne spend her last day and morning without a big audience, but they wanted to say goodbye. They also were expecting a conversation much like this to happen.

“Mind if I suggest an alternative?” Chin stepped forward. His teammates’ eyes begged him to have a good one. “How about I take her?”

“That is very sweet, but you don't need to waste …” Kono’s hand covered Ms. Bradley’s mouth before she could finish.

“I'm going to suggest you forget whatever words were going to finish that statement if you know what is good for you.” The petite Hawaiian gave Dianne a look that pleaded with her not to push that button.

“Too late.” Danny was already gearing up for a rant. “Have you listened to a single thing that's been said here in the last few days. Look carefully at each and every person standing in this room. Do any of us look like taking the time to make sure you arrive safely at the airport in the company of someone you know is somehow an unwelcome burden. I have no clue what it was like the last time you came, but things are different now. Believe me when I say a round trip to the Honolulu airport is a walk in the park compared to some of the lengths we have gone to making sure that this family comes and goes in one piece.” With a final huff, Danny stood with hands braced on his hips, daring her to argue about the ride to the airport.

“But I already called the car.” Dianne admitted sheepishly.
“And I already canceled it.” Chin laughed.

“What?” She wheeled around to look at him, even as the rest of the room started laughing.

“Call it intuition. Half the people in this family,” he threw a pointed look at his boss, “spend a fair bit of timing convinced they are putting the rest of us out. We’ve learned to predict these cases with relative accuracy and counteract the stupidity.”

“Well, I suppose that settles my transportation to the airport.” She conceded defeat.

“Make sure you call us from New York and let us know you made it safely and again when you’re getting ready to board.” Danny sounded every bit the overprotective father.

“Daniel, it will be after midnight here when I land.” She started to argue.

“Don’t care.” He countered.

“We'll have our cell phones with us. You know what will happen if you don’t call, right?” Steve added.

“Just call them. We don't need them freaking out and causing a major incident at La Guardia because they're worried about you.” Kono added.

“Okay. I'll call.” Dianne caved knowing they were likely not kidding. She could just imagine some security officer tracking her down because the pair were worried. A knock at the door interrupted everyone before any further arguments about checking in could erupt. “Who in the world could that be?”

Already closest to the door, Catherine peered out and opened with without explanation. “Why hello you two.” She stepped back to let Kamekona and Governor Denning join the fray.

“I hope we're not imposing.” Sam spoke first. “We just happened to arrive at the same time wishing to say our alohas to Ms. Bradley.” He answered the unspoken question written on everyone’s faces.

Individually seeing Kamekona or Sam arrive at the McGarrett house was not an altogether surprising thing, but their simultaneous arrival had stunned everyone silent.

“Not at all.” Steve regained his ability to speak first and welcomed both men further into the house. “You're both ohana, so your visit could never be an imposition.”

Kamekona wrapped Dianne in a bear hug, leaving some to wonder if she might get crushed. Her laughter was a good indication that she was still breathing, so they opted not to interrupt. “I brought you a goody bag with some of that shrimp you liked so well the other day. Thought it might be a good addition to whatever they try to pass off as food on the flight.”

“That was very sweet of you.” She accepted the bag with a smile. A week ago she would have turned her nose up at such a thing, but he was right. She had really liked it the other day, and she saw his offering for what it was. Kamekona fed the people he cared about and somehow in the short time she had spent with him, he counted her as part of that group. “I may not even make it until I get on the plane before I devour it.”

The big guy’s huge smile brightened the atmosphere of the room considerably. It was hard not to smile when his personality was five times the size of the room where they stood.

Setting the shrimp next to her purse, Dianne turned to find the governor approaching. “You didn't
have to interrupt your day to come see me off.” She chided.

“Well, in all fairness, I didn't just come to see you off. Though the timing of my arrival might have had something to do with that. I had an update on the prospects of their television interview that I thought I should share with the team.” Sam countered.

“And you were unable to give that update via phone?” Dianne teased.

“I could have, but another boring Sunday afternoon in the governor’s mansion lacked appeal given the alternative of sneaking over here for a bit.” He admitted.

“I'm going to get Kono and Cath to help me practice more after Grandma has to go.” Grace appeared beside them. “You can stay if you want to.”

Sam smiled at Grace's invitation, not sure if he should accept without knowing how the adults in the house felt about him crashing their afternoon plans.

“She's right, you know? You're welcome to stay. Just beware, you are dressed casually enough that someone might drag you into the fray.” Steve joked.

“Something tells me I would need to start at the same level as Grace and Beth compared to the rest of you.” Denning laughed. He saw McGarrett’s eyes flash with something. “What crazy schemes are you coming up with there, Commander?” He eyed the man warily.

“Not crazy. Well, possibly crazy. You know we discussed starting to do some sort of monthly self-defense class for women and children?”

“Yes. I haven't forgotten your tentative agreement to that plan.”

“Nothing tentative about it, sir … Sam.” He corrected at the governor’s pointed look. “Hey, you called me Commander first.” McGarrett teased. “Anyway, if you're really serious about wanting this to reflect taking a serious stand against domestic violence, what better way than to have you involved with it. At least the first one.”

“Define involved.” Sam pressed, noticing the rest of the family was not actively listening to their exchange.

“That depends on you. It could just be you there in a relatively informal setting letting your presence speak for your support of goal.”

“Or?” Sam questioned, knowing that could not be the SEAL’s only idea.

“Or, you could let us train you to help teach the class. It's not like we'll be teaching advanced hand-to-hand combat techniques, so I bet we could get you up to snuff fairly quick. And no matter what you said, I have a hard time believing your self-defense skills are really so lacking.” Steve explained the second option with a look that said he thought it was far superior to the politician just showing up for some photo ops. Those were likely to be somewhat limited as they wouldn't want to risk having photos in the press of any women that were trying to get out of dangerous situations.

“Plan B. Plan A might have merit for some politicians, but you're right. This idea isn't about good press and kissing babies. It is about making our stance on domestic violence clear, and I think you're right. Letting the participants see that I am willing to be more than just a mouthpiece for something so important sends a much more meaningful message.”

The general excitement in the room encouraged the governor. It was clear this bunch thought he was
making the right decision. His security team might not be too pleased about it, but he was certain they could come to grips with it. After all, it was no secret his head of security all but considered McGarrett to be some sort of god among men. Not that McGarrett needed to know that.

“It sounds like you're going be staying busy while I am back in London.” Ms. Bradley patted his arm as the others went back to their random chatter around the room. “I do believe if more people in positions of power were like you, the world would be a far better place.”

“Thank you, though I am man enough to admit that I have made, and will likely continue to make, my fair share of mistakes.” He looked around the room as he spoke, considering how much different things almost were with his task force.

“And you have thought better of some of those mistakes before you committed to them. The willingness to re-evaluate a situation before passing final judgment is an admirable quality.” Dianne gave him a warm smile.

“Indeed it is.” Sam’s expression spoke volumes about how much he thought the same applied to Ms. Bradley. “Are you looking forward to your return for the holidays?”

“I am. It will be an odd change to spend the time surrounded by family. I'm afraid most of my recent holidays have been rather on the quiet side.”

“I don't think quiet will be something you will have to worry about around here.” The governor laughed. “Speaking of less than quiet, do make sure you bring at least one more formal dress.”

“I didn't think this bunch was much for the formal wear unless forced.” She stared at him, puzzled.

“They aren't, but I believe I'll get them to make an exception for the formal gala at the governor’s mansion. While they often resist such events, I'm counting on them caving when I tell them that there will be a special party for the children of a select group of guests. I can only imagine how much Grace will enjoy getting to be decked out like a princess for the evening.”

“I still don't quite follow why your task force attending an event requires me to have a formal gown.”

“Because invitations will be sent for you, Mr. and Mrs. Williams, Mary, and Catherine as well.” The governor replied.

“Well, in that case, I'll make sure to come prepared.” She nodded her head. “I do appreciate the advanced warning.”

“I should let you get back to your farewells.” Sam pointed her toward Catherine and Kono. “It has been a pleasure meeting you.”

“That you. I hope things would have eventually ended in a similar fashion had you not taken an interest, but I am very much relieved that you did. I've no doubt you saved me, Daniel, and Grace a world of headaches and heartbreak.” She leaned in to give him a hug. “You have no idea how very much I appreciate what you've done for us.”

“It was my pleasure. The last thing I want is for anything else to hurt Grace.” He embraced her warmly before ushering her off to the waiting women.

“You know,” Danny sidled up beside him, “she's right. We owe you a great deal for what you've done for us in these last several days.”

“No. You owe me nothing.” Sam declined quite strongly even as he kept his voice low. “I did
nothing more than what any of you would have done for each other. As I was informed the other day, I have now become a part of this ohana whether I like it or not, and I find I rather like it. Which means I intend to do my level best to maintain that position."

“Be that as it may, you showed up here to help us face a threat before you had been accepted into the fold. Not only did you show up, but you came in swords drawn, and left no doubt about the futility of continuing on the path. You did all that without having any idea how we would react.” Danny challenged.

“True. For all I knew you could have sent me packing as soon as the threat was gone. It still would have been worth it. You, and the rest of the team, deserve more loyalty than I'd shown you up to that point. That was my chance to make amends. If I had a daughter, I hope were the situations reversed, someone would do the same for me.”

“You ever have a daughter, governor, and she is likely to be one of the most protected children on the planet.” Danny smirked. Sam just gave him a befuddled look. “Like you said, you are ohana now. After what we have experienced, I have no doubt that any children born in this ohana will be combat trained by the time they are ten. I should’ve started teaching Grace before now, but that's on me. The mistake will not be made again.”

Danny and the governor both laughed. They both knew he was only joking, at least about the full extent of the training. Any future kids would probably be closer to eighteen by the time they were fully combat trained, by ten they would just know at least a dozen ways to kill an attacker.

Chapter End Notes

You know the drill. Drop a comment to let me know you guys are still alive and reading.
Chapter 68

Chapter Notes

Oops, this should have gone up this morning, but it didn’t happen. In my defense, I spent the 2nd of yesterday at the ER with my son thanks a concussion resulting from a fall. He’s okay (or as okay as a 9 year old boy with a concussion can get), but let’s just say everything after 1pm yesterday was a total loss for me and it carried over to today.

Waving as Chin’s car pulled away to take Dianne to the airport, Steve stood with Grace propped on one hip, her head resting on his shoulder, and Danny tucked under his other arm. Watching the trio, Kono slid her phone out of her pocket and snapped a picture. Knowing they would want it, she texted it to both men before heading back toward the house with the rest of the group.

Phones buzzing at the same time, Steve and Danny separated to reach for them. Seeing the picture from Kono, Steve held his phone up so Grace could see. “Looks like someone was being sneaky.”

Rejoining the others in the living room, Danny playfully punched Kono in the arm. “Practicing for your side job as a paparazza, Kalakaua?”

“You complaining?” She elbowed him in the side.

“No breaking each other before the fun starts!” Cath pushed her way in between the pair.

“You are no fun sometimes.” Danny stuck his tongue out at Cath before turning back to Kono. “And no. I’m not complaining. It’s a good picture.”

“That’s what I thought.” She grinned at him before facing the other woman. “Can I beat on him now?”

“No, you cannot.” Steve’s voice interrupted. “Danno and I have a date with Grace’s bedroom walls before either of us are allowed to play. If Alyssa is going to start painting later this week, we need to have the walls done. Which means we need to move furniture out, and get the room ready to paint before we are allowed to have any fun.”

“So where we putting everything?” Cath asked.

“We?” Steve raised an eyebrow at her.

“The moving part will go a lot faster if you have help.” Sam interjected, assuming that was her point. He started laughing at the look of abject mortification on the SEAL’s face. “What?”

“Having you wash my dishes was strange enough.” Steve started.

“If it will make you feel better, I’ll invite you over next time we decide to start moving things around at my place.” He gave Steve a challenging look. “Either way, the lady is right. If we all pitch in, that part will take no time.”

“Fine. The furniture in the worst condition is actually the stuff in the room Mary and Dianne stayed in, so I’d planned on pulling it out and putting the stuff from Grace’s room in there. She can stay in
that room until the painting is done, and by that time her new furniture should be here.”

“It should?” Grace sounded confused.

“Well, it should be if we order it in the next few days. That just means we need to make a decision on which set you want.” Steve clarified. Everyone headed up the stairs since it appeared McGarrett was not going to balk at the idea of help. “We might as well put the mattress straight in my truck. I'll have to haul it off later. Everything else can go outside since it's not supposed to rain, and I'll see about getting it donated.”

“Want me to call my cousins? They can take it to the same place they took Danny’s stuff.” Kono offered.

“Go for it.” He was not going to argue with that.

She ducked into Grace’s room to make the call while everyone else headed to the guest room. When she rejoined them several minutes later, Grace, Beth, and Catherine were all missing, apparently already having taken their first items out of the room. Of the three remaining, Danny was ranting at Steve about the proper way to carry something, while the governor looked on with an expression of amusement.

“I have an idea.” Sam interrupted before Danny could get too heated. “How about Kono helps Danny with the dresser, and I'll help Steve with the bed. I'd rather you two not end up divorced before you even have a chance to get married.”

Kono doubled over laughing at the expression on her boss and Danny’s face when the governor’s words registered.

“But we aren’t…”

“Not yet, but I have no doubt you will be and I see no reason to let you kill each other moving furniture before that happy day comes.” Sam deflected.

“Come on, other boss. I promise I won’t drop it on your toes.” Kono grabbed Danny’s arm, tugging him over to the dresser.

“Fine, but if he gets you killed hauling furniture down the stairs, I don't want your crazy security team coming after us.” Danny grumbled as he and Kono hauled their load out the door.

Steve just shook his head as he and Sam started reaching for the mattress. “Promise I won't get you killed.”

“I didn't think you would. Don’t you dare tell Danny, but I thought it might be easier for us to maneuver things since we are of a similar height.” Sam's voice dropped low just in case the detective was anywhere near hearing range.

Steve laughed so hard he had to set his end of the mattress back on the bed frame. “No way in hell am I repeating that to him. He'd kill us both.” Finally recovering from the laughter, the SEAL grabbed the mattress again. “Let’s get this thing out of here before the women are back for their next load.”

By the time Chin returned from the airport, they were putting the last few items from Grace’s room into the guest room. Knowing it would be a week or better before she was able to move back into her actual room, Steve had insisted on having all of her things set up nicely in the guest room so she would be comfortable.
“Wow. You guys have been busy.” Chin smiled. “Looks like the airport run was the easy job this afternoon.”

“Watch it or we'll make you paint.” Danny sniped at him.

“Worse yet, we'll make you help with the taping.” Steve set the bag of painters tape in the middle of the now empty room with a groan. Painting he did not mind. Taping he loathed with a passion. The trim around the ceiling was not bad, but crawling around to tape the floorboards sucked.

“Why don’t you take the high ground,” Beth grabbed a couple rolls of tape. “I'll show Grace how to do the floor while her dad does the windows.”

“What are we supposed to do?” Chin asked.

“Patch holes and such?” Steve asked, giving him a choice.

“I can do that.” The Hawaiian confirmed.

“What about the three of us?” Cath asked as she stood with Kono and the governor.

“It appears you have a reprieve for a while.” Steve shrugged his shoulders.

“Well, if you were serious about getting trained, we could start on that?” Cath offered Sam an option.

“Just don’t break me.” He laughed at the two women. He had witnessed them holding their own against the men, so he knew they were more than capable of doing plenty of damage.

“We won't hurt you. We promise.” Kono smiled sweetly as she led him toward the door.

Steve laughed at his boss’s expression as they followed Kono, Cath hot on Sam’s heels. “Use the pads!” The SEAL yelled after them.

“Are you sure it is a good idea to leave them unsupervised? If they break him, somehow you will end up taking the fall.” Danny snickered.

“He'll be fine. They know he respects their abilities, so they have no reason to try to prove a point and actually hurt him.”

“True. Still, we should probably hurry up before they get too excited and forget he isn't one of us.” Chin was already patching the second small area he had found on the wall.

Before long, the room was taped off and any small imperfections were patched. Steve would need to pop in and sand the patched spots later, but this would mean they could get the first coat of paint on early Monday before he and Danny were supposed to meet with the school about Grace’s pending return.

Swinging Grace up onto his back, Steve trotted down the stairs and into the kitchen. “Let’s grab some water and take it out.” He leaned down as he opened the fridge, and Grace stretched out to grab a couple of bottles.

“I'll grab the others.” Beth smiled at the pair after Steve grabbed two more bottles. With water for everyone, the trio followed the others outside to see how Governor Denning was holding up against Catherine and Kono.

“Ouch. That looked uncomfortable.” Steve winced on behalf of his boss as the other man doubled over after a hit from Catherine.
“Oops. Sorry. Didn’t mean to hit that hard.” She reached out to grip Sam’s shoulder, trying to reassure him.

“S’okay. Pretty sure I will live.” He wheezed. “Though seeing how the rest of the crew is here, perhaps I’ll have a seat and let you beat on someone else for a while.” Sam gave her a smile as he headed toward a blanket that Danny had just spread on the ground.

“Regretting your decision yet?” The detective queried.

“Nope. Wasn’t so bad until that last hit, and that was partially my fault. I stepped the wrong way.” He accepted a bottle of water from Beth with a grateful smile. When Steve and Danny were both sitting next to them, giving the other three a chance to work with Beth and Grace before they jumped in for some fun, Sam turned to them. “George called me this morning with an update on the potential interview. It took him a couple of days to connect with her, but it appears his first choice is more than willing to follow the rules. I’m sure she and her network are aware of the opportunity they have been presented.”

“So we’re really going to do this?” Danny looked to Steve. “You’re sure you are ready to go this public? Once we do this you can’t take it back.” He did not want his partner to regret the decision later. They were all prepared to face some potential backlash, but even with the repeal of Don’t Ask Don’t Tell this was still a bigger risk for the SEAL.

“I’m sure. We are not going to subject Grace to getting ambushed by shady reporters because I hesitated to stand my ground. We have been over this. We agreed we weren’t going to hide this.” McGarrett was adamant. “Not to mention, word will get out fast enough. Intentional or not, I am going to kiss you in public and people will see it.” He gave Danny his best cheesy wink.

“That is true. Expecting you to keep your hands and lips to yourself is a lost cause.” Danny leaned into Steve’s chest. “So when is this all going to happen?”

“They put together a proposed timeline that takes into account the fact you wanted to move quickly. If we approve tomorrow they will send us questions to review by end of day Wednesday. They were going to put it out on tomorrow’s broadcasts that people could submit questions to them if we approve early enough, so you might get some crazy ones to weed out.” Both men snickered. They could all imagine the crap that would lead to, but they may also get some good ones. “We would have until first thing Friday morning to review and then film the interview Friday to air next Monday.”

“I say we do it.” Chin hollered at them as he side stepped an elbow from Beth.

“Me too.” Kono yelped after Grace landed a hit.

“I guess that settles it. Tell George to give them the go ahead. Want to come over Wednesday night and review questions? Something tells me we may need a few drinks for that.”

Sam laughed heartily. “I’ll bring a fresh supply of alcohol with me.”

“And we won’t argue with that offer.” Danny laughed.

“Hey boss!” Kono yelled at Steve. “You want to get in here before Kamekona gets back with dinner?” The big guy had left shortly after his arrival to go work for a while, but promised he would be back with shrimp for dinner.

“Sure thing.” Steve hopped up, rolling his neck and circling his shoulders to loosen up a bit. “You coming Danno?” He reached a hand down for his partner.
“Are you actually going to let me do anything? Or am I just supposed to stand there and look handsome while you knock the rest of our team senseless?” He let Steve pull him to his feet.

“You could always join our side.” Cath suggested. “The four of us versus Super SEAL. That seems fair to me.”

Grace plopped down next to the governor as Beth slipped off to the house to throw together salad to go with dinner.

“Any guess on how this goes down?” Sam asked Grace.

“He will try to avoid fighting against Danno, but he'll have to do it eventually. Danno won’t let him get out of it. It will end in Danno ranting at him for not actually trying.”

Sam watched in silence to see how accurate she was. As expected, Grace couldn't have called it any better. Steve managed to take out each of the other three, but kept sidestepping Danny’s attacks rather than actually defending himself or fighting back.

“Seriously, Steven! What the hell are you doing? Stop sidestepping and hit me you freakin’ Neanderthal!” Danny was fuming after several minutes. “Either fight back or I swear you will be sleeping on the couch tonight.”

This threat made Steve pause even as Danny approached. When the detective through a punch this time, Steve ducked it, grabbed Danny’s arm and twisted it around. If you weren’t paying attention, it looked just like the first time he had done it to Danny after they met. If you were paying attention, you could see the care he took not to actually hurt his partner.

“Better, but don’t think I missed what you did. That hurt a lot worse last time.” Danny glared at the SEAL as he righted himself, but his anger faded at the look on Steve’s face. “Oh come here.” He pulled him closer for a tender kiss.

“Alright you two, break it up. We better get cleaned up for dinner. The shrimp will be better fresh.” Chin started ushering them all toward the door.

“Yes, Dad.” Steve mocked as he let Danny tug him to the door.

Teasing each other as they headed for the house, the entire group was nice and relaxed. It felt strange not to have Dianne with them, but they had a good day of getting things done and having some fun.
“Have you decided what to do about Grace returning to school?” Beth asked Steve and Danny as they sat around the kitchen island. The others had headed out when the little girl went up to take her shower.

“I’m honestly not sure. We meet with them tomorrow at 10. I don’t want her to fall any further behind, but I worry that just sending her back full-time will be a bit much. Then I worry that I am being to over-protective. Then I worry that someone will say something they shouldn’t around her and it will set her back.” Danny started rambling.

“What you’re saying is that you’re every bit as confused about what to do as most parents would be in a similar situation?” Beth reached across the island and covered his hand with her own.

“Yeah. Pretty much.” Danny’s shoulders slumped, his entire body leaning heavily against his partner. He hated not knowing what to do.

“What do you think? Between raising three kids and teaching, you have more experience than either of us do.” Steve looked every bit as overwhelmed with the decision as Danny did.

“Meeting with her teacher and the school’s director is a good step. You need to know what they are willing to do. I would also suggest asking Grace. She has mentioned school a few times, so I know she is expecting to return soon.” Both men agreed. “As far as keeping her from falling behind, I can help with that. If you get any school work she needs to make up while you’re there, we can start working through it.” Danny stared at her, a puzzled expression on his face. “As Steve pointed out, I was a teacher for years. I’m pretty sure it is within my realm of expertise to help make sure Grace does not fall behind.”

“Sorry. Yeah. I suppose it is.” He shook his head, trying to clear his jumbled thoughts.

“Perhaps you two should head to bed. If you’re forgetting things like that, you must be tired.” Beth grabbed the empty glasses from the island. “I think I hear Grace coming down to say goodnight.”

A few seconds later, the little girl appeared in the kitchen. Her hair was still wet from her shower, and the Navy t-shirt she wore looked more like a dress than a shirt. She left Steve pull her onto his lap before scooting a bit so she was seated across one of his legs and one of Danny’s, leaning back against them.

“Well it looks like tomorrow is going to be a big day. I thought we might help with the painting, and then while your dads go to your school I am going to do a bit of cleaning.” Beth broached the topic of the school meeting casually. Grace was already aware of it, but there had been little conversation about it.

“When will I go back?” The little girl’s voice warred between caution and excitement. She missed her friends, but she was also smart enough to know that people would talk about what happened.

“That’s part of what we want to talk to Ms. Jones about. You have missed almost two weeks already, so we need to find out what you need to make up. My guess is you’ll need to go back this week. Maybe Wednesday?” Danny suggested.

The room fell silent for several long seconds as Grace thought about it. “Okay. That means I can spend Tuesday with Grandpa, right?”
“Something tells me we won’t be able to stop the two of you if we tried, so yes. You can spend Tuesday with Grandpa.” Danny laughed. “But you will probably have some makeup work for school too. Grandma said she would help you, but we won’t know how much there is until tomorrow morning.”

“Maybe we can see if Grandpa remembers anything from fourth grade while we’re at it.” Beth grinned. “If you guys don’t have other plans, Paul and I thought we might all go visit the house. We’re closing at the end of the week, so we’ll have a few days to get anything done that we need to before our stuff arrives. It’s in good shape, but I’m sure there is stuff to do. There always is with a house.” Beth yawned as if the idea of getting a house ready to live in was exhausting.

“I think it’s time for all of us to hit the rack.” Steve lifted Grace with him as he stood, turning her so she could wrap her legs around his waist. “What do you say we take this party upstairs?” The other two adults rose and followed him toward the stairs.

“You ready for bed Monkey, or do you want to read for a bit?” Danny asked.

“We’re almost done with the first book. I bet we could finish it tonight.” Grace answered over Steve’s shoulder. “Can we all read together?”

“As long as we don’t break the bed.” Danny laughed at the idea of all four of them on the full size bed.

“Why don’t I grab the rocking chair that’s in my room. The fourth person might be the difference in whether or not we crash to the floor.” Danny’s mom suggested.

“I’ll grab the chair. You go get comfy.” The detective pointed her toward Grace’s temporary room as he ducked a little further down the hall. By the time he returned, the other three were settled onto the bed, though Steve looked ready to jump up.

“Why don’t I take the chair and you can sit here?” The SEAL offered.

“Nope. You stay put. I’ll just use your lap as a pillow while I listen.” Danny placed the chair right next to the bed and Steve’s long legs, plopped down, and proceeded to curl himself up so his feet where underneath him, and his arms and head were rested on the SEAL’s thigh.

As Grace cracked the book open, Steve began absentmindedly running his fingers through Danny’s locks. It was several pages into the book before the first quiet snore floated up from his lap. Grace snickered as Beth and Steve both fought the urge to laugh.

“I guess he really was tired.” Steve continued stroking his partner’s hair, afraid that stopping now would cause him to wake.

“Good thing he already knows how the story ends.” Grace watched her dads. She loved seeing her Danno so relaxed and happy with her Daddy. Glancing up at Steve’s face, she saw him watching Danno. It made her feel all kinds of warm and fuzzy to see the look on his face. Turning the page on the book, she looked over and shared a smile with Grandma Williams. They didn’t have to say a think to know they were both thinking the same thing. Those two belonged together.

Not wanting Steve to notice she wasn’t reading, Grace picked back up on the next page. She could tell he was paying attention as he would make an occasional comment about something in the story. Before too long, she finished the final page of the book.

“Have you and Danno finished The Chamber of Secrets yet?”
“Not yet. Guess that means we’ll have to read that one together.” Steve leaned down and kissed the top of her head. “For now though, we better all get some sleep. Think I can maneuver Danno into bed without dropping him?” He gave the little girl a devilish grin.

“He’s heavier than he looks.” She grinned back. “I tried to help him off the floor the other day and almost fell over.”

Deciding she was right, a sleeping Danny was going to be difficult to move, Steve softly tickled his ear. Danny swatted at his hand as if it were a fly before rousing a bit. “Did I fall asleep?”

“No, Sleeping Beauty. You were just providing some ambient noise to help set the atmosphere for reading.” Steve teased as Danny sat up, untangling himself from the chair.

Finally getting upright, Danny was grateful that Grace met him at the edge of the bed on her knees to give him a final hug and kiss goodnight. “Love you, Monkey. I’ll see you in the morning.”

“Love you too, Danno.” She squeezed him tight before releasing him to turn back to Steve. “Love you too, Daddy.”

“Love you, Gracie. I’ll see you after my swim in the morning. I better get up extra early if we’re going to get the first coat of paint on in the morning.”

“I’ll get her tucked in. You better to make sure Daniel actually finds the bed.” Beth met Steve at the corner of the bed, giving him a quick hug. He headed after his partner without argument.

When they heard the guys’ bedroom door shut, Beth and Grace both giggled a bit. “Looks like we wore your dad out today.”

“Yes. Those two are too cute.” Grace had a huge smile as she spoke of her dads.

“That they are. I’m glad they quit being silly boys and got it together.”

“Me too.” Grace crawled back up to the top of her bed, sliding underneath the light blanket her grandmother held up for her. “I love you, Grandma. I’m really glad you get to stay here.”

“So am I, Gracie. So am I.” Beth sat on the edge of the bed, brushing a stray hair from Grace’s eyes. “There is no place else I would rather be.” Placing a kiss on her granddaughter’s forehead, the older woman slipped from the room as the little girl’s eyes started to drift close, a smile still plastered on her face.

Beth had to wonder if her son and Steve realized just much the two of them being happy actually meant to Grace. For that matter, she wondered if they had a clue how much it meant to their entire ohana. Everyone was very clear in their support, especially in terms of the upcoming media attention, but she knew it ran deeper.

Beth was very glad that Steve had co-opted her son onto his task force. For all that Danny had fussed endlessly in those early days, she had truly never seen him more happier and more at peace with himself in a relationship than what she witnessed every time she watched him with Steve. No doubt the two would drive each other to the brink of insanity sometimes, but there was also no doubt they would find their way back from it as well.

Closing the door to her own bedroom, Beth pulled out her phone and looked at the picture Kono had snapped earlier in the day. It had taken very little to convince her to share it. Attaching it to a text message, she sent it off to Paul with a quick note to let him know she was very happy he would be joining them the next afternoon.
Stretched out in bed, Danny nestled against his side sleeping soundly, Steve had his hand wrapped around his phone. He wasn’t sure why Danny had crashed so hard this evening, but he was glad he getting some much needed rest.

Eying the clock, he guessed Dianne should be calling any moment to let them know she landed safely in New York. It was only a few minutes later when the screen lit up between his fingers.

“You make it?” He questioned without preamble, his voice a hushed whisper.

“Yes. The flight was pleasantly uneventful. I gather you are the only one still up.” Dianne guessed.

“Yes. Danny hit a wall and zonked out earlier than expected, but I’ve been waiting for you to check in.” Steve watched the gentle rise and fall of his partner’s sleeping form.

“Well, now you can stop worrying and get some sleep. I know you have a lot going on tomorrow, so I’ll text when I’m boarding the plane for England.”

“Sounds like a plan. Stay safe and let us know if you need anything.” Steve knew she was right.

“Get some sleep, Steven.”

“Yes, ma’am.” He heard Dianne’s soft laugh at his reply before disconnecting the phone. Setting it quietly on the night stand, Steve rolled onto his side, wrapping himself around Danny’s warm body. Less than five minutes later, he was sleeping just as soundly as his partner.
Chapter Notes

If you are following along with Guardian: Love Explored, there is an extended version of the opening scene for this chapter.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The feeling of Danny’s fingers gently tracing over Steve’s forearm where it was draped over the shorter man’s side lured Steve from his slumber. Without opening his eyes, he could tell that he and Danny were in the same position they’d been in when he fell asleep. That his partner was petting him gave a good indication that he was feeling better rested.

Nuzzling the back of Danny’s neck, Steve smiled against the warm skin when Danny’s breath hitched. “Mornin’ Danno.” Steve whispered, his hot breath causing his partner to shiver. “Sleep well?”

The Jersey native started squirming, turning so he was nose to nose with the SEAL. “Yes. I did. I can’t believe I fell asleep while Grace was reading.”

“She didn’t seem to mind. She was too busy giggling when you started snoring, and she still had two of us awake to listen.” He leaned forward to kiss the tip of Danny’s nose, but ended up connecting to lips instead when Danny shifted. Steve nipped at his partner’s lower lip. “You know, I should really get moving if we’re going to get a coat of paint on before we go to the school.”

“It’s only six. We don’t need to leave for the school until 9:45.” Danny whined as he nosed at Steve’s neck, leaving a trail of teasing kisses. “I’ll even get started while you’re swimming.”

“We should leave by 9:30 to make sure we aren’t late, and what about breakfast?” Steve asked.

“I can survive on coffee until the paint is up.” Danny countered though he didn’t bother to argue the departure time. He knew better.

Twenty minutes later the pair headed down the stairs, Steve ready to swim and Danny to get his first cup of coffee. Heading back up the stairs a few minutes later, he almost ran into his mother.

“You’re up awful early for a non-work day.” Beth grinned when she saw the coffee in his hand.

“Yes, but I promised Super SEAL I would start on the painting while he swam so we would be sure to get it done before heading to the school.”

“And three plus hours didn’t seem sufficient to him?” Beth laughed.

“Not when he tried to factor in swimming, breakfast, painting, and cleaning up to go. Plus you know he prefers to be early for everything.” Danny explained.

“Well Grace is still sleeping, so why don’t I help you get started with the paint?” Beth offered. “Just let me grab my coffee and I’ll be back up.”

Heading into his daughter’s room, Danny set to work getting the paint stirred and rollers prepped. By
the time Beth returned, he was climbing up the ladder to start cutting in at the ceiling.

“I bet Steve will be impressed that you took the high section.” Beth laughed before grabbing her own brush and starting on the other corner of the wall. “So what exactly is the plan since there are two colors?”

“Steven swears he can do the corners where the two colors meet without taping either of them off. No way I’d pull that off, but I figure it’s one of those crazy SEAL tricks that the rest of us mere mortals haven’t learned. So we avoid that part until he gets back.”

“Easy enough.” His mother snickered as they continued painting.

Before they knew it, the pair heard footsteps on the stairs, and Steve popped his head into the room. “I’m back. Let me throw on some dry clothes and I’ll be back to help.”

He disappeared before either Williams could respond, so they just continued to paint. They had managed to get one entire wall done while he was swimming, so with him helping, they would likely have the entire first coat on by roughly eight, leaving plenty of time for a late breakfast before their appointment.

“Have a good swim?” Beth asked when the SEAL reappeared less than five minutes later.

“Yes, ma’am. I kept it short so we could get this done, but I pushed the intensity pretty hard.” Steve prepped his own paint supplies and headed toward the corner where the accent wall met one of the others.

“I assume you’re about to prove how SEALs are capable of making even paint follow perfectly straight lines.” Danny teased.

“Never said it was a SEAL skill.” Steve retorted as he started.

“You never said it wasn’t either.” Danny fussed.

“Does it matter where I learned it, as long as it works?” Steve stopped painting and looked at his partner.

“Nope. Guess not.” The Jersey native winked at him. “Now get back to work so we can go eat breakfast.”

Steve turned back to the wall, resuming the careful paint strokes. He was tempted to suggest one of them run down and grab the docking station for his iPod, but since Grace hadn’t appeared yet he guessed she was still sleeping. Maybe they could do that when they put the second coat on instead.

They were almost finished with the first coat when Grace appeared at the door. “Wow! It looks so pretty.” Her eyes went wide as she took in the new color of her bedroom.

“The color will change just a bit as it dries, but you chose well Gracie.” Steve grinned at her. “Just be careful not to bump the wet paint or it will end up all over you.” He jerked his head toward her father, and saw her smile widen when she noticed the smears of paint all over his arms and shirt.

Hearing his daughter giggle, Danny swung around, running his elbow straight into a section of wet paint. “Shi…. Shoot.”

“Give it up son. You are going to have to take a shower to get all the paint off before you go to the school.” Beth laughed at him. “You always were a bit on the hopeless side when it came to painting.
Danny glared at her, but his laugh gave him away. “Not my fault I’m not as neat at Super SEAL over there. Seriously? Do you have a drop of paint on you?”

Finished with his last section, Steve set the roller down before twisting and turning to check himself over for paint. “Doesn’t look like it.”

“How is this my life? At least Ma had the good graces to get a smudge on her hand.” Danny teased. “If it weren’t for the fact that we have to go to the school, I would make sure you actually looked like you spent the morning painting.”

“You can retaliate later. For now, why don’t you go wash off while I wrap the rollers up and get everything cleaned up for later? Then we can grab some food.” Steve suggested.

“If you can handle clean up, I’ll go start on the food.” Beth offered.

“Works for me.” Steve nodded at her, taking the roller from her hands.

“Can I help, Daddy?” Grace asked as Danny and Beth left the room.

“Sure, sweetheart. Why don’t you grab those plastic bags?” He pointed to the items in question. “A little trick I learned. If you wrap the paint brushes and rollers tight in plastic and put them in the fridge, they stay fresh to use for the second coat. Otherwise, if you rinse them out they take forever to dry and they won’t be ready when the wall is.”

“Cool.” She held one of the bags open so he could insert a roller, and watched as he carefully twisted it until all the air was out before tying the ends off around the handle. “Think you can teach me to paint more like you?”

“I’ll certainly try.”

The pair worked quickly to wrap up the remaining brushes and rollers and clean up the other supplies. Grace ran ahead of Steve when they headed to the kitchen, pulling the fridge open for him.

“Guess it’s a good thing we don’t seem to produce many leftovers to go in there.” Beth laughed as she saw what they were doing.

“They’ll be out of the way before dinner.” Steve assured her.

“Son, it’s your fridge. I’m pretty sure you can put whatever you want it in and it’s not my place to comment.” Beth laughed, pouring him a cup of coffee as he washed his hands.

“Well, I really don’t think they’ll taste very good, so I don’t plan on keeping them in there once we’re done painting.” He accepted the coffee with a grateful smile.

///// GUARDIAN /////

“Detective Williams. Commander McGarrett.” The school’s secretary greeted them. “Mrs. Caldwell is ready for you, if you’d care to follow me.” The two men rose from the chairs they’d been sitting in for the last ten minutes, and did as requested. The petite Hawaiian woman led them down a short hallway before motioning for them to head through the open door. Once they were inside, she shut the door behind them.

Danny had only met the school’s director, Mrs. Caldwell, on a few occasions. Rachel and Stan had
handled everything with registering Grace without so much as consulting him, and had seemed happy to exclude him wherever possible. It had frustrated him to no end, but he’d done his research and knew this was a top notch school, so he couldn’t complain without feeling like an ass.

“Detective Williams.” The sitting behind the desk didn’t bother to stand as she greeted him.

Steve glared at the director. She was in her mid-fifties, hair pulled back in a tight bun, and brown eyes challenging them over the frame of her glasses. He could already see this was going to be an interesting meeting.

“I understand you wish to speak to me regarding Grace’s return to school. I assure you, we were all extremely saddened by the tragic loss of Mrs. Edwards.” Her voice faltered just a bit, and both men wondered just how well Mrs. Caldwell knew Rachel. She hadn’t been at the funeral, but they knew not everyone that was friends with Rachel had attended, many of them still in shock over the events. “We are looking forward to having Grace back with us where she belongs.”

Steve’s hand reached across the small distance, bracing Danny’s forearm. Neither of them missed the less than subtle jab in her words.

“Grace is looking forward to returning, though I’m sure you understand our concerns given the circumstances. Not only has she lost her mother, but the entire thing has been a bit more public than we would care for. While we have no desire to keep her out of school longer than necessary, we felt it was important to make sure you understood our concerns.”

“We?” Mrs. Caldwell asked.

“Commander Steve McGarrett, ma’am.” Steve reached across the table, offering a polite handshake.

“Ah yes. The infamous Commander McGarrett.” Mrs. Caldwell accepted his hand with a forced smile. “And what exactly is your roll in this discussion.”

“As you will note in the updated paperwork we’ve brought, Steve is to be considered one of Grace’s parents, so his role in this discussion is the same as mine. We are here to ensure our daughter is accorded the safest possible environment for her education given the trauma she has recently experienced.” The tension rolled off of Danny in waves. He certainly hoped the rest of the staff at the school were less of a challenge.

“I assure you, everyone here is prepared to handle Grace’s situation with the utmost care.” This time her tone was more sincere. It was obvious that regardless of her opinion regarding Danny and Steve, she did care for her students. “We met with the entire student body last week to make sure they were all aware of the minimal details to avoid any untimely questions. Ms. Jones and our school counselor have also been working with her class to help ensure Grace’s classmates are prepared for her return. They all miss her terribly.”

“We’re glad to hear that. She misses them as well.” Steve spoke, knowing that Danny was still riled over her behavior. “I believe Ms. Jones was planning to bring us Grace’s make up work so she could start on that.”

“Yes. She should be here in a few moments to give it to you after she drops her students off for their gym class.”

“Excellent. Now, as far as Grace’s return, we would like for her to try coming on Wednesday.” The director started to speak, but he didn’t give her a chance. “We want it to be very clear that should any issues arise or should Grace indicate that she needs to contact one of us, that we be called
immediately. If for any reason one of us can’t be reached, you can work your way through the emergency contact list.” Steve stared her down.

“Here is the updated emergency contact list. We had to make a few copies.” Danny handed over the completed forms to the school director.

“I see that.” Mrs. Caldwell flipped through the list. “Are you sure you want all of these people listed? Generally the lists are limited to a few close relatives or friends that the child would be comfortable with in case of emergency.”

Danny tried to keep from glaring at the woman across the large wooden desk. “I believe we are capable of determining the appropriate people to contact in case of an emergency with Grace. I assure you, she will be more the comfortable letting any person on the list pick her up, and we are more than comfortable letting any one of them make appropriate decisions regarding her care should they be needed.” Danny was far beyond annoyed with the school’s director. “Is this going to be an issue?”

“No. Though I do hope she won’t feel the need to call someone every hour.”

“I highly doubt she will.” Steve’s voice had a harder edge this time. “Grace has coped tremendously well with this entire ordeal. She is an amazing strong little girl, and I fully expect that she will handle returning to school with a maturity and poise quite uncommon among your average group of nine year olds. That is why we are quite adamant that should she request to contact a member of our family, she be granted that request immediately and without argument.”

Were it not for the fact he knew uprooting Grace to a new school would be more upheaval than she needed, he would be sorely tempted to suggest to Danny they do just that. The director’s tone had been nothing short of snippy with Danny from the start, and her reaction to him was even worse.

A knock at the door interrupted them before Mrs. Caldwell could reply. “Come in.” The woman appeared relieved at the interruption, more so when she saw it was Ms. Jones. The director knew Grace’s teacher was more at ease with the two men, so she was happy for the intervention. “We were just finishing up here, and then I’ll turn the two of them over to you to discuss Grace’s make up work.”

“Perfect.” Ms. Jones glanced at Steve and Danny. Her expression spoke volumes about what she imagined had happened before her arrival.

“I believe Wednesday will work just fine for Grace’s return. We will, of course, take every care to ensure that Grace is welcomed back to an environment where she feels safe, but should she need to reach out to you at any point, the teachers will all have copies of your contact information.”

“Excellent. Now I’m sure you have other things to attend to, so we’ll let you get back to them.” Danny rose from his chair, giving the director a curt nod before turning toward the door.

The three remained silent as they left the office. Ms. Jones carried a folder in her hand with Grace’s work, but decided to wait until they could speak freely before stopping to go over it with the two men.

“Is everything okay? Did Mrs. Caldwell say something out of line?” Ms. Jones queried as they walked toward the front steps.

“She doesn’t seem to be our biggest fan.” Steve answered, curious what Grace’s teacher would have to say for her boss.
“She was quite a fan of Mr. and Mrs. Edwards. I think it is taking her some time to come to terms with the idea that one of the couples she viewed as the perfect example of Sacred Heart parents wasn’t quite so perfect.” Grace’s teacher explained.

Danny and Steve both shrugged, unsure if that was the extent of the issue.

“Well, hopefully she will come to terms with all this. If her attitude towards us impacts Grace’s happiness at school I will not hesitate to find somewhere else for her to attend.” Danny replied flatly.

“I would hate to see her go, but I understand. Let me assure you within my classroom there will be no issue with the two of you or any of Grace’s ohana.” She noticed Steve’s surprised look. “Give me some credit, Commander. You’ve were already listed on Grace’s emergency contact list when I started teaching her in third grade, I saw your entire team at the end of year performance last year, I saw how everyone was at the funeral, and it is a rare day when she doesn’t speak of her ohana.”

The three shared a laugh at this. Steve silently admitted he should have known as much.

“Anyway, I know you probably want to get back to her. I’ve got all her missed assignments here. I don’t have to put any grades in until the end of the nine weeks, so she has almost a month get them finished if she needs it. Feel free to call my cell if you have any questions on the assignments.

“Thank you. I know her grandmother is planning to work through them with her, so you may here from her. Unfortunately, we will have to head back to work when she returns to school.” Steve explained.

“Mrs. Williams was a teacher, correct?” The pair nodded at her. “Well that should be perfect then. Make sure she has my number if she needs it, and tell her I’d love to see her in the classroom whenever she would like to visit. We love parents and grandparents to come in to read and do other things with the kids.”

“We’ll be sure to let her know.” Steve smiled.

“Well, we better get back before they send a search party. My dad arrives this afternoon and we still have another coat of paint to finish.” Danny smiled at Grace’s teacher before grabbing his partner’s free hand and heading toward the Camaro.

“Have you ever visited her classroom?” Steve asked.

“No. I asked about it once, but Rachel acted like it was discouraged.” Danny sounded less than pleased.

“Well, now we know differently.” Steve squeezed his hand before releasing it when they reached the car. Danny headed to the passenger side without question.

“True.” Danny slid into the seat. “I have to say, I had hoped that meeting would go better.”

“Me too. Though we knew it was inevitable that we’d encounter some less than pleasant people at some point. Hopefully Mrs. Caldwell will get over her issues.”

“Hope so. If not we’ll be researching schools. I wasn’t kidding. If her attitude impacts Grace’s ability to be happy and comfortable at her school, I will find somewhere else for her to learn.”

“Let’s hope it doesn’t come to that, but you know I’ll support that decision if you have to make it.” Steve felt Danny’s fingers tangle with his between their seats.
“I know.”

Chapter End Notes

We all knew it was a matter of time before someone got nasty with them. Hope you enjoyed it anyway. Comments are greatly appreciated.
Pulling up to the house, Steve was surprised to only find Cath’s car next to his truck before remembering that Chin and Kono had said that they were going to pop into the office for at least part of the day and start bringing the Five-0 headquarters back to life. With Grace’s planned return to school, the task force needed to start getting back into the swing of things before the criminals of Hawaii decided to start getting brave.

Once inside, Danny and Steve headed toward the kitchen, finding Beth stirring something on the stove.

“How’d the meeting go?” She turned to look at the pair, her smile fading as she took in their expressions. “Want to tell me what happened? Grace is out back getting some extra practice in with Cath. I wanted to get lunch together so we could eat before painting and still be done in time to go get Paul.”

“Speaking of, who is making the airport run?” Steve asked. “I’m happy to go if you guys don’t feel like it.” His tone sounded less confident with that idea than he intended.

“I think Ma and I can handle it. I don’t think trapping you in a car with my father as soon as he gets off the plane is the smartest idea.” Danny and Beth both laughed until they realized that Steve’s expression was a mix of kicked puppy and worry. “Babe, I’m not trying to keep you away from him. Dad adores you, but you’ve met him. You know he talks more than I do, and he’s spent all day traveling alone, so he’s going to have a backlog of words to use up.”

“True,” Steve admitted.

“Plus, he should have a fair bit of luggage, so we’ll need to go in to get him, and I really don’t want to drag Grace through the airport.”

“I’m sure I can keep her occupied while you’re gone. Maybe we’ll go for a swim.”

“Speaking of Grace. Why don’t you go find her and Catherine and let them know that lunch is ready?” Beth started filling bowls with the homemade chicken and dumplings she’d thrown together.

“Sure thing.” Steve ducked toward the door before Danny could move. Pausing just outside the house, he watched as Grace defended herself as Cath tried to grab her.

“Good hit!” The Naval officer encouraged as Grace landed an elbow to her ribs. Steve waited until Gracie broke completely free before coming away from the house.

“Daddy! Did you see?” She ran toward him, jumping into his outstretched arms.

“I did, Gracie. You’re getting very good.” He smiled as she kissed his cheek. “Grandma sent me to get you two for lunch, and it smelled really good.”

Cath grabbed the two water bottles from the ground before joining them. “I could definitely eat. Grace gave me a run for my money today. Are we finishing the painting after lunch? Beth said Danny was a mess by the time the first coat was up.”
“You wouldn’t believe it. I’m not sure which had more paint on it, him or the walls.” Steve laughed as they headed toward the dining room.

“I heard that!” Danny yelled. “I did not have that much paint on me.” He defended as they sat down at the table. “It’s not my fault that Super SEAL here has some paint deflecting coating.”

“Paint deflecting coating?” Steve shook his head as he laughed at his partner. “Seriously? Just because I’m a neat painter you think I have some special coating covering my body and clothes?”

“Too bad you don’t,” Cath laughed. “You could make a fortune selling something like that.”

“Fine. If you don’t like my method of painting, you can do the second coat without me.” Danny griped at them as they all settled in to eat.

“Aww, come on Danno. Don’t get mad.” Steve wrapped his hand around Danny’s.

“I’m not mad.” Danny really wasn’t. He knew he was a mess when painting and rarely sought out opportunities to do it. He’d offered to help because he didn’t want to dump all the work on Steve. “I’ll play DJ while you paint.”

“I’m happy to help. I’ve had a fair bit of practice painting without making a mess.” Cath offered.

The five settled into their lunch. While everyone was anxious to get back to the painting so they wouldn’t be late to pick up Paul, the guys did manage to hand over the school assignments and explain the time line to complete them.

“We made sure the school has all of our contact numbers, so if anything happens and you need to reach us you will be able to, okay?” Danny assured Grace. His mother gave him a look that told him she knew something was up, but she kept her mouth shut. Danny knew that meant he’d get grilled as soon as they were in the car to the airport.

“Why don’t we see if we can knock a worksheet or two out before we go swimming while your dad and grandma are gone?” Steve suggested. “There’s bound to be something in there that Cath and I can help you with.”

Danny rolled his eyes. “Likely not anything about field stripping firearms or how to build a grenade from materials sitting around the average fourth grade classroom, but given that you graduated from Annapolis and were in military intelligence, I’m willing to bet you can conquer elementary school homework.”

“I can’t decide if that was intended as an insult or if there was a compliment buried somewhere in there.” Steve shook his head before standing with his empty dishes. “Either way, I believe there are walls to be painted.”

Everyone else took the cue and gathered up their things to get started.

“Why don’t I wash these up real quick while you four get started?” Danny offered. If he wasn’t going to paint the least he could do was clean up from lunch.

Steve reached down to give his partner a quick kiss. “We’ll see you in a bit.”

Less than an hour later, the painting crew was putting the finishing touches on the bedroom walls. “Danno?” Grace looked at her father from where she stood by Steve. “How did you manage to get paint on you without touching a paint brush?”
“What?” He twisted around to look at the spot she was staring at. “What the … how the …” He sputtered as everyone else laughed. “That’s right. Laugh at the paint magnet.”

“That’s pretty impressive.” Cath laughed as she set her roller down. “Three of us paint four walls with barely a drop on us, and you manage to get a big streak by just being in the room.”

“It’s a gift.” He grumbled.

Steve laughed as he approached to set his roller down. While Danny wasn’t watching, he winked at Grace, grabbed the brush he’d used earlier, and swiped a long streak of pain across Danny’s shoulders and back.

“You did not …” The detective whirled around to face him, grabbing at the discarded roller. Danny stepped closer to Steve, surprised when the SEAL didn’t back away.

“Bring it.” Steve challenged. He saw the three ladies all grabbing paint brushes and rollers, and knew it was a very good thing they’d covered the entire floor with painting clothes.

Danny took one more step forward before running the roller from Steve’s waist up the gray tank top all the way to his neck. “It’s a good color for you, babe.” Danny jumped at the feel of cold, wet paint on his neck. “Hey!” He shrieked, spinning around to find Grace standing with an innocent expression and a paint brush.

“Hi Danno.” She squeaked as he lunged at her with the roller.

Five minutes later, the five were sprawled around the floor laughing so hard they were crying, and not a single one of them remained paint free. Their laughter was so loud they didn’t hear the sound of footsteps approaching, so the sudden appearance of Kono popping around the door, phone in hand, snapping pictures like a madwoman startled them all.

“Seriously? We leave you guys alone for less than a full day and this is what happens? Chin shook his head, trying not to laugh too hard at the sight they made.

“Hey! We got the painting done.” Steve defended, the paint streak across his nose and cheek making it impossible for Chin and Kono not to laugh at him.

“Looks like the room isn’t the only thing that got painted. Aren’t you guys supposed to be picking up Paul soon?”

“I suppose we should get cleaned up.” Danny pried himself off the floor. “You guys sticking around?”

“Thought we might if we won’t be in the way.” Kono answered.

“Hope you brought your suits. We’re going to see if we can find our way around a couple of Grace’s make up assignments, then we’re going swimming while Danny and Beth get Paul.” Steve replied.

“Silly boss. I always have my suit.” Kono snickered at him. “Never know when you might need to jump in the water.”

“I’d blame that on you,” Danny pointed to Steve, “but I’m pretty sure she was hatched in the same undersea fishery as you.” He turned around to face Chin. “I’m leaving you in charge of supervising the fish while we’re gone.”

“Got it, brah.” Chin chuckled at him. “First, I might suggest you all go rinse off. Otherwise, both the
Camaro and Grace’s homework will be an interesting shade of sea green.”

“Homework’s on the dining room table. You two want to find a couple likely suspects in there that we won’t screw up?” Steve winked at Chin and Kono as he followed Danny toward their bedroom to clean up.

“You got it.” Kono answered.

Shutting their bedroom door behind him, Steve tried not to laugh at Danny’s paint streaked clothes.

“You better hope this washes out of my hair.” The detective griped at him. “I can’t believe you maniacs actually got paint in my hair.”

“It was only a little bit, Danno.” Steve countered.

“Don’t Danno me! Only a little bit? I don’t think the amount matters. If I end up with green hair because of you I will take away all of your guns.” Danny fussed as he stormed into the bathroom.

Steve wisely stayed out of arms reach as Danny turned the shower on, checking to make sure the temperature was adjusted correctly. “Would you like me to assist in getting it out? I’ll be able to see it better than you.”

“Yes, Steven. You may assist in getting the green paint out of my hair, but the threat still stands. And no trying any funny business in the shower, we need to leave for the airport soon and I will not be late to pick up my father because of you.”

“Yes, sir.” The SEAL gave him a sharp salute before stepping into the shower. “If you’re in such a rush, what are you still doing out there?”

“Neanderthal.” Danny groused as he stepped into the shower, letting Steve pull the curtain closed behind him.

“It looks like we’re drowning a sea monster.” Steve laughed as the water spray hit the two of them, creating a stream of diluted sea green.

“You know, it felt good to see her laugh like that.” Danny admitted as Steve reached passed him to grab the shampoo. “I know she’s adjusting well, but that was the most carefree I’ve seen her since it happened.”

“I know. I think we all needed that.” The SEAL massaged the shampoo into his partner’s hair. “It felt good to just laugh and be ridiculous for a while.”

“I guess if my hair turns green, I’ll just have to suck it up if it’s the cost of making Monkey laugh.”

“Pretty sure your hair isn’t actually going to turn green.” Steve continued to work his fingers through the lather, determined to prove he was right. “It’s latex paint, so it should wash out just fine.”

It took two rounds of shampoo, but Steve was able to remove every hint of paint from Danny’s blond locks. He checked meticulously before declaring the all the clear. Unsurprisingly, Steve’s hair had remained paint free, though that may have been the only part of him that did.

By the time they’d finished cleaning up, Danny was rushing around to make himself presentable to get his father.

“Pretty sure he knows what you look like already, Danno. He’s not going to expect you to show up
“I know, but I don’t particularly want to look like some little punk off the streets of Jersey either.” Danny threw on jeans and a polo shirt. Giving Steve a quick kiss before the taller man could even get dressed, he ran out the door.

Staring at the bedroom door, Steve shook his head. He wasn’t sure if it was just excitement to see his father again, knowing he was staying this time, or if perhaps Danny was a bit nervous about their reunion. Whatever it was, Danny’s anxiousness had bled over onto Steve and he was left staring at his clothes wondering what would be appropriate for his own first reunion with the man that had all but adopted him into his family, and was now the father of his partner and lover.

“Shit.” Steve stared at his clothes for a solid five minutes before remembering he’d promised to take Grace swimming after they did some homework. Grabbing his nicest swim trunks and a t-shirt, he donned them quickly before heading out to find the others.

Chapter End Notes

This had to happen because there was no way that painting wasn’t going to get really messy with this bunch.
“Daniel, if you don’t stop fidgeting I’m going to tie you to your chair.” Beth threatened from the seat beside him. “His plane landed a little bit ago, so I’m sure he’ll be out here any minute.”

“Sorry.” Danny squirmed in his chair.

Instead of finding rope to follow through with her threat, Beth wrapped her hand around his forearm. “Why in the world you are you nervous about your father getting here?”

“Gee, I don’t know. Maybe because the last time I spoke with him was before I left to come home, and I’m pretty sure the idea that I was in love with my very male partner hadn’t come up. Now we’re picking him up from the airport so he can come back to the home I am now sharing with that same partner. Now only sharing the house, but sharing his bedroom.” Danny started rambling.

“Daniel.” Beth spoke slowly. “Snap out of it. I sure as hell hope you weren’t this keyed up with Steven or he’ll be an absolute basket case by the time we get back.” She leveled a glare at him, his guilty expression making her sigh. “Well, we’ll deal with that later. In the meantime, calm down. Do you honestly think that this thing between you and Steve was something I figured out on the plane over here? Remember what I said before, your father and I just want you to be happy. We both adore Steve and we both just want to see you happy.”

Staring at his mother, Danny took a few deep breaths. He wasn’t sure why he was so worked up about this. He knew his mom had been talking to his dad on a regular basis since her arrival. Dad knew everything there was to know already, and he’d always had a soft spot for McGarrett. He guessed a part of him just wanted to show his dad that he wasn’t an epic failure in the family department. His parents were such a great example growing up, and yet he’d completely botched his marriage with Rachel. They’d done nothing but support him, but a small part of him always felt like that would be a failure in his father’s eyes.

“Well, some greeting I get.” A loud voice interrupted his thoughts, making Danny and his mom both jump from their chairs.

Beth launched herself into her husband’s arms before Danny could take another step forward. He smiled at his dad when the older Williams looked up at him over his mom’s shoulder. “It’s good to see you again, son.” When his wife finally released him, Paul stepped forward to embrace his son. “You sure you’re ready for your folks to invade and cramp your style?”

“Not a whole lot of wild parties going on in my life for the last few years, so I’m not sure there’s much style for you to cramp.”

“Well, let’s grab my bags. I assume it’s just the two of you here to fetch me, and there are people I’d like to see before I get any older.” Paul headed toward the baggage carousel. “How is Grace doing? Your ma’s been filling me in when we talk, but I know you’re closer to that girl that anyone, so I
“Better than I ever expected. Steve’s helped a lot with that. Those two have always had an uncanny bond, but this experience seems to have magnified it. He gets it on a level I don’t think I can, but I’m glad she has him.”

The carousel hadn’t started turning yet, so Paul turned to face his son. “I’m glad you both have him. You look like you expect me to have some issue with it, but son I don’t. Steve is like another son to me, and if some day you two decide to make it legal, I’ll gladly welcome him into the fold officially. He’s good for you. It’d take a blind man to miss that even just via Skype. The pair of you make all the sense in the world to anyone that cares a lick about either of you.”

Danny stared at his father, not sure what to say to that. It’s not that he and his dad didn’t have a good relationship. The Williams clan didn’t believe in holding things in, but for him to come right out with it before they’d even made it to the car was surprising.

“Told you so.” Beth elbowed him in the side before turning to Paul. “Your eldest had himself in quite the tizzy before you arrived. I didn’t see Steve right before we left, but I’d imagine Danny got him all nervous too.” She gave him a meaningful look. The two parents had spent more than enough time discussing Steve both before Beth came to Hawaii and after. She really hoped that having Paul here would help mend another piece of Steve’s battered soul, giving him a father figure that would embrace him whereas John had only judged Steve.

“Well at least you had the good sense to leave Grace with him so he didn’t sit at home and start freaking out while you two came to get me.” Paul laughed.

“You underestimate his ability to multi-task.” Danny’s head shook. The conveyor started moving before anything else could be said on the topic. “Which bags did you bring?”

“The two big blue ones and another big black one. Thought your mom might like a few new outfits until all our stuff gets here. They all have the bright green straps around them.”

“Nice. Those will definitely help as blue and black are not exactly the most distinct colors for luggage.”

“It’s what we had. Didn’t see the point in splurging for new suitcases to move.” Paul smirked. “There’s one now.”

Within a few minutes, all three bags were collected and the trio headed back out to the parking garage.

“Good thing we brought the truck.” Beth laughed. “Otherwise one of you might have been riding home on top of the car.”

“It’d be a shame to have to strap our son to the hood of his car. Pretty sure Camaros aren’t made for that type of abuse.” Paul followed Danny toward Steve’s truck.

“You’d be surprised.” Danny pulled the tailgate down and heaved one suitcase into the bed of the truck.

“Be surprised about what?” Paul asked as he lifted the next one.

“Nothing.” Danny backpedaled realizing what he’d said.

“And you think I believe that? Try again, son.” Paul pushed as Danny put the last back in the truck.
and slammed the tailgate closed.

“It was worth a try.” Danny climbed into the driver’s seat, silently cursing his big mouth.

“Oh come on, Daniel. Spill. Sounds like there was a story there.” Beth pushed from the backseat.

“I happen to have firsthand knowledge that Camaro hoods are more than capable for supporting the weight of an adult male while navigating the streets of Honolulu.” He admitted, carefully watching his mirrors as he backed the truck out of the parking space. “Didn’t even leave a scratch.”

“I thought you said Steve was the one that did all the crazy stuff?” Paul questioned. “That sounded very much like an admission that you strapped someone to the hood of your car.”

Danny sighed. “Fine. I was attempting to get information from someone while we were investigating Meka’s murder. He wasn’t being overly cooperative.”

Both parents laughed. They’d heard enough stories to know that their son and his team had to go to unusual lengths sometimes, and they both knew Meka has been Danny’s only real friend on the island before Five-0.

“Well, I hope it worked.” Beth grinned at him.

“It did.” The detective decided it was time to change the conversational direction, not ready to divulge any more of his more daring stunts at the moment. “So Dad, are you sure you’re ready to trade New Jersey winters for sun and sand?”

Paul’s eyes were focused on the scenery around them as his son drove. “I think so. I’m not as young as I used to be, and shoveling all that snow last winter took more effort than it should have.”

“That is one advantage here. Aside from building sandcastles with Grace, you shouldn’t have much shoveling to do.” Danny admitted. Even he didn’t really miss clearing massive piles of snow to be able to get out of his house.

“It’ll be nice having family around again. I know I’ve only met most of them once, and some not at all, but your ma tells me you’ve found yourself a home among good people here. Hopefully they don’t get tired of having the parents around.”

“I think as long as ma offers to cook every once in a while you two should be safe.” Danny laughed. “Seriously though, we don’t always like to admit it, but we’re a pretty mangled bunch sometimes. I don’t think anyone is going to complain about having the two of you around to make life feel a little more normal.” He glanced at his father, saw the understanding in his eyes.

“How is Steve doing?”

“He has his good days, and he has his bad days. I think we’re getting through to him though.” He paused for a while. “It’s just hard to watch him take everything on his shoulders, always expecting the rest of us to be disappointed in him when he can’t fix everything.” Paul gave him a knowing look. “Even I am not as bad as Super SEAL. I operate with a full understanding of my limitations as a human-being. He forgets those little details sometimes. I think he drank a little too much of the Kool-Aid the Navy was serving up.”

“Well, maybe he’ll start realizing he has more to live for these days.” Paul smiled at the idea.

“Either that or he’ll decide he has more reason to sacrifice himself.” Danny mumbled under his breath. He had to admit he understood a bit more of Rachel’s fears while married to him now. He
would have done anything to protect his family, including dying for them. Until Steve, he’d never really had someone that he was certain would do the same for him and Grace. The idea was both terrifying and comforting. He really hoped a situation never arose that required testing that theory.

The rest of the ride was filled with idle chatter about the new house they were buying, Grace and Beth’s defense lessons, and anything else Paul wasn’t already current on. Everyone steered away from the heavier topics, not wanting to arrive at the house with too solemn of a mood hanging over them.

As Danny pulled the truck into its spot, Paul laughed. “It’s nice to come home to driveway full of cars. Means you’re surrounded by people that love you.”

“We can grab the bags later unless there’s something you need immediately.” Danny suggested.

“Nope. Right now I just want to find my granddaughter.”

“Grandpa!” The shout reached him before he could even turn for the house. Grace came barreling down the walkway, arms flung wide until she almost crashed into Paul. “You made it!”

“Of course I did. I swear you’ve grown six inches since I saw you last. You’ll be taller than all of us before we know it.” Paul squeezed her tight.

“Not taller than Daddy.” Grace corrected.

“Speaking of your daddy, where is he?” Paul asked.

“In the kitchen getting dinner ready.” She pulled his hand, leading him toward the house.

“Well why don’t I go see if he needs a hand with that?” Mr. Williams followed his granddaughter.

Danny turned to his mother. “Please tell me he’s not going to interrogate Steve over the grill.”

“I seriously doubt it. Just relax and let him talk to Steve. He’s met your father before, and held up just fine.” Beth tried not to laugh at her son’s obvious concern regarding his father and partner being left together. “Come on. Let’s go find the others.”

“Look who I found, Daddy.” Grace led Paul into the kitchen. “I’m going to go back so Kono can finish braiding my hair.”

“Okay, Gracie.” Steve smiled fondly after the girl as she scampered from the room before extending a hand to Danny’s father. “Welcome back to Hawaii, sir.”

“Son, tell me you didn’t just call me sir.” Paul stared up at the taller man.

“No sir. I mean yes, sir. Shit! I’m sorry, Mr. Williams.”

“Steven, take a deep breath. We’ve been over this before. Either call me dad or Paul. None of this sir or Mr. Williams bullshit. Now how about you grab us a couple of beers and I’ll haul these rather tasty looking chops out to the grill.” Paul reached for the platter before Steve could argue.

“Yes … Sure thing, Paul.” Steve felt like a complete bumbling idiot. He hadn’t been this nervous around anyone’s parents before, even when picking up his first date during high school. Following Danny’s dad out the door, he hoped this improved quickly before Paul decided he was a complete loss.

Once the pork chops were on the grill, the two men stood facing the water.
“Relax son, I’m not going to demand to know your intentions with Daniel. It seems pretty obvious. They’re already living with you, and it isn’t hard to see you love them both every bit as much as they love you. I didn’t come here to make you nervous. All I’ve heard from Beth since she got out here is how this is home now. How this is where we have the best chance of being surrounded by a big family again. I miss that. We both do. Family means everything to the both of us, and you are family Steve. You’ve been family since you hijacked Danny for your task force and gave him back a big chunk of his self-respect and motivation to really live.”

Paul fell silent for a moment, letting Steve process his words.

“I know this thing between the two of you is pretty new to both of you, but the rest of us have been expecting it. You make him happy, Grace adores you, and I know you’d do anything to make sure they both know they are loved and protected. I can’t ask for more than that for the pair of them.” He clapped his hand on Steve’s shoulder. “Honestly, I’m glad it’s you. Rachel and I never got on well. She was always too pretentious for my taste. It’s a nice change to have Danny with someone that I actually like.”

“That means a lot.” Steve finally spoke. “I know it may sound strange, but I think having you and Mom here means almost as much to me as it does to Danny. I’d almost forgot what it really felt like to be part of a family.” The SEAL was surprised with his own words, knowing it wasn’t an admission he made easily. “I’m glad to be a part of it.”

The two fell silent, drinking their beers as they looked out over the ocean. Both men were content to be right where they were.

Chapter End Notes

I’ll admit, nervous Steve cracked me up. He’s so adorable when he’s flustered.
Chapter Notes

So first, an update on the expected end of Guardian and what comes next because I’ve had a few reviews mention it. The next chapter will wrap up Monday night. My plan is to run Guardian through the day after the interview airs which gives us 8 more days.

For those of you in the camp that doesn’t want the story to end, I have good news. There are currently 37 different things lurking in my Guardian: Ohana Forever file. Some of these are short notes on a time stamp that I want to write. Others are already the length of a normal Guardian chapter. Some will be single chapter affairs. Others will cross multiple chapters. The point being, as long as you guys are enjoying the story, I will probably be popping up with new things to add to the Guardian-verse for quite some time.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“Daniel, you are going to cut your finger off if you don’t stop trying to see what they are doing out there while you’re cutting tomatoes.” Beth chided her son. “You weren’t this nervous last time they were manning the grill together.”

“And last time I wasn’t sleeping with one of them.” Danny snapped before realizing what he’d just said and turning an amusing shade of red. “Can we forget I just said that, please?”

“I’m pretty sure I’m aware of the fact that you have sex. You do, after all, have a lovely daughter in the other room. Just because now it’s happening with someone that I would have easily gone for in my younger days, doesn’t mean I’m not aware that it’s happening.” Beth laughed as her son turned a darker shade of red, sputtering as he tried to find something to say.

“I can’t be having this conversation. I still haven’t recovered from what you said on Saturday.” Danny slumped over the island, his head resting on the cool wood surface.

“Why are children always convinced their parents should be prudes? Would you rather I pretend you don’t have sex or perhaps throw a fit about the idea?” Beth arched a brow at him. “It’ll take some acting on my part, but I’ve spent enough time around you and your father that I could probably muster a good rant.”

This made Danny look up at last, cracking a smile at his mother’s teasing. “No. I’d rather just not have this conversation, but when it comes to loud disapproval I have a sinking feeling that should Doris ever show back up we’ll get more than enough from her.”

“What makes you say that?” Beth resumed chopping the vegetables that her son was neglecting.

“She’s not exactly the warm fuzzy type to begin with, and from what I’ve seen she’s pretty hard core about a lot of things. She has this vision of the perfect son that she expects Steve to be. She wasn’t happy that he’d given up his active duty military career to run Five-0 because in her opinion it was less prestigious and important. I can only imagine how she’ll react when she finds out he traded in Catherine for me.”
“Did I hear my name?” Cath waltzed into the room. “Thought I’d come see if you two needed a hand since Grace has Chin and Kono helping her with another worksheet. Pretty sure that kid is going to be done with that entire packet of makeup work in no time.”

“That’s good. And yes, you heard your name, but we weren’t really talking about you.” Danny answered. Cath cocked her head, a silent plea for further explanation. “Just discussing the explosion I expect to occur should everyone’s favorite spy decide to return to the island.”

“Aahhh, I see.” Cath picked up a knife and started slicing carrots. “And I can venture a guess that you assume since she wasn’t overly fond of me when she wrongly assumed Steve and I were dating that she’ll be even less fond of you.”

“Do you think I’m wrong?” He asked.

“No. Personally I think if she never showed her face again that would be fine with all of us. She’s just going to hurt him worse if she comes back now.” Cath wielded the knife with more force than necessary, her frustration at the idea showing.

“And then we’ll be left to pick up the pieces when she vanishes again.” Danny grumbled.

“Something tells me I’m going to have a hard time keeping my mouth shut if she ever graces us with her presence.” Beth could see from the other two that their concerns were very real and well-founded. Biological mother or not, she loathed the idea of Doris coming back and hurting Steve.

“Hm. Mama Bear versus Mama Spy. That should be fun to watch.” Danny smiled.

“My money is on Mama Bear.” Cath chuckled.

Danny made himself useful getting plates and silverware to set the table since the two women now had the salad well in hand. By the time he had all the place settings arranged, he heard the door to the lanai opening and his dad and Steve’s voices carrying through the house.

“I’ve always wanted to try spearfishing. With my luck I’ll miss all the fish, but it still sounds fun.” Paul set the platter of chops down on the table.

“Well if you really want to learn from the master, Chin is actually the one to teach you.” Steve replied as everyone filed into the dining room.

“What am I teaching?” Chin asked.

“Spearfishing.” Paul answered.

“Don’t let McGarrett fool you, he’s more than capable, but I’d love to take you out sometime if you’d like.” The Hawaiian smiled. “By the way, it’s great to see you again.”

“You too.” Paul realized he had disappeared outside with Steve as soon as he’d arrived and hadn’t greeted the others. “Kono, I hope you’re still keeping all these boys in line.”

“Doing my best with that one.” She grinned at him.

“And you must be Catherine. I’ve heard great things about you from Beth and Grace.” Paul smiled warmly at her.

“I am, and the same goes for you. We’re all delighted you finally made it.” Cath returned the greeting.
“Why don’t we dig in before the meat gets cold? Plenty of time to chat after plates are filled.” Beth interrupted.

“Yes, Mom.” Came the chorus of replies from the entire Five-0 team and Catherine, making everyone giggle a bit.

“I see you have them well trained already.” Paul grinned before taking his first bite of pork.

“Mmmmm. I need this recipe, Steve. This is delicious.”

Mouth still fool of food, McGarrett gave him a crooked grin and nodded at the request.

“I thought I might try to find some sort of cooking class to help me learn more recipes with the various fresh ingredients I can get here that I’m not used to.” Beth mentioned between bites. “I’ve picked up a few things already from you guys, but I’d love to know more.”

“If you want to learn the art of cooking in Hawaii, I have just the aunt for that.” Chin grinned.

“Almost. Granted, some of them still aren’t on the best of terms with us, but more of them seem to be coming around all the time.” Chin shrugged. Sometimes he was reluctant to forgive their changing opinions, but he kept reminding himself that family mattered.

“Well, if you’re on good terms with this one I’d love to meet her as long as you don’t think I’ll be an imposition.” Beth found herself excited about the prospect.

“Her husband is your Realtor, so I’m pretty sure the introductions will be easy enough.” Chin grinned.

The remainder of dinner passed with the ebb and flow of conversation. Paul found himself quickly settling in among the rest of the ohana, and couldn’t argue with Beth’s assessment that it was time for them to be here.

When everyone had finished up, Steve moved to started collecting dishes. Danny and Grace jumped up to help him, gesturing for the others to relax.

Steve started washing while the other two grabbed the last few things from the dining room, then they both grabbed towels to dry.

“How’s your homework coming, Monkey?” Danny asked.

“Good. Daddy helped me with two of the science worksheets before we swam, and Uncle Chin and Aunt Kono helped me with a history one before dinner. They all decided Grandma was going to have to do the language arts one.”

“I’m pretty sure I knew what all those things were once upon a time, but I’d need a crash course to remember the official definitions for the terms on those sheets.” Steve laughed.

“I’m supposed to write a short story too. The assignment says I can pick any topic I want.” The men laughed as the excited look in her eyes when she said that.

“Sounds like you are going to have fun with that one.” Danny laughed as he put a stack of plates back in the cabinet.

“I might.” Grace giggled.
“Speaking of stories, are we ready to start the second Harry Potter book tonight?” Steve asked.

“Yep.” The little girl bounced across the room to put up a handful of forks.

“Did I hear something about the second Harry Potter book?” Kono hollered from the dining room.

“We’re starting it tonight.” Grace stood in the door between the two rooms to answer. “You wanna read it with us?”

“Can I?” Kono asked. “I loved that one.”

Drying his hands, Steve walked over to where his daughter stood. “Well if everyone wants to join why don’t we read down here tonight?”

“I’ll go take my shower so we can get started.” Grace was out of the room before anyone could argue.

“Guess it’s a good thing I’m up on my Potter books.” Paul laughed.

“Wait, you’ve read Harry Potter?” Danny asked his father.

“Yes. You haven’t?” Mr. Williams looked at his son like he was crazy. “I thought everyone had read them.”

Apparently we’re behind.” Danny leaned against Steve’s chest where he was leaned against the wall.

“You must be. Even Chin has read them.” Kono laughed.

“Seriously?” Danny looked at the Hawaiian man.

“Yep, brah. All the kids in the family were obsessed with them a while back, and most of the adults ended up reading them too. They’re actually really good books.”

“You know, there are enough of us I bet we could have some serious fun with Harry Potter at Halloween.” Steve looked startled as he announced this.

“Oh, boss! You are so on to something with that! Cath you must find a way to be here for it!” She elbowed the Naval officer beside her.

“I get to be Dumbledore.” Paul staked his claim.

“I’ll take Professor McGonagall.” Beth laughed.

“I feel like I need to find a costume shop and reserve every Harry Potter character costume they have until we figure out all the rest.” Steve laughed excitedly. “Although we should probably make sure Grace thinks this is a good idea before we get too carried away. Maybe we can have a party here. Invite some of Grace’s friends and ours. Everybody has to pick a unique character from the book.”

“I have no doubt she’s going to think this is one of your greatest ideas ever. And given her insane propensity to love your crazy ideas, that’s saying something.” Danny looked up at his partner and couldn’t help the wide smile at how happy Steve looked. “I bet Max would make a good Harry. He’s short enough to pull it off.”

“Great. Now we just need to figure out someone to be Ron.” Steve wrapped his arm loosely around Danny, both of them oblivious to the smiles on the faces of their entire family at the casual scene of
domestic bliss they presented.

“You decide to actually do this and I can set up something online so guests can RSVP and claim their character. That way we know we really won’t get duplicates.” Chin offered.

“This is going to be the best Halloween ever!” Kono bounced in her seat. “I love it!”

“You love what?” Grace popped through the door, dressed for bed, wet hair hanging loose.

“Your dads are going to have a Harry Potter party for Halloween, and everybody has to dress up as a different character from the book.” Kono exclaimed.

“Awesome! I want to be Hermione!” Grace bounded over to wrap her arms around her dads. “Are we really going to have a party?”

“It looks that way.” Steve laughed. “Now is probably a good time to admit I have no party planning experience whatsoever.”

“Never mind that, son. I’m pretty sure we can make it happen.” Beth gave Kono a conspiratorial wink.

“I hope you know what you’ve just gotten yourself into.” Danny leaned up and whispered in Steve’s ear as everyone else continued chattering about the party that was still a good two months away.

“When I start freaking out about it, I’ll just remember that look on her face.” Steve nodded his head toward Grace where she’d joined Kono, Catherine, and Beth already in the throes of plotting the biggest party the house had ever likely witnessed. “That smile is worth it. Whatever madness it winds up being.”

Danny wrapped his arms tight around the SEAL’s waist. “I hope you realize just how much I love you right now.”

Chapter End Notes

I guess this means I’ll be adding a Halloween chapter to the future scenes involving the ohana. They’ve gone too far to stop it now. The trick will be figuring out the character assignments.

On a different topic, as referenced in my opening note, Guardian: Ohana Forever is shaping up with quite a collection of ideas. While I will not guarantee I will write everything, I do want to open up the floor for requests or ideas. Right now my notes include things that fall in a timeline between the end of Guardian and Grace leaving for college, so there is really no limit on what may come. Feel free to leave ideas in reviews or send via PM.
Stretching out on the floor with a couple of pillows and a blanket, Steve rolled onto his side as he watched his partner weave his way around the rest of the ohana toward him.

“This spot taken?” Danny toed the open section of blanket in front of Steve’s chest.

“Only by you.” The SEAL patted the space invitingly before Danny slid on the floor. Scooting himself back against his partner’s chest, Danny rested his head on one of the pillows and smiled as Steve’s long arm wrapped around his middle.

Grace was already settled on the couch between her grandparents, holding the book, and watching as the rest of the ohana settled in to their spots. Chin was stretched out in the chair, while Cath and Kono had spread a couple of blankets on the floor.

Steve smiled as he looked around the room. He imagined they made quite a picture. There were seven adults, five of them capable of all matters of dangerous things, all settled in to listen to one nine year old girl read Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets.

“Ready?” Grace asked her audience. When she got a variety of positive responses, she cracked the book open and started. The audience wasn’t exactly a quiet one. There were occasional remarks about what was happening and how hard it must have been for Harry to tolerate life with his muggle relatives.

Steve noticed a thoughtful expression on Grace’s face and wondered if perhaps she could relate a bit given everything they’d learned about her final months with Rachel and Stan. He knew now that she hadn’t felt like she belonged there. She’d felt like she was in the way. Seeing her surrounded by the people that loved her, he hoped she really did understand just how much she belonged here with them.

The SEAL’s reflections were interrupted when they reached chapter two, and Danny pushed away from his chest and sat up. “What the heck is a dobby?”

“No, what. Dobby is the character’s name.” Kono corrected. “He’s a house elf.”

“What kind of name is Dobby?” Danny asked, and was immediately perplexed by the stricken looks he received from everyone, including Grace.

“Do not disrespect Dobby. You will love him, or you will regret it.” Kono level a glare at him.

“Okay.” He held his hands up in surrender. “I know better than to argue. Grace, you haven’t seen the movies or read the books, so why do you look like you know so much.”

“Kids talk. My friends that already read the books tried not to give anything away, but it’s pretty obvious they all love Dobby. There’s gotta be a reason.” His daughter answered.

Danny turned to Steve. “Have you heard of Dobby?”

“I can neither confirm nor deny that I am aware of any exploits related to the house elf known as Dobby.” Steve propped himself up on one arm, grinning at Danny.
“I give up.” The detective pushed at Steve’s chest with his shoulder.

“Does that mean I can continue reading?” Grace asked, an air of exasperation in her voice.

“Yes, mi’lady. You may continue.” Danny gave her a half bow from his still seated position before squirming back down to rest against Steve again. “I didn’t mean to cause a fuss with my innocent question.” He grumbled the latter under his breath, but settled when his partner began gently stroking his arm.

By the time Grace finished chapter three, Paul was struggling to keep his eyes open and the others weren’t much more awake.

“Why don’t you go hit the showers, Dad? You wait any longer you won’t be able to stand up long enough to wash your hair.” Danny suggested as he climbed off the floor. “I’ll go grab your bags from the truck.”

“I’ll give you a hand.” Steve jumped up the floor, making Danny roll his eyes at how ridiculously easy he made it look. As the pair headed toward the door, the others began picking up the living room and saying their good nights.

“It’s nice having them both here, isn’t it?” Steve asked as they meandered toward the truck.

“Yeah. It is. I’ll admit, I was a little nervous when he managed to get you to himself so fast after arriving.” Danny wrapped his arm around Steve’s waist, slowing their pace even further. “I take it since you came back in plotting a spearfishing outing that he didn’t manage to scare you off.”

“Far from it, Danno. He was just making it clear that he approves, but something tells me you knew that was the case already.” Steve stopped next to the truck, turning to face his partner. “Were you really that worried about leaving me with him?”

Danny shrugged. “He likes to talk. A lot. You don’t. I wasn’t so much afraid of what he would say because, you’re right, he’d made his approval abundantly clear on the way home. I was more concerned that he’d overload you with talk of feelings and freak you out.”

Wrapping his around the back of Danny’s neck, Steve pulled him closer. Leaning close, the SEAL chuckled quietly. “I find I’m getting used to the talking thing.”

Danny stretched up, closing the short distance remaining between their lips. The kiss was brief, but welcome. “Well, hopefully having two of us jabbering at you all the time won’t prove you wrong.” This time Steve’s laugh wasn’t quiet. His head fell back and he laughed hard, a huge grin on his face. “I’m glad you find that entertaining.” Danny laughed, shaking his head as he moved to the back of the truck.

Still shaking with laughter, Steve reached around his partner, grabbing the two biggest bags before Danny could argue. “What?” He questioned when the detective gave him a challenging look.

“You know what? Never mind. You want to be the big tough guy and take the bulk of the load I’m not going to argue.” Danny grabbed the last bag and slammed the tailgate shut again.

By the time they were headed into the house Chin, Cath, and Kono were walking toward the door.

“We’ll see you guys tomorrow afternoon. Thought we might sneak in another practice session before Grace starts back to school.” Chin commented, though Steve could tell he was waiting for confirmation the plan was acceptable.
“Sounds good to me. I think Beth wanted to go over the house earlier in the day and do a walk through with us and Paul. Other than that, I think ordering Grace’s furniture is the only other exciting thing we have planned.” The SEAL answered. “Danny and I will be back in the office after we drop Grace off on Wednesday.”

“I guessed as much.” Chin nodded. “Hopefully it’ll stay quiet for a few more days.”

“That’d be nice. Though I can’t imagine we can expect it to hold for too much longer. We’ve gotten lucky enough as it is. Hopefully HPD hasn’t had to pick up too much in our absence.”

“I talked to Duke earlier. It really has been pretty quiet.”

“Come on old man, I’m tired.” Kono nudged her cousin with her elbow.

“You call me old and yet you’re the one that’s ready to crawl in bed already.” He teased, but headed out of the door. “You riding with Cath?”

“Might as well since we’re headed to the same house.” Kono yawned.

“Don’t worry, Chin. I’ll get her tucked in safely.” Cath patted him on the shoulder before pausing to get Danny and Steve both a hug. “I’m going to pop over to the ship and see how things are going in the morning. I should be back in time for practice.”

“Okay. We’ll see you tomorrow.” Tucked under Steve’s arm, Danny waved as the three headed for their cars. “Is it strange that I just assume they’re coming back each day?” He asked Steve once they were gone.

“No. I’m sure at some point they’ll skip days here and there, but right now we all want to give Grace a sense of stability. To them that means being here for some part of each day. They could pick up the phone and call to check on her, but it wouldn’t be the same.” The SEAL answered.

“And you know this because you asked?” Danny was curious how he seemed to know so much.

“No. I know this because if the situation were different I would do the same for any of them. We’ve never exactly been the phone it in kind of team. As a collective, we tend to fully commit where the welfare of one of our own is concerned.”

“You know, you’re a lot smarter than I give you credit for sometimes.” Danny laughed as they headed toward the noise in the kitchen.

“I’m just making sure everything is set for the night and the water bottles are filled for the morning.” Beth spoke from the sink, her back still facing them. “Your dad’s already in the shower, and Grace headed up to bed.” Screwing the lid back on the bottle she was filling, she popped it in before turning and spreading her arms wide, encouraging both her boys to collect their nightly hugs. “I love you two.”

“Love you too, ma.” Both men replied pulling her into a tight bear hug between them. When they finally let go, Beth led the way toward the door, Steve bringing up the rear and flipping off the lights.

“I’ll see you boys in the morning.” Beth called over her shoulder as she headed down the hall to the room she and Paul were staying in.

Danny turned to their bedroom door, but caught Steve looking toward the door where Grace was staying. He waited for a second, trying to guess exactly what this particular SEAL expression meant before deciding to take a guess. “You can go check on her, you know.”
“What?” Steve’s eyes swung to him, looking slightly startled.

“Grace. You can go check on her. Something about the way you were staring at her door tells me you want to, and I’m telling you it’s okay. I can come with you if you want, or you can tell me whatever it is you talk about later, or you can keep it between the two of you. I know this sounds crazy given how incredibly resistant I was to Stan and even sometimes Rachel keeping things from me about her, but it’s different with you. I know with every piece of me that you’ll tell me anything that I should know, but that sometimes you two are going to commiserate on things I just might not understand as well. If we are truly going to parent her together, I’ve gotta respect that bond.” Danny had closed the small gap of space between them while he spoke. Grabbing the SEAL’s hand he squeezed it before stretching up to give him a quick kiss. “Now go do whatever it is you feel compelled to do. You know where to find me when you’re done.”

Steve leaned down to return Danny’s kiss, still marveling at his partner’s words. It wasn’t that Danny hadn’t said similar things since this whole crazy ride started, but part of the SEAL had wondered if Danny would really be able to follow through with that level of trust and commitment when it came to Steve and Grace. For a father so wholly devoted to his daughter, it was a gigantic step to stand back and let someone else get that close. Not for the first time, Steve felt the weight of his new and still developing role in Grace’s life. What surprised him is that the responsibility didn’t scare him like he thought it might. Part of him just knew that this was as right as him being a SEAL. Some things were just meant to be, being Grace’s daddy was apparently one of them.

Hearing the door to the master bedroom click shut, Steve headed down the hall toward Grace’s room. Knocking gently, he heard her soft reply before pushing the door open and stepping inside.

“Hey Gracie. Mind if I come in for a minute?”

The little girl shifted over in the bed, making room for him to sit down next to her. “Come on in.” She smiled at him.

“You don’t look very surprised to see me.” Steve commented as he sat down, leaning back against the headboard.

“Nope. I saw your face while I was reading.” She replied. “That was your thinking face.” Grace giggled.

The SEAL chuckled as the little girl pulled herself up, curling under his arm much like her father had earlier in the day. “Did Danno give you a guidebook for my faces? He swears I have a bunch.”

“Didn’t need one.” Steve laughed a bit more at her response. “What’d you want to talk about?” Grace finally asked. She had her guesses already.

“The stuff with Harry at the beginning of the book, it got me thinking.” Steve started.

“Me too.” Grace admitted.

“You know how he felt living with the Dursleys, don’t you?” He asked quietly.

“I think so. It’s hard being somewhere that you don’t really fit in, and you’re pretty sure you aren’t really wanted.” Grace’s voice was barely louder than a whisper.

Steve swallowed, trying to fight the tears that threatened to come hearing her admit that. He wrapped his arm tighter around her, and wasn’t really surprised when she squirmed her way into his lap. Sitting sideway, her head resting on his shoulder, Grace looked up at her guardian Super SEAL.
“It’s different here.” Her voice broke the silence. “I fit in with you and Danno. I don’t feel like I have
to pretend to like something or act a certain way to keep from causing a fight. I’m safe here. I feel
more like me and less like a dress up doll that’s supposed to stay quiet and be cute.” She watched
Steve’s face as she talked, saw the sadness in his eyes. “That’s good, right?”

Steve swiped at his eyes, brushing away the unshed tears. “Yeah, Gracie. That’s good.”

“Then why are you crying?”

“Because I hate that you ever had to feel like you didn’t belong. I wish I had known sooner. Maybe I
could have figured out a way to bring you here more often.”

“That would have been nice, but I doubt it would have worked.” Grace sighed. She knew better than
to think Stan would have allowed it even if he didn’t really want her there. “I’m glad I’m here now.
I’m glad Grandma and Grandpa came, and that the rest of the ohana is here all the time.”

“Me too.” Steve rested his cheek on the top of her head.

“Daddy?”

“Yeah, Gracie?”

“Can I go running with you in the morning?” She sat up a bit straighter.

“Of course. I’ll come wake you up when I’m up.” Steve smiled.

The little girl shifted back onto the bed, sliding down so the SEAL could tuck her back in as he rose
from the bed. “I love you, Gracie. Get some sleep.” He kissed her forehead as he pulled the blanket
up to her shoulders.

“Love you too, Daddy.” She smiled brightly as he handed her the stuffed seal from her bed.

Slipping out of the room, Steve felt a combined sense of sadness and relief. When he stepped into his
bedroom, Danny was sitting up in bed waiting for him.

“Everything good?” The detective asked.

“Yes. It’s all good.” Steve smiled as he ducked in to brush his teeth and throw his sleep pants on.
When he slipped into bed beside Danny, the shorter man was on his side, facing the SEAL.

“I’m glad it’s all good.” Danny smiled before giving him a gentle kiss.

“We were just chatting a bit about Harry and the Dursleys …”

“And I probably don’t want to know just how much like Harry my baby girl felt, do I?” Danny
interrupted.

“Possibly not, but I will tell you if you want to know.” Steve answered.

“Just tell me she doesn’t feel like that now. Don’t lie to me, but please tell me she feels different
here,” Danny spoke, eyes pleading with the SEAL.

“And I quote, “It’s different here. I fit in with you and Danno.” There was more too, but that’s the
summary.” Steve smiled at his partner, happy to provide honest reassurance.

“Good.” Danny burrowed closer to Steve, content to fall asleep in his arms with the promise that
Grace knew she had a home where she fit in.

Chapter End Notes

For any of you that aren’t HP fans, I’m sorry. Not really, but hopefully you aren’t holding the references against me because with a 9 year old in the house (both for me and for the story) it was inevitable. Anyway, I hope you all enjoyed the doses of family bonding and the bit of Steve and Grace sweetness at the end. I don’t think I’ll ever get enough of those two.
Wrapped in the SEAL’s long arms, Danny blinked sleepily trying to figure out what had woken him. It was still full dark, the middle of the night. After a few seconds he ruled out any noise coming from Grace’s room, and started focusing on his more immediate surroundings. His first clue was the racing heart pressed hard against his back. If Steve’s heart rate went up any more it was likely to burst straight out of his chest.

Before he could try to shift to face his partner, the muscles of the SEAL’s arms began twitching and a series of unintelligible grunts and moans escaped his lips.

“Shit.” Danny murmured under his breath. This was the first time Steve was wrapped around him while having a nightmare. Unsure of what to do, the detective ghosted his fingers gently over Steve’s forearm where it was wrapped around his waist. At first he felt the muscles tensing under his touch, but after a few seconds they began to relax ever so slightly.

After a few minutes he was beginning to think the taller man had fallen back into a more peaceful sleep. Allowing himself to start drifting off again, Danny practically jumped out of his skin when Steve’s arm jerked away from him, the SEAL diving off the side of the bed. Danny barely heard Steve’s feet hit the floor, before he scrambled up keeping his back against the headboard as his eyes sought Steve in the darkness.

“Babe. You’re home. You’re safe.” Danny’s tried to keep his voice soft and reassuring as his eyes began to adjust and he made out the shape of his lover crouched beside the nightstand. He couldn’t make out Steve’s face, but he could see the rigidity of his body, coiled to spring at the slightest provocation. “Steven. Look at me.” He kept talking, hoping that a familiar voice would breakthrough to the SEAL’s nightmare ridden brain.

“Danny?” Steve’s voice shook. “Are you okay?”

The detective rolled his eyes, positive the SEAL’s night vision wasn’t so good that he’d see. “Yes. I was nice and cozy wrapped up with my personal space heater when said heater dove off the bed. Are you okay?” Danny watched as the tension in Steve’s frame relaxed and he seemed to ooze the rest of the way onto the floor. “Do you want to talk about it?”

“It was Korea again.” Darkness or not, Danny could see his partner shudder as he spoke.

“I know that one isn’t classified, so you can talk to me about it, but do you think you should call Dr. Thompson again? That’s two of those nightmares you’ve had in the last few nights.” The Jersey native scooted across the bed, letting himself slip onto the floor so he was practically on top of the SEAL’s feet.

“Yeah. I’ll call him in the morning.”

Danny thought Steve’s easy acceptance of the idea should have made him feel better, instead it worried him more. “Do you want to talk about it? I won’t force you, but I hate to see what it’s doing to you.”

“It was the same part as before. I was stuck in the chains. I had to watch as Wo Fat shot Jenna. I couldn’t save her.” Steve’s head fell forward, a quiet sob wracking his body.
Danny swung onto his knees, pulling his partner against his chest. “Ssshhh. Babe, you know there is nothing you could have done. Jenna made her choice. She was a smart woman. She knew the risks of what she was doing.”

“I know.” Steve answered, but Danny knew from his voice that he didn’t want to accept that.

“You may know it, but that doesn’t mean you want to accept it. If there is one thing I know about you, babe, it is that you do not ever allow yourself the option of not saving the people you care about.” Danny held him close, trying to keep his voice quiet as he spoke against Steve’s short hair. “You can’t save everybody. Nobody expects you to.”

“But …”

“No. No buts. Super SEAL or not you are only one man and you are still human no matter what you might sometimes trick us into believing.” Danny relaxed slightly when he realized the shaking of Steve’s shoulders was a weak laugh this time and not another sob. “Really? You find that amusing.”

“What is it you think I am when I’m supposedly tricking you into thinking I’m not human?”

“I don’t know. Maybe they had a little bit more of that serum shit they used on Captain America lying around so they used it on you. It would explain a lot of things actually. Though I’d think you’d have faster healing times if that were the case, and I’m pretty sure you still heal at approximately the same rate as us mere mortals even if you refuse to allow yourself enough time to actually recover properly.”

“I wish.”

“Of course you do, because being your bad ass self isn’t enough for you. You want to join the fucking Avengers.”

“Nah. Pretty sure we’ve got our own little crew of super heroes here. But I could really mess with the criminal element of Hawaii if I had that stuff.” Steve finally looked up, grinning at Danny.

“Nope. I can barely keep up with you as it is. I do not need you becoming some ultra-enhanced super soldier.” Danny kissed his forehead before falling back onto his heels. “What do you say we make use of the bed that’s sitting here so nice and empty? I know you’re used to all kinds of hideously uncomfortable sleeping positions, but my knee will not thank me in the morning if I stay like this much longer.”

The SEAL nodded and made to push himself off the floor, pulling Danny with him.

“I’m sorry I woke you up. I could always go crash on the couch.” Steve offered, though he didn’t do a very good job of hiding just how much he didn’t want to do that.

“Not happening. I want you where I can keep an eye on you. We’ve been over this already. Your nightmares and cargo ship full of baggage are not news to me. We are not picking and choosing which parts of each other we want to deal with, and you should know better than to suggest such things.”

“Not suggesting you are trying to get rid of me or can’t deal with my issues. Just thought you might sleep better if you don’t have me freaking out in my sleep every time you turn around.” Steve countered.

“Nope. You are staying in here. There will be no argument. Yes. I might lose a bit of sleep every now and then when you have a nightmare, but if you try to sleep on the couch I’ll lie up here awake
the whole damned night listening in case you so much as twitch in your sleep. At least when you’re sleeping wrapped around me I know I’ll be alerted if you need me.”

Settling back into bed, Danny was on his back, Steve curled around him, head resting on the blond’s chest. “You do make a nice pillow.” Steve murmured sleepily, this edginess abating now that he was back in bed with Danny.

“I’m glad you think so. Now go back to sleep. I don’t know what time it is, and I don’t want to know, but it is still the middle of the night. If you’re going to run in the morning you need your beauty sleep first.”

“No if. Gracie wants to run with me.” Steve answered sleepily.

“Then get some sleep so she isn’t running circles around you.” Danny wrapped his arm around Steve’s shoulder, content to know that while they hadn’t talked a lot, Steve had opened up to him a bit about the nightmare and promised to call Dr. Thompson. He would count that as a win.

Several hours later, the SEAL woke still curled around his partner. He remembered the nightmare of the night before all too well, but he also recalled their conversation and Danny’s reassurances. Shifting his head, Steve looked up at Danny’s sleeping form. His face was calm and breathing even. Carefully extricating himself from the shorter man’s arm, Steve leaned over to place a gentle kiss over Danny’s heart before slipping from the bed.

By the time he was dressed and ready to leave, Danny had curled toward the center of the bed. Steve paused to make sure he was still asleep, and smiled when he heard the soft snore. Easing the door open and closed with as little noise as possible, the SEAL tried to cross the hall silently to avoid waking up the parents.

His efforts were for naught, as their bedroom door popped open and Paul’s figure emerged. Mr. Williams saw Steve and paused after closing the bedroom door. “Beth may be adjusted to Hawaiian time, but I’m not yet. I’ve been awake for at least two hours.”

“And you were still in there?” Steve questioned. He was never one to be able to stay still in bed when he couldn’t sleep.

“Didn’t particularly want to get shot if I woke anyone else up prowling around the house.” Paul winked at him. “Anyway, seemed a bit rude to be rummaging around the house on my own.”

The SEAL shook his head. “Not rude. You’re family and until your new house is ready, you’re living here. Make yourself at home. The worst I’ll do is spook you if I come to investigate the noise. I’m pretty good at assessing targets and only shooting the bad guys.” Both men chuckled at this assertion. Paul froze when the door to Grace’s room popped open, but Steve just smiled wider.

“I thought you were going to come get me?” The little girl questioned, already dressed for their run.

“I was on the way when I ran into your grandpa.” Steve nodded his head in Paul’s direction. Realizing they were going to wake Beth or Danny up if they stood around in the hallway talking, Steve motioned for them to head down the stairs. When they reached the kitchen, Grace started grabbing water bottles before disappearing to grab towels. She’d only asked about running, but she was pretty sure Steve would let her swim too.

“Beth said you were letting Grace run with you. Looks like she’s enjoying it.” Paul smiled. “I have to say, I’m impressed with how you’re encouraging them both to do new things.” Steve quirked an eyebrow at his statement. “I never realized that she wanted to learn self-defense. I should have
thought about it and encouraged it. Same with her swimming. She used to love doing that, but with the kids she stayed so busy. It’s just nice to see her settling in so well here already.”

The SEAL nodded. “I just want you guys to feel at home here. To feel like part of the family.” He spoke as Grace returned with their towels. “I take it you’re swimming too.”

“If it’s okay with you,” Grace answered a little sheepishly.

“Always.” Steve pulled her into a hug, kissing the top of her head. He didn’t miss the affectionate expression on Paul’s face.

“I think I’m going to get the coffee started while you two go get sweaty.” He moved toward the machine and started getting things ready, clearly comfortable with how to work it.

“Make yourself at home. I recommend coffee on the beach or the lanai if you are so inclined. We’ll be back and in the water in about a half hour or so.” Steve grabbed his water bottle and followed Grace to the door.

Pitching their stuff on one of the chairs outside, they rounded the house and took off down the road.

“So how’d you sleep last night?” Steve inquired after a moment or two of silence.

“Good. No nightmares.” Grace answered. “How about you?”

“Not great. I had one.” Steve shrugged, not wanting to alarm her, but not wanting to lie to her either.

“Are you going to see Dr. Thompson again?” She looked up at him as they continued at a slow jog to warm up.

“Yeah. I promised Danno I would call this morning.”

“Good.” She smiled at him. “Nightmares are no fun.”

“I know.” Steve watched her from the corner of his eye trying to gauge if there was more to this line of conversation. “You know you can talk to me if something’s bothering you, right?” She turned to look up at him again.

“Yep, but I’m okay this morning.” Grace gave him a reassuring smile. “A little nervous about school tomorrow, but okay.”

“You know you can call us if you need us tomorrow. You’re an amazing, strong girl, but you’re not in this alone. I know Ms. Jones is really looking forward to having you back, and so are your classmates.”

“It’ll be nice to see my friends, especially Nikki.” Her grin implied there was more to seeing Nikki than just missing her friend. Steve remembered his conversation with Danny and wondered if the other little girl knew that Grace was hoping for a second daddy.

“Maybe sometime soon we can invite Nikki and her dads over for lunch on a weekend.” Steve offered.

“Really?” Her face lit up at the idea.

“Of course. I’m sure Danno would agree. We want you to be able to see your friends.” The SEAL knew that having friends her own age was important, and he suspected Danny would be just as eager to meet any close friends and their parents as he was.
“I never got to invite friends over before.” She looked thoughtful, but not as sad as Steve would have expected with that assertion. “I asked if I could have Nikki over once, but Mommy said Stan wouldn’t approve of having too many noisy kids around the house.”

The SEAL frowned slightly, not that he was surprised. But it was no wonder Grace felt like she was in the way if the idea of inviting a single friend over qualified as too many noisy kids.

“Well, I’ll see if your dad and I can wrangle an introduction with Nikki’s parents so we can set something up.” Steve smiled at her, hoping she understood that he really did want her to be happy and be able to have friends over to play.

Grace gave him a smile that warmed his heart before glancing up ahead of them. “Race you to the stop sign.” She stuck her tongue out at him and took off, the SEAL right on her heels.

When they returned to the house, both covered in sweat, they found Paul sitting on the lanai enjoying his coffee.

“So who won the race?” Paul grinned at them over his coffee mug.

“Me, but I think Super SEAL lets me win.” Grace leaned against Steve’s side as they each took a drink of their water. The SEAL started to sputter some denial, but Grace cut him off. “It’s okay. One of these days I’ll be able to beat you for real.”

“I don’t doubt it.” Steve laughed as they both kicked off their shoes, peeling the socks from their feet.

“Time to swim?” Paul asked the obvious question when Grace pulled her shirt over her head, revealing her bathing suit.

“Yep.” The little girl giggled when she started tipping sideways and Steve caught her, her t-shirt somehow stuck on her head.

“Need a hand there, Gracie?” Steve laughed.

“Yep.” She giggled again as the SEAL freed the neck of her t-shirt from her ponytail.

“You two have fun.” Paul chuckled as the other two finished their wardrobe change and headed toward the water. He was still laughing as he watched them a few minutes later when Beth slipped into the chair beside him.

“What’s tickling your funny bone this morning?” She looked at him for a moment before following his gaze out to their granddaughter and Steve.

“The pair of them. I can see what you meant about them. It’s almost hard to believe that the man that almost panicked the first time you hugged him is the same one out there with her now.” Paul looked at his wife.

“It is, but it isn’t. He still struggles with the ideas of love, acceptance, and affection when they are directed at him, but we’re wearing him down.”

Paul knew what she meant without further question. “Mission accepted.” He reached over, lacing his fingers through hers. “If what I’ve seen since arriving is any indication, a good bit of headway has been made, but you know I’m game for my part. I see the way he looks at Danny and Grace. I couldn’t have handpicked someone better for them.”

The pair sat watching their son’s partner and their granddaughter slicing through the Hawaiian surf,
glad they didn’t have to return to an empty house on the other side of the country. They both knew that this island was, without a doubt, exactly where they belonged now.

Chapter End Notes

So I thought I was going to get further into the day than I did, but you know how this bunch gets. Oh well, what would life be without Steve having nightmares and getting a bit angst-y from time to time. Hope you enjoyed the latest. Take a few seconds to drop a comment and let me know.
Chapter 76

Chapter Notes

Sorry about the longer than usual wait between chapters. Things have been a bit crazy around here for the last few weeks.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

“Are my fish out there swimming?” Danny asked his parents as soon as he stepped out of the house. He’d heard his mom head downstairs and followed shortly after.

“Yep. They just went in a few minutes ago.” Paul confirmed as his son took a seat across from him. “Those two really are something.”

“Tell me about it. I know you guys pick up on a lot from phone calls, Skype, and a couple of short visits, but it’s different seeing them together every day.” Danny took a sip of his coffee. “If you’d told me right after I met Steve that I’d let him anywhere near my daughter, much less be raising her with him, I’d have thought you needed your head examined.”

Both his parents laughed. “Oh, believe us. We remember just how fondly you spoke of that “crazy fucking lunatic” back then.” Paul reminded Danny of how he used to refer to his partner when Grace wasn’t around. “People change.” He added as if that explained it.

“I think it’s probably me that changed more than him.” Danny admitted. “It just took me a while to figure it out and earn his trust so he’d show it. Well, it took me a while. I’m pretty sure Grace had him wrapped around her little finger at the football game where they first met.”

“You might be right.” Beth smiled. “Despite the excitement of that day, it was your partner and team that Grace’s retelling focused on. I think she fell in love with all three of them that day.”

“I think the feeling was mutual.” Danny smiled and waved when he noticed Steve and Grace both treading water a ways out from the shore. “Steve told me he knew he loved me the day I almost died from the sarin exposure, but I bet if I pushed he’d admit to loving Grace well before that.” Danny’s expression was a bit wistful as he watched the two out in the water.

“I know the last few years have been hard.” Paul spoke again. “Hell the last couple of weeks have been hell, but it makes your old man very happy to see you finally happy. I’m glad you married Rachel, but only because that gave us all Grace. I’m far more pleased that you found Steve. He suits you in a way Rachel never did. You’re more relaxed with him, more yourself.”

Danny’s eyes turned to his father. He always knew his dad hadn’t been Rachel’s biggest fan, but it made Danny very happy that he had no such reservations about Steve. “And apparently Grace feels much the same way.”

“I take it Steve talked to her before bed?” Beth answered. She’d suspected something was up last night when they’d come upstairs.

“You don’t miss anything, do you?”

“I’m the mom. Of course I don’t.” She shook her head at him as she laughed.
“Yes. They talked and Steve was quite pleased to report that she feels like she fits in here with us.” Danny’s eyes drifted back to the water.

“Of course she does, son.” Paul set his coffee mug on the ground beside his feet, leaning forward in the chair. “You’ve never placed unrealistic expectations on her. The two of you respect her opinions, and encourage her to have them. You’ve made it abundantly clear that she is a central part of the family, not just a necessary burden to be dealt with. Hell, even before she moved here I could have told you that. We may Skype with her when she’s with you, but we did talk to her quite often when she wasn’t. The more Rachel and Stan fought the more she would call us to help distract herself. She never wanted to talk about what they were fighting about. All she ever wanted to talk about was things with you and Steve. That little girl lived for those days and hours with the pair of you.”

“I wished I’d known how miserable she was there. I would have found a way to challenge the custody arrangements.” Danny hated that he hadn’t known the full extent. “I might have gone broke in the process, but I could have tried.”

Beth looked at her son, seeing how much it upset him that he hadn’t done more. “And Stan would have rung you dry in the process. As stupid as it is knowing that he didn’t really want her, I think the idea of his reputation taking a hit because he lost custody of his wife’s daughter would have been too much for him, so he would have fought you tooth and nail.”

“I know. While I didn’t necessarily realize all that, I always knew he wouldn’t back down gracefully if I challenged custody. Hell, Steve and his connections are probably the only reason I still had what rights I was hanging on to.”

“Well, I don’t know about the two of you, but this line of conversation is going to get us nowhere. What’s done is done, and we can’t change that. I, on the other hand, know that it will not be long before two very hungry people come out of that water, and I can do something about that.” Beth rose from her chair and headed to the house.

“I think that’s our cue to talk about something else.” Paul smiled after his wife.

“Excited to see your new house in person today?” Danny went with it, knowing that he didn’t need to be rehashing regrets when Steve and Grace emerged from the water.

“Yes. The pictures were beautiful, the information made it sound wonderful, and your mother just fell in love with it.” Paul perked up at this new avenue of conversation. “I’m sure we’ll have things to do before our stuff arrives. It should be here next Friday, which leaves us a week from closing to get it done. Any word yet on when Mary is returning?”

“No, but I’m hoping she’ll be back by next weekend. If not, one or both of us,” he pointed toward the SEAL in the water, “may be going to retrieve her.”

“I don’t blame you. The whole situation sounded rather messed up from what Beth said.”

“It is. Steve is wondering if something got messed up with her portion of the inheritance from their dad’s estate. It wasn’t like it made them independently wealthy, but it should have been more than enough for her to live for a while.”

“Does he think she spent it or that someone swindled her out of it?” Paul questioned.

“He’s got a call in with the lawyer to find out if she ever submitted the correct paperwork to get it in the first place. Mary’s had a rough patch in recent years. Their aunt did her best, but the estrangement from their parents and Steve did a number on her. He’s tried to bridge the gap since returning home,
but it’s been slow going. I think it about tore him to shreds to know she thought he only viewed her as a burden.”

“Because he never sees himself that way.” Paul’s sarcastic tone made Danny roll his eyes and laugh.

“Yeah. They are two peas in a pod sometimes, even if they don’t see it.” The detective shrugged his shoulders, a silent admission that those were the cards he was dealing with when it came to the McGarrett siblings.

“So really the mission to indoctrinate McGarrett into a stable and supportive family life is more of a mission to indoctrinate the McGarett.” Paul placed great emphasis on the plural.

“That is the mission, should you choose to accept it.” Danny laughed.

“Oh son, your mother and I accepted that mission the moment you introduced us to Steven. She got me up to speed on what’s happened around here, and things with both McGarrett siblings. Rest assured, I’ll do my part to remind him he’s family now, and I’ll damned sure make sure little Ms. Mary Ann McGarrett knows she’s not alone. Money or not, we’ll make sure we convince her to stick around our house for a good long while.” Paul spoke with a conviction that left no room to question his determination.

“Just remember, she’s a McGarrett so she’s pretty scrappy, and she’s used to trying to cope on her own. The aunt that helped raise her died a few years ago, so she’s been on her own for a good long while.” Danny wanted to make sure his dad knew what he was getting into.

“All the more reason why I’m delighted she’s coming to stay with us. What was she, all of twelve when their mother supposedly died?” Paul waited for Danny to nod. “That’s too damned young for anyone to have everything yanked away from them and be dumped into an unfamiliar environment.” He saw the shadow cross his son’s face. “It’s not the same for Grace, Daniel, and you know it. Yes she lost her mother younger than Mary did, but your daughter has a rock solid foundation of family support. Don’t for one second let yourself think she’s going to have the same issues Mary does. They both lost a mother too young, but that is where the similarities of their formative years ends. Just take one look at Grace and tell me that isn’t abundantly clear.”

Danny’s eyes shot to the beach, where he watched Steve swing Grace up into his arms, both of them smiling laughing. He felt his own face split into a huge grin. “You have a point there, pa.”

“Of course I do. Now why don’t you go down and make sure they find their way back to the house while I go see what you’re ma’s cooking up for breakfast. I’ve missed her cooking.” Paul grabbed his empty coffee cup, took Danny’s from his hand, and scurried off into the house.

The detective didn’t waste any time following his dad’s orders. He wasn’t wearing any shoes, so he took off through the sand without reservation. He could practically feel his heart swelling as he watched the two most important people in his world. Steve stood Grace on one of the chairs in the sand, carefully holding her in place with one arm as he helped her dry her hair.

“Mornin’ Danno.” McGarrett grinned at him as he got close. “Enjoying your morning with mom and dad?”

“Yep. We were just enjoying our coffee while we made sure the two of you didn’t stray too far from shore.” Danny grabbed the towel off Steve’s shoulder and began drying his partner as the taller man continued to help their daughter.

“Define too far.” Steve teased. “Am I to assume that swimming to the mainland with Gracie would
“Yes, Neanderthal. The mainland would be too far.” Danny swatted at Steve as both the SEAL and their little girl giggled at him. “I’d prefer to keep with within sight of the shoreline.”

“So much for that long swim we had planned this weekend, Gracie.” Steve teased. “Guess we’ll have to figure out something else to do.” The SEAL winked conspiratorially at the little girl.

“You two! I swear I don’t know what I’m going to do with the pair of you.” Danny griped at them as he tried not to laugh.

“Feed us?” Grace suggested. “I don’t know about Super SEAL, but I’m hungry.”

“I could eat.” Steve laughed.

“Lucky for you, Ma is already working on breakfast. Though Dad went to check on what she was cooking, so we might want to hurry before he eats it all. He did mention missing her cooking.”

“Hop on Gracie.” The SEAL grinned as the little girl jumped onto his back, arms wrapped around his neck.

Danny laughed as he watched them run toward the house, the sound of their laughter trailing behind them. “Don’t track sand into the house.” He shouted after them, knowing he really couldn’t complain. If they tracked sand into the house, his OCD Super SEAL would be the one to clean it up before anyone else could comment.

Checking to make sure they hadn’t left anything on the beach, he followed them at a much more leisurely pace toward the house. He knew Steve and Grace both still had their cracks, but they were a far cry from the shattered people he knew they could easily be if things had been just a little bit different.

Chapter End Notes

I thought I’d get further into the day than I did, but with Paul’s arrival there are things to be said. I will also confess that there will never, ever be enough Steve and Grace as far as I’m concerned, so when the two of them scheme to take over any or all of a chapter I don’t even fight them on it. I’m going to guess most of you are okay with that, otherwise you likely wouldn’t be reading the 76th chapter of this beast.
Chapter 77

Chapter Notes

So I just realized that I haven't posted a new chapter in days. Real life has been an uncooperative pain in the neck lately. I have high hopes that this week will go smoother. If nothing else my husband and son leave for a trip on Wednesday which means I can be irresponsible and stay up late writing :)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“You two better go put some dry clothes on before drip all over the floor.” Beth shook her head, laughing at Steve and Grace. “You’ve got 10 minutes before the biscuits come out of the oven.”

“Yes, ma’am.” Steve saluted, before turning and running up the stairs, Grace still on his back.

Paul and Beth stood in the kitchen still laughing when Danny came in, carrying the water bottles, shoes, and discarded clothes his partner and daughter had left outside in their rush not to miss breakfast.

“Those two were in a hurry to get in here.” Beth gave her son a questioning look.

“I might have mentioned that Dad missed your cooking with a vague implication that there might not be any food left.” Danny rinsed the bottles off and refilled them before sticking them back in the fridge for later.

“As if I wouldn’t have enough food for all you.” Beth swatted at him with the dish towel.

“True, but they needed to come get changed if they were going to be in dry clothes when it was time to eat. That seemed the most expedient way to get them in the house.” Danny smirked.

“Because just telling them they needed to get cleaned up for breakfast wasn’t sufficient?” Paul laughed at his son.

“I’m sure it would have been, but this was much more entertaining.” Danny accepted the freshly filled coffee cup from his mom. “Sometimes it’s the little things in life that make you smile. Now what can I help with?”

“Why don’t you set the table? The sausage and eggs are just staying warm and the biscuits are almost done.” Beth directed her son.

Danny took a big gulp of his coffee before setting it on the island so he could do as requested.

“What about me? I feel guilty being the only one sitting around.” Paul asked.

“Why don’t you get a glass and pour Grace some juice? The rest of us will drink coffee. Grab the bowl of fruit too.”

“I can do that.” Paul grabbed a glass from the cabinet she pointed to and set about his tasks.

By the time the oven timer had gone off, everything was set and the trio heard the sound of footsteps
coming down the stairs. Danny was surprised to only hear what sounded like Steve as he’d expected Grace to be coming as well. When his partner rounded the corner, he just shook his head and smiled.

“I see the monkey decided to hitch a ride to breakfast.” The detective helped his daughter hop down from her daddy’s back.

“Yep.” She giggled before scurrying around the table to sit between her grandparents. “So what’s the plan for today? Do we get to go see the new house?”

“Yes we do. I want to make a list of all the stuff that needs to happen between this Friday when we close and next Friday when our stuff will arrive.” Beth answered.

“I’ll bring a notebook so I can help with the list.” Grace offered.

“We’re going to need to pick out a good bit of new furniture for the guest rooms. Grace, would you like to help me pick things out?”

“Sure.” The little girl nodded enthusiastically.

“Speaking of, we need to decide which bedroom set we’re getting you and order it today so it will be here by the time Alyssa gets done with your wall.” Steve reminded her. “I know you had it narrowed down to three, have you decided which one you want?” Steve asked.

“I think so.” She answered with a slight hesitation.

“You don’t sound so sure.” The SEAL cocked his head in question.

“It’s just that they were expensive. I really just need a bed. The rest of my stuff can go in the closet.” She stared at the plate in front of her. Grace knew Danno had struggled to make ends meet since moving to Hawaii, and now he had her full time which meant spending more. Her mom had liked to talk about how her Danno couldn’t afford to do all the nice things that Stan did for them because he could barely afford a place to live.

“Gracie, I’ve been planning on replacing some of the furniture in the bedrooms for a while now. That is going to be your room at least until you head off to college, probably even while you’re in college. I told you when we first looked that we’d get the whole set - bed, dresser, night stand, desk, all of it.”

“Are you sure?” She asked quietly, staring straight at her Super SEAL.

“Sure am. We can pop into my office and order it as soon as we finish eating, okay?” He assured her before popping a bit of eggs into his mouth. “It’s a good thing we ran this morning, or else I’ll never be able to keep up with the bad guys when we go back to work.”

“Or it just means I might be able to keep up with you.” Danny teased.

“You keep up just fine.” Steve patted his partner on the shoulder as he took another bite.

Danny’s parents watched the pair fondly as they bickered back and forth between bites of food. Paul glanced down at Grace and saw her eyes sparkling with laughter at her dads. He could imagine that to her this scene was part of her normal routine and comforting in its familiarity.

“Are they always like this?” He leaned over and whispered the question in her ear. He chuckled when she turned her head slightly and gave him a look that told him that may have been the silliest question ever. “Of course they are. Your father would need someone that can hold his own when he
“What are you two over there whispering about?” Danny stopped whatever he was saying to his partner mid-sentence when he noticed his dad and Grace. “The pair of you conspiring is almost as frightening as you,” he pointed to Grace, “conspiring with Super SEAL.”

“I’ll have you know we aren’t plotting anything, simply observing.” Paul smirked at his son.

“I’m not sure I want to know.” Danny shook his head.

“My guess is it’s nothing different than the observations that everyone else makes that lead to our favorite question.” Steve had a pretty good idea what they’d been talking about as he’d been half watching them while going back and forth with Danny.

“And that would be?” The detective asked.

“Really? You need further clarification on that?” Steve choked on the words because he was laughing too hard.

“Well I always assumed your favorite question was something about ‘Can you tell me how to make a bomb from the random things I have in my car?’ or ‘Would you mind blowing that up for me?’ but I didn’t know we had a mutual favorite question.” Danny’s hands waved around in his partner’s face.

“Maybe he needs more coffee before he understands the sarcasm.” Paul observed from across the table.

“Or he’s just being willfully stubborn. Can’t imagine where that trait might have come from.” Beth countered.

Danny glared at both his parents even though the strained ‘I’m trying not to smile’ expression gave him away. “Who invited the two of you to this conversation?”

“I believe I was part of the original discussion.” Paul arched a brow, challenging his son to argue.

“He has a point.” Steve agreed with Paul.

“So now all of you are conspiring against me?” Danny playfully elbowed Steve in the ribs.

“Maybe.” The SEAL shrugged his shoulders, winking at Grace.

“How long have you two been married anyway?” Beth finally asked, unable to resist the temptation and sending the entire group into another round of laughter.

Several moments later they were all settled back down, finishing the last of their meal. When the last bite was finished, Beth jumped up to start clearing the table. “Why don’t I tend to the dishes while you go order that furniture? Then we can head over to the house.”

“I’ll help with the dishes.” Paul offered, immediately rising to help his wife.

The other three helped carry the last few things into the kitchen before heading into Steve’s office and booting up the computer. It only took a few minutes since Steve and Grace had already looked at options before.

“I really like this set. The white will make more sense than wood or black with Alyssa’s painting.” Grace said as she sat on Steve’s lap.
“You’re right. It’s also a relatively traditional design so it’s less likely to look out of place or dated in a few years. Classics are always nice.” Danny agreed.

“I think we’ve got all the pieces we need. Looks like we can get it here next Wednesday. Alyssa seemed to think she’d be done by then. So even with assembly we should have you moved back in by Saturday.” Steve pulled his credit card out of his wallet and finished entering in all the information. He saw Danny start to argue about him paying for it, but just shook his head. At some point they would need to discuss how the financial part of this new family was going to run, but it didn’t need to happen right this moment with Grace in the room.

Clicking through the remaining screens and printing out the purchase confirmation, Steve shut the laptop and rose from the chair, lifting Grace with him. The little girl wrapped her legs around his waist without question, gladly going along for the ride.

“I would ask if you remember how to walk, but since you did go run with him this morning while I was still in bed I suppose I have no room to talk.” Danny joked as they went to find his parents. It was unusual for Steve to carry her around quite so much, and Danny wondered if perhaps Grace knew about the SEAL’s nightmare.

“Don’t forget to call Dr. Thompson.” Grace reminded her daddy before they got to the kitchen, confirming her father’s suspicion.

“I should probably do that before we go.” Steve turned to grab his phone, still carrying Grace. Danny was a bit surprised he hadn’t set her down to speak to the doctor in private, but he knew the conversation wasn’t likely to include any graphic details that would upset her. It was nice to see another reminder that the SEAL was willing to put his need for help out there for Grace to plainly see, helping reinforce the idea that her need for the same help was completely acceptable.

When the two reappeared a few minutes later, Danny’s mouth fell open to see his daughter talking on Steve’s phone.

“He said Thursday morning works for him.” She was confirming the SEAL’s appointment. Holding the phone away from her mouth for a second, Grace looked at her father. “Danno, Dr. Thompson wants to know if you can come too.”

“Um … okay … yes. Yes. Tell him I can come too.” The detective assumed Steve would have picked a time they could both go.

“He’ll be there, so they’ll see you after they drop me off at school.” Grace spoke to Dr. Thompson as if she arranged Super SEAL’s appointments on a routine basis. “Okay. I’ll tell them. Bye.” She handed the phone back to Steve. “He said he’ll see you two Thursday morning, and to try to stay out of trouble until then.”

The men both laughed.

“How long has he known you?” Danny asked Steve.

“Since late 2010. Why?”

“Almost two years and the poor man still thinks it is possible for you to stay out of trouble?” Danny threw his hands in the air and headed for the kitchen. His partner and daughter followed, both shaking their heads at him.

“You three ready?” Beth asked.
“Yes, ma’am. We can all fit in the truck if we want to ride together.” Steve suggested.

“Let’s roll.” Paul grabbed his wife’s hand and followed the SEAL toward the door. It was time to go check out the new house.

Chapter End Notes

This chapter was actually written at the tail end of me watching the season finales for the various shows I watch. I think perhaps my brain was traumatized by all the season finale trauma it had endured, and maybe that’s why it took me forever to move beyond the cuteness that is this bunch on a Tuesday morning. I mean 3 chapters for one morning is a bit excessive. Seriously though, Paul’s just happy to finally be with his family again, Steve’s figuring out that his family is ready and willing to support him when his issues surface, and Steve and Danny are reaching a point where they can settle into their normal bickering while still being ridiculously adorable with each other. And yes all this me coping with the idea that my other shows were trying to traumatize me.
Chapter 78

“Wow. I’m not sure the pictures did it justice.” Paul was stretched forward from the backseat of the truck, looking out the front window as Steve pulled up in front of the house.

“I’m glad you think so.” Beth replied as she opened the door to jump out of the truck.

“Personally, I like the fact that you’re less than five minutes from our house.” Steve wrapped an arm around her as they headed the front door.

“That was definitely a big plus.” They paused on the small front porch, giving Paul a chance to take in the front of the house they were about to buy. “Chin’s cousin said he would come by this morning and unlock it for us. I just have to text him when we’re done so he can lock the front door.” She reached for the door as Paul, Grace, and Danny stepped up beside them.

Stepping inside, everyone looked to Beth for guidance since she was the only one of them that had been there before.

“I thought we might do a walk through together to make a list of anything that needs to be fixed. Then, if you wouldn’t mind, Steven I’d love it if you’d take a look outside for anything in that you think might need to be cared for. While you do that I want to start mapping out some of the decor and furniture placement ideas to make moving in go easier.” Beth outlined her plan.

“I can do that.” The SEAL nodded.

By the time they made it through both floors of the house, they were all pleased that none of the to-do items were substantial. Most of them could reasonably be completed in what free time they had in the week between closing and things arriving from the mainland.

“I’m going to head outside and get started there while you guys go back through. Just holler if you need me.” Steve backed out of the room as Danny, Beth, and Paul debated how the dining room furniture should be placed. “Don’t let them argue each other into the ground.” He whispered to Gracie as he retreated.

Popping out the front door, Steve checked over windows, doors, paint, and landscape, working his way around the front to the backyard. He was pleased to see very little that needed to be done.

“Hey babe.” Danny stopped next to his partner as the taller man was inspecting the fence that separated the property from their neighbors.

“Yeah, D. What’s up?” Steve pushed on a few boards to make sure they were still stable, frowning when one moved more than he liked.

“Is there a reason that Dr. Thompson wants to see me too?” Danny took a step back when the SEAL jerked around to face him, eyes full of alarm. “Don’t get me wrong, I don’t mind going at all. It just made me wonder what he knows that would make him think we need to be in therapy when we’ve just gotten together.”

Steve gave him a crooked grin. “I don’t think he intended the invite as couple’s therapy, Danno. Grace told him I had another nightmare. My guess is he wants to include you in at least some portion of our session because he knows you play a central role in my support system. He also knows you’re living with me and are likely to be there when I am having the nightmares.”
“He knows I play a central role …” Danny’s voice fell off before he finished his train of thought. He knew that Steve talked about he and Grace with the therapist. That was obvious the day he found out Dr. Thompson existed. He just never really gave much thought to what exactly Steve would have divulged to him.

“Yes. Is that really such a surprise? I thought we’d already established how important you are to me. Is it that unreasonable that the therapist I’ve been seeing for almost two years is aware of that?” Steve stared at the detective.

“No. I suppose not. I guess it just threw me. The idea of us being in couple’s counseling just planted itself in my head. You know Rachel never even gave us a chance when it came to the end of things.” Danny started spilling what he’d been thinking before the conversation started. “I suggested counseling, but she refused. She was dead set on divorce. Of course, at the time I had no idea she’d already met Stan. His money was great motivation to leave me in the dirt.”

“And my therapist wanting to see you reminds you of Rachel not wanting to see one?” Steve was trying to understand exactly what Danny was thinking.

“No … kind of … I’m really not explaining this well. The only thing you and Rachel have in common is being far too attractive to be paired up with me, but …”

“I promise to argue that point later, but do continue.” Steve eyes darkened as he tried to refrain from kissing his partner senseless to prove just how incorrect that statement was.

“Whatever. Anyway, yes, part of me was a little worried about what Dr. Thompson might see as an issue already. A bigger part of me felt a huge sense of relief at the idea that when it came down to it, you’d be willing to take that step if we needed it. You wouldn’t just cut and run without fighting for us.”

This time Steve didn’t fight his urge to pull his partner into a bruising kiss. His arms wrapped tight around Danny, his lips smashing hard against the shorter man’s. When he finally broke contact, he felt Danny sway slightly in his arms before those big blue eyes focused on him. “I’m pretty sure we don’t need couple’s therapy yet, but Danny, I will always fight for us. We’re going to fight, that’s pretty much inevitable. And we’re probably going to need to allow ourselves a little space to cool off sometimes, but I will never walk away from you. I will never give up on this.”

The Jersey native wasn’t really sure what to say, so he just settled for letting himself melt against the SEAL’s chest.

Steve looked up when he heard the back door open. Beth took one look at the two and shut the door again, retreating into the house. The SEAL smiled at how observant she was. He had no doubt she was curious why her son was wrapped up in his arms in the far corner of the backyard while the others were making detailed notes of their indoor to-do list, but he appreciated her allowing them some space.

“Danny.” The SEAL whispered against his partner’s hair, waiting for him to loosen his hold a bit. “I know this all happened really quick and there are things we probably need to sit down and talk through when we have some time alone, but you have to know I wasn’t kidding when I said I was all in. You and Grace are everything to me. I could never just… will never just throw that away.” Danny smiled up at him, eyes misty with unshed tears.

“Me too. I hope you know that.”

“I think I’m figuring it out.” Steve kissed him gently. “Now, about that other comment …”
“Can you just pretend I didn’t say that?” The skin of Danny’s neck began to turn pink, showing Steve just how embarrassed his partner was about the comment.

“No. I really don’t think I can. I thought we covered the whole topic of just how attractive you are already, but it appears you need to be reminded.” Steve leaned in, his voice a low, rumbling growl in Danny’s ear. The SEAL dipped his head lower, nipping at the warm expanse of neck. “I promise you, as soon as we are alone I am going to painstakingly remind you just what I think of your body.”

Danny’s sharp intake of breath made Steve smirk.

“Maybe for now we should inspect some more fence and give certain issues time to calm down.”

Williams shuddered when he felt Steve’s mouth on his neck again.

Leaving one last chaste kiss on Danny’s lips, Steve stepped back and returned to checking over the boards. “There are at least five so far I’ve found that need to be replaced. Easy enough for us to do.”

Danny fell instep beside his partner, pulling a small pad of paper out of his pocket to make notes.

“Most of the backyard is in good shape. I know mom likes to plant stuff, but we can help her figure out what will grow best here. I’m sure it’ll be a much different list of options than she’s used to back in Jersey.” Steve moved toward the patio that extended away from the back of the house. “At least this is all in good shape, even if it is a bit small given the overall size of the yard. We should find out if they want to expand it a bit, leave dad more room for a grill.”

He’d just finished his commentary when Beth stepped outside, followed by Grace and Paul. “So what’s the verdict?”

“Just a few board to replace. Nothing I can’t do easily.” Steve answered.

“And he was contemplating expansion plans for your patio.” Danny snickered.

“I thought the same thing. Maybe taking it out a few more feet that way and then out to about here.” She stepped a few feet into the yard. “That’d leave more room for chairs, tables, and the grill. I know we’ll probably still do a lot of the outdoor gatherings at your place since you have the beach, but I’m sure we’ll do some hosting here.”

“No doubt.” Steve smiled, grabbing the paper from Danny and scribbling a few notes about what mom wanted to do.

“You know, we can hire someone to do it Steven. You don’t need to take on so much yourself.” Between him and Paul they’d managed to identify a good number of projects they could tackle themselves. Danny had just rolled his eyes and nodded along, positive that he’d end up helping with a fair number of them.

“But …”

“Oh let the boy have his fun, Beth. His house is already in good shape, and a guy likes to get a little dirty working on a house from time to time.” Paul pulled his wife to his side. “Right?” He looked to his son and Steve for confirmation.

“Right.” They both agreed.

“Fine. But I get to feed you when you’re here working.” Beth ordered.

“Wouldn’t dream of arguing with that.” Steve smiled at her. “So what do you think, Gracie, think
you’ll want to come stay with grandma and grandpa every once in a while?”

She nodded her head. “Yep. Grandma let me pick out a room that I get to decorate as mine for when I come over. It’s right next to Aunt Mary’s.”

“And if the three of them prove to be too much estrogen in one house, you can always swing by for a beer with us.” Steve offered to Paul.

“A little estrogen never scared me. Though I might occasionally take you up on that.” He conceded. “Now we’ve been prowling around this house for almost three hours, what do you say we go find some lunch. I’ve heard something about a shrimp truck.”

“Should we call the others and see if they want to meet us for lunch?” Beth asked. The guys nodded. “I’ll call Cath if you two want to call Chin and Kono.”

Steve started dialing Chin’s number without giving any thought to the fact that Beth apparently had Cath’s phone number. Danny looked slightly puzzled, until Grace noticed and explained. “Grandma has all their numbers. She had Chin and Kono’s after she visited last time, and got Cath’s shortly after she showed up. I know she got Aunt Mary’s too, and am pretty sure she might have the Governor’s and Kamekona’s.”

“Of course Grandma does. She is nothing if not organized and thorough.”

“They’ll meet us there.” Steve rejoined the two of them, shoving his phone back in his pocket.

“Cath said she’s just wrapping up, so we should order without her, but she’ll be there to eat. I gather at least one of you knows what she’ll eat.”

“Yeah, we’ve got that covered.” Steve answered. “Is there anything else we need to check before we head out?”

“Nope. Let’s go get some food.” Paul was already headed back into the house so they could lock up and leave.

Steve looked a bit surprised that Danny’s dad had walked off quite so fast.

“Don’t worry, babe. Dad just takes his food serious.”

“I can see that.” He followed the rest of them into the house, flipping the lock on the door as he closed it. “I guess we better not keep him waiting.”
Chapter 79

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Pulling the truck up in front of Kamekona’s shrimp truck, Steve was relieved to see it wasn’t overly
crowded. Of course, they’d missed most of the lunch run and Tuesday afternoons weren’t known to
be the big Hawaiian’s peak business hours. Unloading the truck, the SEAL kept a watchful eye on
Grace and the surrounding area. This was the first time they’d gathered en masse outside of his house
and while he was happy to see things slowly slipping back to normal, he wasn’t ready to let his
guard down.

Chin’s car pulled up beside Steve, just as he was reaching to help Grace down to the ground. The
cousins popped out of the car, joining the others.

“Cath coming?” Kono asked the group in general.

“She’ll be here soon.” Danny replied first.

“Howzit!” Kamekona’s booming voice welcomed them all. “Haven’t had enough of my shrimp, I
see.”

“Apparently not.” Beth laughed as he pulled her in for a hug. “I must have managed to mention the
shrimp to Paul, because he decided he had to try it for lunch.”

“Sounds fair. Might even make up for not coming to try it last time you were both on the island.”
The big guy waggled his eye brows at her. “Well let’s get you guys fed. The usual?” He directed the
question at McGarrett.

“Sounds good. Cath is coming too.” Steve answered, watching as Kamekona pulled Grace in for a
quick hug before heading back to get their food ready.

“I think I could get used to having lunch with a view like this.” Paul stood at the SEAL’s side,
though both men were focused on watching Danny and Grace with the others rather than the
beautiful ocean view.

“Yeah. It’s a sight I find myself unwilling to live without these days.” Steve glanced down at his
partner’s father, not bothering to pretending they were talking about anything other than Danny and
Grace.

“How’s the house looking?” Chin made his way over to the two men. “Any major projects to tackle
before move in?”

“Nothing major. A bit of painting, some minor stuff with ceiling fans, a few cabinet doors to realign,
just random stuff like that.” Paul answered. “And a minor expansion project on the back patio.”

“That doesn’t sound too bad. I bet we can knock a bunch of it out this weekend.” Chin was more
than willing to help out.

“Yeah. Alyssa will probably still be working on the wall, but we could split up and get things done
in both places. Maybe Kono or Cath would prefer to stick around with them while we’re working
here.” Steve knew they would want to have someone with Grace.
“I hear my name?” Cath appeared from around the truck. “What kind of trouble are you trying to get me into?”

“Just speculating if you’d prefer to hang out with Grace and Alyssa painting the mural or help with repairs on the Williams house this weekend.” Steve smirked, knowing she wasn’t a huge fan of home improvement tasks.

“I think I’ll stick with Grace. What about you Kono?” The other woman was approaching. “You game for hanging with Grace and Alyssa while the men go make themselves useful with the house repairs?”

“Oh yeah. I’m definitely up for staying with the estrogen contingent. I get too much testosterone exposure already.” Kono teased Chin and Steve. “Unless you guys need me to help there? I’ve been known to wield a pretty mean hammer.”

“I think we can probably manage.” Chin laughed, patting his cousin on the shoulder.

“Come and get it!” Kamekona’s yell ushered them all toward the picnic tables. Everyone slipped into a spot, passing around the various types of shrimp.

By the time the food was gone, everyone had gotten their fill, and Grace was starting to squirm a bit, ready to do something fun with the rest of her last afternoon before returning to school.

“Are we going to practice today? Grandpa hasn’t gotten to see what we’ve learned yet.” The little girl asked as they started clearing the table.

“I thought we might.” Chin answered her.

“Let’s go!” Grace grabbed her grandfather’s hand, pulling him toward Steve’s truck.

“You heard the lady, let’s move.” Steve chuckled, making sure the rest of the team was coming as he followed toward the truck. Once they were piled into the three vehicles, he pulled onto the road, headed toward home. “Go ahead and get changed when we get there. We can go swim for a bit after practice.”

“Okay, Daddy.” She grinned at him from the backseat. “Just wait until you see what we’ve learned to do.” She launched into an explanation for Paul of all the self-defense moves the team had taught them so far.

“Sounds like you’re going to be ever better than your old man.” Paul finally managed to get a word in.

“Hey! Why is it that everyone assumes I’m the weak link in this equation.” Danny griped, though his words didn’t really carry any sting. “I’ll have you know I can hold my own just fine.”

“I don’t doubt it, son. I’m not sure where you got those skills from because it sure wasn’t me.” Paul admitted.

Danny shrugged. “Had to learn to be scrappy if I was going to get out of all the scrapes my mouth tended to get me into. I will concede that Grace will probably be able to take me though. I may be scrappy, but she’s learning from the whole team and Cath.”

“I suppose I should take this as a hint that annoying your mother is a bad idea now. From what I’ve heard they’ve been teaching her all the same stuff. I’ll wind up in traction if I don’t do as I’m told.” Paul laughed, winking at his wife over their granddaughter’s head.
“You just remember that.” Beth spoke with a mock sternness. “Of course, the boys will be close enough, I can always just offer them homemade food in exchange for helping keep you in line. Won’t even have to mess up my nails that way.”

Everyone laughed.

“You know, I’d prefer not to test that theory.” Paul looked appraisingly as his son and Steve in the front seat. “I don’t believe I’d stand a chance against the pair of them, and I’m pretty sure the three in the vehicles behind us would help with very little coercion.”

“You might be right, Grandpa.”

Pulling into the driveway, everyone climbed out of the vehicles and made their way to the house. Paul marveled at how the entire group split off in different directions as if someone had given them instructions. Had he not been with them during the entire lunch, he would have thought that’s exactly what had happened.

“Come on, dear. Let’s go get changed.” Beth tugged his elbow, leading him toward the stairs.

“Did I miss something?” He followed her up the stairs.

She glanced back at her husband and laughed. “We said we were going to practice when we got home.”

“We talked about that in the car, and I think I heard one mention of it at lunch.” He still sounds perplexed.

“Paul, remember where you are. This the Five-0 team has been together for better than two years, Catherine has known Steve for even longer, and the lot of them have been all but living here since they found Grace. I’m not half convinced they don’t operate on some telepathic wavelength the rest of us don’t know how to join, but really they are just that in tune with each other. At the rate we’re going, they will be assembled outside with blankets and practice pads long before we show up with the water bottles.”

Shutting the door to their room behind him so they can change, Paul cocks his head in question. “The water bottles?”

“Yes. I always bring the water bottles.” Beth heaves an exasperated sigh as she pulls out a bathing suit to change. “Now get with the program before I leave you up here.”

As expected, by the time they make it out to the beach, everyone else is already there. Grace doing some easy warm ups with Kono and Cath, and Beth goes to join them. Paul flops down on an open spot near his son and Steve.

“I’m surprised you two are still sitting out.”

“Oh we get our fun later on, but the other three are leading the instructional part so far.” Danny explained.

“One of these days I’ll graduate to Super SEAL training.” Graced called over, having heard the conversation. “I’ve gotta get the basics down first.”

“I’m not sure I want to know who told her that’s how this was going to progress.” Danny turns challenging look toward his partner.
“Wasn’t me.” The SEAL throws his hands up in innocence. “I’ve said nothing about turning her into a SEAL, super or otherwise.”

The detective turns to look at the rest of the team, trying to see if he can tell which one of them might have done it. Chin chuckles and shakes his head, far too wise to have tempted Danny’s ire by trying to corrupt the little girl. Cath meets his gaze and shrugs. It’s Kono that evades eye contact, and he knows he’s got his culprit.

“I’ll get you for that one Kalakaua.”

“You’ll thank me when she’s a teenager.” Kono winks at Danny, earning her another glare.

“She has a point there, son. As if being the daughter of Five-0 won’t frighten the boys off already, she’ll be able to kick their asses clear to the mainland.” Paul grinned at the idea. “I just wish I’d had the likes of this bunch around when your sister was growing up. Would have saved me a lot of headaches.”

With Danny otherwise occupied, the rest of them got started with their practice. Chin, Kono, and Catherine randomly sprung an attack on Grace or Beth, testing to see if they could quickly remember the defensive strategies they’d already learned.

The three men watching winced as Beth managed to land a hard blow to Chin’s side.

“Is she supposed to hit like that? Don’t you usually coach them to pull the shots during practice?” Paul felt bad that his wife was getting pretty rough with the Hawaiian.

“He’s tough. He can take it. They go a bit easier on Cath and Kono, but only a bit.” Steve laughed at the offended look both women gave him.

“I’d rather end up with a few bruises and know they can land a solid hit than have them step through it and not put enough power behind it when it matters.” Chin straightens after taking another hard hit from Beth. “Though I’m more than willing to let one of you be the punching bag for a while.”

Steve springs up off the blanket. You don’t have to ask him to join the festivities more than once. Danny just shakes his head at the SEAL’s enthusiasm.

“I swear he’s just an overgrown kid sometimes.”

Grabbing a bottle of water, Chin collapses onto an empty expanse of blanket. “But you love him anyway.”

“You’ve got me there.” Danny can’t suppress the goofy grin he gets as he watches his mom try to fight free from his partner’s hold. Despite the serious nature of the training, everyone is having fun. Stretching his legs out in front of him, the detective leans back on his hands, content to watch.

“You know, I thought seeing her trying to fight would bother me.” Paul’s words are quiet enough that only his son hears them. “And I still think it probably would if I had to watch her against a stranger, but this is surprisingly fun.”

“I know. It helps to have zero doubt that any one of them would stop at nothing to protect them.”

Danny and his dad both fell quiet again, only the occasional laugh interrupting when one of the attackers yelp after a particularly good defensive hit. As the afternoon wore on, the training eventually wound down and the entire family ended up in the water. By the time they headed back toward the house for dinner everyone was pleasantly worn out, ready for a relaxing family meal.
Chapter End Notes

Hope you guys enjoyed.

For anyone that wants a bit more feels and fluff (and happens to like Captain America / Bucky), I posted the 2nd chapter of the Five-0/Cap crossover yesterday. That one will be much (much much) shorter than this one at an expected 4 chapters and ~40k words. Here's the link if you want to check it out. It's full of feels and features Grace pretty prominently, because I'm convinced that child is just amazing.
Chapter 80

Chapter Notes

So despite how long it's been since I've updated, I'm not dead :) I have however apparently been holding out on you as I realized last night that I have through chapter 82 written and hadn't posted past 79 here. Oops. :( Over the next several days I'll fix that.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Passing a dish of roasted potatoes around the table, Steve listened as Grace finished telling her grandfather about the HPD bear that Duke and the others had given her.

“You know, I was thinking we might invite a few people over for dinner Saturday. I bet Duke, Max, and Charlie would all like to see you.” Steve suggested.

“Can we invite Kamekona and Governor Denning too?” Grace asked, her enthusiasm for the idea evident.

“Of course.” Steve’s cell phone buzzed in his pocket. Fishing it out, he checked the screen and smiled. “Dianne is safely back in England. She says to tell you all she misses you already.” He fired off a quick return message before setting the phone on the table.

“I’m glad she made it, though it does seem strange not to have her here.” Beth commented.

“It’s a shame I missed seeing her this time.” Paul frowned. “From what you’ve all said, she’s a far different woman than I remember from our previous meetings.”

Conversation died down as everyone settled in to eating. The afternoon outside left them all with quite an appetite.

“Grace, are you going to read more for us tonight?” Kono finally asked. “I know you’ve gotta get to bed before it gets too late since you have school tomorrow, but maybe we could sneak in a chapter.” The Hawaiian winked at the little girl.

“Why don’t you go take a shower while we clean up, and then you can read for a bit. Kono’s right though. No staying up late tonight.” Danny grinned as his daughter immediately scooted back from the table, grabbing her dishes to take them to the kitchen.

“Yes, Danno.” Her voice trailed behind her.

The others took their cue, grabbing dishes and filing their way into the kitchen. Still not quite familiar with the flow of things in the McGarrett house, Paul stood back and watched as everyone else fell into an easy rhythm of putting away leftovers, cleaning dishes, and restoring the dining room to order.

By the time Grace emerged from the stairs in her pajamas, book in hand, everyone was situated around the living room. Beth patted the spot on the couch between her and Paul, wrapping an arm around her granddaughter as the girl settled into the spot.
Looking around the room, Steve wondered if everyone on the team was going to keep showing up in the evenings just so Grace could finish reading the book to them. He’d look at one point and knew there were 18 chapters, and they were just about to start chapter 3. Factoring in a chapter a night on school nights and more on weekends, he decided he could see the team sticking it out. Honestly, he imagined they would be nightly fixtures for at least another week or two depending on how cooperative the Hawaiian criminal element was and how Grace’s re-introduction to school went.

Closing the book at the end of the chapter, Grace gave each of her grandparents a hug before slipping off the couch to say goodnight to everyone else.

“You’ve got all your stuff ready for the morning?” Danny asked as he squeezed her tight. He knew it was important she return to school, back to a normal routine for a nine year old girl, but it still made him nervous.

“Yes, Danno. My homework is in my backpack, and Daddy ironed my uniform while you were helping Grandma with dinner.”

“He did, did he?” Danny looked over her shoulder at his partner. “I didn’t realize they taught you how to iron in the Army.”

“Navy, Danno!” Grace scolded.

“Believe it or not, I learned how to iron from Dad when he had to prep his uniform, but given the exacting specifications of uniform inspections at Annapolis and in the Navy, I had ample opportunity to become quite proficient with an iron.” Steve smirked at him, trying not to laugh at Danny’s expression.

“I’d ask if you know how to sew too, but I already know the answer to that.” Danny cracked a grin, fondly remembering Steve coming to the rescue to make a Kamekona sized Santa suit fit him in time for Christmas with Grace. “Somehow I imagine she’s going to go to school with the most impeccably prepared uniform there.”

Grace continued giggling at her dads as she said goodbye to Cath, Chin, and Kono. The three were preparing to head out so everyone could settle in for the night.

“We’ll see you at HQ in the morning.” Chin waved as he opened the door.

“We’ll be there.” Danny confirmed, since Steve was tangled up in a hug whispering something to Grace.

As the door shut behind the others, Danny watched his partner and daughter, seeing her lean back slightly from his embrace, nodding at something he’d said. She leaned in, giving the SEAL a quick kiss on the cheek before heading up to her bedroom. Steve rose from where he’d been kneeling on the floor, watching her until she was out of sight before turning around and catching Danny observing him.

“What?” Steve asked as if he was surprised someone was watching him.

“Just curious what all that was about.”

“I was reminding her about protocol for while she was at school. Making sure she knew she could call us if needed, and reminding her that sometimes people say things without thinking.” Steve shrugged a bit with the last statement.

“All good reminders.” Beth chimed in, not sure if the boys even remembered she and Paul were still
standing in the room. “I think we’re going to turn in for the night. I’ll make sure breakfast is ready in time for everyone to eat before you head out in the morning.” She gave each of them a quick hug before grabbing her husband’s hand and heading up the stairs.

“Want a beer?” Danny asked the SEAL. “I don’t think I’m quite ready to call it a night yet.”

Steve stepped toward him, closing the small distance between them. Wrapping his hand around the back of Danny’s neck, he leaned down, warm breath hitting the shorter man’s neck. “One beer. Then I get to make good on my promise from earlier.”

The detective swallowed, his brain failing to come up with any verbal response to those words. Instead he nodded, leaning in slightly to inhale the unique scent of McGarrett before pulling away to retrieve the drinks.

The SEAL followed behind, a smug grin on his face at his ability to leave Danny speechless. Accepting a bottle from him, the two made their way out to the beach. Dropping into their chairs, they clinked their bottles together before taking a drink.

“To surviving another day.” Danny commented.

“Just surviving?” Steve questioned.

“No. It was a good day, but part of me feels guilty about having so many good days.”

“You know Rachel would want you both to keep moving forward. Think about what you would want for Grace if the situation were reversed.”

“I’d want her to keep living, not just surviving.” Danny spoke quietly, lapsing into silence for a few seconds before looking at his partner. “Thanks. I know you’re right, I guess sometimes I just need a reminder that it’s okay.”

Steve reached across the small table, wrapping Danny’s hand in his. “Anytime. Why don’t you and Grace do something with just the two of you on Saturday before we have everybody over?” Steve suggested as the pair sat staring over the water.

“Tired of us already?” Danny looked cautiously at him, unsure about this sudden shift in the conversation.

“No. Not at all, but you really haven’t had any time with her to yourself lately. I worry that you’re going to feel like I’m encroaching on your time with her. I love it when we all do things together, but if you think about it, running and swimming is becoming something she and I do together. I know we’ve only gone a few times, but that time with just she and I means the world to me. You’ve gotta have some of that too.”

Danny stared at his partner in silence for a few minutes. “I guess I’ve been so busy being glad that you’re helping her deal with all this shit that I hadn’t really thought about it. You’re right though.” Part of Danny was loathe to admit such a thing when he was still trying to make sure Steve wasn’t afraid he was going to have his new title ripped away from him.

The SEAL stared back at him. “I just don’t want you to think I’ll be upset when you want time alone with her. She may be our daughter now, but she’s been your daughter for 9 years. I get it, and I don’t want to create a problem by always being in the way.”

“First,” Danny shot up from his chair, turning to face Steve, “you will never be in the way when it comes to spending time with her. Yes. You were right, I should make a point of finding something
she and I can do together. It is important that she have that one-on-one time with each of us. Don’t let that make you think I agree with you being a problem by being in the way. Family doesn’t work like that. Have you considered the fact that for the last several months I have had virtually no time completely alone with her, and I’ve been fine with it? Every weekend I had her we were staying her. Yes, you’d make yourself scarce, hide in your office or go run or some such thing, but you’ve been a constant presence in my time with Grace for quite a while now. Did I ever give you any indication I minded you being with us?”

“No, but …”

“Stop. There is no but. That little girl loves you. I love you. You are not ever going to be in the way.” Danny crossed his arms, standing between Steve’s legs and glaring down at him. “Now if you’re finished making ridiculous comments, do you have any recommendations for this bonding time? It needs to be something you wouldn’t necessarily want to do; otherwise, she’ll be upset that you aren’t included.”

“Well what kind of stuff did you do with her before you started coming here?” Steve asked.

“Nothing that she wouldn’t expect you to be involved with.” Danny admitted.

“So what kinds of things did you do when you were growing up? Think of stuff you enjoyed that you’d like to share with her.”

“We used to bowl. Rachel hated bowling though, so I don’t know that Grace has ever been.” Danny admitted. “She swore it was too disgusting with the shared shoes and balls.”

“Can’t say bowling was ever something I really did.” Steve commented. “Were you any good?”

“Played in the department league for a while.” Danny shrugged, flopping back into his chair, staring out over the water. “I wasn’t our best, but I wasn’t the worst either.”

“Then there you have it. Teach her to bowl. Let that be the thing that you two do together.” Steve smiled at him.

“But it’s fun to do as a group too.” The detective didn’t like the idea of Steve never coming with them.

“So you two go practice together however often you want, and then from time to time we go as a family. Heck we could invite the whole ohana. I bet it’d be fun.”

“Too bad Rachel made me get rid of my balls and shoes.” Danny frowned at the ocean. “What are you laughing at?” Steve was doubled over in his chair, laughing so hard he could barely breath.

“Balls … you … got rid of …” Steve gasped the words as he continued laughing.

“My bowling balls, you crazy Neanderthal. I’m pretty sure you are well aware that I still have the others.” Danny shook his head, but joined the SEAL’s laughter. “I can’t believe you.”

“Speaking of,” the SEAL’s countenance changed, eyes darkening as pulled his long frame from the chair, “I believe we have a conversation to finish from earlier.” He dropped to his knees in front of his partner.

“We do?” Danny’s voice was almost a squeak.

“Yes, Daniel. We do.” Steve had Danny trapped in the chair, his body forcing the detective’s legs
apart as his hand gripped he sides of the chair, leaving no escape.

“And which conversation would that be?” The detective almost choked on his words as Steve’s mouth grazed his neck. A faint growl from the SEAL was enough to make him shut up and stop playing stupid.

“We’re the only ones still awake, so I think it’s time I present my side of the argument. The side that says neither Rachel or I are in any way physically overqualified to be with you.” Slipping his hands around Danny’s hips, he jerked the shorter man forward, forcing his legs to spread further. Steve lifted his head from Danny’s neck, eyes locking on his partner’s. “Why do you persist in this ridiculous belief that you are somehow not attractive enough for me?” His eyes blazed with desire, making Danny’s shift nervously, unable to hold his gaze. Leaning forward, Steve kissed his partner’s mouth, gently teasing with his tongue. “Have I given you a single indication that I’m less than pleased with your body.” He brushed his nose across Danny’s cheek, capturing an earlobe between his teeth.

“Ummmm.” The detective stuttered.

Danny whimpered when Steve released his hold, sitting back on his heels. “Really? Considering everything we’ve done in the last couple of weeks you actually have to consider that question?” His eyes bore into Danny’s unrelenting. “What am I doing wrong that’s making you second guess this? That’s making you second guess how much I want you in every way imaginable?” Steve’s hands caressed Danny’s thighs through his shorts.

“Nothing.” The Jersey native sighed.

“But she did, didn’t she?” Steve guessed. He knew Danny was generally a pretty confident guy, so this insecurity had to be rooted somewhere. This time Danny just nodded. “Daniel, I’m not her. Whatever line she fed you to make you think you weren’t good enough, she had it all wrong. I hate to speak ill of the dead, but I get the feeling she was one of those people that was never going to be completely happy with life. She couldn’t admit it was her issue, so she had to find fault with those around her. Unfortunately, that meant finding fault with you. Her issues don’t make a damn thing she said to tear you down true.”

Danny nodded again. As much as he hated to admit that he’d let Rachel fuck with his head, he knew Steve was right.

“Seriously though, you could gain 20 pounds and dye your hair purple, and I still wouldn’t care. Yes, I enjoy looking at you the way you are now, but as I’ve said before, there are many more reasons why I love you other than just your body.” Steve spoke low, his eyes still fixed on Danny’s, his hands trailing over legs from hip to knee. Reaching the hem of his partner’s shorts, he dipped his finger around tickling the sensitive skin on the back of Danny’s knee.

Chapter End Notes

A couple of quick notes ....
1. There is an extended version of the end of the chapter over on Guardian: Love Explored

2. I will hopefully be making headway on the remaining chapters (83 - ??) in the very near future. I appreciate all your patience as my time for writing has been hit or miss and
my muse has been rather all over the place (see all my other stories if you're curious about that).

3. Kudos and comments make my day and do provide great encouragement for my muse to get her ass back in gear. You can also hit me up on Tumblr or Twitter.
Sitting on the edge of the bed lacing up his boots, Steve watched Danny putting the finishing touches on his hair.

“I hope she isn’t as nervous as I feel right now.” Danny met Steve’s eyes in the mirror. “She’s been fine at Sacred Heart since moving here, but I can’t shake the feeling that something is going to go wrong.”

The SEAL rose from the bed, moving to lean on the bathroom door frame. “I know. I’d feel better if yesterday’s meeting had gone smoother.”

Finished with his hair, Danny headed for the door. “Me too. Think they’d notice if we sent an undercover to keep an eye on things?”

“They might.” Steve trailed right behind him. “Though that doesn’t mean I’m opposed to the idea.”

Danny stopped in front of his partner, looking into the taller man’s eyes. He knew Steve wasn’t kidding. He’d find a way to send someone undercover into the school if he thought it would help. Hell, he’d probably manage to hide an entire SEAL team inside the school armed with detailed tactical plans covering everything from Grace getting a paper cut to a terrorist invasion of the building.

By the time the pair appeared in the kitchen, Grace was already there helping Beth take the breakfast things into the dining room.

Laughing at Danny’s expression, Beth shrugged. “I know you don’t normally eat a full sit down breakfast before work, but I couldn’t help it.”

Steve stepped forward, accepting the cup of coffee she held out. “I think we get it.” His eyes dart to the dining room where Grace sat with Paul.

“We better start eating if the three of you are going to get where you need to be on time.” Danny’s dad called, prompting the remaining three to take their seats.

As the meal wound down, Steve leaned back in his seat. “Would you two prefer the truck or the car while we’re at work?”

Paul and Beth looked at each other for a second before he replied. “I think the car should do. Though if it’s okay I might borrow the truck Friday so I can get the supplies to start working on some of the projects once the house is officially ours.”

“That’s fine with me. If you realize you need the truck before then for anything just give one of us a call and we can swap out.” Steve offered.

“I really don’t think we plan on going anywhere today anyway.” Beth noted.

“You don’t need to sit around an empty house all day, ma. Take the car. Go explore the area. Work on some of that shopping list you had for the house. Barring any major case activity, we’ll be home after we pick up Grace from school, so you have several hours to roam free without feeling like you’re neglecting someone that might need to be fed.” Danny teased.

“Well, when you put it that way, I suppose we could go out for a bit.” Beth started clearing dishes.
“Now we’ll take care of these. You three need to get going.”

“Yes, ma’am.” Steve, Danny, and Grace all rose to gather their things and head to the truck.

Pulling into a spot in front of the school, Steve couldn’t help the feeling of entering enemy territory. He knew it wasn’t, but this was the first time since finding her at the Edwards house that he would be apart from Grace for a significant period of time. One look at Danny made it clear his feelings were much the same.

Looking around the area, there were about a dozen kids making their way up the stairs, some waving at the parents while others did their best to pretend they didn’t exist. Steve spotted Ms. Jones and was a bit relieved to see her wave, implying she might be waiting for Grace’s arrival. A few feet from the teacher stood a little girl about Grace’s age with two men.

“Nikki!” Grace squealed from the back seat, spotting the girl and confirming Steve’s guess regarding her identity.

“You ready, Monkey?” Danny asked, removing his seat belt and preparing to get out of the truck.

“Yes.” The sight of her best friend and teacher increased her enthusiasm for the day tenfold.

Steve and Danny hopped out of the truck, Steve stepping to the rear door to help Grace climb out. Wrapping her arms around his neck, she gave him a tight squeeze, smiling as he hugged her tightly before lowering her to the ground.

“Don’t worry, Daddy. I’ll be okay.” Though there were times the men being worried about something might scare her, this time it actually made her feel a bit better. School was familiar, so even though she knew someone might say something to upset her, she didn’t feel physically threatened. Her Danno and Daddy being worried just meant they cared, and knowing that made her feel safer.

Walking between the two men as they crossed the drive to the stairs, she held a hand from each of them. Leading the way toward Ms. Jones and Nikki, Grace was happy to see them both. She’d missed her friends at school.

As they approached, Nikki and Ms. Jones both stepped forward to greet Grace. Ms. Jones gave her a quick hug before letting her go to Nikki. It was clear they both pleased to have her back. The two girls quickly started chattering away as Ms. Jone turned to speak to Danny.

Not wanting to lose the opportunity to meet Nikki’s dads, Steve stepped toward them.

“You must be Nikki’s dads.” He stopped in front of the pair. “Grace has told us a lot about you.”

The two men both paled at Steve’s words. Though neither stepped back, the looks in their eyes said they were considering it. It took Steve a few seconds to realize that with his stress over Grace’s return to school, he was probably looking more over-protective SEAL on a mission than dad trying to meet other parents. The badge and gun weren’t likely to help either.

“Grace adores Nikki, and speaks very highly of both of you from all of Nikki’s stories.” He tried to relax and look less threatening.

“We’ve heard a great deal about Grace as well.” One of the men stepped slightly forward, extending his hand toward Steve, but still looking cautious. “You must be Commander McGarrett. I’m Greg, and this is Nate.”
Steve accepted the offered hand, shaking it firmly.

“Nice to meet you both, but please call me Steve.” McGarrett heard Danny approach, and reached back for his hand without thinking. “This is Grace’s father, Danny. Danny, meet Greg and Nate, Nikki’s dads.”

“It’s a pleasure to meet you.” This time it was Nate that extended a hand, suddenly looking much calmer. “We were so sorry to hear about Grace’s mother. How is she doing?”

“Better than we could have ever imagined.” Danny answered with a sigh.

“That’s good to hear. Nikki has been quite anxious to see her, but we weren’t sure how to contact you, and didn’t want to be intrusive.”

Reaching into his pocket, Steve pulled out his wallet and grabbed a card. Retrieving a pen out of another pocket, he scribbled quickly on the back before handing the card to Nate. “That has my office number and email on it, but I added our cells to the back.” The other man accepted the card, looking a bit surprised. “Listen, I know we just met, but like I said earlier, Grace adores your daughter. We don’t really know any of the other parents here, but since Grace is with us full-time now we’d like to remedy that. Anyway, the point is, we’d like to have the three of you over for lunch Sunday if you’re available.”

Nate continued looking surprised, leaving Greg to recover from the unexpected invite and reply for them. “I don’t believe we have any other plans, and I’m sure Nikki will be delighted to see Grace outside of school. She’s wanted to do something with her since we moved here.”

“We’re aware that the girls weren’t able to do that before,” Danny spoke, glad Steve had filled him in, “but we look forward to changing that. My parents are moving here from Jersey and will be watching Grace in the afternoons. I believe you’ll find all of us a bit more inclined to welcome Grace’s friends for visits.”

All four men were smiling now, the earlier unease fully dissipated once it was clear Steve wasn’t actually mad, and intended no harm.

“That’s great to hear. Nikki will be thrilled.” Greg replied warmly. “We’ll email you our contact info so you can reach us. I suspect we won’t often get the chance to meet in the morning like this, but Nikki was adamant that she meet Grace out front his morning, and we weren’t about to refuse.”

“We appreciate you letting her do that. Seeing her really seemed to make Grace happy.” Danny was grateful they’d been willing to take the extra time. “I suppose we should all get to work.” Judging by their attire, both men were headed to their jobs as well.

“Yes. We probably should.” Greg nodded.

“I’ll email you the address for Sunday once I get your info.” Steve commented before they all headed toward the parking area.

Back in the truck, the pair watched as Nikki’s dads got into their respective cars and drove away.

“That went well.” Danny commented with a smile, pleased to have met the pair.

“It’s a good thing you showed up when you did. I think I intimidated them.”

“You think?” Danny laughed.
“I didn’t mean to.” Steve turned to look at him, a small pout on his face.

“Let me see, the head of Five-0, a decorated Navy SEAL approaches two gay men looking like he’s heading into a fight, and you wonder why they looked a bit scared.”

“Shit. I really didn’t mean to.” Steve looked guilty.

“I know that, and I think they figured it out about the time you grabbed my hand. Homophobic military guys probably don’t run around holding hands with their male work partners.”

“But if half the island already thinks we’re together, and possibly married, why would they think I had an issue with them?”

“Maybe they weren’t in that half. Maybe they’ve had some rough encounters before and it had more to do with general caution than you specifically.”

“Well, I guess by next Monday night I can be reasonably assured of not scaring people into thinking I’m a homophobic asshole.” Steve shrugged, throwing the truck in gear and pulling away from the school.

“You have a point. Once the interview is out there any question on that front will be negated. Speaking of, how bad do we think the questions they send us to review will be?”

Steve gave Danny a sideways glance. “Sam and I agreed to have them send all the questions they receive for us to review, not just the ones they would actually consider asking, so I’d imagine we’re in for some interesting ones.”

“Why all? Why not have them weed out the ones they know won’t fly?”

“Part morbid curiosity and part desire to know the kinds of jerk things people have the balls to ask. Seemed like a good chance to get a feel for what may come our way without having to be face to face with the jack asses saying it.”

Face contorted in a contemplative expression, Danny nodded slowly. “Fair point.”

“Thank you.” Steve smiled as he drove. “Plus, Sam and I thought there would probably be some that would be too damned funny to miss.”

“Again, fair point.” Danny laughed, conceding his partner had a point.
“I’m so glad you’re back.” Nikki wrapped Grace in a hug as soon as their teacher let go. Pulling back, she gripped her best friend’s hand, not ready to relinquish her hold now that Grace was back.

“I missed you too. What did I miss?”

“Nothing exciting. Tommy is still being Tommy, Jimmy asks when you’re coming back every day, and Katie managed to get even quieter without you here. Oh, and we’re going on a field trip to the zoo next Friday. I can’t wait since I haven’t been yet.”

Nikki spoke so quickly that most people would be missed half of what was said, but Grace was well-versed in translating her friends rush of words. In some ways it reminded her of Danno when he started ranting at Steve.

“Not surprising, very surprising, not good, and I can’t wait.” Grace giggled as she acknowledged each of Nikki’s updates. This form of communication was routine between the pair as Nikki was rarely able to limit herself to a single question or piece of information when speaking. “Do you think we should try to talk to Ms. Jones about Katie?”

“See if she’ll talk to you first. Maybe she was just worried about you.” Nikki’s brow furrowed as she spoke.

“Okay.” Grace agreed, though she was really worried about her other friend. Katie was very quiet, always hanging out of the fringe of activity, but during the last school year Grace had managed to lure her out of her shell a bit. It wasn’t the fast, easy friendship she had with Nikki, but she like Katie a lot. Before she could think about it more, Ms. Jones joined them, encouraging the two to head toward the classroom.

Glancing back toward the stairs, Nikki smiled. “It looks like my dads are talking to your Danno and Uncle Steve.”

“Danno and Daddy.” Grace gave her friend a huge grin as she corrected her.

“Finally!” Nikki squealed. “You have to tell me everything.” The little girl bounced with excitement as they walked down the hall.

Ms. Jones smiled fondly as she followed the two girls. She was glad Greg and Nate had shown up a bit earlier than usual and stuck around so Nikki could wait for Grace and her dads. She didn’t expect any trouble for Grace from her classmates, but starting the day off on the right foot would go a long way to setting the right tone for the day.

Entering the classroom, the teacher thanked the teaching assistant that had kept an eye on the other students that were already there while she had waited to greet Grace and her dads. They still had about fifteen minutes before class officially began, so Ms. Jones took a seat at her desk and let the other kids greet their returned classmate.

Fortunately, the other kids in the room quickly went back to what they’d been doing before, leaving Grace and Nikki a few more minutes to chat in private before they had to focus on their studies.

“So what happened?” Grace’s smile fell slightly. “No. Not the bad part. If you want to talk about that we can, but I’m guessing you’re tired of that.” Nikki squeezed her friend’s hand in encouragement. “I mean with the whole daddy thing. Monday you were freaking out about slipping up the day
before and now you’re telling me he’s cool with it?”

Grace grinned. “He’s the one that found me locked in the bathroom at the house. Between the hospital and nightmares, I slipped up a few times before Danno got back from New Jersey. Daddy took me to his house from the hospital and told me he was going to convince Danno that we should stay there.” She tried not to giggle at Nikki’s wide eyed expression. “After Danno got home, he and Steve talked. He explained everything. When they got back to the house, Daddy took me for a walk. I thought he was going to make us move out, but he didn’t. He was really happy.”

Nikki bounced in her seat, squealing in delight for her best friend.

“That’s not all.” Grace raised an eye brow, challenging Nikki to sit still so she could finish.

“Grandma Williams got here later Thursday, she’d followed Danno out as fast as she could. She managed to make those two see the light in less than day. By Friday morning Danno and Daddy managed to get it together.”

“You mean they’re together now?” Nikki’s mouth dropped open.

“Yes.”

“Well for all that what happened totally sucks, I’m really glad some good stuff happened too.” Nikki scooted her chair closer, wrapping an arm around Grace. “So are you really okay? Ms. Jones really couldn’t tell us much, but my dads saw the governor’s press conference and filled me in on what they knew.”

“I miss mom. It’s weird knowing I won’t see her again, but Danno and Daddy took me to see a therapist, Dr. James. She’s really nice, and I’ve been able to talk to her a lot. It helps, but there’s more. Grandma and Grandpa Williams decided to move to Hawaii. They’re buying a house a few minutes away from our house. Grandma Bradley came. She scared me at first, but with some help she decided to stick around for a few days so I could get to know her better. Turns out she’s actually really nice. She’s coming back for Christmas.”

“Oh wow! You haven’t seen here in like two years, right?”

“Right. She promised she’ll come back at least twice a year from now on, and we’re going to video chat every weekend.” Grace smiled.

“That’s awesome!”

“And I’m learning self-defense now. Aunt Cath and Kono started teaching me with Uncle Chin helping. Grandma Williams is learning too.”

“That’s cool. I wish I could learn. How’d you convince them to teach you?” Nikki asked in a single breath.

“It was Daddy’s idea. It sounds silly, but I was worried that they would think I was being a baby because I was still scared. They were really cool about it though. Daddy asked Kono and Cath to help since they know how to protect themselves without being bigger than someone else. I’m learning all kinds of cool things, and the governor asked them if they’d teach a class for other people, moms and kids, that need to know how to protect themselves. I think they’re going to do the first one sometimes in the next few weeks.”

“Your family is so neat. Do you think I’ll ever get to meet them?” Nikki asked. She knew Grace’s mom wouldn’t let them, but maybe this would be different.
“Yeah. Daddy said he would try to meet your dads so he could invite you guys over. Since they met this morning I bet they’re already making plans.”

Before Nikki could get too excited, Ms. Jones called the class to attention. It was time to settle in for the day.

/// GUARDIAN///

Walking toward the Five-0 headquarters, Steve and Danny were surprised by the number of head nods and other small greetings they received. A few of the HPD officers even paused to inquire after Grace. It wasn’t that the officers were usually unpleasant when they came through, more that they usually just didn’t do anything to mark the presence of either of them.

“How come I feel like the last couple of weeks changed a lot?” Danny commented as they walked into the bullpen, finding Chin and Kono leaning against the table and sipping their coffees.

“Because it has.” Chin answered. “The whole situation seems to have broken down what was left of the wall between us and HPD. It’s been an eye opening experience coming back to the office. Every time we walk through at least a half dozen people actively acknowledge our presence. Duke confirmed that there are still a few naysayers on the force, but I think it would be impossible to win them all over.”

“I’m confused. What exactly did we do to change things? We haven’t even been here.” Danny stared down the other three, trying to figure out what was going on with HPD.

“As messed up as it may sound, I think it is just the reminder that Five-0 is as human as the rest of them, and can suffer from tragedy just like anyone else.” Chin spoke slowly as if thinking through each word.

“But this isn’t the first tragedy we’ve dealt with.” Danny argued. “Pretty sure we’ve dealt with a few.”

“Yes, but nothing hits home quite like something involving a child. Bad things have happened to each of us, but this one felt different. We rallied around each other as we always do, but this time the bad thing hit home for them so they closed ranks around us. Judging by what we’ve encountered since returning, the display we saw at Rachel’s funeral was not just a one time show of token support. We’ve been accepted into the fold.” Chin explained as best he could based on his conversations with Duke and general understanding of HPD.

“Well, hopefully we won’t lose too many supporters when everything goes public.” Danny leaned against the smart table, ready to lighten the direction of the conversation.

“You win some. You lose some.” Kono waved a hand dismissively at the idea of anyone that might be prejudiced based on Steve and Danny’s relationship. “If they run over that, they weren’t worth having in our corner to begin with.”

“Anyway … what have we missed? Any update on Dyer?” Steve queried.

“Story hasn’t changed from the initial findings. Thanks to Duke taking the hit, Dyer is being charged with assaulting a law enforcement officer, drinking in public, and disorderly conduct. There were plenty of witness, and one of the cameramen there managed to get a picture of Dyer’s fist connecting with Duke’s face, so he hasn’t got a leg to stand on to argue the case.”

“I suppose he and Stan can keep each other company. What’s he looking at? Five to six years?” Steve snickered, pleased to know that the man would be serving time after what he’d done. Had the
situation been slightly different, it could have done untold amounts of damage to Grace’s recovery.
“We’ll have to thank Duke when we see him.”

“Speaking of, I ran into him this morning, and he’ll be there for Saturday. He said he’d bring dessert
with him.” Kono filled them in.

“He doesn’t need to do that.” Steve protested. “When I said we should have everyone over, I
planned to provide the food and drinks.”

“Are you delusional? You really thought everyone would show up empty handed?” Chin looked at
him like he’d lost his mind.

“Not to mention, I know the bakery he gets his desserts from.” Kono quipped. “He really does
NEED to bring dessert.”

“Fine.” Steve caved.

“Charlie’s bringing his special pasta salad.” Kono added. “And Max said something about an
appetizer to die for.”

“Is there anyone you haven’t invited from the list? How did you already talk to them all? We weren’t
here that late.” Steve quizzed her.

“Max saw me at the coffee stand before I got here, Duke was at the door when I arrived, and Charlie
came up to see how things were going. And Chin was the one that talked to Kamekona, so you can’t
blame me there.”

“He’s bringing shrimp, but I really didn’t think that needed to be stated.” Chin smirked.

“We left you the governor.” Kono stuck her tongue at Steve.

“What about me?” Governor Denning appeared in the bullpen.

“Well that was freaky.” Kono startled at his sudden appearance.

“We were just discussing the barbecue Saturday evening at our place. If you aren’t otherwise
engaged or tired of us yet, we’d be delighted to have you join us.” Steve explained.

“I believe my calendar is free in the evening. I have some speech to give at a lunch event, but no
obligations after that. Who’s on the guest list?” Sam asked.

Danny rattled off the short list. “Basically just the extended family.”

“Excellent, I’ll bring beer. Trust me, you don’t want me trying to cook anything.” Sam chuckled.

“Fair enough.” Steve nodded. “So what brought you by? Stopping in for official business?”

“No. I’m on my way back from a meeting and wanted to see how Grace’s morning went. I know I’ll
see her this evening, but I was anxious to hear.”

“It went well. Nikki and Ms. Jones met her on the front steps, so she had reinforcements from the
moment she arrived.”

“Good. Now, what time should I come this evening? I assume a late dinner since she has her
appointment with Dr. James first.” Sam asked.
Surprised that the governor had committed her therapy schedule to memory, Danny nodded in answer.

“Seven-ish?” Steve suggested. “I’d imagine we’ll be home or close to it by then.”

“Excellent. I’ll see you all then.” The four member of Five-0 watched as he left, noticing his security team just outside the door.

“I suppose we should be flattered that he leaves them out there.” Chin noted. “So, what’s on the agenda for today?”

“Catching up on email and anything else on my desk unless something more exciting comes up.” Steve looked less than thrilled at the prospects. “If you guys are caught up, feel free to see if HPD has anything they’d like us to look at. Failing that, feel free to dig out a cold case or whatever else strikes your fancy.”

“Got it, boss.” Kono turned for her office. “I’ll call HPD.”
Hey! Guess what? I’m still alive and so is Guardian. Or did anyone actually notice it was missing in the first place?

McGarrett popped out of his office, “It’s time …”

“To go get Grace. We know. We’ll see you guys for dinner and the after dinner entertainment.” Chin and Kono shooed the pair out the door. They would likely be a good twenty minutes early, but nobody in their right mind would suggest they wait.

“No calls,” Danny noted as they slid into the Camaro. “That’s a good sign, right?”

“As long as it was because she didn’t feel the need to call and not because she wasn’t allowed to. I’m going to believe that Ms. Jones would have gotten us word if there were an issue, so I’m going to assume that yes. It is a good sign.”

Discriminated at his partner closely from the passenger’s seat. “You’ve given this some thought.”

“Of course I have. Are you telling me you haven’t?” Steve challenged.

“I never said that.” Danny smirked. “Personally, I thought we showed great restraint today. We didn’t actually enter the school building this morning, we didn’t go by to check on things, we didn’t even call.”

“And we probably stopped ourselves from doing those things several dozen times.” Steve countered.

“Like I said, great restraint.” Danny laughed. “So game plan for this evening - homework, Alyssa’s start, Grace’s appointment, dinner, and question review. What am I forgetting?”

“I think that covers it. Makes for a busy evening. Alyssa said she’ll just hole up and work regardless of what we’re doing and hopefully the review won’t take long. Part of me wonders if they will even have received any audience questions. I mean are we really that interesting?” Despite evidence to the contrary, Steve had a hard time believing people were really that interested in Five-0 and their lives.

“You’re kidding, right? You do remember that you have quite the legion of adoring fans, right?” Danny teased.

“I think you’re exaggerating their numbers.” Steve rolled his eyes.

“Only because you remain willfully ignorant.” Danny shook his head.

“If you say so.” McGarrett goaded him, enjoying their usual banter.

“Oh, I say so. I definitely say so.” Danny shook his head at his partner as they pulled into the school parking lot. “Wanna grab a quick cup of coffee since we’re here so early?” He pointed to a small coffee shop right across the street.
“Sure.” McGarrett climbed out of the car, grabbing Danny’s hand as he rounded the front of the vehicle so they could duck across the street.

A few minutes later, the pair sipped their coffee as they leaned against the passenger side of the Camaro. “Hey Danno …” McGarrett started.

“What’s up, babe?” Danny turned his head to look at the SEAL, surprised that he wasn’t looking back at him.

“Do you think maybe once things settle down that Mom and Dad would watch Grace one evening while we went on an actual date?” Steve’s eyes were still fixed on the school as he spoke.

Leaning closer, Danny playfully elbowed Steve in the side. “You know I’m already putting out, you don’t have to take me out on a fancy date.” He smirked when that made his partner look at him.

“Yes, goofy. I’m sure all three of them would think that was an excellent plan. Matter of fact, I’m pretty sure at some point Ma and Grace will order us to do exactly that if we don’t suggest it first.”

“Knowing Grace she’d manage to plan the entire thing and all we’d have to do is show up.” Steve laughed. “Not a bad idea, but I would actually like the chance to plan our first date. Even if we did do things in a completely non-traditional order.”

“You mean the part where we moved in with each other, then started sleeping together, and are then going to go on an actual date?”

“Yeah, that’s what I mean.” Steve shrugged. “Hey Gracie!” He set his coffee on top of the car before leaning down to embrace their daughter. “How was school?”

“It was nice to see everybody. I saw you talking to Nikki’s dads. Are they going to come over?” Grace chattered excitedly as she leaned over to give her Danno a hug too.

“Sure are. We sorted it all out via email while you were at school. The three of them will join us for lunch on Saturday. I made sure they knew to bring suits in case you girls wanted to play in the water.”

“Awesome!” Grace climbed into the back seat when Danny opened the door for her.

“Let’s head home.” McGarrett slid into the car, firing up the engine.

*~*~* GUARDIAN*~*~*

As soon as the doorbell rang, Grace grabbed Steve’s hand, dragging him with her to answer it. “Excited?” The SEAL asked.

“Yes.” She’d zipped through her homework without any prompting as soon as they’d gotten home wanting to help Alyssa a little bit before they had to leave for her appointment with Doctor James.

Glancing through the window, Steve could see it was Alyssa waiting on the other side of the door, so he opened without hesitation. “Ready to get started?” He managed not to laugh as Grace immediately reached to help with the supplies the other woman carried. “Need help bringing the rest in?”

“I certainly won’t turn it down.” Alyssa grinned before turning toward the rest of the group. “Hey
everybody!” She waved before looking back to Steve. “Back of the car is already open. The four totes need to come inside.”

“Got it.” The SEAL stepped toward the door. “You two can start getting set up. We’ll have to leave in about 45 minutes, but you’re welcome to keep working. Like I said earlier, it’s likely to be a bit chaotic around here today.”

“We’ll help.” Chin offered as he and Danny approached.

“I operate well with chaos. If it’s too crazy I just pop in my earbuds and tune it out.” Alyssa called over her shoulder as she followed Grace up the stairs.

By the time the men returned with the rest of the supplies, Alyssa and Grace were already looking at some sketches the painter brought with her.

“It’s gonna look so awesome!” Grace practically squealed with delight at what the artist had come up with. “This will be the coolest bedroom ever.”

“Wow!” Danny looked at the drawing. “She might be right.” The other two men agreed.

“Make sure you’re ready to leave at five.” Steve reminded Grace before they cleared back out. He’d told Alyssa when they spoke earlier that they would stay out of her way, but if she needed extra sets of hands at any point all she had to do was holler.

“Got it.” Grace confirmed as Steve was stepping out of the room before turning back to Alyssa. “Have you done a lot of rooms like this?”

“Nope. I’ve done murals all over the place, but I’ve only ever done one other room in a house. I know a lot of kids that would probably love something like this, but most parents aren’t quite so open to the idea.” She grinned at Grace, easily seeing why Steve and everyone else seemed to adore her so much.

“I couldn’t believe it when Daddy told me the idea. My old room was all pink.” She practically spit the last word.

“Not a fan of pink, eh?”

“You could say that. Hasn’t been a favorite as long as I remember, but having it everywhere I turned the last few years …” Grace stopped herself. “But yeah, it’s not a favorite.”

“Well, lucky for you there are plenty of other colors for fish. Have you ever seen a mandarin fish?”

Grace shook her head. “I don’t think so.”

“Hang on, I’ll show you.” Alyssa grabbed one of her resource books. “They are only about two and half inches long, but they are some of the coolest looking fish I’ve ever seen.” She showed Grace a picture.

“Oh wow. Are you going to put any of them on the wall?”

“I thought I might. They usually hang out in pairs near the bottom, so we’ll probably put a set there and there.” She pointed to two areas on the drawing. “That should put them where you can see them once the desk is in place, right?”

“Looks like it.” Grace smiled. From the picture it looked like Alyssa had planned things carefully to
make sure that there would be things behind the desk in case she ever moved it, but it wouldn’t be hiding of the really cool parts of the mural. “So where do you start?”

“I’m going to draw outlines of the bigger elements on the wall to make sure everything fits right. If everything checks out, then I’ll move on to painting those. Once they’re up, we start filling in all the other details.” Alyssa pointed to various parts of the picture. “My plan for this evening is to try to knock out as much of the outlining as possible. If all goes well, by the time you get home from school tomorrow there will be a few recognizable pieces on the wall.”

“I can’t wait to see it!” Grace watched as Alyssa pulled out a few pencils, consulted the drawing again, and then set to work sketching. She was enthralled with the process. By the time she needed to head downstairs to leave, there were two large dolphins and a big section of coral outlined on her wall.

“How’s it going up there?” Beth asked as the trio got ready to leave.

“So far so good.” Her granddaughter answered. “It’s gonna be so cool!”

“Glad to hear it.” She smiled. “We’ll have dinner ready when you three get back.”

“We’ll be back.” Steve held the door open as the other two walked out before following them.

*~*~* GUARDIAN*~*~*

“Evening doc.” Danny greeted Dr. James as she held the door open for them. “How are you?”

“I’m doing very well. How about the three of you? That smile makes me think your first day back to school went well.” She addressed Grace.

“It did. Everyone in my class was really nice and Nikki and Katie were really happy that I was back.” Grace answered as they went through the second door.

“I bet they were.” The doctor nodded as they headed toward their usual area, turning to face Danny and Steve as Grace headed over to one of the tables. “Anything I should know about or are you two okay to find your way to the waiting area?”

“Nothing that we’re aware of, so we’ll just head back.” Danny answered.

“Okay. Barring any surprises or anything specific that Grace wishes to discuss this evening, I’ll do my best to wrap up pretty quickly so you three can get back to your dinner.”

“That works for us.” While they would both stay all evening if Grace needed it, the idea of being able to get home fairly quickly was appealing given that it was the first day back to some version of normal for all of them.

“In that case, you know where to go. I’ll come get you when we’re done.” Dr. James dismissed them before turning to her patient. “So Grace, is there anything you’d like to tell me about today?”

“It went a lot easier than I expected. I’m pretty sure they talked to all the other students before I came back, because aside from Nikki nobody said a word about it. And she didn’t really bring it up, it just kinda got mentioned when we were talking.” Grace explained. “Speaking of, she’s coming over on Sunday with her dads. Daddy and Danno met them today and invited them. She’s super excited since we never got to see each other outside of school before. I wasn’t allowed to have anyone over
before and it was always too much trouble for them to let me go over to someone else’s house. Though I never really understood that since Nikki’s dads offered to pick me up from school and bring me home the one time we tried.”

“Well, I’m glad you’re getting to do something with her now. I bet that will be nice.” Dr. James was pleased that the men were quickly establishing that they wanted Grace to have friends her own age and be able to have some of the normal things kids liked to do. “I bet you’ll be able to have a sleepover sometime soon. I used to love doing that when I was your age.”

At the mention of the sleepover, Grace launched into a full update of everything with her room. The doctor smiled fondly as the little girl explained how it was all coming together and was going to be the coolest room ever.

“It sounds like it just might.” Dr. James laughed. “So is there anything else we should talk about?”

“I do have one question if that’s okay?” Grace looked up rather seriously.

“It’s always okay to ask me questions, Grace. That’s part of why I’m here.”

“I have a friend at school that I’m worried about. I think something might be wrong, but she won’t talk to me or anyone else about it.”

“What makes you think something is wrong?” Dr. James could tell her patient was genuinely concerned.

“Katie’s always been quiet, but Nikki said it got even worse while I was out. We’ve got some shy kids in our class, but this is different. She never wants to talk about anything that happens outside of school. It’s just … I don’t know. It’s just weird and I’m worried about her.”

“Sometimes when something is really wrong, people are scared to tell someone else. They may think it will make them look bad or they may be afraid they’ll get in trouble. It’s important to just keep trying. Keep spending time with her, and keep being a good friend. Eventually she’ll learn to trust that she can tell you things and you won’t be upset with her. Most importantly, if you ever get any indication that she’s being hurt you make sure you tell an adult.”

“I know. If I knew what was going on, I could get Danno and Daddy to help fix it, but they can’t just show up at her house because I get the feeling something might be wrong. I’ll keep trying though. You’re right, at least then she’ll know I care.”

The pair continued to talk for a few more moments before the doctor went to get her dads.

“Well gentlemen,” she paused when Danny snorted from his sudden laughter. “Come on Detective Williams, I know the pair of you can be gentlemen when it’s called for.”

“I should be worried that you figured us out so fast.” The Jersey native retorted. “So how did things go?”

“She’s doing wonderfully. I think if all is well at Saturday’s appointment we can probably drop to just having those appointments. That way Wednesday evenings will be a bit less insane for the three of you.”

“As long as you think that’s what’s best for her. We’ll be here as often as she needs, I don’t care what it does to our schedule.” Steve replied wanting there to be no question about their priorities.

“I appreciate that Steve, and believe me I would not suggest it if I didn’t feel she was in a good place
for it. And even when we do move to once a week, you still have my phone number so the two of you or Grace can reach me any time if needed, and we can always have extra sessions as needed. Now, there is one more thing I wanted to mention. Have either of you heard Grace mention her friend Katie?"

“Yes.” Both men agreed before Danny elaborated. “Very quiet girl. I think Grace is a bit worried about her, but hasn’t been able to get anything out of her.”

“Agreed. Grace and I spoke about her not long ago. I know she’s been worried, so I try to make sure I’m getting updates in case something gets said that Grace doesn’t necessarily put together but might be enough for us to justify an appearance to check on things. Of course, as observant as she is, I doubt she’ll miss anything. Why do you ask?” Steve was interested to know.

“She asked my advice on how to handle the situation. It’s clear she is very concerned for her friend.”

“Thank you for letting us know. Given that and what we already knew, we’ll try to figure something out sooner rather than later. I don’t like the idea of one of her friends being at risk.”

“Me either.” Steve agreed with his partner.

“That’s good to hear. I figured you two might already be on top of it, but wanted to share the concerns. On that note, why don’t you two go fetch Ms. Grace and head home.”

“Yes, ma’am.” Steve agreed without hesitation as he ushered Danny toward the hall.

Chapter End Notes

A/N: So hopefully my long absence from this fic hasn’t left me slaughtering it on my return. I actually reread the entire story before trying to sit down and write another chapter. Now I just have to keep my fingers crossed that the muse will continue to cooperate so I can get to the intended conclusion of this initial story without another month’s long hiatus.
In the mean time, reviews / comments do wonders to keep me motivated and focused! ;)
Chapter 84

Chapter Notes

Wow! I’ll admit I posted chapter 83 shortly before heading to bed and rather expected that after being MIA for so long people would have given up and moved on - instead my inbox exploded with a bunch of you confirming you’re still here. YAY!!! Thanks so much for sticking it out. I’d love to respond to every single review, but given time I could either do that or write a blanket pre-chapter note thanking you all and get the next chapter out. I thought you might prefer the chapter.

Alas, we get to see some of the more ridiculous questions that came through for the interview. Most of the questions that will actually be used for the interview will not be covered in this chapter since they will be covered in that chapter.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Pulling into the driveway, McGarrett navigated through the other vehicles to park. “Looks like the governor is here already.”

“Not surprising. We did tell him to come for dinner.” Danny climbed out of the car, giving Grace a hand as she unfolded from the back. “You keep growing and we’re just going to have to take the truck everywhere.”

“I’m only nine, Danno. I’m gonna keep growing.” Grace patted her dad on the shoulder as she took off toward the house.

“I should resign myself to being the shortest person in this family now, shouldn’t I?” Danny wrapped an arm around Steve’s waist as they followed behind their daughter.

“It’s a possibility.” Steve squeezed Danny’s arm, his own arm slung around his partner’s shoulder. “But you probably have a few more years before she makes that a reality.”

“I can hope.” Danny slipped free so they’d fit through the door, lacing his fingers through Steve’s so he didn’t have to completely let go of his partner.

“Welcome back.” Kono’s head popped around the corner from the kitchen. “Grace just went up to wash up for dinner. You’ve got five minutes before it’s on the table.”

“Yes, ma’am.” McGarrett gave her a quick salute with his free hand. “I guess we have our orders.” He followed Danny up the stairs. A few minutes later, they popped their head into Grace’s bedroom to see what progress had been made before following the sounds of their ohana back to the dining room.

“Looks like you’ve been busy,” Steve greeted Alyssa as they entered the room. “Are you still planning working more after dinner?”

“Yeah, I thought Grace and I could get a bit more done before she needs to head to bed.”

“Something tells me dinner will be quick tonight.” Beth laughed as she sat down across the table. “I know someone is anxious to help with her room.” She nodded her head toward where Grace sat
chatting with Catherine.

Everyone settled in around the table, quickly filling plates with spaghetti, salad, and garlic bread. Knowing there were things yet to do that evening, the usual lively banter around the table was kept relatively calm. Within half an hour, plates were empty and Grace looked like she was ready to grab Alyssa and make a break for her room any second.

“Why don’t Paul and I knock out clean up while you lot get to what you’re supposed to be doing?” Beth decided to put her granddaughter out of her misery.

“I’ll help.” Catherine rose and started grabbing dishes.

“You’re welcome to join us when you’re done.” Steve offered. It had dawned on him earlier in the day that they might not want Grace to hear some of the questions. Thankfully Alyssa had promised that she worked best with music on and would make sure that she and the little girl were having enough fun that she wouldn’t overhear anything.

“Will do.”

A few minutes later, Governor Denning and the Five-0 team were settled in the living room, beers in hand.

“I had George do a cursory sort of the questions. I think he thought he was being clever.” Sam handed copies of the questions to the other four.

“Acceptable, consider, probably not,” Danny let out a barking laugh, unable to finish reading the final fourth category.

“Fuck no,” Kono picked up where the detective left off. “I like George’s style.”

“All the time he’s worked for me, and I’ve never seen that side of him. I think he was trying to impress you guys.” Sam snickered. “So where do we want to start?”

The room fell quiet for a second, everyone listening to make sure the music was going upstairs before they started. Once they confirmed it was, Steve turned back to the others. “I say we start with the fuck no category. Might as well knock the worst out first so the rest is in perspective.”

“As twisted as that logic is, the neanderthal is probably right.” Danny gave McGarrett’s leg an affectionate squeeze.

“Shit!” Kono squeaked as she read the handful of questions George had put under that grouping. “People are way too interested in your sex life.” She pointed at Danny and Steve. “What kind of people think it’s okay to ask this?”

Chin looked down at the page in his hand, trying to contain his disbelieving laughter. “We’re gonna need more booze if these questions don’t get better.” He shook the page in front of him. “But hey, there’s at least one offer for a threesome if the pair of you are interested.”

“No. Not interested. I don’t share well.” Danny glared at Chin even though he knew it wasn’t his question.

“What the fuck?” McGarrett growled. “Some pervert wants us to tell them if we’ve explained gay sex to Grace.”

“I haven’t explained sex to Grace at all. No. Not even. She’s nine!” Danny stared at the paper in
outrage. “Please tell me these questions get better!”

“They do, I promise.” Sam spoke up. “Though Steve definitely had a point about the other questions being put in perspective by starting with the ones that were so far out of line no rational human being would ever expect you to entertain answering them. I should note that those questions were noted as inappropriate by the station before they sent them over, but they included them based on our request.”

“Good to know that they are both not completely nuts and that they did as we asked.” Steve shrugged, trying to shift the conversation to a more positive frame before he caved to his desire to find out who had dared to ask such ludicrous questions and teach them some respect.

“Moving on before you two kill someone,” Chin spoke up. “The first one in the probably not bunch isn’t that bad. They want to know if you two will be having more kids and if so how many.”

Danny and Steve both stared at Chin for a moment before turning to stare at each other. “We … I … uh.” Steve stumbled.

“I think what he’s trying to say is we haven’t even talked about things like that yet, so I don’t think we’ll be giving a bunch of strangers any answers.” Danny gave Steve a quick smile. “Relax, babe. Pretty sure we get more than a couple of weeks to figure out the answers to shit like that.”

“Yes. Other boss is right about that.” Kono smirked. “Though we if get a vote, I think it’d be a blast to have a little McDanno or two running around here.”

“Um you do realize …” Danny wasn’t even sure how to finish that question.

“Yes. I know, but still even if it only has one of your genes, if the two of you raise a baby from day one I bet it’ll have plenty of both of you.”

“She’s probably right.” Sam laughed. “I can think of worse things to happen to the population of Hawaii.”

“Anyway, moving on.” Danny shook his head. “They want to know if our relationship is just a reaction to the stress of the recent situation. You know, I’d actually be okay answering that one in some fashion. Maybe not exactly as it’s asked, but we know we’ve gotta talk about us some. Making it clear that this has been developing for a long time seems reasonable.”

“Yes. I’m okay with that.” Steve smiled at Danny, both men remembering the many moments that had come before.

“Okay, I made a note on that one.” Sam nodded. He was keeping track of any comments and changes to the list.

“Who made the first move?” Kono read another question. “Think they’d believe us if we told them it was Danny’s mom?”

“There’s no telling what they will decide to believe.” Chin pointed out.

“Honestly, I don’t know that I really want to get into that kind of detail on television. I know you lot know all about how we finally got together.” Danny gave Chin and Kono a pointed look. “Don’t bother feigning innocence, I have no doubt you two were in on it.”

The cousins looked properly guilty, though clearly not remorseful and Governor Denning just laughed at the four.
“Is Grace bothered by us?” Steve read the next question in the probably not list. “Well obviously we know she’s not, but that’s still a rather inappropriate question for the interview.”

“Agreed.” Danny seconded, the other three nodding in agreement as Sam marked it appropriately on his copy. “Lovely, they want to know if we’ve always been gay.”

“Aren’t you technically both bi?” Kono countered, rolling her eyes at the question. “Not that it’s really any of their business.”

“Correct on both counts.” Danny concurred. “That’s not really a question we want to be answering on television, especially at this stage.”

“Agreed. It’s not like the answer to that makes any difference. I really don’t get people’s obsession with knowing if it was some sudden revelation or if we’ve always known. Nobody asks that question when it’s a man and woman dating.”

“You’re right. Don’t believe I’ve ever had somebody come up and ask me if I’ve always been heterosexual or if it’s a new thing when I start dating someone.” Kono’s face gave away her general annoyance with the question.

“So that one is a no go.” Denning exed it out on the list before finishing off his beer.

“You guys ready for another round?” Cath came in the room, hands full of several of the beers Sam had arrived with earlier.

Everyone grabbed a bottle as she made a quick round through the room before plopping down on the floor and leaning back against the chair Chin occupied.

“Would you rather sit in the chair?” The Hawaiian asked immediately, already starting to stand.

“Nah. I’m good here.” Catherine looked up at him as she took a long drink of her beer. “So where were we?”

“I think we got through the worst.” Chin handed her his copy of the question, pointing to the ones they’d already reviewed. “It’s amazing the things people will ask when they don’t have to look you in the eye.”

“You aren’t kidding.” Catherine skimmed over the questions. “Well at least the majority of them actually appear fairly reasonable.”

“True. We started with the bad ones. Figured we might as well end on a high note.” McGarrett explained, looking over the paper. “Only two more left in the probably not. One asking how Grace is handling her mother’s death and the other wanting details of the night Rachel was killed and what happened to Grace.” The SEAL’s tone made it obvious he wasn’t keen on addressing those questions.

“I think a general statement that Grace is back in school and doing as well as can be expected is as much as they’re getting out of us there.” Danny spoke up. “As for the other, I think we address early on that we will not be getting into specifics of what happened as divulging those details will serve no purpose other than to potentially upset those close to the situation.”

“Well said.” Sam nodded along as Danny spoke. “If it’s okay with you, I’d like to ask Ms. Mahelona to address that point when she tees up the interview. I know she stated she had no interest in getting into specifics around that for those very reasons.”
“Good idea.” Steve agreed. “The rest of the list is fine with me. You guys agree?” He looked around to the rest of his team, getting easy agreement from all of them.

“Well, since you know the questions, I might recommend you spend some time considering your answers and possibly discuss as a team tomorrow if things are still slow. Having had to deal with plenty of media crap in my day, it’s always a good idea to feel prepared though you don’t want to come off rehearsed or staged.”

“Any other tips for those of us less experienced with stuff like this?” Steve asked, more than willing to get any helpful tips from the governor.

“Avoid looking like you’re going to kill someone, be professional, but try to be a bit approachable to. Be willing to talk and give answers, but if anything goes sideways and crosses a line, stand your ground. You four shouldn’t run into any issues. She’s been vetted carefully and is a staunch supporter both of Five-0 and me. She understands the goal is to give you an controlled environment to share what you are willing and cut off the race between the more unscrupulous types to try to get the dirt.”

“Got it. Don’t intimidate the nice interviewer, but don’t be a push over.” Steve summarized.

“Yeah, that covers the basics.” Denning laughed. “I am going to try to be on hand, but have one meeting that is proving a challenge to move. Either way, George will meet you at the studio Friday morning and will stay on hand until you leave.”

“Once upon a time I would have assumed that was because you didn’t trust us.” McGarrett quipped.

“Does that mean you understand otherwise now?” Sam asked, curious to know the answer.

“Yes. It does.”

“Sounds like the music just turned off upstairs,” Beth interrupted as she walked into the room.

“Great timing, I think we just wrapped up.” Kono hopped up, grabbing the papers from the others. “I’ll just stick these in your office for now.” She headed into the other room, not wanting to leave them sitting where Grace might see some of the more questionable things on the list. Kono was back with the others in just a few seconds. “I’ll take them with me when I leave and bring them to the office tomorrow. That way you don’t have to worry about having them with you when you’re taking Grace in the morning.”

“Thanks, Kono.” Danny pulled himself off the couch as he heard footsteps coming down the stairs. “All done for the night?”

“Sure are.” Alyssa had her bag slung over her shoulder. “If it’s okay with you guys, I’ll be back around nine tomorrow morning.”

“They’ll be gone dear well before that, but Paul and I will be here so that’s just fine.” Beth assured her.

“Great. I’ll see you guys tomorrow. Governor, it was a pleasure to meet you.” She shook Sam’s hand before letting McGarrett escort her to the door. “You’ve got quite a lovely family these days. Your father would be thrilled to see the house this full of life again.”

Steve stared down at her, struck silent by her assertion for a long moment. “I sometimes forget that you were around when he was still here. It’s been so long.”
“I know, and I know you two didn’t have the best relationship, but he did love you. He’d be happy to see you now.” With that she gave him a tight hug before walking down the sidewalk.

“Daddy,” Grace’s voice interrupted his thoughts before she appeared at his side. “Are you okay, Daddy?”

“Yeah, Gracie.” He reached down, swinging her into his arms. “She just reminded me how lucky I am.”

The little girl didn’t say anything else, just wrapped her arms around his neck, resting her head on his shoulder as they rejoined the others.

“Alright Monkey, it’s bath time.” Danny reminded her.

“Yes, Danno.” She gave Steve a quick kiss on the cheek before letting him set her back on the ground. “Since it’s already kinda late, can we read the next chapter tomorrow night?”

“Good idea, sweetheart.” Steve ruffled her hair.

“Works for us.” Kono nodded, answering for her, Chin, and Catherine.

Within a few minutes, Grace had given everyone hugs and headed upstairs and the others had cleared out for the night, leaving Danny, Steve, Paul, and Beth standing in the living room.

“On that note, I think I’m going to call it a night.” Beth yawned. “I’ll fix breakfast in the morning.” She gave both her boys a hug before grabbing Paul’s hand and leading him up the stairs.

Danny closed the short distance between him and Steve. “So what did Alyssa say that had you looking all thoughtful?” His hands rested on Steve’s abs as he spoke.

“She just said she thought Dad would be thrilled to see the house so full of life again.” Steve leaned into Danny’s touch. “She’s right. For all that he was shit at showing it, I know he loved us. He would have loved you too.”

“I wish I could have had the chance to know him.” Danny’s hands slid around Steve’s waist, pulling him closer.

“Me too.” Steve leaned in, letting his head drop to lean against Danny’s. “I love you.”

The pair stood in the darkness of the living room for several silent moments, simply sharing that moment.

Chapter End Notes

Comments are always much appreciated!!
Chapter 85

Chapter Notes

First, don’t freak out – this really is the third chapter in three days. Also don’t freak out when the next chapter takes a bit longer. I had a long weekend and was able to spend a good part of it writing. Will probably be running around a chapter a week or so going forward.
And with that I bring you - Day 2 of Grace’s return to school.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Nikki, Grace, and Katie were huddled together at their table in the school cafeteria. Katie seemed to be coming back out of her shell just a bit now that Grace was back for a second day in a row. Chatting away, the girls paid little attention to the other students until one of the boys from the older grades walked by, bumping into Grace’s back.

“He’s such a jerk.” Katie shook her head at her friend. “Never watches where he’s going.”

“Some thing never change.” Grace mused, watching as the boys took a seat at the neighboring table. “Oh well.” She shrugged it off, but before she could get back to asking Katie which animal she was going to do her research project on, the boy’s voice carried to their table.

“I heard he bashed her in head. Blood everywhere. My uncle said he didn’t blame him.”

Nikki could see the tears welling in Grace’s eyes. It wasn’t hard to figure out they were either talking about Grace’s mom or something way too close. “Grace, are you okay?”

Grace stared at her friend, tears threatening to spill as she shook her head. She could still hear the boys behind her, apparently Tony’s uncle worked for HPD and had a big mouth.

“Do you want to call somebody?” Nikki asked, reaching across the table to hold Grace’s hand, Katie wrapping an arm around her from where she sat.

Nodding her head, Grace remained silent.

“I’ll be right back. I’m just gonna find one of the teachers.” Nikki scanned the room, groaning a bit when the only adult she saw was Ms. Caldwell. Glancing back at her best friend, Nikki took off toward where the director stood staring over one section of the room. “Excuse me, Ms. Caldwell.”

“Yes, Nikki. What can I do for you?” The little girl cringed just a bit at the slightly haughty tone. Ms. Caldwell wasn’t the warmest staff member at Sacred Heart by any stretch of the imagination.

“Tony and his friends,” she pointed toward the tables, “are talking really loud about what happened to Grace’s mom. She needs to call her dads.”

“If she’s that upset she should come tell me herself.” Ms. Caldwell brushed her off.

“She’s a little busy trying not to run out of the room in tears.” Nikki wasn’t going to back down, even back talking the director landed her in trouble. “You need to make them stop and let her call her dads.”
“I don’t believe it is your place to tell me, the director of this school, what I need to do.” Ms. Caldwell stared down at her. “Now why don’t you go sit back down?”

Nikki turned, scanning the room for any other adults. She caught sight of their gym teacher, Mr. Kimo coming through the door. Throwing a glance in Grace’s direction, she could see her best friend trying to keep it together as Katie held her close. Tony and his friends continued to carry on, laughing loudly as they threw looks toward Grace. “Jerks.” Nikki grumbled as she wound her way toward the teacher.

“Nikki, is everything okay?” Mr. Kimo called as he saw her approaching, taking several steps in her direction.

“No.” She was so flustered now she had a hard time figuring out what to say. Pointing in the direction of her best friend, she took a deep breath. “Tony and his friends …”

“Oh no.” Mr. Kimo exhaled sharply, taking off toward the tables, Nikki following right behind him. “You boys, cut it out. Go to my office. Now.” He spoke sharply, making sure they were moving that direction before turning to Grace. He spotted Ms. Caldwell with her back turned to them and glanced down at Nikki.

“I tried her first.” The little girl’s bottom lip trembled she was so upset with the director.

“I’ll deal with her later. Why don’t we get Grace to Ms. Jones.” He squatted down next to their table, placing a gentle hand on Grace’s shoulder. “Come on, sweetheart. I’m going to take you back to your classroom and Ms. Jones will let you call your dads. Nikki, Katie, do you girls want to stay with her?”

Both girls nodded immediately. “Yes, sir.”

Mr. Kimo led the three from the cafeteria, keeping a reassuring hand on Grace’s shoulder as they navigated the halls toward the classroom. Knocking on the door, he didn’t want to startle the other teacher too much.

“What happened?” Ms. Jones hurried to open the door, seeing the three girls with him.

“Tony and his band of fiends.” He watched as Ms. Jones wrapped her arms around Grace. “And no assistance from Ms. Caldwell.” Ms. Jones’s eyes shot up. “Nikki found me as soon as I walked into the cafeteria.”

“Grace, why don’t we call one of your dads?” The teacher tugged the little girl toward her desk and her cell phone. “Should we start with Danno?”

“Yes, ma’am.”

*~*~* GUARDIAN*~*~*

“I hope he remembers the extra sauce.” Kono looked up from the smart table. “Last time we let Danny go grab lunch for all of us, he forgot the sauce.”

“Why don’t you call and remind him?” Chin poked at his cousin.

“Ooohh, I should.” Kono started pulling her phone out of her pocket. Before she’d even unlocked it, the sound of Danny’s phone ringing filled the office.

“That was fast.” McGarrett laughed from his office, looking up expecting to see Danny scrambling
in because he forgot something.

“Danny left his phone,” Chin called back as he scrambled toward the phone. “Shit. Steve’s it’s the school.” The Hawaiian answered, putting it on speaker phone as McGarrett damn near jumped over his desk to get to them. “Danny’s phone. This is Chin.”

“Uncle Chin?” They could tell from her voice that she’d been crying. “Where’s Danno?”

“Danno ran out to get lunch and forgot his phone, Gracie.” Steve answered. “What’s wrong?” The SEAL fought the urge to run for the car before he actually knew what was happening.

“Some of the 5th grade boys were talking about what happened to mom.” Grace’s voice cracked.

Steve and the team glared at the phone. “Do you want me to come get you?”

There was no answer for a few seconds as Grace considered what to do. “No. I just … I just needed to hear you. Mr. Kimo is taking care of them and Nikki and Katie are with me and Ms. Jones in our classroom. I’ll be okay.” In just the short period of time she was already sounding calmer.

Steve stayed on the line chatting with her for a few more minutes. He could hear Ms. Jones in the background talking to someone else. When it was clear that Grace was okay to handle things, Steve felt like he could finally breathe again. “Gracie, can I talk to Ms. Jones for a minute?”

“Sure, Daddy.”

“Thanks, sweetheart. I love you.”

“Love you too.” He could hear the phone being handed off.

“Commander,” Ms. Jones greeted him.

“What wasn’t Grace telling me?”

“She wasn’t withholding, but I don’t think she knew everything. When the boys started causing problems, the only adult in the room was Ms. Caldwell. While Katie stayed with Grace, Nikki approached her and was repeatedly dismissed. Fortunately, Mr. Kimo came in and interceded as soon as Nikki approached.”

“Son of a b …” Steve stopped himself before he completely let loose knowing that it wasn’t the teacher’s fault.

“My sentiments exactly, Commander.” Ms. Jones was furious that the director would let her bias against Detective Williams put Grace in such a position.

“I think I’ll be paying Ms. Caldwell a visit.” Steve growled.

“I think that’s an excellent plan. Shall we keep things quiet until you arrive?” Ms. Jones was all for letting the SEAL scare the heck out of her boss. As far as she was concerned, Ms. Caldwell needed to be put in her place. If that place happened to be somewhere other than Sacred Heart, she wouldn’t mind a bit.

“Appreciate that. Provided I don’t get kicked out of the building, do you mind if I stop by the class after?”

“I’d pay good money to see her try to remove you from the building.” Ms. Jones laughed. “But yes you are more than welcome to stop by when you’re done with her.”
“I’ll see you soon.” Steve disconnected the call, tossing Danny’s phone back to Chin. “Make sure Danny gets that when he gets back and fill him in on everything. I’ll be back when I’m done with Caldwell.” He took three steps before he stopped. “Shit! Danny has the car.”

“Take mine.” Chin threw him the keys to his Mustang. “Just please be nice to her. The car, not the director. Tear that one to pieces.”

“Thanks, Chin. Promise I’ll bring her back in one piece.” Steve headed for the door.

“So, do we think Sacred Heart will have a new director by week’s end or that Grace will be in a new school?” Kono asked her cousin.

“I’d say either is fair game right now.” Chin shook his head. “I’m not sure if I hope Danny gets his ass back here so we can get this over with or if I hope he takes his time so he doesn’t have time to catch up to Steve.”

*~*~* GUARDIAN*~*~*

Storming up the stairs of Sacred Heart Academy, Steve tried to remind himself that he wasn’t actually going in for combat. The knowledge that the school’s director had blatantly disregarded their request that Grace be able to contact them, and had turned a blind eye to the potentially traumatic mouthing off of a group of older boys infuriated him.

Coming through the door, he went straight for the front office. The secretary’s smile faded the second her eyes landed on him. “Commander?”

“Where is Ms. Caldwell?”

The woman pointed to the director’s office. Looking through the partially opened blinds, he could see she was alone and appeared to be reading something on her desk.

“Would you like me to let her know you’re …”

“No. I’ll tell her myself.” McGarrett rounded the desk, going straight for Caldwell’s office door. Stepping inside, the director’s head shot up.

“Commander McGarrett,” the woman almost squeaked. “Is there a reason you’re barging into my office?”

“Is there a reason why my daughter wasn’t permitted to call when the request was made? Or for that matter a reason that you completely ignored the fact that a group of your students were loudly discussing her mother’s death in an obvious attempt to upset her?” Steve stood straight, arms crossed tight over his chest, looking like every bit like he was questioning a suspect.

“I don’t know what you’re talking about?” Ms. Caldwell gave him an icy stare.

“Are you saying that three students of your students and two of your teachers are lying about what happened in the cafeteria.”

“I’m saying it was just kids being beings and Grace being overly emotional. It’s clear she’s not handling the situation well at all.” She leaned back in her chair.

“Do you hear yourself? Do you really think I’m that stupid?” Steve shouted. “You’ve been nothing but condescending to Danny and I since were here earlier this week. I don’t know what you think you’re playing at, but don’t try to lie to me about what happened with our daughter. I’ve already
spoken to both her and her teacher.”

“Ms. Jones had no business in the cafeteria.” The director started to argue.

“Ms. Jones wasn’t in the cafeteria. Fortunately Mr. Kimo was and he had the intelligence to step in where you failed. What the hell do you think you’re playing at?”

“As I said before, it’s clear that Grace is not handling the situation well at all. She is clearly suffering without the presence of her mother. Perhaps the two of you should consider making other arrangements for her long term care. Somewhere more appropriate for a nine year old girl than with two men.”

“I’m going to pretend you didn’t just sit there and make a blatantly homophobic statement. You’re clearly creating your own version of reality, as every … I repeat EVERYONE else that has interacted with Grace has been impressed with just how well she is coping with the situation and attributing that to the supportive and loving environment she is in. If I had to guess, I’d say you’ve spent less than five minutes with her and are spouting off complete bull based on your prejudices.”

“I’ll have you know …”

“Ms. Caldwell,” a new voice interrupted from behind McGarrett. “I suggest you stop there before you completely alienate Commander McGarrett.”

Steve stepped aside, staring down a short, gray-haired man that now blocked the doorway.

“Apologies for interrupting, Commander. I’m Josh Black, president of the Sacred Heart board of directors. Ms. Liko,” he gestured toward the secretary, “called and I thought I would stop by since I was in the area.”

Ms. Caldwell was now standing, looking rather taken aback. “I assure you, Mr. Black, there was no need for her to call.”

“On the contrary, based on what I overheard you saying, I believe there was every need for her to call.” The man turned his attention back to McGarrett. “I apologize for the gross accusations and insults that have been hurled at you since your arrival. I am sure both you and Detective Williams expect better from the leadership of your daughter’s school, as do I.”

“We do.” Steve’s eyes narrowed, not quite sure what to think of the man that had shown up and seemed to be so familiar with the situation already.

“Commander, why don’t we step into another room to talk for a few moments?” Mr. Black gestured toward an unoccupied office across from where they currently stood. Steve nodded and followed the shorter man into the other office, waiting as he shut the door behind them. “First, let me apologize for what you’ve just encountered. While we’ve had some challenges with her handling of parent relations, we have never had any indication of that type of behavior from her.”

“I would hope not.” McGarrett arched an challenging eyebrow, anxious to find out why the board president wanted to speak with him. “I hope this doesn’t offend you, but in the last hour this day has taken a turn for the worst and after that conversation with Ms. Caldwell, I’m really not in the mood for games.”

“No offense taken, sir. I haven’t received a full briefing on what happened, but Ms. Liko connected me with Grace’s teacher so I did get the abbreviated version of what occurred at lunch. Based on what was coming out of Ms. Caldwell’s mouth when I can arrive, I can only imagine what else was said. Ms. Jones also gave me as much of the background as she could in that short period. Suffice it
to say, Ms. Caldwell’s treatment of the situation and her attitude toward you and Detective Williams will not be tolerated. Given the previous challenges we’ve faced with her, she will be relieved of her duties this afternoon. While I would certainly understand if you chose to pursue other options for Grace’s education, I hope you will give Sacred Heart another chance.”

Steve stared him down for a moment, considering what he’d just said. “I appreciate your candor. Provided you follow through, I expect Danny and I will give you and your team a chance to prove that this is still the best place for Grace, but we will need to discuss that decision before I can promise anything.”

Mr. Black pulled a business card out of his pocket, extending it to Steve. “I understand. Please, call me at any time if you or Detective Williams have any questions or concerns.”

Shaking hands, the two men headed for the door. “Thank you. Now I’m going to swing by the classroom and check on Grace before I head back to HQ.”

“I’m sure she’ll be thrilled to see you.” Mr. Black waved as McGarrett headed down the hall toward Grace.

Pausing just outside Ms. Jones’s classroom, Steve watched through the window, waiting to catch the teacher’s attention before entering. As soon as she waved him in, Steve opened the door. The kids were all focused on their work, so his presence wasn’t immediately noticed.

“How’s she doing?” He whispered when the teacher approached.

“Much better. Talking to you helped a lot.” She smiled warmly as she looked at Grace hard at work at her desk. “I gather things got interesting?”

“Yes. I’m sure you’ll be hearing all about it soon.” Steve could tell she was making a guess already at what that meant.

“Why don’t you go see how Grace’s project is going?” She nudged him toward Grace’s desk.

Slipping down the aisle, he winked at one boy that looked up at him, receiving a huge grin in return. Reaching Grace’s desk, he knelt down beside her, catching her eye as he went.

“Daddy?” Her surprised smile was worth every second it took to make the quick visit.

“Hey, Gracie.” Steve gave her a quick hug. “I stopped by to talk to Ms. Caldwell, but I couldn’t leave without saying hi. Everything going okay now?”

“Yeah. I’m okay now.” Grace nodded. “I knew it was going to happen eventually.”

“I wish it hadn’t.” Steve wrapped his hand around hers. “But I’m glad you’re okay.”

“I am. I promise. Nikki and Katie made sure I was okay.”

“You’ve got good friends.” Steve smiled. “Shaved ice after school?”

“Absolutely.” Grace smiled, giving him a quick kiss on the cheek before he headed back to the front of the class.

“Thanks for letting me stop by.” Steve bid farewell to Ms. Jones before heading out.

Trotting down the stairs, he realized that the Camaro sat where Chin’s Mustang had been. Danny was perched on the hood, watching him.
“You could have come inside.” Steve called as he approached.

“I could have, but I was pretty confident you could handle it. Since Chin and Kono assure me that they’d heard the entire conversation with Grace and she was just fine, I didn’t feel the need to charge in and interrupt. You’re perfectly capable of instilling fear into uncooperative pains in the ass.” Danny slipped off the hood, greeting the SEAL with a brief kiss.

“Well, if Mr. Black …”

“Board president of Sacred Heart, Mr. Black?”

“One and the same.” Steve confirmed. “Like I was saying, if he’s to be believed the pain in the ass will be gone this afternoon.” Steve handed him the business card. “He sincerely hopes that we’ll gave them a chance to prove that this is the right place for Grace. I told him I expected we would give them a chance, but that we would need to discuss.”

“Well played, Super SEAL.” Danny rested his head against Steve’s chest. “Did you get a chance to see Grace?”

Steve let out a wry laugh. “As if I would go in there and not lay eyes on her. Yes, I stopped in for just a minute. She’s handling this with as much poise as she handles everything else. I might have promised her shaved ice after we pick her up.”

“Just the three of us?” Danny perked up.

“Yeah. Not that I don’t love having everyone around, but I thought we could grab a little time for the three of us.”

“I approve.” Danny handed Steve the keys. “Now tell me all about what happened while you drive us back to work.”

“Sure thing, Danno.”

Chapter End Notes

So much for an uneventful return to school. Me thinks things are going to get interesting fast with someone at HPD when they figure out where little Tony got his info.

Comments provide great motivation to keep me writing.

For those that have asked, there will be more of Guardian: Love Explored coming.
Chapter 86

Chapter Notes

So this one gets a little heated (and not in the fun way).

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

"So we did a quick check of HPD personnel against the enrollment at Sacred Heart and found this." Chin swiped at the table's screen, sending the picture of Officer Derrick Martinez onto the larger screen.

"He's been with HPD about four months. He was one of the many officers on scene the day we found Grace." Kono continued briefing them. "It appears his older brother was a friend of Stan's. They'd done a couple of business deals together. The brother’s son, Tony, is the one that caused the issue at the school."

"Charming," Danny glared at the screen. "So at best, Martinez was spouting off about the case to his brother and Tony overheard. At worst, he intentionally told the kid knowing he'd mouth off in front of Grace."

"How do you want to handle it?" Steve watched his partner.

Danny’s turned slowly from the scree to face McGarrett. "How do I want to handle it? You mean you don’t have a plan already formulated in that crazy head of yours?"

“I didn’t say I didn’t have thoughts, but by nature of the timing of Grace’s call, I took the lead with the school. I figured you’d want your shot.” Steve shrugged. “I can line up a shark cage if you’d prefer."

“Not what I expected.” Danny stared up at Steve with a look full of surprised affection. “It’s incredibly thoughtful of you to leave some ass chewing for me, babe.”

Steve gave him what others classified as a trademark McGarrett grin.

“Goof.” Danny shook his head as he turned backed to stare at Martinez’s picture. “So while talking about Rachel’s death was a completely asshole move on his part, he hasn’t technically done anything illegal. And he is a cop, so we should probably avoid some of our more questionable methods of scaring someone into line.”

“More questionable methods,” Kono barely held in a giggle. “And which methods do you classify in that category?"

“Shark cages. Dangling people off roofs. Anything involving grenades in public places. You know, all his favorite things.” Danny nudged Steve playfully with his elbow.

“Shouldn’t we be figuring out the plan?” Chin laughed at the trio. “We can catalog all Steve’s questionable tactics later.”

“Fair point.” Danny admitted. “Given the situation, I saw we go pay him a visit in the squad room.”
“We?” Steve’s eyes lit up at the idea that he’d be joining the confrontation.

“Yes, we. By which I mean all four of us. You know, strength in numbers and all that.” Danny shrugged. “I can’t imagine it’s gonna get out of control, but you have to admit we have some serious presence when you put us all together. And we never know if he’s gonna have friends standing on his side.”

“When?” Chin asked.

“No time like the present.” Danny looked to the others for approval.

“Let’s go.” Kono slapped him on the shoulder.

The four headed out of headquarters, ready to go see what Martinez had to say for himself. As they were heading down the stairs, Duke caught sight of them.

“Catch a case?” He called out as they approached.

“Not exactly.” Danny responded.

“Grace okay?” Duke was obviously picking up that something was wrong.

“She is now. Had a bit of an issue at school today.” McGarrett answered this time.

“Anything I can help with?”

“Nah. We’re just headed over to have a little chat with Officer Martinez about keeping his mouth shut when his nephew is around.”

“Derrick Martinez?” Duke appeared even more interested.

“Yeah.” Steve answered, noticing the shift.

“Mind if I come along? He could use a reminder that he should be looking out for more than just himself.” Duke frowned. “Kid’s got potential, or at least he would, but he’s got an attitude and doesn’t always seem to take the job serious. He’s far too worried about having fun stories to tell.”

“And it appears the propensity for story telling is a family trait based on what young Tony was spouting off in the cafeteria.”

The five walked in relative silence as they approached HPD.

“Hey guys!” The young officer at the front desk called when he spotted them.

“Hey McGarrett! What’s Five-0 doing in these parts?” Another veteran of the force came over, shaking Steve’s hand. “Not that you aren’t always welcome to pop by.”

“Just paying Martinez a visit. His mouth is causing some problems.” Duke explained.

“Well shit.” The other officer looked neither surprised nor pleased at the revelation. “That kid has got to get it together. What’d he run his mouth about this time?”

Danny and Steve both noticed several other officers paying attention to the conversation. Judging by their expressions they weren’t particularly fans of Officer Martinez either.

“Details of Rachel’s death.” Danny answered. “In front of his 11 year old nephew who just happens
to attend Grace’s school. So you can imagine what the kid decided to start mouthing off about at lunch today to terrorize Grace.”

“Shit.” Several of the officers had gone from looking annoyed to down right pissed. “Somebody wanna grab the captain? I think he’s gonna wanna be able to make an appearance at some point during the dressing down Martinez is about to get.”

“I’ll get ‘em.” One of the other guys ducked down the hall.

“You boys lead the way.” One of the lieutenants stepped toward them. “I believe we’ll be joining you.” As he spoke more cops appeared around them.

Danny gave a sharp nod, looking at the dozen or so men that now stood around them before following Duke toward where Martinez would be found. Approaching, they could see he was on his cell phone, and quickly picked his end of the conversation.

“Nah, brah. They can’t do shit to Tony. Not like he was tellin’ lies. Bitch had it coming, you said as much.”

Five-0 and company stopped just a few feet the still oblivious cop. Everyone in the group appeared to be twitching to hit him after that comment.

“Seriously, who do you think Caldwell’s going to believe? A hysterical little brat and her two fuckin’ homos or the nephew of one of her biggest supporters.”

McGarrett cleared his throat, deciding that if they had to listen much longer things might actually escalate to a shark cage.

Martinez turned, mouth open to make some smart ass comment about being interrupted until he saw the group. “Brah, I gotta go. Later.” He tossed the phone on his desk. “McGarrett, what can I do for you?”

“Oh I think you’ve done plenty already.” Danny closed in on him, getting right up in Martinez’s face. Fortunately, he was only about an inch taller than Danny. “Was this just a game to you? Not a fan of Five-0, so see if you can get your nephew to make our daughter’s life a living hell? Thought you’d get away with it because your brother has Caldwell in his pocket.”

“I’m just sayin’ what everybody else is too chicken shit to say. Nobody wants people like you here.” Martinez leaned forward, trying to intimidate Danny. “I bet these guys are all just here to watch you get your ass handed to you by a real cop.”

“That’s what you think, huh?” Danny wasn’t backing down. “You think because you’re an arrogant, close-minded asshole that the rest of HPD is too?”

“I think you four are nothing but a three ring circus that wouldn’t know how to be real cops if your life depended on it?”

“Enough!” The Chief of Police bellowed from behind the gathered crowd before they all split to let him through. “I’m not sure where you get off thinking that in less that four months you’ve earned the right to speak for the entire Honolulu Police Department or what gave you the idea that your small-minded, prejudiced views in any way reflect the beliefs of even a fraction of your fellow offers, much less the entirety of them. But you clearly don’t know shit if you honestly believe the bull you just stood there spewing at Williams.”

“I …” Martinez started.
“Oh no. We’re well past the point where you get to speak.” The chief cut him off, looking around to where damn near every officer in the building had gathered, a united front behind Five-0. “You’re on my turf here, Martinez, and I don’t take kindly to punks that don’t know there place and clearly have objectives other than to protect and serve at the top of their priority list. Pack your things. I want you gone.”

“You can’t …”

“Oh, I can and I just did. Did you forget you’re still in your probationary period? There’s not a review board on this island that would let you pass with an attitude like yours.”

“Duke, Scott, you two wanna make sure he doesn’t cause any problems on his way out?”


“You know this doesn’t stop anything.” Martinez spouted off to Danny. “Tony’s untouchable at that school. Caldwell won’t let you near him.”

“First off, we don’t plan on touching that kid. The school is taking care of that. And second, they will be taking care of that. Caldwell already joined the unemployment line.”

Five-0 watched as Martinez paled at this assertion as Duke grabbed his arm, turning him toward the locker room, but not before Martinez could open his mouth again. "Better watch your back detective. You keep making enemies more powerful than you and that girl of yours will land in the system."

Before anyone could say a thing, Danny wheeled around, slamming his fist into Martinez's jaw.

"You should consider your next move carefully," Steve stepped forward, towering over the idiot that was now on the ground. "You seem to be under the misguided assumption that your brother's money makes all of you untouchable. I promise you, you try to deliver on that threat and you'll discover just how wrong you are."

Grabbing Danny's hand, McGarrett headed the opposite direction of where Duke was hauling Martinez. "Come on, Danno. I think we've wasted enough time on the trash."

"More than enough." Danny followed his partner, flanked by Chin, Kono, the police chief, and the majority of the others.

“So what’s this I hear about Five-0 starting a monthly self defense seminar for women and children?” The chief asked when they were out of the room. “That really happening?”

“It will. We’re still ironing out the details.” McGarrett turned his attention to the chief. “I’ve actually been thinking it would be great to expand the idea a bit and offer something for male victims or those at risk as well. I know there’s less attention there, but it is a problem. I just have to figure out how we do that without making the women and kids, some of which are likely very skittish around men, uncomfortable.”

“Not a bad idea. Would you mind some help from my guys?”

“We’d actually love that. I’d mentioned to the Governor that I thought it would be a great opportunity to partner up.” Steve watched as several of the officers expressed interest in participating.

“We get enough of us we could figure out a way to do both groups. Maybe one in the morning and one in the afternoon.” One of the guys spoke up, getting nods from several others.
"Sounds like we should be able to make something work." Steve smiled. "We've gotta work out more of the plan, but I'll reach out when we get a better idea. Maybe you can identify a person or two work with us on the details?"

"That shouldn't be a problem." The Chief laughed, knowing the hard part would be narrowing down the volunteers rather than finding them. "I'll discuss with the guys and get you a couple of names soon. Now why don't the rest of you get back to work." He waved them all away. "If you four have a minute, I'd like to talk to you in my office before you go."

McGarrett glanced at his watch. "We've got about a half an hour before we need to get to pick up Grace."

"I'll be done in far less than that." The Chief led them into this office, shutting the door behind them. "First, I hope you all realize that in no way, shape, or form does the bullshit Martinez was spouting off represent the opinion of the rest of the department. There may still be a few that aren't exactly huge fans of Five-0 or the pair of you," he motioned to Steve and Danny. "But those few are smart enough to keep their mouths shut and not stir up any trouble. I just wouldn't expect them to volunteer to do anything with the lot of you."

"We wouldn't expect everyone to be happy with us, but we do appreciate you being upfront." Steve interjected.

"I guessed you might be realistic about that. Anyway, I just wanted to make sure there was no question about things between Five-0 and HPD. We're all on the same team. I happened to meet with the governor this morning and he gave me the heads up about the upcoming interview. I have to say, initially I wondered what the hell you four were thinking, but as we talked about it I realized it really is the smartest move. That being said, I'm sure you guys are expecting fall out from it."

The team nodded in agreement with his assumption. "Just know that we have your backs. Anybody here causes problems, you let me know. Got it?"

"We appreciate that, Chief." McGarrett responded, pleased to hear they did have his support. "As we said, we don’t expect everyone to approve. Anybody gives us a real problem, we’ll let you know. As long as the detractors don’t go out of the way to cause an issue or become unprofessional when we’re working together, we’ll respect their opinions. While Danny and I have no intention of hiding in the shadows, we also realize that not everyone will be accepting, so we’ll be sure to keep things professional when we’re working to avoid any unnecessary issues."

"He’s right," Danny added. "We can’t tell you how much we appreciate the support from HPD, but provided they aren’t total asses about it, we don’t expect anyone to have a hard time just because they don’t like Five-0 or don’t approve of our choices. That’d be a fast road to causing problems that none of us need."

The chief leaned back, partially sitting atop his desk. "I appreciate the candor, gentlemen. And I’m sure that stance will be respected. Now, I’m sure you have better things to do than stand around my office all day, and I need to finish dealing with the Martinez mess."

"Thanks, Chief." The team all shook his hand as they filed out of his office.

Once clear of the building, Danny finally turned to his partner. "One question."

Steve stopped in the middle of the sidewalk, looking down at Danny. "Only one?"

"Only one at the moment." Danny rolled his eyes. "What made you start kicking around the idea of the mens self-defense? Not that I don’t think it’s a great idea, just didn’t expect it."
“I was doing some research. Thought it would be a good idea before we start the classes to see what I could learn about domestic violence and such. Ran across some statistics around male victims, and realized that the stuff I was reading was right. It’s an issue for both genders. The majority of cases are against women and children, but that doesn’t make the male victims any less victims or any less worth protection.”

“Very insightful, boss.” Kono looked a surprised from where she and Chin stood a few steps away.

“She’s right. Very insightful.” Danny nodded. “And if we’re going to take stance against it, we better take a stance against all of it. Not just the stuff everybody hears about.”

“Exactly.” Steve threw his arm around Danny’s shoulders. “Now what do you say we go fetch our daughter.”

“We’ll see you guys at the house later. Grace owes us a chapter of Harry Potter.” Chin called after them.

“See you then.” McGarrett hollered over his shoulder. “I don’t know about you, but I’m ready for some shaved ice with Gracie. This has been one hell of a interesting day.”

“I’ll second that.” Danny wrapped his arm around Steve’s waist. It had definitely been a day he wouldn’t mind forgetting.

Chapter End Notes

So I obviously know nothing about the legalities of how all that would actually go down with Martinez getting canned, but I know most place's probationary periods provide little protection if you fuck up.
Take a second to review/comment and let me know what you think.
Chapter 87

Chapter Notes

So this chapter is a lot shorter than most, but between travel and being sick for two full weeks I’ve reached the point of either posting as is or it possibly taking another week more more before I can get something up. I’m hoping you guys will take something over nothing.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“Danno!” Grace raced down the steps in front of Sacred Heart as soon as she spotted her dads and the Camaro.

“Hey there, Monkey.” The detective wrapped his arms around her, thankful that the day hadn’t gone any worse than it did. “I hear we’re going for shaved ice before we go home.”

She leaned back, grinning at him. “That’s the plan.”

Looking up, Danny caught sight of Ms. Jones heading toward them. “Why don’t you hop in the car, Grace? We’ll be ready in just a minute.”

Grace saw her teacher and nodded, giving Steve a quick hug before she climbed into the back of the Camaro. The SEAL reached in and turned the car on, letting her listen to the radio and enjoy the air conditioning while they spoke with her teacher.

“I’m glad I caught you,” Ms. Jones spoke as soon as she was close enough. “I just wanted to follow up after this afternoon’s excitement. I believe the full staff is going to be notified as soon as all the kids are gone judging by the message we received to stay for a brief staff meeting, but Mr. Black did swing by earlier to let me know that Ms. Caldwell is officially gone.” Her eyes shifted to McGarrett. “I believe you were expecting that.”

Steve nodded, “We didn’t push for it, but from what Mr. Black said her involvement, or lack thereof, today was the last straw. Can’t say I’m sorry to see her go, especially after what we learned this afternoon.”

“Do tell.” Ms. Jones’s arched brow emphasized her curiosity.

“Tony’s uncle was a rookie at HPD.” Danny explained. “It appears he had an issue with us and assumed that since his brother was a substantial financial backer for the school that his nephew would be able to get away with causing problems.”

“Just like he almost did.” Ms. Jones interjected. “Thankfully, Mr. Kimo didn’t share Ms. Caldwell’s prejudices. I gather from what he told me that Tony and his buddies were quite surprised when they actually got in trouble. Even after he sent them to his office, they expected it was just for appearances sake.”

“I’m glad he was there. I still can’t believe Caldwell actually thought it was okay to just ignore the situation. I mean did she really not think that we’d find out eventually?” Danny shook his head.

“I think she was genuinely that full of herself. She often forgot that there was anyone with more
power than her around here given that the board doesn’t often get involved in the day to day activities of the school. I guess this was a good reality check.” Ms. Jones shrugged. “Personally I’m thrilled to see her gone. I’ve been here longer than she has, and I miss the way things were before her attitude started permeating the school.” Both men noticed the hopeful tone as she spoke. “Now, if I understood Ms. Grace correctly on our way out, you three have a date for some shaved ice. You better get to it.”

“That we do.” Steve nodded.

“We’ll see you tomorrow.” Danny shook her hand before she turned back toward the school.

“How come this day feels like it was more like three days crammed into one?” Danny asked his partner over the hood of the car before they opened the doors. “I mean seriously, the session with the doc, the excitement at the school, the madness at HPD … how did we fit that into one day?”

“Could of been worse. There was no gunfire, explosions, or shark cages.” Steve winked at him as he started to lower himself into the car.

“Don’t jinx us, Super SEAL. Day’s not over yet.” Danny shook his head as he joined the two in the Camaro. “Ready for that shaved ice, Monkey?”

“Silly question, Danno.” Grace shook her head as she giggled at her father.

Fifteen minutes late the three had their treats and were walking barefoot down the beach enjoying the afternoon sun and the sound of the waves crashing on shore.

“How’d it go with Dr. Thompson?” Grace asked after they’d walked for a couple of minutes, voice full of curiosity.

The men exchanged a quick glance over her head before Danny answered, thankful they’d expected Grace to ask and agreed on what to tell her. “Really well. Mostly he was just interested to meet the person that was helping keep Super SEAL here in line, but he also wanted to talk through tips on handling Steve’s nightmares since I’m around when they happen. All good stuff.”

Grace nodded. “That’s good.” She grinned at her father. “Told you that you weren’t in trouble.”

“Yeah. Yeah. I know.” Danny stuck his no purple tongue out at her.

“He asked about you too.” Steve added toward Grace as he laughed at his partner. “I get the feeling someday he’d really like to meet you since he’s heard so much about you from me.”

“That’d be cool. He sounds really nice.” The little girl smiled before turning her attention back to the shaved ice.

They walked a little further content to just spend the time together before Danny spoke again. “So how are you feeling after today?”

Grace took a few more steps before turning to look at her dads. “I don’t know.” Her head cocked to the side as she thought about how to answer. “I think more than anything I was mad at Tony for being such a jerk. Dr. James and I talked about the idea that I would probably hear people talking about what happened. She was right, knowing it was gonna happen helped some. Still sucked though.” She shrugged, not sure how else to explain.

“Yeah, knowing it’s probably going to happen doesn’t mean it makes it any fun to hear when it does. You did the right thing asking your friends to help you and get an adult.” Danny squatted down in
front of her, looking up into her big brown eyes.

“Yeah, Nikki and Katie helped a lot.” She let out a small laugh. “Probably a good thing Mr. Kimo showed up or I think Nikki might have tried to stop Tony on her own.”

“I bet she could have done it too.” Steve chuckled. “Still better that the teacher was able to deal with them though.”

“Yeah. I would have felt really bad if she’d gotten in trouble for me.” Grace started walking back in the direction they’d come from, obviously ready to put the topic behind her. “So do you think Alyssa will have more painted when we get home?”

“I bet she will. I talked to your grandma earlier and she said Alyssa got there shortly after we left this morning. Sounded like she planned on getting a lot done today.” Danny grinned when Grace’s pace picked up slightly before looking up at his partner. “You get the feeling someone wants to go check out the work?”

“I don’t know. Maybe we should go back to HQ and do her homework there. She doesn’t seem that interested in going home.”

Throwing her now empty shaved ice cone into a nearby trashcan, Grace ran back to the pair, grabbing their hands, and pulling them toward the car. “Not a chance. We’re going home.”

The pair laughed, letting her lead them down the beach. They hadn’t expected it to be a long stop on the way home, but they were both happy they’d carved out a little time for just the three of them. Of course, with Beth and Paul preparing to move into their new house fairly soon, they knew they’d be getting settled back into some version of what would become a normal routine. As much as they loved having the ohana around so close since all hell broke loose, they knew things would need to settle some.

*~*~* GUARDIAN*~*~*

“I insist dear,” Beth watched Alyssa over the kitchen island. “You’ve been working hard all day, you need to get a good meal. Unless you have other plans you’re staying for dinner.”

“But I really don’t …”

“Give it up, Alyssa.” McGarrett’s voice carried from the entry where he’d caught the last bit of the conversation. “If mom is determined to feed you, she’s going to feed you. It’s a lot easier to just go with it.”

“But …”

“Nope,” Danny trailed his partner into the kitchen as they heard Grace barrel up the stairs to see her walls. “Steve’s right, just go with it.” He gave his mom a quick hug. “Speaking of dinner, I can already smell it cooking. What is it?”

“Chicken enchiladas. Nothing fancy.”

“Fancy or not, it smells delicious.” Steve hugged Beth, laughing as he heard Grace racing back down the stairs.

“It’s awesome!” She declared, huge smile plastered on her face as she bounced into the room. “There are so many fish!”
To give you an idea about what Grace’s wall is going to look like, imagine something really cool a lot like this.
Chapter 88

Chapter Notes

Show of hands - how many of you either forgot about this fic or were pretty sure it was abandoned, never to be heard from again? I realized the other day as I was finishing up a reread that it had been over a year since I’d updated. That seemed next to impossible because I’ve been slow to post things but I have been posting things. I then realized that my 5-0 writing had been completing the much shorter crossover fic. Oops. Alas, I have committed to finishing Guardian before I do anything else.
Of course, I think this season of 5-0 has helped the muse come out of hiding a bit as well. It’s been strange without Chin and Kono, but we have had some particularly lovely bits with McDanno. Anyway, enough of me rambling … on to the story.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Approaching the entrance to the studio, Steve took a deep breath. “You guys sure you want to go through with this?”

“Don’t tell me that the man that plays enjoys playing with explosives is afraid of something like a television interview that’s likely to end up being spread all over creation.” Danny tried to tease, but his own nerves made it fall flat.

“Not afraid of what it’ll be like for me, but I do worry about the consequences for the rest of you.” Steve glanced at Danny before looking at the cousins.

“Well, our fates our pretty well intertwined in this, so I’m sure we’ll be just fine.” Danny tried to reassure the SEAL.

“We’ve been over this, Steve,” Chin started. “We don’t care what anybody else says. Not about the two of you. Not about how 5-0 operates. Not about how we got here. The critics will be there no matter what we do, but we’re not backing out of this and leaving Grace or the rest of us open to being ambushed by another shady reporter out for a story.”

Kono gave a sharp nod as she stepped forward to open the door. Waving the others through, she looked determined to see this through.

“Commander,” a man in his early thirties stepped forward. “Governor Denning expects to be here within the hour, but he gave me strict instructions to make sure I do anything necessary to make things run as smoothly as possible for you today.”

“Please, call me Steve. We appreciate everything you’ve done to make this happen. I know it’s a bit outside of your normal scope of work. I hope it hasn’t been too much of a headache.” The SEAL shook the other man’s hand.

“Nonsense. It hasn’t been a problem at all. And handling anything press related for the governor is well within the scope of my duties.”

Before Steve could argue that this wasn’t directly connected with the governor, George held up a hand.
“Please don’t argue. I’ve worked for several politicians in the last dozen years or so and Governor Denning is the first one that I’ve genuinely liked. He asks me to do something and I’m going to do it to the best of my ability. Not to mention, I’m well aware of just what the four of you have done for our island. I was more than happy to take on this assignment.”

All four members of the task force simply nodded at this assertion.

“Now if you’ll follow me, I’ll take you to the studio to meet Ms. Mahelona so we can get this done. I’m sure you’d rather not spend your entire day in a news studio and the sooner we get through filming the sooner we should get the final cut to review.”

Steve looking at George questioningly.

“You requested to review the questions ahead of time. I added an additional request to review and approve the final edited cut before it aired. I’ve seen perfectly innocent statements by good people be turned into gossip fodder by questionable editing. While I don’t anticipate any such issue here I thought it was in everyone’s best interest to have an opportunity to verify before things go public.”

“Damn. You are good.” Kono shook her head. “I know who I’m calling if I ever need help with anything in this area again.”

“It would be my pleasure, Ms. Kalakaua. That goes for all of you. I have no doubt you’d like to avoid any further exposure to the press, but should the need arise I’m more than willing to assist. Officially or otherwise.”

“Thanks, George.” Danny replied for the group of them.

“Now, don’t be alarmed when they start messing with your hair and putting powder and stuff on you. I’ve already told them to keep it to a minimum, but they will want to minimize any glares and such from the studio lighting.”

“Welcome,” a petite Hawaiian woman approached. “I see George is already giving you some of the scoop on what to expect. I’m Natalie Mahelona.”

“Steve McGarrett,” the SEAL offered his hand before stepping aside to let the others introduce themselves.

“It’s a pleasure meeting you all. I do hope Governor Denning and George let you know how excited I am about today. I promise my crew and I will do our part to make this as pleasant as possible.” She pivoted to face Danny and Steve. “I was so sorry to hear about the loss of your daughter’s mother. I know we’ve already reviewed the questions, but as we’re talking please don’t hesitate to stop me if you decide something doesn’t feel right.”

“We appreciate that,” Steve nodded at her. “So where do we start?”

“Why don’t you follow me?”

Half an hour later the team were all set with makeup and mics and the five were arranged in a semicircle of stools in front of a large picture window with the view of the ocean. With everything in place, the crew indicated they were starting to film.

“Today I’d like to welcome a group of very special guests to the studio. I have the privilege of sitting down with the four members of the governor’s elite task force, known to most as Five-0. As we announced on a previous broadcast, due to recent circumstances Five-0 has received more attention than usual. Unfortunately, this attention has included some that do not respect privacy and
boundaries. Commander McGarrett and his team have agreed to sit down with me today to appease the curiosity surrounding the task force in hopes that they can get back to what they do best - keeping our island safe. With that, I’d like to introduce the team.”

Ms. Mahelona went through the introductions of each of the team, spending a brief amount of time on the high level story of how each member of the team had come to join the task force.

“I have to ask. You’ve worked dozens of cases since the task force started. Is there any that really stands out?”

“I think every case is memorable in its own way,” Steve started. “But I think for all of us one that always sticks with us is being able to save a bus full of kids.”

“He’s right,” Danny added. “I don’t think a moment of that case has faded from our memories. The fear that we wouldn’t be in time when we realized where they were …”

“I remember seeing the story after you returned them safely. I know those children and parents were eternally grateful for how dedicated you were to bringing them home safely.” Natalie paused, observing just how affected each member of the task force appeared to be at the memory.

“On a lighter note, one of our viewers had a question from Detective Williams. Apparently there is a fair bit of curiosity about your socks and why every time they see pictures of you, you are wearing such interesting socks.”

Everyone laughed at the question, eyes immediately shifting down to see just what type of socks Danny was wearing. The viewers were right. Below the hemline of his grey slacks were a pair of socks with small grey seals in various poses.

“Honest, I don’t know,” Danny shrugged. “I’ve just always preferred them to plain ones. Something about them always made being dressed in the shirts, ties, and slacks a bit more fun.”

“Those are some very cute seals you’re sporting today.” Natalie grinned, wondering if perhaps there was a little hidden meaning in his sock choice.

Danny stretched his leg out, tugging his pant leg up so the camera could get an even better shot of his socks. “You might be right. I find I’m rather partial to seals these days.”

Glancing over at his partner, Danny found Steve smiling back, eyes full of affection. “Yeah. I found one I’m rather attached to these days.” He was only slightly surprised when the SEAL in question reached out to clasp his hand where it rested atop his thigh.

“While there has been speculation around our relationship almost since the inception of Five-0, only recently have Danny and I officially taken that step.” Steve’s eyes never left Danny’s as he spoke.

“Sorry ladies. It looks like two of Honolulu’s most eligible bachelors are off the market.” Natalie continued. “Judging by a number of the questions we received, it appears that a good percentage of our viewers were expecting this revelation and are quite happy for you.” Looking directly into the camera, she continued. “Of course, we also received a fair number of questions that my team and I deemed inappropriate, so not all questions will be asked.”

She paused for a brief moment, turning her focus to Chin and Kono. “So how do the two of you feel about Honolulu’s hottest couple and what it will do to the task force’s dynamic?”

Chin cleared his throat, throwing a glance at the two men in question before responded. “Personally, we are both thrilled. Steve and Danny are family to both of us and we want nothing more than for
them to be happy. They’ve both been through enough in their lives. They deserve it. Professionally, Five-0 has always been as much family as working team. Any one of us would lay down our lives for the others without hesitation and we all trust each other implicitly. That doesn’t change.”

“I think he pretty well summed it up for both of us. We are 110% on board with the two of them.” Kono added, wanting to leave no doubt that they both supported them.

Pivoting back to Steve and Danny, Natalia glanced down at the question cards. She had to admit she was a bit surprised these next couple had made it onto the cleared list. “There are a couple more questions focused on family. One viewer asks how you plan on working together and raising a child when you are in such a dangerous job?”

Danny chuckled drily, “The same way I always have. I’ve been in law enforcement since before Grace was born. No. It’s not always easy, but we’re smart enough to surround ourselves with family and friends that understand and are willing to help. The challenges of working in this field and raising a family aren’t exclusive to us. I know other couples that are both first responders and even more first responders that are single parents. We make choices and sacrifices every day because we know our children will be safer for it and so will many other children like them.”

“Very well said, Detective,” Natalie nodded as she considered his response. “I want to come back to something related to that after this last question. I was actually a bit surprised when this one made it onto the approved list. Do you believe you can provide a healthy, supportive environment for your daughter without a woman in the house?”

This time it was Steve that spoke first. “I can see why you were surprised that we let this one go, but Danny and I both felt it was important not just for our family but for others like us. While we love having Grace with us full time, we also both wish she still had her mother. That being said, the gender of the people raising a child matter less than whether or not a child is properly cared for and raised in an environment where they know they are loved without a doubt. Whether that means having a mother and father, two fathers, two mothers, or any combination of mixed families these days is irrelevant. Children need to know they are loved and to know the adults in their life will ensure their safety and wellbeing. I’m pretty sure that we are providing that for her.” Steve grinned, “of course, that being said. We also know that it is important for Grace to have positive female role models. She is surrounded by amazing women such as her Aunt Kono and other members of our ohana. Grace will not be lacking for strong women to help guide her through life.”

“Well said, Commander. I believe any young woman would be lucky to have the type of family support system that Ms. Grace appears to have. I expect we’ll see her go on to do amazing things with her life.” Natalie was thrilled with how well they’d handled that question. “Now, I’d like to go back to the comment Detective Williams made about making this a safer place for Grace and children like her. Governor Denning’s staff mentioned that there was something in the works related to that. Would you care to elaborate a bit?”

The team all turned to Steve for this answer. “Absolutely. As part of Grace’s recovery, the family has been teaching her and her grandmother self defense. During one of the sessions the idea of making this type of training available to others at risk or in need of learning how to protect themselves was raised. We’ve all seen the statistics. More importantly the four of us have experienced first hand what can happen to victims of abuse in many settings. While the exact details are still being worked out, Five-0 and HPD, with the help of Governor Denning, will be announcing regularly scheduled self defense seminars. The plan is to offer two sessions on each seminar day. One will be exclusively for women and children. The other will be exclusively for men and children.”

“Why split?” Natalie could guess, but wanted them to explain.
“We want participants to feel safe,” Danny replied. “Children are invited to both sessions so they can attend with the at risk parent. While many people view domestic violence as something that only happens to women, that is simply not true. There are a staggering number of men that are also victims. In both cases, it seemed best to provide unique training opportunities that minimize the risk of making victims and potential victims feel threatened during the training.”

“I must say, I’m looking forward to helping announce the details when they are available. It is one thing to hear politicians and law enforcement talk about stopping domestic violence. It is an entirely different thing to see those same groups taking action to help prevent it.” Natalie turned as she heard a bit of noise off to the side of the set. “It appears that Governor Denning has arrived. “Would you care to join us, Governor?”

Sam and George exchanged a brief look before the governor turned to Steve and team. “I don’t want to intrude, but I’m more than happy to join for a bit if the team is good with it.

“You know what will this will mean,” Steve challenged.

“I do and you know my stance,” Sam approached the stage.

Steve shook his head, letting out a dry chuckle. “In that case, can we get another stool?”

Within seconds a crew member appeared with the requested seat and everyone shifted around a bit to accommodate the extra person.

“Any particular topics you care to cover?” Ms. Mahelona queried as the governor’s mic was being set up.

“Since it sounds like you were already on the topic of the self defense seminars, I want to add just how excited I am about this initiative. Every person deserves to feel safe in their own home and hopefully this will help. The team has been gracious enough to begin training me to help teach and I'm looking forward to being an active part of the program rather than just a mouthpiece.”

Natalie stared at the governor for a moment, surprised by his announcement. “I must say, when I heard you were helping plan the seminars I didn’t expect you would get so involved. What drove you to take a more hands on approach.”

“The team and I discussed ways for me to assist. It is important to me that those on this island that need services like this understand that I am serious about finding ways to stop domestic violence. To me, the best way to show how serious I am is to do more than just talk about it.”

“I believe many others will agree with me when I say you are sending a very clear message. It's refreshing to see.” Natalie nodded, noting the nods and smiles from the task force. “Is there anything else you'd like to add before we wrap up?”

“Hopefully it's obvious by this point, but I'm case it isn't. I want to express my unequivocal support for my Five-0 task force. These four have made a tremendous difference to this island with little regard for their own safety and we owe them an immense debt of gratitude. I feel fortunate to work with them. Even more so that I've had the opportunity to get to know them as people. I'd also like to congratulate Steve and Danny on becoming Honolulu's hottest couple. We've certainly been waiting long enough for it to happen.”

Everyone laughed at the governor’s last statement while Steve and Danny just shrugged, trying to pretend they were completely innocent about the entire thing dragging out.

It didn’t take long for the last few pieces of the interview process to wrap up and the crew made
quick work of removing the mics from everyone.

“I really do appreciate you all taking the time to sit down with me today.” Ms. Mahelona walked with them as they were leaving. “I know you typically try to stay out of the press, but should you ever need the platform again you only need to give me a call.”

“We appreciate that,” Steve shook the hand she offered. “Though you are right that it’s not likely.”

Five-0, the governor, and George made their way out of the building. The task force were considerably calmer than they’d been only a couple of hours before.

“Anyone care for lunch at my office before getting back to work?” Denning offered since it was about that time. “No point in going to work hungry.”

“I could eat,” Kono replied first, laughing as the men all looked at her. “What? I went surfing early today. I’m hungry.”

“Come on. Let’s go feed the rookie.” Danny teased as he headed for the car. Whatever happened with the interview was largely out of their hands now, so they might as well get back to normal … or as normal as this group could ever be.

Chapter End Notes

Hopefully this latest update didn’t suck. All comments and feedback are much appreciated. The next chapter will pick up on Saturday. We’ve only got a few days left to cover in the initial story. Though there are still plenty of follow ups that will happen - some that are even partially written. :)

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!